

Headlines:

- **US Increasing Troop Presence in Europe, While New NATO Strategy Eyes China**
- **Iran Says Indirect Talks with U.S. Proceeding in Serious Atmosphere**
- **Trade Blacklist: US Accuses 36 Companies of Supporting Russia**

Details:

US Increasing Troop Presence in Europe, while New NATO Strategy Eyes China

In the span of 24 hours, NATO has cleared the way for Sweden and Finland to begin their membership drive, introduced as new strategic concept for the alliance and seen the US dramatically its footprint in Europe. It's a flurry of action that would have seemed unlikely, if not impossible, just months ago. But Russia's February invasion of Ukraine has spurred a renewal of the alliance — something leaders have used the early hours of the Madrid summit this week to underline. "In a moment when [Russian president Vladimir] Putin has shattered peace in Europe and attacked the very, very tenets of the rules-based order, the United States and our Allies — we're going to step up. We're stepping up," US President Joe Biden said in remarks at the summit. "We're proving that NATO is more needed now than it ever has been and it's as important as it has ever been." The US announced today it will be increasing its forces across the continent, starting with the creation of a permanent presence in Poland, made up of the V Corps Headquarters Forward Command Post, an Army garrison headquarters, and a field support battalion. In a statement, the Defense Department described this as the "first permanent U.S. forces on NATO's Eastern Flank," and will be accompanied by continued support for rotational forces in Poland, including "an Armored Brigade Combat Team, Combat Aviation Brigade element, and Division Headquarters element." NATO's new Strategic Concept, published today and setting the tone for the Madrid summit, is like many documents of its type more about policy posture than hard details. But a few things stand out from what Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg called "the biggest overhaul of our collective defense deterrence since the end of the Cold War." The document — the first formal update since 2010, even before Russia's first 2014 invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea — for the first time mentions China, with the alliance warning that Beijing's "ambitions and coercive policies" are a "challenge our interests, security and values." [Source: Breaking Defense]

Putin's invasion of Ukraine has not only strengthened NATO but also expanded NATO's scope eastward to address the rising threat of China.

Iran Says Indirect Talks with U.S. Proceeding in Serious Atmosphere

Iran's foreign ministry said indirect, EU-mediated talks between Tehran and Washington in the Qatari capital were proceeding in a "serious" atmosphere, denying an earlier report that they had ended. The talks are aimed at overcoming differences over how to salvage a 2015 nuclear pact between Iran and world powers. Earlier, Iran's semi-official Tasnim news agency had reported that the negotiations in Doha had ended without result. "The two-day talks are not over yet and later today Iran's top nuclear negotiator and the EU's envoy

Enrique Mora will meet again," ministry spokesman Naser Kanani said, according to Iranian state media. "Talks continue in a serious and business-like atmosphere." The talks started on Tuesday with Mora as the coordinator, shuttling between Iran's Ali Bagheri Kani and Washington's special Iran envoy Rob Malley. They are trying to break a months-long impasse that has stalled negotiations in Vienna to reinstate the 2015 pact. "What prevented these negotiations from coming to fruition is the U.S. insistence on its proposed draft text in Vienna that excludes any guarantee for Iran's economic benefits," Tasnim said, citing informed sources at the talks. Then-U.S. President Donald Trump ditched the pact in 2018 and reimposed crippling sanctions on Iran's economy. A year later, Tehran reacted by gradually breaching nuclear limits of the deal. [Source: Reuters]

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has created renewed urgency in Washington to strike a nuclear deal with Iran that will also enable the flow of Iranian oil to the international markets, especially Europe and cushion high oil prices.

Trade Blacklist: US Accuses 36 Companies of Supporting Russia

US President Joe Biden's administration added five companies in China to a trade blacklist on Tuesday for allegedly supporting Russia's military and defense industrial base, flexing its muscle to enforce sanctions against Moscow over its invasion of Ukraine. The Commerce Department, which oversees the blacklist, said the targeted companies had supplied items to Russian "entities of concern" before the Feb. 24 invasion, adding that they "continue to contract to supply Russian entity listed and sanctioned parties." The agency also added another 31 entities to the blacklist from countries that include Russia, UAE, Lithuania, Pakistan, Singapore, the United Kingdom, Uzbekistan and Vietnam, according to the Federal Register entry. Of the 36 total companies added, 25 had China-based operations. "Today's action sends a powerful message to entities and individuals across the globe that if they seek to support Russia, the United States will cut them off as well," Under Secretary of Commerce for Industry and Security Alan Estevez said in a statement. The Chinese embassy in Washington did not respond to the allegations against the companies, but said Beijing had not provided military assistance to Russia or Ukraine. It said it would take "necessary measures" to protect the rights of its companies, arguing that the sanctions violate international law. Three of the companies in China accused of aiding the Russian military, Connec Electronic Ltd, Hong Kong-based World Jetta, and Logistics Limited, could not be reached for comment. The other two, King Pai Technology Co, Ltd and Winninc Electronic did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The US not satisfied with the impact of its sanctions to hurt Russia is now tightening the noose around both friend and foe to ensure sanctions begin to bite. The US cares little for safeguarding the interests of its allies like the UK and Pakistan, and will sacrifice them to fully achieve US goals.