



Former Trump Lawyer Tells ABC Trump Directed Him to Break the Law. Is He Credible?

President Donald Trump — whose enemies have been seeking to delegitimize his presidency since before it even began — is now facing new accusations from his former personal lawyer, Michael Cohen. Cohen (shown) claims that candidate Trump directed him to make payments to assure the silence of two women who claimed to have extramarital affairs with Trump, even though Trump “of course” knew it was wrong to do so.



In an interview with *ABC News*’ Chief Anchor George Stephanopoulos that aired Friday, Cohen played the part of a redeemed man, full of contrition and humility — except when he blamed his actions on his “blind loyalty” to President Trump.

“I knew what I was doing was wrong,” Cohen told Stephanopoulos, adding that on Wednesday he “stood up before the world and I accepted the responsibility for my actions.” But his veneer of contrition began to peel away when he added that he is “angry” at himself for the role he played in handling the payments to Karen McDougal and Stormy Daniels, who both allege that they had affairs with Trump. The reason for his anger? “I gave loyalty to someone who, truthfully, does not deserve loyalty.”

Further diluting his claim that he “accepted the responsibility” for his actions, Cohen told Stephanopoulos, “It is sad that I should take responsibility for his [Trump’s] dirty deeds.”

The crux of the matter is that Cohen claims that candidate Trump directed him to break the law and make the payments. Besides the fact that there may not have been anything illegal about the payments (since they do not appear to have come from campaign finances), there is the fact that Trump denies Cohen’s accusation that he directed Cohen to break the law.

So, it’s a rousing game of he said/he said, and it is difficult to take anything Cohen says at face value, given his convictions for tax evasion, banking crimes, and — especially — perjury for lying to Congress.

In response to questions about why people should believe a self-confessed liar, Cohen — attempting to borrow some credibility from President Trump’s enemies in the office of the special counsel — said, “Because the special counsel stated emphatically that the information that I gave to them is credible and helpful.” He added, “There’s a substantial amount of information that they possessed that corroborates the fact that I am telling the truth.” Stepping back into the role of a redeemed man, Cohen said that he is “done with the lying,” and that he is also “done being loyal to President Trump.” He went on to say, “My first loyalty belongs to my wife, my daughter, my son, and this country.”

Cohen also lashed out at the president for a series of tweets sent by Trump on Thursday. In those tweets (arranged here in order for easier reading), the president said:

I never directed Michael Cohen to break the law. He was a lawyer and he is supposed to know the law. It is called “advice of counsel,” and a lawyer has great liability if a mistake is made. That is



why they get paid.

Despite that many campaign finance lawyers have strongly stated that I did nothing wrong with respect to campaign finance laws, if they even apply, because this was not campaign finance.

Cohen was guilty on many charges unrelated to me, but he plead to two campaign charges which were not criminal and of which he probably was not guilty even on a civil basis. Those charges were just agreed to by him in order to embarrass the president and get a much reduced prison sentence, which he did — including the fact that his family was temporarily let off the hook. As a lawyer, Michael has great liability to me!

Cohen denied that was part of a scheme to “embarrass the president” in exchange for a reduced sentence. “It is absolutely not true,” Cohen said. “Under no circumstances do I want to embarrass the president.” Then — appearing to forget that he was claiming not to want to embarrass Trump — Cohen peeled away more of his own veneer of contrition, saying, “He knows the truth. I know the truth,” adding, “I don’t think there is anybody that believes” that Trump did not order him to break the law. “First of all, nothing at the Trump organization was ever done unless it was run through Mr. Trump. He directed me to make the payments, he directed me to become involved in these matters.”

He went on to say, “He [Trump] knows the truth. I know the truth. Others know the truth.” And what is that truth that Trump and others know? Cohen’s definition was long on words and short on substance. “Here is the truth: People of the United States of America, people of the world, don’t believe what he is saying. The man doesn’t tell the truth. And it is sad that I should take responsibility for his dirty deeds,” he told Stephanopoulos.

Cohen also expressed his disdain that President Trump mentioned Cohen’s family in Thursday’s tweets. “Instead of him taking responsibility for his actions, what does he do?” Cohen asked, answering, “He attacks my family.” Apparently, Cohen — who mentions his own family when playing the part of a man dripping with contrition — considers them off limits where his motives for turning on the man he once claimed he “would take a bullet for” are concerned.

Lest the interview end without the specter of Russian collusion being interjected into the discussion, Stephanopoulos asked Cohen whether he thinks Trump is telling the truth about Russia. Cohen — who says he will continue to cooperate with the probe after reporting to prison March 6 — simply answered, “No.”

Other of Cohen’s remarks shine a light on what lies just beneath his veneer of contrition and redemption. While again seeming to forget that he claimed not to want to embarrass the president, Cohen launched into a severe critique of Trump’s character, leadership, and personality. Referring to the president as “a very difficult individual,” Cohen said, “I think the pressure of the job is much more than what he thought it was going to be,” adding, “It’s not like the Trump organization where he would bark out orders and people would blindly follow what he wanted done.” He continued, “There’s a system here; he doesn’t understand the system and it’s sad because the country has never been more divisive.”

Revealing what is likely his real motive for joining the president’s enemies in their ever-active and multi-pronged witch hunt, Cohen added, “one of the hopes that I have out of the punishment that I’ve received as well as the cooperation that I have given I will be remembered in history as helping to bring this country back together.” Of course, part of the quest for that legacy is that Cohen has to be cast as a



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hero who made up for all of his misdeeds by helping to bring down the president. To that end, Cohen added, "I will not be the villain of his story."

No. Instead, Trump will be made the villain — even if it means that "evidence" of the president's "crimes" comes from the lips of a man who is going to prison for tax evasion (which requires lying), banking crimes (involving lying), and perjury (lying under oath).

As ABC News reports:

Federal prosecutors in the Southern District of New York have implicated, but not charged, the president in the deals reached in the closing weeks of the 2016 election. They allege that Cohen acted "in coordination with and at the direction of" Trump, according to court filings. Prosecutors also reached a non-prosecution agreement with AMI, the publishers of the *National Inquirer*, in which the tabloid admitted to making a \$150,000 payment to McDougal "in concert" with the Trump campaign.

Of course, "in concert" with the Trump campaign could simply mean "Cohen." It does not necessarily follow that Trump himself was aware of the details of the deal. That non-prosecution agreement certainly goes a long way to getting AMI/*National Enquirer* (not exactly known for their veracity) to cooperate. It is easy to play along when you have nothing to lose if you do, and everything to lose if you don't.

Trump's enemies have created such fear about the consequences of going against the anti-Trump narrative that they have created a strong incentive for the accused to come up with something — anything — that could be used to implicate Trump in order to gain leniency.

This is not lost on the president, who ended Thursday's tweet-fest by drawing a parallel between Cohen and Michael Flynn. "They gave General Flynn a great deal because they were embarrassed by the way he was treated - the FBI said he didn't lie and they overrode the FBI. They want to scare everybody into making up stories that are not true by catching them in the smallest of misstatements," he tweeted, adding, "Sad! WITCH HUNT!"

Photo of Michael Cohen: AP Images



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