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**UN REPORT: 20,000-30,000 ISIL FIGHTERS LEFT IN IRAQ AND SYRIA**

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Al Jazeera (13 August 2018)

Between 20,000 and 30,000 members of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as ISIS) group, remain in Iraq and Syria despite its defeat and a halt in the flow of foreigners joining its ranks, according to a new United Nations report.

Released on Monday, the report by UN sanctions monitors estimates that between 3,000 and 4,000 ISIL fighters were based in Libya, while some of the key operatives in the armed group were being relocated to Afghanistan.

Member-states told the monitors that the total membership in Iraq and Syria was "between 20,000 and 30,000 individuals, roughly equally distributed between the two countries".

"Among these is still a significant component of the many thousands of active foreign terrorist fighters," said the report.

The sanctions monitoring team submits independent reports every six months to the Security Council on ISIL, also known as ISIS, and al-Qaeda.

ISIL's initial aim was to create a so-called caliphate across Iraq, Syria and beyond.

In early 2014, it took over the Syrian city of Raqqa and declared it its capital. A few months later, the group conquered the Iraqi city of Mosul, where its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared a caliphate in June 2014.

Within a year, ISIL took control of most of eastern Syria and about one-third of Iraq's territory.

In the same year, an international coalition of 77 countries was formed with the aim to "degrade and ultimately defeat ISIL".

By 2017, the group was militarily defeated and largely driven out of all major cities, including its capital.

By January 2018, ISIL was confined to small pockets of territory in Syria, although the new report said the group "showed greater resilience" in eastern Syria.

In Syria, ISIL "is still able to mount attacks. It does not fully control any territory in Iraq, but it remains active through sleeper cells" of agents hiding out in the desert and elsewhere, the report added.

### *Foreign fighters*

The flow of foreigners leaving ISIL "remains lower than expected" and no other arena has emerged as a favourite destination for foreign fighters, although "significant numbers have made their way to Afghanistan", said the report.

There are an estimated 3,500 - 4,500 fighters in Afghanistan and those numbers are increasing, according to the report.

The flow of foreign fighters towards the group "has essentially come to a halt," it added.

ISIL finances are drying up, with one member-state estimating that its total reserves were "in the low hundreds of millions" of US dollars. Some revenue from oil fields in northeastern Syria continues to flow to the group.

ISIL commands only 250 to 500 members in Yemen, compared to between 6,000 and 7,000 al-Qaeda fighters.

In the Sahel, the group is active mostly at the border between Mali and Niger.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/08/report-20000-30000-isil-fighters-left-iraq-syria-180813>

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