0:00:00.0 Celeste Watkins-Hayes: And I am delighted to welcome all of you here this afternoon to the Ford School's annual Vandenberg Lecture, which this year features US Permanent Resident to NATO Ambassador Julianne Smith.

[applause]

0:00:20.5 CW: I am so happy to see many of you from our campus community here in Weill Hall and I know that there are many more tuning in from elsewhere with special thanks to our media partners at Detroit Public Television. We are so proud to host this distinguished lecture series named for the great Arthur Vandenberg, who served the state of Michigan in the United States Senate from 1928 to 1951. Born and raised in Grand Rapids, Senator Vandenberg led the Republican Party from a position of staunch isolationism prior to American involvement in World War II to a broad embrace of internationalism.

0:00:58.2 CW: As chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Vandenberg worked to forge bipartisan support for our country's most significant and enduring international policies, including the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, NATO, and the creation of the United Nations. The Vandenberg Fund was established at the Ford School by a generous gift from the Meyer Foundation. The fund enables the school to host important leaders and experts in international relations, US foreign policy, diplomacy, trade, and more. Past speakers in this series have included Samantha Power, Penny Pritzker, Anthony Blinken, and William Burns. Hank Meyer is here with us in the audience today and we are so grateful to Hank and the Meyer family for their generous support for this ongoing series, for making these opportunities for students possible, and a personal thank you for our partnership this year as interim dean. Thank you, Hank.

[applause]

0:02:05.9 CW: Today's guest of honor is Ambassador Julianne Smith, who assumed her position as the US Permanent Representative to NATO in November 2021. Prior to her current position, she served as senior advisor to Anthony Blinken at the Department of State and previously as the director of Asia and geopolitics programs at the German Marshall Fund of the United States. Ambassador Smith is a proud Michigan native from Farmington Hills, in fact, and a steadfast supporter of transatlantic leadership. In addition to her government service, she's held a variety of positions at research institutions, including the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the German Marshall Fund, and the American Academy in Berlin. She's written extensively on transatlantic relations and European security. Ambassador Smith will kick things off today with remarks on her work with NATO, confronting the crisis in Ukraine and adapting to meet global challenges. Following, she'll be joined in conversation by my colleague John Ciorciari, associate dean at the Ford School and director of the Weiser Diplomacy Center, to reflect on topics and foreign policy that I know are top of mind for many of us here. So with that, please join me in welcoming Ambassador Julianne Smith.

[applause]

0:03:31.6 Julianne Smith: Well, thank you very much, Dean Watkins-Hayes, for that lovely introduction. Thanks to you and the Ford School for welcoming me here today to deliver the 2023 Vandenberg Lecture. Let me also thank Katee Cole for her work on this event today, and I want to thank my friend Steve Began for sending the original invitation to get me back to my home state of Michigan. And I also want to recognize the mayor of Ann Arbor. I believe that Christopher Taylor has joined us as well, so a warm welcome to you. Before I start, I have to say just how meaningful it is for me personally to deliver the Arthur Vandenberg Lecture. And I say that because really his legacy is tied so much to what I do today inside the NATO Alliance. As chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senator Vandenberg worked with President Truman on the Marshall Plan on NATO.

0:04:31.0 JS: He was present at the creation for so many signature foreign policy achievements here in the United States. He worked tirelessly and closely with President Truman, and what I love about his life's work is he not only believed in bipartisanship, but he lived it each and every day. And that's why it's such an honor to be delivering this particular lecture in his name. So NATO, as some of you might know, is about to turn 75 years old. It will celebrate its 75th birthday next summer. We're gonna have a big summit in Washington, DC to mark the occasion. It was founded in 1949 with the chief purpose of collective defense, which is enshrined in the original founding treaty in Article V inside that very short treaty. And Article V, as you all know, is a pretty simple clause. It's an attack on one, is an attack on all. And NATO throughout its 75 years has had many different milestones, many achievements. It's added many new members. It started with only 12 countries, and it's about to go to 32 in the next few weeks and months with a little luck, but I'm confident we're gonna get there.

0:05:45.7 JS: And then, of course, the only time the Alliance actually invoked the Article V clause was in reaction to the September 11th attacks here in the United States. But despite various milestones and developments across the NATO Alliance over many, many decades, I really truly believe we're gonna look back on 2022 and 2023 as a pivotal moment in the Alliance's history. And I wanna talk to a little bit about today why I believe that is the case. So I was confirmed, as the dean mentioned, in November of 2021. And you'll remember at the time that the Biden administration had acquired enough intelligence in the fall of 2021 to make the determination, not with 100% guarantee, but with what the intelligence community calls high confidence that Russia was about to invade Ukraine. Of course, Russia had already gone into Ukraine in 2014. It had its attempted illegal annexation of Crimea, which many of you remember. And since then, Putin has talked a lot about the fact that Russians and Ukrainians are one.

