

**The Undying Relevance of Thucydides as a Political Theorist**

**Mariam Mgebrishvili**

**University of California, Santa Barbara**

**April 7, 2023**

**Presented at the 2023 Western Political Science Association Conference**

**I appreciate you taking the time to read the following paper. This paper serves as a framework for a larger project I'm working on for my dissertation. I have presented it in this format with a specific goal in mind: I am eager to get your feedback on the various sections of the paper.**

## **Abstract**

After two thousand years since its inception, Thucydides' History of the Peloponnesian Wars remains relevant as ever to conceptualizing and analyzing war, its preconditions, and implications. Thucydides is regarded by some to be not only a great historian but a father of realist theory in international relations. Nevertheless, significantly less attention has been paid to Thucydides' contributions to comprehending imperialism, as well as its continuing significance in current political philosophy. This study seeks to fulfill two objectives. First, analyze Thucydides as a reliable historian and determine whether he surpasses this criterion. Second, to highlight the aspects of the theories in the Histories that are still relevant to understanding and conceptualizing modern imperialism.

## **Introduction**

Thucydides' account of how the Peloponnesian wars between Athens and Sparta subsequently led to the decline of the Athenian empire has retained its relevance after more than two thousand years. The simplest explanation for such lasting significance *the History of the Peloponnesian Wars* has had in the field of political theory can be found in the book's introduction, where, the author declares, in an almost prophetic manner, that the present continuously mirrors the past, and that what has happened will thereafter happen again as this is the course of human affairs (Book I-23). Indeed, many empires have risen and fallen since then, yet almost invariably, they have all, in one way or another, mirrored the events that led to the decline Athenian empire. In some manner, they have all fallen victim to their own glory and ambition - victim to overextension.

A few clarifications must be made before we start applying Thucydides' writings to the contemporary context. First, it is the context in which we look at empires. Both empire and imperialism acquired negative connotations after the Second World War. The terms are now essentially solely used in a pejorative manner (Kumar 2017). Today, no one advocates for empire, at least not a formal empire, as many did in the past. Furthermore, unlike the epoch described by Thucydides, no nation will announce its imperial intentions. If there are imperial powers today, they will never acknowledge it (Kumar 2017). Instead, these regimes are often hidden under the veil of democracy as the absence of such a veil could potentially result in the alienation from diplomatic the community<sup>1</sup>. Our puzzle, then, is as follows: how do we recognize imperial powers today? And when we do recognize them, what can we learn from the past empires that will allow us to better understand the present and peer into the future - given that the present always mirrors the past?

The first section of the paper will delve into why Thucydides is not only the father of scientific history (outlining his objective as a historian and the novelty of the methods he used) but that he far exceeds the criteria of a conventional historian by emphasizing the novelty of his thinking, his founding role in the realist school of thought, and his significant influence on subsequent political thinkers. The second part of the paper will subsequently explore the second part of our puzzle: What can contemporary political theorists learn about imperialism from the past and what makes Thucydides still relevant to this day?

---

<sup>1</sup> There is a large literature in the field of comparative politics which studies the international pressure on nations to maintain (at least the face of) democracy. Since it is beyond the scope of this paper, I will not be exploring the topic further.

I will make the case that two particular aspects of Thucydides' analysis of the Athenian empire might be proven to be particularly relevant for political theorists today: 1. Athens' sense of cultural/political/military supremacy that justified its rule; 2. Athens' growing need for coercion, and overextension led the empire to its demise. I shall not claim that the ideas postulated by Thucydides two thousand years ago are indisputably correct and universally applicable to all empires; however, their relevance today is unmistakable. To substantiate this claim, I will relate these aspects of Thucydides' work to contemporary events and explain the key insights *the History* offers us to better understand them.

### **Thucydides: A Historian**

Karl Popper (1945; 2013) once referred to Thucydides as “the greatest historian, perhaps, who ever lived”(169). In this section, I will argue that such an assessment is by no means an overstatement. In fact, not only is Thucydides one of the most credible historians of the ancient world but he also can be credited with developing the paradigm through which we currently see history. In order to substantiate this claim, I shall examine Thucydides' aims as a historian and the novelty of his methods of inquiry. For better clarity, I will compare and contrast his works with those of two other great ancient historians - Herodotus and Titus Livius. Lastly, the section will lightly touch upon why Thucydides surpasses the role of a typical historian who merely documents events - an argument further developed in the second half of the essay.

