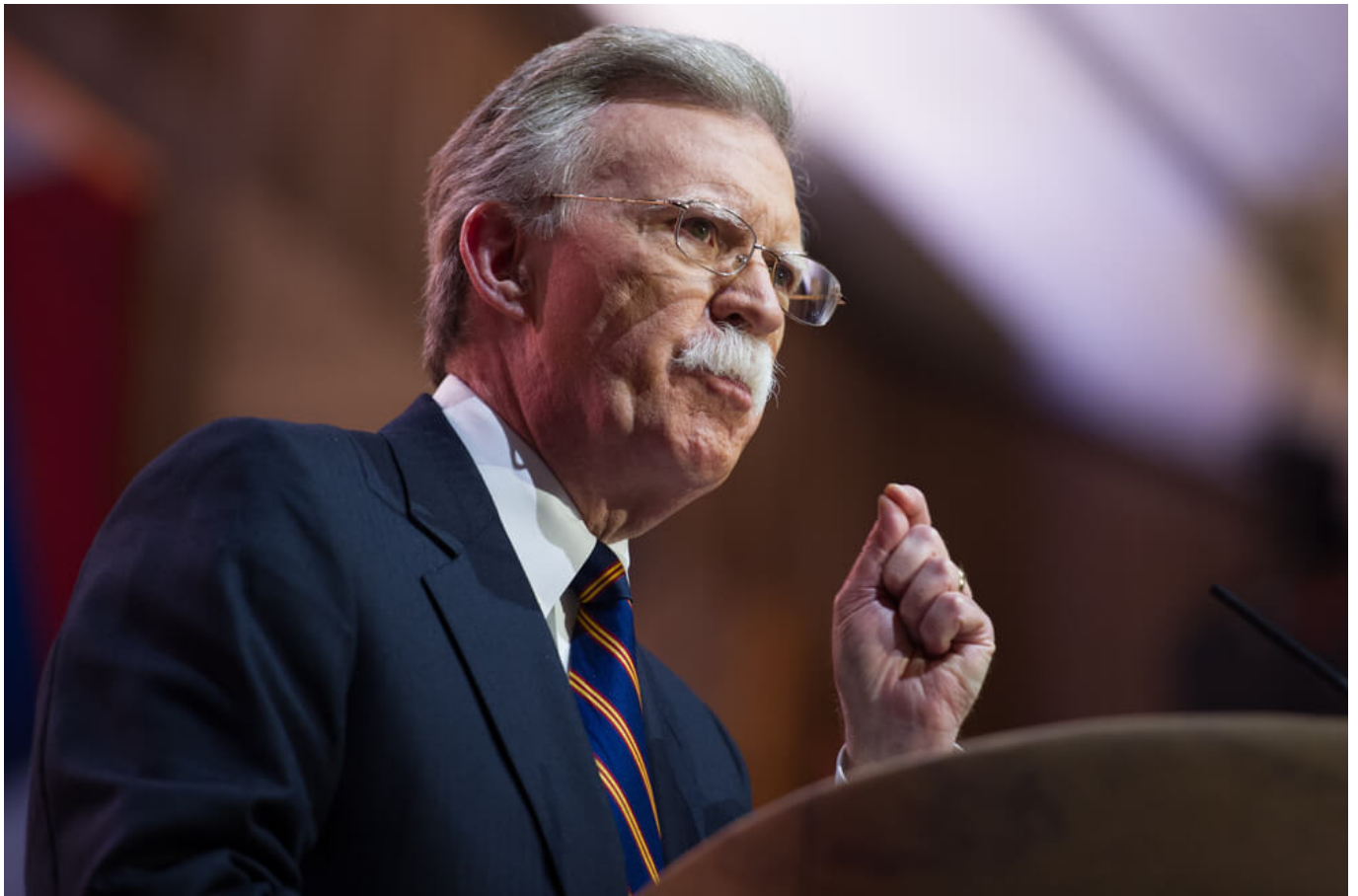




By: TA | AP Insight

The Bolton case - Is Trump weaponizing the justice system against his foes?



John Bolton pleaded not guilty Friday to charges accusing the former President Donald Trump national security adviser turned critic of emailing classified information to family members and keeping top secret documents at his Maryland home.

