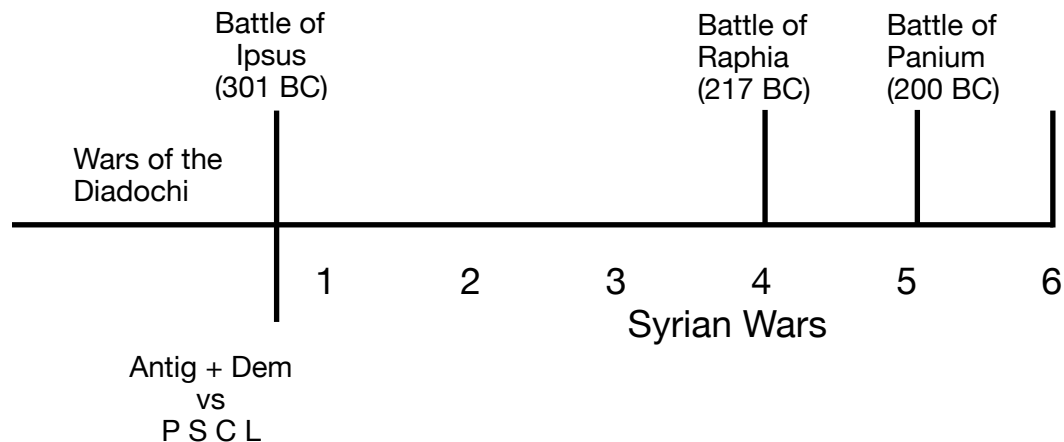


The Fulfilment of Prophecy in 2019 Part 2 - The Battle of Raphia



Syrian Wars

The **Syrian Wars** were a series of six wars between the [Seleucid Empire](#) and the [Ptolemaic Kingdom of Egypt](#), successor states to [Alexander the Great](#)'s empire, during the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC over the region then called [Coele-Syria](#), one of the few avenues into Egypt. These conflicts drained the material and manpower of both parties and led to their eventual destruction and conquest by [Rome](#) and [Parthia](#). They are briefly mentioned in the biblical [Books of the Maccabees](#). - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syrian_Wars

Battle of Ipsus, Its Aftermath, Coele-Syria

- The battle of Ipsus marked the end of the wars for the Diadochi and paved the way for the first Syrian War.

...In 302 BC, Ptolemy joined a new coalition against Antigonos and reoccupied Coele-Syria, but quickly withdrew on hearing a false report that Antigonos had won a victory. He was only to return when Antigonos had been defeated at [Ipsus](#) in 301 BC. Coele-Syria was assigned to [Seleucus](#), by the victors of Ipsus, as Ptolemy had added nothing to the victory. Though, given Ptolemy's track record, he was unlikely to organize a serious defense of Coele-Syria, Seleucus acquiesced in Ptolemy's occupation, probably because Seleucus remembered how it had been with Ptolemy's help he had reestablished himself in Babylonia.

The later Seleucids were not to be so understanding, resulting in the century of [Syrian Wars](#) between the Ptolemies and Seleucids. **The Battle of Panium in 200 BC, during the Fifth Syrian War, was the final decisive battle between the two sides in ending Ptolemaic control over the region.** <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coele-Syria>

- Ptolemy heard a false report that the allies had been defeated and hence retreated (he was not at the battle).

