

Press Briefing by Ari Fleischer

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Q Ari, the United States just declared about 50 countries, including Colombia and six prospective NATO members, ineligible for military aid because they won't exempt Americans from the International Criminal Court. My question is, why is this priority more important than, you know, fighting the drug war, integrating Eastern Europe? And is there any chance that they would be declared eligible for this aid anytime soon?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, number one, because the president is following the law. This is a law that Congress passed, that the president signed, dealing with what's called Article 98 actions that would make certain that American military personnel and other personnel who are stationed abroad would not be subject to a court who has international sovereignty that's in dispute that would be able to reach out to these countries and take Americans and put them on trial before an entity that the United States does not recognize. So, it's important to protect American service men and women and others in government.

There should be no misunderstanding that the issue of protecting U.S. persons from the International Criminal Court will be a significant and pressing matter in our relations with every state.

David?

Q So, you're -- isn't there a chance, though, that, you know, the drug war in Colombia, for example, would be negatively affected by the -- if you can't give Colombia military aid, what's going to be the impact on the ground down there?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, current programs will continue under the law until the termination date of current programs is reached. And so, that which is in the pipeline will continue through the pipeline. But you have stated it correctly -- this is a reflection of the United States' priorities to protect the men and women in our military, men and women who serve. These are the people who are able to deliver assistance to the various states around the world, and if delivering aid to those states endangers America's servicemen and servicewomen, the president's first priority is with the servicemen servicewomen.