

Embassy to remove non-essential personnel

by UPI

BELGRADE, Serbia - The U.S. State Department was asked Friday to approve the evacuation of family members and non-essential personnel from the U.S. Embassy in Serbia. Rioters protesting Kosovo's declaration of independence from Serbia torched the embassy Thursday, damaging the first two floors. State Department spokesman Sean McCormack Friday said no sensitive material was lost or stolen, CNN reported. A burned body officials said is a protester was removed from the embassy. U.S. Ambassador Cameron Munter expressed disappointment with both police and security along embassy row when the rioting broke out and the response by some government officials. People evacuated from Belgrade would be re-located to another country in the region, McCormack said. They could return to Serbia when the situation calms down. Core embassy functions will continue. Undersecretary Nick Burns blasted Serbian officials, saying it "absolutely reprehensible" that security officials "melted away" as rioters stormed the embassy. "They have a fundamental responsibility" to protect the embassy and its personnel, Burns said. Burns said he told the Serbian prime minister that "he and his government would be held personally responsible." The embassy was to be closed Friday and Monday while officials assessed damage, and was expected to re-open Tuesday.

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