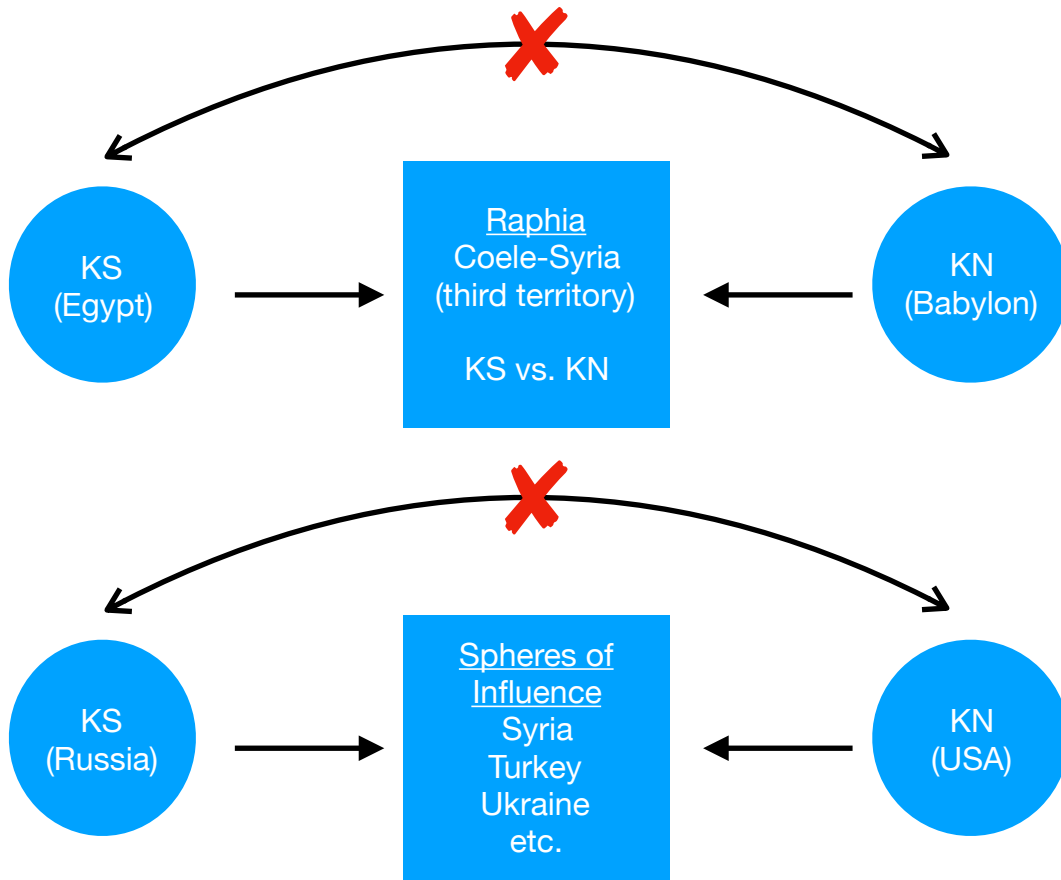
- The allies won and divided Antigonus' empire. But Ptolemy moved to take Coele-Syria which should have gone to Antigonus.
- Antigonus did not fight for it but his and Ptolemy's successors initiated the competition for the region with the first Syrian War (274 - 271 BC).
- Coele-Syria was a strategically important region as it was one of the only gateways into into Egypt.

Battle of Raphia (217 BC)

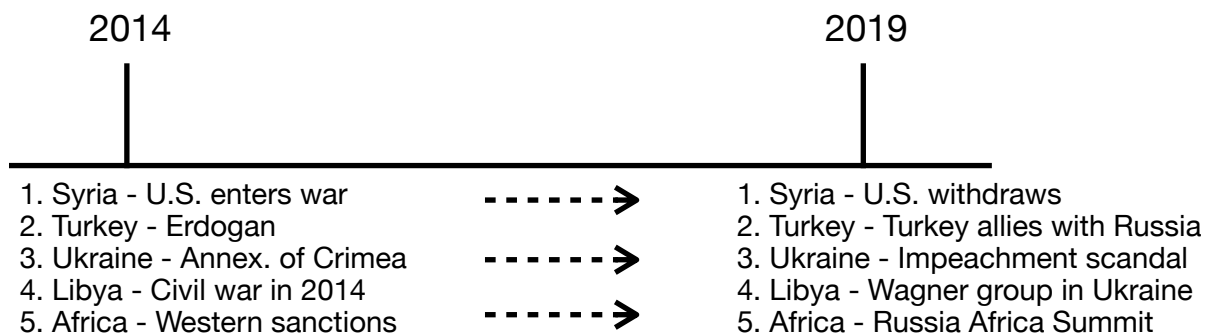
- The Battle of Raphia was part of the fourth Syrian War and Panium was part of the fifth.

The **Battle of Raphia**, also known as the **Battle of Gaza**^[citation needed], was a battle fought on 22 June 217 BC near modern [Rafah](#) between the forces of [Ptolemy IV Philopator](#), king and pharaoh of [Ptolemaic Egypt](#) and [Antiochus III the Great](#) of the [Seleucid Empire](#) during the [Syrian Wars](#). It was one of the largest battles of the Hellenistic kingdoms and was one of the largest battles of the ancient world. **The battle was waged to determine the sovereignty of Coele Syria.** - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Raphia

- The fight between the KN and KS through the Syrian wars were for a third territory (sphere of influence).
 - The antitypical Syrian Wars will also be for spheres of influence external to the KN and KS.
 - Panium will be of a similar character to Raphia.
 - Raphia is 2019 and Panium is 2021.
- We see the KN and KS engaged in conflicts over control of spheres of influence.



