

Barack Obama asks Vladimir Putin to end airstrikes against Syrian opposition

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Moscow: US President Barack Obama has urged his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin to stop bombing 'moderate' rebels in Syria in support of its ally Bashar al-Assad, a campaign seen in the West as a major obstacle to latest efforts to end the war.

A White House statement said Vladimir Putin and Barack Obama have held a telephone conversation about the Syrian war and the unresolved conflict in Ukraine on Saturday.

Obama stressed the need to quickly get humanitarian aid to besieged areas and initiating the cessation of hostilities across the war-racked country, it said. "In particular, President Obama emphasized the importance now of Russia playing a constructive role by ceasing its air campaign against moderate opposition forces in Syria."

On Syria, the statement said that 'both sides gave a positive assessment of the results of the meeting of the International Syrian Support Group in Munich on Feb. 11-12, confirmed the principles and provisions of the UN Security Council Resolution 2254 both in terms of humanitarian aspects and to develop modalities for the cease-fire, and in promoting the launch of a real political process'.

Putin stressed the importance of creating a 'common front against terrorism' and establishing a working relationship between the Pentagon and the Russian Defense Ministry, it said.

Russia said the airstrikes it began on September 30 are aimed at extremist groups, but there are wide claims from the West that Russia is targeting rebels fighting the forces of Syrian President Bashar Assad, a longtime Moscow ally.

On Ukraine, Obama urged Russia-backed rebels in eastern Ukraine to fulfill their obligations under a peace deal signed a year ago, while Putin made a similar call for the Ukrainian government to live up to its part of the agreement.

- With AP Inputs