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Trump impeachment: Barr refused to publicly deny president broke laws with Ukraine call, reports say

US president has been 'aggressively' pushing Republicans to publicly deny any wrongdoing, according to sources

Імпічмент Трампа: Барр відмовився публічно заперечувати щодо правопорушень президента у справі України, йдеться в повідомленнях

Прохання пана Трампа до республіканців публічно заперечувати будь-які правопорушення надійшло незабаром після того, як Білий дім опублікував реконструйовану стенограму дзвінка, в якій він тиснув на пана Зеленського, щоб розпочати розслідування щодо колишнього віце-президента Джо Байдена та інших демократів. Генеральний прокурор В. Барр відмовився публічно оголосити про те, що президент США не порушував ніяких законів в телефонній розмові з Україною. Телефонний дзвінок між паном Трампом та Президентом України В. Зеленським лежить в основі розслідування імпічменту.
<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/trump-impeachment-barr-ukraine-inquiry-zelenskiy-biden-call-transcript-a9188761.html>

Attorney General William Barr refused Donald Trump's request to declare that the US president had broken no laws in a telephone call with Ukraine's president, according to sources.

The phone call between Mr Trump and Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy is at the heart of the Democratic impeachment inquiry.

Mr Trump's request came shortly after the White House released a reconstructed transcript of a call in which he pressed Mr Zelenskiy to launch investigations into former vice president Joe Biden and other Democrats.

An intelligence whistleblower pointed to the call as evidence that the US president had tried to enlist a foreign power to help him in the 2020 presidential election. In response, the Democrats launched an impeachment inquiry into whether the president's conduct warranted his removal from office.

Mr Trump, who has aggressively pushed Republicans and administration officials to say he did nothing wrong, has repeatedly said the call was "perfect".

In the days after the reconstructed transcript was released to the public, the White House told the Justice Department of Mr Trump's desire for Mr Barr to appear publicly, according to the person who was told of it. The request was first reported by The Washington Post.

The US president wanted Mr Barr to personally deliver the message to the media that Mr Trump had done nothing wrong, much as he did in a news conference he held shortly before the release of the report by Robert Mueller, the special counsel who investigated Russia's interference in the 2016 elections, according to a person with knowledge of the events.

It was hardly the first time that Mr Trump has sought to pressure his chief law enforcement official to defend him more aggressively in the face of what he considered an existential crisis.

The US president never got over his rage at Jeff Sessions, his former attorney general, for recusing himself from Mueller's investigation, and tried repeatedly – and unsuccessfully – to get Mr Sessions to insert himself into that inquiry on Mr Trump's behalf.

A Justice Department spokeswoman put out a statement after the release of the whistleblower complaint about the call, saying that the criminal division had reviewed the official record of the conversation and determined that “there was no campaign finance violation and that no further action was warranted”. That satisfied Mr Trump, according to one of the people with knowledge of what took place, and aides were able to redirect his concerns.

Mr Barr had been involved in the decision to release the transcript of the call between Mr Trump and Mr Zelenskiy, according to multiple White House officials, and a Justice Department official said at the time that he supported the idea of being transparent. But Mr Barr decided against holding the news conference.

A spokeswoman for the Justice Department declined to comment.

Hogan Gidley, a deputy White House press secretary, said: “The president has nothing but respect for Mr Barr and greatly appreciates the work he's done on behalf of the country, and no amount of shady sources with clear intent to divide, smear and slander will change that.”

At various points since the impeachment inquiry began, Mr Trump has complained that people in his administration have not done more to defend him, multiple people close to the president said. The US president's complaint prompted Mick Mulvaney, the acting White House chief of staff, to try to defend Mr Trump at an appearance in front of reporters last month.

During that briefing, Mr Mulvaney initially acknowledged the existence of a quid pro quo linking military assistance for Ukraine to the country's willingness to start investigations Mr Trump demanded, before insisting several hours later that he had not said that.

Democratic investigators in the house have spent the past several weeks methodically trying to build a case for impeachment that goes well beyond the 25 July call, interviewing current and former administration officials who have testified to the existence of a shadow diplomatic effort aimed at pressuring Ukraine.

But Mr Trump's telephone call with Mr Zelenskiy remains the most direct evidence of the president's involvement. During the call, Mr Zelenskiy thanked Mr Trump for delivering military aid to help in their fight against Russian aggression, including anti-tank weapons.

“I would like you to do us a favour, though,” Trump responded, shifting the conversation towards investigating Democrats and urging Mr Zelenskiy that he work with Mr Barr and Rudy Giuliani, the president's personal lawyer.

Mr Barr has been investigating the origins of the Russia investigation that Mr Trump has long called “a hoax”. The attorney general appointed the US attorney John H Durham to look in to how the Mueller inquiry began and whether the intelligence community did anything improper related to collecting information about the Trump campaign.

The US president has repeatedly called for an inquiry into the Russia investigators, and Mr Barr's willingness to pursue it over the past several months has pleased Mr Trump and helped cement what people close to the two men say is a good relationship between them.

But critics of Mr Barr have accused him of lacking the independence from the White House that is traditional for the nation's top law enforcement official.

The New York Times