

British troops in Iraq

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Sixty-three MPs – including 58 Labour backbenchers – have so far (as of 21 October) signed the Early Day Motion, British Troops in Iraq (EDM 1769), in the name of Alice Mahon, which:

notes the United States Administration's request to send British troops into areas currently patrolled by American-led forces; is aware of the statement by the Secretary of State for Defence that he is inclined to comply; believes that such a move would significantly increase the danger to British troops in Iraq; and therefore calls for a vote in the House before Her Majesty's Government takes a final decision on this matter.

Although there is no doubt that concerns about the redeployment of British forces extend well beyond the 'usual suspects' (however defined), this is not yet evident from those prepared to go public on the issue by signing the EDM.

The vast majority of the 58 – 52 (90 per cent) – voted against the war on 18 March 2003. And most of the other six EDM signatories also have some 'form' on the issue.

Clare Short voted in favour of war as a Member of Cabinet (before her resignation several weeks later). Colin Burgon voted in favour of war last March, but had abstained in an earlier vote in February 2003, when the House voted upon whether the case against war had not yet been proven, whilst Colin Challen and Brian White abstained on the vote on war in March 2003, but voted against the Government in the earlier February vote.

The fifth, Geraldine Smith, has frequently called upon the Prime Minister to step down because of Iraq (most spectacularly in an article in the Guardian on 17 July earlier this year).

The only 'new' rebel is Andrew Mackinlay, who reluctantly voted in favour of war last time, and who was highly critical of the Defence Secretary when he made his statement to the Commons.

The 58 Labour backbenchers are joined by three Plaid Cymru MPs (Elfyn Llwyd, Adam Price and Simon Thomas), one SNP MP (Michael Weir), and the Conservative, Richard Page, all of whom voted against the war last year.

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