



North and East Syria: Displaced populations and refugee camps update 4th November 2019

The Turkish invasion of North and East Syria has created a large-scale humanitarian crisis in the region. Since the start of attacks on the 9th October, between 200,000 - 300,000 of civilians have been displaced, including those who were already living in IDP camps. The presence of ISIS-linked women within some of these camps caused further chaos as riots and breakouts repeatedly occurred.

This update covers the period 9th October - 2nd November, providing an overview of the impact of the invasion on existing IDP and refugee camps in the region, rioting and breakouts of ISIS affiliates, newly displaced populations and the humanitarian response to the crisis.

As of the 2nd November 2019, there are 150,000 IDPs in Jazeera region. 45,000 are under 10 years old, and there are 30 children without families. 131,000 are in Hasakah city, 11,836 in Tel Tamer, 3,500 in Dirbesiye, 1,676 in Qamishlo, 1,200 in Girke Lege and 4,000 in Derik. 13,000 have gone to KRG Iraq. These figures do not include the displaced populations in other regions, such as the thousands displaced from Tel Abyad and surrounding countryside, many whom have moved south and ended up in Mahmoudli camp in Raqqa region, as well as spread throughout Kobane, Ayn Issa and Raqqa regions.

Impact on existing camps

Two camps for refugees and displaced people – Mabruka and Ayn Issa - had to be evacuated due to the proximity of attacks. In addition, the situation of other camps degenerated due to waves of new arrivals, evacuation of international NGOs and disruption to aid.

11 October: Mabruka refugee camp (Jazeera region), which housed approximately 4,000 internally displaced people (63% of whom are children) is evacuated and relocated to Areesha camp south of Hasakah city in Jazeera region. Some residents of Mabruka are transported to Mahmoudli camp in Raqqa region. However, reports say that 14 families were still in the camp when Turkish proxies took over the territory on the 14th October.

Fact Check: Although shelling took place in the surroundings of Mabruka camp, the camp itself was not hit by shelling.

14 October: Ayn Issa refugee camp in Raqqa region is in the process of evacuation due to shelling and attacks from Turkish proxy forces and ISIS attacks.

15 October: Virtually all international NGOs have pulled out of the region. Severely reduced UN and ICRC presence in some of the refugee camps remains.

19 October: Ayn Issa confirmed as evacuated. It is unclear exactly when this happened as the Administration would not give information for security reasons.

22 October: The situation in IDP camps is reaching breaking point, as the population of Mahmoudli and Areesha camps swell from new arrivals. Mahmoudli camp experiences a shortage of tents and food. Flow of humanitarian aid to the region is disrupted.

International food aid has not arrived at Hol camp for several days. The Autonomous Administration is providing food and water, but is unable to provide additional supplies.

ISIS-linked violence and breakouts from camps



The camps al Hol, Ayn Issa and Roj all hosted ISIS-linked women and their children, both from Syria and Iraq as well as third country nationals. The Turkish invasion triggered outbreaks of violence within the camps due to a weakened security presence within the camps due to re-allocation of forces and workers to deal with the critical situation at the front. The situation is further exacerbated by a general resurgence of ISIS caused by destabilization of the region as well as disruption to counter-terrorism operations, and the actions of Turkish proxies on the ground, many of whom subscribe to jihadist ideology.

Al Hol Camp, outside of Hasakah city, Jazeera region

Al Hol camp has a long history of violence and tension due to the high numbers of ISIS-linked women and their children present in the camp, including 11,200 third country nationals. The situation severely degenerated because of the Turkish attacks as nearly all international NGOs left, and camp residents saw the unstable security situation as an opportunity to break out and rejoin the remnants of ISIS. As predicted by the Autonomous Administration, when the invasion happened it was not possible to keep enough security forces within the camps to control rising levels of violence.

9th October: On the first day of Turkish invasion, ISIS-linked women attack the Internal Security Forces guards, set fires in the camp and attempt to break out.

11 October: ISIS-linked women attack security forces, set fires, and attempt to break out.

15 October: Breakouts of ISIS-linked families from Al Hol camp, later recaptured.

18 October: Breakout of 14 ISIS-linked families from Al Hol camp (14 women and 21 children), later recaptured. The women - from Syria and Iraq - claim that they wanted to "join the war against the Kurds" or "return to Baghouz."

20 October: 46 ISIS-linked women escape with 56 of their children, later recaptured.

23 October: ISIS-linked women attempt to murder another camp resident, security forces intervened.

Ayn Issa, Ayn Issa city, Raqqa region

Ayn Issa camp is located on the southern edge of Ayn Issa city, technically outside of the 30km safe zone that Turkey originally claimed to be establishing. However, in addition to the city of Ayn Issa being hit by shelling and air strike, Turkish proxies breached camp boundaries in at least one instance. Ayn Issa hosts third national ISIS-linked women and their families, as well as people from Iraq and Syria who are not linked to ISIS.