“Thucydides, an Athenian, wrote the history of the war between the Peloponnesians and the Athenians, how they warred against each other” (Book I -1) states the opening line of *the History of the Peloponnesian Wars*. Thucydides further elaborates how right at the outset of war he

began writing, as it was clear this conflict would eclipse all others in importance. It is thus safe to infer, from this opening, that Thucydides aims to chronicle the events of the war, identifying himself as a historian.

In several instances throughout the book, Thucydides implicitly hints at what he considers the work of a credible historian should look like: chronological, based on reliable sources, strictly factual - utterly devoid of hyperbole or embellishment. For example, in Book I, chapter 97, he references a historian Hellanicus, some of whose work he finds wanting. Hellanicus comes up as Thucydides explains his reasoning for why he digressed from his main story to describe events that were tangential to the core plot. He reasons that the “subject was omitted by all before” him, and although Hellanicus seems to have touched on the subject briefly, he deems his accounts to be not in satisfactory detail and “with no regard to their chronology”. In book I chapter 21, he asserts that the events he catalogues are not embellished to be made more enticing and that instead, they are supported by credible sources such as witness accounts and his own recollections. This distinction is important because it allows him to distinguish himself from poets, he contends. Although Thucydides did perhaps want to separate his work from that of Homer, this statement seems to allude more to his immediate predecessor Herodotus, notorious for such embellishments.

To understand better the novelty of Thucydides’ perspective on history and his role as a historian, we shall further delineate what this particular notion meant in the context of his time. Ἱστορία (historia), a Greek word for history can be translated as inquiry<sup>2</sup>- both the act of pursuing knowledge and the knowledge gained through inquiry. This is precisely what being a

---

<sup>2</sup> “Ἱστορία”, in Liddell & Scott (1940) A Greek–English Lexicon, Oxford: Clarendon Press

historian is perceived to be in ancient Greece. Herodotus, notably regarded as the "father of history" by Cicero, writes the earliest piece of historical literature in the western world - Ἱστορίαι, also known as *the History* (or *the Histories*), which is most renowned for its account of the Greco-Persian wars in the 5th century BC. Although its monumental significance, the credibility of Herodotus' accounts can be impugned as they heavily rely on a combination of orally passed down tales, myths, and rumors that tend to be rich in hyperboles and embellishments. Furthermore, Herodotus' works are notoriously unchronological, and he seems to consider history to be a source of moral teachings, repeatedly incorporating his own opinions and perspectives on the events he describes. Although Thucydides never expressly mentions Herodotus, we may safely conjecture that his remarks on source reliability, cross-examination, and avoidance of exaggeration were purposefully put there to distinguish his own methods from those of Herodotus. He identifies the weaknesses and limits of his predecessor and proposes methodological improvements that he, as a scientific historian, offers<sup>3</sup>.

Several elements instantly place Thucydides in a favorable position to establish himself as "a scientific historian". First, the area of the history he intends to narrate is limited, enabling him to do comprehensive inquiry. The exhaustive quality of Thucydides' history stands in stark contrast to Herodotus' and Livy's writings, which cover a more comprehensive range of historical events. The latter, for example, attempts to cover more than seven hundred years of general history, while Thucydides writes about a particular segment of the history of a single nation, where he is a direct participant in the events that he describes. Moreover, as a direct participant in these

---

<sup>3</sup>The opening line of *the History of the Peloponnesian War*, where Thucydides explains how the war that he narrates is of greater significance than any that had come before, is sometimes considered to be another manifestation of his ambition to surpass his predecessor; This remark again indirectly puts his work in competition with that of Herodotus, who writes about Persian wars.

events, he has immediate access to every minute detail of present occurrences. He could conduct interviews with key actors, recount speeches from his own memory, and cross-examine multiple accounts of the same events, all while maintaining his complete neutrality (De Romilly 2012). It is no surprise, then, that Thucydides successfully revolutionized the methods of inquiry used by those who came before him and created a piece of historical writing that, in terms of reliability, outmatches many that came after him.

