

President Trump open to joining Russian strikes against ISIS in Syria: White House

24/01/2017 22:40 by admin

Washington: In a significant break from the policy of the erstwhile Obama administration, the White House has suggested that it can reverse a previous refusal to coordinate military action with Russia as long as it backs the Syrian government.

File pic - US President Donald Trump

White House press secretary Sean Spicer on Monday said that the Trump administration has opened the door to cooperating with Russia – or anyone else – to combat the Islamic State group in Syria.

"I think if there's a way that we can combat ISIS with any country, whether it's Russia or anyone else, and we have a shared national interest in that, sure, we'll take it," Spicer said.

Asked if the openness extended to working with Syrian President Bashar Assad, who has been condemned internationally for killing civilians, Spicer said, "We're not going to get together with people under the guise of defeating ISIS if that's not truly their guise."

He added, "So let's not take that too far."

Spicer also suggested that Trump already has told Defense Secretary James Mattis to review how he might change the US approach to fighting the Islamic State.

"I think he has ordered it," Spicer said, adding that Trump would discuss the matter with Mattis during a visit to the Pentagon Friday.

"At that time, he will continue to have conversations about what he wants from them and the joint chiefs," he added, referring to the military service chiefs.

During the more than two years that President Barack Obama directed US military action against IS in Syria, he resisted Russian overtures to coordinate military action.

Obama believed Moscow was acting counter to US interests by propping up Assad, whose government Obama called illegitimate. The Pentagon has maintained a hotline with the Russian military to deal with the narrower issue of avoiding air accidents in Syria.

Russia eager to work with Trump administration

With Trump in the White House, Moscow seems eager to draw the new administration into closer military cooperation, perhaps reflecting Trump's frequent statements during the presidential campaign that he welcomed opportunities to improve relations with Moscow.

On Monday, the Russian Ministry of Defense announced that the US had provided targeting information for a joint airstrike against Islamic State fighters in Syria. But Pentagon officials flatly denied the Russian assertion.

US Air Force Col. John Dorrian, chief spokesman for the US-led coalition in Baghdad, called the Russian statement

"rubbish."

At the Pentagon, a spokesman, Maj. Adrian J. Rankine-Galloway, said the U.S. military is not providing targeting information to the Russians or coordinating air operations with them.

- With AP Inputs