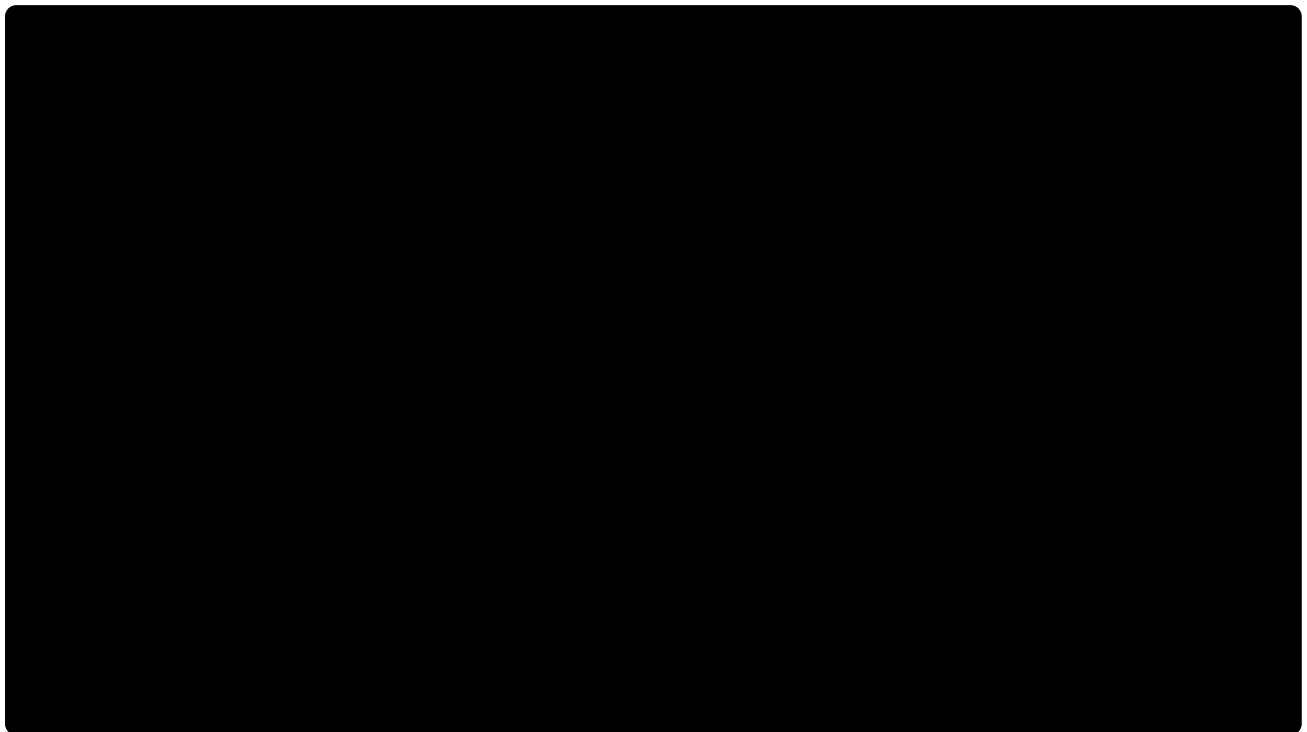


TRANSCRIPT: John Bolton interview with ABC News' Martha Raddatz

The president's former national security adviser discussed his new book.

By ABC News

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'Totally inappropriate' for Bolton to write book: Trump President Trump said Bolton would be breaking federal law if his book is published in its current form.

MARTHA RADDATZ: Ambassador, I want talk to you about specific foreign policies, and go country by country. But what I want ask you first is a very simple question. Why is this the book President Trump doesn't want anyone to read?

JOHN BOLTON: Because this is a book of facts. It's not a book of theories or accusations or emotional responses. What I've tried to do is write 500 pages of facts, of history, that show how decisions were made in the [national security](#) field and the Trump administration.

And I think what it shows is a couple things: number one that foreign policy and defense policy are not motivated by philosophy, grand strategy or policy. This is not a conservative administration nor is policy made in a coherent, competent way. And I think these are things the American people need to know about. I obviously have conclusions and thoughts of my own in the book. But the main purpose is to lay out facts, let people read the book, and they can make up their own mind.

RADDATZ: So why wouldn't President Trump want to know about those facts?

BOLTON: Because I think it shows a pattern quite contrary to the image he would like to convey, of a decisive president who knows something about what he's doing. There really isn't any guiding principle -- that I was able to discern other than-- what's good for [Donald Trump](#)'s reelection.

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Now, look, you can't take the politics out of politics. It plays a role in every aspect of decision making in the executive branch. But there's no coherent basis, no strategy, no philosophy. And decisions are made in a very scatter shot fashion, especially in the potentially mortal field of national security policy. This is a danger for the republic.

RADDATZ: Let's go back. You supported Donald Trump during the 2016 election. You watched his first 15 months in office. What did you think of the job he was doing up to that point?

BOLTON: Well, I could see even before my first day, when I would go over to talk to Trump and others that this was not like a White House I had ever seen before. It was not functioning in the same way as any of the three previous presidents I had worked for.

And the very first thing that I encountered on my opening day was, of course, the chemical weapons attack by the [Syrian](#) government against innocent civilians in Syria. We responded by the end of the week. But I have to say, it was a very disappointing process we went through.

I felt there was obstruction from the Defense Department. I don't think the president fully understood all of the implications of what he was doing. And I thought -- that -- while the immediate response appeared satisfactory, that it was an indication of serious decision making problems, and a serious lack of an overall strategy.



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RADDATZ: So you walk in to the White House on April 9, 2018. You'd worked for three other presidents, both Bushes and [Ronald] Reagan. When you walked into the White House, what was immediately different about the Trump White House?

BOLTON: Well, I could see even before my first day, when I would go over to talk to Trump and others that this was not like a White House I had ever seen before. It was not functioning in the same way as any of the three previous presidents I had worked for.

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RADDATZ: And when you eventually did air strikes on Syria, what was that decision process like? What was going on? You say there was obstruction from the Defense Department. What was wrong with that decision making process in the strikes on Syria?

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BOLTON: Well, I describe in the book that what we thought we should get from the Defense Department was a series of heavy, medium and light options for the president to choose from. We got, instead, a series of options that were apples and oranges.

And I felt that while the main purpose of the strike was to reestablish the deterrent against the use of chemical weapons that had failed after the previous strike one year before, we didn't really reestablish that deterrent. And it was very hard to get the president to focus on the objective of the strike, and what the implications were.

RADDATZ: And that brings us to his briefings. What were his briefings like? Was he reading his briefings? How often did he get intelligence briefings?

BOLTON: Well, my experience was he very rarely read much. The intelligence briefings took place perhaps once or twice a week.

RADDATZ: Is that unusual?

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BOLTON: It's very unusual. They should take place every day. The president should read extensively the material he's given. It's not clear to me that he read much of anything. I think too many people attended the briefings. There were perhaps eight, ten people in the room most times.

And it'd be interesting if somebody could do a statistical analysis at the end of the administration, total time in intelligence briefings, what percentage of that time did the president speak, and what time did the intelligence briefers speak. I would love to see that statistic. Because it's gonna be pretty close to 50/50, which is unusual to say the least.

RADDATZ: You say he didn't -- you don't think he read anything, or much? How do you function if you don't read those briefings?

BOLTON: Well, I -- you know, it's possible that there was more reading going on than I saw. But it wasn't evident in the conversations. I found it very difficult, therefore, to have sustained conversations about policy development over a period of time.

But I think it emphasized the way the president normally works, which is on any given day, he's capable of making almost any given decision. And -- and that is not, in my view, the way you should do national security policy. Maybe it works in other areas. But even in trade, which I describe in the context largely of the trade dispute with China and the European Union -- I thought that -- that it was almost impossible to sustain a consistent coherent policy over time.

RADDATZ: And you wrote the president was not just uninformed, but stunningly uninformed. Can you give us some examples?

BOLTON: Well, there are parts of history that you would expect a president to learn over time. No, no president comes to office with 360 degrees knowledge of every aspect of our affairs. But there were things that we went over again and again and again, that just didn't seem to sink in, like why was the Korean peninsula partitioned in 1945 at the end of World War II, and what did that lead to and how did we get to that point? There are just bits of history that help to inform the current context of a lot of situations. And we just never made headway on many of them.

RADDATZ: You say in the book that Trump asked Gen. John Kelly if Finland was part of Russia, or thought Venezuela is really part of the United States.

BOLTON: He said those things, absolutely. And this is when people talk about the-- what the policy making process was, when you're dealing with somebody who asks questions like that. It's very hard to know how to proceed. And, this sort of incident occurred time and time again, as well as the fact that the president received information from people outside the normal process.

And again, there's nothing wrong with that. All presidents talk to their friends, acquaintances. They seek out different opinions. It's perfectly normal, except when you rely on outside opinions more than the considered judgments of the people that your taxpayers are paying to provide that information.

It's not because there was a uniform view of North Korea, or Iran, China, Russia or any of the major problems inside. We had plenty of debates. So the president wasn't only getting one side of the picture from the people who were working in the administration. But ideas came from outside that were very hard to deal with, and that I think led to a lot of confusion and missed opportunities --

RADDATZ: And who were those outsiders he was listening to? We know that he had a lot of phone time in the morning, executive time in the morning. Who was he listening to outside?

BOLTON: Well, it's a very good question. I don't really know. I think they were friends. Sometimes he would say a very wise person told me X, or -- somebody who really knows this stuff told me Y. And in many cases, I went to try and see if I could find out where that information would come from, was it accurate?

Sometimes it was. Sometimes it wasn't. But there was just an unwillingness on the part of the president, I think, to do systematic learning so that he could make the most informed decisions. Now it's one thing to be erratic and impulsive and episodic and anecdotal on day-to-day stuff. It's when you get into crisis situations or very high stakes circumstances where it becomes not only important but potentially dangerous if the president doesn't maintain the focus on what's in front of him.

RADDATZ: And would you say anything to him about this? Would anybody from the staff?

BOLTON: Well, you don't necessarily say to any president, "You know, Mr. President, you really gotta buckle down here and do your lessons." So no, I didn't do it that way. But I certainly -- tried on a couple of occasions -- with, I think, success from time to time.

I think in the case of the preparation of Trump for his second summit meeting with Kim Jong Un in Hanoi, we had three briefings beforehand. And I think he came to understand completely on board that it would be entirely sensible if he couldn't get the kinda deal he wanted on North Korea's nuclear program, to walk away from the table, which is what he did in Hanoi, quite properly.

RADDATZ: You say that you were astonished by what you saw. President for whom getting reelected was the only thing that mattered, even if it meant endangering or weakening the nation?