- As with Raphia, victories by the KS over these third parties can be seen in 2019.
 - These victories are book-ended by 2014 which marks the beginning of the conflict that leads to the KS victory in 2019.



- Other lines provide information that can be used to better understand this way-mark.
 - That it is not only a fight for spheres of influence but involves information warfare and proxy warfare.
 - **Information warfare - Information Age study**

- **Proxy warfare**

Information warfare is the manipulation of **information** trusted by a target without the target's awareness so that the target will make decisions against their interest but in the interest of the one conducting **information warfare**. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Information_warfare

A **proxy war** is an armed conflict between two states or **non-state actors** which act on the instigation or on behalf of other parties that are not directly involved in the hostilities.^[1] In order for a conflict to be considered a proxy war, there must be a direct, long-term relationship between external actors and the belligerents involved.^[2] The aforementioned relationship usually takes the form of funding, military training, arms, or other forms of material assistance which assist a belligerent party in sustaining its war effort. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proxy_war

Syria

- Syria - USA has withdrawn from Northern Syria leaving the country to Putin and his puppet Assad.

Russian resolve: Why Syria matters to Putin

The naval installation in the port city of Tartus, first established in the Cold War, provides Russia's only access to the Mediterranean, crucial for both commercial and military purposes. Earlier this year, Mr. al-Assad struck a deal to confer territorial sovereignty of the base to the Kremlin, which has plans to expand capacity to host large warships, including aircraft carriers. There is also a Russian air-force base near the northwestern city of Latakia; it was built essentially from scratch in 2015 and is home to more than 1,000 personnel.

Syria also provides the Iranian Navy's only direct Mediterranean access.

Importance of natural gas

Pipeline politics are a factor in Syria.

The largest natural gas field in the world lies under the Persian Gulf and is shared by Iran and Qatar, the latter of which has forged close ties with the European Union.

Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey would like to build a link, but it necessarily passes through Syria. Mr. al-Assad and his Iranian and Russian allies have a competing proposal for a pipeline route. Given that Syria's economy has all but collapsed amid six years of brutal military repression, the resource business takes on a special lustre for anyone who would wish to rebuild the country. Two weeks ago, Russia and Iran held high-level talks about deepening their energy ties. As Middle East expert Milad Jokar pointed out in a recent article, "Europe has significant gas energy needs and a quarter of it comes from Russia."

Needless to say, Gazprom, the Russian resources giant, is closely linked to Mr. Putin. Russia's political and economic incentives are to support the status quo, which for now means their ally, Mr. al-Assad, who is from the minority Alawite sect and has held onto power thanks partly to Christian and Druze minorities.

"Russia's commitment is less to the Assad family than to that kind of regime," Mr. Bell said.

"They can't afford to be unseated, but they also don't want a confrontation with the Americans." <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/russian-resolve-why-syria-matters-to-putin/article34643406/>

Is the fight over a gas pipeline fuelling the world's bloodiest conflict?

Many have questioned why Russia became involved in the Syrian war but often overlook the fight over natural gas.

As Harvard Professor Mitchell A Orenstein and George Romer wrote last month in [Foreign Affairs](#), Russia currently supplies Europe with a quarter of the gas it uses for heating, cooking, fuel and other activities.

In fact 80 per cent of the gas that Russian state-controlled company Gazprom produces is sold to Europe, so maintaining this crucial market is very important.

But Europe doesn't like being so reliant on Russia for fuel and has been trying to reduce its dependence. It's a move that is supported by the United States as it would weaken Russian influence over Europe.

This has not gone down well with Russia, which uses its power over gas as political leverage and has a [history of cutting off supply](#) to countries during conflicts. *It has even gone [to war in Georgia and Ukraine](#) to disrupt plans to export gas from other parts of the Middle East.*

As David Dalton, the editor of the Economist Intelligence Unit, told [The New York Times](#):

"Russia has always used gas as an instrument of influence. The more you owe Gazprom, the more they think they can turn the screws."

Much of Russia's power comes from established pipelines used to transport gas to Europe cheaply. But other countries are now trying to get around Russia and provide new sources of gas to Europe.

Last year US President Barack Obama spoke openly about the need for Europe to reduce its reliance on Russian gas following the conflict in Ukraine.