13 October: Shelling in the proximity of the camp triggers panic and a mass breakout of ISIS-linked families – 785 people – occurs. Some are later recaptured.

14 October: Clashes between security forces and ISIS elements within Ayn Issa camp. Camp is in the process of evacuation. ISIS communications aimed at ISIS-linked women detained in camps urge them to prepare to break out.

15 October: Uprisings in Ayn Issa camp, fires set by ISIS-linked residents spread across the whole camp. Loss of control by the Internal Security Forces results in escapes.

16 October: Clashes erupt in Ayn Issa camp between SDF security forces and ISIS sleeper cells in the camp. Another group of ISIS-linked families breaks out. The French Foreign Minister confirms that nine French ISIS-linked individuals escaped from a camp.



Escaped ISIS-linked detainees

17 October: Approximately 50 ISIS-linked women of Russian nationality are reported as heading towards Turkish border after escape from Ayn Issa.

22 October: Manbij Military Council issues a warning that ISIS cells are increasing their activity. The Council accuses Turkish backed forces of trying to break ISIS-linked families out of camps. A group of ISIS-linked women and their children, who had broken out of Ayn Issa camp, are arrested while trying to enter Turkey from Manbij region.

24 October: Internal Security Forces arrest five escaped ISIS-linked women who were attempting to flee towards the Iraqi border, along with 18 children. The women were of German, Turkish and Uzbek nationality.

30 October: Two Belgian-national ISIS-linked women who escaped from Ayn Issa are reported as being in Turkish-controlled territory in Syria.

Newly displaced people

The Turkish invasion displaced between 200,000 - 300,000 people from areas targeted by Turkish air strikes, shelling, and presence of Turkish-backed forces on the ground. Tens of thousands settle in temporary accommodation (mostly schools) in Tel Tamer and Hasakah, some arrive at Mahmoudli camp (near Raqqa) and Newroz camp (reopened camp, near Derik), and 13,000 arrive in KRG Iraq.

10 October: At least 70,000 people have fled the villages and cities along the border region, mostly seeking safety in Tel Tamer, Raqqa and Hasakeh, as well as seeking to cross at the Semalka border crossing into the Kurdish region of Iraq.

11 October: The United Nations Human Needs Assessment Programme calculates the number of displaced people from the first two days of the conflict as 191,069.

15 October: Tel Tamer is crowded with IDPs. The city bread oven couldn't feed the refugee influx, so bread from village ovens is being brought to the schools, where refugees take shelter. UNICEF calculates at least 70,000 children as being displaced. All international NGOs have left the city, including ICRC, Doctors without Borders and Mercy Corps.

16 October: Bardarash camp in the Kurdish region of Iraq, near Duhok, has been re-opened to receive refugees via the Semalka border crossing, mostly elders and families with very young children.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reports that in the first week of the Turkish invasion, there have been 300,000 displaced and 71 civilian dead.

20 October: New displacement continues from villages surrounding Sere Kaniye, Tel Tamer and other areas occupied by proxy forces. Most displaced people head towards Hasakah.

21 October: A significant proportion of Dirbesiye residents flee before the end of the ceasefire, expecting an increase in attacks.

22 October: People flee from border areas such as Amude and Dirbesiye as well as Tel Tamer. The Autonomous Administration announces that a new camp, "Tuwena," is being built outside Hasakah to accommodate tens of thousands of IDPs. Figures range from 15,000 – 50,000.

24 October: Newroz camp near Derik, which was closed following the return of its Yazidi residents, is reopened to house 10 - 15,000 people from the Tel Abyad – Sere Kaniye region.

26 October: Bardarash camp in KRG Iraq reaches capacity with approximately 12,000 refugees, 75% of whom are women and children. Some children arrive unaccompanied,



and there are 220 disabled people among the displaced population within Hasakah. New arrivals continue.

27 October: The first 15 families arrived at Newroz refugee camp near city of Derik. The first 346 refugees arrive at Gawilan Camp in Duhok, KRG Iraq, which has been expanded to cope with the influx.

29 October: The total number of refugee arrivals in KRG reaches 12,964. The regional government issues a call to international humanitarian actors to meet the need for heaters and fuel as winter approaches.

31 October: IDPs from Sere Kaniye set up tents outside the UN offices in Qamishlo and start an indefinite sit in protest.

2 November: The first 33 families arrive at Tuwena camp outside of Hasakah city.

Humanitarian response/ Impact on NGOs

The humanitarian situation in North and East Syria was already critical prior to the Turkish invasion. The attacks, as well as the increased presence of the Syrian regime in the region, resulted in evacuation of virtually all international NGO staff and therefore the stoppage or severe reduction of international humanitarian support services.