0:07:01.8 JS: He's talked about his desire to pull Ukraine back into Russia. He's talked about his concerns over many years that Ukraine was tilting too far to the west, that Ukraine was looking at a future that was tied to the European Union and to NATO. And he also put forward another excuse for his invasion of Ukraine, and that was that he was personally concerned that Russia needed to go to denazify Ukraine, which of course was preposterous, but was one of the other excuses that he put on the table for his invasion. So recognizing the value of putting NATO's collective weight behind an effort to call out Putin for his planned invasion of Ukraine and try to expose those plans and rally the free world around an effort to stop that from happening, President Biden took a very interesting and historic decision, and that was to share an unprecedented amount of US intelligence with our closest allies.

0:08:12.2 JS: And so when I arrived in the fall of 2021, I had two simple missions. One was to keep sharing as much intelligence as possible with our allies so that we were all sharing this common sight picture and understood what Russia was about to do. And two, to prepare for all contingencies, try to undertake diplomatic efforts to stop the war if we could, or deter Putin from going into Ukraine, but also prepare for the worst case scenario. And I had a couple of challenges with that plan. One of the challenges I had is the allies didn't believe us, and that includes our allies in Eastern Europe. Most of the allies in the NATO alliance saw that Putin was assembling tens of thousands, at a certain point, hundreds of thousands of Russian troops on and around Ukraine's border, but they thought it was bluster. They thought it was posturing that again, Putin was trying to apply pressure on Ukraine.

0:09:15.0 JS: He was trying to extract something from the West, putting pressure on Europe, but that ultimately Putin wouldn't go into Ukraine, which made the second part of my job very difficult because it's hard to prepare for all contingencies when your allies don't believe that some of those contingencies are going to happen. So nonetheless, I set out working with my colleagues to try and make the case to work on continuing sharing the intelligence and pressure the alliance and push the alliance to prepare for every possible contingency. But that plan had a second challenge, and that was that the alliance had spent the better part of the last 20 years focused on expeditionary operations in faraway places. NATO, over the last 20 years since September 11th, was focused on Iraq.

0:10:08.2 JS: It was focused on Afghanistan. It was focused on counter-piracy missions off the coast of Africa. NATO as an alliance hadn't really focused on the possibility of a land war in Europe from Russia for many, many decades. But again, we had to set to work. We had to work as an alliance, try to reach some common sense and common shared picture of what Russia could do, and again, prepare for all contingencies. So as we started to grapple with what those possible contingencies could look like, we were trying to answer several questions simultaneously. One, what can the alliance do? What should the alliance do to deter Russia from going into Ukraine? Two, what will NATO do if Russia actually invades Ukraine? Ukraine is not a member of the alliance.

0:11:00.7 JS: It doesn't have Article 5 clause, and it doesn't have the security guarantees that would trigger action on the part of the alliance. But Ukraine was and is a strong partner of NATO, and so it raised questions again about what obligations the alliance had to come to Ukraine's aid. And three, the question we were grappling with in NATO is how will Ukraine respond to this if and when Russian tanks roll across the border? Do the Ukrainians have the capabilities they need? Should we be sending capabilities to the Ukrainians right now, and how do we get them ready? While we were grappling with those questions inside the NATO alliance, there was a flurry of diplomatic activity.

0:11:41.6 JS: You'll remember high level USG officials were flying back and forth to Geneva meeting with Russian officials. We had Macron and other leaders flying to Kiev and Moscow trying to do what they could to halt Putin's plans to go into Ukraine. NATO met with the Russians on January 12th of last year. We welcomed them into the alliance for four long hours I'll never get back, and the NATO-Russia Council to try and persuade them that while the alliance was not going to shut off its open door policy on enlargement, we were willing to talk to the Russians about an array of other shared challenges like arms control. And slowly, bit by bit, through December of 2021, January and February of 2022, NATO got ready.

0:12:31.4 JS: So my phone rang at 3 AM. On the morning of February 24th. I was told to get dressed and report to NATO immediately for an emergency North Atlantic Council meeting because Russian tanks were crossing the border. And on that morning when NATO allies came around the big table and sat together very early that morning, we decided immediately to do three things. One, we were going to ensure that NATO would not be a party to the conflict, but that each and every nation inside the alliance would provide support to the people of Ukraine. We would support them with humanitarian, economic, and security assistance. That was the first line of effort. Two, NATO understood that it immediately needed to reinforce the eastern flank.

0:13:19.5 JS: The United States put 20,000 additional troops into Eastern Europe. The countries of Western Europe moved tens of thousands of troops into Eastern Europe as well so that we could send a strong deterrent signal to Moscow. And lastly, collectively, the transatlantic partners joined forces to apply unprecedented sanctions on Moscow so that they would feel isolated in the consequences of this unprovoked war. So that has been the focus of the NATO alliance for the last year. That is the focus for the NATO alliance today, as I stand here at the University of Michigan, and will be our focus, as you've heard President Biden say, for as long as it takes. Now, what I will say is that over the last year, we've encountered so many surprises about how Putin's decision to go into Ukraine has fundamentally shifted the landscape across Europe.

0:14:12.8 JS: And let me give you just a couple of quick examples. So one, we had two countries, two neutral countries, Sweden and Finland, that had never expressed interest in joining the alliance, knock on the door and decide that they wanted to become full-fledged members. Putin's actions did that. He got more nations coming into the alliance because of his war in Ukraine. We also had the European Union decide for the first time in its history to provide lethal support to Ukraine, something it had never done before. And so suddenly the European Union, which wasn't that deep on defense and security policy, radically shifting its approach because of the war in Ukraine. And then we had countries that had longstanding policies against providing lethal support to parties involved in a conflict, wash away those national policies.

