

Bush arrives in Europe

by UPI

PRAGUE, Czech Republic - U.S. President George Bush met in the Czech Republic Tuesday with Czech President Vaclav Klaus to discuss a U.S. proposal to put a missile defense base there.

Bush's meeting also included Czech Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek, who, like Klaus supports the missile defense system, Radio Free Europe reported. Bush planned to meet with former Czech Prime Minister Jiri Paroubek, who wants to have a national referendum on the issue.

"We, as well as our interlocutors, think that this is the right thing to do to protect these populations -- not only our population, but the populations in Europe," U.S. State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said on Radio Free Europe.

The anti-missile system, which Russia strongly opposes, would include a site in Poland. U.S. officials have said it would be aimed at protecting Europe against "rogue states" such as Iran and North Korea.

The BBC reported that Bush is expected to give a speech in the Czech Republic criticizing what he sees as growing authoritarianism in Russia. However, the British network said, White House officials insist Bush's speech won't be about Russia but about his commitment to spreading freedom and democracy.

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