

**DUTCH CITIZENS UP IN ARMS OVER US CONGRESSIONAL ACT THAT WOULD PROTECT
US OFFICIALS OR SERVICE PERSONNEL FROM WAR CRIMES
CONVICTIONS IN THE HAGUE**

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BOB EDWARDS, host:

Congress has approved legislation to protect Americans from prosecution by the soon-to-be-established International Criminal Court in The Hague. The US is not party to the treaty that created the new court, and lawmakers are concerned that American officials or service personnel could one day face war crimes charges there. The American Service Members Protection Act authorizes the president to use all means necessary to free any American held by the new tribunal. The court's host country is the Netherlands, a NATO ally, and Dutch politicians are seething over what they call the Hague Invasion Act. Greg

Crouch reports.

GREG CROUCH reporting:

The Netherlands is gearing up for a major invasion by the United States, at least rhetorically. Dutch cartoonists show George Bush charging a windmill on horseback. Few people here really worry about a US invasion, but they're still angry about the US bill. Terry Gill, an American professor in the Netherlands, recalls a recent faculty lunch.

Professor TERRY GILL: One of the older colleagues completely exploded and, you know, said, 'How dare the United States dream of using force against us.'

CROUCH: At the center of this brouhaha is the International Criminal Court or ICC. It will prosecute war criminals in cases where the defendant's own country lacks a functioning justice system or is unwilling to take up the case. Court supporters say it's unlikely any US defendant would ever end up at the tribunal, but opponents like US Republican Whip Tom DeLay fear they will.

That's why he urged his colleagues last month to support the American Service Members Protection Act.

Representative TOM DeLAY (Republican, Texas): This provision that is the core of the bill, by the way, simply gives the president the authority to do whatever is necessary to free our people who get snatched by this rogue court.

CROUCH: But Democrat David Obey of Wisconsin, with tongue-in-cheek, worried about the trans-Atlantic implications of the bill.

Representative DAVID OBEY (Democrat, Wisconsin): I have a chart here labeled Tom DeLay's Proposed Invasion of the Netherlands. It shows that perhaps we might do it by sea, we might do it by air, we might involve paratroopers. I don't know what military force the Netherlands would use to repel our invasion, but I assume they will use something.

CROUCH: It may seem far-fetched, but just that kind of scenario is what has folks here worked up. One leading Dutch newspaper pictures another D-Day, with US warships positioned off the Dutch coast. Gill, the professor of military and international law, mused jokingly about possible consequences of the US legislation.

Prof. GILL: When I was thinking about this, I just had sort of a vision of Delta Force coming to try to rescue Secretary Donald Rumsfeld from the icy sea's clutches.

CROUCH: Yesterday, the Dutch Parliament unanimously endorsed a resolution expressing concern about the so-called Hague Invasion Act. Parliament urged the Dutch government to take up the matter with both the European Union and NATO.

Farah Karimi, a member of the Green Party who wrote the motion, expressed shock at the US bill.

Mr. FARAH KARIMI (Green Party): The people say to me, 'It's not possible because they were in the Second World War, the country and the people who make us free.' You can't say, 'We are supporting the United States in fight against terrorists, and at the same time, the same nation and the same country has a law which is named the Hague Invasion.'

CROUCH: The bill, which is really called the American Service Members Protection Act, has been approved by both the House and Senate and is now before a conference committee as part of a larger spending bill being prepared for the president. The Dutch foreign minister has already written to the committee, complaining about the bill. The US Embassy here issued a statement Wednesday saying it could not envision a scenario in which the American military would launch a strike against the Netherlands. Given the debate in the Dutch Parliament yesterday, it doesn't appear to have cooled tempers much. It's hard to say when this war of words will end. The treaty establishing the ICC comes into effect July 1st, barring, of course, any last-minute invasions. For NPR News, I'm Gregory Crouch in the Netherlands.