Transformative Ambition in Peace and War: The Case of Pericles of Athens

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This paper revisits the realist interpretation of the Peloponnesian War that was fought by Athens against Sparta. This paper explores how the transformative ambition of ancient Athens's most prominent leader, Pericles, was directly involved in the precipitation and conduct of the war against Sparta. Specifically, Pericles' vision of Athens deeply influenced its politics and foreign policy. His diplomatic decisions were instrumental in precipitating the war against Sparta and his military strategy revolutionized the conduct of ancient Greek warfare.

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I examine Pericles of Athens as a leader who demonstrated what I call transformative political ambition. On their own initiative, leaders with transformative ambition try to make bold and sweeping changes to domestic and international politics. Transformative ambition varies in its content and direction, depending on a leader's perceptive understanding of the prevailing order of political life. Such leaders aspire to reshape fundamental features of domestic society. For example, they may seek to reorder domestic institutions, to propose new policies and establish new doctrines, and to rethink the ideals that animate their countries. Far-reaching ambition, like that of Pericles, aims for a redefinition of the national character that not only influences citizens' beliefs but also shapes their habits and practices. As leaders successfully implement domestic and foreign policy, they may also make profound changes to international relations.

Through the example of Pericles, I demonstrate how the interaction of personal characteristics and regime politics indelibly shapes some leader attributes. Yet, regimes can also foster environments where the better qualities of individuals can flourish, which enable leaders to stand above the morass of politics. These statesmen can also provide guidance to improve the lives of their fellow citizens. For example, Athens produced leaders who were very competitive, cunning, and bold. They were molded by the empire's ascendance, and they behaved in ways that added to its glory and strength. However, as a leader, Pericles was superior to his contemporaries in many ways. He was a natural imperialist like other leaders, but he acted as an independent force in policy and was able to shape and curb his followers' political aims. Thus, he could define the Athenian imperial project in a way he believed was both sustainable and did justice to the Athenian character.

Although realists consider the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta as an incontrovertible case of the effects of dramatic shifts to the balance of power, I demonstrate how Pericles' leadership and ambition gave shape to Athens's imperial project. Pericles had the difficult task of managing an expanding empire's power in prudent ways. He did his best to turn the desire for expansion

and wealth toward Athens's more noble activities, such as political participation, public works, and philosophical and aesthetic achievement.

TRANSFORMATIVE AMBITION AND TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP

Political ambition, I argue, is partly a product of a leader's unique development and personal experience, but it also depends on the regime type that conditions a leader and that a leader may condition in turn. In this regard, my understanding of political ambition complements and combines rational-choice and personality approaches, which tend to reduce it either to strategic institutional maneuvering for the sake of staying in power or to static personality traits and psychological needs.

Political ambition and the leadership that accompanies it is partly the product of internal drives and unalterable idiosyncrasies that compel individuals to seek power but is also nurtured by and sometimes bound to the regime. Political culture and the process that brings leaders to power have a way of shaping ambition, and successful leaders learn the proper way to channel their ambition in their respective regimes. In this respect, as rational-choice theorists argue, political ambition is constrained by the institutions and subset of the population that select leaders.

Politically ambitious leaders can respect the laws of their country, subvert and manipulate them, and even seek to alter the principles and institutions on which a regime is based. Contemporary scholars have examined the independent role of leaders to explain institutional change (see March & Olsen, 1984); leaders are viewed as educators and moral guides who are capable of transforming the preferences of followers (Burns, 1978); leaders can also practice the art of political manipulation and change their environments through the use of "heresthetics" in order to win (Riker, 1986).

James MacGregor Burns (1978) popularized the idea of transformational leadership, which connotes leadership at its "highest," when leaders and followers engage with each other in such a way as to provoke a change in morality. He contrasts transformational leadership with transactional leadership, which is based on the cost-benefit transactions between leaders and followers. I share Burns's interest in examining leadership that makes a difference in politics and also at the level of ideas (pp. 454–55). However, Burns understands transformational leadership as a purely psychological process. I understand transformative ambition and leadership to be more than a psychological process; it can only be carried out from concrete transformation of political structures and citizens' opinions. As a result, I argue, Burns does not spell out the full implications of transformational leadership. While the most profound changes are moral and psychological, they will not endure without redirecting citizens' habits, mores, and opinions through a concrete change in political institutions and patterns of behavior at the international level.

This paper pays special attention to Pericles' statesmanship during the Peloponnesian War, which is the subject of much debate in international relations studies. He devised a rational defensive strategy that broke and radically reshaped the Hellenistic rules of war. Moreover, it was antithetical to the Athenian national character, and through the force of his character, he executed and made the Athenians stick to it. Ultimately, his plan failed. A plague decimated Athens's population and morale; it also killed him two years into the conflict. While the turn of fortune contributed to Pericles' failure to win the war, it also exhibited the major failures of the Periclean regime and his statecraft. Focusing on the precarious balance of the common good in an especially individualistic and wealthy democracy, his cautious and rationalist strategy strained the institutional power that made the empire successful, expansion. His death proved that in the absence of a great and prudent leader like Pericles, the imperial democracy produced selfish and dangerous politicians who took Athens down a disastrous path and were eventually defeated by Sparta.