The US also wants to use its own natural gas supply, recently developed through fracking, to undercut Russian supply. But it will be years before the US will be in a position to ship this overseas.

The US is not the only country trying to outmanoeuvre Russia, and this is where the role of Syria becomes more important.

TWO NEW PIPELINES

Before the [Syrian] civil war, two competing pipelines put forward by Qatar and Iran aimed to transport gas to Europe through Syria.

Qatar's plans were first put forward in 2009 and involved building a pipeline from the Persian Gulf via Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria and Turkey.

The gas field located 3000 metres below the floor of the Persian Gulf is the largest natural gas field in the world. Qatar owns about two-thirds of the resource but can't capitalise on it fully because it relies on tankers to deliver it to other countries and this makes its gas more expensive than Russia's.

It was hoped the pipeline would provide cheaper access to Europe but Syrian President Bashar al Assad refused to give permission for the pipeline to go through his territory. Some believe Russia pressured him to reject the pipeline to safeguard its own business.



The proposed gas pipeline from Qatar via Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria and Turkey to Europe (has USA's approval)

In the meantime Iran, which owns the other smaller, share of the Persian Gulf gas field, decided to lodge its own rival plan for a \$10 billion pipeline to Europe via Iraq and Syria and then under the Mediterranean Sea.



Pipeline from Iran via Iraq and Syria to Europe (has Russia's approval)

These plans apparently had Russia's blessing, possibly because it could exert more influence over Iran, which, unlike Qatar, did not host a US air base.

Assad signed off on the Iran plan in 2012 and it was due to be completed in 2016 but it was ultimately delayed because of the Arab Spring and the civil war.

Many countries supporting or opposing the war against Assad have links to these pipeline plans.

Failed pipeline bidder Qatar is believed to have funded anti-Assad rebel groups by \$3 billion between 2011 and 2013. Saudi Arabia has also been [accused of funding](#) the terrorist group. In contrast Orenstein and Romer noted the successful pipeline bidder, Iran, was believed to be helping Assad by running the Syrian army, supplying it with weapons and even troops.

Major Rob Taylor, an instructor at the US Army's Command and General Staff College wrote in the [Armed Forces Journal](#) last year that the rival pipelines could be influencing the conflict in Syria.

"Viewed through a geopolitical and economic lens, the conflict in Syria is not a civil war, but the result of larger international players positioning themselves on the geopolitical chessboard in preparation for the opening of the pipeline," he noted. <https://www.news.com.au/world/middle-east/is-the-fight-over-a-gas-pipeline-fuelling-the-worlds-bloodiest-conflict/news-story/74efc9a9554c10bd35e280b63a9afb74>

- Civil uprisings which led to the civil war began in 2011. USA entered the war in September 2014.
- Trump announced that the U.S. would withdraw its troops from Northern Syria in October 2019.

As the U.S. withdraws, Assad and Putin are emerging as the winners in Syria

ERBIL, Iraq — In less than a week, the tectonic plates have shifted beyond recognition in the Middle East.

The U.S. counterterrorism operation against the Islamic State militant group, or ISIS, in northern Syria is in shreds. The U.S. military is accelerating its plans toward an [almost total withdrawal](#) from Syria, and the Kurdish troops in the northeast have [called on Damascus and Moscow to help](#) repel the invading Turkish forces.

The map of territorial control in Syria has begun shifting. Kurdish fighters who once stood side by side with the United States are now being absorbed into the Syrian army's Fifth Corps, under Russian command. **And Russia will, quite literally, move into the space vacated by President Donald Trump.**

And Trump does not appear to mind.

"Others may want to come in and fight for one side or the other," he posted on Twitter on Sunday. "Let them!"

Analysts said it was clear that Syrian President Bashar Assad and Russian President Vladimir Putin were emerging as the winners of the geopolitical puzzle, and the Kurds and the U.S. as the losers.

It also looks like ISIS will benefit too and may be able to resurge as stability eludes the region. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/u-s-withdraws-assad-putin-are-emerging-winners-syria-n1066231>

Turkey

- Turkey - a buffer country between Europe and Russia and a member of NATO has been drawn more closely into Russia's orbit.
- Turkey has served as an important intermediary between Russia and Europe
- Erdogan was Prime Minister of Turkey (2003-2013). When his legal term limit expired he created the position of president which he won via election in 2014.
 - In December 2013 a "gas for gold" corruption scandal with Iran exposed. This scandal implicated many key members of Erdogan's ruling AKP party.
 - In 2014 Erdogan began a purge as revenge for this investigation.

