

WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Rep. Harry Mitchell today said that it is time for the Iraqi government to be held accountable for failing to meet key benchmarks and voted to responsibly redeploy U.S. troops from Iraq.

The Responsible Redeployment from Iraq Act, which sets a goal of reaching a limited American presence in Iraq by April 1, passed by a vote of 223-201.

The situation in Iraq continues to deteriorate. Earlier today, the Washington Post reported that CIA Director Michael V. Hayden told the bipartisan Iraq Study Group that “the inability of the government to govern seems irreversible,” adding that he could not ‘point to any milestone or checkpoint where we can turn this thing around.’ Hayden reportedly added, “The government is unable to govern. We have spent a lot of energy and treasure creating a government that is balanced, and it cannot function.” [Source: [Washington Post](#), July 12, 2007]

Mitchell made the following statement in the Congressional Record:

“In January, Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki publicly committed to meeting a set of benchmarks, including quelling sectarian violence, disarming sectarian militias and developing a plan to share oil revenues equitably among all Iraqis.

“In May, Congress, in a bipartisan way, made clear that the Iraqi government should be held accountable for meeting those benchmarks and required the President to report on the Iraqi government’s progress in meeting those goals.

“That report, which was released today, demonstrates the President’s surge is failing and that the Iraqi government is failing to meet the benchmarks it agreed to meet seven months ago.

“The Iraqi government has not moved toward national reconciliation. This morning, we learned that Director of Central Intelligence General Michael Hayden, an accomplished four-star general, told the bipartisan Iraq Study Group eight months ago that Iraq’s leaders are ‘unable to govern.’

“Now, the inability of the Iraqi government to govern seems irreversible. If there is no functioning government in Iraq, how do we expect to fix the problems in that country militarily?

“We continue to see the serious consequences that result from that inability to govern. Sectarian violence has not been quelled; it continues to escalate. Sectarian militias have not been disarmed; they continue to wreak havoc. There has been no progress on a plan to share oil revenues equitably among all Iraqis.

“The situation is rapidly deteriorating and American troops are caught in the crossfire.

“Continued U.S. involvement in Iraq must be contingent on the Iraqi government keeping its word. Benchmarks without accountability are not benchmarks at all. They are blank checks.

And I refuse to allow the Iraqi government, or any government, to have a blank check on American lives.

“The time has come to redeploy American troops from Iraq and reduce the U.S. military role in Iraq. We must do so in a responsible way that will help us better meet our strategic objectives and renew our fight against global terrorism.

“I am convinced that this course, combined with stepping up our diplomatic efforts, provide the best opportunity to achieve our strategic objectives, reduce sectarian violence and force Iraq’s leaders to get serious about Iraqi reconciliation and stabilization efforts.

“As their failure to meet the benchmarks clearly illustrates, Iraq’s leaders are unwilling and incapable of moving toward national reconciliation. If the United States allows the Iraqi government to have an open-ended timetable to meet these benchmarks, and demands no accountability, our troops may literally be in harm’s way forever. We cannot continue to allow the safety of our troops to be placed in the hands of Iraqi leaders who have failed to keep their word or are incapable of meeting their obligations.

“Make no mistake: the deteriorating situation in Iraq is not a result of military failure. Our nation’s armed forces crushed Saddam Hussein’s regime in one of the most complete and impressive military victories in the history of our country.

“The disaster in Iraq is a result of the Bush Administration’s failure to plan and failure to listen. It is a result of misplaced trust in the Malaki government. It is a result of mismanagement and incompetence.

“Even worse, the Administration’s failed policy in Iraq has limited the success of our mission in Afghanistan, and hindered our ability to destroy al Qaeda’s international operations. As a result, U.S. intelligence analysts say al Qaeda is the strongest it has ever been since the September 11, 2001 attacks. We must renew our commitment to leading the fight against global terrorism and destroying al Qaeda.

“Our nation is at a critical crossroad in Iraq, and Congress has a difficult choice to make. But one thing is clear: staying the course is not an option. We can ill-afford to continue down the same course of failure that has undermined our mission in Iraq, and undermined our ability to protect our nation from terrorist threats.”