

Clinton Defensive During 'Commander in Chief Forum'

At times, it looked like NBC's Matt Lauer was actually trying to be a fair moderator during Wednesday night's "Commander in Chief" forum held in New York City.

That wasn't good news for Hillary Clinton. The Democratic presidential nominee was peppered relentlessly with questions about the private email server she used while secretary of state.

And when Lauer was done talking about it, the veterans in the audience jumped on board.

Lauer asked: "The word judgment has been used a lot around you, Secretary Clinton, over the last year and a half, and in particular concerning your use of your personal email and server to communicate while you were secretary of state. Why wasn't it more than a mistake, why wasn't it disqualifying, if you want to be commander in chief?"

Clinton responded: "As I have said repeatedly, it was a mistake to have a personal account. I would certainly not do it again. I make no excuses for it. It was something that should not have been done.

"The real question here is the handling of classified material, which I think is what the implication of your question was. [I] have a lot of experience dealing with classified material, starting when I was on the Senate Armed Services Committee, going into the four years as secretary of state.

"Classified material has a header, which says, 'Top Secret,' 'Secret,' 'Confidential.' Nothing—and I will repeat this, and this is verified in the report by the Department of

Justice—none of the emails sent or received by me had such a header.”

This was a new defense for the email scandal, meant to allow her to continue to use the now-debunked position that she never sent or received classified information. But Lauer wasn't done asking about the issue, either.

Pressed about whether or not emails she sent or received included information about the U.S. secret drone program, she admitted some did. That was a damaging admission, even with her assurance that none of the emails discussed details about covert actions related to the controversial program.

Later, a veteran in the audience pounded Clinton further on the email issue. The former naval flight officer, who said he had a “top-secret, sensitive, compartmentalized information clearance and that provided me access to materials and information highly sensitive to our war-fighting capabilities,” noted he would have been imprisoned for not following proper protocol in handling that information, then asked:

“How can you expect those such as myself, who were and are entrusted with America's most sensitive information, to have any confidence in your leadership as president, when you clearly corrupted our national security?”

Clinton, clearly angered by the question, gave a terse response:

“You know and I know, classified material is designated, it is marked, there is a header so that there is no dispute at all that what is being communicated to or from someone who has that access is marked classified.”

Lauer and the vets later pressed Clinton on whether or not she would use ground troops in Syria to fight ISIS. She initially said she would not, but a few minutes later, appeared to

suddenly change her answer.

Her campaign rhetoric has waffled on the issue, as well.

Lauer and the veterans were tough on Donald Trump during his portion of the event, as well, peppering him with questions about his demeanor and lack of experience with foreign policy and the military. But he also had the chance to address issues ranging from illegals and women in uniform to how he would confront ISIS as president.

A number of military veterans spoke out after the event, declaring it a victory for Trump.

"Tonight the American people saw one candidate who was ready to assume the role of commander-in-chief and lead our troops to victory over radical Islamic terrorists, and they also saw Hillary Clinton," U.S. Rep. Ryan Zinke (R-Mont.) said. "As a former Commander at SEAL Team Six and the Commander of Joint Special Forces in Iraq (2004), I've not only commanded the men who died in Benghazi under Clinton's watch, I've also trained hundreds more who are still serving.

"I think of them when I listen to our candidates for president and to me the choice is clear. Donald Trump is not afraid to say radical Islamic terrorism and he certainly isn't afraid to destroy it. Mr. Trump's commitment to military readiness and American leadership stands in stark Contrast to Clinton's third term of Obama.

"As a military dad, father of a Navy Diver and Navy SEAL, I shudder to think of how many times the flag will be flown at half staff over a weak Clinton White House. There's a reason veterans and military families are coalescing around Trump. Clinton has disqualified herself as commander-in-chief and Mr. Trump has proven himself."

Lt. Gen. Keith Kellogg (ret.) said Trump would pursue a foreign policy based on "clear-eyed realism" as opposed to

Clinton's "open-ended military adventurism." Trump's policy, he added, would be focused on "America's core national interests."

"He will protect American security and promote regional stability," he said. "Mr. Trump will see to it that our actions in the Middle East are guided by realism. The current flawed strategy that destabilizes entire regions and produces hundreds of thousands of dead and millions of refugees will end."

Rear Adm. Chuck Kubic (ret.) added that Trump understands the U.S. isn't currently prepared to deal with the threats it faces for the 21st century, and that is when the danger is the greatest. He said the GOP nominee's plan to rebuild the military would "deter, avoid and prevent conflict through our unmatched military might."

"He has the vision and judgment to keep America safe from radical Islamic terrorists and take on the global challenges of the 21st century," he said. "Hillary Clinton, through her actions, has proven she cannot be trusted to serve as commander in chief."

"Her foreign policy record is a graveyard of diplomatic failures from the Middle East to Asia to Russia which have undermined America's interests. And the fact she put national security at risk with a private email system designed to conceal Clinton Foundation corruption is disqualifying on its face. We cannot reward her bad judgment and reckless conduct with a promotion."