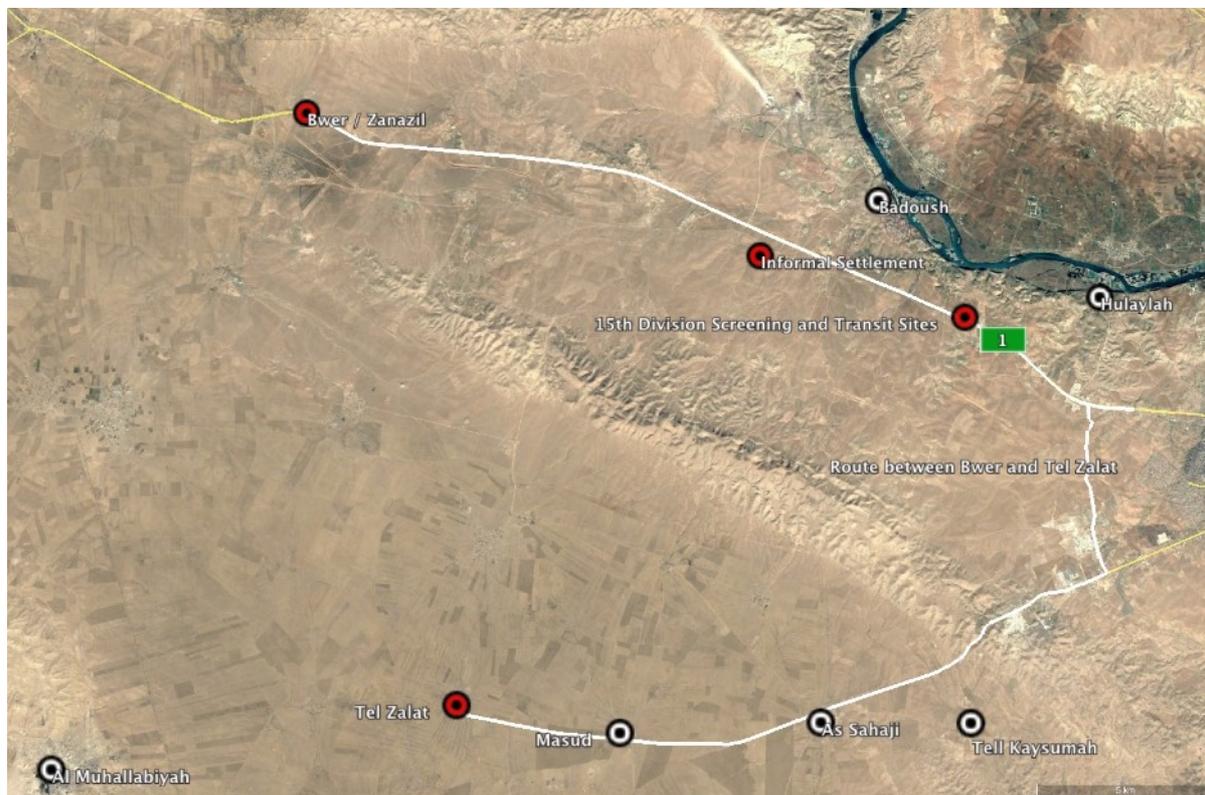


Tel Afar Displacement and Upcoming Offensive, 31 July

Al Zanazil - Tel Zalot



Current mustering points and routes taken to access them

The next stage of the operation to retake Nineveh from IS is about to begin with an offensive on Tel Afar. The exact commencement date has not been announced but should be expected within a couple of weeks, if not days.

IS occupied Tel Afar and a few outlying villages are surrounded by the Peshmerga, ISF and PMF forces. The Peshmerga are defending the northern border and will not be advancing. ISF and PMF forces are surrounding Tel Afar from the other sides. Estimates of the population inside Tel Afar district have varied greatly in recent weeks and have ranged from 10,000 - 40,000. This is reduced from a population of 500,000 before ISIS took control. The ratio of people in the city and in the countryside is not currently known. The population of Tel Afar was historically almost entirely Turkmen, approximately 65% of which were Sunni and the others Shia.

Operation Commander Major-General Najm Al Jabouri on 31 July claimed there could be up to 2,000 IS fighters in Tel Afar but that they are exhausted and demoralised. Whether this is true or not, other sources indicate that the fighting is unlikely to be over quickly. Many of the IS fighters in the city are originally from Tel Afar. The fighting in Tel Afar will be very different to that seen in Mosul. Tel Afar is a much less dense environment which is already highly depopulated. This will allow for a greater use of armoured vehicles, though this could lead to high levels destruction as seen in west Mosul.

