

# Within the Long Walls: Observations on Pericles' Defense Strategy

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## Abstract

This paper examines Pericles' defensive strategy during the Peloponnesian War, focusing on his strategic vision centered on the "Long Walls" system and naval supremacy, its implementation, and its impact on Athens' short- and long-term fate. Drawing on primary sources such as Thucydides' History of the Peloponnesian War and contemporary research, the study evaluates the strategy's merits and shortcomings from military, economic, political, and social perspectives. The research indicates that Pericles' strategy effectively repelled Spartan land forces and safeguarded Athens in the short term. However, it also led to problems such as overcrowding triggering epidemics, severe depletion of fiscal resources, and lagging development of the land forces. Long-term consequences included an imbalance in Athens' military structure and distorted risk assessments, which in turn prompted later leadership to undertake radical and risky ventures (such as the Sicilian Expedition), ultimately exacerbating Athens' strategic failure. Through a comparative analysis of Athenian and Spartan strategies, the paper highlights differences in resource allocation, warfare methods, and endurance in protracted conflicts. It distills historical lessons with implications for modern strategic planning, focusing on balancing offense and defense, enhancing strategic adaptability, optimizing resource allocation, and expanding threat perception. This paper argues that Pericles' strategy not only reflects the strategic logic of classical city-state warfare but also provides a crucial case study for understanding the limitations of defensive strategies in protracted conflicts.

**Keywords:** Pericles, defensive strategy, Peloponnesian War, strategic equilibrium, risk perception

## 1. Introduction

In the long course of ancient Greek history, the Peloponnesian War marked a decisive turning point. It not only reshaped the political landscape of ancient Greece but also profoundly influenced subsequent generations' understanding of strategic thought. As the central figure in this nearly three-decade-long war, Pericles, the leader of Athens, secured temporary safety and stability for Athens through his unique defensive strategy. Pericles' decision-making process and strategic choices vividly illustrate the wisdom and dilemmas faced by ancient city-states in the face of survival and development challenges, offering us a valuable perspective on classical strategic thought.

This article aims to systematically analyze Pericles' defensive strategy, explore the strategic thinking behind the grand defensive structures and warships, and examine its profound impact on Athens' military, political, and economic spheres. Additionally, by drawing on research into Thucydides' original text and related literature, this article will assess the short-term and long-term effects of this strategy and further explore its potential implications for contemporary strategic decision-making.

## 2. Thucydides' Record and Commentary on Pericles' Strategy

In Thucydides' History of the Peloponnesian War, the main introduction to Pericles' strategy is contained in the record of his speeches and the final evaluation of his death. Pericles stated in his speech:

“In fact, from now on, we should regard ourselves as islanders as much as possible. We must abandon all thoughts of our land and houses and be prepared at all times to defend the sea and the city. We must not be provoked by the loss of our land into fighting the numerically superior Peloponnesians. If we win a single battle, we will then have to fight against a numerically superior army; if we lose, we will lose our allies, who are the source of our strength; and if our army cannot subdue them, they will not remain silent. What we should mourn is not the loss of houses and land, but the loss of human lives, for houses and land do not increase the population, but people can increase them.”<sup>1</sup>

“If you all agree not to use war to pursue new plans for conquest and expansion, and if you do not voluntarily involve yourselves in new dangers, I can give you many more reasons why you have hope of achieving final victory.”<sup>2</sup>

Before the war began, Pericles refined his strategic ideas and presented them in a speech, including relocating rural property to the city; defending the city walls; utilizing a powerful navy; and controlling allies to ensure tribute payments. <sup>3</sup>It is clear that Pericles, based on an objective analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of Sparta and the Athenian alliance, proposed a strategic system centered on the long walls to avoid decisive battles on land, maintain naval strength, firmly control allies, refrain from expanding territorial claims during the war, and avoid defensive actions that would threaten the city-state, with the aim of helping Athens achieve victory in the war. Thucydides highly praised Pericles’ strategic design in his final evaluation after Pericles’ death. He believed that Pericles’ strategy was a correct judgment based on an analysis of Athens’ actual situation. Athens’ ultimate defeat could not be attributed to strategic errors, but rather to the fact that Pericles’ successors did not follow his strategic guidelines, ultimately leading to Athens’ defeat.<sup>4</sup>

### 3. Analysis of the Merits and Demerits of Pericles’ Strategy

Pericles’ defensive strategy centered on the long wall defense system, leveraging Athens’ relative advantages to engage in asymmetric warfare against the Peloponnesian League. The implementation of the strategy and the underlying strategic thinking had a significant impact on the Athenian city-state. Building on the previous analysis of the proposal and implementation of Pericles’ strategy, this chapter will analyze the gains and losses of Pericles’ strategy from the perspectives of short-term gains and losses and long-term impacts.