REALIST THEORY AND THE PELOPONNESIAN WAR

The Peloponnesian War, fought between Athens and Sparta, began in 431 BC; this total war engulfed the entire Greek world and lasted 27 years. When the conflict broke out, each polis was at the height of its power. In Thucydides' estimation, it was "the greatest movement yet known in history" (1.1.2, trans. 1847). On account of its intensity, duration, and the radical differences in political, military, and

economic organization between Athens and Sparta, the war transformed the Greek world. The balance of power shifted to Sparta, Athens never regained the international vitality it had under its maritime empire, and civil strife, which unhinged the Greek poleis during the war, became commonplace in Greece.

Why did Athens and Sparta go to war? Thucydides provides an answer:

> To the question why they broke the treaty, I answer by placing first an account of their grounds of complaint and points of difference, that no one may ever have to ask the immediate cause which plunged the Hellenes into war of such magnitude. The real cause, however, I consider to be the one which was formally most kept out of sight. The growth of the power of Athens, and the alarm which this inspired in Sparta, made the war inevitable. (1.23)

International-relations scholars, who have duly noted Thucydides' distinction between the immediate cause and the real cause for the war, understand his *History* as an early expression of power politics and structural realism (Wight, 1978; Waltz, 1979; Keohane, 1986; Gilpin, 1988; Doyle, 1997). For these realists, Thucydides' statement about the war's inevitability implies a neorealist explanation. These scholars think that Thucydides vindicates the realist perspective for two reasons. His search for an underlying cause for the war ends in the discovery of power politics. In addition, Thucydides thinks of power in transhistorical terms. As a result, the role of events, leaders, and regime politics give way to the analysis of power operating at the system level. Two great powers struggled in an unstable balance of power; the uneven growth of one contributed to the fear of the other; mutual suspicion and distrust led the states' leaders into a series of decisions that culminated in the great war.

Robert Gilpin (1988) has argued that Thucydides' explanation of the war in 1.23 offers an early attempt to provide a structural account of international politics, and, specifically, Thucydides proposes a theory of hegemonic war (p. 592). As such, Thucydides understood classical Greece as a system composed of two powers, in which the distribution of power defined the system and the hierarchy of power ordered and stabilized it (1988, p. 592).

Thucydides' theory of hegemonic war attributes the outbreak to the uneven growth of power in Athens over Sparta, which is explained by three factors: demographic and economic necessity, the mastery of naval power and the expansion of commerce, and the rise of the Athenian Empire after the Persian Wars (1988, pp. 597–98). Athens's commercial democracy and rule of the sea encircled and threatened Sparta, which was more conservative and austere. Up until the Persian Wars, Sparta was Greece's hegemon, thanks to its masterful command of land warfare. Its strength lay in its regimented warrior society, conservative constitution, and suppression of the Helots—a subjugated Greek people who lived as serfs to the state.

Despite Thucydides' explicitness about the war's true cause, Michael Doyle (1997), in a careful reading of the narrative, urges us to pay closer attention to the Greek thinker's complex realism. Doyle argues that Thucydides' work "is a testament to the fact that he held that a state's ends, its means, and (therefore) its choices could not be adequately determined through an analysis of international structure" (1997, p. 73). For Doyle, the explanation for the conflict is more complex as Spartan fear, vulnerability, and pride contributed to its declaration of war. Thucydides rejected shallow interpretations of power (1997, p. 74).

Each city's political, economic, and cultural systems animated, and constrained, their foreign policies. From a neorealist perspective, Sparta should have balanced against the increase in Athens's power by investing in a fleet, a larger expeditionary force, and its own empire, but Sparta's social structure, "which was equivalent to a massive penal colony designed to control and exploit the oppressed Messenian helots, resisted innovation" (1997, p. 74). Conversely, Athens's wealth and power was supplied by a strong navy that could project the city's power throughout the Aegean Sea.

In addition, Doyle argues that Sparta's and Athens's interactions were not just based on rational assessments of each other's power. Their dealings were also laced with enmity, mistrust, and Spartan envy. Doyle agrees that Thucydides offers a structural explanation for the war in 1.23, but he emphasizes

each city's appeals to security, honor, and self-interest as sources of its behavior. For example, Spartan fear and honor equally contributed to its declaration of war against Athens.

Ned Lebow (2001) is critical of the realist interpretation of Thucydides, which interprets him as a proto–social scientist who was primarily interested in discerning causes and outcomes. As a result, they lose sight of important ethical lessons that are embedded in what is a more complex story. Lebow takes a literary approach to the *History*; specifically, he explains the war of Athens against Sparta from a constructivist perspective.

