

THE [EMAILS SENT TO] CLINTON STORY MAY END UP BEING ABOUT LOYALTY

I was surprised that this story voicing concerns that Clinton backers fear “old weaknesses stalk” her campaign (stalk!) didn’t mention one of the weaknesses from 2008 that bothered me the most: loyalty.

Don’t get me wrong. Loyalty is a good thing.

Except when loyalty to long-term friends drives your hiring decisions.

To me, Hillary’s failure in 2008 is best exemplified by her refusal to fire Mark Penn, even though he divided the campaign staff and made a lot of the decisions that let Obama beat her.

More recently, Hillary retained Sidney Blumenthal as an advisor even after the White House nixed him having an official role at State – a decision that lies behind some of the more controversial emails revealed as part of the email scandal.

Yet the WaPo article on potential Hillary stumbles doesn’t mention loyalty, not even in its discussion of the email scandal.

The e-mail issue has dampened Clinton’s support in New Hampshire, which holds the nation’s first primary, on Feb. 9. Sanders rose to a statistical tie there in the latest statewide poll, to the shock of some longtime Clinton backers. She is on safer ground in Iowa, which will hold the nation’s first presidential selection vote in the Feb. 1 caucuses.

Democrats in Washington fret that the e-mail liability is something Clinton

brought on herself and has managed from a defensive crouch. The decision to operate a separate e-mail system parallel to the regular State Department system has resulted in an investigation that is now out of the control of Clinton and her campaign advisers.

Political strategists who have been through past such episodes note that an investigation like this can go in unexpected and damaging directions.

"I don't think there's a big smoking gun," one Democrat said. "But it's hard to explain why you had a private server, why you just now turned it over. . . .Shouldn't you have had better judgment?"

As I have noted, everything we know about the email scandal confirms that any legal problems stem *not* from Hillary sitting down and transcribing the contents of a satellite-derived intelligence report into an unencrypted email, but from a staffer taking material he or she knew to be classified and including it in an email to Hillary. It's not even clear *that* happened – the CIA has a nasty habit of claiming widely known facts are Top Secret, but that is the legal issue we're discussing (go here to review my critique of Hillary's over actions).

Both because they hate her, because she worked under a special status at State, and because there seems to be real reason to think she had a role in emails of question, the focus has now turned to Huma Abedin, currently Vice Chairwoman for Hillary's campaign. This report on Abedin's possible involvement emphasizes how closer Hillary and Abedin are.

Abedin, who's been with Clinton for about two decades, started working for Clinton as a 19-year-old intern in the former first lady's office.

At State and during the 2008 campaign she was considered Clinton's "body woman," never far from Clinton's side and often seen watching her boss intently, ready to scramble to her aid at any minute. Top politicians, and even Bill Clinton, would phone her to reach Hillary, and emails released in recent months showed she enjoyed access to Clinton at her private home, too, dropping items off on her counter and instructing her how to dress and keeping her schedule.

In 2013, news broke that Abedin had been given a special government employee status, allowing her to be simultaneously on the payroll for the philanthropic Clinton Foundation and Teneo, a consulting firm founded by former Clinton White House adviser Doug Band. She previously had not disclosed the dual employment.

Abedin has said she stepped back from government work and became a contractor so she could be with her family and her newborn son. But since then, critics have questioned her about whether she had a conflict of interest while working at State and alongside close friends of the Clinton family.

There are a few other staffers whose names have been floated as potentially sending the emails with information deemed classified.

But if Abedin is among them, it poses the quintessential problem for Hillary: the possibility that dealing with this email problem would at the same time require distancing herself from a cherished associate. If someone like Abedin were involved in sending classified information, would Hillary do what she refused to do in 2008?