Turkish Authorities Purge Regulators, State TV Employees in Backlash Against Graft Probe

*Turkey has extended a purge of official organizations to the **banking and telecommunications regulators and state television, firing dozens of executives in moves that appear to broaden Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's push back against a corruption investigation.***

The authorities had previously reassigned thousands of police officers and about 20 prosecutors and fired some TV officials in response to the graft probe, the biggest challenge to Erdogan's 11-year rule.

Investigators are believed to have been looking into allegations of corruption and bribery involving trade in gold with Iran and big real estate projects, although full details of their charges have not been made public.

The Prime Minister says the investigation, which began a month ago with arrests of high-profile figures including the sons of three of his cabinet ministers, are part of an attempted "judicial coup."

His opponents say they fear a purge of official bodies will destroy the independence of the judiciary, police and media.

"It is like reformatting a computer. They are changing the whole system and people in various positions to protect the government," said Akin Unver, assistant professor of international relations at Istanbul's Kadir Has University. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/turkish-authorities-purge-regulators-state-tv-employees-in-backlash-against-graft-probe/2014/01/18/a2132546-8079-11e3-9556-4a4bf7bcdb84_story.html

- A failed coup in 2016 became the pre-text for a second wave of purges.

*The **2016–2020 purges in Turkey** was series of [purges](#) by the [government](#) of [Turkey](#) enabled by a [state of emergency](#) in reaction to the [15 July failed coup d'état](#).^{[1][2][3][4]} The purges began with the arrest of military personnel reportedly linked to the coup attempt but arrests were expanded to include other elements of the [Turkish military service](#), as well [civil servants](#) and private persons. These later actions reflected a power struggle between [secularist](#) and [Islamist](#) political elites in Turkey,^[18] affected people who were not active in nor aware of the coup, but who the government claimed were connected with the [Gülen movement](#), a opposition group which the government blamed for the coup. Persons in possession of books authored by Gülen was considered valid evidence of such a connection and cause for arrest.^[19]*

Tens of thousands of public servants and soldiers were purged in the first week following the coup.**^[20] For example, on 16 July 2016, just one day after the coup was foiled, 2,745 judges were dismissed and detained.^{[21][22]} **This was followed by the dismissal, detention or suspension of over 100,000 officials,**^{[23][24][25]} **a figure that had increased to over 110,000 by early November 2016,**^[26] **over 125,000 after the 22 November decree,**^[27] **reaching at

least 135,000 with the 7 January's decrees, about 160,000 after 29 April 2017's suspensions and arrests decree^[9] and 180,000 after 8 July 2018's massive dismissal decree. Collectively about 10% of Turkey's 2 million public employees were removed from the government as a result of the purges.^[10]

In the [business sector](#), the government forcefully seized assets of over 1000 companies worth between \$11^[28] and \$50–60 billion,^[29] on the charge of being related to Gülen and the coup.^[28] By late 2017 over a thousand companies and their assets owned by individuals reportedly affiliated with the movement had been seized^[30] and generally such things as goods produced by such companies had become boycotted by the public.^[31]

The purges also extend to the media with television channels, newspapers and other media outlets that were seen as critical of the government being shut down, critical [journalists being arrested](#) and [Wikipedia being blocked since April 2017](#).^{[32][33][34][35][36]} Since early September 2016, the post-coup emergency state allowed a turn against [Kurdish groups](#) and Kurdish culture,^[37] including the dismissal of over 11,000 Kurdish teachers^{[38][39][40][41][42][43][44]} and dozens of elected mayors^{[42][44][45][46][47][48]} and arrest of the co-chairs of the [Peoples' Democratic Party](#)^{[49][50][51]} for reported links with the [PKK](#).^[52] In August 2018, the Turkish Parliament approved a new “anti-terror” law to replace the state of emergency.^{[53][54][55]} https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2016–present_purges_in_Turkey

- He is a populist and has taken Turkey down a right-wing nationalist path.
- In recent times he has moved Turkey away from the United States and closer to Russia.

NATO Faces a Fresh Quandary as Turkey Tips Toward Russia

Turkey's president has warned that he would evict U.S. forces from two military bases in his country if Washington imposes [new sanctions](#) on his government—creating a quandary for the NATO alliance as it seeks to cope with Ankara's deepening ties to Russia.

