President Obama: "Time to Turn the Page" on Iraq

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Transcript

President Obama: "Time to Turn the Page" on Iraq

MATT LAUER, co-host:
Now to President Obama's prime-time address officially marking the end of combat operations in Iraq. Was the war worth the sacrifice? We'll talk with Vice President Joe Biden who's in Baghdad this morning in just a moment, but first NBC's Savannah Guthrie has more on the president's remarks.
Savannah, good morning to you.
SAVANNAH GUTHRIE reporting:
Good morning to you, Matt. The president said last night the country has paid a huge price for the war in Iraq and it was time to turn the page.
President BARACK OBAMA: So tonight I am announcing that the American combat mission in Iraq has ended.
GUTHRIE: Addressing the nation in prime time from the Oval Office, the president said he was fulfilling a campaign promise withdrawing combat troops from Iraq, a seven-year war that claimed more than 4400 American lives.
Pres. OBAMA: The United States has paid a huge price to put the future of Iraq in the hands of its people. We have met our responsibilities. Now it's time to turn the page.
GUTHRIE: Aboard Air Force One Tuesday, the president called former President Bush and Tuesday night had kind words for his predecessor.
Pres. OBAMA: It's well known that he and I disagreed about the war from its outset, yet no one can doubt President Bush's support for our troops or his love of country and commitment to our security.
GUTHRIE: But the president's critics lashed out even before the address saying the president failed to give proper credit to Bush's troop surge.
Representative JOHN BOEHNER (Republican, Ohio): Some leaders who opposed, criticized and fought tooth and nail to stop the surge strategy now proudly claim credit for the results.
GUTHRIE: The president, who visited with returning soldiers in Texas Tuesday said he was awed by the
troops’ service and sacrifice. And said the country's mission now is to restore the economy and put Americans back to work.

Pres. OBAMA: We must tackle those challenges at home with as much energy and grit and sense of common purpose as our men and women in uniform who have served abroad.

GUTHRIE: Today, the president's next foreign policy challenge is already before him. Middle East leaders have arrived in Washington for the first face-to-face talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority in 18 months. The president making a high stakes bet that involvement by the US will kick-start the peace process. Yet on the eve of negotiations, Hamas fighters killed four Israeli settlers, bringing a swift response from Israel's prime minister in Washington.

Prime Minister BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: We will not let the blood of Israeli civilians go unpunished.

GUTHRIE: ...and making talk of peace all the more difficult.

Mr. JAMES ZOGBY (The Arab American Institute): The test of the mettle of this president is going to be can he move both leaders despite whatever provocations occur to stay committed.

GUTHRIE: Well, today the president will hold private back-to-back meetings in the Oval Office with the leaders from Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Egypt and Jordan, then host a private dinner at the personal residence tonight at the White House. Tomorrow the peace talks get under way in earnest at the State Department. Matt:

LAUER: Savannah Guthrie, thank you very much.