

THE MUELLER QUESTIONS MAP OUT CULTIVATION, A QUID PRO QUO, AND A COVER- UP (PART ONE, CULTIVATION)

I wasn't going to do this originally, but upon learning that the Mueller questions, as NYT has presented them, don't maintain the sixteen subjects or even the 49 questions that Jay Sekulow drew up from those 16 areas of interest, and especially after WaPo continues to claim that Mueller is only investigating "whether Trump obstructed justice and sought to thwart a criminal probe into Russia's interference in the 2016 presidential election," I am going to do my own version of the questions, as released by the NYT.

I'm not pretending that this better represents what Mueller has communicated to Sekulow, nor am I suggesting NYT's version isn't valid. But the questions provide an opportunity to lay out a cultivation, quid pro quo, and cover-up structure I've been using to frame the investigation in my own mind.

This post lays out the "cultivation" questions Mueller wants to pose.

The cultivation

The questions start well before the election, focusing on both Trump's persistent interest in building a Trump Tower in Moscow, the cultivation of Trump by the Agalarov camp, and Trump's interest in becoming best friends with Vladimir Putin. The questions may also include other real estate deals that would be less obviously tied to Russia, but possibly just as

compromising. It's worth remembering, Trump probably didn't expect he'd win. So the Trump Tower offers were a prize that would be available (and easier to take advantage of) based on the assumption he'd lose.

**November 9, 2013:
During a 2013 trip to
Russia, what
communication and
relationships did you
have with the Agalarovs
and Russian government
officials?**

On November 9, 2013, the Agalarovs helped Trump put on Miss Universe in Moscow; Trump Tower meeting attendees Rob Goldstone and Ike Kaveladze were both also involved. If the pee tape – or any kompromat involving “golden showers,” as Jim Comey claims Trump called it – exists, it was made on November 8, 2013.

Leading up to the event, Trump talked about meeting Putin and “will he become my new best friend?,” but that reportedly did not happen. But he did meet a bunch of other oligarchs. In the aftermath of the event, the Agalarovs floated building a Trump Tower in one of their developments.

**November 2, 2015 to
November, 2016: What
communication did you
have with Michael D.
Cohen, Felix Sater and**

others, including foreign nationals, about Russian real estate developments during the campaign?

On November 3, 2015, at a time when Trump's campaign was experiencing remarkable success, and well after (per the Internet Research Agency indictment) the election year operation had started, Felix Sater approached Michael Cohen to pitch yet another Trump Tower in Moscow deal. He tied the deal *explicitly* to getting Trump elected.

Michael I arranged for Ivanka to sit in Putins [sic] private chair at his desk and office in the Kremlin. I will get Putin on this program and we will get Donald elected. We both know no one else knows how to pull this off without stupidity or greed getting in the way. I know how to play it and we will get this done. Buddy our boy can become President of the USA and we can engineer it. I will get Putins [sic] team to buy in on this, I will manage this process.

Remember: Mueller's subpoena to Sam Nunberg goes back to November 1, 2015, suggesting this is the timeframe he's thinking explicitly about.

The initial public story about the deal – which Cohen tried to squelch before his congressional interviews – claimed that the deal fizzled out in January 2016. More recent reporting has revealed that one of the people involved in this deal has ties to GRU, the Russian intelligence organization behind the hack-and-leak, and that Cohen pursued it at least as late as June, 2016.

Around that time (possibly on July 22, with the involvement of Ivan Timofeev, who was involved in offering up emails), Sergei Millian – who had

brokered Trump business with Russians in the past – started cultivating George Papadopoulos. After the election, Millian pitched that the two of them should do a Trump Tower deal.

The Trump Tower offers are only the most obvious election-related deal Mueller might be interested in. In October 2016, for example, Cypriot businessman Orestes Fintiklis obtained a majority stake in the troubled Trump Panama development, which he has since taken over (possibly along with a bunch of papers showing the money laundering Ivanka did to fill the building). And all that's before you consider any deals Jared was pitching.

RESOURCES

These are some of the most useful resources in mapping these events.

Mueller questions as imagined by Jay Sekulow

CNN's timeline of investigative events

Majority HPSCI Report

Minority HPSCI Report

Trump Twitter Archive

Jim Comey March 20, 2017 HPSCI testimony

Comey May 3, 2017 SJC testimony

Jim Comey June 8, 2017 SSCI testimony

Jim Comey written statement, June 8, 2017

Jim Comey memos

Sally Yates and James Clapper Senate Judiciary Committee testimony, May 8, 2017

NPR Timeline on Trump's ties to Aras Agalarov

George Papadopoulos complaint

George Papadopoulos statement of the offense

Mike Flynn statement of the offense

Internet Research Agency indictment

Text of the Don Jr Trump Tower Meeting emails

Jared Kushner's statement to Congress

Erik Prince HPSCI transcript

THE SERIES

Part One: The Mueller Questions Map Out
Cultivation, a Quid Pro Quo, and a Cover-Up

Part Two: The Quid Pro Quo: a Putin Meeting and
Election Assistance, in Exchange for Sanctions
Relief

Part Three: The Quo: Policy and Real Estate
Payoffs to Russia

Part Four: The Quest: Trump Learns of the
Investigation

Part Five: Attempting a Cover-Up by Firing Comey

Part Six: Trump Exacerbates His Woes