In a television interview this month, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said if the U.S. punishes Turkey for its purchase of a Russian air-defense system, then, “if necessary, we may close Incirlik and Kurecik,” installations where the U.S. keeps nuclear weapons and operates critical radar.

President Trump and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan left the stage after a group photo taken at the NATO summit in the U.K. this month. PHOTO: PETER NICHOLLS/REUTERS

The declaration elicited an anxious reaction from U.S. Defense Secretary Mark Esper, who said it raised questions about Turkey's dedication to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

“They have that inherent right to house or to not house NATO bases or foreign troops,” Mr. Esper said. “But again, I think this becomes an alliance matter, your commitment to the alliance, if indeed they are serious about what they are saying.”

Turkey, which has NATO's biggest standing army after the U.S., has taken steps that have put it at odds with Washington and the rest of the alliance—including sending its army into northern Syria to fight a U.S.-allied militia and [purchasing the Russian S-400 missile system](#).

“It feels like watching a car crash in slow motion,” a Western diplomat in Turkey said.

The Trump administration has [sought to cajole](#) Mr. Erdogan in a bid to prevent Ankara from knitting closer ties with Moscow amid concerns that treating him like a pariah would push Turkey further into Russia's orbit, U.S. officials said. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/nato-faces-a-fresh-quandary-as-turkey-tips-toward-russia-11577269801>

Vladimir Putin is looking unstoppable after a string of victories that Trump handed to him on a plate

Vladimir Putin is on a roll.

This week alone, the Russian president:

- Replaced the US as the chief power broker in Syria.
- Drew a NATO member, and buffer between Russia and Europe, close into his orbit.
- Showed global ambition by hosting *all 54 African nations* to sign billions in new business deals.

His deal to jointly patrol northeastern Syria with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, made on Tuesday, establishes Russia as a power player in the war-torn country.

Putin is now a bridge between Turkish militants and Bashar al-Assad's regime, and a guarantor of regional security.

His renewed friendship with Erdogan has also secured for him an ally, and a useful buffer between the Russian heartland and European territory.

As the only country straddling Asia and Europe, Turkey has long served as Russia and Europe's middleman.

Putin's embrace of Turkey comes despite its membership of NATO, the military bloc formed specifically to check Russian ambition.

"NATO was formed to keep Russia's former Soviet empire in check. Now, Russian military police have unrestrained access to hundreds of kilometers of NATO's southern border, at the invitation of a NATO member," CNN's Nick Paton Walsh wrote on Wednesday.

"That is something Vladimir Putin can only have dreamed of..." - <https://www.businessinsider.com/russia-vladimir-putin-thriving-trump-hands-victories-2019-10>

Ukraine

- Conflict over Ukraine began with Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014.
 - Ukraine is an important buffer country between Russia and Europe and a former Soviet satellite state.
 - Russia invaded Ukraine as punishment for the latter's moves towards Europe.
 - This invasion led to a four year jump in Putin's approval ratings at home.
- In 2019 Trump moved on the basis of Russian (?) conspiracy theories to demand the investigation of his political opponent or military aid would be withheld.
 - The exposure of this phone call damaged Ukraine's president's (Zelensky) reputation and his country's prospects of joining the EU.
 - This has in turn led him to turn towards Russia in search for a deal to end the war.

In the last month Donald Trump has triggered chaos in both Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

A phone call to Ukraine triggered an impeachment inquiry, and a phone call to Turkey triggered an invasion. These actions seem unconnected, but deliberately or not, massively benefit Russian President Vladimir Putin. And they both came at a time Putin was desperate for a win.

Putin in strife

Putin has learnt during his 20 years at the top of Russian politics that finding enemies to attack is the best way to stay popular.

The pinnacle of this strategy was in 2014, when Putin used Russia's military might to invade Ukraine.

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The high approval rating he gained in the wake of that operation — about 60 to 85 per cent, depending on the pollster — held steady for four years as he conducted a global campaign to meddle in western democracies.

But soon after his re-election as President in March 2018, his luck began to change. During his four years of popularity, Putin had been ignoring his country's worsening economic situation, brought about primarily by his decision to focus on foreign policy while turning a blind eye to corruption.

But after his re-election, Putin announced a wildly unpopular policy: a five-year increase in the nation's retirement age.

His approval rating plummeted by about 20 per cent, and has stayed there in the year since, [despite occasional attempts at chest-beating](#).

It was all looking a bit dire. But in the past four months, Putin's luck has changed, thanks to the actions of US President Donald Trump.

