



[DOJ Opens Criminal Investigation into Mueller Report Origins](#)

The U.S. Department of Justice upgraded its administrative review of the origins of the Mueller Report to a criminal inquiry last week. The investigation is being conducted by Prosecutor John Durham and closely supervised by Attorney General William Barr. The switch of status to a criminal probe means that investigators can now issue subpoenas for testimony and documents. Critics of the investigation maintain that the administrative review, now a criminal inquiry, was started in the interests of President Trump and not in the interest of justice.

In June of this year, the Justice Department sent a letter to Congress notifying them that an investigator was beginning an inquiry into the origins of the Mueller investigation – which examined Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election. The initial decision was broadly contested, with many believing that Attorney General Barr was opening an administrative review in the interests of the President, rather than in the interest of justice. Last week, the administrative review of the report was shifted to a criminal inquiry by Justice Department officials.

The now criminal inquiry has been closely overseen by Attorney General William Barr, and this recent shift will allow Prosecutor John Durham to subpoena for witness testimony and documents, the ability to convene a grand jury, and the power to file criminal charges. Durham is widely respected within the Justice Department and has worked previously on investigations into the destruction of interrogation videos in the CIA and FBI ties to organized crime.

There is tremendous concern among certain parties that the opening of the criminal inquiry is evidence that the President is wielding the Justice Department as a tool against political rivals. The Justice Department is typically an independently-operating entity of the government; however, it has increasingly come under the control of the President with his close ties to William Barr. There are continued questions as to the legitimacy of the investigation, as the upgrade to a criminal inquiry comes just as the impeachment investigation into President Trump has gained significant momentum in recent weeks. The decision to convert the administrative review to a criminal inquiry also creates an unprecedented circumstance where the Justice Department is now effectively investigating itself. Durham has not released information about what provoked the decision to change to a criminal inquiry, and there is no information about what criminal charges Durham is now investigating.

The President has supported the decision to change the investigation into a criminal inquiry, as he has long maintained that the FBI agents that opened the initial inquiry into Russian interference committed an act of treason. In a statement to the press last week, President Trump said that he would be leaving everything to the Attorney General, as well as asserting that the Mueller Report and investigation was “the worst hoax in the history of our country.”

Responding to allegations on Monday that the Justice Department had started a criminal inquiry into the origins of the Mueller Report to support President Trump’s interests, Attorney General Barr denied doing so and made it explicit that he believed the inquiry to be “thorough and fair.” Barr mentioned that Durham was making great progress and that the criminal inquiry would allow him to run down leads more quickly and effectively.