On the other hand, whether he succeeds in his endeavor to exemplify the pinnacle of historical objectivity is debated among scholars. J.B. Bury (1975), for example, considers *the History of the Peloponnesian Wars* to truly be an impartial, empirically rich, scientific analysis of the wars. On the other hand - though referring to Thucydides as the greatest historian who ever lived - Karl R. Popper (2013) points out Thucydides' bias toward Athens: "however sincere his efforts to be impartial, comments and moral judgments represent an interpretation, a point of view" (169). Such partiality can be observed in Thucydides' special fondness for Pericles, for example, or his description of Brasidas (Spartan officer by whom he was defeated) conveniently presented as a formidable, almost unconquerable force. It should be noted, however, that this partiality of Thucydides manifests itself implicitly, and only in his attitudes and inclinations. The factual information presented by him is accurate and unembellished.

Moreover, an argument can be made that such partiality is fairly prevalent among ancient historians - usually far more conspicuous - as their works are imbued with personal commentary, never-ending laudation of their own culture, or sometimes, blunt lies. In fact, when compared to other ancient historians such as Herodotus, Plutarch, or Livy, Thucydides is arguably the most reliable when it comes to presenting purely analytical, nonjudgmental, impartial works that are primarily concerned with documenting events. Thucydides stands out from the crowd with his



sole concentration on the political nature of life and the political nature of history. In his understanding of political events, conventional moral concerns play no part. Referencing Lucian, Arnaldo Momigliano (1990) credits Thucydides to have been the one who influenced subsequent historians to study history analytically - to see it as a part of the political domain.

Another passage distinguishing Thucydides from others of his period is when he explains the significance of his historical work. Acknowledging the faults in his own writing, particularly the recitation of speeches, he contends that, despite the imperfections, these chronicles may be valuable to people who want to understand the past and apply this knowledge to the future - as the present always reflects the past: “but as many as shall wish to see the truth of what both has happened and will hereafter happen again, according to human nature — the same or pretty nearly so — for such to think it useful will be sufficient.” (Book I -23). We can thus see how Thucydides does not just write to chronicle events but urges the readers to draw conclusions and learn from the mistakes of the past.

Compared to other historians of ancient empires, for example, Livy’s unrestricted, almost brazen partiality when it comes to Roman civilization, Thucydides’ bias towards Athens seems inconsequential and hardly noticeable. Thucydides’ more advanced framework for reporting historical events, as well as the techniques of inquiry he used, precluded glaring prejudice. In fact, Jaqueline de Romilly (2012) argues that in the telling of the past, he pursued objectivity so scrupulously that he avoided nearly any personal interpretation, permitting his characters extreme severity in speech and deed.

### **Thucydides: a founder of realism**

In 1628, Thomas Hobbes was the first to translate Thucydides' works from Greek to English, once more shedding the light on the text that had been forgotten during the medieval ages: "for the principal and proper work of history being to instruct and enable men by the knowledge of actions past to bear themselves prudently in the present and providently towards the future, there is not extant any other that doth more fully and naturally perform it than this of my author"<sup>4</sup> writes Hobbes in the preface of his translation - titled "To The Readers". We can here see how this line points to Thucydides' own words on the instructional nature of history.

*The History of the Peloponnesian War* seems to have helped Hobbes, an ardent admirer of Thucydides, clarify a number of the core concepts of his later political theory. Together, Thucydides, Hobbes, and Machiavelli are regarded as the founders of western political realism, which holds that the need to retain military and economic might must take precedence over moral principles or ethical considerations since power is the fundamental motivator and currency among the states.

The novelty of Thucydides' writings was partly his sole concentration on the political nature of life and the political nature of history. According to J. B. Bury (1909), Thucydides' primary purpose is to examine and reveal political behavior from a purely political standpoint, without any moral criteria. This direct negation of moral idealism is precisely the premise that defines realism on a fundamental level (Forde 1995). Bury further maintains that if, instead of a history, Thucydides had produced an analytical treatise on politics, with specific reference to the Athenian empire, it is likely that he would have overshadowed Machiavelli's reputation (143).