The Ukraine phone call

Trump's first helping hand to Putin was in the form of a phone call with the new Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

The White House told Zelensky that if he wanted face-to-face meetings with Donald Trump and access to the US military aid he needs to fight Russia in Eastern Ukraine, he would have to participate in Trump's scheme to smear his political opponents.

So how has this helped Putin?

Putin's five-year war in Ukraine has been an attempt to isolate its neighbour and prevent it from joining the European Union.

Weakening the Ukrainian government is an important part of this goal.

And while the White House's release of the phone call transcript has led to an impeachment investigation and severely damaged President Trump, it has also caused problems for Zelensky.

His approval ratings are down for the first time since he was elected, and details of the phone call have damaged his relationship with the European Union at a time Zelensky was hoping to take steps to join it.

Zelensky, weakened both at home and internationally, has now indicated an openness to striking a deal with Putin.

Venezuela

- Venezuela - Russia supported Maduro in the 2019 Guaido-led protests and USA failed to overthrow him.
 - The opposition leader, Juan Guaido, is supported by the U.S.
 - Protests in 2014 led to the arrest of his mentor and leader of the Popular Will party Leopoldo Lopez.
 - Lopez named Guaido the leader of his party in 2019.

Libya

- Gaddafi was overthrown in 2011 by Hillary Clinton.
- Putin was incensed by this as Libya was a sphere of influence for Russia *****Explain why*****
- Libyan civil war ignited in 2014.
- In September 2019 Russia sent in the Wagner Group (a group of Russian mercenaries).
- Putin is using the conflict to leverage his influence with the West as Libya is oil-rich and is the gateway to Europe for migrants who are at the centre of Europe's migration crisis.

Libyan officials cite evidence of Russian mercenaries in war

Officials in Libya's UN-recognised government say they plan to confront Moscow over the alleged deployment of Russian mercenaries to fight alongside their opponents in the country's civil war.

Libyan and US officials accused Russia of deploying fighters through a private security contractor, the Wagner Group, to key battleground areas in Libya in recent months.

They say the Russian fighters are backing renegade military commander Khalifa Haftar, whose forces have been trying for months to capture the capital, Tripoli, where the UN-recognised Government of National Accord is based...

Analysts said Russian President Vladimir Putin is trying to find leverage with Western powers in oil-rich Libya and recognises the country is a gateway for many migrants trying to reach European shores, they said.

"Most of this is smoke and mirrors designed to induce fear," said Anas Gamati, founder of the Tripoli-based Sadeq Institute.

"Russian influence has done only two things: inflate their size and spectre of their power in Libya. They're not positively engaged or trying to play a constructive role with diplomatic or political value..."

"Putin would like nothing more than to keep Europe busy and divided over Libya, scared of illegal immigration, paralysed by right-wing populism that threatens the very idea of the EU," said Mohammed Eljareh, an analyst who runs Libya Outlook, a consulting company on Libyan affairs. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/12/libyan-officials-cite-evidence-russian-mercenaries-war-191205083745552.html>

Africa

- Africa - Russia making inroads via trade.
 - Russia has been suffering as a result of sanctions imposed on it for its invasion of Crimea in 2014.
 - Its inroads into Africa is partly an effort to offset the effects of those sanctions by strengthening other trade relationships.

Vladimir Putin is looking unstoppable after a string of victories that Trump handed to him on a plate

...Putin's expansion into Africa — highlighted in this week's first Russia-Africa Summit — has shown to the world a desire to cement his economic influence beyond his immediate surroundings. The Soviet Union used to have a major presence on the continent, but that has decreased since the end of the Cold War.

"Whether it's through diamond extraction or arms sales in Madagascar, or energy deals in Nigeria or Libya, the Russians are [showing themselves to be] an increasing force to be reckoned with," said James Nixey, head of the Russia and Eurasia Programme at Chatham House... - <https://www.businessinsider.com/russia-vladimir-putin-thriving-trump-hands-victories-2019-10>

Pyrrhic Victories

- Line of Pyrrhus shows that the victories by the king of the South are Pyrrhic ones. They do not serve to strengthen the KS.
- Sources speaking of Russia's successes in 2019 point to the fact that its successes are not what they appear at face value.

Putin touts Russia as a great power. But he's made it a weak one.

From Venezuela to Syria to Ukraine, Moscow is playing an assertive role in global affairs. Observers often give Vladimir Putin the credit for bringing Russia "back" as a force to be reckoned with on the international stage — despite his country's acknowledged weakness.