0:15:08.8 JS: Countries like Norway, Germany, suddenly woke up and said, you know what, we're gonna provide lethal support to Ukraine. And lastly, we had other neutral countries like Switzerland decide to freeze Russian assets, something we hadn't seen them do in the past. So in a matter of a few months, the European security landscape had turned upside down in so many different ways. But no one faced more surprises in terms of how the last year has unfolded than President Putin. President Putin assumed a couple of things when he went into Ukraine. One, he assumed we in the United States and our friends in Europe were distracted and we would look away and we wouldn't care if he went into Ukraine. And that's not been the case. We've been standing with Ukraine since February 24th of last year and I don't see that changing.

0:15:57.1 JS: He also thought the money he had been pouring in to modernize the Russian military would create a strong, capable force and that hasn't transpired either. Turns out that the money he was pouring into the Russian military was going into someone's pocket and not into Russian capacity and capabilities and the Russian forces have faced severe logistical morale challenges, munitions challenges, supplies, you name it, and they've had enormous difficulty. And Putin also assumed that Ukraine was divided and weak and wouldn't be able to push back on Russian aggression. Of course, as we all know, they've had major success on the battlefield.

0:16:37.7 JS: So fundamentally, Putin is not achieving his strategic objectives on the ground, but sadly the war is continuing and I can't stand here today and predict exactly how this is all going to play out, but I am confident about one thing and that is that the NATO allies will stand united. We are resolved to support Ukraine for as long as it takes and that we will continue to find ways to support them with humanitarian, with economic and security assistance in the months ahead. And I say that because allies fundamentally understand what's at stake here. Ukraine is not just defending its own territory and its right to exist.

0:17:22.2 JS: Ukraine is defending the key tenets of the UN Charter about sovereignty and territorial integrity and Ukraine is fighting to ensure that our values that we're all here to protect can be preserved and that Putin doesn't carry this war any further and make it into something much, much larger. So just to conclude, because again, this lecture is named after Arthur Vandenberg, I do want to read you a quote from an address that he delivered in the Senate in 1945 because I think it's really relevant to some of the debates we're having here in Europe and here in the United States. He said in this address, and this is in 1945 as at the end of World War II, thinking about what the post-war period will look like.

0:18:11.6 JS: The next thing we need to do, Mr. President, is to appeal to our allies in the name of reason to frankly face the post-war alternatives which are available to them and to us as a means to preserve tomorrow's peace. There are two ways to do it. One way is by exclusive individual action in which each of us tries to look out for himself. The other way is by joint action in which we undertake to look out for each other. The first way is the old way, which has twice taken us to Europe's interminable battlefields within a quarter century. The second way is the new way in which our present fraternity of war becomes a new fraternity of peace. I do not believe that either we or our allies can have it both ways. I think we must make our choice. I think we must make it wholly plain to our major allies that they too must make their choice. So thankfully, the United States and our closest allies did make the choice. They made the right choice. They made the choice to create the NATO alliance, which continues to this day at its 75 years ripe old. [chuckle]

0:19:28.0 JS: Of its 75 years of working together under a common purpose, continues to put the strength of consensus behind collective action to preserve peace and stability. I look forward to your questions. Thank you very much.

[applause]

[pause]

0:20:11.0 Speaker 3: Thanks. Good. Well, thank you very much for your remarks, Ambassador Smith. I'm pleased to be able to share a number of questions that are drawn from you, the audience members... Quite a number of you submitted questions in advance, and I'm gonna try to weave in some themes that the audience members are keen to ask about, and the very first topic, as you will not be surprised to hear is about NATO's role in the war in Ukraine. A number of members of the audience are curious, what success looks like for NATO in the United States in the months and years ahead, with variants of that question touching on how to get Putin to engage in serious negotiations, what are the key near-term steps for NATO to take to bring about a favorable resolution to this conflict.

0:21:03.1 JS: Thank you for that. So a couple of different comments on that. First, just to clarify and make sure, because I think Putin tries to put out an alternative message, NATO is not a party to this conflict, it is not directly engaged, it doesn't have troops on the ground in Ukraine. And again, it's not providing direct lethal assistance, but it is the place where we have built unity and consensus on our individual collective actions to support Ukraine.

0:21:30.6 JS: In terms of Ukraine's future, I mean, first and foremost, we want to ensure that Ukraine has the practical support it needs to succeed with the Spring Offensive that we believe is coming in the weeks ahead, and they've been talking about this ever since the back end of last year, and so we as allies have been meeting with the Ukrainians monthly in something called the Ramstein group or The UDCG, where we sit down with Ukrainian military commanders and hear from them first-hand what they need, and what we've heard from them over the last couple of months is that they've been focused on four main forms of assistance, they want air defense artillery, ammunition and armor, and we have delivered those types of assets to them at a rapid clip, really over the last three or four months, we've been providing those types of things for a long time, but we've seen a steep increase again in the last few months, so ultimately, we want Ukraine to succeed on the battlefield, we want the Ukrainians to breach this connection between what Russian forces are doing in the East in the Donbas and what they're doing in the South.