It is not yet clear which ISF and PMF units will be involved in the fighting for Tel Afar, and to what extent these forces will be comprised of locals from the district. Deciding this has been an extremely complicated issue as there are major concerns about sectarian violence. Many Iranian backed PMF forces have been demanding to be involved in the fighting. Some ISF members spoken to during the assessment estimated that a large portion of the civilians inside Tel Afar are supporters of IS. If this is a common perception amongst the ISF, it could prove extremely dangerous for Sunni civilians trapped in the city, who may suffer revenge attacks. Another ISF member stationed alongside a PMF unit in Tel Zalut claimed that the ISF are building a relationship with the PMF to counter ISIS propaganda in Tel Afar that the PMF will massacre all civilians upon entry into the city. Turkey publicly expressed fear that the PMF will ill-treat Sunni Turkmen during the battle, stating that they will 'take all precautionary measures allowed under international law' to stop PMF involvement.

There does not appear to be any plans to keep civilians in Tel Afar, and avoid mass displacement, during the fighting. Humanitarian partners should expect at least short term displacement of the population. Given the much smaller population of the city than Mosul, it is unlikely that thousands of people will be displaced as rapidly as was seen during the final stages of Mosul operations. Regardless, people in Tel Afar are in desperate need of aid as urgently as can be provided by humanitarian partners along displacement routes. Rise assessed two of these routes in Bwer and Tel Zalut on 31 July. These sites are likely to move forward with the frontline and others may be created as the operation progresses. Syria road will almost certainly remain a major displacement route. Displacement is also likely to occur towards Tel Jarabiah camp to the south, the Peshmerga are currently not accepting IDPs to the north.

Al Zanazil (Bwer) Mustering Point and Screening Site (36.438492, 42.777753)

Access

Getting to Bwer from the western edge of Mosul city took 1 hour. However, nearly 40 minutes of this time was spent at checkpoints. The first checkpoint is at the 15th Division screening and transit site near Badoush at 36.383236, 42.994263. To pass this checkpoint, it was requested that the vehicle's registration card was left with 15th division until returning. The same process is required for civilians moving in and out of the villages along Syria Road. These civilians have also had to be screened and sponsored by a local Sheikh before access is permitted. The second checkpoint at 36.408531, 42.922894 required waiting for 25 minutes whilst permission was gained from the Headquarters in Bwer. The road itself is mostly in good condition, with some damaged areas, and the drive time could be under 15 minutes.

Security

The Al Zanazil mustering point and basic screening site is located nearby the 71st brigade of the 15th division's mobile headquarters which sits 3km from the frontline. The 71st brigade mans a 12km stretch of the front, with another 15th division brigade to the south. The Peshmerga mans the front north of the ISF's position. Over the past few weeks, ISF and IS have exchanged indirect fire. On 16 July ISF repelled an IS attack. According to the ISF IS occasionally fires mortar rounds towards their position at night but this has not resulted in any casualties.

IDP Arrivals and Screening

IDPs arrive daily at the frontline, currently the average is between 30 and 100 each day. Most IDPs are women, children, and older persons. IS makes it hard for families to flee together so the ISF rarely receive large family units over seven persons. Some of the men received at the mustering point have been identified as IS members. It was not possible to verify numbers of accused IS members detained, or what judicial process was being followed. ISF claimed that men are also generally blocked from leaving as it is believed that IS wants to use them as human shields and fighters once the offensive starts. It was

also suggested that many of these families are perceived by the ISF as being IS affiliates because they had not previously fled. This is considered a main reason why few men are currently fleeing.

According to the ISF, all IDPs are coming from villages on the outskirts of Tel Afar city and not the city itself, because the front line is still 35 km from Tel Afar city and IS are actively blocking escape attempts. Some IDPs walk up to 20km in a circuitous route before arriving at the frontline to avoid detection by IS who shoot any civilians caught fleeing. Some families are arriving with injuries from gunshots or IEDs sustained during their journey. Several days ago a family arrived at the front after walking for 15 hours and some civilians arrive without shoes.

Most IDPs arrive at night at various points along the 12km frontline. For security reasons, the ISF waits until daybreak to receive the IDPs but pass basic food like biscuits and water to the IDPs who wait 100-200m away, across the frontline berm. At daybreak, the ISF receive the IDPs and conducts a weapons check and a brief security screening and then transports them to the Al Zanazil screening site and mustering point located at 71st brigade's mobile headquarters. Screening at the front line reportedly takes under an hour.

Men and women are separated at the Al Zanazil basic screening site for cultural and security reasons. Their names are checked against database lists and then all those cleared are transferred to the Badoush screening site within two to four hours after arrival. Many IDPs are arriving without IDs. If an IDP does not have an ID they are allowed through but must provide testimony from at least two witnesses to confirm their identity.

IDPs are then trucked on by ISF to the 15th Division screening and transit site near Badoush (36.383236, 42.994263). They are screened again before being bused on to Scorpion Junction for another round of screening.



Damage to a bridge along Syria Road

Medical Concerns

A 15th Division medical clinic is also at the site. It has two doctors, four assistants and two ambulance drivers. The clinic receives patients brought by various brigades operating in the surrounding areas. Patients requiring further treatment are transferred to a 15th Division CCP in Badoush. They are able to provide basic trauma and primary healthy care. The ISF said many IDPs arriving are suffering from asthma and skin diseases. Skin diseases commonly reported at other mustering sites include leishmaniasis and scabies. Psychological support for IDPs who arrive traumatised at the screening site was also requested.

