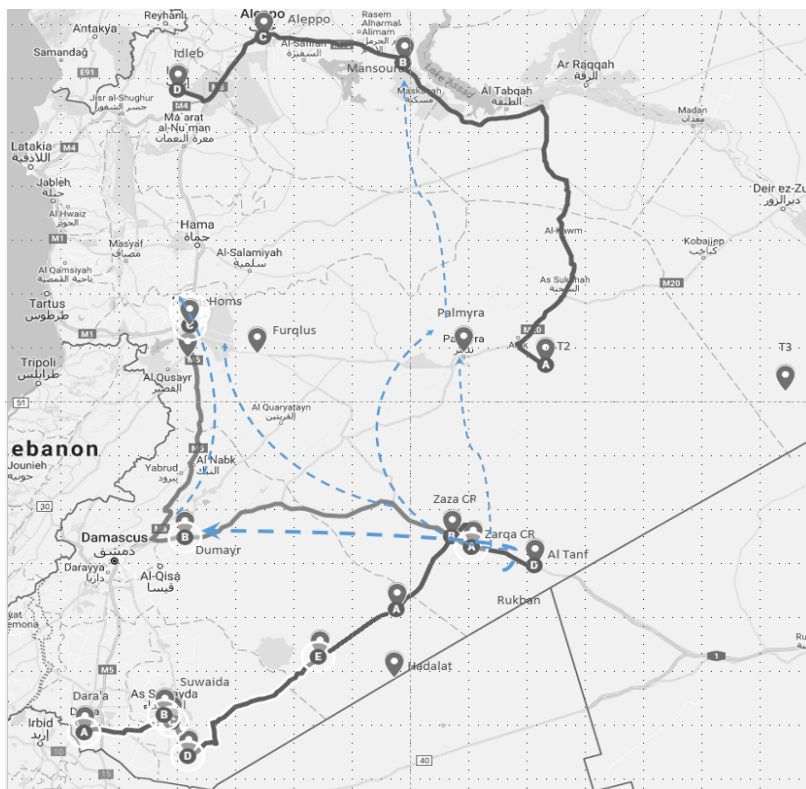




Situation Overview

Based on the last distribution which take place in January 2018, an estimated 45-50,000 individuals remained stranded at Rukban, which consist mainly of women and children having fled insecurity from other parts of Syria. Since May 2018, the further deterioration of the living conditions at Rukban, also known as “the berm” led to the returns of an estimated 550 families thus reducing the population to closer to 45,000. The displacement in South Dara’a in early July had limited impact on population movement to/from Rukban, with only an estimated 30 families arriving however there are increased reports regarding potential returns after mid-July allegedly based on the reconciliation deals with the Syrian authorities.



Population Movements

An estimated 220 families have allegedly left Rukban in July. The main route taken by Rukban residents continues to be through Dumayr road, with intentions to reach the Syrian Arab Army controlled facility in Dumayr to go through a ‘security screening’. Rukban residents from major groups and tribes including Bani Khaled, Al Omour, Oqaidat, Fawareh, Mahin, Tadmur, Qaryatain and other groups have collected the names and are in the process of returning. Security clearance allegedly is being obtained prior to their departure from Rukban through a reconciliation process between tribal representatives and the Syrian authority, some of whom are traveling to Homs to share the names in preparation for same. The majority of returnees through Dumayr to Homs from Rukban are allegedly kept in surrounding villages outside the city and not allowed inside.

Returns are often taking place with incomplete families as some members are staying behind in Rukban. Fear of military conscription of male family members is a paramount concern in addition to concerns regarding the protection of female family members from a security perspective. Some respondents recall the alleged killing of people from Al Qaryatain upon their return in 2017.

There are many more families on the return security screening request lists but the factions are reportedly discouraging returns at this time. A member of Tribal Army indicated that approximately 200 families had attempted to leave since 23 July to Dumayr or to Tadmur, and that the TA attempted to convince them not to do so which they refused. Some residents allegedly ‘sneaked out’ of Rukban settlement at midnight with the intention to reach Dumayr for security clearance and to move onwards to Homs. They left secretly as believed that the TA leaders would not allow them to leave without pre-approvals under the pretext of the families’ safety. Around 130 families from Al Omour tribe have allegedly applied to return to Tadmur.

Those who failed to obtain security assurances or those who are concerned with regards to the process

typically take the road to AlMansoura, Tadmur and rural Homs. Irregular movements to Tadmur and surrounding (Al Hamad) desert appeared to become increasingly a trend in July. People typically use cars and small trucks heading to villages surrounding Tadmur. A number of returnees from Al Omour tribe allegedly returned to Abu Rajmain, 33km north of Tadmur city. Reports indicated that some people are pretending to be shepherds in order to pass security clearances at checkpoints in Tadmor. However an allegation of arrest of ‘shepherds’ and possible torture in detention facilities in Tadmur was reported in July. Since mid-June more than 30 ‘male’ Rukban residents reportedly took the risky AlMansoura road in the desert to find job opportunities with some of them leaving family members in Rukban. Some of them have been allegedly caught and killed. Around 20 men from different tribes were confirmed to have reached -Al Mansoura and then subsequently fled to northern Syria.

Overall security remains a concern for the population and Maghawir Al-Thowra (MaT) announced that they have captured a total of 22 ISIS fighters in the 55km Deconfliction Zone (DCZ) during the month of July. Two gunshot injury cases and one injury caused by landmine explosion were identified at Rukban clinic during the month of July. The high number of gunshot incidents in Rukban settlement has been a paramount concern to Rukban residents.

Some Rukban resident expressed hopes in the reconciliation processes, however majority expressed no intentions of immediate returns for fear of military conscription of male family members. There remains a belief that buses may be sent to return for free those who are from tribes who sign the agreements, and men will be taken to military conscriptions.

Currently return options are believed to be available only for those who afford to pay ‘return fees’. The fees varies depending on the route taken. Movement to Al Mansoura by motorcycles thereby avoiding the authorities’ security checkpoint allegedly costs 50,000-150,000 SYP [100-300 USD] per individual to pass the checkpoints without inspections. Movement to rural Homs by detouring Dumayr security screening facility allegedly costs up to 2-300,000 SYP [4-500 USD], while the travel cost through Dumayr to Homs has decreased to 20,000-100,000 SYP [40-200USD].