Lebow identifies four layers in the text: "the nature and relationships among power, interest, and justice; Athens as a tragedy; the relationship between nomos (convention, custom and law) and phusis (nature); and the relationship between erga and logoi and its implications for civilization" (2001, p. 549). He also acknowledges Thucydides' distinction between the real cause and other grounds of complaint. Yet, Lebow proceeds beyond 1.23, the subsequent narrative, and paired speeches of Book 1, and discovers that the true cause runs deeper than Thucydides first admits. Sparta's fear of its rival's power was magnified by the threat that dynamic Athens posed to the traditional Spartan way of life. Moreover, its trepidation was stoked by third parties with their own interests; and, lastly, leaders' miscalculations at critical junctures during the crisis helped bring upon the war (2001, p. 549).

Lebow argues that Thucydides understood that the social conventions, which provided Greek life its significance, also regulated domestic and international behavior. Yet, as long-standing social meanings changed quickly, the Greek social world was disrupted, precipitating the conflict. Sparta had a greater apprehension of losing its identity than of Athens's actual military might. Sparta's declaration of war was proof that its citizens did not necessarily fear the Athenians but, rather, underestimated their power and resolve.

The former international relations scholars make room for leaders' perceptions, but they mostly interpret them as a series of miscalculations that brought the cities to war. I argue the opposite. The war was consistent with Pericles' ambition to supplant Sparta's influence. I agree with Lebow's view that interests and moral meaning are thoroughly tied together and influence behavior. Yet, the root of many changes in Athenian society and Greek warfare were not just constructivist in nature. Although many social conventions are accidental, major shifts in Athenian politics were attributable to Pericles' domestic policies, far-sighted foreign policies, and high-minded view of Athens. These new conditions were not accidental. His statesmanship was marked by various episodes in which he convinced his fellow Athenians to follow his policies and accept his beliefs.

Next, I present evidence that demonstrates how Athens's domestic politics, which relied heavily on Pericles' personal leadership, were the driving force behind the war. Athens was an imperial democracy; domestic and foreign policy were tightly bound. Moreover, the Athenians' worldview was fueled by their daring spirit (a phenomenon recognized by the Athenians as well as outsiders) and the combined efforts of its greatest leaders. Pericles' influence on international relations explains the many steps that the Greek world took toward the imbalance of power that Thucydides' observed and the realists concentrate on. If the realists want to understand the true cause of war (Athens's power), then they must understand Pericles' part in the historical drama.

PERICLES' LEADERSHIP AND ATHENIAN POLITICS

The unique attributes and political ambition that made Pericles the paragon of Athenian leadership were themselves shaped by the character of the Athenian regime—its laws, the constitution, the mores, and way of life—which fostered certain character traits to the exclusion of others (Newell 2009, p. 227).

Pericles came of age at the beginning of one of Western civilization's most remarkable periods. Cutting edge pre-Socratic philosophers and sophists were challenging traditional forms of instruction and turning religious ideas on their heads. During Socrates lifetime, the sophists came to be known as a particular class of professional educators who gave instruction to young men and public displays of eloquence (Guthrie 1971, p. 35). The importance of oratory was undeniable in the law courts and the assembly, "the word rhetor, indeed, comes almost to mean 'politician'" (Rhodes 1986 p. 141). Plutarch

tells us that the pre-Socratic philosophers influenced Pericles' education; he was a hearer of Zeno and kept close company with Anaxagoras who came up with the concept of the immaterial nous (mind). Pericles' philosophical education refined his thought and helped him perfect his speech. Pericles' understanding of the world was "superior to that superstition with which the ignorant wonder at appearances" (Plutarch 2001, p. 205).

Pericles' style of speaking, rhetorical ability, and preference for rational explanations, became well settled in him on account of his great natural genius. His preference for rationality over custom, omens and divinations made its way into his policy proposals. His aristocratic lineage combined with his education resulted in an elevation of purpose and dignity of language, "raised far above the base and dishonest buffooneries of mob eloquence" (2001, p. 204). The perfect comportment with which he carried all these talents and virtues showed him superior to all others, "upon which account, they say, he had his nickname given him, though some are of the opinion he was named the Olympian from the public buildings he adorned the city; and others again, from his great power in public affairs" (2001, p. 207).

Plutarch's description of Pericles' Olympian loftiness, composure, calmness, and even the composure that characterized his tone of voice, present the embodiment of a political leader who derived his authority through his self-command and persuasive speech. As the leading citizen of his time, Pericles greatly affected the life of the average citizen in democratic Athens (Plutarch 2001, p. 204). Pericles' character, public manner, intelligence, and rhetorical ability were all important to his political success.

In Athens, an individual's political success was dependent upon them requiring renown. Renown was attained through family lineage, by creating a strong network of close companions, and by distinguishing oneself in Athens's hyper competitive society. In Athens, there were no parties to speak of; political groups formed around popular leaders who created group followings from their relatives and friends. The skills of political leadership included the ability to win fame and honor, and also being able to persuade the people in the assembly.

Leading politicians surrounded themselves with associates who worked on their behalf, "holding offices, appearing in the courts and proposing measures in the assembly" (Rhodes 1986 p. 138). As one of these leaders, Pericles consciously crafted his public persona. He was wary of commonness and presented himself only on intervals by limiting his appearances only at great public and political occasions (Plutarch 2001, p. 206). To devote himself solely to public affairs he maintained limited friendships and left the responsibility of his estate to others.

