

Trump and Modi had a call about the Iran war. Elon Musk joined them.

WASHINGTON — Elon Musk participated in a phone call this week with President Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India, an unusual appearance by a private citizen on a call between two heads of state during a wartime crisis.

The inclusion of Musk, confirmed by two US officials, suggests that the world's richest man is back on better terms with the president. The two men had a falling out last summer following the billionaire's departure from the government, where he had been tasked with slashing the workforce. They appear to have smoothed things over in recent months.

The US officials asked for anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly.

It is unclear why Musk was on the call Tuesday or whether he spoke. His companies have taken on significant investment from sovereign wealth funds in countries in the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Musk has also long coveted a greater commercial presence in India. And SpaceX, his private rocket company, has been considering an initial public offering later this year, which could be thrown into turmoil if global economic conditions worsen.

The call, US and Indian officials have said, was about the escalating crisis in the Middle East, and in particular the Iranian military's control of the Strait



ANDREW HARNIK/GETTY IMAGES

Representative Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick appeared for a hearing of the House Ethics Committee Thursday.

of Hormuz, which is crucial for the shipping of oil and gas around the globe. The halt to most maritime traffic through the strait has led to surging energy prices worldwide and roiled markets. Some Asian nations are on the verge of having to ration fuel.

“Ensuring that the Strait of Hormuz remains open, secure and accessible is essential for the whole world. We agreed to stay in touch regarding efforts towards peace and stability,” Modi wrote on social media on Tuesday.

While he helped elect Trump and played a significant role in cutting the federal bureaucracy last year, Musk does not have a government position. In the first months of the administration, he had the title of “special government employee” while overseeing a group known as DOGE that tried to make deep cuts to federal operations and spend-

ing, which led to tensions between Musk and other senior Trump aides.

NEW YORK TIMES

Lawmaker broke 25 ethics rules, House panel says

WASHINGTON — Democratic Representative Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick of Florida committed numerous violations of House rules and ethics standards, the House Ethics Committee found Friday in a ruling that could add weight to Republicans' push to expel her from Congress.

After meeting into early Friday morning following a seven-hour hearing, the ethics panel of four Democrats and four Republicans found that Cherfilus-McCormick had committed 25 ethics violations. The panel said it would recommend a punishment in the coming weeks.

The allegations center around Cherfilus-McCormick's

receipt of millions of dollars from her family's health care business after Florida made an overpayment of roughly \$5 million in disaster relief funds. Cherfilus-McCormick is accused of using that money to fund her 2022 congressional campaign through a network of businesses and family members.

The congresswoman, who is running for a fourth term representing a southeastern Florida district, has denied wrongdoing, and her attorney stridently criticized Thursday's public hearing — the first open proceeding in nearly 15 years. But the ruling from the Ethics Committee may fuel a potential vote on her expulsion and divide a Democratic caucus that is trying to make a comeback to power in the November midterm elections.

Cherfilus-McCormick also faces federal charges for allegedly stealing the \$5 million in COVID-19 disaster relief funds and using it for purchases like a 3-carat yellow diamond ring. Her brother, former chief of staff, and accountant were also charged. She has pleaded not guilty to those charges, and her attorney indicated Thursday that the trial is expected to start in the coming months.

The congresswoman declined to testify during Thursday's ethics hearing, citing her Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination. Her attorney, William Barzee, sparred with some of the lawmakers on the ethics panel and argued that they should have allowed a thor-

ough ethics trial, where he could present witnesses and evidence to counter the conclusions of House investigators.

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Lawyers for Ga. county, US battle over seized ballots

ATLANTA — Attorneys for Georgia's Fulton County and President Trump's administration squared off in court Friday over the county's demand that the FBI return seized ballots and other materials from the 2020 election.

Abbe Lowell, representing Fulton County, repeatedly called the January seizure “unusual” because it involved an old election and allegations that have already been investigated in the years since Donald Trump, a Republican, lost the county and the state to Joe Biden, a Democrat.

Lowell suggested that the Trump administration seized the materials because it grew impatient with the pace of litigation the Justice Department filed to obtain them last year. He said the affidavit used to obtain a search warrant failed to allege any specific crime or accuse anyone of intentionally committing any wrongdoing.

“There's nothing to support that there's an ongoing investigation that matters,” Lowell told US District Judge J.P. Boulee, arguing that the federal government should return the seized documents.

Tysen Duma, a Justice Department attorney, dismissed disputes over the grounds for

the seizure as “posturing.”

Lawyers for the federal government said the Justice Department had already provided Fulton County with digital copies of everything taken and needs to retain physical copies to carry out its own investigation.

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Iran a source of frustration for young CPAC attendees

GRAPEVINE, Texas — A generational divide over the Iran war surfaced Thursday between older attendees and their political heirs at this year's Conservative Political Action Conference, as the group's leaders pleaded for unity in a challenging midterm election year for Republicans.

Younger conservatives spoke of disappointment and even “betrayal” over President Trump's launch of strikes against Iran, saying in interviews that the president's actions run counter to his many pledges to oppose foreign entanglements.

Meanwhile, older conservatives were looking past Trump's campaign criticism of military action to topple foreign regimes, arguing the war in Iran is a pragmatic act forced by threats to the United States.

That split could reflect flagging enthusiasm for Trump among some younger voters, a potentially troubling sign for Republicans heading into midterm elections and for the conservative movement as it looks to build beyond Trump's tenure.

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