

# Trump claims victory in wake of Mueller testimony

US President Donald Trump declared the Russia meddling and obstruction probe a "big hoax" Wednesday as Democrats reaped precious little new ammunition for impeachment in marathon testimony to Congress by investigation leader Robert Mueller.

Mueller said during his hotly-anticipated appearance that he had not exonerated Trump of obstruction allegations, but once again declined to accuse the US president of a crime or recommend that Congress do so.

Answering questions on his investigation for the first time, a shaky-voiced, sometimes uncertain Mueller would not go beyond the facts set out in his final investigation report and refused dozens of times to answer questions from both Democrats and Republicans.

Mueller's report, made public in April, outlined a pattern of attempted cooperation between Trump's 2016 campaign and Russia which didn't rise to the level of a criminal conspiracy -- and at least 10 instances of alleged interference in the probe by Trump.

But the former FBI director denied Democrats seeking an impeachment effort their number one goal, an unequivocal statement on national television that Trump had criminally obstructed justice.

Republicans quickly declared the Russia

investigation over and Trump said it was "a very big day" for himself and the country.

"This whole thing has been three years of embarrassment and a waste of time for our country," he told reporters. "The Democrats lost so big today," he added.

The marathon day of nationally-televised hearings did little to resolve the outcome of Mueller's 22-month investigation, which outraged and at times shook the White House, as indictments came down for six former Trump aids and associates, five of whom were convicted.

Mueller explained that he could not have charged Trump because Justice Department rules prohibited him from indicting a sitting president. And he later added that Trump could theoretically be indicted after he leaves office.

But beyond that, the 74-year-old veteran prosecutor had little to add, failing to clear up the confusion left among the American public about the conclusions of his dense report.

He answered many questions by directing lawmakers to the document, while at times appearing to forget or to be unfamiliar with details contained within.

The Democrats, who declined last week to advance an impeachment motion launched from within their own ranks, said Mueller's testimony added to arguments for removing the president and that they would continue to seek information that could advance the case.



A wounded boy cries in an ambulance following a reported airstrike in Kafar Roma in the outskirts of Maaret al-Numan in the southern Idlib province, yesterday. Inset, Syrians and members of the Syrian civil defence, known as the White Helmets, pull an injured man from the rubble of a collapsed building. Bombardment by the Syrian regime and its Russian ally killed at least 32 civilians including children in last two days in the latest violence to hit northwest Syria.



# Europe bakes in record heatwaves

Mercury hits 41 degrees Celsius in Paris as all-time temperature records tumble in Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany

Paris yesterday baked in a record hot temperature of 41 degrees Celsius as a ferocious heatwave in northern Europe reached its peak, sparking concerns about public health and new misery for rail travellers.

As all-time temperature records tumbled in Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany in the last 24 hours, Paris saw its highest ever temperature of 41 degrees Celsius (105.8 Fahrenheit), beating the previous high of 40.4C (104.7F) set in July 1947.

Trains have been slowed in several European countries to avoid damage to the railway networks and French national operator SNCF has urged travellers to delay journeys planned for Thursday.

In the sweltering French capital, tourists and locals alike made a beeline for fountains and even pools laid on by the authorities next to the Ourcq canal in the north of the city.

Authorities have warned people to keep an eye on those living alone and also to beware of taking the plunge to cool down after a spike in drownings.

The scorching weather spelled misery for

millions of commuters in public transport.

"Its so hot in the metro, it's unbearable. There are so many people, no air conditioning and everyone is on top of each other," said Paris commuter Petra Ullm, 34, a clinical researcher.

The heatwave, which is expected to ease up today as rain and thunderstorms move in, had again focused public attention on the problems caused by climate change.

In Austria, a three-year-old child died of dehydration after going to sleep in a car parked in full sunshine at the family farm, local authorities said.

Meanwhile, Britain's Met Office predicted a

chance that the UK record of 38.5C, which was recorded in Faversham, Kent, in August 2004, would also be exceeded on Thursday.

The northern third of France, including Paris, was under a red alert while the rest of the country had a yellow warning and water-use restrictions were in force.

The Netherlands broke a record dating back to 1944 on Wednesday.