Pericles earned a reputation for probity among his fellow citizens but he also learned to contend with the turbulent character of the Athenian democracy. In democratic Athens, religious questions, public festivals, financial matters, inheritance law, ostracism, political office, and all matters pertaining to foreign policy were decided by a popular assembly. At this open assembly there was no restriction on speech. Athenian citizens met to discuss and vote on public decrees that affected the public and private individuals. A simple majority decided an issue and voting was mostly conducted by show of hands.

Assembly meetings drew around 6,000 (the minimum amount for a quorum) of 30,000 eligible citizens. Due to democratic reforms, which Ephialtes and Pericles were responsible for, citizens were paid to attend. The assembly met 40 times a year, and once a meeting was called to order, "a lotteried president for the day announced (through a herald) the first item on the agenda; after reading it the president asked, 'Who of the Athenians has advice to give?'" (Ober 1993 p. 483).

The chief and most prominent elected officials in Athens were the *strategoi*. They were ten generals serving one-year terms with no limit on re-election. As a *strategos*, Pericles could only issue orders on a military campaign since the office did not carry formal political power. Thus, Pericles political power arose in the assembly and when he initiated policy he did so as a citizen. Yet, as a general, Pericles had to skilled in both military and diplomatic affairs, since the generals were subject to a yearly review, prosecution, impeachment, fines, exile, and even death.

PERICLES' DOMESTIC POLICIES

Pericles was elected 16 times as general, more than any other Athenian in history. Due to his unparalleled prestige, Thucydides, in his *History,* introduces Pericles as "the first man of his time at Athens, ablest alike in counsel and in action" (1.139). In ancient Athens it was common for a prominent leader to put through a consistent program over many years. Before Pericles, some notable Athenians made great political strides. Themistocles laid the empire's foundation by persuading the Athenians to shift their military power to the navy. Ephialtes initiated the radical democratic reforms that Pericles fulfilled. Cimon won major battles against Persia; he diminished the Persian threat and heralded an era of magnificent civic benefaction. Yet as a visionary leader, Pericles surpassed them all (Hale, 2009, p. 126).

Pericles' lengthy tenure and influence was unmatched. As such a rare and gifted politician, he could channel his political ambition beyond the desire to sustain himself in office. Despite what some rational choice theorists assume (Mesquita et al. 1995), Pericles' ambition transcended the desire to simply hold on to political power. His goals were visionary and he wanted to bring to Athens a level of glory that was unsurpassable and sublime. To that end, Pericles' amplified the arena where Athenian citizens could attain glory, which was not through individual accomplishments but through service to the city. Pericles project depended upon a transformation of Athenian domestic politics through its imperial power. Pericles used the imperial treasury to subsidize the public payment of juries, the assembly, the citizen rowers, and it paid for his ambitious building project.

Pericles' rise to power, in the decade of 450-460, was coeval with the implementation of *misthos*, state payment for public service. Payment gave the poorer citizens in Athens a say in the city's affairs; their responsibility for Athens's naval power
was now being represented in their share of the city's power. Pericles' most radical measure instituted jury payment, "Pericles first made service in the jury-courts a paid office, as a popular counter-measure against Cimon's wealth" (Ath. Pol. 27.2). Jury payment marks the turning point that brought city affairs into a radical new balance.

Pericles' legislation had a widespread and profound effect on the lives of Athenian citizens. The domestic policies that were implemented under his leadership were based upon a deliberate decision to rely on the permanent availability of imperial revenue. Aristotle's description of how Athens's public funds were divvied up at the height of the empire reveals the extent to which political life in Athens became dependent on *misthos*.

> They also established a plentiful food supply for the multitude, as Aristeides had proposed; for the combined proceeds of the tributes and the taxes of the allies served to feed more than twenty thousand men. For there were six thousand jurymen, one thousand six hundred archers and also one thousand two hundred cavalry, five hundred members of the Council, five hundred guardians of the docks, and also fifty watchmen in the city, as many as seven hundred officials at home and as many as seven hundred abroad; and in addition to these, when later they settled into the war, two thousand five hundred hoplites, twenty guard-ships and other ships conveying the guards to the number of two hundred elected by lot; and furthermore the prytaneum, orphans, and warders of prisoners—for all of these had their maintenance from public funds. (*Athenian Constitution* 24.3)

In Plato's Gorgias, the character of Socrates articulates the conservative opinion about the moral consequences of Pericles' policies. He says, "If the Athenians are said to have become better because of Pericles, or, quite the opposite, to have been corrupted by him. For I at any rate hear these things, that Pericles made the Athenians lazy, cowardly, babbling, and money lovers, when he first brought them into the state of mercenaries" (515e).

The new and expanding empire brought unprecedented wealth to Athens. In 431, the year that the war started, Athens's annual income was 1,000 talents, of which 400 came from internal revenue and 600

from tribute; it had 6,000 talents of coined silver in the treasury (Kagan, 1991 p. 232). According to some sources, at one point there may once have been as much as 9,700 talents in the treasury (see Rhodes, 2006 p. 91). We can think of the value of Athenian currency in terms of keeping the naval fleet operational. One talent was the amount of silver needed to pay the crew of a trireme for one month, tours of duty lasted 8 months, and Athens had a fleet of over 200 triremes.

