

## **Barack Obama presses Turkey's President to lower tensions with Iraq**

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**Washington:** Urging an end to tensions between two U.S. partners, President Barack Obama asked Turkey on Friday to keep pulling its troops from a training camp in Iraq and respect the country's integrity as a sovereign nation.

In a phone call, Obama urged Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan "to take additional steps to de-escalate tensions with Iraq," the White House said, including removing more troops. The White House said both leaders were in agreement about the need to cooperate in fighting the Islamic State group and pursuing a resolution to Syria's civil war.

Obama's outreach marked the latest effort in an ongoing U.S. diplomatic campaign to resolve the spat between Iraq and Turkey, and followed phone calls earlier in the week between Vice President Joe Biden and the prime ministers of both Iraq and Turkey.

The dispute flared up earlier this month after Turkey sent reinforcements to a camp in northern Iraq where Sunni and Kurdish troops are being trained to fight IS militants. Turkey has stationed troops there since last year but recently sent more, claiming the need to protect its forces from IS attacks.

During a U.N. Security Council meeting on the issue later Friday, Iraqi Foreign Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari reminded council members of Article 51 of the U.N. Charter, which notes a member state's right of self-defense.

When asked by reporters whether his country will resort to force to remove the Turkish troops, al-Jaafari said his country has no intention of starting a war with other countries, but "all options are available."

Iraq asked the Security Council to condemn the "Turkish occupation" and demand that the troops leave immediately, but council diplomats said after the meeting that no decisions had been made.

Tensions with Iraq have played out against the backdrop of Turkish concerns about Kurdish rebels, who have been engaged in renewed fighting with Turkish troops since July. In the last three days, Turkish security forces have killed 62 Kurdish militants in two mainly Kurdish towns near the border with Iraq, Turkey's military said. One Turkish soldier was killed.

Turkey's ambassador to the U.N., Halit Cevik, told reporters that Turkish troops were in Iraq to protect not only the trainers but also Iraq's "territorial integrity."

- PTI