

**Ambassador Julianne Smith  
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**Moderator:** I always love introducing people who need no introductions. Most of you have known and worked with Ambassador Smith for years. She's currently, of course, the U.S. Perm Rep to NATO but she has vast experience -- White House, Pentagon, elsewhere. I consider her basically this nation's premier expert on Transatlantic relations.

As always, this is on the record. As I said, we'll have one question from those who are asking. Let's please not do follow-ups just so more people can get to questions in the half hour available to us. I'll ask the opening question and then I'll go to our list.

Ambassador Smith, we are truly honored to have you today. Thank you so much.

I'd like for you to say a few words, if you would, about the upcoming NATO Summit in Madrid. Clearly the Alliance will unveil its new Strategic Concept. That's the blueprint for the Alliance going ahead. But there's lots of big questions, how the Alliance will address Russia's war in Ukraine, the significance of Finland and Sweden membership applications. So what are the administration's goals heading into this important Alliance Summit?

**Ambassador Smith:** First of all, thank you for the invitation. It's great to see some familiar faces and meet some new folks around the table.

I guess there's two parts to the story. There's what we thought the Madrid Summit would look like before February 24<sup>th</sup> and what in fact we think it's going to look like and what our goals are at this juncture, a couple of months into the war in Ukraine.

First and foremost, obviously we knew that the Summit, essentially the crown jewel of the Madrid Summit was going to be the Strategic Concept. And we knew that the Strategic Concept needed significant updating. Even before February 24<sup>th</sup> there was

a deep appreciation across the Alliance that the language on Russia from 2010 was sorely outdated and needed a significant upgrade and needed to reflect the current environment.

There was also an appreciation that China, for the first time, needed to be part of the Strategic Concept. It was not mentioned in 2010. You've watched the Alliance in recent years say more about China in its communiqués, in statements coming out of ministerials. You've heard the Secretary General talk about China. So that was going to be a key feature.

The lastly, a lot on new threats and challenges. A heavier emphasis on things like emerging and disruptive technologies, heavier emphasis on new domains like cyber and space, more on climate change. So that was the plan.

Obviously now we still have the crown jewel that is the Strategic Concept and work is going on each and every day back in Brussels, in NATO HQ as we go through various revs of the Strategic Concept and try to get the language just right. But there are new pieces.

First and foremost, there's the force posture piece to what's going to be happening in Madrid in late June and that is above and beyond the force posture that NATO has already moved into Eastern Europe. What over the medium and long term should the Alliance be looking to do in that neighborhood to reinforce NATO's Eastern Flank. You know what the United States did, moved close to 20,000 troops into that region. Many other, almost every other nation has moved posture into Eastern Europe as well. It's been a remarkable moment of solidarity, but there are medium and longer term questions about what else is needed and that hinges to a significant degree on what happens in Ukraine and Belarus over the medium and long term. So that work is underway.

Then of course the third element is this question of Finland and Sweden, where they walked through NATO's open door which was wide open and has stayed open. We've signaled that very clearly to Russia in recent months. Walked in and submitted their letter to formally request membership. And the hope is, we do not know with any certainty, but the hope is that those two countries will join us in Madrid as invitees. We'll have to see how the coming weeks unfold and we can talk more about that in a minute if you'd like. But the hope is that they will join us again in Madrid.

So there's a lot going on in the Summit.

Lastly I'll say we're interested in expanding NATO's relationship with partners outside the region, so four Asian Pacific partners will join us at the Summit. Those countries are Australia, New Zealand, Japan and South Korea. For the first time ever, the four Foreign Ministers of those countries joined a foreign ministerial this spring. That was a turning point for the Alliance as well. Broadening the conversation about our shared security; talking to them about things like emerging and disruptive technologies and cyber.

So it is going to be a busy Summit. It's going to be a pivotal moment for the Alliance. Folks are looking forward to it. I was just in Madrid on Monday celebrating Spain's 40<sup>th</sup> year of NATO membership and planning out the Madrid Summit, so it's an exciting time, but it's a busy time.

**Moderator:** Thank you so much.

The first question from the floor is Tony Bertuca of Inside Defense.