A massive building program accompanied Athens's largesse. Under Pericles direction, the Long Walls that connected Athens to the port of Piraeus were completed. The Long Walls were proposed much earlier by Themistocles and began being built after the Persian wars, so the fortification of city is not attributable to Pericles entirely. However, Pericles' strategic decisions during the war were dependent upon the completion and fortification of the Long Walls. They made Athens invulnerable to attack since Sparta would not risk a siege of Athens and could not build a counter wall. In addition, the most famous architectural works were built on the acropolis: the Parthenon, the Erechtheion, the Propylaea, and the temple of Athena Nike. Pericles was very involved in the conception and construction of many of these architectural works, specifically the Parthenon.

On a political level, the building program functioned as a public works program. Laborers, architects, craftsman, traders and merchants could be of service and as result, "it put the whole city, in a manner, into state pay, while at the same time she is both beautiful and maintained by herself" (Plutarch 2001, 212). Public compensation was distributed through legislation and the building program. Pericles' policies were tangible and symbolic. They enriched Athenian citizens; it lifted the demos into political prominence, and conveyed to the citizens the stake they had in the city's resources and continued success. Through his policies Pericles was inducing a remarkable change in domestic ideology, a change that was necessary for the maintenance of Athens's empire.

PERICLES' FOREIGN POLICY

Pericles presided over the transition from league leader to imperial ruler, which conflicted with the identity of the free-ruling polis. By the Peloponnesian War, the Greek world saw Athens as an arrogant and aggressive city. The Peloponnesians stated aim was to liberate Greece, restoring freedom to subjugated cities, and only a destruction of the Athenian Empire could accomplish this goal. Pericles embarked on a new imperial policy when in 454 he changed the Delian League's organization, moving the treasury from Delos to the Acropolis in Athens. The conservative faction, now led by Thucydides, mounted a challenge. Pericles' new direction violated traditional religion and morality. The charge against Pericles took aim at his decision to transfer the treasury and the building campaign:

> Greece cannot but resent it as an insufferable affront, and consider herself to be tyrannized over openly, when she sees the treasure, which was contributed by her upon a necessity for war, wantonly lavished out by us upon our city, to gild her all over, and to adorn and set her forth, as it were some vain woman. (Plutarch, 2001, p. 211)

Pericles rebuffed the charges of moral impropriety and the abuse of imperial funds as he reminded people of the benefits they derived from the empire. His policies prevailed. In 443, when he finally could secure adequate political backing, he called for Thucydides' ostracism. He succeeded, and secure in his policies without a considerable political figure to oppose him, he turned to consolidating the empire.

In 445, after Pericles successfully warded off a major military showdown with the Peloponnesians, Athens and Sparta agreed to a truce, which led to the negotiation of the Thirty Years' Peace. The treaty ended the first Peloponnesian War, and the peace lasted 14 years. The treaty stipulated that Athens give up any claims to territory in the Peloponnese while the Spartans tacitly recognized its rival's empire. To prevent future wars, they agreed to observe certain protocols: allies from one league could not defect to another side (the cause of the conflict in 445), neutral cities were free to become allies of either side, and each side would submit any future disagreement to arbitration. The arbitration clause was unconventional in Greek relations; Pericles was likely behind this diplomatic innovation.

Next, I discuss the series of events starting in 433 that precipitated the Peloponnesian War, in which I argue that Pericles played an independent role in fashioning events including the beginning of the conflict in 431. At critical junctures, he made decisive diplomatic moves that brought the Athenians closer to war. Thucydides describes his exacting policies toward Sparta: "for being the most powerful man of his time, and the leading Athenian statesman, he opposed the Spartans in everything, and would have no concessions, but ever urged the Athenians to war" (1.127).

The war originated in a dispute between two smaller powers, Corinth and Corcyra, over control the Epidamnus, which was a small city in a faraway corner of the Greek world. Prior to the disagreement, Corinth and Corcyra were on bad terms. Corcyra was originally a Corinthian colony, but as Corcyra's strength grew, so did its independence and pride. It failed to pay the customary reverence to its mother country, and the two cities became bitter rivals. The conflict over Epidamnus escalated, and the two cities went to war.

In 433, Corcyra appealed to Athens for help in what was becoming a dangerous conflict for it to undertake alone. Corinth was building a large fleet to counter Corcyra's, and while Corinth was Sparta's ally, Corcyra was neutral. Both cities sent ambassadors to Athens to plead their cases. The majority in the assembly preferred to stay out of the dispute because Corcyra was not an ally and remote Epidamnus lay outside Athens's strategic interests.

Thucydides tells us that the debate lasted two days, and on the first day, public opinion was disposed to reject Corcyra's plea. However, the debate was not resolved, and the vote was postponed for the next day (a delay on a vote was extremely rare). On the second day, public opinion had shifted to intervention (1.44). Pericles and his associates had made a case for the strategic worth in coming to Corcyra's aid in what they were building up to be an inevitable war with Sparta.

