

Mueller declares his Russia report did not exonerate Trump

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Associated Press



Special counsel Robert Mueller speaks at the Department of Justice on in Washington about the Russia investigation on Wednesday.

AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster

WASHINGTON — Special counsel Robert Mueller said Wednesday that charging President Donald Trump with a crime was “not an option” because of federal rules, but he used his first public remarks on the Russia investigation to emphasize that he did not exonerate the president.

“If we had had confidence that the president clearly did not commit a crime, we would have said so,” Mueller declared.

The special counsel’s remarks stood as a pointed rebuttal to Trump’s repeated claims that he was cleared and that the two-year inquiry was merely a “witch hunt.” They also marked a counter to criticism, including by Attorney General William Barr, that Mueller should have reached a determination on whether the president illegally tried to obstruct the probe by taking actions such as firing his

FBI director.

Mueller made clear that his team never considered indicting Trump because the Justice Department prohibits the prosecution of a sitting president.

“Charging the president with a crime was therefore not an option we could consider,” Mueller said during a

televised statement. He said he believed such an action would be unconstitutional.

Mueller did not use the word “impeachment,” but said it was the job of Congress — not the criminal justice system — to hold the president accountable for any wrongdoing.

The special counsel’s

statement largely echoed the central points of his lengthy report, which was released last month with some redactions. But his remarks, just under 10 minutes long and delivered from a Justice Department podium, were extraordinary given that he had never before discussed or characterized his findings

and had stayed mute during two years of feverish public speculation.

Mueller, a former FBI director, said Wednesday that his work was complete and he was resigning to return to private life. Under pressure to testify before Congress, Mueller did not rule it out. But he seemed to warn lawmakers that they would not be pulling more detail out of him. His report is his testimony, he said.

“So beyond what I have said here today and what is contained in our written work,” Mueller said, “I do not believe it is appropriate for me to speak further about the investigation or to comment on the actions of the Justice Department or Congress.”

His remarks underscored the unsettled resolution, and revelations of behind-the-scenes discontent, that accompanied the end of his investigation. His refusal to reach a conclusion on criminal obstruction opened the door for Barr to clear the president, who in turn has cited the attorney general’s

finding as proof of his innocence. Mueller has privately vented to Barr about the attorney general’s handling of the report, while Barr has publicly said he was taken aback by the special counsel’s decision to neither exonerate nor incriminate the president.

Trump, given notice Tuesday evening that Mueller would speak the next morning, watched on television. For weeks, he had been nervous about the possibility about the special counsel testifying before Congress, worried about the visual power of such a public appearance.

Shortly after Mueller concluded, the president, who has repeatedly and falsely claimed that the report cleared him of obstruction of justice, tweeted a subdued yet still somewhat inaccurate reaction: “Nothing changes from the Mueller Report. There was insufficient evidence and therefore, in our Country, a person is innocent. The case is closed! Thank you”

Trump adviser warns of ‘strong response’ to any Gulf attack

By JON GAMBRELL
Associated Press

ABU DHABI, United Arab Emirates — President Donald Trump’s national security adviser warned Iran on Wednesday that any attacks in the Persian Gulf will draw a “very strong response” from the U.S., taking a hard-line approach with Tehran after his boss only two days earlier said America wasn’t “looking to hurt Iran at all.”

John Bolton’s comments are the latest amid heightened tensions between Washington and Tehran that have been playing out in the Middle East.

Bolton spoke to journalists in Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates, which only days earlier saw former Defense Secretary Jim Mattis warn there that “unilateralism will not work” in confronting the Islamic Republic.

The dueling approaches highlight the divide over Iran within American politics. The U.S. has accused Tehran of being behind a string of incidents this month, including the alleged sabotage of oil tank-

ers off the Emirati coast, a rocket strike near the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad and a coordinated drone attack on Saudi Arabia by Yemen’s Iran-allied Houthi rebels.

On Wednesday, Bolton told journalists that there had been a previously unknown attempt to attack the Saudi oil port of Yanbu as well, which he also blamed on Iran.

He described Tehran’s decision to back away from its 2015 atomic deal with world powers as evidence it sought nuclear weapons, even though it came a year after America unilaterally withdrew from the unraveling agreement.

Bolton stressed the U.S. had not seen any further Iranian attacks in the time since, something he attributed to the recent military deployments — America recently sent an aircraft carrier and B-52 bombers to the Persian Gulf. But he warned the U.S. would strike back if again attacked.

“The point is to make it very clear to Iran and its surrogates that these kinds of action risk a very strong response from the United



AP Photo/Jessica Hill, File

National Security Adviser John Bolton arrives to speak at the commencement for the United States Coast Guard Academy in New London, Conn., on May 22.

States,” Bolton threatened, without elaborating.

Bolton spoke before talks with Abu Dhabi’s powerful crown prince, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan. He declined to have his remarks recorded by journalists.

A longtime Iran hawk, Bolton blamed Tehran for the recent incidents, at one point saying it was “almost certainly” Iran that planted explosives on the four oil tankers off the UAE coast. He declined to offer any evidence for his claims.

“Who else would you think is doing it?” Bolton asked at one point when pressed. “Somebody from Nepal?”

Iran’s Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has repeatedly criticized Bolton as a warmonger. Abbas Mousavi, a spokesman for Iran’s Foreign Ministry, said later Wednesday Bolton’s remarks were a “ridiculous accusation.”