**DWG:** Thank you, ma'am, for being with us.

I wanted to talk about weapon transfers. We know now the HIMARS system is being sent over from the U.S. What type of discussion do you have when it comes to trying to get other NATO nations to transfer weapons to Ukraine? And what type of discussions do you have when it comes to maybe the United States trying to sell more upgraded versions of those weapons to NATO nations after they've donated? Can you talk a little bit about sort of the dynamics?

**Ambassador Smith:** First I would say, I would want to make crystal clear because I think sometimes this is not always articulated in a clear way, that NATO itself is not providing weapon systems to Ukraine. Individual NATO allies, I would say I think it's all but two, three, four allies in the NATO Alliance. Obviously Iceland does not have a military, they will not be providing military assistance to Ukraine, but I would say the large majority of NATO allies are providing security assistance. Every ally is providing either humanitarian, financial, economic assistance.

But at NATO through Defense Ministerials when Secretary Austin comes to town, obviously they talk about Ukraine. On certain

occasions they've been joined by the Ukrainian Defense Minister who then delivers to NATO a list of requirements given the current snapshot. So it's an ongoing conversation that NATO allies have collectively and individually with their Ukraine counterparts.

In terms of looking out over the horizon and making determinations about how we can meet Ukrainian needs, that is an effort that I really leave to my DoD counterparts. I know that Secretary Austin is frequently and almost on a daily basis in constant contact with countries, over 40 countries around the world, as they assess what they have on offer, what they believe they can donate. Some of them have transportation issues. We can sometimes connect them with a country that's willing to transport security assistance to one of the hubs to get that in Ukraine. But that is largely handled in bilateral and minilateral conversations among allies.

So there is not a concentrated NATO effort to be assessing and determining what NATO should be giving, because NATO is in fact not providing legal assistance.

So again, sometimes I see, particularly on the other side of the Atlantic, sometimes reporting that indicates that there's, you know, people making comments all the time about NATO's role in this conflict. NATO, again, is not providing that kind of assistance.

The USEUCOM is involved in this. You've seen the first meeting in Ramstein of the contact group where Secretary Austin -- the U.S. convened that meeting with 40 countries to sit at the table, share what they're hearing, what they're providing, and make a determination on what to do next.

So those are kind of the multiple strands of effort. But to be sure these are things we talk about just broadly at NATO Ministerials.

**Moderator:** Julian Barnes, New York Times.

**DWG:** I'd love your assessment of how the war is going. There were reports yesterday from European intelligence officials that they think that Ukraine can't win. There have been some losses in the Donbas. How from the Brussels perspective, how is this war going? Can Ukraine still win? And what is the situation in the Donbas?

**Ambassador Smith:** I'm not the top military analyst. Probably those questions are best left to my colleagues over at DoD.

What I can say is from a NATO perspective, I can say with certainty that over the last few months the NATO allies have certainly been impressed by the performance of the Ukrainian forces. I think many of us were surprised by their ability to push back on Russian aggression, their determination, their fighting spirit, the way in which they were handling certain assets and capabilities. So the level of respect that you see across the Alliance for Ukrainian forces right now is quite high.

Similarly, I think there has been some surprise across the Alliance in watching the Russian performance. That Russia is a country that is clearly having some major challenges on the ground. Putin was incapable and unable to move into Kyiv and take it in just a few days. Russia's had to reassess, put its focus almost exclusively in the East.

But in terms of the day to day, I think we've been impressed by the Ukrainian progress. It's not linear in all cases. We see moments where Russian forces advance. We see moments where Ukrainian forces are successfully able to push back.

I guess I can't provide you with kind of the current snapshot that you're seeking at this moment, only to say that collectively at NATO I think we do hope and believe that Ukraine will ultimately prevail and that the allies remain united in their determination to continue providing security assistance to Ukraine. I don't see anyone moving away from that mission.

**Moderator:** Michael Gordon, Wall Street Journal.

**DWG:** I'd like to ask you about the Strategic Concept. It seems like there are two ways to go in the Strategic Concept. One can emphasize the deterrence mission, bulking up in the East against Russia's threat to NATO; and there's also the concerns you flagged earlier about the pacing threat of China and steering the Alliance more in that direction and perhaps having European countries pick up 50 percent of the combat task but the U.S. can do more in Asia.