BOLTON: Well, I think he was so focused on the reelection that longer term considerations fell by the wayside. So if he thought he could get a photo opportunity with Kim Jong Un at the demilitarized zone in Korea, or he thought he could get a meeting with the ayatollahs from Iran at the United Nations, that there was considerable emphasis on the photo opportunity and the press reaction to it and little or no focus on what such meetings did for the bargaining position of the United States, the strength that our allies saw or didn't see in our position, their confidence that we knew what we were doing. And I think it became very clear to foreign leaders -- that they were dealing with a president who just wasn't serious about many of these issues, to our detriment as a country.

RADDATZ: But are you saying that all decisions the president made were driven by reelection?

BOLTON: I didn't see anything where that wasn't the major factor. And there may have been many in the domestic field I'm not aware of. But it was not something that started with a strategy of how do we wanna see the threats from China and Russia resolved on arms control, for example.

The president repeatedly said that he wanted to do a big arms control deal with Russia. But we never really had specific conversations about what that might be, what the implications would be, issues that are extraordinarily complicated for anybody. It's difficult for any president who comes in. But to learn the issues and to be ready to discuss them, you have to -- you have to do the homework. And that I'm afraid far too often just never took place.

RADDATZ: I want to talk about politics and reelection again. Bob Gates wrote that President Obama, his decision making, was based on domestic political concerns as well. But you do seem to be going much further here, writing, "It's the only thing that Trump couldn't tell the difference between his personal interests and the country's interests."

BOLTON: Well, this is a very serious aspect of the national security policy of the Trump administration. The president over and over again seemed to think that a good personal relationship with Xi Jinping, Vladimir Putin, Kim Jong Un, the ayatollahs, Erdogan of Turkey, was equivalent to a good relationship between the United States and their respective countries.

Again, there's absolutely no doubt that good personal relations between world leaders, between counterparts, foreign secretaries, defense ministers, that kind of thing, it's all a positive. But nobody should misunderstand that a personal relationship is somehow equivalent to better relations between the two nations.

And on any number of occasions, Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin and others would say things like, "Look, you pursue the interests of the United States. We pursue the interests of our countries." I had no doubt they knew what that meant. I'm not sure that Donald Trump did.

RADDATZ: How often did he talk about reelection to you in your presence?

BOLTON: Well, we didn't talk about reelection as such. It was a question of the direction of his thinking in the political field that was clear things like photo opportunities and how it played on Twitter and what he would say, and what the reaction would be in the press were based on political calculations.

So a lot of people who did not really observe the president up close have complained that he has a short attention span. And he doesn't focus. I wanna say when it comes to reelection, his attention span was infinite. And his focus was very direct. It's just too bad there wasn't more of that when it came to national security.

RADDATZ: I guess what would you say to critics who argue that the president's national security policy and political interests align with the country's interests?

BOLTON: Well, I think to say that, you'd have to say that there was a policy and a strategy that he was following. And there really wasn't. It's not a policy to say, "I wanna deal with Iran on nuclear weapons." You have to think through what the implications are.

It's not a policy to say, "I want a big trade deal with China." What are the terms of the trade deal? He focused on terms like China buying more agricultural products, which he said to Xi Jinping directly would help him in the farm states, a really, to me, stunning statement by a president to the leader of an adversarial foreign country.

RADDATZ: And explain that further.

BOLTON: Well --

RADDATZ: I know in the book you do say that is a stunning statement.

BOLTON: Yeah. Well, it was clear that in the trade talks with China, which involve extraordinarily important structural issues, as we call them, China's theft of not just American intellectual property, but intellectual property from all the developed countries, forced technology transfers, discrimination against foreign investment and trade.

That these issues had to be addressed for there to be any real progress in the bilateral U.S.-China relation on trade or many, many other things. But instead, the conversations over and over again turned on how many more soybeans are the Chinese gonna buy this year? How much more wheat are they gonna buy?

And then, oh yeah, and then we've gotta deal with the intellectual property issues at some point, too. These are the sorts of things that then become recurring problems when the Chinese back away from commitments they make, don't buy the amount of soybeans that they said they were going to.

But we keep going back to them, quite apart from the fact that as important as trade is between the United States and China, it is not the entire geopolitical strategic picture. There's the Chinese advance in nuclear weapons; their weapons designed to counteract American presence in space, their effort to push us out of the South China Sea, and make it a Chinese province, which are issues that were very hard to get the president to focus on.

RADDATZ: Well, I think if you pursue policies that are consistent with American national interests, that that's the best politics that a president could pursue. But to do that, you have to understand where you are, where you wanna go, and how to get there, how to match your objectives which are with your resources.

And that kinda conversation almost never took place. There were successes, as, for example, when the Defense Department budget was significantly increased over wholly inadequate defense spending levels in the Obama administration. But not in anything in the president's mind connected to what those resources were for, their deterrent capabilities, where we still needed improvements.

He wanted to use those increases, which were important, simply to say, "I've boosted the defense budget. I don't have to say anything else." That's the political win for him. And I think the concern I have speaking as a conservative Republican is that once the election is over, if the president wins, the political constraint is gone. And because he has no philosophical grounding, there's no telling what will happen in a second term.

RADDATZ: And what do you think might happen?

BOLTON: I don't think you can tell. I couldn't tell from day to day in the White House what was gonna happen, let alone what might happen over a four-year period where he only has to worry about his legacy, and he doesn't have to worry about reelection.

RADDATZ: Describe to me, sum up Donald Trump's foreign policy.

BOLTON: Well, I don't think you can do that. I don't think there is a policy. My point is that policy is derived from careful thinking, analysis, building up evidence, the critical strategic task of matching resources with priorities. He just doesn't do that.

So commentators on the outside write about his strategic doctrines. And there are certainly decisions you can point to. There's a decision, there's a decision, there's another decision. And I give these commentators great credit for tryin' to find coherence where there is none.

That's not how decision-making proceeds in the Trump administration. And it's one reason why there seems to be a lot of zigging and zagging. There is a lot of zigging and zagging, sometimes during the same meeting, sometimes during the same day. And the rest of the bureaucracy tried to function in the way it understands of marching step by step toward an objective. But it was very, very hard to do.

RADDATZ: But look, you've got the attacks in in Syria. You pulled out, as you wanted to do, from the Iran nuclear deal. They basically defeated ISIS, certainly ISIS territory. He did some things that you would agree with.

BOLTON: That's correct. And that's why it helps demonstrate that the decisions that I agree with and the decisions that I disagree with, as anybody would say on their substantive merits,

aren't based on a coherent philosophy on the president's part.

So I was happy to take the correct decisions when I could get them. I thought they were consistent with broad mainstream Republican Party foreign policy. But there were many others that were just out of nowhere. And it's the inconsistency and the back and forth that makes it hard to accomplish long-term American national interests.

RADDATZ: The president has referred to himself as a stable genius. Is that what you saw?

BOLTON: Really? Well, how can anybody call himself a stable genius? It's hard for me to imagine somebody who would say that. He did say it a couple times when I was in his presence. And I just didn't react to him.

RADDATZ: Today as we sit here, do you think U.S. national security is stronger or weaker because of President Trump?

BOLTON: I think we're in a weaker position around the world. I think we have given up leadership in a wide variety of areas. There are plenty of international obligations that I am happy to get out of. Because I think they constrain the United States. The Iran nuclear deal's one of 'em, the INF treaty, which the U.S. withdrew from, is another.

There are a long list of such constraints that I think harm American national interests. But the fundamental point is that as the global power whose economy depends on ensuring as much stability as we can around the world, a retreat from concern about America's place in the world and the place of our allies inevitably leaves us weaker, no matter how big the defense budget.

So I think whether it's after four years or eight years -- whoever succeeds the Trump administration is gonna have an enormous amount of repair work to do. To me, as a lifelong conservative, this is extraordinarily disappointing. It's a huge missed opportunity. We had eight years, I think, of very poorly designed foreign and defense policy under Barack Obama. I saw the Trump administration as a chance to correct it. And we corrected precious little.

RADDATZ: I want to go back to North Korea. You have always been a hard liner on North Korea. And yet, there you were with a president who wanted to meet with Kim Jong Un. What concerns did you have about that?

BOLTON: Well, I was very concerned that he would give away things that he didn't need to give away. And as I describe in the book, and has received massive press coverage at the time,

he told Kim Jong Un we would give up, what he called, "the war games on the Korean peninsula," which caused enormous heartburn at the Defense Department.

They felt they had been left out of the decision. So had I, so had Mike Pompeo, so had John Kelly. We had all been left out of that. This was a case where after almost two years in office, the president didn't seem to understand that the war games, as he called them, were critical to American and South Korean ability to be ready to withstand pressure from North Korea.

You know, the motto of our forces in the Pacific and in South Korea in particular is "fight tonight," meaning we have to be ready. We don't get to decide when the hostilities start. And to pull down these engagements, these exercises, because they displeased Kim Jong Un, I just thought was an act of folly.

RADDATZ: Why is this diplomatic initiative so important to President Trump, approaching it this way?

BOLTON: When we were in Singapore for the first summit, one of the things he said over and over again-- was to ask how many press people were gonna be present for his final press conference. And I think the final number, it was a very large number-- as it should have been, 400, 500.

By the time we left Singapore, he was at 2,000. And I think that number went up from there. That's what he was focused on. That he had had this enormous photo opportunity -- first time an American president has met with the leader of North Korea.

And he got enormous attention from it. I thought it was a strategic mistake. The U.S. itself got nothing from that. Donald Trump got a lot. The United States gave much more legitimacy to this dictator. And didn't accomplish anything toward any meaningful discussion on the elimination of their nuclear weapons program.

To be clear, I don't think North Korea is ever gonna voluntarily give up its nuclear weapons program. They have tried this line for onto 30 years now. And one successive American administration after another has fallen for it. I quote in the book a speech Winston Churchill gave in the House of Commons in the 1930s.

It's a very dark quotation, where he says, "People simply will not take the steps that are necessary when the threat is small, and the risk is low. And they wait and they wait until the threat is large and the risk is high." And Churchill talked about the confirmed unteachability of mankind. That's what we saw in the Trump administration Korea policy.

RADDATZ: And take us inside that room. You talked about the press being there. We saw that historic handshake. The press mob, as you call them, comes in. As soon as they leave, you say, the flattery began with Kim Jong Un.

BOLTON: Right. Well, I think it occurred in all three meetings -- two of which I attended, one of which I did not. And it's a style. Every president has a style. But the idea that -- just this oleaginous -- layer of compliments to this brutal dictator would convince him that you could make a deal with Donald Trump, I thought, was both strikingly naïve and dangerous.

Because there were times when we were very close to making concessions that I think even prior administrations like the Clinton and Obama administration wouldn't have made. But if your goal is to pursue a deal, and the substance of the deal really doesn't matter, what you want is to announce we've made a deal, it's not that hard to make a deal, if you're prepared to give away enough. And if you don't fully appreciate what it is you're giving away, or the nature of the adversary negotiating on the other side of the table, you can make some pretty serious mistakes.