Among the diplomatic hurdles to this measure, Corinth was in the Peloponnesian League and Corcyra was a neutral state. The Corinthian ambassadors had argued that Athenian intervention on Corcyra's behalf, with the conflict underway, violated the Thirty Years' Peace. Although Athens risked war with Sparta, it did not want to see Corcyra's fleet lost to Corinth. A Corinthian victory at sea would embolden that city and threaten Athens's command of the waters. Thucydides tells us that Athens accepted the danger since its attitude about the possibilities for a long peace with Sparta had dimmed, while its expansionist ambitions had not:

> For it began to be felt that the coming of the Peloponnesian War was only a question of time, and no one was willing to see a naval power of such magnitude as Corcyra sacrificed to Corinth; though if they could let them weaken each other by mutual conflict, it would be no bad preparation for the struggle which Athens might one day have to wage with Corinth and the other naval powers. At the same time the island seemed to lie conveniently on the coasting passage to Italy and Sicily. (1.44)

To avoid open war, however, Athens did not make a traditional alliance, a fully offensive and defensive one, with Corcyra. Making such an alliance would have been tantamount to declaring war on one of Sparta's allies. Instead, the Athenians crafted an innovative defensive alliance with Corcyra (one with no historical precedent). Pericles played a hand in shifting public opinion to his view and designing the less provocative alliance. It is very likely that without Pericles the Athenians would have rejected the Corcyrean appeal for assistance, a fateful decision that put Athens and Sparta on the path to war.

The cautious Athenians only sent Corcyra ten ships (and three *strategoi*) to reinforce its fleet of 110. Yet, this small support still showed that Athens was serious about the alliance. Moreover, the mere sight of Athenian ships could act as a deterrent. Athens's generals were under strict instructions; "if they sailed to Corcyra and threatened a landing on her coast, or in any of her possessions, they were to do their utmost to prevent it" (1.45). The policy sought to hinder Corinth without fighting its military at sea because that would constitute the use of offensive force.

In the battle of Sybota in 433, Corcyra and Corinth used primitive methods of trireme warfare and lacked discipline and tactical sense. As the battle wore on, the Athenians were drawn into the fight and

began ramming Corinthian ships. However, they had waited too long and had to flee with the remaining Corcyrean vessels. Corinth then rowed out again, in attempt to strike a fatal blow to Corcyra's navy. Yet, in dramatic fashion Corinth retreated when a second fleet of Athenian ships approached over the horizon. It is likely that at the last minute, the assembly regretted its decision to send such few ships.

In the battle's aftermath, other cities were now embroiled with Athens. Megara had fought alongside Corinth, and Athens decided to punish the city with a peacetime embargo, which was another novel policy. Again, this was most certainly one of Pericles' innovations since he fiercely defended it in the assembly. The Megarian Decree, as it is known, was also Pericles' most "striking, and in some ways most puzzling, measure" (Kagan, 2003, p. 207). Through the only peacetime embargo ever documented in the ancient world, Pericles showed Athenian resolve and the ability to punish cities in the Peloponnesian League.

Through the Megarian Decree, Pericles found another inventive way to skirt the application of offensive military force with another Spartan ally. Cut off from Athenian harbors, the embargo strangled the city's economy and offended the Megarians who now joined Corinth and a chorus of other aggrieved Greeks in an effort to make Sparta declare war against Athens.

What explains Pericles' alliance with Corcyra and his unpopular decision to bar Megara from Athenian harbors? The Megarian Decree further stoked anti-Athenian sentiment. Pericles did not rescind the decree even as Spartan ambassadors promised that war would be avoided if Athens did so (1.139). In fact, he had a great deal of latitude and could determine Athens's strategic behavior. Unlike any other leader in Athens and Sparta—the Spartans had ignored King Archidamus' advice—Pericles shows that he could steer opinion to his position despite considerable opposition.

Pericles, however, had a plan to fight Sparta, which was arguably designed free from situational pressures. Pericles took the long view. He scrupulously observed the Thirty Years' Peace but then decisively shifted to a hawkish posture toward the Spartans. This behavior points to his coolly rational, strategic understanding of international relations. He could prescribe restraint or aggression when necessary.

However, Pericles' transformative ambitions figured into his strategic decisions. The continued success of his domestic and imperial policies was undergirded by the requisite shift in the Greek balance of power to Athens. Pericles' realism was in service of his ambition. His transformative ambition, which is transmitted with rhetorical flourish in the Funeral Oration, fostered his city's daring character and brought it to its peak. However, for other states, the consequence of this national greatness is that they must contend with a restless, innovative, aggressive, and revolutionary regime.

After the declaration of war, cooler tempers prevailed in Sparta. Over the course of a year, it seemed to try and avoid war by sending envoys to Athens with various requests. When the Athenians refused to entertain the Spartan's demands, they made a final proposal that Athens give independence back to the subject cities, and "they proclaimed publicly and in the clearest language that there would be no war if the Athenians withdrew the Megarian Decree" (1.139).