---

<sup>4</sup> I took this passage from Schlatters (1945) article Thomas Hobbes and Thucydides, used the edition in the Harvard College Library which was probably printed at Venice about 1485 (Hain-Cop. \*15511). I shall thus cite Schlatter in the references page.

Furthermore, another unorthodox aspect of Thucydides' work (at the time) was that he essentially erased divine causation, producing a rationalistic aspect that established a pattern for later Western historical literature. The absence of the divine in his work is almost like a statement; it is a proclamation that the decisions and deeds of human beings are what cause history to unfold as it does. He was also the first to differentiate between an event's cause and its immediate beginnings.

It is not merely a single passage or a scene that adheres to (or, in this case, sets the foundation) the realist school of thought. The History of the Peloponnesian War is consistently imbued with a realist viewpoint, creating a coherent political theory that can be accredited to Thucydides. A number of major passages, notably the Melian Dialogue and the Athenians' first speech in Sparta, espouse political realism. In fact, Thucydides' explanation for the causes of war is a great example of realist reasoning.

Thucydides outlines what he thought was the true reason that caused the conflict. He believed that the rise of Athens' might, and the fear it instilled in Sparta, made war inevitable. His reasoning suggests that there is a tipping point beyond which a growing power can no longer be contained because it has gotten too powerful. At this moment, the conflict between near equals may be unavoidable, particularly if inferior allies are clamoring for action. This was perhaps the first conceptualization of "the security dilemma", a term widely used in the field of international relations, which occurs when an increase in one state's security (such as increased military power) causes other governments to be concerned about their own security (Jervis 1978).

Another term widely used to describe such a scenario is "Thucydides Trap", a concept developed by Graham Allison (2017), which describes an apparent predisposition towards conflict that

occurs when a rising force threatens to displace an already established great power as a regional or worldwide hegemon.

The Melian Dialogue is considered to be the earliest realist-idealist discussion and presents an argument between Melians - idealists eager to fight for freedom despite military disadvantages - and Athenians, realists who dismiss moral considerations and declare that the strong are meant to rule: "Right... is only in question between equals in power... the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must" (VI-85). The Athenian position which seemingly relies on rational thought and concerns for their own security is proven to be fallacious following a closer inspection. It is clear that Athens faces no significant security risks from Melos, a considerably weaker state. The fate of Athens in the Peloponnesian War is not altered by the subsequent destruction of Melos; Thucydides' perception of power and politics, therefore, is partly rooted in humans' neverending ambitious nature which creates a necessity for an extension. This necessity, then, becomes demanding enough to justify imperialism (Forde 1992, 373).

I will conclude this section with Leo Strauss' statement on Thucydides where in the concluding essay of "the City and Man". Although widely accepted, Thucydides is not just a predecessor to Plato and Aristotle, he asserts, he is as a political philosopher in his own right, and the History of the Peloponnesian Wars marked the culmination of classical political thought rather than its beginning.

### **Thucydides: Undying relevance**

This next part of the paper will make the case that two particular aspects of Thucydides' analysis of the Athenian empire might be proven to be particularly relevant for political theorists that study imperialism today: 1. Athens' sense of cultural/political/military supremacy that justified

its rule; 2. Athens' growing need for coercion, and overextension that led the empire to its demise. I shall not claim that the ideas postulated by Thucydides two thousand years ago are indisputably correct and universally applicable to all empires; however, their relevance today is unmistakable. To substantiate this claim, I will relate these aspects of Thucydides' work to contemporary events and explain the key insights *the History* offers us to better understand them.

## **Imperialism**

The study of the empire is essential to comprehending modern political languages and ideologies, as recent research in the history of political thought has shown. Despite this, compared to other disciplines, political theory was slower to arrive at the study of empire. Modern political thought since then has rightfully been primarily focused on the place of empire in the thought of many canonical thinkers and in the lens of it shaping modern liberalism, the formation of postcolonial states, and other related fields that concern the postcolonial world. However, to completely understand any concept, looking into its very foundations has also proven to be illuminating.