What is the state of the discussion within the Alliance on this? Is there any agreement on which one to emphasize? And how do you see this being balanced? The near term concerns over the

Russian threat and the longer term China thing. Can they be reconciled? And how?

**Ambassador Smith:** I think there is agreement, I mean the Strategic Concept isn't finalized, but I think we are largely in agreement that Russia is the preeminent challenge, the primary threat that the NATO Alliance is facing in this moment, and because of that you'll see a heavy emphasis on Russia right out of the gates at the top. For NATO, that is priority number one and will remain so for the foreseeable future. So you're going to see a heavy emphasis on things like deterrence and defense and the steps the Alliance is willing to undertake to fortify.

And to be clear, NATO was already in the middle of a transition, working on enhancing deterrence and defense even before Russia took the decision to go into Ukraine. So this was going to be the focus irrespective of Russia's actions.

Now it will get more of a spotlight and be featured more prominently in the Strategic Concept because of its actions.

Now let me pause for a minute and say there is also an appreciation across NATO that this document is not intended to last for a week. This document, because that's how NATO operates, is in essence supposed to last for ten years. Now that's an impossible task because we don't know where we're going to be in ten years with some of these challenges, so as is the case with every Strategic Concept, you do your very best to represent the moment the Alliance finds itself in and try to outline the challenges for the next decade. So we'll have to see how we get that right.

What sometimes happens at Summits, and we'll have to see if this happens as well, NATO could opt to issue either a communique or a political declaration on the side that would better capture the exact moment that the Alliance finds itself in. So more detail on Russia and that specific challenge as it relates to Ukraine in a document that would sit outside the Strategic Concept. But that's a debate that we're fleshing out right now.

But yes, the Strategic Concept, you'll see Russia appear as the primary threat to the Alliance.

Now on China, China will also appear in this document and that's in part because 2019, NATO conducted its first China review and then in the communique last summer at the 2021 Summit you saw strong language on China, how China is a threat to the rules-

based order, and I think now moving from the language from last summer to present day what we have to do now is capture something that was not captured in my mind quite adequately last summer, because we were in a different environment, and that's the China-Russia alignment.

Given what they're saying, given joint exercises, given the no-limits partnership, given what they have said in support of each other in this moment in Ukraine, I think there's a determination across the alliance right now to try and capture that strategic alignment somehow in the Strategic Concept.

So you'll see reference to China. You'll see reference to China-Russia I'm guessing. Again, it's not final so these are my predictions here. But I think Russia will remain kind of the feature of the Strategic Concept at the top, if I had to describe it that way. But we'll see. We can bet on whether or not it turns out that way. That's my prediction.

**Moderator:** Jim Garamone, DoD News.

**DWG:** If I could sort of delve in on that. You mentioned the Asia Pacific allies showing up. How will they [work]? You ultimately see like NATO forming, they had the NATO-Russia Council. Do you see sort of a NATO Indo-Pacific Council of some kind in the future? Where do you see that sort of thing going?

**Ambassador Smith:** No, there's nothing on the table along those lines. I think where we've benefited from the conversation with those countries is to have those countries come in sometimes at lower levels, whether it's at a NAC or at a Foreign Ministerial and now at the Summit, to have a conversation about what we're both seeing. It's been interesting for me to watch say countries in the Asia Pacific talk about hybrid threats on their side of the Pacific. How are they grappling with disinformation, cyber attacks, the aggressive tactics that they're seeing, active intimidation from China. Then you pair that with an Estonian or a Lithuanian and they talk about some of the challenges that they're seeing from Russia.

And what we've talked about is the learning that's going on, how China will parrot the disinformation coming out of Russia, they'll look very carefully at how they use these hybrid tactics. So it's really, for us it's about a shared experience, it's about sharing lessons learned, sharing new policies that we're developing. We've had a number of conversations about emerging and disruptive technologies, how are we grappling with

that? The Koreans have an interesting experience that they can share. The Czechs may have a different set of experiences.

So for us it's about our shared commitment to our shared values and protection of the rules-based order and coping with two countries, China and Russia, that increasingly find themselves relying on a similar set of hybrid tactics.