Separately in Tehran, President Hassan Rouhani said that the “road is not closed” when it comes

to talks with the U.S. — if America returns to the nuclear deal. However, the relatively moderate Rouhani faces increasing criticism from hard-liners and Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei over the collapsing accord.

Meanwhile, acting U.S. Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan said some 900 troops coming to the Middle East over the perceived Iran threat to reinforce the tens of thousands already in the region would be placed in Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Another 600 attached to a Patriot missile battery have had their deployment in the region extended.

“The Iranian threat to our forces in the region remains,” Shanahan said.

Speaking in Abu Dhabi, Bolton linked the rocket fire in Baghdad, the alleged sabotage of the ships and the drone attack by Yemen’s rebels, describing them as a response from Iran and its proxies.

“I think it’s important that the leadership in Iran to know that we know,” Bolton said. He then brought up what he said could be a considered a fourth, previously

unknown attack.

“There also had been an attack, an unsuccessful attack, on the Saudi port of Yanbu a couple of days before the attack on the tankers,” he said.

Saudi officials did not immediately respond to a request for comment about Bolton’s claim on Yanbu, which is the terminus, or end point, of the kingdom’s East-West Pipeline. The Houthis have already targeted two pumping stations on that pipeline during a coordinated drone assault.

Bolton also said the U.S. would boost American military installations and those of its allies in the region.

The White House said Wednesday that Bolton will meet with his counterparts from Israel and Russia next month in Jerusalem to discuss regional security issues.

White House press secretary Sarah Sanders did not disclose further details about Bolton’s planned meeting with Israeli national security adviser Meir Ben-Shabbat and Nikolai Patrushev, secretary of the Russian security council.

Charter: Proposals draw objections

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fellow commissioners alone decide the structure of county government “causes me great discomfort.” The broader public instead, he said, should decide.

Some of that public spoke up at the end of the meeting. Nearly all said they did not like the idea of part-time commissioners and a full-time manager. One man

said he wanted to be able to take as much time with a commissioner as his problems demand, while others worried a full-time manager would impose his will on the county.

Most, including Rex Morehouse of Pendleton and Rob Lovett of Hermiston, said they have no problem with access to commissioners now and the county board is working just fine

as is.

Only one person spoke in favor of the committee’s recommendations: Hermiston Mayor David Droztmann.

“I work in that environment,” he said, “and it works really well.”

The charter committee and the county board decided to continue the discussion Tuesday at 5:30 p.m. at the courthouse.

Signing: Students share their plans

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Umatilla School District staff are very encouraging of students making plans to gain additional skills above their high school diploma.

“They’re definitely pushing us in the right direction, pushing us to succeed,” he said.

April Dirksen, dean of students, also said that district staff were “tremendous” in encouraging students to set goals and make plans.

Students take a “success” class their

freshman year where they are required to make a 10-year plan, and then are moved through classes such as personal finance to help them succeed or refine their plan.

“We want them to find something they’re passionate about and stick with it,” she said.

She said the annual signing day was a way to recognize the “amazing” students who were working hard to better themselves.

“They worked a lot of years to get to this point,” she said.

Wildfires: Bill aims to reduce risk of out-of-control fires and economic damage

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“It’s very, very important to me if we are going to take action, we need broad support,” Allen said.

Prescribed fires, like the West Bend Project, reduces the risk of wildfire affecting private property, improves wildlife habitat and creates safer places for firefighters to work.

“As chair of the collaborative, I recognize the need to educate the community about the work in our forest,” said Bend Mayor Sally Russell, a co-chair of the collaborative.

Before the collaborative was formed nearly a decade ago Ed Keith, Deschutes County forester, mill operators and the representatives from what he called the “environmental industry” were only



AP Photo/File

Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Oregon, touted timber harvest, thinning and prescribed fires as ways to reduce the risk of out-of-control wildfires, such as the Eagle Creek Fire (pictured) that burned the Columbia River Gorge in 2017, that can quickly consume entire neighborhoods when fuel conditions, wind and fire starts combine.

meeting each other in the courtroom.

“Projects were getting slowed down or not hap-

pening,” he said.

Keith said 18,000 acres of fuels treatment are planned for the West Bend

WHAT IT WOULD DO

U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley introduced the Wildfire-Resilient Communities Act, a bill that would reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires, and the smoke and economic losses that they cause by:

Creating a \$1 billion fund to provide stability and allow the Forest Service to increase the pace and scale of catastrophic wildfire reduction projects.

Empowering federal agencies to work with local communities to plan and prepare for wildfires.

Permanently reauthorizing the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program, allowing more projects to receive funding in a given fiscal year.

Creating a County Stewardship Fund that would provide payments to counties equal to 25 percent of stewardship contract receipts on federal land within their counties.

project area as well as areas outside of Sisters.

Reducing the number of trees per acre reduces fires from moving through the crowns, lowering the severity and intensity of the destruction of a wildfire.

With the support of the collaborative members, more acres are being treated at a faster pace.

“The end result is our forests are healthier and safer, and we are benefiting wildlife and water quality,”

Keith said.

Merkley said he supports the work the collaboratives have accomplished throughout Oregon, supported, in part, with federal money through the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program.

Hotter and drier fire seasons and the lack of thinning and harvest in the national forests are one of the regular topics addressed by collaborative groups. He said the additional funding for fuels reduction included in his bill will help get the projects the collaboratives discuss in the boardroom become realities in the forest.

“The bill’s funding and having a collaborative to be able to do its work is really critical as we move into the future with climate change,” Merkley said.