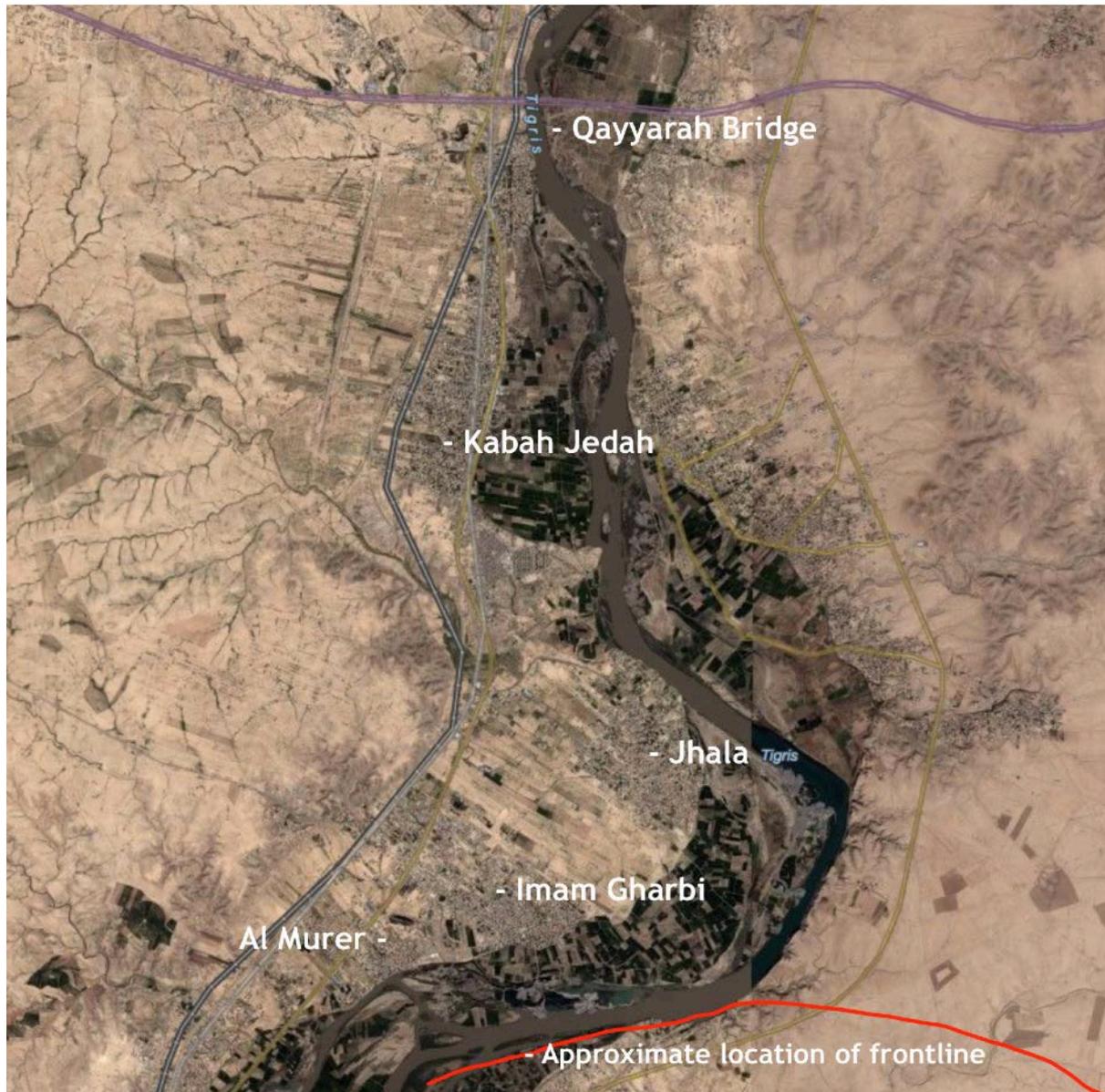


Update on Imam Gharbi, 08 August



Returns

Since Rise's 23 July report, residents of Imam Gharbi (35.696418, 43.287658) have begun to return since its recapture from ISIS on 21 July. It was estimated by several sources that up to 50% of the village's approximately 12,000 residents have returned to the village. This estimate may be high, but there certainly appears to be well over a thousand returns.

