

Situation Report: Raqqa Refugee Camps

July 25-August 19, 2017

This report provides an overview of the conditions of civilians fleeing from Raqqa.

The province of Raqqa is witnessing waves of displacement of civilians from the northern, eastern and western countryside of the province. There are limited incidents of escape from Raqqa City, which is under complete siege. This massive wave of displacement from Raqqa began after the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) announced the launch of military operation “Euphrates Wrath” on April 11, 2016, which is supported by the US led coalition.

1. Situation in the northern countryside

The northern countryside is located 90 kilometers north of the city of Raqqa. It includes areas of Tel Abiad, Suluk and Ein Essa. It has been considered the starting point of SDF military operations since it was taken out of ISIS control in June 2015. The northern countryside hosts a significant number of internally displaced people (IDPs), and they are concentrated in Tel Abiad and its suburbs, al-Shirkarak and al-Sukaryeh. The estimated number of IDPs is more than 200,000. A new camp for IDPs has been established in a cotton warehouse in Ein Essa.

- a. **Ein Essa IDPs camp** is located 50 kilometers north of the city of Raqqa, on the Aleppo-Hasakeh road juncture which intersects with the Tel Abiad road. The camp was established in the cotton warehouse of the Ministry of Agriculture. It is 200 hectares in size, surrounded by barbed wire and guarded by an armed group of SDF. It contains 1,080 tents which shelter about ten thousand IDPs, most of whom are from Raqqa and its countryside. There are also a number of Iraqi families who were displaced from Mosul after the launch of the military campaign against ISIS in Iraq.

The overall situation in the camp:

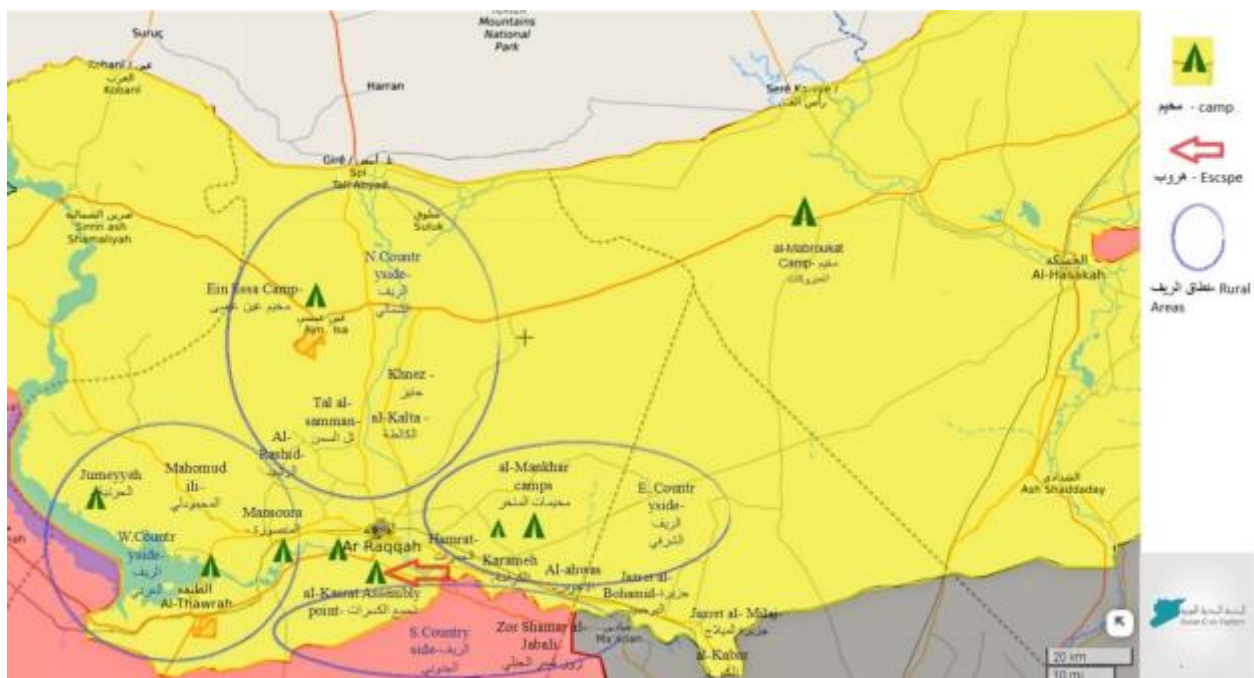
- IDPs suffer from a lack of electricity and safe water. There is a risk of outbreak of diseases and epidemics due to high temperatures and lack of ventilation and cooling systems.
- The camp has one Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders (MSF) medical point, which has a limited number of first aid kits that are insufficient to meet the needs.
- Access to nutrient-rich foods is limited to only one meal per day.
- Due to huge numbers of new IDPs, the privacy of people has been violated in the overcrowded camp, where more than one family is being placed in one tent.
- Many IDPs are being investigated by a security group belonging the Kurdish Security Forces (Asayish). There are reports of detainees being tortured.

Considering that the camp is a compulsory stop for anyone who leaves Raqqa, these practices make the camp more closely resemble a detainee center than a IDP shelter.

- b. **Assembly points within urban communities in the northern countryside:** In addition to the Tel Abiad area, there are assembly points closer to the city, located 30-40 kilometers north of Raqqa (i.e. al-Kalta, Khnez, Tal al-Samman, Hazima), in addition to the government farms (Tishreen, al-Rashid and al-Jayef).

The overall situation in these communities:

- These areas, overcrowded by new IDPs, suffer from lack of services, such as fuel, gas and electricity.
- Low standard of health care, where diarrhea and infections and intestinal diseases has emerged. In addition, there are measles and smallpox infections, and there is also a shortage of medicines and medical points.
- High temperatures have allowed for higher rates of growth and reproduction in insects in the surrounding environment, and there is a lack of access to safe, clean drinking-water and basic sanitation.
- There is a shortage of food and humanitarian aid.