## **Part I**

### **On the Superiority of the Center**

Several parts of *the History* clearly demonstrate Athens' growing sense of self-superiority. During the debate at Sparta, Athenians are careful to “contrast Athenian resolve, zeal, sagacity, and sea-power with the implicit Spartan want of all that” (Orwin 1986, 75). Pericles' Funeral Oration is another, perhaps the best, illustration of Athenians' sense of eminence over all others

who are deemed inferior. Pericles is sure to contrast the merits of Athenian democracy - including tolerance, freedom, and lawfulness - with those of Athens' opponents. The contradiction in Athenian morals inside and outside the Polis also becomes starkly evident in Pericles' oration.

The sense of superior strength is perhaps the key justification for the Athenian empire's need for expansion. There is a consistent trend throughout *the History* where Athenians justify and legitimize their rule by claiming that the stronger are simply inherently meant to rule. This attitude is best illustrated in the Melian Dialogue: "Right... is only in question between equals in power... the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must" (VI-85).

### ***Relevance***

I shall now explain why I deemed this specific aspect from *the History* particularly relevant for political theorists to explore today. In *Social Contract*, Rousseau is faced with a problem of absolute. To solve this perplexity, he presents an almost transcendental power, a divinity, to legitimate the authority of a founder (II:164). Exploring the concept of novelty, and revolutions, Hannah Arendt (1990) identified a puzzle in the new states' difficulty to find legitimacy, requiring "a new absolute".

It can be argued that Athens' growing sense of its own supremacy begins with the withdrawal from Gods and acknowledgment of the significant role humans play in politics. Despite the fact that the Funeral Oration is a burial address for those who have died in the battle, Pericles makes no major reference to the gods, which is especially surprising considering that it is a funerary speech for people who have perished in the fight. Instead, Pericles "depicts Athens, Athenian power, and Athenian greatness as monuments purely of human endeavor" (Forde 1986, 438). I

contend then, that the sense of their own exceptionalism replaced the old absolute of the Athenian empire, becoming a chief source of their legitimacy to rule.

Why I believe political theorists should pay attention to this particular aspect of Thucydides' work is that if there are imperial powers today, the myth of their own exceptionalism is certainly one of the main sources of legitimacy to rule/exert influence.

## **Part II**

### **On Imperial overextension**

According to Jacqueline de Romilly (1963), Thucydides utilizes three concepts or rules to try to explain Athens' developing need for expansion and coercion. First, the powerful despised and are therefore continually compelled to preserve their empire via displays of might. Second, the strong will always rule over the weak. Third, it is in a man's nature to get so consumed with accomplishment that he creates excessive wants that lead to his downfall.

As we have already touched upon the first two of these rules, let us pay attention to how human compulsions can lead the empire to its perish. Firstly, Athens' claim to the rule precludes any congeniality between the peripheries and the center. With so much emphasis on its might, it can only rely on coercion and demonstration of power. Once this demonstration of power becomes the new normal, however, the moral qualms for violence seem to gradually start to disappear. There is always more to conquer and more glory to be had. The empire's capacity for expansion and power is infinite and it is precisely this that will ultimately lead to its downfall. Thucydides shows how unchecked power always breeds a need for even more power. Throughout the story, the Athenians' desire for glory becomes ever more voracious, and their morality becomes more

dubious. The conquest of Melos does not satiate the empire's hunger for more conquest, leading Athens to Sicily. Such overextension proved to be a fatal mistake, leading the Athenian empire to its downfall.

Thucydides himself never raises the issues of whether an empire should exist, whether conquest is good or bad, or if there has to be justification for imperialism. He believes in Athens' supremacy and its' inherent right to rule. However, Thucydides does not always have the same views on the need for coercion. He sometimes ponders the moral ramifications of conquest, particularly whether it's wise to start a war without considering its potential costs.