RADDATZ: And when President Trump talks about Kim Jong Un, he talks about these love letters, and these bromance. And -- we love each other. Do you think he really believes that Kim Jong Un loves him?

BOLTON: I don't know any other explanation. I think Kim Jong Un gets a huge laugh out of this. I mean, these letters that the president has shown to the press -- off the record and whatnot, but I've been in the room when he's done it -- are written by some functionary in the North Korean Workers Party Agitprop Office.

And yet, the president has looked at 'em as evidence of this deep friendship. Even if it were a deep personal relationship, it doesn't change the fact Kim Jong Un is never gonna give up his nuclear weapons program. And from the U.S. national security point of view, that is the only thing that matters.

RADDATZ: And Trump's nickname for Kim Jong Un, as we all know, was Rocketman. He explained that to Kim at one point, and also wanted to give him a gift.

BOLTON: Well, he gave him an Elton John CD, I think. And he tried to explain that calling him Rocketman was actually a compliment. And I don't think we've heard from Kim Jong Un what he thought of Elton John's song. But that would -- that'll be an interesting tidbit in history. But this is the kind of focus that leads you to wonder whether there's an ability to discern what's cosmetic here from what's truly serious.

RADDATZ: And you think what he did there is dangerous?

BOLTON: I think when you're dealing with the power of nuclear weapons in the hands of an irrational regime, not taking that as seriously as he should have was a big mistake.

RADDATZ: This is the president who touts his ability to make deals, "The Art of the Deal." So how would you assess that deal making?

BOLTON: Well, as we sit here today, there's not gonna be any deal with North Korea, I think, until after the election. That's finished. It -- in many respects, I think the North Koreans -- as perhaps with Iran and China and Russia as well -- think that if they can separate Trump from his advisors, they can get him to make a deal.

And that it's the advisors -- it was me at one point. There are plenty of other who can fulfill (LAUGH) that role now that I'm gone. But they see him as somebody who's fundamentally not aware of the trade-offs he's making. It failed for Kim Jong Un. It has certainly failed with China -- before the election.

But again, if the president's reelected, he will come back not from the harsh rhetoric about China we've seen in the past couple months, he will come back to the great white whale of the Trump administration, the big trade deal with China. And there's no telling what the terms of that deal will be.

RADDATZ: Just a month before that summit, I interviewed you. And you praised the president's skill, saying he would size Kim up, and that he has got an outstanding ability to do that. Did you believe that when you said it?

BOLTON: Not particularly. But, you know, one of the functions of an administration official is to defend the administration. And I think one of the reasons I fell out of favor with President Trump was that I wouldn't go on television often enough defending him.

I felt I went on when I could. But I didn't feel I should go on more than was necessary to say things that I didn't believe. That's when ultimately the responsibility of a senior official is to defend the policies of the administration. Only the president gets elected. And when you get to the point when you can't do it anymore, you resign, which is what I did.

RADDATZ: Well, that was the triumph of hope over limited experience at that point. And -- I will say that -- I think the president did the right thing when he walked away from the Hanoi summit. And that's what makes it difficult to write about the Trump administration.

You know, we're in a political environment in this country where you're either pro-Trump or anti-Trump. And anybody who says, "You know, life is a little more complicated than that" is denounced by both sides-- a position I currently find myself in.

But that really goes to the underlying reason why I wrote the book. With all due respect, you can't tweet about these things and give a complete picture. You can't write an 800-word op-ed and give a complete picture. You can't do television interviews and give a complete picture.

I wrote a 500-page book. And even that's not a complete picture. If Simon and Schuster had given me 500 more pages, I could have filled that too. But it's important for people to look at these facts spread out over a range of issues to see what actually happened. Not to listen just to the rhetoric and the hoopla, but look at the facts. And I hope they do, and they'll make up their own decisions.

RADDATZ: And let's go back to what you -- what you were saying about not being fully behind Donald Trump at the time, and having to be an administration official. You stayed about 15 months longer. Why did you stay so long if you did not trust the president, if you thought all of his foreign policy was because of reelection? Why did you stay so long?

BOLTON: Because the stakes are so high that I thought I could continue to make a contribution. And -- you know, people who are opposed to Trump say, "You should have seen it from the beginning. You never should have gone in. You should have resigned after one month or two months or three months."

You know, you can characterize it in a lot of different ways. It's a huge honor to serve the United States in a senior government position. It's not something you walk away from lightly. It's not something you walk into lightly. But it's certainly not something you walk away from lightly.

And a lot of different people have left this administration. I've had my disagreements with some of them. They would say they've had their disagreements with me. But I don't criticize or second guess their own personal decision as to how long to stay and under what circumstances to leave.

When you have that opportunity -- and then president did ask me to do it-- I think you have an obligation to take your best shot. And that's what I tried to do. I also think, though, that because the people of the country need to hear the reality, that there's an obligation to tell the story of what happened.

Bob Gates wrote a book about his tenure as secretary of defense. And he was criticized for writing the book in the middle of Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign while President Obama was still in office. I think he did exactly the right thing. I wrote a book review of his book back in 2014.

He was criticized for many of the same things I was -- I've been criticized for. I think Gates was right to do it then. I think it was right to do it here. What better time for the American people to look at the character of the people running for president than during a presidential campaign?

RADDATZ: I want to explore that further. But I just want to wrap up with North Korea. As we sit here today, would you say the threat from North Korea is greater today than when President Trump took office?

BOLTON: The threat from North Korea today is absolutely greater. Because while all these photo opportunities were taking place, there's absolutely no doubt that North Korea's work on both its nuclear and ballistic missile programs continued. It's one of the most secretive societies on the planet.

But there's a -- there's an iron law of proliferation, whether it's nuclear, chemical or biological weapons. And that is time is on the side of the proliferator. The more time that goes by, the more time they have to overcome the scientific and technological obstacles to getting, in this case, deliverable nuclear weapons.

So the president would say, "Oh, well, they're not test firing missiles." Look, there come times and programs where you don't have to test launch missiles. You can do rocket engine design modification underground. You can do a lot of technical work on the nuclear weapons design itself underground.

I don't think the North Koreans slowed down one bit during these two years of negotiations. So like the eight years of Obama, we just lost another two or three years. And the North Korea and the Iranian and other rogue state capabilities continue to advance.

RADDATZ: So on a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate Trump's ability to make a deal on North Korea?

BOLTON: Well, I think it turned out, clearly at this point, to be zero. And I think it was because of the misperception that he could make a deal that would be satisfactory. He knew, and he would say over and over again, "I can't -- I can't do something that would make me look like a fool here," which is comforting to hear the president say. But it meant that we were

saved from a bad deal with North Korea primarily because of the threat of a massive revolt by the Republican Party -- if the president had made the same kinda deal that Jimmy Carter wanted to make -- when he was negotiating during the Clinton administration, or the Clinton administration itself negotiated, or that -- Obama would have been prepared to negotiate.

RADDATZ: Let's move to Vladimir Putin. How would you describe Trump's relationship with Vladimir Putin?

BOLTON: I think Putin thinks he can play him like a fiddle. I think Putin is smart, tough. He plays a bad hand extremely well. And I think he sees that he's not faced with a serious adversary here. And he works on him, and he works on him, and he works on him.

He didn't get everything he wanted. He didn't want us to leave the INF Treaty, which Russia's been violating for 15 or 20 years. He wanted us to stay locked into it, not doing many of the things he was doing in violation of the treaty. He didn't win on that one. But I don't think he's worried about Donald Trump.

RADDATZ: And President Trump, of course, got the summit with him in Helsinki in July, 2018. You were worried about leaving him alone in a room with Vladimir Putin. Why?

BOLTON: Because I didn't know what he would say. At any given moment, we didn't know what he was gonna say. Now, it turned out and I say in the book, I feel very confident nothing untoward happened in the one on one. But that means we escaped without injury in the meeting.

That not advancing American interests. I mean, it's better than sustaining the injury. But it's certainly not advancing the interests. Then, of course, we had the famous press conference. And the equivalency that the president ascribed, he says, because he was misunderstood, to what our intelligence was saying about Russian interference in American elections and Vladimir Putin's denial. It was a stunning moment.

RADDATZ: You said you were frozen in your seat watching that.

BOLTON: I -- I -- I -- I -- I thought I wouldn't get up. I didn't know what to do. And it was -- I describe in the book, we went through a lot of gyrations. And I say -- to try and explain it -- I thought Dan Coats, then the director of national intelligence, was close to resignation.

Ultimately, he didn't resign. And the president -- found a way of -- of tryin' to get out of it. But the fact is that the Russian threat to our elections and the threat from China, Iran and North Korea in different forms of cyber attacks is very, very real.

And I viewed this before I joined the administration. I viewed it while I was there, and I view it today. These are attacks on the constitution itself. These are acts of war against the United States. And we need to take them seriously. I think we took steps to get our cyber offensive capabilities into better shape during the administration, during my service there. I think that was a very important step forward.

RADDATZ: You wrote that on a few occasions, President Trump was eager or even desperate, as you describe it, to meet with Vladimir Putin. What are some examples of that? And you said he also took steps to reduce U.S. pressure.

BOLTON: Well, I think there was the same fascination with speaking with a leader like Putin that we saw with respect to Xi Jinping and Kim Jong Un. It was hard to explain. The president himself used to comment on how strange it was that in one trip he took to a NATO summit, a summit with Theresa May, the prime minister of Britain, and then Vladimir Putin in Helsinki that he thought the easiest, most pleasant one might be with Vladimir Putin.

The kinds of pressure that we needed to put on Russia, economic pressure through sanctions and other steps we could take always took persuading to get the president to do, even when the sanctions were seemingly required by statutes that we operated under.

He had voices in the administration that urged him not to impose sanctions time and time again. Secretary of the Treasury Mnuchin frequently took that view. But I think it also now is a reflection of that lack of strategic thinking, the lack of continuity and perseverance that you need to have policies that work over time.

That you can't just make a decision one day, and three months later, make a contrary decision, and expect that your adversary is gonna do anything-- other than conclude that you're not following any policy at all. And that if they have a plan they're pursuing, they're more likely to succeed than you are.

RADDATZ: Do you think President Trump did not like to talk about election interference?

BOLTON: Oh, I definitely think he did not like talking about election interference. Because he made what I viewed as the mistake of believing that if he accepted that the Russians had intervened in the 2016 election, that it legitimized the narrative that they had intervened to help him, hurt Hillary Clinton, and that he would not have won without the Russian interference.