2. Situation in the eastern countryside

The eastern countryside stretches 70 kilometers east of the province of Raqqa, on the northern bank of the Euphrates River from Raqqa al-Samra and Mashlab to Jazret al-Bohamid, Jazret al-Milaj and al-Kubar, which administratively belongs to the province of Deir al-Zor. The area is currently controlled by the SDF and suffers from difficult living conditions similar to those in the northern countryside.

The eastern countryside is divided into three sections, according to people's conditions and the turn of events:

The first section includes al-Kabar, al-Jazrat, al-Awad villages, Khas Ajeel, Khas Habal, al-Shaher and al-Ghasanyeh. This part of the eastern countryside was taken out of ISIS control during early 2017 and the population returned to their villages.

The overall situation:

- Civilians suffer from shortages of fuel, electricity, gas, bread, flour, bakeries, mills, water, health care and medicines. They rely on firewood and generators. In addition to the deteriorating humanitarian situation in this zone, the area is being attacked and bombarded by ISIS from the two areas of Madaan and al-Tabanni. Looting and theft were also carried out during the process of taking the area out of ISIS by some groups of SDF.

The second section is 30 kilometers east of the city of Raqqa, in al-Karameh, which has been completely evacuated. Two camps have been set up in al-Manakher to the east and west of al-Manakhar Camp. The displaced population of the two camps, established with the support of the United Nations, is estimated at 35,000. It should be noted that the number of IDPs in the camps is changing with the return of IDPs to their villages, and the mass influx of IDPs to the camps from the opposite bank; from Madaan, al-Sabkha and Deir al-Zor. The camps' populations suffer from lack of organization, guardianship, administration, health, care, clean and safe water, electricity and food. As a semi-desert region, people are suffering from extremely high temperatures.

The third section includes al-Hamrat, Hamret Naser, Hamret Balasem, Hamret Ghanam and Hamret Jamaseh. There are no assigned refugee camps in these areas. IDPs are randomly distributed in agricultural land, located 8 to 10 kilometers north of the Euphrates. The majority of these villages' inhabitants have been allowed to return, but they suffer from the deterioration of basic services, such as lack of electricity and energy, lack of water and food. In addition, people suffer from the authoritarian practices of the newly formed Relations office in Ein Essa which belongs to the Civil Counsel of Raqqa.

As for the area which includes the villages of Raqqa, Mashlab and al-Samra, it is still uninhabited because of its proximity to the besieged city. There are frequent thefts and looting of private properties in the area, keeping in mind that the factions which are present in the region include the Manbij Military Council, the Revolutionary Army, the Elite Army and the Peoples' Protection Units (YPG).

3. Situation in the western countryside

The western countryside extends along the banks of the Euphrates River from the city to the west, at a distance of 80 kilometers. It includes al-Tabqa, Mansoura, Hammam, Kasrat,

Khatounia, Salhabieh, Hawi al-Hawa, Mahomudili and Jurneyyeh. The area also suffers from a decline in basic services, like other areas.

4. The situation in the southeastern countryside

This area stretches 70 kilometers from Ratleh to Madaan and it is currently under attack by the Syrian government and its militias as well as Russian allies. The Syrian government's forces along with the Iranian-supported Iraqi militia group Harakat al-Nujaba, Hezbollah and some tribesmen from the southern countryside of Raqqa are making progress, and they have taken control of most of the Badia area, south of Raqqa. These military developments have increased the population's fear of retaliation by the Syrian government and Shiite militias, as well as fear of sectarian violence. Consequently, people have fled from the villages of Zour Shamar, Qabli and Madaan to SDF areas by crossing the river to the north of the Euphrates. There have been reports of cases of drowning in the river, as well as incidents of escape from the aforementioned villages as well as Dier al-Zor towards the villages of al-Kasra, south of Raqqa. IDPs who are present in al-Kasrat, Mansoura and al-Tabqa need assistance and urgent humanitarian intervention.

Recommendations:

- The international community, especially the coalition countries under the leadership of the United States of America, must increase their humanitarian assistance and ensure that the needs of all civilians are met, with equal attention to that paid to financing military operations and troops.
- The United Nations and the international and local organizations must intensify their efforts immediately to address the needs of refugees, mainly providing essential aid, such as food, medicine, medical services and clean water.
- Provide access to power lines and fuel to camps, and also to the areas to which people have returned, in order to face the severe heat wave.
- Provide necessary vaccines to all areas to combat outbreaks of measles and smallpox. It is important to note that vaccines are partially available, but the medical materials have expired and have caused complications. Therefore, vaccines must be provided and adequate storage and transport conditions must be secured, in addition to the need to train specialized teams.
- Greater attention must be directed to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH). In addition, awareness of environmental diseases must be brought about to concentrations of IDPs, due to high temperatures, humidity and the spread of insects and pests.

- Allow the Salhabieh and Hawi al-Hawa families to return to their homes, which will alleviate the suffering of the displaced.
- Ensure the protection of uninhabited areas, such as al-Raqqa al-Samra, al Mashlap and al-Sabahai from theft and looting. We call for the opening of investigations and we call for those responsible for these violations to be held accountable. In addition, we demand that the faction in charge of the area be held accountable for the systematic looting and vandalism.
- Increase support for community, domestic and youth initiatives in IDP areas.
- The Kurdish Self-Administration and SDF must facilitate the work of local and international organizations to address the needs of IDPs.

Finally, the Syrian Civic Platform in the province of Raqqa confirms that the basis for addressing the problems facing Raqqa's population and alleviating the suffering of civilians is to ensure effective civil society involvement in managing its needs.