

Question on notice no. 68

Portfolio question number: AE18-069

2017-18 Additional estimates

Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee, Attorney-General's Portfolio

Senator Louise Pratt: asked the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation on 27 February 2018—

1. How many Australians have travelled to the Middle East to participate with terrorist organisations in the last 12 months?
2. Is that figure higher than in the previous 12 months?
3. Approximately how many Australians have been killed fighting with terrorist organisation in Iraq and Syria?
4. Do you expect an increase in the number of foreign fighters with Australian passports seeking to return to Australia following the defeat of ISIS in its territories?
5. Do you consider that the security risk within Australia is likely to be increased or decreased by the defeat of ISIS in the territories it controls in the Middle East?
6. How many Australian foreign fighters do you expect to return to Australia?
7. Do you believe any threat those returning individuals may pose can be managed?

Answer —

1. Since 2012, around 220 Australians have travelled to Syria/Iraq to join the conflict. Although unable to further breakdown these figures for security reasons, ASIO notes that as the conflict continues, fewer individuals are successfully entering the conflict zone.

2. Please refer to the answer for Question 1.

3. At least 70, and possibly as many as 90, Australians have been killed as a result of their involvement in the conflict.

4. The vast majority of the Australians who travelled to Syria or Iraq in support of terrorist organisations are assessed to be associated with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The military defeat of ISIL increases the potential for possible returnees from the region; however, the situation on the ground is complex and fluid, and the exact number of returnees in any given period will depend upon a wide range of circumstances. However, we do not expect to see a largescale return of these travellers; rather we anticipate the numbers of returnees to be small and their arrival sporadic.

5. ISIL's military losses in Syria and Iraq will not eliminate the threat it poses to Australia and Australian interests globally. ISIL's global appeal has continued

through the support of its network of branches and affiliated groups and its propaganda. ISIL will continue to seek to direct, encourage and inspire attacks in Western countries and against Western interests elsewhere.

6. We do not expect to see a large scale return of these travellers and anticipate the numbers of returnees to be small and their arrival sporadic.

7. All overseas Australian terrorism suspects, including those seeking to return to Australia, are handled in accordance with the Australian Government framework. This framework supports whole-of-government coordination in relation to the handling of such cases, and ensures that each individual is managed in light of the threat they pose, the nature and potential criminality of their activities, and the level of their engagement with extremist groups. ASIO works closely with other Australian agencies to identify the issues each of these individuals might pose and ensure appropriate treatment plans are in place.