0:22:38.3 JS: And we want to present a strategic dilemma to Putin that will drive him to the negotiating table, but the terms under which those negotiations transpire need to be determined by the Ukrainians themselves. We don't need, as the United States to dictate those terms. But fundamentally, we want Ukraine's borders to be respected, we want Ukraine to have the right to freely choose its own alliances and memberships in other organizations, and we want to ensure that Ukraine has what it needs to deter and defend itself from any future attacks from Russia.

0:23:12.6 S3: Thank you, a follow-up to that. A number of audience members ask, where is there a pinch in terms of the support that NATO members can provide to Ukraine, what are the principal challenges to effectuating the vision that you just laid out?

0:23:28.0 JS: Well, there's a whole host of challenges in the support to Ukraine. I mean, let me just say, at the onset that our European allies have given just unbelievable amounts of support, every single country again, has found a way to contribute, but due to that generosity, what has actually transpired is it has left some shortfalls in individual countries own national defense, so we have two efforts that we're undertaking right now, first and foremost, we want to address the backfill challenges that the Ukrainians themselves have, so Ukrainians have been open about some of the munition shortages, for example. And so we want to ensure that they have what they need to succeed on the battlefield, but NATO as an alliance is also very focused on, say, Estonia's backfill needs, because the Estonians have given everything they have to the Ukrainians, and we wanna make sure we can backfill those assets, so that if the Estonians needed those assets to defend their own national security, that they actually would have what they need. So we at NATO are working tirelessly to cope with the amount of assistance that is going to Ukraine, first of all, to make sure it keeps flowing, but again, to address some of the gaps that it's created along the way, and then there's political support, look...

0:24:50.2 JS: I mean, we should be honest, we're a year into this war, countries have been very, very generous with their support, but all of us also have domestic needs and challenges that need to be addressed as well. And I think it's fair for our publics to ask the question, you know, how much longer can we envision this continuing and are we all able to carry on with this level of support? Again, I think we can, but I think we need to be clear-eyed about the challenges that it presents all of us, for all political leaders out there that are contributing right now.

0:25:24.7 S3: Right, and your mention of politics points to the Global Challenge as well, which is that many governments have been reluctant to take strong stance against the Russian invasion either through joining sanctions, some even abstaining at votes in the UN General Assembly to condemn the Kremlin. How are you and your colleagues, both in the US and in NATO allied capitals working to boost support through multiple channels, military, economic, political from other security partners around the world outside of the NATO umbrella?

0:26:00.0 JS: Well, early on when the war started, I mean again, because of what I said for... Personally, for me, I was very focused on maintaining unity across the alliance, across the 30 members that exist inside NATO, but I think all of us began to have conversations last summer about the importance of also engaging, what we refer to as the global South or emerging partners to the Alliance. Countries that have a variety of perspectives and views, sometimes a very complicated relationship with Russia that aren't always willing to vote with us in condemning Russian's actions. Russia's war of aggression in places like the United Nations, and so over time, personally, I've changed some of my own engagement, I've done more outreach, say, with South Africans on the question of NATO support inside Ukraine, and also I've done a little bit of myth busting along the way, because there are some misperceptions about what we are and are not doing, I think the US government has worked tirelessly to engage countries far beyond the NATO alliance, we now have over 50 countries providing security assistance, we had over 140 countries vote to condemn Russia in the United Nations, but all of that takes work.

0:27:20.1 JS: In some cases, you have to physically go to that country, you have to ask them what more they can do to support Ukraine, you have to make the case about what's at stake. It's not just about Ukraine, it's not just about what Russia is doing in Ukraine, it's about what China... What lessons China's drawing from our support to Ukraine in this moment, if Putin succeeds, certainly the PRC and Iran will take other lessons from that, and so helping countries around the world that there's much more at stake here has been part of our task as well.

0:27:56.1 S3: That leads me on to another question, which is about the framing of this conflict in some circles, framing this as a war of autocracy against democracy has tremendous resonance and helps boost public support, particularly in western democracies for the conflict and many other parts of the world. A framing of defensive democracy doesn't necessarily carry the same favor, at least not among incumbent political leaders in authoritarian systems. To what extent do you feel that the message has been reaching capitals around the world, that this is also about other norms, territorial integrity, sovereignty, self-determination, has it been a challenge as a diplomat to try to appeal to these very different audiences through framings of the problem?

0:28:38.9 JS: It is a challenge because depending on who you're engaging, you know, you want to try to wrap it around a set of issues and values that resonates with that particular, the political system, the people that live there. And I think really what we found is most effective is really talking about the fundamentals of the UN Charter, most countries irrespective of what kind of politics they have on their home front, they fundamentally want to see the UN Charter be protected and preserved. They fundamentally understand the terms and the importance of the values of territorial integrity and sovereignty, and I think that resonates, and I think increasingly that's how we framed this, I think you're right, the autocracy versus democracy, isn't a one-size-fits-all kind of debate, and that discourse doesn't resonate in some corners of the world, I've noticed in some of my own engagements really coming back to the basics, coming back to the fundamentals of sovereignty full stop is really the best way to engage on what's at stake here and what we're talking about.