Most returnees are living in houses northwest of the main road running through the village. The returnees include both the original inhabitants of these homes, and their family and friends from the southeast whom they are hosting. Imam Gharbi residents interviewed said that there are several reasons why most residents have not returned to their houses in the southeast. There is extensive destruction to structures further southeast where fighting was most intense, many houses are destroyed or require extensive renovation. Others fear that houses may still be contaminated with IEDs. People remain worried about another attack from IS, and are staying away from the river so that they have time to flee the village if this happens again. Finally, residents are also still blocked by ISF from returning

to their homes close to the river due to security concerns. One resident said that the ISF has blocked returns to a large portion of the eastern area of the town running north and south along the river.

Residents who wish to return must pass through a screening process. Lists of family members' names are compiled on lists of up to 100 families and a local committee presents these names to the Salah a Din Operations Command (SOC) who then screen the individuals. SOC then informs the Iraqi Army 16th division in Imam Gharbi of all names cleared. Some people are cleared quickly while others wait days for results of the screening. Residents may return each day to the 16th division in Imam Gharbi to see if they have passed screening and are allowed to return.

Reportedly Imam Gharbi's mukhtar, or local leader, and Sheikh were dismissed due to their family members' alleged connections with ISIS. Some residents reported that a new sheikh and mukhtar have since been appointed but other residents indicated that their appointment may not be permanent due to their lack of support among some of the town's residents.

Those families that have not returned continue to remain scattered. Many have now moved to Al Ma'mun neighbourhood in west Mosul to stay with family, others are doing the same in villages surrounding Imam Gharbi. Some have also moved much further south and it was suggested that they are not expected to return in the near future.

Needs

It's not clear if there has been any NGO support to the village so far. One ISF member stated that he had heard that 2 local NGOs made visits, but was not certain. Locals did not report receiving any aid. PDS distribution remains ongoing with some residents reportedly receiving some flour, sugar, oil, and rice. However, because most livestock died during the fighting and areas of farmland are too insecure to access, many people have lost their livelihood and requested additional food and water support.

Locals reported relying on their own finances to buy goods. A few shops have reopened in the village. The customers are mainly residents, whereas the soldiers deployed to the village are buying goods in bulk from Qayyarah. Residents are buying their water from private trucking sources. Some residents have incomes through work outside the village. Some other residents reportedly have joined the PMF militia, Kata'ib Babylon as a way to secure a monthly salary.

Residents claimed that shelter remains a big issue and assistance is requested from NGOs to help repair their homes destroyed or damaged during the fighting.

The town's water pump is reportedly functional. Rise was unable to assess it because it is close to the river and therefore located in an insecure area. Water delivery remains a problem however, because pipes delivering water from the pump to homes are in need of repair. In general, the town remains without electricity. Some homes suffered damages to their electricity boxes but other reasons for lack of electricity include problems at the source. The resident said that the Directorate of Electricity is in the process of repairing the network which has been affected by the Qayyarah gas power station which currently isn't providing electricity to Imam Gharbi and other surrounding areas.

The village is now mostly clear from IEDs and UXO. There are reportedly a couple of houses that might remain booby trapped. One resident requested that the UN support further clearance efforts to ensure safe returns. The village itself is not receiving indirect fire, but its proximity to ISIS held territory means that this remains a risk. Areas along the banks of the Tigris are at risk of sniper fire.

Local Tensions

As reported on 23 July's assessment, there is great distrust from the ISF of locals in the village, as well as amongst locals and from surrounding villages. It is believed that there must have been ISIS affiliates inside the village to facilitate the attack. Some residents reported that they or others were denied entry to IDP camps or neighbouring villages when they fled during clashes due to the perception that Imam Gharbi residents are ISIS sympathisers. Despite the screening, some ISF members suspect everyone in the village to be an ISIS affiliate or sympathiser. One resident said that because some residents have not yet been cleared by SOC this has led some Imam Gharbi residents to question if these individuals may have ISIS affiliations. Whilst specific concerns were not raised during the assessment, given local tensions protection actors should consider a rapid assessment of the area.

The Iraqi Army's 16th Division remain in charge of the village's security. There is also a local Hashd force, as well as locals who have joined Kata'ib Babylon. Kata'ib Babylon locals have either remained in the village or have reportedly returned from deployment elsewhere to aid the village's security, though Rise could not independently confirm these reports. There were notable tensions between the ISF and Kata'ib Babylon during the assessment. 16th division have requested that NGOs coordinate any response with them due to the perceived threat from local residents.