So I don't think you're going to see necessarily any formal initiatives announced now. But again, there is a sense in the alliance that sharing with these Asia Pacific countries, shared experiences, having them at the table benefits all of us. That's I think as far as it goes right now. But this is not about having them there every week. These are periodic engagements that I think collectively we both find useful.

**Moderator:** Next is Dmitry Kirsanov of TASS.

**DWG:** Good morning, Madame Ambassador. Thank you so much for doing this.

It raises the follow-up on NATO and military assistance. We all know that NATO itself is not involved as an institution. Is it going to change? And the NATO-Russia Founding Act, what's going to happen to it? What's the U.S. position on that? [Inaudible] has already proclaimed it's ultimately dead. So please share your view.

**Ambassador Smith:** I guess I'll say on the first question about will NATO be providing any sort of security assistance? I don't see that changing. I think the current policy is widely accepted and supported by NATO allies and countries reserve their own sovereign right to determine what kind of assistance they want to provide to the Ukrainians, and they're quite comfortable with that.

We will continue to have discussions about Ukraine at NATO. We have moments where the U.S. as you well know, comes in and has shared intelligence since December or November of last year. So Ukraine is a part of the debate, but that does not translate into the delivery of weapons from NATO to Ukraine. There has been some non-lethal support from NATO to Ukraine.

On the NATO-Russia Founding Act, I think the position is that you've heard principals talk about this, whether it's Secretary Blinken, or Jake Sullivan or others, Russia is in violation of the NATO-Russia Founding Act, and I think as you've heard the



President comment, NATO allies collectively do not believe that the NATO-Russia Founding Act now constrains decisions that we're taking as it relates to force posture in Central and Eastern Europe. I think that's about all I have to say on the NATO-Russia Founding Act.

**Moderator:** Meghann Myers of Military Times.

**DWG:** What are you hearing from allies in terms of U.S. military posture going forward in Europe? Whether that's rotations, basing, exercises? What are they asking for now that the calculus has changed so much?

**Ambassador Smith:** I think the first thing that we heard in December/January from a number of countries on the Eastern Flank, they had concerns about deterrence and they came into the Alliance and made it clear that they were immediately seeking additional forces, whether it's air, land, sea from NATO allies. Those requests were met with action in swift, in really short order. It was remarkable to see how quickly the Alliance even before February 24<sup>th</sup>, they were able to respond to those requests.

And I think in part, we were able to respond because of the work that the Alliance had done collectively and individually in the wake of the attempted annexation of Crimea in 2014. The U.S. had more prepositioned equipment in Europe after 2014 and that enabled that quick movement of forces -- the 82<sup>nd</sup> going into Poland with such great speed, and showing up in a timely manner.

After February 24<sup>th</sup> we had more conversations with our friends in Central and Eastern Europe. You know that the decision was eventually taken to double the number of battle groups -- we went from four to eight. The allies were thrilled to see that and they were also thrilled to see how quickly allies came forward to fill out those battle groups and make sure that we could quickly ensure that we had battalion-level presence in all eight countries and we're still moving out on that.

But yes, you're right, and as I noted at the top, there's a bigger conversation about what this means over the medium and long term.

These are ongoing debates. There's probably not much I can share on that above and beyond what you've heard from some of the allies themselves. Obviously these countries have legitimate security concerns, particularly if Russia decides to

keep, you know, before February 24<sup>th</sup> Russia had 30,000 troops in Belarus. We'll have to see how Ukraine proceeds, what Russia leaves either in Ukraine or in Belarus. We don't know. We hope Russia will stop the war, leave Ukraine, not keep any weapons or troops in Belarus. But there are open-ended questions for these allies about their security, depending on how things progress inside Ukraine.

So we will continue to debate that. That is literally what's going on right now inside the Alliance. How do we continue to address their security needs? And what is needed above and beyond what's already been committed?

**Moderator:** End of the table, Nick.

**DWG:** Can I go back to Julian's question and ask about political goals, even though it's about the military reality on the ground.