#### 3.1 Short-Term Gains and Losses

In the short term, Pericles’ defensive strategy effectively prevented the Peloponnesian League from attacking Athens by comprehensively employing tactics such as deterrence and defense. First, the long wall served as a strategic barrier that blocked the Peloponnesian League from directly attacking the city-state of Athens, preventing Athens from engaging in direct combat with the Spartan army and forcing the Peloponnesian League to change its strategy. The primary objective of Spartan invasion of the Attica region was to locate the main force of the Athenian army, fully leverage its land army’s advantage in open-field battles, and annihilate the Athenian main force through a decisive engagement, thereby forcing Athens to surrender. However, Pericles’ defensive strategy did not give the Spartans such an opportunity. He persuaded the Athenians to remain within the walls and hold their ground, thereby avoiding a large-scale land battle against the Peloponnesian League that would have been difficult to win, and also thwarted Sparta’s strategy of achieving a swift victory. In fact, the Peloponnesian army was unable to defeat Athens without engaging in a decisive battle with the Athenian army, nor could it inflict significant damage on the entire Attica region. Due to limitations in production methods and war conditions, the Peloponnesian army could not remain in the Attica region for too long, generally not exceeding one month<sup>5</sup>. Within such a short timeframe, they could neither besiege Athens nor, with the technological means available at the time, cause severe damage to the entire Attica region. It can be said that Sparta’s strategy for a swift victory was largely neutralized by Pericles’ defensive strategy.

Second, deploying naval forces along the Peloponnesian coast to harass the coastline, disrupt internal unity, and prevent the construction of a navy. As part of its deterrence strategy, the Athenian navy not only defended the safety of the long walls and nearby ports but also deployed a significant portion of its fleet along the coastline of the Peloponnesian peninsula. These fleets had two objectives: first, to launch surprise attacks on the Peloponnesian

<sup>1</sup> Thucydides, (1972). *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 1, 143, (5).

<sup>2</sup> Thucydides, (1972). *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 1, 144, (1).

<sup>3</sup> Thucydides, (1972). *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 2, 13, (2).

<sup>4</sup> He Yuanguo, (2017). How Did the Athenians Fight the Peloponnesian War? — A Review and Reflection on the Study of the ‘Periclean Strategy.’ *Historical Research in Auhui*, 4, 5-16.

<sup>5</sup> Zhang Yan, (2019). The Destruction of Agriculture in the Attica Region During the Peloponnesian War and Its Impact. *Agricultural Archaeology*, 6, 218-225.

Peninsula, disrupting agricultural production and trade activities, and thereby further undermining the internal unity of the Peloponnesian League and inciting rebellion; second, to monitor the coastline of the Peloponnesian Peninsula and strike at Sparta's naval allies. The devastation inflicted on the Attica region deeply humiliated the honor-bound Athenians, and the coastal raiding strategy served to boost their morale. Since the raids were typically launched after the main Spartan forces had withdrawn from their offensive against Attica, the landing forces faced only a small garrison and the elderly and women in the cities, encountering little resistance. Additionally, they could rely on the mobility of their navy to retreat quickly. The threat of attacks from the rear and the uncertainty surrounding them dealt a severe psychological blow to the Peloponnesians, undermining the morale of the Peloponnesian League. When sailing along the peninsula's coast, the Athenian navy focused its surveillance on the waters around the Gulf of Corinth, as Corinth was a crucial ally of Sparta, and its naval strength was a vital reliance for the Peloponnesian League, which had relatively weak naval power. Athens established a naval base at Nauplia on the northern shore of the Gulf of Corinth, which can be seen as a key strategic move targeting Corinth.

