

US attorney general vows to rubber-stamp FBI findings in Clinton e-mail case

Tom Hall
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US Attorney General Loretta Lynch announced Friday that she will back whatever recommendations for prosecution the FBI makes based on its inquiry into Hillary Clinton's use of a private e-mail server during her tenure as secretary of state. The investigation focuses on whether the Democratic Party's presumptive presidential nominee mishandled classified information.

While the FBI makes recommendations on whether or not to prosecute, the final decision rests with the attorney general. It is uncommon, but not unprecedented, for the attorney general to overrule the recommendations of investigators.

The timing of the announcement, made in the midst of the ongoing investigation, was aimed at dispelling the appearance of impropriety following Lynch's extraordinary private meeting on Monday with Hillary's husband, former president Bill Clinton, who talked with her for half an hour on her private plane as it sat parked on the tarmac of the airport in Phoenix, Arizona.

An initial report on her decision, leaked to the *New York Times* by an anonymous Department of Justice (DoJ) official, declared that she would accept the "determinations and findings of career prosecutors and lawyers as well as FBI investigators and director [James B.] Comey." Lynch confirmed the decision later in the morning during an on-stage interview with a *Washington Post* reporter at a conference in Aspen, Colorado.

Lynch struck a remorseful pose over the "optics" of her meeting with Bill Clinton, the husband of the target of a Justice Department investigation. "I certainly wouldn't do it again," she said. "Because I think it has cast a shadow. The most important thing for me as attorney general is the integrity of this Department of

Justice. And the fact that the meeting I had is now casting a shadow over how people will view that work is something that I take seriously and deeply and painfully."

Lynch insists that her rendezvous with the former president was entirely coincidental and little more than a social call. However, the meeting has become a cause célèbre among Republicans and the right-wing media, who suggested that Clinton met with Lynch to "plea bargain" on his wife's behalf and called on Lynch to recuse herself from the case in favor of a special prosecutor.

However, given the fact that it was Bill Clinton who gave Lynch her first major appointment, as US attorney for the Eastern District of New York, the two competing narratives are not necessarily mutually exclusive: if Bill Clinton had intended to influence Lynch's decision in the case, a wink and a nod would have been all that was necessary.

Lynch's announcement that she would accept the results of the FBI investigation does not come as a surprise. Given the politically inflammatory character of the case, especially in the aftermath of the meeting with Bill Clinton, for Lynch to move to overturn any recommendation that Clinton be prosecuted would only invite even more of a political firestorm.

The case against Clinton for mishandling classified information is tenuous at best, as it would require demonstrating that Clinton knowingly provided classified information to unauthorized people, as former CIA Director David Petraeus did to his biographer and lover, Paula Broadwell, or that she demonstrated "gross negligence" by placing it on her private server.

That being said, the declaration by Loretta Lynch that she will rubber-stamp an FBI decision has ominous,

anti-democratic implications. The ostensible function of the attorney general, an appointee of the president, confirmed by the US Senate, is to provide civilian oversight over the federal police agencies, including acting as a check against runaway or vindictive prosecutions. Her withdrawal from that role only augments the unaccountable powers of the police.

Lynch's decision effectively hands the FBI the ability to alter the outcome of a presidential election. On Friday evening, as this decision was being digested in Washington, NBC News reported that the FBI was going ahead with its long-planned interview of Hillary Clinton—the only significant witness in the case who has not yet testified under oath—as early as this weekend.

It is significant that in spite of the wall-to-wall coverage of the scandal, which has been ongoing for more than a year, there has been no focus, either in the media campaign or the federal investigation itself, upon the content of the e-mails, which document the criminal activities of American imperialism, including such actions as Clinton signing off on drone-missile assassination strikes in Pakistan.

Rather, the main concern of the political establishment and the corporate media is that these communications took place through unofficial channels, where they could have been leaked to foreign governments, or far worse, to the American and world public.



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