9 October: Kurdish Red Crescent announces the removal of some teams from camps to the border to provide critical support to those injured by the attacks.

10 October: International NGOs begin to evacuate international staff, leaving minimal staffing and vastly reduced services. Virtually no NGOs remain in al Hol camp.

11 October: Turkish shelling of Alouk water station causes critical water shortage in Hasakah region, including in hospitals.

12 October: Significant numbers of volunteers from across North and East Syria, including doctors, have rushed to Tel Tamer to join the emergency response efforts. International NGOs Cadus and Medecins Sans Frontieres, as well as local NGOs Hevi and Kurdish Red Crescent are in Tel Tamer, but much of the humanitarian response is being organized by local residents, the local administration, and the displaced people themselves. The water shortage in Tel Tamer is critical, with people emptying backup water storage tanks.

14 October: Following SDF's military agreement with the Syrian government, all international NGOs evacuate international staff. Reduced services in the camps provided by the Autonomous Administration, local NGOs (primarily Kurdish Red Crescent) and a reduced UN and ICRC presence.

15 October: Local response networks in Tel Tamer continue to coordinate distribution of bread from bakeries in nearby villages. ICRC, MSF and Mercy Corps have all left Tel Tamer.

16 October: Schools and community centers in Tel Tamer and Hasakah have been opened as emergency accommodation for displaced families. Local associations are helping collect and distribute food and blankets, but the scale of need greatly outstrips their capacity. Some aid has arrived from the Kurdish Regional Government in Iraq.

18 October: The humanitarian situation in Tel Tamer and Hasakah continues to be at crisis point, with over 100,000 displaced people crowded into schools, mosques, gardens and family homes without adequate food, water, or blankets. Concerns mount over the approach of winter.

20 October: Regular water supply is still not restored to Hasakah and Tel Tamer.

Fact Check: It was reported that the Alouk water station was been fixed by the Red



Cross, but it still only operates at 20% capacity.

22 October: International aid food packets - which generally arrive three times a week - have not arrived. Most United Nations aid arrives from the Al Waleed/ Al Tanf border crossing, managed by the Syrian regime.

23 October: New arrivals in Tel Tamer often have to wait 1 to 2 days before accessing aid.

29 October: Displaced families await the construction of Tuwan camp, still in early stages. Newroz Camp (near Derik) has been re-opened to receive people displaced by the Turkish invasion, but lack of UN presence means that other international NGOs will not come.

31 October: The water crisis in Hasakah continues. Residents document green-colored water coming from household taps.

1 November: 63 schools in Hasakah house displaced people, including 433 women who are pregnant or breastfeeding, and 813 infants who are still nursing. Kitchens have been installed in all of the schools, and 50-60 local organizations are supporting with health, food, and materials. In addition to the displaced families in schools, 66,000 are temporarily accommodated in houses in Hasakah. 86,000 children are not able to go to school because schools are being used as accommodation.

Returns

In the first week of the attacks, nearly all cities and towns along the Syria- Turkey border were targeted with artillery. As a result, many residents fled from all areas. Since then, some residents have been able to return to areas which have been largely calm in recent weeks – such as Qamishlo, Amude, Dirbesiye and Derik, but fighting continues east of Sere Kaniye, on the Sere Kaniye – Tel Tamer axis, north of Ayn Issa and west of Tal Abyad. Tel Abyad and Sere Kaniye and the surrounding countryside are occupied by Turkish proxies. Hundreds of houses have been seized and occupied by Turkish proxies and civilians have been murdered or kidnapped for ransom. Those who have been willing, or have attempted to go back to the city to check on their homes or businesses, have been targeted on the roads by shooting and shelling, have found their property seized or have been detained. The manager of coordination of NGOs in Hasakah has said that although some families have returned to Tal Abyad, he does not believe that a single family has successfully returned to Sere Kaniye (Ras al Ain).

Fact Check: On the 28th October the UN OCHA reported 61,050 former residents have returned to Sere Kaniye and Tal Abyad. These figures are not supported by our observations from on the ground. Having spoken to officials responsible for emergency response and displaced populations, dozens of displaced residents of Sere Kaniye and residents of the areas where displaced families have been housed, RIC believes that the actual figure of returns is significantly lower. In the case of Sere Kaniye, returns appear to be negligible. UN figures that have been produced on returns are not only inconsistent with our observations on the ground, but also internally inconsistent or implausible. To take one example, OCHA brief that over 40,000 people were displaced from Kobane on 13 October, only for all of them bar 30 to have returned home in just over a week by 24 October. We continue to investigate these figures and will provide a fuller response in the coming days.