The Athenians held a decisive assembly regarding Sparta's demands. They were divided into two camps, those who urged for war and others who believed that the Megarian decree was pure folly (1.139.4). Pericles came forward and gave the definitive speech. He refused concessions to the Spartans on principle because Sparta had failed to abide by the legalistic clause of the Thirty Years' Peace, which stipulated that cities submit disputes to arbitration. Thus, any concession to Sparta amounted to direct interference in Athens's political affairs. Pericles warned the Athenians that this was a slippery basis for negotiations because if they accommodated Sparta on the "trifle" that was the Megarian Decree, they "will instantly have to meet some greater demand, as having been frightened into obedience in the first instance; while a firm refusal will make them clearly understand that they must treat [the Athenians] as equals" (1.140.5).

Pericles was willing to incur the costs of war in 431 but not in 445. Both times he knew that the Peloponnesians would likely prevail in a traditional land war. What changed in Athens's favor was that he could now persuade the citizens to fight an unconventional war and also hold them to it long-term. He planned a long war at sea that relied on Athens's projection of power and wealth and exploited the

enemies' weakness, which was a lack of naval experience and unfamiliarity with a protracted engagement.

Conventional Greek warfare was short and brutal and ended decisively. The Greeks understood war as a human activity that exercised a citizen's virtue and fulfilled his duty. As an invading army made its way into enemy territory, it began to lay waste to the countryside. Courage, honor, and sheer necessity demanded that the defending city's army go out to secure its territory. The decisive battle was fought on chosen ground that would make it easier for each hoplite army to form phalanxes. The soldier ranks held closely together and created a mass wall of shields that made frontal assaults difficult. Opposing phalanxes would collide against each other with the aim of maintaining the cohesion of one's front line while breaking the enemy's formation. The courage of the men in the front ranks made all the difference. To hold the line and control the field were enough to claim victory over one's adversary. The more disciplined and well-trained army usually succeeded, and the Spartan polis was fully dedicated to fielding the best army.

In order to win the war, the Athenians could not engage the Peloponnesian army on land. Pericles told the Athenians that they had no chance in a conventional battle: "in a single battle the Peloponnesians and their allies may be able to defy all Hellas" (1.141.6). However, there was no other proven way to win a war against a land force. Thus, Pericles sought to exploit the military and resource differences between Sparta and Athens (1.141).

Pericles devised a fully defensive strategy against Sparta. The Athenians would never go out to meet the invading Peloponnesians. He would test the enemy's will, hoping to convince it that conventional tactics were futile. Sparta might march into Attica every summer and devastate Athens's countryside, but as long as Athens controlled the sea, it was invincible. In his speech Pericles advises the Athenians that if they "would remain quiet, take care of their fleet, refrain from trying to extend their empire in wartime and thus putting their city in danger, they would prevail" (2.65.7).

Pericles' defensive strategy would dampen Spartan morale by making them tire of invading Attica without inflicting any real harm. Athens's best shot at winning was through the empire. It could afford to import all the food it needed while maintaining the fleet for several years. Kagan (1991) has estimated how long Pericles planned to hold out. Considering the costs to the naval fleet, money in the treasury, and yearly revenue and tribute, he believes that Pericles planned the war to last no more than three years. Pericles was likely expecting that Sparta would recall the campaigns.

This strategy used Athens's fortifications, military capabilities, and vast resources. Its naval fleet was the largest and best trained in the Greek world. Long walls encircled the city and connected it to the port of Piraeus, which made it invulnerable to attack. Pericles had built a financial reserve that could sustain the fleet and the city's inhabitants. Although these resources were unique to Athens, there is no reason that they naturally led to Pericles' war strategy. Consistent with his transformative ambition, Pericles abandoned traditional attachments. His leadership aimed at redefining the polity's conception of itself in such a way that citizens would value empire more than their territory and realize that perpetuating the empire was above any private loss (1.143.5).

Although Athens was a cosmopolitan city, the majority of people lived in the countryside and were not happy to abandon their homes. The idea of laying waste to their private possessions was unthinkable. Thucydides says, "[D]eep was their trouble and discontent at abandoning their houses and the hereditary temples of the ancient state, and at having to change their habits of life and to bid farewell to what each regarded as his native city" (2.16). Pericles' speech demonstrates that he was not attached to any traditional mores, and the city-dwelling masses and naval rowers certainly must have favored his strategy. I think that we are left to infer that, owing to Pericles' reputation, persuasion, a bit of cajoling, and the preponderance of resources he poured into the walled city, his policy passed and citizens evacuated the countryside.

Kagan (1991) and Josiah Ober (1996) have argued that Pericles' strategy was not only original but also completely rational. Abandoning homes and a defensive strategy were unorthodox methods so contrary to the ordinary passions and attachments of Athens's citizens that, for Pericles to discharge them, Kagan has said, "his greatness lay not only in conceiving the plan and implementing it decisively by

yielding all of Attica instead of taking half measures, but, most of all, in being able to put the plan through a democratic assembly by the force of his personality and to see that it was carried out" (1991, p. 230).

