

## **U.S. drops fight over global court**

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UNITED NATIONS (Reuters) - The Bush administration, a bitter foe of the new International Criminal Court, has backed away from a potentially embarrassing clash with its European allies over U.N. funding of the court, diplomats have said.

Based in The Hague in the Netherlands, the court is the first permanent world tribunal set up to prosecute individuals for war crimes, genocide and other gross human rights abuses.

The court came into being last year under U.N. auspices, and 97 countries, including the entire European Union, have so far ratified the 1998 statute creating it.

But Washington, which calls the court "fatally flawed," is campaigning to prevent the spending of U.N. funds to support its activities. It wants only those governments that have signed on to the court to cover the costs.

The U.S. administration says it fears the court will expose U.S. soldiers and officials serving in foreign countries to frivolous or ideologically motivated prosecutions. Court backers say ample safeguards are in place to prevent this.

Washington threatened a fresh confrontation over the issue on Friday in the U.N. General Assembly's legal committee, which was due to approve the standard annual resolution putting the court on the assembly's formal agenda for another year.

Washington argued that, if the panel wanted to discuss the court, only court members should have to pay for the meeting.

But following talks with EU envoys, it backed down and agreed instead simply not to participate in the adoption of the standard resolution, diplomats said.

"The U.S. proposal amounted to taking the court off the committee's agenda," one EU diplomat said. "It would have been defeated by a very lopsided margin."

U.S. officials had no immediate comment.