Jaqueline De Romilly (1963) contends that Thucydides' inconsistent perspective on Athenian imperialism may be explained by one of two possible processes: first, his ideas may have evolved through time, or second, he may have just changed his mind after learning the conclusion of the war. As Thucydides was writing *the History* for decades, it makes sense how different events might have influenced his attitudes. De Romilly parallels Thucydides' qualms with those shown in Aristophanes and Euripides' plays. Relating Thucydides' remarks with a depiction of Creon in the *Wasps*, for example, she concludes, that, due to the growing deterioration of the living conditions induced by the war, the Athenian population was no longer united in supporting the protracted war and/or imperial ambition for limitless expansion (De Romilly 1963).

### ***Relevance***

In this section, I contend that Thucydides' explanation of imperial overextension and a growing need for coercion can help us explain Russia's recent invasion of Ukraine; I will, thus, regard the Russian Federation as a power with imperial ambitions.



I believe this comparison to be important for several reasons. First, the patent one - the relevance of the topic; second, I have long believed that the aspect of Russia's imperial ambitions should gain more significance in any political research done on the state. Further, although the scope of this essay will not allow for an in-depth analysis, I believe there to be an uncharted research opportunity for political theorists to explore the Russian Federation's sense of entitlement for the third imperial regime.

According to Thucydides, "fear, honor, and interest" are unchanging human attributes that have always been the causes of conflicts.

He states that the growing might of Athens and the resulting fear it inspired in Sparta made their conflict inevitable. His line of reasoning argues that there is a limit beyond which a growing force can no longer be restrained because it has reached a point where it is too strong to be contained. This was possibly the first conceptualization of "the security dilemma," a term that is widely used in the field of international relations or "the Thucydides Trap," a concept developed by Graham Allison (2017). These terms describe an apparent predisposition towards conflict that occurs when a rising force threatens to displace an already established great power as a regional or worldwide hegemon.

In 2016, during an event honoring young geographers, Russian President Vladimir Putin quizzed one young boy on his knowledge of Geography. "Where do Russia's borders end?" the question stated; the 9-year-old tentatively responded, "At the Bering Strait with the United States." "The borders of Russia never end", corrected the President (WSJ 2022). Vladimir Putin's consistent **interest** in maintaining the old imperial sphere of influence and potentially bringing back the second imperial power has not been a secret to anyone. The president of the Russian Federation

has made several allusions to the glory days of the Soviet Union, has highlighted Tsarist Russia's role in "civilizing" some of the nations that were part of the empire (now independent), continuously perpetrating the existence of an all-encompassing all-Russian (rossiiskaya) identity (Semenenko 2015).

It is no novelty that the Russian government has seen the United States, and particularly NATO's expansion in the region (especially near their western borders - in Georgia and Ukraine), as the biggest threat to these goals. A few months after the Bucharest summit in 2008, when it was promised that Georgia and Ukraine would eventually join NATO, Russia launched a "peace enforcement" military operation to Georgia. Ukraine has begun the processes required for membership in both NATO and the European Union. Russia again intervened in 2014 - Crimea was captured and annexed, while pro-Russian rebels in Ukraine's eastern Donbas area were backed by the Russian government. Again, Ukrainian president Volodymir Zelensky's clearly stated desire to join NATO and the European Union was followed by Russian invasion in February. We can safely assume, then, that the growing influence of the United States in the region that the Russian Federation feels entitled to sparks **fear** that leads to conflict.

Putin's political judgments are heavily influenced by his sense of **honor**, which is consistent with his strongman reputation. His campaigns are always focused on his heroic manhood in a world where traditional values no longer count. In fact, research has continuously showed that the conflicts Putin instigates have largely coincided with the fall of his approval ratings. The notion that he is the one to bring back the glory to the Russian empire is central to his popularity.

So, can we allow ourselves to speculate, on the basis of the Peloponnesian Wars, that Russia's demise will be precipitated by its overextension and insatiable drive for power? There is no

denying the similarities. Russia can no longer support the war without facing the consequences inward. Aside from economic and diplomatic isolation, as well as dramatically worsening living circumstances for its population, the invasion proved to be lengthy and difficult. Just yesterday, Vladimir Putin declared partial military mobilization throughout the country. We can clearly observe growing discontent, disappointment, and disillusionment among the citizens. Even the most ardent supporters of Putin are starting to doubt his prowess. The road so far, thus, has certainly mirrored the one described by Thucydides. As for the future, only time can tell.