Bolton did not comment to reporters as he entered the courthouse in Greenbelt, Maryland, where he made his initial appearance before a judge on the 18-count **indictment** brought against him on Thursday.

It's third criminal **case** brought in recent weeks by the Justice Department against a Trump adversary, and is unfolding against the backdrop of growing concerns that the Republican president is using the law enforcement agency to seek retribution against his perceived enemies.

"Now, I have become the latest target in weaponizing the Justice Department to charge those he deems to be his enemies with charges that were declined before or distort the facts," Bolton said in a statement after a grand jury returned the indictment on Thursday.

Bolton is accused sharing with his wife and daughter more than 1,000 pages of notes that included sensitive national defense information he had gleaned from meetings with other U.S. government officials and foreign leaders or from intelligence briefings.

Authorities say some of the information was exposed when operatives believed to be linked to the Iranian government hacked Bolton's email account he used to send the diary-like notes about his activities to his relatives.

Bolton, 76, is a longtime fixture in Republican foreign policy circles who became known for his hawkish views on American power and who served for more than a year in Trump's first administration before being fired in 2019. He later published a book highly critical of Trump.

The indictment is significantly more detailed in its allegations than earlier cases against former FBI Director James Comey and New York Attorney General Letitia James

"There is one tier of justice for all Americans," Attorney General Pam Bondi said in a statement Thursday. "Anyone who abuses a position of power and jeopardizes our national security will be held accountable. No one is above the law."

The indictment is significantly more detailed in its allegations than earlier cases **against** former FBI Director James Comey and New York Attorney General Letitia James.

Unlike in those cases filed by a hastily appointed U.S. attorney, Bolton's indictment was signed by career national security prosecutors.

While the Bolton investigation burst into public view in August when the FBI **searched** his home in Maryland and his office in Washington, the inquiry was well underway by the time Trump had taken office in January.

Sharing of classified secrets

The indictment suggests Bolton was aware of the impropriety of sharing classified information with people not authorized to receive it, citing an April news media interview in which he chastised Trump administration officials for **using** Signal to discuss sensitive military details.

Though the anecdote is meant by prosecutors to show Bolton understood proper protocol for government secrets, Bolton's legal team may also point to it to argue a double standard in enforcement because the Justice Department is not known to have opened any investigation into the Signal **episode**.

Authorities say Bolton took meticulous notes

about his meetings and briefings as national security adviser and then used a personal email account and messaging platform to share information classified as high as top secret with his family members.



Bolton suggested the criminal case was an outgrowth of an unsuccessful Justice Department effort after he left government to block the publication of his 2020 book "The Room Where It Happened"

After sending one document, Bolton wrote in a message to his relatives, "None of which we talk about!!!" In response, one of his relatives wrote, "Shhhhh," prosecutors said.

The two family members were not identified in court papers, but a person familiar with the case, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss nonpublic details, identified them as Bolton's wife and daughter.

A Bolton representative told the FBI in July 2021 that his email account had been hacked by operatives believed to be linked to the Iranian government but did not reveal he had shared classified information through the account or that the hackers now had possession of government secrets, according to the indictment.

The indictment also accuses Bolton of storing at his home top secret intelligence about a foreign adversary's plans to attack U.S. forces overseas, covert action taken by the U.S. government or other information authorities say could put the country's national security at risk.

Bolton's attorney, Abbe Lowell, said in a statement that the "underlying facts in this

case were investigated and resolved years ago."

He said the charges stem from portions of Bolton's personal diaries over his 45-year career in government and included unclassified information that was shared only with his immediate family and was known to the FBI as far back as 2021.

"Like many public officials throughout history," Lowell said, "Bolton kept diaries — that is not a crime." He said Bolton "did not unlawfully share or store any information."

Controversy over a book

Bolton suggested the criminal case was an outgrowth of an unsuccessful Justice Department effort after he left government to block the publication of his 2020 **book** "The Room Where It Happened," which portrayed Trump as grossly misinformed about foreign policy.

The Trump administration asserted that Bolton's manuscript contained classified information that could harm national security if exposed.

Bolton's lawyers have said he moved forward with the book after a White House National Security Council official, with whom Bolton had worked for months, said the manuscript no longer had classified information.