PELOPONNESIAN WAR

Mode: Seminar

Lesson No. SA-1-S

1. Introduction.
   a. "I shall be satisfied if my words are judged useful by those who desire a clear understanding of the events which occurred in the past and which will occur again, in much the same way, in the future, human nature being what it is." So wrote Thucydides, participant and historian of the Peloponnesian War. Thucydides provides a sure rationale for our study of history. In the previous module we looked at theories and doctrine on the employment of force. In this module we will study strategic decision-making, how nations choose to employ that force. In fact, we are back to the question of, "How do you win a war?"

   b. Thucydides' history of the Peloponnesian War is an excellent place to begin our study. Virtually all of the themes that we will study are evident in this war between the Spartans and the Athenians. Greek strategic decision-making was marked by problems in matching military means to political objectives. The problems that the Greeks experience will be echoed in later wars throughout history.

   c. Thucydides tells us that this 27-year war emerged out of Spartan fears of Athenian expansion. In 490 BC these two preeminent city-states united to face a Persian invasion. Victory in this struggle, however, led these two city-states in different directions. Sparta declined any further role in international diplomacy. Athens dependent upon commerce and her navy to secure it, created an empire. In 460-445 BC Spartan concerns about Athenian expansion resulted in the First Peloponnesian War. Fifteen years later through entangling alliances, the influence of strong personalities, all against the background of a continuing fear of hegemony, led to the decisive showdown in the Peloponnesian War.

   d. Read Kagan’s essay first to get a general understanding of characters, events, and issues. As you read Thucydides do not get stuck in the many details that the author provides. Focus on the patterns that emerge from those details. In addition to the obvious strategic issues look at the sheer continuity in human behavior. Civil-military relationships, motivation, and strategic leadership in this ancient war should have a very relevant if not modern ring to them.

2. Learning Objectives. To enable the student to:
   a. Evaluate the strategic complexity and issues in the employment of maritime and land power.
b. Comprehend the problems and solutions in war termination.

c. Understand strategic net assessment and reassessment.

3. Student Requirements.

a. Required Readings.


(a) Book I pp. 38-49, 80-85 [12_pages]

(b) Book II Outbreak of the War, pp. 89-107 [9_pages]
   Pericles Funeral Oration, pp. 111-128 [18_pages]

(c) Book IV Athens Success at Pylos, pp. 223-246 [24_pages]
   Brasidas strikes back, pp. 266-269, 279-285 [12_pages]

(d) Book V Peace of Nicias, pp. 309-316 [8_pages]
   Melian Dialogue, pp. 350-357 [8_pages]

(e) Book VI Launching the Sicilian Expedition, pp. 366-379 [14_pages]

(f) Book VII Athenian disaster, pp. 427-478 [52_pages]

(g) Book VIII Reaction to Athenian Defeat, pp. 481-483, 502 [4_pages]

b. Suggested Readings.


(3) Cawkwell, George. Thucydides and the Peloponnesian War, Routledge Press, 1997. This short book provides a more in-depth view of Thucydides attitudes and perspective on some of the crucial issues of the war.

(4) Hanson, Victor D., ed., Makers of Ancient Strategy: From the Persian Wars to the Fall of Rome, Princeton University Press, 2010. This edited volume of essays
includes some very useful chapters. For the Peloponnesian War see: Donald Kagan, “Pericles, Thucydides and the Defense of Empire.”

(5) ______________, A War Like No Other: How the Athenians and Spartans Fought the Peloponnesian War, NY: Random House, 2005. This is a new assessment of the conditions under which the war was fought. Hanson also discusses the wider issues of two societies at war—the reasons and the consequences.


4. Points to Consider.

a. Who did a better job of net assessment prior to the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War, Pericles or Archidamus?

b. “Sparta and Athens were drawn into a war neither wanted because of alliances which caused both powers to act against their interests and inclinations.” Explain why you agree or disagree with this statement.

c. Evaluate Periclean strategy? Why did it fail?

d. Evaluate Archidamus’ strategy. Did it succeed?

e. The Peloponnesian War reveals the problems encountered by a maritime power at war with a land power. How well did Athenian strategy deal with Sparta?

f. Was the Sicilian campaign a good idea badly executed or a bad idea?

g. Athens sued for peace unsuccessfully in 430, as did Sparta in 425, and even the Peace of Nicias broke down almost immediately. Explain the reasons for these failures and the problems they reveal about the process of war termination.

5. Relationship to FA 59 Competencies. FC A, B, E