In terms of negative impacts, Pericles' defensive strategy, while achieving good short-term results, also led to many serious problems that undermined Athens' strength. First, the influx of rural populations into the city exacerbated public health burdens, leading to the spread of epidemics and damaging the foundation of Athens' strength. Under the guidance of the Long Walls strategy, farmers and other groups living outside Athens abandoned their land and moved into the city. While this effectively prevented direct contact with the Peloponnesian army, it drastically increased the city's population in a short period, posing a significant challenge to public health and ultimately leading to the outbreak of plague, causing irreparable losses to Athens. The impact of the plague on Athens was primarily manifested in two aspects: first, the destruction of Athens' resources; second, the disruption of internal unity within Athens. In terms of resource destruction, the outbreak of the plague directly resulted in the loss of 4,400 heavily armed infantrymen, 300 cavalrymen, and a large number of lower-class members, with Athens losing approximately one-third of its population, suffering severe losses in military strength and labor force<sup>1</sup>. At the same time, the rampant plague caused chaos in the public infrastructure and institutional systems of the Athenian city-state<sup>2</sup>. The wealthy citizens who had previously borne the financial responsibility for city affairs were now unable to do so<sup>3</sup>, and these expenses had to be covered by public finances. While the plague's impact on Athens' financial resources had not yet shaken the city-state's fiscal foundation, its effects on the Athenians had already undermined the city-state's very foundations. With all Athenians relocated to the city, the population surged sharply. Those who had previously lived outside the city walls had no homes within the city and were forced to seek shelter elsewhere, causing severe environmental degradation within the city. The original residents of the city blamed the environmental destruction on the influx of people from outside the city, while those from outside the city, whose property and land had suffered losses while the city dwellers had not been greatly affected, grew dissatisfied. Tensions arose between the two groups, and within the peasantry, differences emerged due to the varying degrees of oppression they had suffered at the hands of Sparta, thereby undermining the unity of the city-state<sup>4</sup>. Additionally, it is important to note that the Athenian plague resulted in the loss of a strategically important figure—Pericles himself. From that point onward, no one was able to match Pericles' ability to control the masses and public opinion, or to guide Athens' strategic direction.

Secondly, the cost-effectiveness of naval raids was low, wasting Athens' financial resources and eroding its strategic advantages. Regardless of the era, the construction and maintenance of a navy constitute a significant portion of military expenditures, and the Peloponnesian War period was no exception. A navy with 200 warships required the construction of 10 to 15 triremes annually to replace those lost due to warfare and aging. The funds required to maintain a fleet of 200 warships were roughly equivalent to those needed to sustain an army of 100,000 heavily armed infantrymen, a force far larger than any deployed in the internal conflicts of 5th-century BC Greece. Additionally, the maintenance of shipyards and other port facilities also entailed substantial costs<sup>5</sup>. According to statistics, before the war began, the Athenian navy had approximately 300 warships, which highlights the financial strain of maintaining the navy. However, under Pericles' defensive strategy, such a large navy was only tasked with defensive operations and ineffective raids, which undoubtedly constituted a massive waste of Athenian fiscal resources. Some scholars have calculated that at the beginning of the war, Athens

<sup>1</sup> Thucydides, (1972). *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 3, 87, (3).

<sup>2</sup> Yu Shaolong, (2021). An Analysis of the Impact of the Plague on the Peloponnesian War. *Journal of Baoding University*, 2, 46-53.

<sup>3</sup> Thucydides, (1972). *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 2, 53 (2).

<sup>4</sup> Zhang Yan, (2019). The Destruction of Agriculture in the Attica Region During the Peloponnesian War and Its Impact. *Agricultural Archaeology*, 6, 218-225.

<sup>5</sup> Brent L. Sterling, (n.d.). Do Good Fences Make Good Neighbors? 24.

deployed approximately 200 warships to the Peloponnese and other regions, along with the expenses for the accompanying land forces. The annual expenditure for Athens was estimated to be around 2,000 talents<sup>1</sup>. However, Pericles claimed that Athens' wealth was around 6,000 talents<sup>2</sup>. It is easy to imagine the immense pressure such a massive deployment cost placed on Athens' finances. In contrast, the impact of the raids was limited due to the agricultural nature of the Peloponnese Peninsula and the technological limitations of the time, which prevented significant destruction. There are no records detailing the extent of Athens' destruction of the Peloponnese Peninsula, but as another region subjected to raids, the damage inflicted by Spartan forces on the Attica region can serve as a point of comparison for the impact of Athens' naval raids on the Peloponnese Peninsula. Some scholars have estimated that the Spartan army's ravages in the Attica region caused annual losses of approximately 50-100 talents.<sup>3</sup> Based on similar technology and timeframes, it can be roughly inferred that the destruction caused by Athens was also close to this figure. Compared to Athens' expenditures, these losses were negligible. Even with Athens' strong financial strength, it could not withstand such a low cost-effectiveness ratio. Additionally, due to the enormous naval expenditures, Athens had to increase its demands for other forms of aid from its allies, which indirectly undermined the imperial system under Athens' rule.