Yesterday, Germany again hit a national record of 40.9 Celsius (105.62F) in Lingen, West Germany.

Belgium also reached a new record high of 40.6 degrees Celsius (105F), recorded on the Kleine-Brogel military base, in northeastern Belgium.

Paris, in particular, remains haunted by the early summer of 2003 when 15,000 deaths were blamed on the heat and the authorities were bitterly criticised for not mobilising fast enough.

This summer's second heatwave has amplified concerns in Europe that human activity is heating the planet at a dangerous rate.

The June 26-28 blast of heat in France was four degrees Celsius (7.2 degrees Fahrenheit) hotter than an equally rare June heatwave would have been in 1900, the World Weather Attribution (WWA) team said this month.



# Trump vetoes measures blocking arms sales to Saudi Arabia, UAE

President Donald Trump on Wednesday vetoed three congressional resolutions barring billions of dollars in weapons sales to countries including Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which are engaged in a devastating war in Yemen.

The resolutions "would weaken America's global competitiveness and damage the important relationships we share with our allies and partners," Trump said in letters to the Senate justifying blocking them.

It is the third time the president has employed his veto power since taking office.

The measures rebuked Congress this month in a strong reuke to Trump, whose administration took the extraordinary step of bypassing legislators to approve the sales in May.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo had said the administration was responding to an emergency caused by Saudi Arabia's arch-foe Iran.

But lawmakers including some Senate Republicans said there were no legitimate grounds to circumvent Congress, which has the right to disapprove arms sales.

Senator Lindsey Graham delivered a stinging rebuke to Riyadh last month, saying he hoped his vote against the sales would "send a signal to Saudi Arabia that if you act the way you're acting, there is no space for a strategic relationship."

The senator was referring to last year's brutal murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in Turkey at the hands of Saudi agents, an incident that outraged lawmakers and triggered a full-blown crisis in Riyadh's relations with the West.

Critics also say the arms sales would aggravate the war in Yemen, where Saudi Arabia is leading a US-backed coalition that also includes the UAE in a battle against the Iranian-supported Huthi rebels.

The UN says the conflict has triggered the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

But Trump argued Wednesday that barring the sale of US weapons "would likely prolong the conflict in Yemen and deepen the suffering it causes," and that "without precision-guided munitions, more -- not fewer -- civilians are likely to become casualties."

The US president also pointed to Iran in justifying blocking the resolutions.

# 'Populist wave' upending int'l ties

From Donald Trump to Boris Johnson, the group of world leaders with an anti-system stance bordering on populism grows ever more powerful, crashing over global diplomacy and threatening multilateralism and international cooperation.

For many observers, the "populist wave" sweeping democratic countries claimed its first victory in June 2016 with the passing of the Brexit referendum, months before the election of a billionaire Republican as president of the United States.

Whether the term "populist" applies to conservative politician and Brexit champion Boris Johnson, who is more liberal than any of the list, is a question for academics and future historians.

What is certain is that his appointment Wednesday as Britain's new prime minister, hard on the heels of the rise of far-right leaders such as Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil and Matteo Salvini in Italy, was welcomed by Trump.

"When you look at the G20 leaders, you see a lot of people now -- almost half of the leaders -- that generally speaking are friendly oriented towards Trump as an American leader," said Ian Bremmer, president of consultancy the Eurasia Group.

Bremmer noted that many leaders



propelled by the populist wave have come to power in Trump's wake, pointing to Britain, Brazil, Italy and Australia's Scott Morrison.

But he added that many had been in power much longer, including Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Argentinian president Mauricio Macri and Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan, as well as leaders from more authoritarian countries, such as Russia's Vladimir Putin and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

The group of populist or populist-adjacent leaders may have different personalities and backgrounds, but they have a long list of similarities, too.

"They all share a populist style and are clearly part of the same broader political phenomenon," said Luigi Scazzieri, a research fellow at the Centre for European Reform in London.

players has had a "profound impact on global affairs," noted Scazzieri.

The first victim has been the doctrine of multilateralism, and all its achievements since 1945, which Trump and many of his international counterparts have targeted.