When I was talking to [inaudible] people there just a couple of weeks ago they had admitted, frankly, that they did not think the military could evict Russian troops from the territories like Kherson, [Inaudible], toward Mariupol that they've already occupied. So without asking you to delve into the military aspects, the implication of that is that this is a long-term [inaudible]. I think everyone's [inaudible] with that.

Given that, why not embrace a more holistical [response], like the Ukrainians have. Zelensky says he is not going to give up any land. The HIMARS are not going to [inaudible]. When the U.S. thinks about the political victory or political version of the long term impact of this war, how do you see creating conditions on the ground that can actually change the diplomatic talks that happen whenever they may happen without sending things like the longest range fires that HIMARS provides? Without even more advanced weapons that so far this administration is ruling out?

**Ambassador Smith:** I guess a couple of things on that. First and foremost, I think we need to be clear that from the U.S. perspective our position is that Ukraine needs to make those determinations. We do not feel like we're in a position where we can dictate the terms of any negotiation or any final outcome. We will take our lead from the Ukrainians on that. I think NATO allies generally believe the same thing, that Ukraine, Zelensky himself will have to make that determination.

In terms of the evolving nature of the assistance, I mean all of us, NATO allies, the NATO Secretary General, the U.S. Secretary of Defense, are in constant contact with the Ukrainians. They are constantly obviously reassessing what their requirements are based on events on the ground, based on changes to the Russian approach, and we've seen an evolution in terms of what's been provided. We saw a heavy emphasis on air defense ammunition, we've had conversations about coastal defense, we've talked about armored vehicles and have sent those, and we are at the point now where you saw in the President's piece in the New York Times yesterday, is looking at advanced rocket systems. That is the, I think it reflects the evolution of the war, of the situation on the ground, of the Ukrainians' own internal debates about what is needed in this moment. And I don't find it I guess particularly surprising that we've seen at different moments the U.S. and individual NATO allies put a different emphasis on different sets of capabilities.

So we'll have to see how this continues to evolve, but I think throughout those debates, throughout the deliberations with the Ukrainians, we've seen a couple of consistent things ring true throughout those debates. One, NATO allies are united that NATO will not become a party to this conflict. Two, the U.S. President has not changed his position that we will not be sending American forces into Ukraine. Three, as the President stated in his OpEd, he's also determined to message to the Ukrainians that we are not in a position to support you with equipment that can attack Russian territory.

So I think while the pieces of equipment have, that's all evolved and changed over the last couple of months I think quite naturally, I think the parameters have remained relatively clear and I don't expect those to change.

**Moderator:** [Inaudible].

**DWG:** Thank you so much for doing this.

On the food crisis, we saw the Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba yesterday talk about foreign or allied navies escorting ships through the Black Sea. I was wondering if you could point to any sort of concrete progress that has been made over the course of the past few days in terms of figuring out how to get grain and other food products out of Ukraine. Whether you can envisage a time in which NATO navies would help escort any ships carrying grain and other things. And then if you wouldn't mind, just speaking to the role that the Turks have played and the

conversations they're having, whether they're helping with the Russians and what those conversations with the Russians actually look like.

**Ambassador Smith:** On food security, this obviously comes up. It's a concern for all NATO allies. I don't foresee any NATO role as of today. I think we are also interested to watch the European Union, the United Nations, Samantha Power, Tony Blinken, there are many different actors engaged in that. It's obviously a top priority for all of us and we don't want to see this continued Russian blockade. We're disheartened by the fact that we have grain and corn and sunflower oil essentially sitting in ports unable to get out. So that remains a key feature of our Transatlantic conversations, but I would say less so in NATO channels. It resides elsewhere. We're having bilateral and other multilateral conversations through U.S.-EU and through the UN that's focused on that. So I guess no breaking news on that front right now from a NATO perspective.

On Turkey, look, before February 24<sup>th</sup> we had so many different efforts that were being taken simultaneously to try and pursue some sort of negotiated settlement with Russia. We had the NATO-Russia Council, four long hours on January 12<sup>th</sup>. We had the OSCE engage the Russians. We had the U.S. bilateral efforts in Geneva. We had several heads of state in Europe traveling to Kyiv and Moscow on a regular basis. All of that continues to bubble to the surface. I mean NATO will not be holding any more NATO-Russia Council meetings obviously, but you do see individual leaders, whether it's Erdogan or Macron, picking up the phone to engage Moscow. I think we're at a point where we're open to seeing countries engage with Moscow, but what we're disheartened to see is that there's no indication that Russia is taking any of this seriously or negotiating in good faith.