Now, I don't believe that. But I think that from Cold War days right until the present, Moscow has tried to interfere in American politics. In the '40s and '50s they were tryin' to take over the

movie industry. They've tried it in a whole variety of ways. It shouldn't surprise anybody they're trying it now.

They have a doctrine and a strategy. They call it Asymmetric Warfare. They understand exactly what they're doing. And I don't think it's because they-- that Vladimir Putin really thinks it's great to have Donald Trump as president. I think Vladimir Putin and their strategy rests on the real perception that American politics today is very fraught, very tense, very difficult.

Everything they can do to stir mistrust, to undercut the legitimacy of our democratic institutions helps to paralyze America. And a weaker, more paralyzed, more divided America is in Russia's interests. They're having great success at it.

RADDATZ: You say in the book that Putin knew just how to play Trump, like comparing Hillary Clinton to the U.S.-backed Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaidó, or saying falsely that Nicolás Maduro had big rallies. You're saying that worked on the president?

BOLTON: Yeah. I think-- I think many of these foreign leaders -- mastered the art of ringing his bells. And some were better at it than others. Chancellor [Angela] Merkel of Germany had no success. I don't think she tried. I think she just tried to say what her position was, like a normal leader would do, and expect a response. Didn't get it. But the dictators seem to be better at it than the leaders of the democracy. And I just hope that pattern is not gonna persist if he's reelected.

RADDATZ: You say the term, "He was marked by some of those leaders."

BOLTON: I think they knew exactly what they were looking at far better than some people here in the United States. And they pursue their objectives. And this -- this is, in my view, the only way you can pursue a successful policy, is persistently -- with the eye on your ultimate objective, and taking Trump apart piece by piece by piece -- which I'm afraid too often was the case.

RADDATZ: And I have to ask you again, did you tell him at any time about what you saw with these leaders, the things you're now telling the world?

BOLTON: Well, I certainly tried to. I said at one point, I tell this story in the book, about a question with -- whether there would be another meeting with Kim Jong Un at one point. And I finally said -- he wanted the meeting. He wanted another meeting. And I finally said, "Mr. President, he's the dictator of a rat shit little country that doesn't deserve a meeting with you."

The president's response to that was, "You know, you have a lot of hostility. Of course, I have more hostility. But you have a lot of hostility." I normally didn't resort to that kind of approach with the president. I tried to do it in more even-handed language. But there are times when he just didn't seem to wanna listen to it.

RADDATZ: All of this turns us to Ukraine. You've never spoken publicly about what happened last year, and what the president may have told you. But you wrote that Ukraine was a perfect example of Trump working for his own best personal interests. Explain.

BOLTON: There is no question in my mind that -- the president felt that the prior Ukrainian government -- had been part of a conspiracy to take him down. He said that on any number of occasions. And that what he wanted -- from the Ukrainians -- this took months to develop. It didn't -- it didn't happen all at once.

But he wanted a probe of Joe Biden in exchange for delivering the security assistance that was part of the congressional legislation that had been passed several years before. So that in his mind, he was bargaining to get the investigation, using the resources of the federal government, which I found very disturbing.

And I found it using national security to advance his own political position. Now, in the course of the impeachment affair, the defense of the president was he cares about the general corruption in the Ukraine. And that was on his mind. That's utter nonsense.

There's corruption all over the world. The corruption he was concerned about in Ukraine was that they tried to take him down. And that, to me, was something that I found very disturbing. So did a lot of other people in very senior levels in the government. I describe that in the book. And our objective was to find a way to get the president to approve the security assistance, the military aid, and get it delivered, and not tie it to an investigation of his political opponents.

RADDATZ: I want to go through some specifics here. You were on that infamous July 25th call between President Trump and the Ukrainian President [Volodymyr] Zelenskiy. What did you hear? And why, as you say, were you not surprised?

BOLTON: Because this had been foreshadowed before. As I say, this is the idea of trading the investigation for the military aid didn't sort of come out of nowhere. It had evolved over time. The president didn't like what he saw in the Ukraine. But the linkage between the military assistance and that opportunity to go after Joe Biden didn't emerge immediately.

But I could see that the issue was there. It was one reason I resisted the idea of having an early meeting by President Zelenskiy with President Trump or more phone calls than just the congratulatory calls we had. Because I feared that the president himself would put that on the table directly.

And it would be much more difficult in those circumstances. But there wasn't any doubt. And I point out in the book he said it to me directly that that's what he had in mind. And I'll say again, I think it was widely understood at senior levels in the government that that's exactly what his objective was.

RADDATZ: Can you tell us who else understood that?

BOLTON: Well, I think Secretary Pompeo understood. I think the Pentagon understood. I think the intelligence community understood. I think people in the White House understood. He wasn't -- president wasn't shy in voicing the view of the Ukraine -- that that's what he wanted.

RADDATZ: Was it not at all unusual for Trump to ask favors of the Ukrainian president?

BOLTON: Well, it was unusual in the Ukraine. It was not so unusual in other countries. As I mention in the book with respect to China, the idea that buying agricultural products was a good thing in the farm states, whose electoral votes Trump needed. He talked about it all the time in those terms. And there were plenty of people on the American side in the room who heard it. And more importantly, there were plenty of people on the Chinese side in the room who heard it as well.

RADDATZ: I want to go to some specifics on Ukraine. Aug. 20 comes a key conversation you had with President Trump about the security assistance. What exactly did the president say to you?

BOLTON: Well, he directly linked the provision of that assistance with the investigation. My objective here, people in the aftermath, in light of the impeachment investigation thought that those of us like Pompeo and [Mark] Esper and myself should have been sort of junior woodchuck FBI agents looking for evidence of impeachable offenses.

What we were all tryin' to do was get the assistance released to the Ukraine. Because it was in America's interests to do so. We'd worry about the Biden thing later. And I told the White House counsel, I told the Justice Department about these conversations. That's what I thought I should do. Because I was very concerned about them. But my objective as national

security advisor was to carry out the president's own policy since he had agreed to the legislation to get this assistance sent.

RADDATZ: Back to the Aug. 20 conversation. What exactly do you remember him saying?

BOLTON: Well, I lay out in the book my recollection of the sentence. But the linkage, the specificity of the linkage, I think, was unmistakable.

RADDATZ: He said in the book, he said he wasn't in favor of sending them anything until all the Russia investigation materials related to Clinton and Biden had been turned over.

BOLTON: Right.

RADDATZ: So this was not the first time you heard the president himself directly link the investigation and the Ukraine aid? Or was it?

BOLTON: No. There were other conversations, some of which involved Rudy Giuliani, or references to Rudy Giuliani or others -- where this connection was becoming clear. The conversation in August was the crispest indication of the linkage. But indirectly, and by clear implication, it had been growing for quite some time.

RADDATZ: The New York Times reported on that August conversation. And the president denied it, tweeting, "I never told [John Bolton](#) that the aid to Ukraine was tied to investigations into Democrats, including the Bidens." Is the president lying?

BOLTON: Yes he is. And it's not the first time, either. This is why I think it's important to get these kinds of facts out on the table. The president's talked about what he wants the people to hear about Ukraine. He's talked about what he wants the people to hear about Iran, about North Korea, about Russia, about China.

I think -- you know, foreign governments are not gonna be fascinated by what they read in my book. And I don't think President Trump really fears what foreign governments are gonna read in the book. He fears what the American people are gonna read.

RADDATZ: How often did he talk about Biden and Ukraine?

BOLTON: As the months and weeks wore on, he talked about them more and more and more. And I think this was a case of him listening to outside advisors, and maybe some of his inside advisors as well, and just becoming obsessive on the point that if he could crack open what

happened in Ukraine, he could discredit Biden -- discredit Hillary as sort of a -- icing on the cake.

And that that would be an enormous boost for his reelection. There was no doubt this was political. And what he was able to do during impeachment was convince people that somehow he only had the issue of corruption in the Ukraine in mind. And that was the least of his concerns.

RADDATZ: You were a star witness to something the president was on trial for, something you say you now find deeply disturbing, possibly criminal. Yet, you felt no obligation at all to tell the American people about this? Whether in testimony on the hill or an interview or a statement or anything?

BOLTON: I was fully prepared -- if I got a subpoena like everybody else who testified got a subpoena. I think the way the House advocates of impeachment proceeded was badly wrong. I think it was impeachment malpractice. I think they were determined because of their own political objectives to conduct an impeachment proceeding that was very narrowly focused on Ukraine, and that went very, very quickly.

Because they didn't wanna mess up the Democratic presidential nomination. Now, I find that conduct almost as bad and somewhat equivalent to Trump. That they're torquing one of the gravest constitutional responsibilities the House of Representatives has, the power of impeachment, around their presidential nomination schedule.

And they failed utterly to accomplish what they wanted. In fact, they made things worse. Because their strategy fitted with the Trump political strategy. Keep it narrow, and move it fast. So what did they do? The House advocates said, "We have proven Trump is impeached forever, and that he'd learn a lesson from it."

It's absolutely 180 degrees the opposite of the truth. Because he was acquitted in the Senate. He didn't learn lessons from it, other than that he could get away with it, which leaves only the last guardrail -- is the election this November. I think the House Democrats built a cliff, they threw themselves off of it. And halfway down, they looked up and saw me, and said, "Hey, why don't you come along?"

RADDATZ: But you could have testified. You could have made some sort of statement. Your critics say you put your personal profit over the country by saving your depiction of Trump for this book.

BOLTON: I think that's absolutely wrong. The fact was, the way the Democrats misused the process, the way they drove Republicans in the House away from them -- Republicans in the House who might have supported impeachment, who might have looked for a boarder investigation, who would have been open to something they boxed into a very small political space, and forced them to fight back. And that guaranteed on the Senate side it would be a partisan fight there as well. And my testimony, or, by the way, the test --

RADDATZ: You don't think it would have made a difference, your testimony --

BOLTON: I don't think it would have made a difference because of the way the Democrats pursued the impeachment process in the House.

And people watched it on TV. It was a partisan catfight. There was no in -- this was -- this was so far removed from the Ervin committee -- hearings of the Watergate era, which I remember quite well. The Democrats showed it was partisan in the House because they had it conducted by the House Intelligence Committee, rather than the House Judiciary Committee, which is in contemporary times, where impeachment's conducted. This was all about politics for them. And it became all about politics for the Republicans. So --

RADDATZ: It's also about -- you're a man who says you want to talk about facts. And you say it wouldn't make a difference. But what you would have said in your testimony was what many believed was a key statement. The president himself directly connecting the aid to security assistance and the investigation.

BOLTON: Right.

RADDATZ: This is what Michael Purpura said during the impeachment hearings, the president's legal counsel: "Not a single witness testified that the president himself said that there was any connection between any investigations and security assistance, a presidential meeting, or anything else." You could have been that person providing that testimony.

