

Strategy for Today's Strategoi: Teaching Thucydides to Modern Commanders

"I doubt seriously whether a man can think with full wisdom and with deep convictions regarding certain of the basic international issues today who has not at least reviewed in his mind the period of the Peloponnesian war."

George C. Marshall

It has been a distinct honor and pleasure for me to teach military history and national security, at both the undergraduate and graduate level, to a group of international officer candidates and serving officers at a number of military universities. Whether teaching core or elective history courses, leading graduate seminars on strategy and security, or guiding individual research, Thucydides' *Peloponnesian War* has been a key text for my students. George C. Marshall, formerly Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during World War II and Secretary of State at the start of the Cold War, suggested that Thucydides was critical for an officer's education, and over the past two decades, I have taken the general's advice to heart.

My presentation at the 2010 CAMWS Meetings will offer the argument that what Marshall said about Thucydides in 1947 is still true today. I will explain how I have used Thucydides for multiple purposes at a variety of institutions. First, I'll discuss teaching undergraduates at the USAF Academy core and elective courses on military history and European history, and how I used the text of *The History of the Peloponnesian War* in this venue, focusing on the challenges using a primary source of great complexity, albeit in translation, with undergraduates from a wide variety of backgrounds.

Next, I'll discuss teaching mid-level officers at the US Air Force Air Command and Staff College the rudiments of national security issues and the role Thucydides plays in explaining modern political science concepts like realism and security interests. Also, I will explain how Thucydides has been used and misused to illustrate points on morality, ethics and war, examining the notion of power politics, the causes of war, and the ethical issues associated with military operations from the perspective of the Western tradition.

Finally, I will focus on using Thucydides to teach strategy to higher-level military officers at the School of Advanced Air and Space Studies, a very select group of the "best and brightest" primarily from the US, but also from European and Asian states. Thucydides is a core text in a course on Military Theory, and students have wrestled with what the ancient world teaches us about war, strategy, ethics and power. Additionally, walking the battlefields of Syracuse with these students offers a particularly poignant teaching experience which illustrates the timeless nature of strategy and the eternal value of reading Thucydides for today's military commanders.

In the end, I hope my paper shows how the discipline of classics is a vital part of the education of modern military officers, officers whose impact and influence have direct

consequences on international security policy and the modern world. And in turn, with my personal example, I hope to show that classicists can serve in non-traditional positions and show how current and relevant the study of the ancient world is for all modern students and scholars.