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Syed Hamid: Our foreign policy flexible enough to adapt to changes

PUTRAJAYA, Thurs. - The Malaysian foreign policy is flexible enough to adapt to global changes as it is based on core principles, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said today.

He said re-adjustments could be made according to the nation's national and strategic interests.

"At the same time, we must be pragmatic and not be inflexible to the extent of not being able to make decisions that will affect our long-term interests."

Syed Hamid was speaking after a lunch hosted by the Association of Former Malaysian Ambassadors (Afma) at the Shangri-La Hotel here.

He said the existing foreign policy would be continued along the lines of what Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi stated recently.

"But the global situation will change and our foreign policy will depend on global developments. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who determines the foreign policy, also makes adjustments from time to time depending on the developments."

Syed Hamid said the Malaysian Government's policy on terrorism had changed after the Sept 11 attacks on the United States.

He said Dr Mahathir's statement was a clear indication that Malaysian policies were well thought out and would be continued even if there was a change in the leadership.

"But the approaches will have to change depending on the situation.

"The situation around the world is not static and there will have to be re-adjustments to our policies but that does not mean our core principles will change. We will be firm and pragmatic about our policies."

Asked if there was a change in policy against the United States after its invasion of Iraq, Syed Hamid said:

"We have never made any statement based on our feelings against the United States ... the statements we made were based on the principles of international law, on the UN Charter and the multilateral process.

The statements have nothing to do with being against any country.

"We are not a big power. We are a small country and if we differ on the principles with other countries, we should be able to speak our mind without affecting our long-term relationship with the United States.

"The relationship was not built today or yesterday. It was built over a period of time and there are bound to be some differences from time to time. But that should not mar the long-term relationship."

He said the United States was a major trading partner of Malaysia and had many investments here.

He said based on the UN Charter, Malaysia did not support the war but it was not against the United States.

Malaysia, he said, would participate in the reconstruction of Iraq under the UN flag.

The Afma, with more than 70 members, provides feedback to the foreign minister on Malaysia's foreign policy.

More than 30 members attended the luncheon.