

JAPAN 'NOT CONSIDERING' U.S. DEMAND ON CRIMINAL COURT WAIVER

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Japan on Thursday ruled out the possibility of accepting a U.S. request to sign a bilateral pact that would exempt Americans from being handed over to the International Criminal Court (ICC).

'At this point in time, we are not at all considering' the request, Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Shinzo Abe said at a news conference.

On Friday last week, Marisa Lino, U.S. ambassador in charge of ICC issues, sounded out Japan about concluding such a pact. Abe said that Tokyo and Washington agreed that close consultations should be continued on the matter but he indicated that it is premature for Japan to sign such an accord when it is preparing to ratify a treaty for the establishment of the ICC.

Washington has already sounded out Western nations on similar bilateral pacts in a bid to ensure exemption of its citizens from prosecution by the ICC, as it wants to avoid any charges against U.S. soldiers deployed around the world.

However, these actions have drawn criticism from member nations of the European Union on the grounds such bilateral pacts would diminish the authority of the international court.

The United States signed such an agreement with Romania on Aug. 1, but the Netherlands and Yugoslavia rejected it.