

## Bosnia, Serbia-Montenegro mull US non-extradition pact

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Sarajevo and Belgrade said Wednesday they needed more time to consider signing bilateral deals with Washington exempting US citizens from prosecution before the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Visiting foreign minister of Serbia and Montenegro, Goran Svilanovic, and his Bosnian counterpart Mladen Ivanic told reporters that their governments were still discussing whether to accept US demands received several months ago.

By accepting the US demands they would be defying the ICC statute, if they refuse, they face losing vital US financial aid.

Washington refuses to support the ICC, arguing that it could be turned into a political instrument through war crimes accusations against its own troops abroad, particularly in UN peacekeeping operations.

"As a signatory to the ICC statute we have an obligation to strengthen it (the court), but at the same time we are aware of the important US role in Bosnia-Herzegovina," Bosnia's Ivanic said after the talks.

"It is not unusual to delay decision on extremely complex issues," Ivanic said stressing that the deadline for taking a stance on the immunity deal with Washington was July 1.

The US message was clear in saying that it would be "very difficult to continue military and other assistance" to countries that reject the deal, he added.  
The United States is the major individual donor to Bosnia, whose economy is still dependent on foreign aid.

It was a US-brokered peace deal that ended the country's bloody 1992-95 war and its troops still participate in a NATO-led peacekeeping force.

Svilanovic said that his moderate government has always tried to keep "balanced relations with key (foreign) partners" that include the United States and the European Union.

"This issue puts the government in a situation where it is forced to give up" this principle, said Svilanovic, who arrived earlier Wednesday on a one-day visit to Bosnia.

The Hague-based ICC was established in 1998. The court, which is to try war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, is due to start work in March.  
Since last July, when the treaty creating the ICC came into effect, the US has signed immunity deals with 21 countries.