### 3.2 Long-Term Impact

The long-term strategic impacts are not easily discernible during the initial stages of strategic implementation and manifest in various forms. Many decisions and actions taken during a war may initially appear unrelated to the strategic objectives or even contrary to the original strategic design. However, the underlying logic behind these decisions and actions may be deeply influenced by long-term strategic thinking. Pericles' defensive strategy and the ideas behind it had a profound impact on the decisions and actions taken in Athens after his death.

First, in terms of military strength. Athens relied on its naval power while neglecting the development of its military forces and strategic balance. In Pericles' strategic vision, while the long walls served as the core of the defense system, naval power was another crucial factor that enabled the entire strategy to take shape, complementing the long walls. The long walls hindered land-based enemies from directly attacking the Athenian city-state, while the powerful navy protected Athens from enemy naval attacks and ensured the safety of its maritime trade routes. Pericles' defensive strategy focused on relying on the long wall defense system and Athens' powerful navy to avoid direct combat with Spartan land forces. This strategy effectively halted Spartan land attacks in the early stages of the war, safeguarding the security of the Athenian city-state. The Athenian navy played a crucial role during this period, harassing Spartan coastal regions and maintaining naval superiority, enabling Athens to gain the upper hand in its rivalry with Sparta.

Pericles fully understood the advantages of the Athenian navy, and maritime offensives were a crucial component of his strategy. However, the overreliance on naval power made Athens' military strength overly one-dimensional and began to reveal signs of strategic imbalance. As the war dragged on, the limitations of Pericles' strategy became increasingly apparent. Although Athens' reliance on defense and the navy was effective in the short term, it failed to effectively balance the development of the army and navy. Long-term reliance on naval power led to the underdevelopment of Athens' army, putting it at a significant disadvantage in confrontations with Spartan ground forces. As a land power, Sparta's army was highly disciplined and combat-ready, while Athens' insufficient investment in its army gradually caused it to lose the initiative in the later stages of the war. Thucydides recorded Athens' land forces in his writings, stating that Athens had 13,000 heavily armed infantry, 16,000 defenders of the Long Walls, 1,200 cavalry, and 1,600 archers.<sup>4</sup> The troops guarding the Long Walls cannot be considered a strict military force, as they included many young and elderly individuals. Additionally, due to the importance of the Long Walls, this force could not participate in land battles. Therefore, Athens could deploy fewer than 20,000 troops on land, a significant gap compared to the Peloponnesian League's approximately 60,000-strong army, let alone Sparta's land forces, which possessed even greater combat capabilities. This military imbalance grew more pronounced as the war progressed, especially after Sparta allied with Persia and gained sufficient financial support to develop its navy, weakening Athens' naval superiority and significantly reducing the effectiveness of its naval strategy. Sparta not only engaged Athens directly at sea but also maintained its land-based advantage, preventing Athens from achieving a decisive

<sup>1</sup> Donald Kagan, (1974). *The Archidamian War*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, Third Printing, 1996, pp. 37–40; p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> Thucydides, (1972). *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 2, 24, (1).

<sup>3</sup> Thorne, J. A., (2001). Warfare and Agriculture: The Economic Impact of Devastation in Classical Greece. *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*, (42), 225–253.

<sup>4</sup> Thucydides, (1972). *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 2, 13, (6)(7).

victory throughout the war. Pericles sought to use the attrition caused by the long wall defense and naval raids to make Sparta realize that Athens was invincible. This strategic thinking led to a decline in the importance of the army in the Athenian military, and the high costs of the navy left Athens without sufficient funds to build a larger army. However, Pericles failed to realize that without defeating the Peloponnesian League's army on land, it was almost impossible to defeat Sparta. For a land-based city-state like Sparta, the importance of its army and its view of the army were the same as Athens' view of its navy. Only by winning in the opponent's area of strength could it force the opponent to sign a treaty. Otherwise, the Athenian fleet's raids on the Peloponnesians would be as unsuccessful as its invasion of Attica.