0:29:51.6 S3: Right, I have another question that comes from an audience question, which is about... It relates to the point that you made a moment ago about how this is partly a return to NATO's original mission deterrence, major conventional armed conflict in Europe, and there's partly a question of adapting to new challenges, hybrid threats, disinformation campaigns and the like, and that implicates the use of sanctions, controls on technology and the like. How effective do you think that the sanctions regime has been thus far with regard to defense technologies that can be of use to Russia on the battlefield, and to the extent that there has been slippage or other things that NATO, the European Union, the US can do to strengthen those controls?

0:30:40.0 JS: Yeah, I mean after... As I noted, after Russia went into Ukraine, initially, we did move out, not at NATO, because NATO doesn't work on sanctions policy, but our friends downtown in Brussels in the European Union worked very closely with the United States and the United Kingdom, and many countries around the world, also the Japanese on these unprecedented sanctions, the problem with sanctions is sometimes I think there's the expectation that you lay on the sanctions and immediately you see an impact and the reality of sanctions policy is it can take time for all of us to witness and monitor a change in how the country is grappling with either a series of export controls or sanctions... I do think Russia is feeling it. I think their determination to go into far away places and seek additional technical support is a sign of how difficult they are finding it to continue addressing their ongoing and very real-time defense requirements.

0:31:36.0 JS: I think they felt it in the commercial airline industry, there's just no question, we've seen their drive to acquire chips from some unusual places or even in cases where they're stripping them out of washing machines and putting them into other pieces of technology. So there's no question in my mind that they are feeling the pinch, but it may not lead to the results that one would expect in terms of catastrophic economic results overnight, it does build over time, but our challenge as allies is we have to closely monitor where Russia is gonna go next to acquire these types of capabilities and either call out countries for sanctions evasion or try and cut them off at the pass and ensure that they're not able to get some of the technology that they're seeking right now, because we do want to fundamentally erode their military capabilities.

0:32:31.9 JS: We don't want Russia to have the capacity to do this again in Ukraine, and the Ukrainians are doing an incredible job of eroding that military capability, but again, this tech piece is a key component of it, we've sent very clear messages to the Chinese not to provide material support to Russia, they have held that line as far as we can tell for the better part of the last year, but whether or not they're willing to shift and change that position is something that we're monitoring very closely right now, and we do worry that they could be on the cusp of changing that. We watched Xi's recent visit to Moscow just a couple of days ago, very closely for signs that they would be making any announcement in that regard. So this is a daily challenge across the alliance, we worry about it, but again, the actual sanctions themselves really are handled outside the NATO alliance.

0:33:25.9 S3: You've begun to answer the next thing I was gonna ask about, which is the concern of many audience members about China's role. Up to this point, what role do you perceive China as having played as a factor in the course of the conflict, and what are you most concerned that China might do next, that would be really a detriment to US and NATO objectives with respect to Ukraine?

0:33:49.6 JS: Well, just broadly, we've seen a real evolution in the relationship between China and Russia, and this has been happening for a number of years now, it's an odd relationship, it's not a proper Alliance, it's a partnership that's growing, it's asymmetric, Russia is the junior partnership in this relationship, but as it relates to Ukraine, China has played a very unhelpful role because of its political support, it has in essence echoed Russian misinformation and supported Russia's false narratives about why it needed to go into Ukraine in the first place. China sometimes likes to portray itself as neutral, but that's preposterous because it really has provided a tremendous amount of political support. It stands with Russia in places like the United Nations, and blocks the Security Council from taking important votes as it relates to condemning Russia's aggression and its war in Ukraine, and again, we've gotta watch closely about what additional measures the Chinese will consider in terms of actual lethal assistance to the Russians. I think at times the Chinese might be tempted, but again, they haven't quite crossed the line, but we worry that they could change their mind and take that route in the weeks and months ahead, and for that reason again, it's something that we watch very closely.

0:35:13.7 S3: Thank you. Shifting gears a tiny bit, a number of audience members were also interested in how you and your colleagues think about domestic developments inside of Russia. Some folks asked the question of what's the probability that Putin will lose power, and if so, what might come next? To gather these questions together, I'll frame the question as follows. How do you think about the range of possible contingencies in Russian domestic politics, and how does that affect the strategies that you said with regard to support for Ukraine?

0:35:47.0 JS: Well, we see the Putin's regime appears to be quite stable, we don't see any sort of force that's moving to undermine him. There have certainly been disputes and tensions across his administration, and again, as you might imagine, we monitor those quite closely, there's a lot of tension between the individual that leads the Wagner Group, this kind of rogue military force that's operating in Bakhmut right now, Prigozhin is the head of that unit and the current Minister of Defense in Russia, and that tension has not been directed at Putin, but creates some dilemmas for him, and sometimes I think he rather enjoys it, but sometimes it's complicated in navigating that and harnessing it and managing it in a way that allows him to continue to lead this operation inside Ukraine. I mean, I do think Putin has faced some uncomfortable and hard truths throughout this war, again, the realization that the West has held Ukrainians have been incredibly effective on the battlefield while his own forces have not, but he's also had to take decisions, he did not wanna mobilize forces in Russia. He calls this a special military operation, he doesn't wanna call it a war, and he does that quite deliberately, but he did have to mobilize forces, 300,000 additional Russians to put on the problem, and that was an uncomfortable decision for him.