Pericles' plan not only changed the Hellenistic rules of war (Ober, 1996, pp. 51–71), it also was the beginning of a long-term strategic analysis of war planning and waging. He substituted tactics for grand strategy, brute force with financial resources, and the predominance of manly honor in agonal warfare with a psychological war of endurance. If it would not exact heavy losses on Sparta, Athens would project its power with the fleet around the Peloponnesus.

Was this a sound strategy to win? Pericles used some of the Athenians' strategic advantages by sending expeditions and launching assaults from sea. Yet, he did not lay siege to other poleis, which is because his grand strategy rested on a psychological dimension that Spartan futility would wither away its commitment to the war.

Athens launched a series of hit-and-run operations against Peloponnesian coastal cities. With 100 ships, Pericles invaded Megara, which was in the Peloponnesian League. It was the largest Athenian force ever assembled, and it shows that in Pericles' mind it was a key component of his strategy (2.31.2). They ravaged the territory and then retired; subsequently, they invaded Megara annually, up until 424 (4.66). The goal of these invasions was to force the city to negotiate a separate peace or join the Athenian alliance: "their territory spanned the Isthmus, and even their neutrality would presumably have denied invading Peloponnesian armies passage to Attica" (Lazenby, 2004, p. 38).

However, without trying to seize and hold ground, Pericles relied mostly on the expectations that Sparta's ineffectual invasions would require it to switch tactics or give up. As a result, Pericles put Sparta in the driver's seat. The defensive policy was rational, but he left victory to chance. Maybe Sparta would suffer reverses, its domestic system might strain, the Helots could revolt, and her allies might defect. Athens could have accelerated these problems by establishing a base in Spartan territory, which it finally did six years into the war and to much success. Pericles did not match defense with a proper offensive strategy to make the war costly for Sparta. His rationalism took for granted that citizens would bear the costs of an empire at rest. The windfall of revenues, constant political activity, and daring that defined his and a younger generation of Athenians came to a complete halt.

However, the greatest reverse to his strategy was dealt by an event that Pericles could not have predicted. A plague decimated Athens's population and severely dampened morale. Allies defected from the league, and Pericles died from it two years into the war. The plague demolished Periclean ambition and cool rationalism. A third of the population also suffered excruciating deaths. People turned to selfishness and vice and disregarded each other, eroding the bonds of the community. It was so corrosive to Athens's social fabric that the people despaired; they turned on Pericles and sought peace with Sparta, which refused the ambassadors' entreaties.

CONCLUSION

Pericles was an imperialist, but a prudent one who calibrated imperial expansion and war strategy to Athens's resources, which he gauged accurately (2.65.5). He knew that his people were too enthusiastic, too whimsical, and obsessed with gain. However, he directed these impulses and engineered a moderate and conservative policy that brought the empire's greatness to its height (2.65.5).

Pericles' war strategy was not bold, but it did not hazard the city's security. After his death, his prudent course was lost amid the cacophony of policies that allowed "private ambitions and private interests, in matters apparently quite foreign to the war, to lead them into projects unjust both to themselves and to their allies" (2.65).

Lesser leaders such as Cleon, Nicias, and Alcibiades possessed strong attributes but lacked the Periclean blend that enabled him to exercise an independent control over the multitude, "to lead them instead of being led by them" (2.65.8). Cleon was patriotic but immoderate. Nicias was esteemed for his prudence. His conservative nature assuaged the public's uncertainty and fears, but his cautiousness was paralyzing. Alcibiades was bold and intelligent; his desire for personal glory knew no bounds. He

embodied both the daring spirit and also the grander egoistic ambition of the Athenians; his statecraft stoked the imperial impulses that Pericles had so diligently tried to restrain during the war. Alcibiades' irrepressible ambitions and Nicias' trepidations led to the catastrophic Sicilian expedition.

This disaster exposed how the post-Periclean state failed to match resources and strategy to foreign-policy aims. Athens lost thousands of men, almost the entire fleet of ships, and the allies broke out in rebellion. This failure produced civil discord in the city, from which they finally fell victims too. Conversely, Sparta proved capable of waging a long-term war and adapted to naval warfare, scoring some surprising victories against Athens. In 404, 27 years after the war started, Athens surrendered to Sparta: the fleet and alliance were dismantled, the city's wall turned down, and its foreign policy was commanded by Sparta, which then imposed the Thirty, the infamous oligarchic regime.

The missing element in Pericles' transformative ambition was that he relied so greatly on his statesmanship. He proved that he had a unique ability to guide Athens's imperial might and resolve the tension between its democracy and empire.

The problem that leaders with transformative ambition like Pericles present to their polities and the world is that they can set forces in motion, which, if not entirely beyond the control of their less capable successors, can certainly overwhelm them. He drew out the strengths and abated the weaknesses of democratic energy and freedom, and in his lifetime achieved great things that brought the Athenian empire and democracy to their peaks. Yet, he learned how fragile the summits of human greatness are when an unpredictable calamity undermined his polity's character, nerve, and social bonds. While Pericles is proof that a statesman's intervening influence can fundamentally change the course of international and domestic politics, he also shows that in the long run transformative ambition may not produce its intended effects.

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