

TWO EXCEPTIONS TO TRUMP'S "DO NOT RECALL" RESPONSES: A LIMITED ANSWER ON AN ASSANGE PARDON AND A NON-ANSWER ON SANCTIONS RELIEF

With few exceptions, the questions Mueller posed to Trump were questions I expected: his awareness of the June 9 meeting, the Russian hacking and Stone's attempts to optimize the release of stolen emails, the Trump Tower Moscow deal, Manafort's sharing of polling data and the platform on sanctions relief, and Trump's role in Flynn's calls with Sergey Kislyak.

One question I did not expect was about whether Trump attended the World Chess Championship on November 10, 2016; the report makes it clear there were allegations that Kirill Dmitriev made a last minute decision to attend it to meet with Trump, though Trump denies he attended. Notably, by answering, Trump reflected a willingness to answer a question about the transition period.

One question I did not expect, however, pertained to a pardon for Julian Assange.

Did you have any discussions prior to January 20, 2017, regarding a potential pardon or other action to benefit Julian Assange? If yes, describe who you had the discussion(s) with, when, and the content of the discussion(s).

As with most of the questions, Trump answered with a "do not recall" answer.

I do not recall having had any discussion during the campaign regarding a pardon or action to benefit Julian

Assange.

Except that (as he did on some other questions that largely pertained solely to election period activities), he specifically limited his answer to the campaign period. He basically refused to answer regarding any discussion of a pardon during the transition. That's particularly interesting for two reasons.

In the report's discussion of Don Jr's DMs with WikiLeaks, they don't mention the one where Assange suggests his father should get him named Ambassador to the US.

Hi Don. Hope you're doing well! In relation to Mr. Assange: Obama/Clinton placed pressure on Sweden, UK and Australia (his home country) to illicitly go after Mr. Assange. It would be real easy and helpful for your dad to suggest that Australia appoint Assange ambassador to DC "That's a really smart tough guy and the most famous australian you have! " or something similar. They won't do it, but it will send the right signals to Australia, UK + Sweden to start following the law and stop bending it to ingratiate themselves with the Clintons. 12/16/16 12:38PM

And, we know that after inauguration and into 2018, a series of Trump flunkies kept trying to broker a pardon for Assange.

Now, as reported, Trump refused to answer questions about about the transition (except for that chess championship one). So that may be his explanation for limiting his answer. But the effect seems to suggest he did discuss pardoning Assange.

His refusal to answer questions about the transition also explains why he didn't answer a slew of other questions, generally about Flynn's communications with Kislyak and Kushner and Steve Bannon's attempts to establish a back

channel with Russia.

Particularly given Bannon and Erik Prince's deleted texts and the inclusion of the follow-up in the January 28 conference call with Putin, it's pretty clear Trump knew about it (and so probably also knew about Flynn's activities).

But there is one question about sanctions relief that Trump didn't answer, offering no excuse. It appears as a sub-question to one about the Trump's promise – at the same press conference he asked and Russia to further hacking Hillary – to lift sanctions on Russia.

g. On July 27, 2016, in response to a question about whether you would recognize Crimea as Russian territory and lift sanctions on Russia, you said: "We'll be looking at that. Yeah, we'll be looking." Did you intend to communicate by that statement or at any other time during the campaign a willingness to lift sanctions and/or recognize Russia's annexation of Crimea if you were elected?

i. What consideration did you give to lifting sanctions and/or recognizing Russia's annexation of Crimea if you were elected? Describe who you spoke with about this topic, when, the substance of the discussion(s).

Trump responded to the Crimea question – by claiming his statement did not communicate any position.

But Trump did not answer the sub-question, whether he considered lifting sanctions and whom he spoke with about that. That question was in no way limited to the transition, and therefore should have been answered.

And it's not like Trump simply missed the question: His lawyers replicated it in their own answers. And they read Mueller's questions

closely enough to add a “sic” where Mueller had included a double “about.”

Were you asked to attend the World Chess Championship gala on November 10, 2016?
If yes, who asked you to attend, when were you asked, and what were you told about about why your presence was requested?

[snip]

Were you asked to attend the World Chess Championship gala on November 10, 2016?
If yes, who asked you to attend, when were you asked, and what were you told about about [sic] why your presence was requested?

So they presumably saw the question, a question that on its face pertained to the election as well as the transition.

They just didn't answer it.

So the two things that even given Trump's contemptuous response to responding to basic answers about the Russian investigation he refused to answer pertain to a Julian Assange pardon (for the transition period) and sanctions relief.

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Two Exceptions to Trump's "Do Not Recall" Responses: A Limited Answer on an Assange Pardon and a Non-Answer on Sanctions Relief

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As I disclosed last July, I provided information to the FBI on issues related to the Mueller investigation, so I'm going to include disclosure statements on Mueller investigation posts from here on out. I will include the disclosure whether or not the stuff I shared with the FBI pertains to the subject of the post.