

China's Strategic Partnership with Russia amid the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Beijing and Moscow issued a joint statement declaring that Sino-Russian relations have reached the highest level in their history and exceeded the form of a military and political alliance in late June 2021. This article systematically analyzes the Russian-language materials publicized by the authorities and local media in the first six months of the COVID-19 outbreak and explores if the global public health crisis would mean a fundamental transformation of the strategic partnership between China and Russia. The authors find that the Russian government adopted the strictest anti-pandemic measures vis-à-vis China, compared to the other post-Soviet states. Russia took a highly cautious approach to the border control, mobility of Chinese citizens, and procurement of China-made inactivated vaccines. The domestic front in Russia was also inclined to be defensive on China in the time of the pandemic. The findings offer an important reference for the “new era” of Sino-Russian strategic partnership, a highly pragmatic and flexible agreement driven by the mutual interest in prevailing circumstances. It remains to be observed if there will be a fundamental shift in the post-COVID era.

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