From the Paris climate agreement to the Iran nuclear deal, the United Nations to the European Union, the laws and institutions that have regulated the international order have all come under attack.

It is difficult, however, to talk about a "coalition" of "nationalist," "populist" or "anti-system" leaders: they make up a disparate group but are neither uniform nor unified.

For instance, after the spring European Parliament elections, it proved difficult to form a joint parliamentary group as questions about the economy or Russian relations divided the right.

"They all have different flags, they all have different national interests," said Bremmer.

"It's easy for them to oppose globalism and existing international structures and free trade, but that doesn't make them agree on something. It makes them support more nationalist borders, more tariffs," he added.

"Populists' zero-sum mentality... leads to a less cooperative and more unstable international system," said Scazzieri.



# Is Johnson the British Trump?

Much has been made of the similarities between Boris Johnson and Donald Trump. It's a comparison that the United States president seems to like. But Johnson might not like the comparison.

There are plenty of reasons to criticize Johnson. He has said incredibly controversial things in newspaper columns and on public platforms over the years: Highlights include saying that women who wear Islamic face veils look "like letterboxes" and using racist terms to describe people from the British Commonwealth.

But this doesn't extend to the same sort of anti-immigrant rhetoric that we hear so often from Trump. While Johnson has talked about controlling immigration, he is pro-immigration. And the idea he would say that British citizens who happen to be an ethnic minority should "go back" if they don't like one of his policies is unthinkable.

Johnson, like Trump, favors lowering taxes for the wealthy. But unlike Trump, he is not an economic protectionist. Johnson believes that one of the main advantages of Brexit is that it will open up the UK's economy to the rest of the world. And Johnson is an unashamed internationalist.

The final and probably most important way that the two men differ is that Johnson actually needs to unite his country. Whatever you think of the man and his politics, Johnson -- unlike Trump -- cannot survive by only playing to his base. If Johnson wants to pull off Brexit and then win a general election in a nation as divided as Britain, he has to win over people from all over the political spectrum.

Another reason Johnson will not like the Trump comparison is that Trump is genuinely unpopular in the UK, according to almost all polling. So, while the president might think that praising Boris and describing him as a friend is the highest of compliments, it could make British voters that are already uncomfortable about their new prime minister even less happy.

The danger for Johnson is that the harder-line Brexiters who support him believe that a trade deal with America could be the best way to prove to the world that Brexit was a success project. But there is absolutely no evidence to suggest that a trade deal with America would make up for the economic damage the UK would suffer if it leaves the EU without a deal. There has been no detail on what that trade deal would be, nor any serious conversations about the fact that Trump is very unlikely to offer an asymmetrical trade deal that floods the UK with dollars.

So, is Boris Johnson the British Trump? They have a similar hairstyle. But that's pretty much where it ends.

## DEMOLITION OF PALESTINIAN HOMES

# US blocks UN rebuke of Israel

The US on Wednesday blocked an attempt by Kuwait, Indonesia and South Africa to get the UN Security Council to condemn Israel's demolition of Palestinian homes on the outskirts of Jerusalem, diplomats said.

Israel said the 10 apartment buildings demolished on Monday, most of them still under construction, had been built illegally and posed a security risk to Israeli armed forces operating along a barrier that runs through the occupied West Bank. UN officials, who had called on Israel to halt the demolition plans, said 17 Palestinians faced displacement.

Such statements have to be agreed by consensus and on Wednesday the United States told its council counterparts it could not support the text, diplomats said. The buildings demolished on Monday were near what Israel describes as a security barrier. The initial draft Security Council statement described the construction of the wall by Israel as contrary to international law.

Israel credits the barrier - projected to be 720 km long when complete - with stemming Palestinian attacks. Palestinians call it a land grab designed to annex parts of the West Bank, including Israeli settlements.



Girls infected with dengue, which vector is the Aedes aegypti, is assisted in the Roberto Suazo Cordova Hospital, in La Paz municipality, La Paz department, Honduras, on Wednesday. The massive influx of people infected with dengue have collapsed 26 public hospital in Honduras in what the health authorities describe as the worst emergency of the last 50 years for this virus, which so far left 54 dead, mostly children, of the more than 28,000 patients.