

Barack Obama, Francois Hollande vow to escalate airstrikes against ISIS

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Washington: The United States and France on Tuesday decided to intensify airstrikes against the Islamic State group in Iraq and Syria and support those fighting against it on the ground.

"We cannot, and we will not succumb to fear. Nor can we allow fear to divide us. For that's how terrorists win," President Barack Obama asserted at a joint news conference with his French counterpart Francois Hollande after they met at the White House to discuss the anti-ISIS mission.

The two leaders held the meeting to strengthen the coalition against the Islamic State in the wake of the horrific Paris terrorist attack by the dreaded terror group.

Hollande's trip to Washington was part of a diplomatic push to get the US and other nations to bolster efforts to destroy the militant group that has claimed responsibility for the Paris attacks.

Calling for a "joint response", Hollande said France and US would "scale up our strikes both in Syria and in Iraq to broaden our scope to strengthen our intelligence sharing regarding the targets."

Hollande said that France and the United States had agreed to step up a joint response, including new efforts to target terrorists' financial networks, take back IS-controlled territory, scale up efforts in Syria and Iraq and increase intelligence sharing.

"We will not allow them to do it," Hollande told reporters referring to the terrorist strikes in Paris.

Obama said, "We are here today to declare that the United States and France stand united in total solidarity to deliver justice to these terrorists and those who sent them and to defend our nations."

"This barbaric terrorist group, ISIL or Daesh, and its murderous ideology poses a serious threat to all of us. It cannot be tolerated. It must be destroyed. And we must do it together. This is the unity of purpose that brings us here today," said the US President.

Obama said it has been noted that the terrorists did not direct their attacks against the French government or military; rather, they focused their violence on the very spirit of France and, by extension, on all liberal democracies.

"This was an attack on our free and open societies, where people come together to celebrate and sing and compete," he said.

"And targeting venues where people come together from around the world, killing citizens of nearly 20 countries, including America, this was an attack on the very idea that people of different races and religions and backgrounds can live together in peace," he said.

"In short, this was not only a strike against one of the world's great cities, it was an attack against the world itself. It's the same madness that has slaughtered the innocent from Nigeria to the Sinai, from Lebanon to Iraq. It is a scourge that threatens all of us," Obama said. This was their first meeting after the November 13 Paris attacks that killed 130 people.

"What happened in Paris is truly horrific. I understand that people worry that something similar could happen here. I

want you to know that we will continue to do everything in our power to defend our nation," said the US President.

"Groups like ISIL cannot defeat US and its allies on the battlefield, so they try to terrorise at home, against soft targets, against civilians, against innocent people," he said.

Hollande said France came under attack for what it represents, for what it stands for, for its culture, its way of living, as well as its values and principles.

"We decided, President Obama and myself, to scale up our strikes both in Syria and Iraq to broaden their scope, to strengthen our intelligence sharing regarding the targets we might aim at," Hollande said.

He said that the priority is to take back key locations in the hands of the Islamic State in Syria.

"It is also a matter of urgency to close the border between Turkey and Syria and prevent terrorists from crossing the border and coming to Europe or other places and undertake such terrible attacks," he said.

"Together with President Obama, today, we wanted on the occasion of that meeting first of all to share, share our determination, relentless determination, to fight terrorism everywhere and anywhere," he said, adding there needs to be an implacable joint response.

"France and the United States stand together to bring that joint response. Militarily, it is about destroying Daesh no matter where they are. It is about taking out their financing, hunting down their leaders, dismantling their networks and taking back the land they currently control," Hollande said.

"We will not give in. That being said, we have to defend ourselves and use intelligence. Diplomatically, we are working on a credible political transition in Syria within the framework of the Vienna process," he said.

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