

Summer Courses, Summer 2017
THUCYDIDES AND TODAY'S CHALLENGES
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Are allies costly or beneficial to a great power? Do they enhance its security or drag it into peripheral and unnecessary wars? What are the advantages and risks of a maritime power? Does a sea power need allies more than a land power? How should it compete with a continental rival? What is the impact of a prolonged conflict on an already fragile social order of a polity? These questions characterize our current debates on U.S. strategy, but they are not new. More than two thousand years ago, Thucydides described with great lucidity the strategic challenges facing a maritime great power, Athens – and they are remarkably relevant to today's U.S. security dilemmas and strategic choices.

The course will focus on Thucydides' masterpiece, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, and examine a series of strategic challenges, and responses to them. During the weeklong seminar, students will read extended excerpts from Thucydides, focusing on key speeches and moments in the conflict. The course requires careful reading of the text but is not a history class. Rather, by placing themselves in the position of the Thucydidean characters, students will discuss recurrent principles of strategy and the dilemmas facing leaders.

Books:

- *The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Richard Strassler
- *The Persians*, trans. Seth Benardete

Resources

To learn more about the ideas and figures discussed in this course, we encourage you to explore a project supported by the Hertog Foundation: **The Great Thinkers** (<http://thegreatthinkers.org/>) and **Contemporary Thinkers** (<http://contemporarythinkers.org/>) websites. These sites are aimed at introducing important thinkers in Western thought, with a particular emphasis on politics and philosophy.

Relevant pages include Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli, and Thucydides (on The Great Thinkers).

Monday, July 24, 2017, 9:00 am to Noon

How to Assess the Enemy

Readings:

- Aeschylus, *The Persians*
- Thucydides, Book 1.1 – 1.29 (pp. 3–20)

Discussion Questions:

1. Geopolitical rivalries begin and continue with an assessment of the enemy: how to know the rival? What are the consequences of a poor assessment?

Tuesday, July 25, 2017, 9:00 am to Noon

The Role of Alliances

Readings:

- Thucydides, Book 1.30 – 1.146 (pp. 20–85)

Discussion Questions:

1. Great powers fear “entrapment” (being dragged into small and peripheral wars by their allies) while their allies fear “abandonment” (being left alone by their distant security patron). How can these fears be mitigated? Do they reflect the reality of international politics?
2. What is the importance of allies for the U.S.?

Wednesday, July 26, 2017, 9:00 am to Noon

Land Power vs. Sea Power

Readings:

- Thucydides, Book 2.1 – 2.103 (pp. 89–156)

Discussion Questions:

1. The Peloponnesian War was a conflict between a sea power (Athens) and a land power (Sparta). What are the features of such a conflict? What are the differences in how they conduct war?
2. How did the strategy of Archidamus differ from that of Pericles?
3. What strategy should the U.S. pursue against its continental rivals (China, Iran, Russia)?

Thursday, July 27, 2017, 9:00 am to Noon

The Role of Domestic Cohesion and The Rise of Demagogues

Readings:

- Thucydides, Book 3.1 – 3.86 (pp. 159–202)
- Thucydides, Book 5.84 – 5.116 (pp. 350–57)

Discussion Questions:

1. States are fragile. Factions are powerful while social cohesion can collapse unexpectedly. What are the sources of weakness and strength?
2. How does internal cohesion (or lack thereof) affect foreign policy?
3. What is the appeal of demagogues?

Friday, July 28, 2017, 9:00 am to Noon

Are Distant Expeditions Always Doomed?

Readings:

- Thucydides, Book 6:
 - o 6.1; 6.6 – 6.26 (pp. 361; 365–76)
 - o 6.46 – 6.53 (pp. 387–90)
 - o 6.75 – 6.88 (pp. 403–12)
 - o 6.89 – 6.93 (pp. 412–16)
- Thucydides, Book 7:
 - o 7.3 – 7.30 (pp. 429–45)
 - o 7.42 – 7.87 (pp. 451–78)

Discussion Questions:

1. Pericles warned against ambitious power projections. The Athenians went to Sicily and failed miserably. Are distant expeditions doomed? Was it a strategic blunder – or a strategically bold move but executed poorly?