BOLTON: Yeah. And it would not have made any difference. The --

RADDATZ: How can you say that? How do you know --

BOLTON: Because minds -- because minds were made up on Capitol Hill. And my feeling was in the midst of all the chaos that had been created, this would have come and gone, and nobody would have paid any attention to it. My view is when you take the extraordinary step of removing a president from office, you have to do it in a serious way. The only way to win an

impeachment would have been to get Republicans to go along. And the Democrats abandoned that idea almost before they got started.

RADDATZ: But you're also saying had they looked at -- it was too narrow. They were just looking at Ukraine. And they should have looked at all these things that you're outlining in the book. If they didn't know about those things from you, how could they do that?

BOLTON: Because, a.) an impeachment process that was serious and not partisan, like Watergate, would have taken the time to cover all these areas. They were in a rush. They wanted to get it done much earlier than the beginning of the presidential nomination contest.

They didn't quite make it. But the fact was, they had a strategy that suited their political objectives. And it's not my obligation to help the Democrats out of their own problem. My judgment was that I was prepared to testify. But I think now this is actually a better time to tell the story. Because now the American people can look at it in the context of the most important political decision we make as a nation every four years.

RADDATZ: But you can certainly understand why your critics say, "Why didn't he come forward before?"

BOLTON: Well --

RADDATZ: "Why is he making a profit on this now?"

BOLTON: You know, it has (LAUGH) nothing to do with making a profit. It has everything to do with making sure that the constitutional responsibilities that are accorded the different branches of government are carried out the right way. This is a very difficult issue, and the Democrats committed impeachment malpractice. They don't like to hear that. But that's the fact.

RADDATZ: So you're saying that if the Democrats had looked at what you call a broader pattern of behavior, then, "There might have been a greater chance to persuade others that high crimes and misdemeanors had been perpetrated." You say that in the book. Do you believe, as you look at what you call this broader pattern, that high crimes and misdemeanors were perpetrated by President Trump?

BOLTON: I think the example of Ukraine could well amount to it. As for the others, they require more investigation. I saw pieces of it that troubled me greatly. But Ukraine, for

example, where he is urging a foreign government to help him for his own domestic political purposes.

You know, George H.W. Bush was confronted with the same opportunity in the 1992 election, to look into Bill Clinton's activities, I'll just call them that, during his college days and his days at Oxford in Europe. And President Bush and Jim Baker at the time said, "We are absolutely not gonna do it."

Donald Trump went right for it. And I think that's something that -- it turned out not to be a convictable impeachable offense. But it's something the American people ought to take a look at, as they should the other examples of how the president dealt with Halkbank in Turkey, Huawei and ZTE in China, agriculture purchases by the Chinese government, and a range of other activities too.

RADDATZ: You also use the phrase in the book that Trump's pattern looked like obstruction of justice as a way of life, which we couldn't accept. Obstruction of justice as a way of life?

BOLTON: Look, these were things that I could see some evidence of. And they bothered me greatly. I talked to the attorney general about them. I talked to the counsel to the president about them. I've talked to other members of the cabinet about them and relayed my concerns. And they were very much on my mind.

RADDATZ: So you were and still are concerned that some of these things were criminal, impeachable, what?

BOLTON: I think the potential is there. I think it requires more investigation. It was not my job to be a FBI investigator, or a Hill investigator. I had plenty of other things to do. I referred the matters to the people whose responsibilities they were. And it was their responsibility to go from there.

RADDATZ: OK. I want to go back over a couple of things. You say that President Putin plays Donald Trump like a fiddle. What does he do? How does he do it? What should Americans think of that?

BOLTON: President Putin prepares very comprehensively for meetings. He knows the people he's talking to. He thinks about what he wants to say. He thinks about the points he wants to accomplish. And I think he looks at somebody like Donald Trump and says to himself -- as an old KGB officer, "How am I gonna get him to the place I want him to be?"

I think that's a level of preparation, of thoroughness -- of -- pre-planning that just would not register with Donald Trump. That's not to say Putin succeeds all the time. But he has a plan and he pursues it. And I can just see the smirk when he knows he's got him following his line. It's almost transparent.

RADDATZ: Give us some examples, how that works --

BOLTON: Well, I think at the lunch in Helsinki following the long one on one meeting -- there were a series of conversations about the Middle East, following onto their discussion about Syria. The Russian position in Syria, their view of the Iranians and the U.S. position in Syria. And he could tell what he wanted was the United States out of Syria and Trump was moving in that direction.

RADDATZ: I would assume that Donald Trump would come back and say, "Look, we put very serious sanctions on Russia" and that he has been good with Donald Trump and you need to have good relationships.

BOLTON: Certainly, personal relationships between leaders are important. But they do not dominate what the national interests are. And I think Putin has a very acute knowledge of what Russia's national interests are -- and how he wants to accomplish them. And in the case of Syria, America's objectives during the Trump administration have changed repeatedly.

It is the case that the ISIS territorial caliphate has been destroyed. That was under way for years before -- he took office. The ISIS threat, however, remains. And that's something I don't think we've fully taken account of.

RADDATZ: Donald Trump, as we say, sees himself as a dealmaker. But Vladimir Putin says he's easily manipulated. What happened to the dealmaker in those situations?

BOLTON: Well, the president may well be a superb dealmaker when it comes to Manhattan real estate. Dealing with Syria, dealing with arms limitation treaties on strategic weapons dealing in many, many other international security issues are things far removed from his life experience.

Presidents don't come to the office -- no president does, knowing everything. So it's no wrap on anybody to say, "Well, they don't know about strategic arms limitations talks." But when you're dealing with somebody like Putin, who has made his life understanding Russia's strategic position in the world-- against Donald Trump, who doesn't enjoy reading about these issues or learning about them -- it's a very difficult position for America to be in, notwithstanding our objective superiority over the Russians in all these areas.

RADDATZ: And you talk about other adversaries and dictators who looked at Donald Trump in the same way and marked him. Who are they?

BOLTON: Well, I think Xi Jinping would be right up there with Putin in his ability to look at Donald Trump and say, "This is somebody that we can move ultimately on our side." Now, we're in a period today, and we will be in that period up until Nov. 3, Election Day, when rhetoric about Chinese behavior is tough. It's harsh.

And some steps have been taken because of the thoroughly impermissible behavior of China with respect to Hong Kong, with respect to the Uighurs, with respect to a whole range of important issues. But how long after Nov. 3 will the harsh rhetoric prevail if Donald Trump wins? How long will it be before he's calling Xi Jinping and saying, "Let's together on those trade negotiations again?"

That's part of the problem. You could argue about the wisdom of a policy that was hard on human rights, hard in defense of Hong Kong, hard in defense of American interests in the South China Sea -- versus some other policy. But when the policy one day is harsh and the next day it's not, next day it's something else, that's not a policy at all.

RADDATZ: And I want to go back to Ukraine for a moment. Why was President Trump so obsessed, as you say, with Joe Biden, with Ukraine?

BOLTON: Fundamentally, the pursuit of the Russia collusion issue was, I think, for many Democrats, an effort to delegitimize the Trump presidency. And I think the president could've handled it in a variety of different ways. But in his inimitable style, he concluded the way to respond was to delegitimize the Democrats, to go after Hillary Clinton and Joe Biden through the Ukraine and through a variety of other steps.

Politically, that's fine. That's what politicians do. The line here that was crossed was trying to use a foreign government and to use the resources of the United States government to pressure that foreign government to do something to help Donald Trump politically.

RADDATZ: Who knew about that connection? The security assistance and the investigations? Did the Ukrainians know?

BOLTON: I think the Ukrainians fully understood it. I think they were confused and uncertain why Rudy Giuliani was involved. They were confused and uncertain why Gordon Sondland was involved. I can understand their perspective. I was confused too. But I think they were people who were willing to pursue this use of American power for the president's personal political interest.

When I was in Kyiv just within two weeks before I resigned, I pulled aside in a private conversation the prosecutor general of Ukraine, the new, incoming equivalent to the U.S. attorney general in the Zelensky administration. And I urged him, and I explain this in the book, "When you get all these requests for meetings about all these different political matters, talk to the American attorney general.

"Don't talk to anybody else," in hopes that that would focus him -- on whether there is any legitimate reason for the government of Ukraine to conduct an investigation. If there're legitimate law enforcement reasons, that's one thing. If this is a prosecution, as Lavrentiy Beria used to say to Stalin, "You show me the man, and I'll show you the crime," that is illegitimate.

RADDATZ: You talked about Giuliani fantasies. What did you mean by that?

BOLTON: There are more fairytales coming out of Ukraine than I think people can imagine. A lotta conspiracy theories. Some of 'em I think are fed by the Russians. Some of 'em are fed by internal Ukraine political disputes. It's a complicated country. There is enormous corruption.

There's widespread lack of political cooperation. And there's many fantasies as there are contenders for power. That's why it was so important when Zelenskiy took office in this new chance to get somebody in place who could satisfy what I think was the overwhelming feeling of the Ukrainian people. They wanted this corruption ended. They wanted this barrier to their country being tied more closely into the West, eliminated. That we couldn't find ourselves distracted by an American domestic political agenda.

RADDATZ: Again, who else knew about this connection? Who else do you believe had heard the president make that connection between investigations and security assistance?

BOLTON: I don't know how many people had heard him say it as directly as he said it to me. But in conversations with many, many people, I think everybody understood what was going on. In some cases, people didn't wanna say it expressly. Gordon Sondland was never troubled by that inhibition. It was a trade. It was a trade of an investigation in exchange for the security assistance. What we --

RADDATZ: Is it something -- is it something Vice President Pence knew about?

BOLTON: I don't think Vice President Pence did know about it. I think Vice President Pence felt very strongly, and I describe this in the book, that it was in U.S. national interest to make

this delivery of the security assistance to the Ukraine. And I think he worked hard to do it. I think he worked hard behind the scenes with the president.

And I didn't want to embroil him in it any more than was absolutely necessary. Our objective here again, this -- people distort this in light of the subsequent impeachment proceedings. I wasn't a judicial officer. My goal as national security advisor was to give the president the best advice I could on advancing our national interest, which in this case meant forget about Joe Biden and his Ukraine connection and deliver the security assistance before the authority expires at the end of the fiscal year on September the 30th. That ultimately happened actually the day after I resigned. But I take some professional pride in saying that at least at the end of the day, we were able to get that done.

RADDATZ: But you said you had gone to Attorney General Barr about this. What did you say to him? And did he do anything about it?

BOLTON: I told him about my conversation with the new prosecutor general in Ukraine, who would be his direct counterpart when he took office. And I explained it to the White House counsel's office as well. I didn't ask them what they did about it because I felt that was their responsibility.

One of the criticisms of me and my job was that I was always doing everybody else's job. So occasionally, I tried to let others do theirs. This was a good example. I talked to the lawyers and then I went about the rest of my business.