Obviously we supported the Ukrainians in those first few weeks of the war when they sat down at a table with Russian counterparts. We all hoped there would be some breakthrough. Russia continued to come in with maximalist positions, didn't seem to indicate at all that it was taking those negotiations seriously. And we really had some question about the degree to which the folks at the table were actually connected to the folks at the top back in Moscow.

So because of that, I think we've been disheartened by the efforts to date. But certainly, when Erdogan made an offer to convene the parties, that was seen at the time as constructive.

But given Russian behavior in these negotiations I think we're skeptical that at this juncture it's going to lead to some sort of major breakthrough. But our goal is obviously, and again you can see the President's comment on this in his OpEd in the New York Times last night that was published, that we hope that there will be some sort of diplomatic breakthrough here and that there will be an off-ramp that Putin will take one way or another.

**Moderator:** I know there's lots of questions, but the tyranny of schedules will allow just one more. Abraham, the last one's yours.

**DWG:** Thank you, Madame Ambassador.

Our readers are very interested in the air domain, obviously since day one. If this conflict is expected to prolong, have there been conversations with the U.S. and in the Alliance with transfer of training of American fighter aircraft like F-16s?

**Ambassador Smith:** No. I don't have anything to say. That's an easy one to answer. No. And you can again go to my DoD colleagues, but we don't have anything to say on that.

**DWG:** Can I reserve my time and -- [Laughter].

**DWG:** Just from your seat in Brussels, there's been reporting and comments in Europe in the past few days kind of suggesting cracks or a fissure that some European leaders are calling for a ceasefire. Obviously Biden took a more middle of the road position perhaps. What is your assessment of that? Is that real? And what can you do in NATO to keep people together?

**Ambassador Smith:** Well, it's funny. I think there have been many attempts to issue last rites on Transatlantic unity in the last couple of months, but I can say and those of you that are real NATO nerds like myself, know full well that when you've got 30 countries around the table of course there are lively debates each and every day, and do we even have 30 here? If we had to, my traditional line that I've probably said too many, but if we had to pick a restaurant right now it would be a challenge, all of us at this table.

So yes, of course there are debates, there are differences, we all have different perspectives, we have different histories, we sit in different places, we have different relationships with the countries in the region and with the Ukrainians, you name

it. But what's really struck me in recent months is despite all of that, our ability to still stay united and to showcase resolve despite the fact that we're a couple of months into this, and when it counts, the allies really come together.

I'll just say lastly, at the NATO-Russia Council on January 12<sup>th</sup>, I mean it was pretty remarkable to see Grushko at the table over those four hours and trying very hard to pick off individual allies, and he did that in a pretty interesting and skillful way with some personal jabs and revisionist history on countries' relationship with Russia. And in that moment when it was so critical that we stand united and send one message to our Russian counterparts, the allies did it. There wasn't one ounce of daylight between the 30 allies in that meeting. And Wendy Sherman ended the meeting with this quote I think you saw floating around, that we came together today as thirty but we spoke as one. And we stand here with a singular position.

That's what happens in NATO. In the NAC on a day to day basis, we have several NACs every week. Of course we debate and disagree. That's what NATO's all about.

But when it counts, in the moment when we have to take a decision or send a signal to Moscow or work with the Ukrainians, I feel like each and every day I can see and see the benefits of the unity that we're able to project right now.

So I'm not concerned about this. As an old Transatlantic hand we've seen these disagreements for many, many decades. We've all had moments where we've seen slightly, you know, the same situation through slightly different lenses.

But I think it would be premature to write any story about disunity at this juncture. I see it every single day and am pretty impressed and proud of NATO's ability to stand together right now.

**Moderator:** Madame Ambassador, thank you for a thought-provoking discussion, and I hope that by respecting the short schedule we can get you back to join us again in the future.

**Ambassador Smith:** Of course.

**DWG:** For a longer time.

**Moderator:** Sorry. You can blame Secretary Blinken.

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