NGO medical support was requested. An international organisation is intending to respond within days but when that happens remains unclear. The ISF medics stated that a female doctor is urgently needed to treat female patients, they have had two pregnancies at the site already. The medics have treated several pregnant women, including two women who gave birth at the site. The medic mentioned that because he's a man, he could not treat one woman wounded in a sensitive area in her lower abdomen. He mentioned this to emphasise the importance of sending a female doctor as soon as possible.

Humanitarian Needs

The ISF told Rise that they are in need of NGO support for the IDPs. Currently the ISF are providing water and food to IDPs from their own rations. They said that they have enough space to provide facilities to house additional medics and other NGO staff. It was also claimed that there was a need for NGOs to provide buses to transport IDPs from the screening sites to Badoush. ISF are currently using military vehicles to transport IDPs but claimed that once the offensive starts they will have to requisition these vehicles for use on the frontline. Also, the military vehicles currently being used are high, open vehicles so it is difficult for women and children to get up into the vehicles and are uncomfortable under the sun.

Informal Settlement

An informal settlement was established beside Syria road at 36.406487, 42.927753 approximately six weeks ago. It was estimated by one resident to have 250 tents, widely dispersed, with approximately as many IDP families. The residents are IDPs from Bwer and other villages to the south west including Abu Gaddur, Tuaym, Gonaisiyah and Mjarin, and likely other villages. They have stayed in the area due to their livestock, which they cannot take to camps.

They claimed that they are not being allowed back past the Syria Road checkpoint at 36.408531, 42.922894, but the ISF had not given them a clear reason why. However, most of their home villages are still held by ISIS or are on the frontline which is likely why they are not allowed past the checkpoint.

NGOs have responded with aid to the settlement, providing water and food, as well as mattresses that were reportedly not needed. An Iraqi member of parliament also reportedly organised a distribution of food. Residents are allowed to move east, past the 15th division screening and transit site, towards shops in Mosul. However, they have no savings or income to buy goods. They are also receiving some water from the military and a nearby broken water pipe that has created a pond. One resident cited the main need as being food or grazing land for their livestock. The area is not suitable for the animals and they are beginning to starve. Primary health care is also needed. A mobile clinic had been visiting the settlement but has reportedly stopped coming.



The informal settlement is sparsely dotted with tents

Tel Zalal Mustering and Screening Site (36.285492, 42.829582)

Access

It was not possible to get to Tel Zalal directly from Bwer. Tel Zalal was accessed from the Syria Road and turning south at 36.36039, 43.03127. This road leads south onto the Sahaji Road. The journey to Tel Zalal along the Sahaji road took approximately 45 minutes. There are several checkpoints along the route, both PMF (possibly from Kata'ib Saeed Al Shuhada forces) and 15th Division. A 15 minute wait was required at 15th Division checkpoint at Masud (36.275123, 42.882617) while permission was again requested from 15th Division Headquarters. The road is also mostly in good condition though there are periodic trenches along the way.

Security

Security in the village is jointly managed by 15th Division and Kata'ib Al Nukhba (Battalions of Elites), a PMF group operating under the Saraya Al Jihad Brigades. It was not possible to speak to anyone from Kata'ib Al Nukhba during the assessment. The ISF claimed there is no risk of sniper fire hitting the mustering point because the nearest IS occupied village is 4.5km over the frontline. The site has not been hit by mortar fire but is within range.

IDP Arrivals

Approximately 35 people arrive each day at the mustering point, some days no new IDPs arrive. IDPs are coming from IS controlled villages surrounding Tel Afar such as Majareen, Thelja, and Sheikh Ibrahim. Tel Zalal is close to the town of Muhallabiya where there are estimated to be up to 100 families trapped by IS.

Most IDPs are women and children who generally arrive at night. The site does not receive many older persons because the journey is generally too difficult for them. The ISF

conduct a weapons check before moving the IDPs inside the building for basic screening. It is unclear whether they wait until dawn to conduct the weapons check although this is the general procedure for most frontline arrivals of IDPs. IDPs are provided with basic food and water upon arrival.

Screening Process

After the initial weapons check, the IDPs are moved over the front line into a building for basic screening. A PMF intelligence unit conducts a database screening in conjunction with army intelligence forces, comparing their respective lists. If IDPs cannot provide IDs, they rely on statements from witnesses and key informants inside their villages to verify their identities. After the database screening, the IDPs are reportedly transported by the PMF directly to various IDP camps including Jed'ah, Hammam Al Alil and not via the site near Badoush.

Humanitarian Needs

The ISF that most of the food, water, and clothing provided to IDPs are donations from families in Southern Iraq, handed out by the PMF. It was claimed that there is need of further support from NGOs to meet IDP's needs which will become more acute once the Tel Afar offensive starts and more IDPs arrive.

Medical Concerns

IDPs in need of medical care are provided with basic primary healthcare on site. They have not received any trauma cases. IDPs in need of further medical care are sent to a PMF hospital 20km away from the mustering point.



The frontline in Tel Zalat