

New York City mayor Eric Adams faces deepening FBI investigation into his 2021 campaign

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The deepening federal investigation into possible criminal violations in connection with the 2021 campaign of New York City mayor Eric Adams represents the greatest challenge yet for his not quite two-year-old mayoralty. It also coincides with a growing crisis of affordable housing and homelessness, along with a record influx of migrants, budget cuts and ever-mounting inequality.

The allegations concern whether the right-wing Turkish government of Recep Tayyip Erdogan made donations to the Adams campaign either directly or through businessmen acting on its behalf in exchange for official favors. The FBI probe may be nearing the point where a decision is made on whether to bring criminal charges.

The investigation surfaced publicly on November 2, when the authorities raided the Brooklyn home of Adams' chief campaign fund-raiser, Brianna Suggs, and seized two laptops, three iPhones and a manila folder labeled "Eric Adams." The mayor, who had only just arrived in Washington D.C. that morning to push for federal action to ease the recent influx of migrants into New York, heard news of the raid and took the next plane back to the city. He canceled meetings with White House officials and members of Congress, to which he had earlier attached the greatest importance.

Adams later claimed that he had returned out of concern for Suggs, his 25-year-old aide, but he also admitted that he hadn't even seen or spoken to her upon his return.

A few days later, on November 6, an even more unusual development took place on the streets of lower Manhattan. The mayor was stopped upon leaving an event at New York University. Two FBI agents asked Adams' security detail to step aside. They entered the mayor's car and seized his electronic devices, including two cellphones and an iPad, which they later returned after copying emails and texts. As observers pointed out, the FBI could have quietly and privately requested that Adams turn over his phones. The extraordinary public confrontation had to have been aimed at

generating publicity, and suggested that charges were in the offing.

Although neither Adams nor Suggs has been charged with wrongdoing, and the mayor claims he is cooperating fully with the investigation and has nothing to hide, he has also retained the services of the giant WilmerHale law firm.

The central question of the investigation, as reported on in some detail by the *New York Times*, is whether Turkish officials illegally donated to the Adams campaign and whether his administration gave the Turkish authorities benefits in return. As the *Times* reports, 11 employees of the KSK Construction Company in Brooklyn, owned by Turkish immigrants, made campaign donations to Adams in 2021. He also received five donations from individuals connected to Bay Atlantic University, a small institution founded by a Turkish philanthropist. Other groups connected with Turkish President Erdogan also donated to the campaign.

Adams has made, by his own account, at least six or seven separate trips to Turkey over the past decade or so. He has said that this is not unusual, considering his love of travel. A trip by Adams in 2015 was paid for in part by the Turkish consulate general. The consulate has cultivated close relations with Adams from his time as Brooklyn Borough President. In 2021, he had breakfast with the Turkish ambassador and with Dr. Mehmet Oz, the son of Turkish immigrants who ran unsuccessfully as the Republican candidate for the US Senate from Pennsylvania a year later. Since taking office, Adams has continued to meet with the consul general, both at City Hall and the mayor's home, Gracie Mansion.

Text messages leaked to the press indicate that Adams, while still Brooklyn Borough President, but certain of election only two months later as the Democratic nominee for mayor, may have pressured then-Fire Commissioner Daniel Nigro to give permission for the temporary opening of the new Turkish consulate in Manhattan—the \$300 million, 36-story Turkevi Center—despite serious fire safety

concerns. Permission was granted, and President Erdogan cut the ribbon only a few weeks before Adams won his election. The mayor, when questioned about this, said that his duties as borough president routinely involved issues like the official opening of new buildings and outreach to immigrant communities. He did not explain how a new high-rise in Manhattan fell under his jurisdiction, which was then limited to Brooklyn. When the Turkevi Center opened two years ago, Adams was given a guided tour.

In a press conference this week, the mayor responded to persistent questions about the investigation by saying that he is “fully cooperating” and would “follow the law.” Adams and his top aides repeatedly deflected all questions, insisting that he would not interfere with an ongoing probe. Chief Counsel Lisa Zornberg declared, “No one has been accused of wrongdoing in the investigation, to my knowledge, and there has been no indication that I’ve seen that the mayor is a target.”

The Adams administration has faced a number of previous corruption charges. Several months ago, Buildings Commissioner Eric Ulrich was forced to resign after being indicted on bribery charges. The Manhattan District Attorney has also indicted six donors to Adams’ 2021 run for the mayoralty for allegedly violating campaign finance rules.

Various observers and critics of Adams within the framework of capitalist politics have also called attention to numerous unusual aspects of his circle and of his administration. The mayor is known for appointing longstanding associates whose loyalty is unquestioned. Brianna Suggs, who started working for Adams in 2018, when she was 20 years old and had not yet graduated from Brooklyn College, is extremely close to Ingrid Lewis-Martin, who has the title of chief adviser to the mayor, and has known Adams for 40 years.

The New York City mayor has already raised \$2.5 million in preparation for his reelection campaign two years hence. When asked at his press conference whether he would resign if indicted, he said that was premature, and repeated his insistence that he always followed the law.

The news about Adams’ relationship with the Turkish authorities bears an uncanny resemblance to the indictment, only a month ago, of New Jersey Democratic Senator Robert Menendez. Menendez was charged with acting as an unregistered agent of the Egyptian government. Earlier, in September, Menendez had been indicted on multiple counts of bribery. Over 30 of his Democratic colleagues in the Senate have called for his resignation, a call which he has rejected.

As in the case of Menendez, there is no question that Adams is a corrupt representative of big business. After a

22-year career as a police officer, during which he postured as an opponent of police brutality and racism, as the head of the organization of black police officers, Adams entered politics in 2006 and won election to the state senate, then in 2013 to the largely ceremonial post of borough president in Brooklyn.

In the mayoral election in 2021, Adams became the favored candidate of the corporate and financial elite from the outset of his campaign. His administration has been characterized by its ruthless defense of big business and police brutality, wrapped up in right-wing demagoguery and the rhetoric of law and order.

Savage budget cuts have hit education, libraries and health care. Nearly one-half of the city’s population is poor or “near poor,” while the wealthiest sections of the upper-middle class join the multi-millionaires and billionaires in their parasitic existence. Meanwhile, like virtually all of the Democrats, Adams has joined in the support for Israeli genocide in the Gaza Strip, backing the expenditure of tens of billions of dollars for war against the working class abroad while prosecuting an economic war against the working class at home.

It is not clear the extent to which the FBI probe has been triggered by the overflowing corruption scandals of the Adams administration, but it is certainly being used to keep the pressure on Adams not to deviate from his right-wing course. He has heard this message loud and clear. On Thursday afternoon, the mayor announced a massive new round of budget cuts targeting virtually every city service, including more than \$1 billion over two years from public education, blaming it largely on the fiscal crisis produced by the influx of undocumented immigrants into the city.



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