RADDATZ: And just again, back to the senior officials you say who may have known about the connection between the investigations and the security assistant, who were they?

BOLTON: Well, I think Secretary Pompeo, Secretary Esper, Attorney General Barr -- and perhaps others. Now, look --

RADDATZ: Were they as alarmed as you?

BOLTON: Yes, they were. And -- but they knew what their responsibility was. They were not acting as lawyers inside the government. They had responsibility for foreign and defense matters. And they agreed, and we all agreed, that this security assistance should be turned over to the Ukrainians.

And that whatever other consequences would flow from the president's behavior were for others to deal with. But they were focused on, and we had countless conversations, between

Mark Esper and Mike Pompeo and myself: "How do we persuade the president to do what's manifestly in his interest and the country's interest, deliver this assistance to the Ukraine?"

RADDATZ: And I wanna go back to other examples you say outside of Ukraine and things that raised red flags for you. One of them, Halkbank, which is Turkey's most powerful state run bank. They were under investigation and what happened?

BOLTON: Well, there were any number of conversations between the president and [Turkish President Recep Tayyip] Erdogan of Turkey on the subject of Halkbank. And what Erdogan wanted was basically a settlement that would take the pressure off Halkbank. And let's be clear, what Halkbank had done was violate U.S. laws respecting sanctions on Iran.

So if this had been a U.S. financial institution, we would've toasted them, and quite properly so. So it was not a case where Halkbank was being treated by the U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York more harshly than an American bank. It was just really looking for the same kind of treatment.

And the president said to Erdogan at one point, "Look, those prosecutors in New York are Obama people. Wait till I get my people in and then we'll take care of this." And I thought to myself -- and I'm a Department of Justice alumnus myself -- "I've never heard any president say anything like that. Ever."

Now ultimately, I think Attorney General Barr got the prosecution of Halkbank that they deserved because the Turks wouldn't agree to anything like a reasonable settlement. So it turned out all right. But that's so far. That's how close we got. That's how close we got. And I find that disturbing.

RADDATZ: And do you see that as criminal? Do you see that as high crimes and misdemeanor?

BOLTON: I don't think I know enough about all the circumstances, but I tell ya, it did feel like obstruction of justice to me. The president has enormous power in the law enforcement area. The executive power is vested in the president.

And the attorney general, as the Supreme Court said in the famous case, the attorney general is the hand of the president in fulfilling the president's duty to take care that the laws be faithfully executed. But that means faithful execution means execution that's not politically motivated. And -- this idea that you give Erdogan and his family, who use Halkbank like a slush fund -- in exchange for, what? -- some hope down the road of some other kind of treatment for Trump or the country -- was very troubling.

RADDATZ: And ZTE, the Chinese telecom giant. What happened there in a conversation with President Trump?

BOLTON: Well, again the circumstances were such: ZTE was violating American laws with respect to Iran sanctions and the disclosure that they were making. And Secretary Wilbur Ross of the Commerce Department imposed penalties on ZTE. These were not penalties that were harsher on ZTE than they would've been for an American company doing exactly the same thing.

And in the course of a conversation with Xi Jinping, the president said he'd rescind the penalties for basically in exchange for nothing. I mean, it's one thing if you had a clear foreign policy rationale to downplay a criminal or regulatory proceeding because of a larger strategic interest.

It's quite another just to do it off the cuff, on the whim, give your buddy Xi Jinping a benefit. This was not part of some sustained interagency policy making process. This was just conversation with Xi Jinping. And I find that very troubling.

RADDATZ: So let me go back to this again. You're releasing a book. You could've told these stories about phone calls, about Ukraine, about ZTE when you were in the White House or when the impeachment trial was going on. And you chose instead to do it in a book.

BOLTON: Because I didn't think the Democrats had the wit or the political understanding or the reach to change what, for them, was an exercise in arousing their own base, so that they could say, "We impeached Donald Trump." To impeach him on the ground of Ukraine, knowing full well -- they could see it, they knew it from their own behavior.

They pushed the Republicans in the House into unanimous opposition to their view. And they essentially did the same thing to Republicans in the Senate. This was a partisan play. It was not a Constitutional process. I judge that to be almost as irregular as what they were accusing Trump of doing.

The Democrats can pursue whatever policy they want. They don't dictate to me how best to bring this to the attention of the American people. You can agree or disagree with the way I tried to do it, but I don't think anybody is required to engage in futile activity to satisfy the Democratic congressional leadership.

RADDATZ: So let's go back over this. You describe the president as "erratic, foolish, behaved irrationally, bizarrely. You can't leave him alone for a minute. He saw conspiracies behind rocks and was stunningly uninformed. He couldn't tell the difference between his personal

interests and the country's interests." When you put all that together, how can anyone come away, after reading your book, and make any conclusion other than that you don't think he is fit for office?

BOLTON: I don't think he's fit for office. I don't think he has the competence to carry out the job. I don't think he's a conservative Republican. I'm not gonna vote for him in November. Certainly not gonna vote for Joe Biden either. I'm gonna figure out a conservative Republican to write in. But this comes back to the point of why I wrote the book.

It's 500 pages, I hope, of facts. You've just read out a number of judgments I make, and that's fair. And any book is gonna contain opinions and conclusions. But I want people to read it, not for the conclusions, but for the basic evidence that it provides. They can make up their own minds. Some Republicans will read it and say, "We're gonna vote for Trump anyway." And all I want them to know is what they're actually voting for.

RADDATZ: And you talk about these political guardrails, but what do you think would really change? Supreme Court justices? What would those guardrails keep him from doing that they wouldn't keep him from doing in a second term?

BOLTON: Well, it's very hard to predict since the president's thought process is a random walk that never stops. I mean, it's like a random walk meets "Groundhog Day." But I could imagine, for example, the following. The president's record on appointing conservative judges and justices to the Supreme Court is one of the strongest arguments with the conservative Republican base for reelection.

But let's imagine he's reelected and a member of the liberal side of the Supreme Court leaves. I could imagine advisors that he has now saying, "You know, you nominated two wonderful conservative justices in your first term. Now think of your legacy. Think of the balance of the Supreme Court. Nominate equally competent liberal justices in your second term so that you leave the balance of the Court as it was when you came in. What a legacy that would be."

RADDATZ: And who would tell him that?

BOLTON: Well, I think members of his family would tell him that. I don't wanna get into the specifics there. I didn't write the book about the family. But I think there are others advisors of his --

RADDATZ: So Ivanka [Trump] and Jared [Kushner]?

BOLTON: -- who would say the same thing. I'll rest on my statement there.

RADDATZ: Aren't that many other members of his family in there. Next to the president, who held the most power in the White House?

BOLTON: It varied from time to time. At different points, different people would have influence. But I think the sustained answer to that question over time is Jared Kushner. I think it's a bit little bit unfair to Vice President Pence because I believe that much of the work he did, he did in private with the president. And that history will record that we owe a lotta gratitude to Mike Pence for the work he did that we just don't know about at this point.

RADDATZ: Jared Kushner has a very broad portfolio. The Middle East, other things. Is he the most qualified person for those jobs?

BOLTON: As I say, I don't really wanna get into the family aspect of this. I think it's -- the focus oughta be on the president. He's the one who's running for reelection. He's the one who ultimately has the responsibility. And he's the one I went to work for.

RADDATZ: But if Jared Kushner is the second-most powerful person in that White House, why can't you answer that question?

BOLTON: Well, I think -- a question I would put in turn to conservative Republicans is, "How do you feel about that?"

RADDATZ: You share one story, and-- and this does involve the family, of how policy was essentially shaped to protect the Trump family interest. After U.S. intelligence reportedly determined the Saudi crown prince played a role in the killing of Jamal Khashoggi, Trump issued a statement, you say, to divert attention from Ivanka, who was getting press for her emails, her private email account. Did it happen that way?

BOLTON: Well, the president said that. Now, in fact, he also strongly believed in the statement that he made about U.S. policy vis-à-vis Saudi Arabia, despite the killing of Khashoggi because of the arms sales relationship and other things. But it was very much on his mind that day that his daughter was taking some heavy hits in the press and absolutely guaranteed this diverted everyone's attention.

RADDATZ: And he said that?

BOLTON: Yes.

RADDATZ: Let me just go through a few former and current members of the administration and your thoughts on them. Gen. John Kelly, who was chief of staff?

BOLTON: Well, Kelly and I certainly had disagreements from time to time. He -- it's a good example of how I tried in the book to be objective about it. I tried to indicate where I thought Kelly was right and I was wrong. I would have to say I shared what I think was a pretty strong relationship with him.

I said at the beginning, based on my own observations of prior administrations, I said to Kelly, "Neither you nor I can be successful here if we don't work together on this." I felt he was terribly abused by the president. He is an honorable man who tried to serve his country. And I'm glad for him that he's found some measure of peace now that he's outta the administration.

RADDATZ: And you talk about the vindictiveness, as you say, of President Trump. And you cite John McCain, even after he had died. What did you see in terms of his vindictiveness?

BOLTON: I think it's a focus on going after people even after the purpose of doing so really has served no further purpose. And -- you know, I have to say, after a while, I just was deadened to it. And I could observe it. And I just put it aside 'cause it obviously wasn't anything I was gonna change.

RADDATZ: What was it about John McCain?

BOLTON: Well, I think McCain to him represented a lotta the reasons he had run. I thought, and in fact I remember saying at the time, that when he said in an interview durin' the 2016 campaign, "I like people who aren't made prisoners of war," I thought, as did other people, that was the end of the Trump campaign. But I think what really set him off was McCain's vote against the repeal of Obamacare. And I think he just was not gonna let up on it after that.

RADDATZ: What would you say to the American people as you sit here? Donald Trump won. He is the president of the United States. He has a very strong base of support. What would you say to them? How could you convince them?

BOLTON: I tried to write a book that took the 17 months I spent as national security advisor and reveal a picture of the president that people can draw their own conclusions from. My conclusion is clear. I don't think he should be president. But I didn't wanna write a book that was argumentation or that was being an amateur psychoanalyst or coming up with pigeon holes or categories or put the president in.

I wanted people to see him as he operated. Now, there're people who say that somehow, this is a breach of trust. I don't see it that way at all. I think there's an obligation to let the American people know what it's like in the White House and what their leader is doing. I'm prepared to

take the grief that this book will cause because I think the greater loyalty should be to the Constitution and the country.

RADDATZ: The president has said this will put him in a bad position with world leaders. And you've said a lot of things about those world leaders, if you were president, you certainly wouldn't want your former national security advisor to be saying you are easily manipulated, that the Russian president could play you like a fiddle. Why does that not matter as he goes forward?