0:37:24.7 JS: So there have been some moments for him, tough decisions, maybe some tough realizations, although honestly, I don't think he really has a grip on how hard this has been for the Russian forces and how unlikely they are to prevail. The question on the table is, at what point can we alter, can the Ukrainians alter his strategic calculus to get him to the negotiating table, and that takes us back to the Spring Offensive, so that we could possibly see some sort of negotiations later this year, if at all possible, but there have been protests in Russia, but I don't think they're a real threat to him. He's lost about a million people have left Russia and fleeing from the regime, and in protest, he's had a lot of young men leave trying to avoid the mobilization, about 1000 corporations have left Russia. So there has been this mass exodus, but in terms of the impact on his regime, it's pretty minimal.

0:38:31.0 JS: In terms of the stability of what he's able to manage, but if there's one thing we've learned about Russia is always expect the unexpected. And sometimes things may look stable and in a hot minute things shift, so it's hard to make long-standing predictions about really anything that's going on inside Moscow right now, and for that reason, I think we have to definitely stay on our toes.

0:38:53.8 S3: Sure, and the staying on toes leads to the last question I wanna ask about the Ukraine war also from our audience, and that is... You mentioned the United States and its NATO allies are not directly involved in the war in Ukraine, under what conditions could that conceivably change apart from an attack on a NATO member that would activate Article 5, is there anything that could happen in Ukraine that might cause the United States to become directly involved in this conflict?

0:39:18.4 JS: Well, it's hard to deal in hypotheticals. And I hesitate to go down that path, I think probably the easiest scenario to talk about is the one you mentioned, obviously if there were any strikes on NATO territory, that changes the dynamic entirely because of the Article 5 clause that I mentioned at the top. Now, we did have a missile strike in Poland a couple of months ago that killed two Polish farmers, you can imagine that it took our breath away, because initially in those first few minutes we didn't know what had transpired and the possibility that Russia had decided to strike NATO territory was on the table. Now, as it turns out, that's not the case, as far as we can tell, this is something that came from Ukraine, it was an accident. But for that reason, you can imagine how those front-line states feel right now, and I think it's fair to say that our friends in the Baltic states and Poland and Romania, most of the countries in the Eastern flank are feeling anxious about those types of potential scenarios but again, we have taken countless steps over the last year to radically shift our commanding control structures, the presence of Allied troops in those territories, the resourcing of the forces to making sure that they're at the ready exercise and training, so that, again, the NATO alliance is ready for any and all possible contingencies.

0:40:52.6 S3: Thank you. Oh, we have a few questions from the audience as well on NATO more broadly, including the path ahead for the Alliance, and one question that a few people asked are variants of the following: Germany's just agree that it's gonna spend a lot more on defense, France has a large military, so does the UK; aren't Europeans able to carry more of the burden and responsibility for European security on their own, do they really need this level of US security assistance to confront threats from Russia or elsewhere to the east?

0:41:23.5 JS: Well, I guess that would take us to a long-standing debate, one way to answer it is to focus on defense spending, so you may remember after Russia went into Crimea in 2014, NATO allies collectively pledged to spend 2% of their GDP on defense, and since 2014, we've seen eight consecutive years of growth in European defense spending, this isn't what they give to the NATO alliance, there sometimes is a misperception there, this is about what countries spend on their own national defense, we want everybody to invest in their own national defense, so that they have capabilities and assets at the ready, and again, we've seen consecutive growth, so next year, we said between 2014 and 2024, all allies should get to 2%. The good news is, we believe we're gonna have 17 or 18 members at 2%, that's not 30, so we're gonna have to have another turn at the crank and try to push our allies...

0:42:25.7 JS: Everybody needs to get to 2%. Russia has helped us with this war in Ukraine that certainly spurred new investments in Germany, but not just in Germany, in lots of places. So we will keep working on this, we're gonna have a new defense investment pledge at the summit this year in Lithuania, and we will continue to push our allies to step up and make sure that they're meeting that 2% target, but is US leadership required? Absolutely. The United States plays and continues to play a critical role inside the NATO alliance, it drives certain agenda items, we've been pushing the Allies increasingly to focus on the PRC and what China is doing in and around the Euro-Atlantic area, we've been pushing on the alliance with other like-minded allies to move out on new cyber defense capabilities, we've been pushing the alliance to focus on things like critical infrastructure and building resilience, and so I believe that the NATO alliance serves our interests because it spreads the burden of collective security across many member states and doesn't just put the burden on the United States, but I also believe firmly, and I live this each and every day about the importance of US leadership in this institution, it matters, it's important.

0:43:41.6 JS: Our European allies can do a lot, but I think we can do even more when we do it together.

0:43:47.4 S3: Sure. And just as you mentioned that Russia has helped to boost defense spending in Europe, but also, as you referenced in your remarks, has inclined Finland and Sweden to join the alliance, a couple of our audience members would like to know your thoughts on the likelihood of a smooth entry process, given some Turkish and other objections. Do you expect Finland and Sweden to be able to join the alliance in the near term? And how important is it to the alliance that they do?

