

Daily Press Briefing
Richard Boucher, Spokesman
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[Excerpt]

QUESTION: Another issue. It's on the announcement made by the U.S. administration to suspend military aid to those countries, including Latin American countries who are not -- have not agreed to exempt the U.S. soldiers from prosecution by the International Criminal Court.

My first question is: Mr. Chicola from Bogota announced that the U.S. restriction on military aid will have minimal impact on Colombia. But what about on other countries like Venezuela? From the beginning, there was a very -- Venezuela was very concerned on the implementation of Plan Colombia. Now, Venezuela has been sanctioned, too. Is -- this situation is not going to increase imbalance in the region?

And my second question is how to create a flourishing dialogue and foster a relationship between the U.S. Government and Latin America, when the United States is going against its principle. It's a question of principles.

MR. BOUCHER: Well, I think, first of all, the United States is not going against its principles. The United States is implementing its principles. And we have a very flourishing relationship and an active dialogue with the countries of Latin America, including on this subject of the Article 98 agreements.

It's an important principle for the United States that those who want to adhere to the Rome Treaty, who want to participate in the International Criminal Court, can do so. That's their sovereign decision to do so. But they cannot implicate others and pretend to carry out prosecutions against others who may not be participating, especially since we have our own legal system that deals with the same kind of crimes, and that we do deal with the same kind of crimes. We hold our military to the highest standards, and we don't think that we need to rely on prosecutors under this court to decide when that needs to be done.

So this has been a matter of principle to the United States and has been an important element of national policy. We have a law that was passed by our Congress that says that we won't provide military assistance to countries who put American officials and military personnel and others in jeopardy of this kind of prosecutorial discretion under this court. In terms of the current fiscal year, because we're two-thirds, three-quarters of the way through the fiscal year, most of the money in those military programs has probably been spent, much of it has. And I had numbers sometimes on Colombia. I did have numbers on Colombia. But the actual amount -- if you look at our overall aid assistance to Colombia under the Andean Regional Initiative, it's hundreds of millions of dollars. There is about \$120-\$130 million of that that's military, and, of that, this year there is only \$5 million that has been captured.

Now, come October 1st, there is a new fiscal year's worth of money, and until these issues are resolved, we wouldn't be able to spend that. So it is in all of our interests to continue working on these issues, continue discussing these issues and conclude these agreements, so that we can respect the right of others to participate in the court, and they can respect our right not to be subject to the prosecution of prosecutorial discretion of the court.

QUESTION: But, in your opinion, this is not going to create an imbalance in the region -- more aid for Colombia, less for other countries, as Venezuela?

MR. BOUCHER: No. I don't have the numbers with me. I'd be surprised to find that we had any substantial military assistance to Venezuela, but you can look that up easily on the Internet to find out what the numbers are.

QUESTION: Richard, are there any new Article 98s to report, or are you still at 45?

MR. BOUCHER: I don't have any new numbers this morning, so I don't know if we are still at -- have we checked to make sure there are no new ones, or we just

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There are no new ones today.

Okay, thank you.