

THE PELOPONNESIAN WAR

A WAR LIKE NO OTHER

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Like Athens and Sparta and the Persian Wars, similarly, the **USA** and the **Soviet Union** are also **bitter rivals** before World War II when Germany, Italy, Japan, begin their nefarious invasions that results in more than **50 million deaths**, most of them civilians. After forming an alliance and rising victorious from the War, the USA and USSR renew their imperialistic rivalry with **mortal ferocity**. History repeats!

Sparta and Athens become allies and end the Persian hegemony in 479. Athens stands as the **sole super-power** in the Mediterranean, respected by her many allies for fairness and for the democratic leadership of master debater **Pericles**. Athens forms security alliances with other city states and islands, something like NATO, and with her fleet and allies encircles Sparta who forms its own alliance within Peloponnesos. Sparta like the Soviet Union was a monolithic state controlling its neighbors with her military might. One of the reasons Spartans would not send soldiers to join the battles away from Peloponnesos was their **fear of revolt** by the people they had enslaved. It sounds just like USSR in the second half of the 20th century [*once USSR sends soldiers out of her agreed hegemony margins, Afghanistan 1980, her future is doomed; Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, East Germany cross over to the other side of the Iron Curtain*].

In the **Periclean Democracy** during the Golden Age of Athens, every citizen is invited to debate every public issue before voting in the **ecclesia**. Pericles never loses a crucial vote. In my mind, the 1990s were like that in America following the **collapse of the Russian hegemony in 1989**, thanks to the spread of wealth with free trade, the respect for human rights, the access to the **Internet** by all the peoples of the world, **cultural alliances**, prosperity, **consensus**, **peace**, **no wars**, etc. In a democracy, heroes are praised and applauded, but political opponents are free to attack them and dethrone them!



Imagine this. At the height of her hegemony, **Athens**, out of vanity, reacts radically to a challenge of her hegemony and, before the consequences of any precipitous action are fully assessed, the **Peloponnesian War** starts. Pericles takes drastic measures for **homeland security**. A tall fortified wall around the city all the way to the **Piraeus** harbor is erected. The Athenian navy and merchant fleet dominates the seas. Pericles, however, **dies too soon**. Sparta moves into Attica and cuts off the local food supplies, forcing prosperous Athens to depend on her naval fleet for the supply of commodities from abroad for her ravenous appetite.

After a while, allies of Athens, like those in **Sicily**, balk at the adamant, excessive demands of Athens for grain and military contributions for her contest with ideological rival Sparta. The Athenians, showing an absolute contempt for their own

democratic principles and traditions, instead of concentrating on the war against Sparta, succumb to the greed of their merchants, and invade Sicily in the **Adriatic Gulf**. The military elite and the intellectuals argue against it, but they are **labeled unpatriotic**, and thus are neutralized.

The ill-lead and inadequately armed Athenian expeditionary force falls into a **trap**. The invasion is a disaster. The most capable general **Alkibiades** is blamed and is charged with religious sacrilege. He bolts to Sparta to fight his misbehaving patria. Later he is recalled by desperate Athens, but Alkibiades loses a crucial navy battle and is ostracized to **Persia** like hero **Themistocles** before him. In 404, **Lysander** of Sparta marches victorious into **anemic Athens** and tears down the walls to Piraeus.

Socrates, whose gnomic aphorism “**Know Thyself**” [Γνωθαι Σ’ Εαυτον] can no longer be tolerated by the city despots, is sentenced to death making the greatest **philosopher of all time** a scapegoat for the failures of Athenian **foreign policies** and **moral decline**.

Athens goes into oblivion and does not rise again to **world prominence** until 2,404 years later, with the **2004 Olympics!**

LYSANDER OF SPARTA, THE DESTROYER OF THE ATHENIAN FLEET with massive help from Persia:

“We are men of few words [laconic] but concise. **Hubris**, we abhor. We, Spartans and Peloponnesians, possess courage, [γεναιότητα, θαρρος].

We believe in courage to endure and we have **contempt for death**. Our women are free and brave, challenging their sons to return victorious or not at all [η των η επι τας]. The brave man is calm, god-fearing, and steady.

Courage is born of obedience, of selflessness, of brotherhood, of love for communal commonwealth. Spartans are **courageous** but not bold. Athenians are **bold** but not courageous. Courage is long-suffering.

Boldness is impatient; **boldness** cannot endure hardships or delays; it is **ravenous**; it must feed on **victory** or it dies.”

HISTORIAN THUCYDIDES ACCOUNT ON CHANGES IN ATHENIANS BECAUSE OF WAR STRESSES:

“Words had to change their ordinary meaning and to take that which was given to them by the **authorities**.

Reckless audacity came to be considered the courage of a loyal ally.

Prudent hesitation became **cowardice**, and moderation was held to be a cover for unmanliness. The ability to see all sides of a question became suspicious.

The advocate of **extreme measures** was always trustworthy and his opponent a man to be suspected. The cause of all these evils was the hunger arising from **greed** and **ambition**”.

“The use of **religion** to commit culpable deeds became acceptable”!

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