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Taliban is Not Enemy: US

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In an indication of a major shift in the American policy toward the Taliban, the Obama Administration on Monday said rulers of Kabul before 9/11 were not its enemies. "Look, the Taliban per se is not our enemy. That's critical," US Vice President Joe Biden told the Newsweek magazine in an interview. "There is not a single statement that the (US) President has ever made in any of our policy assertions that the Taliban is our enemy because it threatens US interests. If, in fact, the Taliban is able to collapse the existing government, which is cooperating with us in keeping the bad guys from being able to do damage to us, then that becomes a problem for us. So there's a dual track here," he said.

"What the Vice President was reflecting is that -- and this is related to the reconciliation process that I was just discussing -- is that the Taliban per se -- while we are fighting them, the elimination of the Taliban is not the issue here," the White House Press Secretary, Jay Carney, told reporters at his daily news conference.

"The objective that the President laid out when he laid out his Afghanistan strategy made clear that the number one principle here is to disrupt, dismantle and ultimately defeat al-Qaida as well as help stabilize Afghanistan. That's what we're doing," Carney said in response to a question.

In his interview Biden said the US and the Afghan Government is engaged in a reconciliation process. "Whether it will work or not is another question. But we are in a position where if Afghanistan ceased and desisted from being a haven for people who do damage and have as a target the United States of America and their allies, that's good enough. That's good enough. We're not there yet," Biden said.

"Part of that process is our support for the Afghan-led reconciliation talks. The conditions for reconciliation for the Taliban are very clear, but reconciliation has to be a part of the long-time -- the long-term process in Afghanistan if Afghanistan is going to evolve into a peaceful country," he said.

Meanwhile, the State Department on Monday came out in support of an Afghan-led reconciliation process.

"We have talked for some time about the need to both fight and talk, and about the US Government's commitment to support Afghan-led reconciliation provided that those we are endeavoring to reconcile with renounce violence, break ties with al-Qaida, and support the constitution of Afghanistan in all of its aspects, but particularly with regard to human rights and the rights of minorities," the State Department spokesperson, Victoria Nuland, said.

"Our role in supporting the Afghans in this process continues. This process has to be Afghan-led, and it will only work if we are truly talking to people who are prepared to join a political process, put down their arms, and be part of a positive future for Afghanistan," she said.

When asked about progress in talks with the Taliban, the US official said there has been numerous efforts by numerous folk on the Afghan side, on the American side in support of the Afghans. "But only time is going to tell if these interlocutors are serious about coming off the battlefield and joining the political process," Nuland said.