

US NEGOTIATING ICC DEAL WITH ROMANIA AMID GLOBAL PUSH FOR SIMILAR PACTS

Agence France Presse
July 25, 2002 Thursday

The United States is negotiating a deal with Romania to give US troops there immunity from prosecution by the International Criminal Court amid a worldwide diplomatic push to ink similar pacts, the State Department said Thursday.

Spokesman Richard Boucher said Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage had thanked Bucharest for its positive response to discuss such a deal during a meeting with Romanian Foreign Minister Mircea Geoana.

"The deputy secretary ... expressed appreciation for Romania's willingness to negotiate a bilateral treaty with the United States regarding Article 98 provisions for the International Criminal Court," Boucher said.

Article 98 of the treaty that created the tribunal limits its ability to ask a country to surrender suspects if that clashes with another international agreement.

The United States is vehemently opposed to the court, which it fears will be turned into a political instrument with malicious war crimes accusations against its soldiers abroad, particularly in UN peacekeeping operations.

Washington appeared poised to threaten UN peacekeeping until a compromise was reached July 12 in the UN Security Council that permits a yearly review of the court's jurisdiction over US peacekeepers and a review of accusations on a case-by-case basis by the council.

Boucher, indirectly confirming a report that appeared this week in the German business newspaper Handelsblatt, said US diplomats had been ordered to seek out bilateral immunity deals for US troops shortly after that compromise had been reached.

"The day that the UN resolution passed we went out with instructions to all our embassies to approach other governments in key countries about negotiating these Article 98 agreements that would exempt US personnel from prosecution under the ICC agreement," he said. "We're starting to get responses," Boucher said, without saying which countries were approached. "Everywhere that we can, we will negotiate these agreements."

He could not say if any countries other than Romania had agreed to such talks, but a German foreign ministry spokeswoman said Monday that Berlin had balked at the request believing the matter should be decided jointly with other members of the European Union.

The European Union backs the court, and EU resistance to US-proposed immunity deals had been the main hurdle to reaching a compromise at the United Nations, according to US officials.