

Tel Afar City, 03 October

Since the declaration of Tel Afar district's liberation on 31 August, no confirmed returns to the city itself have been confirmed. However, the ISF, Hashd and Municipality are working to prepare the city for future returns.

Municipality

There have been municipal employees in the city for the past three weeks. Currently the municipality has at least 140 employees working to repair the city following the fighting. The head of the municipality is present and the work is being coordinated from the municipal building at 36.379844, 42.447654. The municipality is also using approximately 50 volunteers to assist in clearing the streets of rubble. One volunteer said that the volunteers are from Tel Afar city, most of them Sunni Turkmen. He said that they are not being paid but were promised payment in the future. Volunteers are provided with food and accommodation in the city. The head of the municipality claimed that they were coordinating with the Ministry of Construction, Housing, and Municipalities but were under funded and did not have enough staff or resources. The head of the municipality said that Tel Afar is especially in need of personnel and trucks to support the clearing process and asked for assistance from the international community. The head claimed that 7000 buildings inside the city were completely or partially destroyed. This estimate seems plausible based on the destruction witnessed during the assessment but exact numbers were not verified. The head of the municipality did not currently know of any plans for the city's reconstruction and said their current focus is simply on clearing the rubble.



Volunteers in Tel Afar

Contamination

The city is extremely contaminated with explosives and volunteers are regularly encountering IEDs and UXO during the work which is reportedly causing frequent casualties. As was the case in Mosul, some civilians have briefly returned to check on their houses despite the risks of contamination. It was claimed by the municipality head that 20

people have so far been killed in the process. A Federal Police Colonel claimed that ISF were working to coordinate with municipality workers and civilians over the risks, but did not provide details. The ISF reportedly have a team of engineers who are working to clear the city of IEDs and UXO but residential buildings will be their last priority. There is a small civilian hospital to treat casualties, but serious cases are taken to Mosul.

Security Forces

The main armed forces in Tel Afar are the Iraqi army 15th Division, an 'Emergency Division' of the Federal Police and a PMF Shia Turkmen Hashd force called Liwa Hussein (Hashd Brigade 53). Tel Afar Local police also has a presence and one security personnel claimed that 3 tribal Hashd groups are also being established. Details could not be gained on the demographics of these new Hashd groups. Both a member of Liwa Hussein and the Colonel in charge of the Federal Police claimed that they had no security concerns inside the city other than the ongoing contamination. The Hashd member stated that there may be a risk of IS members still hiding in outlying villages. Other reports suggest that occasionally such fighters are found by ISF and Hashd in such areas. The National Security Service (NSS) are also present to screen any returns as they happen.



Central Tel Afar

Returns and infrastructure

Currently no families have returned to Tel Afar. One source suggested that 25 families of Hashd and police members may have returned, though this could not be verified. The main reason for the lack of returns given was the ongoing insecurity from contamination and the lack of services.

There is currently no piped water to the city. Some water is being piped from Badoush to nearby villages via Bwer. However, the pipes and the project within the city are severely damaged and in need of extensive repair. Repairs are already underway to the city's electricity services, new transformers have been delivered and repairs to the wiring are being conducted. Reportedly, one neighbourhood already has functioning electricity. The

city originally had 11 PHCs and a hospital. These are in need of repair as 3 PHCs have been destroyed, 2 burnt and the others looted. Widespread looting of structures has been reported from several sources.

An NSS officer claimed that from 25 October the ISF will start to encourage a small number of families to begin returning to the city. This is dependent upon the extent of demining however and may be pushed back. Details were not given on how services will be provided by then or how the returns process will be organised.

Tel Afar was historically predominantly Turkmen, 65% of which were Sunni, the others Shia. Since 2003 until IS's takeover of Tel Afar in 2014, the city experienced waves of sectarian violence between Sunnis and Shia. Some Sunni Turkmen IDPs interviewed in IDP camps expressed fear of Shia Hashd groups preventing their safe return. Given the dominant presence of the Shia Hashd and common distrust of Sunnis in post-ISIS environments, humanitarian actors should be aware of potential concerns.