0:44:15.2 JS: Well, we were just astounded when the two countries walked through the front door last year and said, we wanna join the alliance, we're two neutral countries, but Putin has changed our minds and we've been strong NATO partners for a long time now, and we're ready to cross over to the other side, and it was a decision that was simultaneously applauded across the Alliance by all 30 allies, and last summer, we started what's called the Accession Process and got them on their way. Now what happens inside the alliances, all 30 countries have to ratify what's called the accession protocol, that's done in our Congress or in Parliament in a variety of other member states, and as we went through the process, two countries have been slower to ratify the Accession Protocols. 28 countries rapidly moved to welcome Sweden and Finland into the Alliance and ratify, but two countries, Hungary and Turkey had concerns. But that is how NATO operates. We've had 75 years of experience of a hand going up in the room and saying, We're not ready to agree to this, but we just... We get to work and we've been working with our friends in Turkey and Hungary to address some of their concerns.

0:45:32.2 JS: We've encouraged the Turks to meet with the Swedes and the Fins several times over the last year. And now we're in a situation where Hungary ratified Finland yesterday, and I think Turkey will ratify Finland in the next couple of days, and then I suspect that Sweden will be ratified probably in the next two to three months. So I think by the time we get to the NATO summit in Vilnius in July, we'll have those two new members and we'll welcome them with open arms, and it's a game changer because we're bringing much more security up into the Nordic Baltic region. Those are two very capable allies, impressive naval forces, strong reserve forces. They share our values, we've exercised with them. They've participated in NATO missions, they know NATO better than the rest of us. And so they will walk through the front door as full-fledged members, ready to be security providers, there's just no question in my mind.

0:46:23.5 S3: What about future NATO expansion beyond Finland and Sweden? Do you envision that NATO would have a good reason to expand its membership in the near future without asking you to speculate on which particular countries, what do you think are the key standards that NATO should consider in making decisions about possible future enlargement?

0:46:45.5 JS: Well, it's a pretty simple principle. NATO's door remains open. And in that meeting I mentioned where we met with the Russians last January, where they came in to NATO Headquarters and we met with them for four hours, it was incredible to watch them over the course of a half day try and pick off individual members and get somebody to say they would be willing to reconsider our open door policy on enlargement and despite their best efforts, and they really tried... The only message that the Russians heard back over those four long hours was, our open door policy is remaining the same, you're not gonna alter it, and PS, you don't get a voice, you don't get a veto, you don't get to weigh in. This is between the aspirant country, whether it's Ukraine or Bosnia or someone else, and the NATO allies. Every country has its right to determine its own alliances and membership and organizations, we believe that they should maintain that right, and so NATO will bit by bit continue to engage those countries that aspire to join, and we will do that without the voice and veto of the Russian government and when they went home that day, they certainly had that take away that we would not budge on NATO's open door policy.

0:48:03.2 S3: And another area of expansion that you've referenced already is an expansion of the types of activities that NATO engages in, not just sort of conventional deterrence and defense, but everything from cyber to societal resilience to disinformation. In what ways does the Alliance need to grow in order to meet these challenges organizationally, these are some pretty different functions when you talk about societal resilience as opposed to dealing with tanks rolling across borders, so what needs to happen in terms of building out that infrastructure for partners to be able to thrive in those functions?

0:48:37.1 JS: Yeah, you're right. This is a military alliance, it was designed to basically counter Soviet aggression and bring peace and stability to Europe and to the wider Euro-Atlantic area, and we thought in very conventional terms, everything we did at NATO revolved around our militaries working together, and we focused on things like tanks rolling across borders, but now if you wander the halls of the NATO alliance, you hear about space as a new domain, you hear about cyber, you hear about climate security, infrastructure, energy security, women, peace and security. I could go on and on. The problem is that for most of us, like the American mission inside NATO has largely stayed the same, and in terms of staffing, and so we find that the people, the Americans, but also the other nations and their missions have to have the people on their teams wear several different hats.

0:49:39.4 JS: So someone on your team might be responsible for NATO cyber policy, but they also might be working climate policy at the same time, so there's a staffing thing, consequence and just to high management of managing all these different types of challenges that the alliance is facing, but there is a bigger challenge, and that is, to what degree should the European Union downtown to which we are not a member, take on some of those challenges? Or should NATO take on those challenges? So in the case of cyber security, Europeans are in some ways more comfortable having the European Union be the lead on cyber security, so they wanna park cyber security there.

0:50:22.3 JS: We say, That's great, but we also want NATO to take on a piece of cyber security because it does affect our collective security, and our adversaries are using cyber security to undermine our own security and defense. So it has to be both. So there's a lot of conceptual strategic challenges of first laying out the strategy and then transferring it into policy and real tools, there's an institutional structural dilemma about which institution should best manage this, is it the United Nations, is it NATO, is it the G7? Is it something else? There are staffing challenges as I mentioned, just how do you take the same number of people and cover many more issues with many different partners, not just NATO members, so it's a lot, and I will say it's not without its difficulties. And that's part of the reason why the work at NATO keeps us on our toes, and definitely it never feels like one day looks like another, because we are swinging from simultaneously coping with a land war in Europe, which feels in some ways familiar to us, to also looking out in a forward way to think about future challenges and how the Alliance can prepare itself to cope with those.

