

With a significant procedural motion concerning the **NI Troubles Bill** expected on Monday (27 April), the picture is supposedly complicated by the **expected absence of the Armed Forces Minister Al Carns**, who is believed to be visiting troops engaged in defensive missions against Iran in the Gulf.

His absence from a key Commons moment raises questions in some minds about:

- Ministerial ownership of the Bill
- The internal balance being struck within government
- The extent to which veterans' concerns are shaping the final legislation

Carns became Minister for Veterans and People at the Ministry of Defence on 9 July 2024, shortly after being elected as the Labour MP for Birmingham Selly Oak in the 2024 General Election, and was appointed Minister for the Armed Forces in September 2025.

As an MoD minister, Carns would not in any event be expected to lead for the Government in Commons proceedings on a Northern Ireland Office Bill, though his presence on the front bench might have carried some political weight given his role as the Government's principal veterans-facing minister.

Al Carns was alleged to have 'been on resignation watch' for much of last year over the decision to replace the 2023 legislation. He is also said to have been closely involved in the drafting of the new protections which have yet to be published. According to [The Times](#),

Many veterans believe he remains ambivalent about the overall plans and has stopped short of endorsing them. He has previously described protecting veterans as his "red line."

As one would hope given his Royal Marines and SBS background and his roles to date in government, Carns is said to have been one of the most prominent voices within government on the impact of legacy processes on veterans, and the need for stronger safeguards against repeated or unjustified investigation.

Ultimately, as long as he remains in government Al Carns must - and surely does - accept collective responsibility for the outcome of this saga.

The very fact that he is a veteran and yes, a rather distinguished ex senior officer, means that there has been criticism on social media of his role in what some have seen as 'letting down the veteran community'.

Other service-veteran MPs have been subjected to similar criticism over their perceived stance on this legislation based, in at least one case to our knowledge, on misinformation and a profound misunderstanding of the process which, to be fair, has been no means straightforward.

We can only hope that Monday's Commons business will generate a little more light than heat.

See also: [Continuing troubles with the 'Troubles Bill' \(April 2026\)](#)