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Canada says will push Iraq compromise plan at UN

By David Ljunggren

OTTAWA, Feb 20 (Reuters) - Canada urged the U.N. Security Council on Thursday to consider a compromise plan whereby Iraq would be given a deadline to show it was complying with demands to disarm or face the consequences.

The plan, which was unveiled at the United Nations on Wednesday, aims to bridge the increasing divide between those nations that want to give weapons inspectors more time and those keen to use military force against Iraq.

Foreign Minister Bill Graham said that although Canada was not on the U.N. Security Council, it wanted to do everything possible to avert a conflict.

"Here's a way in which we believe the Security Council could bring clarity to this issue in a way that would help us all see our way forward and enable us to get a peaceful solution," he told CBC television.

The Canadian plan suggests setting a fixed date for Iraq to show it had fulfilled a set of "key remaining disarmament tasks". The United Nations would then decide whether the cooperation was sufficient.

"We believe it would be helpful if everyone would be explicit as to what it is he (Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein) has to do to be in conformity and within a time frame that's reasonable," Graham said.

"We do want to bring a message to the Security Council that more clarity on these issues would be helpful to us all."

One advantage of Canada's plan was that it would maintain the pressure on Saddam to comply with U.N. resolutions calling for the destruction of arms of mass destruction, Graham said.

"He's very good at slipping away from his obligations. We know he may take the demonstrations and the genuine outpouring of world sympathy not to wish for a war as some indication to him he can maybe get out of this. We don't want him to have that attitude," he said.

Graham, who said he had spoken to the foreign ministers of Britain and Germany over the last 24 hours, played down media reports that Prime Minister Jean Chretien was single-handedly trying to forge an agreement based on the Canadian proposal.

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"I don't think the prime minister himself would say he's brokering a deal," he said. Canada insists the Iraq crisis be tackled solely by the United Nations.

Chretien, under fire from right-wing opposition parties for not backing Washington's hawkish line on Iraq, on Tuesday made clear Ottawa would under no circumstances take part in a U.S.-led attack outside the auspices of the United Nations.

An opinion poll conducted by SES Canada Research for the Ottawa Sun newspaper on Thursday showed 66 percent of those polled were firmly opposed to the idea of contributing forces to a unilateral U.S. attack.




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