

'We treat people, we don't judge them': US medics care for all in Mosul battle

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American volunteers save the lives of anyone brought to their trauma clinic in west Mosul, be they civilian, soldier - or IS suspects



Hamid is treated by American medics in Mosul (MEE/Marielle van Uitert)



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Mosul, IRAQ - It is early morning when soldiers rush in a screaming patient, cutting into the calm of a coffee break among the American volunteer doctors. With his face torn and teeth pulled, the young man looks more dead than alive.

His cheeks are covered with soil, suggesting to medics he had been buried alive, while red marks around his neck suggest he has been choked.

In this makeshift clinic on western Mosul's front line, the sounds of bombs and bullets are never far away as the medics work on the next case.

He's been badly tortured again. By whom? God knows

- *NYC Medics volunteer*

Their brief moments of rest last only until the next ambulance or armoured vehicle unloads its charges, be they children ripped apart by shrapnel or soldiers shot or blasted in battles with Islamic State.

This is the second time the doctors have seen this patient. The 18-year-old, Hamid, is known to all.

"He's been badly tortured again, that's clear," one of the volunteers says. "By whom? God knows."

Carrie Garavan, the lead doctor examining the patient, says the man shakes uncontrollably when electronic equipment is brought near him. "He associated them with electric shocks," she says.

This is the reality of this "stabilisation point" in western Mosul, run by the 'NYC Medics' NGO in conjunction with the World Health Organisation.

It is a crucial first line of care for those wounded in a battle that has become bogged down in the old city area.

Armoured cars are useless in the narrow streets, and the threat of IS snipers looms large as they move like ghosts between buildings still filled with civilians.



Iraqi forces fight in the narrow streets of old city (MEE/Marielle van Uitert)

But not all here think Hamid should be helped - there are suggestions he is an IS fighter.

Peter, a translator born in Mosul, storms out of the treatment room in anger.

"The guy keeps lying," he says. "First he says he has escaped IS, then that he's not. Then he makes up another story."

"He is 100 percent IS," Peter claims, before stating: "This man should have been killed."

"He killed many people himself. He had already been judged and condemned to death."

He is 100 percent IS... this man should have been killed.

- Peter, translator

But for the American medics, their only job is to save lives, not decide who is worthy of aid.

"Whatever crimes he has committed, he is still a human being in great pain who needs medical treatment," says Kathy Bequary, the executive director of NYC Medics.

"If we didn't treat this patient like any other, regardless of his background, then what's the difference between IS and whoever did this to him?"

"An Iraqi officer once told me they were not fighting only for their country, but for humanity.

"This is exactly the battle we're all fighting here: the battle for humanity."

Garavan adds: "We are here to treat people, not to interrogate or judge them."



An injured soldier is brought to the NYC Medics clinic in Mosul (MEE/Marielle van Uitert)

Ali is not the first torture victim to arrive at the clinic. There have been others dumped at its doors.

"One of our first cases were a husband and his pregnant wife who had escaped IS," says Bequary.

"The couple had been tortured by IS when they tried to escape. She lost her baby."

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[We'll probably kill him later. The prisons are full'](#)

It is an IS terror tactic that has become industrialised in Mosul. During an operation last week, Iraqi soldiers uncovered a range of torture instruments in a house that had served as an IS prison.

Abu Adnan Hazem al-Tai is sitting next to his house opposite the prison, while his granddaughters are running around.

"We have never been inside, but we saw prisoners being brought in every day," he says.

"IS was everywhere. My son-in-law was shot when they knocked at his door, just because he wasn't quick enough to open it."



Blood marks the spot where an IS fighter lies dead in western Mosul (MEE/Marielle van Uitert)

A few blocks from the clinic, a small convoy of exhausted refugees includes a grandmother, toddlers and a cage full of chicken. The refugees have walked for hours under cover of night to escape the grip of IS.

Pick-ups packed with others are driving in the direction of nearby Hammam al-Alil camp.

In the same street, people are pushing carts piled with furniture in opposite direction: their area has been declared safe, so they are heading home today.

Hussein Hamid Harbi, 25, a member in the Iraqi police's Rapid Response Division, has lost several friends in previous battles against IS in Ramadi, Fallujah and Tikrit. This time it is different.

They will accuse one another. I am afraid that it is only going to get worse here
- Ibtisam Saleh, refugee

"These are the last hours for IS, in Iraq and hopefully in the world," he says.

But Ibtisam Saleh, a 40-year-old refugee, fears a bout of revenge after the defeat of IS. She is sitting with some other women in a courtyard, drinking tea and eating bread.

"They will accuse one another: her son was an IS member, his brother fought with a Shia militia... I am afraid that it is only going to get worse here."

That fear has crystallised in the stabilisation centre manned by NYC medics. Hamid has been patched up, despite the protests of the local translator.



A poster of the Ali al-Sistani, the highest Shia power in Iraq, in majority-Sunni Mosul (MEE/Marielle van Uitert) Hamid does not say who inflicted his injuries, but what is known is this: he was escorted by two Iraqi policemen the last time he left the clinic.

"He was supposed to be transported to another, more advanced hospital for further treatment," says Garavan.

"All we know is that he never arrived. And that we now have him here again, buried alive."

This time, the doctors decide to provide their own escort in the ambulance.

"The patient begged us to not leave him alone."