0:51:43.5 S3: Right, and, of course, part of that future for NATO will be the political support it continues to enjoy from its member states, including this one, and I'd like for our next question to turn to the home front, a number of our audience members are interested in your thoughts about where NATO sits in the US domestic political discourse. We've had some shifts over the last few administrations and how leaders have spoken about NATO and engaged with it. How do you feel about where we are right now as a country in terms of bipartisan consensus and support of the alliance, and what do you think the prospects are going forward? Lastly, what can we do to communicate to ordinary citizens for whom NATO operations are very far from their day-to-day lives to ensure that they understand the value of the Alliance?

0:52:31.5 JS: Well, on bipartisan support, I get this question a lot from allies across the Alliance, saying, How do Americans look at NATO? Are they more skeptical? Do they see the value in it? They have concerns, sometimes they hear various little clips and tidbits coming from our press, people expressing skepticism, age-old debates about burden-sharing, Europeans not doing enough, and what I usually say back to them is, I feel very good about the level of bipartisan support that exists in Congress for the NATO alliance, we get delegations coming through every month, Republicans and Democrats, strong support for the NATO alliance, a fundamental understanding of what's at stake and why the alliance matters, and I find that when I do press, whether I'm doing press on the left or the right, or somewhere in between. Fundamentally, I think most Americans understand the value of this alliance, that we're stronger together, that's the bottom...

0:53:31.5 JS: That's the bottom line message. That's something my eight-year-old son even fundamentally gets rather than going it alone in the world, it's good when you have a group of like-minded pals standing with you to encounter whatever challenges you may face, so whether it's Ukraine where we can't let a bully take over another country, and just eat Ukraine and allow that to pass, whether it's explaining why having friends and partners around the world, particularly inside the NATO alliance benefits us, or why we're collectively...

0:54:04.6 JS: Defending the values that we hold dear. I think it shouldn't be a hard argument to make fundamentally, to most Americans, even if they're not following various battalions that we're setting up in Romania or a mission that we're undertaking here or there, they don't need to follow the nuts and bolts of what's going on at NATO each and every day. Fundamentally, I think I just ask Americans to appreciate again the slogan of stronger together and our allies are stepping up, they do a lot, they've absorbed over 8 million refugees from Ukraine into their homes, and they're still living there a year later, that in itself, I mean, the generosity and the contributions that they've made to Ukraine have been absolutely crucial, so we're in this together, we have to continue to stand together and we're fundamentally stronger together.

0:54:58.8 S3: Thank you. Certainly, I'm sure you will all agree, a very, very appropriate principle for a Vandenberg Lecture Center. Senator Vandenberg very much stands for these types of norms. To bring it even closer to home, this is the last question I'll ask, a number of people in the audience, particularly students, wanna know, How can we equip ourselves to make a difference in this space? How can we get involved in the very near future in the NATO-led campaign to support Ukraine and otherwise to enforce relevant norms in international society? What are your suggestions to, particularly to students in the audience about the things that we can be doing now to train ourselves to be effective, whether as diplomats or other professionals in this space, and whether there are ways we can be involved right now in a constructive way?

0:55:47.5 JS: Well, come to NATO Headquarters. I would say to all the students in the audience come visit us, we love having student visitors, classes come through, take time to get to know some of the other nations in the alliance, if you have the opportunity to take a trip to Latvia or Portugal or Norway, take advantage of those exchanges. Talk to them about how they look at Ukraine and what NATO means to them. I've found some of the most interesting conversations right now is with the countries like, Sweden and Finland that are about to join the alliance, why did they decide to do it? What are their expectations, but also some of the other newer members, North Macedonia and Montenegro just joined also in the last couple of years, how have they found NATO membership, what are the benefits that the Alliance brings to those two small Balkan countries?

0:56:36.1 JS: I think the more you can engage directly with our allies and with our friends from Ukraine, we have a huge Ukrainian-American community here in the wider Detroit area in the state of Michigan, and we've welcomed some Ukrainians here in Michigan, which is important. Those types of face-to-face interactions are worth their weight in gold, and so whether you have an opportunity to come to NATO or just chat with people from those various countries, it's an important way to continue to learn from one another, to chip away at some of the misperceptions and not fall for some of the Russian disinformation that's circulating out there.

0:57:12.6 CW: Thank you. Before we invite you to stroll across the hallway here for some coffee and desserts, let me just share with students who aren't already familiar with opportunities that we have here at the Ford School where you can get involved. We run regular simulations, we just had two outstanding teams of Ford School students represent different countries in Model NATO in February in Washington and won a bunch of awards for their performance. Next year we're going to represent Latvia and if you need some pointers on that team, we have the former US Ambassador to Latvia, Mark Pekala teaching with us right now, we've also been delighted to welcome Steve Biegun back to the Ford School, former Deputy Secretary of State, as part of an array of programs that we run to try to help prepare you to perform these kinds of roles in diplomacy and related fields. So I wanna wrap up by thanking Hank Meyer and the Meyer family for their support for this wonderful lecture series, and I hope you'll all join me in thanking Ambassador Julianne Smith for some really insightful remarks.

0:58:14.5 JS: Thank you.