

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6200

June 30, 2020

Mr. Peter Navarro
Assistant to the President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. Navarro:

I am writing concerning allegations made by former National Security Advisor John Bolton that President Trump improperly used trade negotiations with China to advance his personal political interests. In particular, I am concerned about the meetings between President Trump and Chinese President Xi at the December 2018 WTO Ministerial in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and the June 2019 Group of 20 summit in Osaka, Japan at which President Trump is said to have asked Mr. Xi to intervene in the 2020 presidential election.

As President Trump's key advisor on China trade policy, and someone who served in the White House with Mr. Bolton, you are uniquely able to explain these alleged interactions and describe any efforts you took to mitigate them. As I noted in my October 28, 2019 letter to you, Mr. Bolton's claims are consistent with other reporting that the President and his administration have actively encouraged the Chinese to engage in political activities in exchange for favorable trade agreements, which you have denied.¹

According to reporting on Bolton's book, at one point during the meeting in Osaka, Trump "turned the conversation to the coming U.S. presidential election, alluding to China's economic capability to affect the ongoing campaigns, pleading with Xi to ensure he'd win."² Bolton reportedly goes on to claim "he stressed the importance of farmers, and increased Chinese purchases of soybeans and wheat in the electoral outcome. I would print Trump's exact words but the government's prepublication review process has decided otherwise."³ According to Vanity Fair, who reportedly viewed the unredacted passage, Trump's ask is even more crudely shocking when you read Trump's specific language. "Make sure I win," Trump allegedly told Xi

¹ Letter from Sen. Ron Wyden to Peter Navarro, Oct. 28, 2019, www.finance.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/102919%20Wyden%20Letter%20to%20Navarro%20RE%20China%20Trade.pdf.

² Josh Dawsey, "Trump asked China's Xi to help him win reelection, according to Bolton book," Washington Post, June 17, 2020; https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-asked-chinas-xi-to-help-him-win-reelection-according-to-bolton-book/2020/06/17/d4ea601c-ad7a-11ea-868b-93d63cd833b2_story.html.

³ Josh Dawsey, "Trump asked China's Xi to help him win reelection, according to Bolton book," Washington Post, June 17, 2020; https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-asked-chinas-xi-to-help-him-win-reelection-according-to-bolton-book/2020/06/17/d4ea601c-ad7a-11ea-868b-93d63cd833b2_story.html.

during a dinner at the G20 conference in Osaka, Japan last summer. “I will probably win anyway, so don’t hurt my farms.... Buy a lot of soybeans and wheat and make sure we win.”⁴

The allegations by Bolton are troubling, particularly because they fit a pattern of President Trump using his office for his own political gain. Even before Bolton’s allegations surfaced, there was disturbing evidence that trade negotiations with China were being used for advance Trump’s personal interests. I was critical of the initial China trade deal, because it appeared to prioritize the sale of soybeans from the electorally important states in the Midwest over more foundational issues like addressing intellectual property theft, forced technology transfers, and economic espionage.

The outcome of the deal appears to reflect fundamental flaws in the negotiation process. That is, rather than focusing on critical, systematic aspects of China’s theft of American intellectual property or unfair treatment of American workers identified in USTR’s Section 301 report, President Trump was worried about remedying the impact of his indiscriminate trade war on farmers in electorally important states, and implored China to buy more agricultural products. Furthermore, because sections of the purchase agreement continued to be secret, there may well be other politically connected industries receiving sweetheart deals. For instance, only a limited number of facilities are licensed to export natural gas, guaranteeing export sales may benefit favored companies and their shareholders. There is also good reason to think that other issues, like the treatment of ZTE by the U.S. Department of Commerce,⁵ and the willingness of the U.S. government to speak out regarding human rights violations in Xinjiang⁶ and Hong Kong⁷ have been tied into the trade negotiations.⁸

Furthermore, Trump’s own statements seem to validate Bolton’s claims. At a January 14, 2020 rally in Wisconsin, Trump promised the China deal would “massively” boost exports from the State.⁹ At a rally in Iowa, Trump promised the China deal would bring billions of dollars to local industry.¹⁰ He added that China had agreed to buy more of their products as a personal gesture.

⁴ Gabriel Sherman, “Make Sure I Win”: John Bolton’s Unredacted Book Shows What Trump Was Really Trying to Hide,” *Vanity Fair*, June 18, 2020; <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2020/06/boltons-unredacted-book-shows-trump-trying-to-hide>.

⁵ Ana Swanson, “Trump Strikes Deal to Save China’s ZTE as North Korea Meeting Looms,” *New York Times*, June 7, 2018; <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/07/business/us-china-zte-deal.html>.

⁶ Michael Crowley, “Trump Says He Avoided Punishing China Over Uighur Camps to Protect Trade Talks,” *New York Times*, June 21, 2020; <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/21/us/politics/trump-uighurs-china-trade.html>.

⁷ Alan Rappeport and Edward Wong, “To Gain Leverage in China Trade Talks, Trump Shows Solidarity With Hong Kong,” *New York Times*, Aug. 22, 2019; <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/22/us/politics/trump-china-hong-kong.html>. Michael Crowley and Ana Swanson, “White House Won’t Say if Trump Will Sign Hong Kong Bill That Has Angered China,” Nov. 21, 2019; <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/21/us/politics/trump-hong-kong-china.html>.

⁸ Ana Swanson, “Trump Strikes Deal to Save China’s ZTE as North Korea Meeting Looms,” *New York Times*, June 7, 2018; <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/07/business/us-china-zte-deal.html>.