BOLTON: Well, it's not telling Vladimir Putin anything that he doesn't already know. And it's telling the American people something they may not be aware of. I think everybody in Washington's an adult. My assumption is essentially, anything I said during my government service could end up in the pages of our great national newspapers the next morning.

That didn't inhibit me because I felt that you're always safe if you say what you think and what you believe honestly. And if the president were more honest in some of his public statements, maybe there'd be less urgency to do this.

RADDATZ: I go back to those officials, if I could. Mike Pompeo.

BOLTON: What was the question? (LAUGH)

RADDATZ: Oh, sorry. I just want to get your impressions of various administration officials, current or former, like -- just as you did with -- Gen. Kelly. Mike Pompeo.

BOLTON: Yeah. Well, I think on many issues Mike Pompeo and I agreed. We disagreed on some. I tried to lay out in the book why I thought the disagreements took place, why I frankly didn't understand them. And if there were -- if there had been more occasions where we could've worked together, maybe would've -- we would've accomplished more. But it -- that was not to be.

RADDATZ: Steve Mnuchin?

BOLTON: Well, Mnuchin is a Democrat. And the views that he recommended, go light on sanctions on Russia, don't sanction the Chinese, don't sanction Maduro, don't sanction the North Koreans so harshly, are all the positions of a big business Democrat, which is fine in a big business Democratic type administration. I don't know what he was doing in the Trump administration, other than he was an outstanding fundraiser for the president and a supporter that was close to family for him.

RADDATZ: And Jim Mattis?

BOLTON: Well, Mattis and I had our disagreements. I lay them out in the book as well. I think he had a view of the threat from Iran that was perhaps because of his own experience, I don't think he took it seriously enough.

But I don't question Mattis' motives, in the sense I think he acted in what he felt was the country's best interest. And, you know, people can judge the disagreements between the two of us. I'm sure when the book comes out, he'll have a few things to say.

RADDATZ: There's a lot of talk, there's a lot of talk before you got your job about your mustache. But apparently, you say that didn't have anything to do with it. And President Trump liked it?

BOLTON: Well, I don't think he liked it. I mean, his father had a mustache. I'm not gonna get all Freudian on us here and so on. But maybe it was important and he just didn't wanna say anything about it to me. I don't know. I consider it a triviality.

RADDATZ: You said it wasn't important, but you also make a point to write, "Attractive women fall into a different category when it comes to Trump." What do you mean by that?

BOLTON: Well, I think he would comment on potential nominees and it wasn't anything that you couldn't say in family circles, I'll put it that way. But it was restricted to women more than the men.

RADDATZ: And their attractiveness?

BOLTON: Right.

RADDATZ: What about your own relationship with the president? Throughout the book you said you were close to resigning on a handful of occasions. You said one of those occasions, a turning point, was the night there were no retaliatory strikes against Iran at the time for bombing some ships in the Persian Gulf or placing explosives on the side of them, for shooting down one of our very high tech drones. That was a turning point for you?

BOLTON: Yes. I think at that point -- if I look back on it, it only became a matter of time -- when I actually resigned. And this is something people can disagree with me, that maybe I shoulda resigned right then. But I felt and I understand how others in analogous situations still in the government can feel, that there were still contributions I could make.

But I thought that was the most irrational decision I'd ever seen any president make in my own personal experience serving in the government. It wasn't a mega crisis. Although it was a crisis. And it was a failure of decision making that -- that convinced me it was a serious, serious problem.

RADDATZ: He did, obviously, follow up -- killing [Iranian military leader Qassem] Soleimani -- with a missile strike a drone strike.

BOLTON: Well, there are subjects -- and -- this is obviously an issue of controversy now that involve classified information that I don't talk about. And, you know, if I had put classified information in the book, it might've been 500 pages longer. But I had plenty to talk about without dealing with classified information. I'm glad Soleimani's dead. I wish it had happened earlier.

RADDATZ: And you're talking about the book. The president is reportedly furious about this book? He calls you a traitor? What would you call him?

BOLTON: I've made my case about the president's not being a conservative and not being competent to serve in the book. And that's why people say, "Oh, 500 pages long. We don't wanna read that much." OK. You can't make anybody read it. But I urge that people take the time to look at it because it's the laying of one fact after another.

One fact, one fact, one fact that paint the picture that accusations and op-ed pieces and even TV interviews can't really capture. It's understanding the fullness of the problem -- and the fullness of a lack of philosophical commitment that -- that I think is the most important.

RADDATZ: How do you think he'll react to the book?

BOLTON: Well, I think it'll be volcanic. And I've expected that from the beginning. There were times when I was writing this book or getting it ready for publication that I thought-- "Goodness, this is -- this is more trouble than it's worth." But now that we're at the point, I'm prepared to accept whatever happens.

RADDATZ: Why did you decide to do it before the final clearance from the White House?

BOLTON: We had the final clearance from the White House. We had been through this pre-publication review for four months. And on the last day of substantive discussion about it, April the 24th, the professional career people who do these reviews for everybody had nothing more to request of it.

The White House then sat on it for over seven weeks. And it was part of a stall. How do we know that? Because President Trump himself said that's what he was gonna do. He didn't want the book to be published. And then he said something interesting.

He didn't want the book to be published before the election. After it, different story. That tells you this is not about national security. The national security equities don't change depending on who wins the election. This is about suppressing an unfavorable account of his presidency.

RADDATZ: The White House says the current draft manuscript still contains classified material. Mr. Eisenberg, the White House lawyer, wrote in a letter to your lawyer, Mr. Cooper. You just don't agree with that?

BOLTON: As flatly incorrect. And the people responsible for deciding that decided it on April the 24th. And so final was that decision that we were down to talking about how to get the clearance letter delivered. Now, I think there was a foot on the break this whole process.

And it was more (LAUGH) meticulous and harder than anybody else's who had gone through. Think the professional people who did it, did it honestly by their own lights. But I think the upper White House management has decided for a long time that they were gonna do whatever it took to stop this book from coming out before the election because they feared the American people reading it.

RADDATZ: What kinds of things were taken out? I know you can't talk about the classified material, but generally what kinds of things?

BOLTON: Well, a lot of it was actually putting things in. We more than tripled the number of footnotes in the book. And you say, "Well, why do that?" To show that information conveyed in the manuscript was actually public already.

A lot of the things that we found to put in the footnotes, I didn't -- I hadn't seen before. But if it's the choice between taking something out or putting a footnote in, I was happy to do that. We took many things and raised them to a slightly more abstract level. A lot of direct conversations between the president and foreign heads of state were paraphrased, rather than put in direct quotations.

And these are steps that -- that I was told and I believe were not unique to me. This is the process that the prepublication review undertakes for all authors who are covered by the provision. I didn't think actually I had to submit it for prepublication review. My first book, "Surrender's Not an Option," in 2007 -- I didn't submit that for prepublication review. And for

those who are surprised I'm writing a book now, they may have observed that I wrote the same (LAUGH) kind of book 13 years ago.

RADDATZ: Do you fear at all you could be prosecuted?

BOLTON: Look -- under Donald Trump -- no -- no regular rules here apply. But I am confident that there's no national security information, no classified information in the book. I didn't intend to write anything that revealed classified information. I don't wanna do anything that would benefit our adversaries around the world. I wrote this to help inform the American people. I feel very confident after going through four months of page by page, line by line prepublication review, that there's no classified information in the book.

RADDATZ: You resigned, although the president said he fired you, on Sept. 10. And we learn you're no longer working at the White House through a series of tweets. The president puts out you're gone, you're fired. You come back about 12 minutes later and said, "I resigned." Tell us that story.

BOLTON: Well -- this is a lesson to anybody else contemplating resigning. Don't tell the president first. Don't show him the courtesy, 'cause he's not gonna show you the courtesy. I had told him -- the night before, "If you want me to resign, I will do it." He said, "Let's talk about it the next morning."

I describe in the book why he had conversations later that night that indicated in his own mind I wasn't gonna be fired. But he didn't want me outta the gate first. And I tell the story in the book about Kim Jong Un. But I think it applies to anyone who leaves the Trump administration. The president said when he was a younger man he never wanted the girl to break up with him. He always wanted to be the one who broke up with the girl. I think that tells you everything.

RADDATZ: The president has said he disagreed with you strongly with many of your tenure during your time in the White House. So why wouldn't he want to get rid of you?

BOLTON: Well, I think -- I would urge people to read chapter one of the book -- called "The Long March to a West Wing Corner Office," which describes how I got the job. And describes the comments the president made to me over a series of meetings before the election, during the transition and during his first year in office -- about what he said to me about my views and his views. And, you know, they can draw their own conclusions from that.

RADDATZ: What was the last straw for you?

BOLTON: Well -- you know, the last straw is the wrong thing to look at. But I do think the last straw was the handling of the Afghanistan negotiations, the negotiations with the Taliban and the decision to bring Taliban to Camp David.

And it was -- you know, we were down to the point where -- I had almost resigned -- just before that when we were at the G-7 meeting in -- France. And so what actually precipitated the decision -- really is the least significant. It was the accumulation of the weight of the evidence over the 17-month period.

RADDATZ: Critics including the president's own lawyers during the impeachment trial paint you as disgruntled. Is this a book from a disgruntled employee?

BOLTON: Look, it's a book that will stand on its own merits. Whatever my motives are, the book tried to capture accurately and faithfully what actually happened. And I think it's typical of the Trump administration that when faced with criticism, they don't deal with the substance of the criticism, they attack the person, which I fully expect and doesn't surprise me.

RADDATZ: And speaking of attacks, when you publisher released a few lines from the book, the reaction on Twitter was fierce. Tweets saying you're a coward for not coming forward with this information when Congress was investigating, and defenders of the president calling you disloyal.

BOLTON: Yeah. Look, I fully expect that there'll be a lot of criticism from people who haven't read the book. Let 'em read the book first. For those who thought I should've come forward and testified -- I explain what my position was on that. And if they had to walk in my shoes, why they would see it differently.

That there's no credit in following a futile strategy because some of the opponents of the president decided to pursue it. And for those who are loyal to Donald Trump, I would say loyalty in politics is twofold: one is to our country and the Constitution, primarily, not to any one individual, and loyalty to a philosophy. And I think that's what I would be judged by.

RADDATZ: Let's talk about other Republicans. You're a conservative Republican. If the president is all of these things you've claimed he is in the book and in this interview, why are almost all of your fellow Republicans still supporting him?

BOLTON: Well, I think they're in a very difficult position. And I view the circumstance we're in now really as the beginning of the fight for the soul of the Republican party, post Trump. Whether Trump wins in November or loses in November, that battle begins immediately.

And I think a lotta people regret that they're not able to express their views more fully. I'm not gonna criticize anybody else for what they say about Trump or when they came out against him. I don't think there's any purchase in that.

