

In another shot across the White House's bow

## Mueller lauds former Trump lawyer Cohen for providing “useful and relevant” information

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A series of legal documents filed Friday by Special Counsel Robert Mueller and federal prosecutors in Manhattan point to an intensification of the investigation into alleged Russian interference in the 2016 election and possible collusion and obstruction of justice by the Trump White House.

They concern two former Trump associates who have been convicted or have pled guilty to charges laid in connection with the 17-month investigation being led by former FBI director Mueller: Trump's former personal lawyer and “fixer” Michael Cohen and the former chairman of the 2016 Trump election campaign Paul Manafort.

Mueller's office and federal prosecutors from the Southern District of New York filed separate sentencing recommendations before Judge William H. Pauley III in Manhattan, who is scheduled to hand down a sentence on December 12 on two guilty pleas tendered by Cohen.

The first was last August, when Cohen pled guilty to charges of financial fraud, tax evasion and campaign finance violations brought by the Manhattan prosecutors. The campaign offenses concerned hush money Cohen paid on behalf of Trump near the end of the 2016 election campaign to silence two women who claimed they had had sexual relations with the then-Republican presidential candidate.

The second came on November 29 when Cohen pled guilty to one count of lying to Congress as part of a plea agreement with Mueller. Cohen admitted to lying during the campaign about his negotiations with Russian officials about a project to build a Trump

Tower hotel in Moscow. His testimony implicated Trump and other Trump family members in lying to conceal their business relations with Russia, prompting Democratic officials and media outlets to proclaim that Cohen had provided a “smoking gun” to prove Russian “meddling” in the election and Trump collusion.

Cohen's plea and court appearance were timed to coincide with Trump's departure for the G20 summit in Argentina, where he was to meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Trump summarily canceled the meeting during his flight, underscoring the right-wing political motivations behind the Democratic Party-led, CIA orchestrated campaign over Russian “meddling.” The anti-Trump faction within the ruling class and the state is no less reactionary and warmongering than Trump. The central concern of the Democrats is to force Trump to assume an even more belligerent and aggressive posture toward Moscow.

The sentencing memo submitted by Mueller stressed Cohen's cooperation with the Russia investigation and urged the judge to order any prison sentence for the perjury plea to run concurrently with the sentence handed down in connection with the Manhattan fraud conviction. It stated that Cohen had disclosed “relevant and useful” information and “gone to significant lengths to assist the Special Counsel's investigation.”

In a clear shot across Trump's bow, the document said: “The fact that Cohen continued to work on the [Trump Tower] project and discuss it with Individual 1 [Trump] well into the campaign was material to the ongoing efforts by the Russian government to interfere with the US presidential election... the defendant

provided a detailed account of his involvement and the involvement of others in the Moscow Project...”

It went on to state that Cohen provided “useful” information concerning “Russia-related matters core to its investigation that he obtained by virtue of his regular contact with [Trump] Company executives during the campaign.” It added that Cohen described the “circumstances” surrounding the preparation of his false testimony to Congress.

This suggests that Mueller has evidence implicating Trump and/or his close aides and family members in obstruction of justice as well as collusion.

The special counsel memo was similar in tone and content to a sentencing recommendation submitted on Tuesday in relation to the case of former Trump national security adviser Michael Flynn, who pleaded guilty last December to one count of lying to federal investigators and agreed to cooperate with Mueller’s office. In a heavily redacted filing, Mueller’s team repeatedly told the judge that Flynn had provided “substantial assistance” and recommended that he be given no prison time.

Friday’s sentencing recommendation from the Manhattan prosecutors regarding Cohen’s earlier guilty plea took a much harder line than the one submitted by Mueller. It accused Cohen of withholding information and urged the judge to give him a substantial prison sentence of three or more years.

In relation to Manafort, Mueller’s office filed a document outlining the reasons it voided a cooperation agreement with the former Trump campaign official on November 26. In a heavily redacted document, it outlined in general terms its claim that Manafort had violated the agreement by repeatedly lying to investigators.

Manafort, a long-time lobbyist for pro-Russian Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, who was ousted in a US-backed, fascist-led putsch in February 2014, was convicted by a Virginia jury in August of eight bank and tax charges brought by the special counsel’s office. He has been in jail since the summer, when the judge revoked his bail. Sentencing in that case is set for February 8.

Manafort pled guilty in September to conspiring to obstruct justice and agreed to cooperate with Mueller. Sentencing in that case is scheduled for March 5.

In Friday’s submission, Mueller’s prosecutors

accused Manafort of lying about five issues: his contacts with administration officials after Trump’s inauguration; information “pertinent to another Department of Justice investigation;” his interactions with his former assistant, the Russian-Ukrainian political consultant Konstantin Kilimnik; comments about Kilimnik’s alleged participation in a conspiracy to obstruct justice; and a wire transfer.

Mueller has indicated he may file additional charges against Manafort or request that any sentences handed down be extended.

Also on Friday, former FBI Director James Comey, whose firing by Trump in May 2017 triggered the appointment of Mueller as special counsel, testified for seven hours behind closed doors before the House Judiciary and Oversight Committees. The Republican leadership of the committees reportedly grilled him on his supposedly kid gloves treatment of Hillary Clinton in connection with her use of a private email server while secretary of state under Obama.



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