## **Conclusion**

In this essay, I aimed to accomplish two goals. First, I wanted to recognize that Thucydides is, in fact, a scientific historian who deserves credit as one of the originators of historical writing. To substantiate this assertion, I examined Thucydides' objectives as a historian and the distinctiveness of his research techniques. I juxtaposed his writings with those of two other renowned ancient historians, Herodotus and Titus Livius, which created a clear contrast between the rigor of their methods of inquiry, establishing Thucydides as a far more reliable source. Second, I argued that Thucydides, although a skilled historian, goes much beyond what is expected of a conventional historian and that his work presents a cogent political theory. This was accomplished by highlighting the uniqueness of his thinking, his pioneering position in the realist school of thought, and the significant effect he had on subsequent political theorists, particularly in the field of international relations theory. Furthermore, the paper delved into Thucydides' analysis of the Athenian empire that may prove to be very useful to modern political theorists: 1. Athens' sense of cultural/political/military supremacy that justified its rule; 2. Athens' growing need for coercion, and the overextension that led the empire to its demise. To

back up this assertion, I elucidated how Thucydides' analysis sheds light on certain contemporary events and how we might use these insights to better understand them.

## References

- Allison, G. (2017). *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. ISBN 978-1328915382.
- Arendt, H. (1973). *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. United States: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Arendt, Hannah (1990) *On revolution*. London: Penguin.
- Bury J.B. (1975), *History of Greece*, 4th ed.,
- Bury, J.B. (1909) *The Ancient Greek Historians*, London: Macmillan,
- Doyle, Michael (5 September 2018). *Empires*. Cornell University Press. p. 30. ISBN 978-1-5017-3413-7
- Forde, S. (1986). Thucydides on the Causes of Athenian Imperialism. *The American Political Science Review*, 80(2), 433–448. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1958267>
- Forde, S. (1995). International Realism and the Science of Politics: Thucydides, Machiavelli, and Neorealism. *International Studies Quarterly*, 39(2), 141–160. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2600844>
- Howe, Stephen (2002). *Empire: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press. ISBN 9780192802231 <https://doi.org/10.2307/1842109>
- Jervis, R (1978). "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma". *World Politics*. 30 (2): 167–214

- Kumar, K. (2017). The time of empire: Temporality and genealogy in the development of European empires. *Thesis Eleven*, 139(1), 113–128.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0725513617701919>
- Momigliano, A. (1990) *The Classical Foundations of Modern Historiography* (= Sather Classical Lectures 54). Berkeley: University of California Press
- Orwin, C. (1986). Justifying Empire: The Speech of the Athenians at Sparta and the Problem of Justice in Thucydides. *The Journal of Politics*, 48(1), 72–85.  
<https://doi.org/10.2307/2130925>
- Popper, K. R. (2013). *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Princeton University Press.
- Romilly, J. d. (n.d.). *The Mind of Thucydides*. United States: Cornell University Press.
- Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, Book II, Chapter 7. See also Aristotle, *Politics*, Book II, 1274a23–1274b25
- Schlatter, R. (1945). Thomas Hobbes and Thucydides. *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 6(3), 350–362. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2707297>
- Strauss, L. (1964). *The City and Man*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press
- Strauss, L. (1962) *Seminar on Thucydides' Political Philosophy*, University of Chicago
- The History of the Peloponnesian War*. (1912). United Kingdom: G. Bell & Sons.
- The Poetics of Aristotle*. (1907). United Kingdom: Macmillan.
- Thucydides, ., & Warner, R. (1968). *History of the Peloponnesian War*. Baltimore, Md: Penguin Books.
- Titus Livius' *Roman History*. (1805). United Kingdom: Chalmers.
- Tromifov, Y. (2022) How Far Do Putin's Imperial Ambitions Go?. *Wall Street Journal*

Velychenko, S. (1998). The end of empire? the transformation of the USSR in comparative perspective. *Journal of Ukrainian Studies*, 23(1), 120.