

TRUMP'S TWO DENIALS COULD PROVIDE REASON FOR MUELLER TO DEMAND AN INTERVIEW

According to an updated NYT story on this week's Paul Manafort and Jerome Corsi developments, the delay in Trump's submission of his open book test came in response to two things: Seeing a reference to Roger Stone's regular contact with then-candidate Trump in Corsi's draft statement of the offense and learning that Mueller had informed Manafort he had caught him lying.

Mr. Corsi's dealings with Mr. Mueller's prosecutors have caused alarm among the president's legal team, who were informed of developments by Mr. Corsi's lawyer. President Trump's lawyers were especially troubled by a draft statement of offense against Mr. Corsi that was passed on to them, according to people familiar with the situation. In it, prosecutors claimed that Mr. Corsi understood that Mr. Stone was "in regular contact with senior members of the Trump campaign, including with then-candidate Donald J. Trump" when he asked Mr. Corsi in late July 2016 to "get to" Julian Assange, the founder of WikiLeaks.

The reference to Mr. Trump coincided with other events that so disturbed the president's lawyers that they delayed turning in his responses to written questions after negotiating over them with the special counsel for nearly a year. At roughly the same time, the Justice Department inadvertently released a secret criminal complaint against Mr. Assange and Mr.

Trump's legal team learned that prosecutors were accusing Paul Manafort, Mr. Trump's campaign chairman, of lying. Only after Mr. Mueller's team reassured Mr. Trump's lawyers that they were not trying to lure the president into a trap did they forward his answers on Nov. 20.

Unsurprisingly, CNN has already confirmed that Trump denied culpability in his answers to the two questions that address those topics.

President Donald Trump told special counsel Robert Mueller in writing that Roger Stone did not tell him about WikiLeaks, nor was he told about the 2016 Trump Tower meeting between his son, campaign officials and a Russian lawyer promising dirt on Hillary Clinton, according to two sources familiar with the matter.

One source described the President's answers without providing any direct quotes and said the President made clear he was answering to the best of his recollection.

Remember, the GRU indictment described Stone as "a person who was in regular contact with senior members of the presidential campaign of Donald J. Trump," so the inclusion of "including with then-candidate Donald J. Trump" reflects language added since July. Recall, too, that Stone at first complained about that description, insisting that "My contact with the campaign in 2016 was Donald Trump. I was not in regular contact with campaign officials," only to backtrack to, "I certainly acknowledge that I was in touch with Trump campaign officials," when he realized the implications of that. As CNN notes, in recent weeks Mueller's team asked for records of Stone's calls and visits to Trump Tower. So it's possible a recent witness – Michael Cohen and Steve Bannon could both be possibilities – suggested that Stone had

conveyed WikiLeaks information directly to Trump, leading to the request for more records.

And (as I used as a hypothetical last night on Chris Hayes' show), we know that Manafort and Trump met on June 7, 2016, just before Trump announced an attack on Hillary Clinton in coming days and two days before the June 9 meeting.

So it is quite likely Mueller has evidence that both of Trump's claims are lies.

Finally, remember that one excuse Trump has given for refusing to sit for an interview is that none of this really affects him directly, so Mueller has no need to engage in back-and-forth with him. It's quite likely that a Corsi indictment and a Manafort sentencing report could be public within the next month alleging that both of the claims Trump made are false. While I still doubt Mueller would wait for a Trump interview, any inconsistency between Mueller's evidence and Trump's answers would make it far easier to demand an interview.