

## ASIO boss Duncan Lewis fears wave of attacks too big to stop



ASIO director-general Duncan Lewis. Picture: Ray Strange

[Brendan Nicholson](#), The Australian, 12:00AM October 14, 2016

The scale of the terrorist threat faced by Australia is such that ASIO cannot guarantee it will uncover and prevent attacks, the key counter-terrorism agency has warned. ASIO director-general Duncan Lewis has warned in his annual report that he fears his staff will be singled out for terrorist attacks. "It is an unfortunate reality that the changes to the security environment have resulted in an increased threat to the personal safety of ASIO staff," he said.

"My officers are operating in an environment that puts their personal safety at risk from spontaneous or opportunistic attack using readily acquired weapons and relatively simple tactics. "In today's environment, regardless of resourcing and expertise, we cannot provide complete assurance that all terrorist attacks or high harm espionage activities affecting Australia and Australians will be identified and prevented."

Mr Lewis said the principal threat came from a small number of individuals in Australia who remained committed to anti-Western, violent and extremist Sunni Islamist ideology. "Some have turned their attention to onshore attack planning after the cancellation of their Australian passports, preventing them from travelling to join jihadist groups in the conflict zone in Syria and Iraq, while some are returnees from the conflict," he said.

Reporting of suspicious behaviour in and around ASIO premises had risen. Security had been elevated and armed Australian Federal Police were closely patrolling the agency's headquarters in Canberra, Mr Lewis said, adding: "The safety of staff remains the paramount priority for ASIO."

Radicalisation and commitment to violent Islamist terrorist activities were happening at a speed hitherto unseen, he said. The threat was real and unprecedented for Australia, with four attacks carried out and 10 more planned attacks disrupted since September 2014.

Mr Lewis said it was of great concern that up to 70 children of Australians had been exposed to extremist groups in Syria or Iraq. "These children have either travelled to Syria or Iraq or a surrounding country with their Australian parents or have been born to Australian parents while in the conflict zone. These children had been in brutal war zones and were desensitised to extreme violence."