

Barack Obama slams Russia's Syria policy

03/10/2015 18:05 by admin

Washington: President Barack Obama has said that Russia's Syrian strategy is a recipe for disaster as President Vladimir Putin failed to differentiate between Islamic State militants and moderate groups who oppose the regime of Syrian strongman Bashar al-Assad.

Referring to his meeting with Putin early this week, Obama told a press conference that he told Putin that it is true that the two countries and the entire world have a common interest in destroying the dreaded Islamic State militant group (ISIS). "But what was very clear, and regardless of what Putin said, was that he doesn't distinguish between ISIS and a moderate Sunni opposition that wants to see Assad go," he said.

"From their (Russian) perspective, they're all terrorists, and that's a recipe for disaster. And it's one that I reject," Obama said referring to the reports that the Russian military is targeting non-Islamic State forces too inside Syria. "The top line message that I want everybody to understand is, we are going to continue to go after ISIS. We are going to continue to reach out to a moderate opposition. We reject Russia's theory that everybody opposed to Assad is a terrorist," he said.

"We think that is self-defeating, it will get them into a quagmire, it will be used as a further recruitment tool for foreign fighters," Obama said adding that US will work with the international community and its coalition to relieve the humanitarian pressure on refugees. "We're working with the Turks and others to see what we can do along the border to make things safer for people. But ultimately, we're going to have to find a way for a political transition, if we're going to solve Syria," he said.

He said that Russia has now become stronger because of its recent military action in Syria. "Russia's not stronger as a consequence of what they've been doing. They get attention. The sanctions against Ukraine are still in place," Obama said.

"What I've consistently offered, from a position of strength, because the US is not subject to sanctions. We're not contracting 4 per cent a year. What I've offered is a pathway whereby they can get back onto a path of growth and do right by their people," he added. "So Putin's actions have been successful only insofar as it's boosted his poll ratings inside of Russia, which may be why the beltway is so impressed, because that tends to be the measure of success. Of course it's easier to do when you have a state-controlled media," the president said.

"What Russia has now done is not only committed its own troops into a situation in which the overwhelming majority of the Syrian population sees it now as an enemy. But the Sunni population throughout the Middle East is gonna see it as a supporter, an endorser of those barrel bombs landing on kids," Obama said.

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