

Obama: 'New era' of leadership in Mideast

by UPI

CAMP LEJEUNE, N.C. - President Barack Obama said the futures of Iraq and the Middle East are interwoven so the United States needs a more comprehensive approach to the region.

"(We) must work with our friends and partners to establish a new framework that advances Iraq's security and the region's (security)," he told an audience at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina Friday. "It is time for Iraq to be a full partner in a regional dialogue, and for Iraq's neighbors to establish productive and normalized relations with Iraq."

Obama used his speech at the military facility to announce the withdrawal of U.S. combat troops from Iraq by Aug. 31, 2010. In keeping with the Status of Forces Agreement with the Iraqi government, Obama said he intends to remove all U.S. troops by the end of 2011.

"And going forward, the United States will pursue principled and sustained engagement with all of the nations in the region, and that will include Iran and Syria," Obama said.

This strategy must have a "smarter, more sustainable and comprehensive approach," he said. "That is why we are renewing our diplomacy, while relieving the burden on our military."

He said the United States must focus on al-Qaida in Afghanistan and Pakistan, develop a strategy "to use all

elements of American power" to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon, and seek a lasting peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors.

"Every nation and every group must know -- whether you wish America good or ill -- that the end of the war in Iraq will enable a new era of American leadership and engagement in the Middle East," Obama said. "And that era has just begun."

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