Former U.S. secretary of state Madeleine Albright expressed a common view in a recent interview: Putin, *she said*, "is playing a weak hand very well internationally."

Yet that analysis betrays a fundamental flaw. Power in global politics is not dealt from a deck of cards but is a function of state policy. Putin has now been leading his country for almost 20 years. If anyone has made Russia's hand weak, it's him.'

...The failure to create a more dynamic economy is the root of the problem. Thanks to high energy prices and fiscal caution, the Kremlin has accrued large reserve funds, but the economy has stagnated for a decade. When he returned to the presidency in 2012, Putin promised 6 percent growth per year, but the Russian economy is now about the same size as it was in 2008 (\$1.6 trillion), and average real incomes for ordinary Russians have declined for six years running. (In nominal terms, Russia's economy is smaller than that of Canada — or Texas.) Most experts *predict* economic growth in Russia will be less than 2 percent in the years to come, and few Russians harbor hope that economic conditions will improve. Slow economic growth does not directly threaten Russia's military operations abroad, but Moscow's spending on national defense fell to *sixth* place in 2018 — behind the United States, China, Saudi Arabia, India and France.

Putin's foreign policy, too, has led to reactions that have ultimately limited Russia's power. My research shows that the annexation of Crimea brought a four-year surge in support for Putin within Russia but also removed the largest and most pro-Russian voting bloc from Ukrainian politics. The landslide victory of Volodymyr Zelensky in presidential elections in April suggests that the polarization between Eastern and Western Ukraine that served Russia well is far less important today. And China *will soon replace* Russia as Ukraine's largest single trading partner. **To top it off, Moscow's actions in Ukraine have reinvigorated NATO despite all the centrifugal forces at work in Europe and led to economic sanctions that have further slowed economic growth in Russia.**

To be sure, we should recognize Putin's deftness. In Syria, the Kremlin has kept its ally Bashar al-Assad in power and retained its naval base with a small number of troops and few casualties. In the Middle East, the Kremlin has good relations with both Israel and the Palestinians and with both Saudi Arabia and Iran. Moscow's ties with longtime NATO member Turkey have never been better, while relations with China have improved. Putin may even manage to prop up the Maduro regime in Venezuela for a while. This is an impressive record.

But in other areas, Putin's assertive policies have produced short-term victories that limit Russian power in the long run. This trade-off is not lost on the Russian public, which has tired of the Kremlin's foreign adventures. Surveys show that Russians prioritize economic development over foreign policy by large margins. In May, they also *expressed* less trust in Putin than at any time *in the past 13 years*.

Putin can continue to play his weak hand well and abet Russia's long-term decline or try to strengthen his hand with all the inherent political risks of altering the status quo at home. My money is on the former. But before we crown him as a foreign policy genius, let's remember that his weak hand is largely of his own making. More importantly, by recognizing the self-limiting dynamics of Putin's foreign policy, we can keep the challenge from Moscow in proper perspective. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/06/06/putin-touts-russia-great-power-hes-made-it-weak-one/>

Putin Lost His African Great Game Before He Started

“Russia is trying to fuel the perception that it’s a major player,” Grant Harris, who served as former U.S. President Barack Obama’s senior advisor for African affairs, told Foreign Policy. In Sochi, Putin was undoubtedly able to do so, but the data tells a different story.

Since 2014, when sanctions following the annexation of Crimea forced Putin to find new markets and partners beyond the West’s regulatory reach, Russia has made a concerted effort to expand into Africa. It hasn’t had much effect. Today, only 3.7 percent of Russian goods end up in Africa. With more than 2.7 percent getting gobbled up by North Africa, a paltry fraction is destined for the bulk of the continent. It’s even worse in reverse, as African goods account for just 1.1 percent of Russian imports. The Sochi summit was supposed to change all this. However, there’s not much to suggest that it will. Of the \$12.5 billion in deals that were allegedly signed, most were only memorandums of understanding that may never get off the ground.

The problem is simple and seemingly unavoidable: Other than arms, of which Russia continues to be the continent’s key supplier, there is little it has to offer and less that Africa will take. For now, it’s hard to see how Putin’s plan to find new partners, make more money, and restart the Russian economy will succeed. “When the forum is finished, everything will be the same,” one Sochi native despaired. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/10/31/putin-russia-africa-great-game-china-united-states/>