

Headlines:

- **China to Establish Base North of Australia**
- **Moscow Expects Europe to Pay in Roubles for Gas**
- **Russia says it will 'Fundamentally Cut Back Military Activity'**

Details:

China to Establish Base North of Australia

The Solomon Islands has confirmed it is drafting a security deal with China - a move that's triggered alarm in neighbouring Australia and other Western allies in the Indo-Pacific.

Leaked papers indicate a Chinese military base could potentially be set up on the island to Australia's north. This has sparked concern from Australia, longtime chief defence partner and biggest aid donor to the tiny island. Australia's Foreign Minister Marise Payne said she respected the Pacific island's right to make sovereign decisions but: "We would be particularly concerned by any actions that undermine the stability and security of our region, including the establishment of a permanent presence such as a military base." The details of the leaked plans have particularly concerned Australia, which is just 1,400 miles south of the Solomon Islands. The papers set out a framework which could allow Beijing to deploy forces to "protect the safety of Chinese personnel and major projects in Solomon Islands". Whilst China's global policy has been largely determined by its commercial needs, in its region China has been very aggressive, expanding militarily and challenging the status quo.

Moscow Expects Europe to Pay in Roubles for Gas

Russia has announced that "unfriendly" countries must pay in roubles, not euros, for its gas in the wake of the US and European allies teaming up on a series of sanctions aimed at Russia. The Russian central bank, the government and Gazprom, which accounts for 40% of European gas imports, should present their proposals for rouble gas payments to President Vladimir Putin by March 31. Earlier this month, the EU announced it would cut its dependency on Russian gas by two-thirds this year and end Russian fossil fuel imports by 2027. But Europe's dependency on Russian energy means there is no easy or quick fix and with Europe joining the US against Russia in the Ukraine war, it will now have to deal with Russia and its energy demands.

Russia says it will 'Fundamentally Cut Back Military Activity'

Russian and Ukrainian negotiators have ended the first direct talks in more than two weeks in Istanbul, with Moscow saying it was ready to "fundamentally cut back" military activity near the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv and the northern city of Chernihiv. Russian Deputy Defence Minister Alexander Fomin said the move was meant "to increase trust" in talks aimed at ending the fighting, whilst Ukrainian officials said they were willing to agree to a neutral status – one of Russia's key demands. Russia has performed poorly on the battlefield and has had to scale back its political demands. Russia says it always only wanted Donbass, which goes against sending large forces to Kiev in order to conquer it. The pause in fighting benefits Russia as it allows it to regroup and move further supplies through Ukraine. Russia will have to grind out a victory in Ukraine, after a month of stalled front across Ukraine.