I think the issues for the country are so grave domestically and internationally, that we need a functioning Republican Party that can stand up for the same principles that we all agreed to before Trump and that we're gonna agree to after Trump. The key point is that the 2020 election, if Trump wins, is not a victory for conservatism. If Trump loses, it's not a defeat for conservatism.

RADDATZ: You also write in the book that the speculation about President Trump replacing Mike Pence possibly with Nikki Haley was not just idle speculation? Tell us about that.

BOLTON: No. I think there were people in the White House, family members in particular, who pushed that very hard. And I recount one conversation with the president where I said I thought that would be a very, very bad idea. It's still my view, not that it carries a lotta weight in the Oval Office. I think Pence has been a fantastic vice president. And I think it would be in the terms the president best understands, a political mistake for him to not to keep Pence on the ticket.

RADDATZ: I wanna close with where the country is right now and a couple of things. And I know you talk about Gen. Kelly at one point worried about the president's style and worried about how he would be in a crisis, another 9/11 type crisis. We're in the middle of a pandemic. How do you think the president has handled that?

BOLTON: I think he's handled it very poorly. There're a lot of criticisms about what happened-- who was responsible and so on. The main problem the administration has had with coronavirus is the empty chair behind the resolute desk in the Oval Office. In early January, people, whether on the staff of the National Security Council or the Centers for Disease Control and elsewhere were saying, "This is a potential problem."

Donald Trump didn't wanna hear about it. He didn't wanna hear about it because he didn't wanna hear bad things about Xi Jinping. He didn't wanna hear bad things about China covering up what had happened with the outset of the disease. He didn't wanna hear bad things about the Chinese economy that could affect the fantastic trade deal he was working on, No. 1.

And No. 2, he didn't wanna hear anything about an exogenous variable that could have a negative effect on the American economy, which he saw as his ticket to reelection. So for months, it was contained. It wasn't a problem. There was no economic effect.

And I think we lost a lotta time because of that. That is an example of making policy out of your hip pocket, without systematic consideration of what needs to be done, despite being warned by the people charged with making the warnings that it was coming.

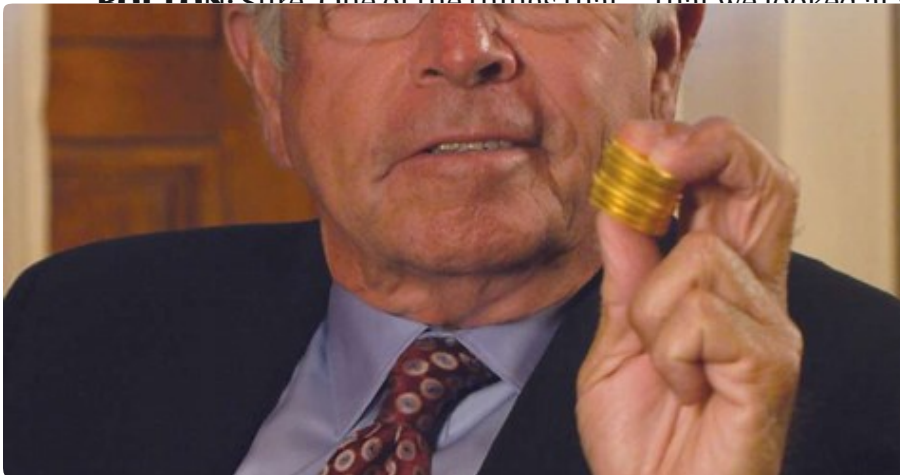
RADDATZ: He talks about President Obama leaving the cupboards bare and that they couldn't do anything about that.

BOLTON: That's three years ago. That's three years ago. And the absence of personal protective equipment and the other things, these were all issues that could've been mitigated had the administration acted earlier. But because of the potential which we've now seen as a reality of the effect on the economy, he did not wanna consider it.

And I think this is something that -- that certainly was on my mind. If -- if you look at this response to the pandemic now, what does it tell Russia, China, other countries that violate the biological weapons convention about the utility of this as a form of attack on the United States?

RADDATZ: Do you remember any time in the White House when you discussed a possible pandemic?

BOLTON: Sure. One of the things that -- that we looked at very seriously during the 2018



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That issue had not been brought to Mike Pompeo's attention. As soon as he heard about it, he immediately authorized it. We did a number of other things to beef up production of vaccine supplies for Ebola. And that outbreak has been largely contained. Ebola is, we know from defectors from Soviet days, one of the pathogens that they wanted to weaponize to use as a biological weapon. I've spent a lotta my career on not just nuclear weapons, but chemical and biological weapons as well. This has always been something that's been of acute concern.

RADDATZ: You've also come under criticism, however. When you were at the NSC, you folded the Global Health Security Directorate into another office. Did that remove any kind of early warning system?

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it. And if you look at press reporting and sources no less than The New York Times, it says those very people on the staff of the NSC were sounding the warning in early January. It was the president and the empty chair that didn't wanna hear it.

RADDATZ: And his response to the killing of George Floyd?

BOLTON: Well, I think the issue of resolving racial tensions in America is one that's not gonna be solved overnight. I think the president's reaction -- from his own political point of view, which again, is the only thing he thinks about -- was very misguided.

And I think it could well push the electorate toward his opponent. I think the answer for police forces all over the country, and I speak as somebody whose father was a firefighter and who lived next to a policeman for most of my young boyhood is that each city's gonna have to confront this on its own. And there's no one-size-fits-all answer. I think that -- I think none of these considerations have entered into the president's thinking.

RADDATZ: Former Defense Secretary Mattis said that the president doesn't even pretend to try to unite the American people. You and Mattis didn't always agree, but do you agree with that?

BOLTON: Well, I think he does what's in his electoral interest. And in this case, he obviously hasn't seen any virtue in trying to find a way to lessen the tensions that we've seen. I have to say, that doesn't mean that others have done better.

You know, when we had the famous Beer Summit during the Obama administration after an incident with the Cambridge police force, I thought that was pure theater. And it didn't do much to unite the country then either. This is very serious.

It's not gonna be met by theatrical gestures or things like that. It just requires time. And it is the strength of the United States that we don't put problems out of sight. We don't simply ignore them. We try to resolve them. And that's the future we face here. There's no question about it.

RADDATZ: Yeah, just a few more questions. Do you think you made mistakes in your job?

BOLTON: Well, I'm sure I did. If I had been better at giving advice to the president perhaps some of the things that he did wouldn't have gone wrong. I obviously went through the trajectory of many other people. I didn't -- I'm not still there, by definition. So I can't give him

that advice. And -- it was -- it was hard for me to adjust to his decision making style. And I think -- I'm not sure there was much I could've done. Probably, I could've done more and didn't do it.

RADDATZ: How do you think history will look at you up to this point?

BOLTON: Look, I'm a conservative Republican. I've been a conservative since as a boy I ran doorbells and handed out leaflets for Barry Goldwater. And my objective in being engaged in political life over my professional career has been to advance philosophical objectives.

That remains what I'm focused on. And I've had people who have supported me. And I've had my share, maybe more than my share, of critics. But that's what motivates me. That's what has motivated me. That's what continues to motivate me. And if history at least gets that part right, I'll be happy.

RADDATZ: I'm assuming you have not seen Donald Trump since you resigned?

BOLTON: Have not spoken with him.

RADDATZ: Do you think you'll ever speak to him again?

BOLTON: I doubt it.

RADDATZ: How do you think history will remember Donald Trump?

BOLTON: I hope it will remember him as a one-term president who didn't plunge the country irretrievably into a downward spiral we can't recall from. We can get over one term. I have absolute confidence -- even if it's not the miracle of a conservative Republican being elected in November.

Two terms, I'm more troubled about. But I'm really troubled about the absence as well of a viable national security wing in the Democratic Party. So this is an election for me of a choice of two unacceptable alternatives. And it's not one I relish.

RADDATZ: So will you vote at all? You'll just figure out how you do that?

BOLTON: I'm gonna pick a conservative Republican and write his or her name in.

RADDATZ: You say President Trump is unfit for office and you're talking about the election, do you worry about his commitment to the democratic process?

BOLTON: I don't think he fully understands the democratic process. I don't think he fully understands the Constitution. I don't necessarily view that as malevolent. But I view it as very (LAUGH) concerning that he does not appreciate the proper role of the presidency. With no prior experience in government, which is not a bad thing -- it nonetheless leads him in directions that can often causes problems. It's certainly the case in national security. It's the case in domestic affairs, too.

RADDATZ: Do you worry about foreign interference in this election?

BOLTON: I absolutely worry about foreign interference. I think the Russians, the Chinese, the Iranians, the North Koreans, perhaps others may well try to interfere. That's one reason I explain in the book some of the steps we took to increase America's offensive cyber capability so that we could, in cyber space, create structures of deterrence to tell these countries, "You come after us in our elections, you're gonna pay a much higher price than you realize."

RADDATZ: And I want to ask you this again. Why is this the book President Trump does not want anyone to read?

BOLTON: Because I hope that people will see it as a book reciting facts about what happened and what he did. It's not a book of accusations and theories and -- junior psychoanalyst -- speculation. It's a book that sets out for history what actually happened. And I think it demonstrates why Donald Trump is not philosophically conservative. He's not philosophically anything. And why he doesn't have the basic competence that he should have to be president.

RADDATZ: Tell us what happened the day you resigned.

BOLTON: I came into the West Wing as usual -- about 6 o'clock. I wrapped up a bunch of things that had been pending. I had my resignation letter prepared. I gave it to Christine Samuelian, my assistant, to take down to the Oval Office. I left to go home so I would be out of range when the letter hit.

And we were preparing to announce it a few hours later, when the president, obviously stunned at what had happened, tweeted first. So -- we tweeted the actual circumstances of the resignation. And at that point, my Twitter account was shut off.

RADDATZ: Shut off? And he said he fired you?

BOLTON: Well, that's simply not true. He and I had a one on one conversation the prior afternoon. And I said, "Look, if you want me to resign, I'll do it." He said, "Let's talk about it

the next morning." And then he went off to a political event. I heard the next morning that he had said things on the Air Force One on the way back clearly indicating that he expected me to be around for a while.

So I think that he doesn't like a circumstance where he is upstaged. And he told me a story a couple times actually, involving Kim Jong Un, whether there would be a Singapore summit, whether it would be canceled or not. And he told me that back in the day, he always wanted to be the one who broke up with the girl. He never wanted the girl to break up with him. And I think that explains everything.

RADDATZ: He broke up with you?

BOLTON: (LAUGH) He wants to look at it that way. I resigned.

RADDATZ: All right. Thank you.

This transcript has been edited for clarity.

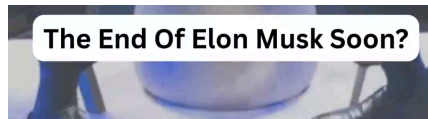
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