

Britain less hawkish over Iraq: Syed Hamid

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KUALA LUMPUR: Britain is less hawkish over Iraq than its US ally and believes war is not inevitable, Foreign Minister Datuk Syed Hamid Albar said yesterday after talks with British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw.

"We are very happy with the reassurance that while they are making preparations, war is not inevitable," Syed Hamid told a news conference.

"They just want to see some compliance with the (UN) resolutions (that Iraq must disarm).

"Britain is taking a more balanced view while the Americans take a very strong view, (and) hawkish about the issue.

"Britain believes in a two-step process, that is if there is a war there must be another resolution (first) by the UN Security Council," Syed Hamid said.

Asked whether Kuala Lumpur would support a war sanctioned by the United Nations Security Council, Syed Hamid declined to comment.

Straw is in Malaysia on the last leg of a three-nation tour of Southeast Asia to drum up support for possible action against Iraq.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has made clear his opposition to an Iraqi invasion by the US and its allies without the backing of the UN. Syed Hamid said he has also given

Straw the same message.

Straw told the Malaysian leaders that they have as much to fear from Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction as the West has.

But Syed Hamid said that if the UN weapons inspectors are unable to find any proof that Iraq has weapons of

mass destruction "we will not support any move for war and we think the sanctions (against Iraq) should be lifted".

Malaysia believes that an Iraqi invasion would take world attention away from the war against international terrorism, and that it would

hit global economic recovery, he said.

In a sign of increasing diplomatic activity over Iraq ahead of a decision on whether or not to go to war, Malaysia found itself hosting Straw at the same time as a government envoy from Baghdad.