



## **Fix Political Impasse Before You Go, Iraqis Tell U.S.**

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BAGHDAD (Reuters) -- President Barack Obama is pushing Iraq's democracy out of the nest before it can fly and abandoning Iraqis while they are still at war, many Iraqis said on Wednesday after the end of U.S. combat operations.

Obama said in an address on Tuesday that it was "time to turn the page" in Iraq, declaring the Iraqi people now had primary responsibility for their security and future.

The end of U.S. combat operations on Tuesday has raised fears of spiralling violence in Iraq where sectarian bloodshed killed tens of thousands after the 2003 U.S.-led invasion.

Bombs remain a daily occurrence and attacks against Iraq's security forces have been rising. Frustrations are also increasing over a political stalemate six months after an inconclusive election.

"Obama is wrong. When they first entered Iraq, it was based on developing Iraq. Now we are on the verge of a chasm. He left us in the middle," said 55-year-old labourer Nafae Sami.

"There's still some political problems which have not been solved. He didn't solve the problem. The government is not formed yet."

Iraq's main Shi'ite, Sunni and Kurdish factions remain locked in a dispute over positions and power, unable to agree on a coalition government.

A Sunni-backed cross-sectarian alliance headed by ex-premier Iyad Allawi won two more seats than Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's Shi'ite-led bloc in the March 7 vote, but neither has the majority needed to govern.

"He (Obama) doesn't care what will happen to Iraq. They withdraw from the country and the country is not yet stable. How could they withdraw?" 40-year-old Mohammed Kadhim, who owns a shop selling spare parts for cars, said.

The number of U.S. troops in Iraq has dropped to under 50,000 ahead of a full withdrawal by the end of 2011, as dictated by a bilateral security pact.

Many Iraqis are concerned their own security forces will not be able to provide stability in the war-torn country.

The United States says it is not disengaging from Iraq, but changing its relationship to a diplomatic and economic one. The remaining U.S. troops will provide assistance in training Iraq's forces as they lead the fight against Sunni Islamist insurgents and Shi'ite militia.

U.S. Vice President Joe Biden flew into Iraq on Monday to assure Iraqis the United States is not abandoning them, joined by Defence Secretary Robert Gates for a ceremony at which a new U.S. general took command of military operations in Iraq.

Biden called on Iraqi leaders to speed up the process of forming a government.

"They said they have withdrawn, but they are still controlling us. They are the ones who make the decisions in Iraq," Um Ahmed, a 42-year-old housewife, said.

By Aseel Kami

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