

**SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S PORTFOLIO**

Program: ASIO

Question No. AE17/077

Senator Pratt asked the following question at the hearing on 28 February 2017:

- 1) Approximately how many Australians are participating in armed conflicts with non-state actors in overseas conflicts (for the purposes of these questions, called 'foreign fighters with Australian citizenship')?
- 2) How many foreign fighters with Australian citizenship are in conflicts in the Middle East?
- 3) How many foreign fighters with Australian citizenship are engaged in conflicts serving with Kurdish forces?
- 4) How many foreign fighters with Australian citizenship have travelled to the Middle East to participate with terrorist organisations in the last 12 months? Is that figure higher than in the previous 12 months?
- 5) Are the numbers of Australians going to join terrorist organisation overseas increasing or decreasing or staying approximately the same?
- 6) Approximately how many Australians have returned from fighting with terrorist organisations in Iraq and Syria since 1 January 2013?
- 7) Approximately how many Australians have been killed fighting with terrorist organisations in Iraq and Syria?
- 8) Do you expect an increase in the number of foreign fighters with Australian citizenship seeking to return to Australia in the event that ISIS is defeated in the territories it controls in the Middle East?
 - a) How many foreign fighters with Australian citizenship do you expect to return to Australia in the next year?
 - b) How many foreign fighters with Australian citizenship do you expect to return to Australia in the next two years?
- 9) How many of the currently known foreign fighters with Australian citizenship are known to have dual citizenship? What is the nationality of the non-Australian citizenship of each of these individuals?
- 10) How many of the currently known foreign fighters with Australian citizenship are suspected to have dual citizenship?
 - a) What is the suspected nationality of the non-Australian citizenship of each of these individuals?

The answers to the honourable senator's questions are as follows:

1) Approximately how many Australians are participating in armed conflicts with non-state actors in overseas conflicts (for the purposes of these questions, called 'foreign fighters with Australian citizenship')?

As of 16 October 2017, around 110 Australians are fighting or engaged with terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq.

2) How many foreign fighters with Australian citizenship are in conflicts in the Middle East?

For security reasons, ASIO cannot provide a breakdown of these figures.

3) How many foreign fighters with Australian citizenship are engaged in conflicts serving with Kurdish forces?

For security reasons, ASIO cannot provide a breakdown of these figures

4) How many foreign fighters with Australian citizenship have travelled to the Middle East to participate with terrorist organisations in the last 12 months? Is that figure higher than in the previous 12 months?

For security reasons, ASIO cannot provide a breakdown of these figures.

5) Are the numbers of Australians going to join terrorist organisation overseas increasing or decreasing or staying approximately the same?

ASIO is seeing a reduction in the number of people seeking to leave Australia to join ISIL (or other extremist groups in Syria or Iraq, which has been the destination for the vast majority of Australians attempting to travel overseas and join terrorist organisations).

6) Approximately how many Australians have returned from fighting with terrorist organisations in Iraq and Syria since 1 January 2013?

As of 16 October 2017, returnees from the conflict in Syria and Iraq number around 40.

The majority of these travelled and returned in the early days of the conflict, before ISIL's claim to a caliphate in June 2014 and emergence as the dominant group drawing Australian travellers.

Of those who have returned since then, some have fought for ISIL, some have not fought but provided support to ISIL, a few had joined other Islamic extremist groups and a small number have fought with anti-ISIL groups.

7) Approximately how many Australians have been killed fighting with terrorist organisations in Iraq and Syria?

As of 16 October 2017, at least 68, and possibly as many as 83, Australians have been killed as a result of their involvement in the conflict.

8) Do you expect an increase in the number of foreign fighters with Australian citizenship seeking to return to Australia in the event that ISIS is defeated in the territories it controls in the Middle East?

a) How many foreign fighters with Australian citizenship do you expect to return to Australia in the next year?

b) How many foreign fighters with Australian citizenship do you expect to return to Australia in the next two years?

The vast majority of the Australians currently in Syria or Iraq are assessed to be in ISIL-controlled territory. Military defeat of ISIL is likely to increase the number of possible returnees from the region. This group may include men, women and young children currently with ISIL in Syria and Iraq who are either Australian citizens or who could seek to return here due to their connections to Australia.

The exact number of returnees in any given period will depend upon a wide range of circumstances. ASIO does not expect a sudden spike in numbers returning, but a steady trickle, dependent on individual circumstances. It is important to note that in the short term we expect the number of returnees to be small.

9) How many of the currently known foreign fighters with Australian citizenship are known to have dual citizenship? What is the nationality of the non-Australian citizenship of each of these individuals?

ASIO investigations are undertaken in relation to security and the resolution of security issues. While in some cases it is relevant to these investigations for ASIO to identify individuals as potentially holding or having an entitlement to dual nationalities, this does not necessarily include confirmation of that potential citizenship status. ASIO does not routinely seek to determine dual nationality status to a given legal threshold which could equate to identifying a sub-set of investigative targets as known to have dual citizenship.

10) How many of the currently known foreign fighters with Australian citizenship are suspected to have dual citizenship?

a) What is the suspected nationality of the non-Australian citizenship of each of these individuals?

In many cases it is difficult to establish which individuals have non-Australian nationalities, as often they have not taken steps to establish legal documents proving the nationality (such as obtaining a passport). However, of the Australians in Syria or Iraq who ASIO is investigating, ASIO has identified that between a third and a half might have an entitlement to a secondary nationality.

ASIO has identified over 20 countries as being possible secondary nationalities for these individuals; for security reasons ASIO cannot provide further details.