

Barack Obama vetoes bill allowing 9-11 victims to sue Saudi

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Washington: US President Barack Obama on Friday vetoed legislation that would allow families of victims of the 9/11 terror attacks to sue the Saudi government for any role in the plot.

Barack Obama

The Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act (JASTA) bill, passed by both the chambers of the Republican controlled Congress, would have jeopardized the long standing international principles regarding sovereignty and would have made adverse impact with US interests and nationals overseas, Obama said.

He stressed that the bill departs from longstanding standards and practice under US Foreign Sovereign Immunities Act and threatens to strip all foreign governments of immunity from judicial process in the country based solely upon allegations by private litigants that a foreign government's overseas conduct had some role or connection to a group or person that carried out a terrorist attack inside the United States.

"This would invite consequential decisions to be made based upon incomplete information and risk having different courts reaching different conclusions about the culpability of individual foreign governments and their role in terrorist activities directed against the United States," Obama said.

"It is neither an effective nor a coordinated way for us to respond to indications that a foreign government might have been behind a terrorist attack," he added.

Fearing its consequences, the US President said JASTA would upset longstanding international principles regarding sovereign immunity, putting in place rules that, if applied globally, could have serious implications for the country's national interests and it can even complicate relations with its closest partners.

"If JASTA were enacted, courts could potentially consider even minimal allegations accusing US allies or partners of complicity in a particular terrorist attack in the United States to be sufficient to open the door to litigation and wide-ranging discovery against a foreign country," Obama said.

White House justifies Obama's move

Justifying his decision, White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest said Obama is much more worried about the long-term impact of this legislation on the US national security as compared to his daily interactions with members of the Congress.

"This is the president that ordered the operation to take Osama bin Laden off the battlefield. This is the president who time and again advocated for legislation that provided health care to recovery workers at Ground Zero, even in the face of some Republican opposition to that," Earnest said.

"And this is the president who time and time again has spoken movingly about the impact that 9/11 has had on our country and the way that those who lost loved ones on 9/11 serve as a daily inspiration to the president and to Americans across the country and exhibiting the kind of resolve and resiliency that's unique to this country," he said.

The secretary said the bill, if signed into law, would open up potentially US service members and US diplomats to being

hauled into court under spurious charges or claims in a way that would force the United States to expend significant resources and in some cases diplomatic capital to go and defend them.

"We also make a strong case that the most effective way for the United States to confront state sponsors of terrorism is to level a government-wide designation against them and take appropriate steps, including sanctions, to isolate them from the United States and the rest of the international community, that that is a forceful way to compel them to stop supporting terrorism," he said.

Donald Trump slams Obama's veto decision

Slamming the veto decision, Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump, "President Obama's veto of the Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act is shameful and will go down as one of the low points of his presidency".

"This bipartisan legislation was passed unanimously by both houses of Congress and would have allowed the families of nearly 3,000 people slaughtered by radical Islamic terrorists on September 11, 2001, the opportunity to seek justice in an American court of law," he said.

Trump said Obama would deny the parents, spouses and children of those we lost on that horrific day the chance to close this painful chapter in their lives is a disgrace.

These are wonderful people, and as a lifelong New Yorker, I am saddened that they will, for now, not have that opportunity, he said.

"If elected president, I would sign such legislation should it reach my desk," Trump said.

- With AP Inputs