

Barack Obama to push Nawaz Sharif to do more to counter terrorism

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Washington: As Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif arrived in Washington, the White House made clear that its top priority would be how to take on extremist elements inside Pakistan who have "committed terrible acts of terrorism."

The US "has an important security relationship with Pakistan, that our security forces have in a variety of ways been able to effectively coordinate our efforts in a way that enhances the national security of both the United States and Pakistan," the White spokesman Josh Earnest told reporters Tuesday.

President Barack Obama, who is set to meet Sharif at the White House on Thursday, he said will come "with some ideas about what more the Pakistanis could do to strengthen the relationship between our two countries and to advance the security interests of our two countries."

"Obviously there are extremist elements inside of Pakistan that have committed terrible acts of violence and terrible acts of terrorism inside of Pakistan," Earnest said describing it as a "shared priority of our two countries."

"This risk that we sense emanates from this broader region .is a threat that Pakistan has had to deal with firsthand, and it underscores the importance of our security relationship with the Pakistanis," he said.

Obama, Earnest indicated, would also discuss with Sharif the need to push the Taliban back into peace negotiations in Afghanistan, where the US in a policy reversal has decided to delay its troop drawdown beyond 2016.

"One of the early rounds of reconciliation talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban was actually hosted by the Pakistani government inside of Pakistan," Earnest noted.

"So it's clear that the Pakistan government recognizes how important those reconciliation efforts are and we're pleased that they've stepped up in trying to facilitate constructive conversations," he said.

Asked if there was a feeling in the administration that Pakistan was not doing enough to tamp down the extremist interest there, Earnest acknowledged "that there have been some peaks and troughs in the relationship between the United States and Pakistan."

"What the President hopes to do is to strengthen the relationship between our two countries based on our shared interest," he said describing "countering extremist forces in that region of the world" as such.

"This is something that Pakistan has to deal with on their doorstep," Earnest said. "And to the extent that the United States can be helpful in that regard, we would like to be, principally because we believe that it's in our interest for Pakistan to succeed in their fight against those extremist elements."

Ahead of his meeting with Obama, Sharif will also meet Secretary of State John Kerry Wednesday.

Meanwhile, a South Asia expert has suggested that Obama "must focus the meeting on gaining full Pakistani cooperation with the US-led mission in Afghanistan, rather than on striking a civil nuclear deal-the terms of which Pakistan would be unlikely to honour in any case."

"Discussing civil nuclear cooperation with the Pakistani government before it has begun to crack down on terrorist

groups that are undermining the US mission in Afghanistan and that fuel Indo-Pakistani tensions would compromise vital US national security interests in the region," wrote Lisa Curtis, a senior research fellow at the Heritage Foundation.

"Rewarding a country that is responsible for the most significant nuclear proliferation disaster in history and which has continually rebuffed US appeals to crack down on terrorists would undermine US credibility and contribute to regional instability," she wrote.

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