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**BEYOND THE PUTIN-XI RELATIONSHIP: CHINA, RUSSIA AND GREAT POWER POLITICS**

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*While the Putin-Xi friendship is important, it mostly oils the wheels of a relationship driven by longer-term structural trends.*

On February 4, 2022, the opening day of the Winter Olympics in Beijing and only 20 days before Russia invaded Ukraine, China and Russia declared a no limits partnership that surpasses an alliance. This new upgrade of the bilateral relationship has been commonly accredited to the role of Presidents Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin or, more precisely, their special friendship. Indeed, the two leaders often describe each other as best friends and are believed to have a close personal relationship. Therefore, the so-called no limits partnership is actually the one between Putin and Xi.

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