⁹ President Trump Rally in Milwaukee, C-Span, January 14, 2020; <https://www.c-span.org/video/?467870-1/president-trump-campaigns-milwaukee-wisconsin>.

¹⁰ President Trump Rally in Des Moines, Iowa, C-Span, January 30, 2020; <https://www.c-span.org/video/?468452-1/president-trump-rally-des-moines-iowa>.

“I said, ‘Do me a favor: Instead of \$20 billion purchased from our farmers, would you make it 50?’ ... And they agreed to do it.”¹¹

Finally, as described in my October 28, 2019 letter to you, in October 2019, after the alleged events of the G20 Summit in Osaka, President Trump told reporters “China should start an investigation into the Bidens because what happened in China is just about as bad as what happened with Ukraine,” referencing the baseless allegations of wrongdoing by Joe and Hunter Biden in Ukraine.¹² Several days later, Michael Pillsbury, an informal White House adviser on China, told the Financial Times that he had gotten “quite a bit of background on Hunter Biden from the Chinese” on a recent visit to Beijing.¹³ You may recall, I asked you in the letter about President Trump’s comments at the time, and you denied that the Chinese trade negotiations were being used to advance President Trump’s political ends.

In light of these concerns, please answer the following questions:

1. According to former national security advisor John Bolton’s forthcoming book, during a dinner between President Trump and Chinese President Xi during the December 2018 WTO Ministerial in Buenos Aires, Trump “asked . . . for some increases in Chinese farm-product purchases, to help with the crucial farm-state vote,” in exchange for “U.S. tariffs would remain at 10% rather than rise to 25%, as he had previously threatened.” According to Bolton, Ambassador Lighthizer “did what he could to get the conversation back onto the plane of reality, focusing on the structural issues and ripping apart the Chinese proposal.” Do you recall President Trump raising farm purchases by China in connection with his electoral popularity during the December 2018 dinner? If so, please describe.
2. Are you aware of any meetings or calls between President Trump and President Xi at or in preparation for the December 2018 WTO Ministerial dinner that you did not attend? If so, please describe.
3. Bolton’s forthcoming book further states that at one point during a meeting between President Trump and Chinese President Xi during the June 2019 G20 Summit, Trump “turned the conversation to the coming U.S. presidential election, alluding to China’s economic capability to affect the ongoing campaigns, pleading with Xi to ensure he’d win.” Do you recall this interaction? Did President Trump use this meeting to discuss China’s ability to give him an electoral advantage?

¹¹ President Trump Campaign Rally in Colorado Springs, Colorado, C-Span, February 20, 2020; <https://www.c-span.org/video/?469438-1/president-trump-campaign-rally-colorado-springs-colorado>.

¹² Kevin Liptak, “Trump now says both China and Ukraine should investigate Bidens,” CNN, October 3, 2019; <https://www.cnn.com/2019/10/03/politics/donald-trump-ukraine-china-investigate-2020/index.html>.

¹³ Demetri Sevastopulo, “Trump Adviser Says China Provided Information About Hunger Biden,” Financial Times, Oct. 10, 2019; <https://amp.ft.com/content/d4b9b0a8-eb14-11e9-a240-3b065ef5fc55>; <https://twitter.com/Dimi/status/1182295578128064513?s=20>.

4. Bolton reportedly also claims that during the G20 Summit President Trump stressed to President Xi “the importance of farmers, and increased Chinese purchases of soybeans and wheat in the electoral outcome.” Do you recall this interaction? If so, please describe.
5. Further describing the June 2019 meeting between President Trump and President Xi, Bolton reportedly also says “I would print Trump’s exact words but the government’s prepublication review process has decided otherwise,” implying that the exact conversation was deemed classified. If you believe any relevant information related to Bolton’s allegations is classified, please contact my office to arrange an appropriate discussion of that information.
6. Are you aware of any meetings or calls between President Trump and President Xi at or in preparation for the June 2019 G20 summit that you did not attend? If so, please describe.
7. At any time do you recall President Trump expressing to a foreign official the importance of Chinese purchases of soybeans, wheat, or other agricultural products to Trump’s electoral interests? If so, please describe.
8. At any time do you recall President Trump directing you to prioritize Chinese purchases of soybeans, wheat, or other agricultural products? Did he ever discuss with you how such purchases could aid his electoral interests? If so, please describe.
9. Important details of the China trade agreement have yet to be released. In order to assure the public that the agreement did not prioritize agricultural products from electorally important states for the benefit of President Trump, please describe how each subcategory purchase obligations was determined.
10. How were the purchase obligations in subcategories 1 through 23 of the Phase I trade agreement determined? What relevance did the state of origin or electoral politics play in determining these purchase obligations?
11. Bolton also reportedly writes that Trump offered to reverse criminal charges against Huawei Technologies Co. if it would help secure a phase-one trade deal with China.¹⁴ Are you aware of President Trump making any such offer? Were the criminal charges against Huawei ever discussed in connection in a trade deal with China? If so, please describe.

¹⁴ Jordan Fabian, Nick Wadhams, “Bolton Book Says Trump Sought Xi’s 2020 Help, Roiling Race Anew,” Bloomberg, June 17, 2020; <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-06-17/bolton-says-in-book-trump-sought-xi-s-help-in-re-election-bid>.

12. Please describe any aspects of the Phase I trade deal that were either not recorded in writing or not publically disclosed, including, but not limited to, agreements regarding ZTE, Huawei, North Korea, Hong Kong, Uyghur detention and forced labor, private business interests, political rivals, or other topics, that influenced the scope and tenor of obligations in the Phase I trade deal.

I would appreciate a response to these questions no later than July 14, 2020. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
Ranking Member