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Beijing Fears Russia Becoming 'Minor Power' Under 'Crazy' Putin – FT

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Beijing is planning to reorient its foreign policy away from Moscow fearing a decline in Russia's economic and political clout as a direct result of its disastrous invasion of Ukraine and Putin's eventual downfall, the Financial Times reported on Tuesday, citing anonymous Chinese officials and regional experts.

Though Vladimir Putin and Chinese leader Xi Jinping pledged to strengthen bilateral ties during a video conference in late December, sources told the FT that mistrust towards the Russian leader is growing among the upper echelons of the Chinese Communist Party.

"The invasion decision was made by a very small group of people. China shouldn't simply follow Russia," the FT quoted one anonymous Chinese official as saying. "Putin is crazy."

China, according to the outlet's sources and contrary to the widely accepted version of events, was not aware of the Kremlin's plan to launch a full-scale military invasion of Ukraine last year and expected a limited military operation at most.

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During a meeting on Feb. 4, Putin reportedly informed Xi that Russia "would not rule out taking whatever measures possible if eastern Ukrainian separatists attack Russian territory and cause humanitarian disasters."

Beijing's failure to obtain accurate intelligence on Putin's plans left it unprepared for the invasion and resulted in the demotion of China's then-vice-minister of foreign affairs and top Russia expert Le Yucheng, according to the FT.

Anonymous Chinese officials told the outlet they believed the Kremlin's goals in Ukraine were doomed to failure and that Russia would emerge from the conflict as a "minor power."

However, Beijing still has much to gain from its relationship with the Kremlin in the short term, seeing its closeness to Putin as a useful bargaining chip in its relationship with Europe, the FT sources said.

China is also hoping to profit from the post-war reconstruction boom in Ukraine, officials said.

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