Additionally, due to the absolute superiority of its navy on the battlefield, Athens had no shortage of motivation to continue building its navy. However, from a strategic perspective, the true rival of the Athenian navy was never the Spartan navy, but rather the Persian navy across the Aegean Sea. Due to the limitations of their production and lifestyle, the Peloponnesian League lacked the sufficient funds to build a fleet capable of directly confronting Athens. From the perspective of overall strength, the true power capable of such a feat was the Persian Empire, and Sparta's ability to build a powerful fleet relied on financial support from the Persian Empire. From this perspective, Athens did not recognize the threat posed by the Persian Empire. If Athens had taken precautions against the Persian threat, it might not have dispatched its main fleet to launch the disastrous expedition.

The second is a possibility analysis. Confidence in the core of the long wall defense may have altered Athens' risk preference calculations. When people are continuously in a safe environment, objective safety will continue to reinforce subjective safety in their minds, creating a situation where subjective safety is constantly generated as long as the objective safety carrier exists, thereby leading to a general sense of optimism. Since the long wall effectively protected the safety of the Athenian city-state during the war, Athens developed unwavering confidence in its defensive capabilities. This confidence gradually evolved into a strategic defensive mindset, causing a powerful nation to distort its risk calculations and adopt offensive and risky actions<sup>1</sup>. The influence of Pericles' defensive strategy extended beyond the war period and had a profound impact on Athens' strategic decisions in later years. Although Pericles' strategic thinking was primarily defensive, emphasizing the avoidance of risky military actions, Athens' strategic approach gradually shifted after his death, particularly following the signing of the Nicias Treaty. After the treaty was signed, Athens and Sparta remained each other's primary rivals, but the strategic situation at the time was more favorable to Athens. First, Sparta's important ally, Corinth, and other city-states refused to cease hostilities with Athens, expressing strong dissatisfaction with Sparta's peace negotiations. Second, the treaty between Sparta and the powerful city-state of Argos was about to expire. Argos was located at the entrance to the Corinthian Isthmus and could completely block the strait if it chose to do so. In opposing Sparta, Athens and Argos shared common interests. As a powerful land power, Argos possessed the land forces Athens desperately needed to fight Sparta, and Argos had already begun preparations to form an alliance against Sparta. For Athens, an alliance with Argos would compensate for its lack of land forces and isolate Sparta on the Peloponnesian Peninsula, presenting an excellent opportunity to defeat Sparta. Although Nicias believed that delaying the battle would increase Athens' advantage, other citizens demanded a more proactive security policy. During this period, Athens' strategic decision-makers began to favor more aggressive and risky strategies, seeking to break the stalemate with Sparta by expanding their sphere of influence. The Sicilian Expedition was a classic example of this shift in strategic thinking. Although the expedition appeared to align with Athens' objectives of expanding its power and striking at Spartan allies, it actually deviated from Pericles' original defensive mindset, becoming a risky and costly offensive operation. It is possible that the presence of the navy and the Long Walls led the Athenian people to overestimate their subjective sense of security relative to the objective security situation. The Athenian people endured difficult times while the Peloponnesians ravaged the Attica region, and they sought to bring the war to Peloponnesian soil to avenge the destruction inflicted on Attica. Even if the Argos alliance failed, Athens would not suffer significant losses, as the Long Walls remained intact and the Athenian navy was still intact, ensuring Athens' safety. Under the leadership of the radical Alcibiades, Athens eventually allied with Argos and other city-states, but the conservative Nicias was more restrained in aiding Argos, and the Argos alliance was ultimately defeated by Sparta.

In early 415 BC, Athens dispatched a large army to Sicily, over 800 miles from its mainland. According to Pericles, this would have been an extremely risky endeavor, as such an expedition would undoubtedly pose significant strategic risks to Athens. However, under the influence of the long walls and a powerful navy, people generally believed that the risks involved were limited. Here, the Athenians made a fatal mistake: they separated the defensive role of the Long Walls from that of the navy. In their eyes, the Long Walls were a symbol of safety; with such a sturdy fortification, nothing could harm them, and they could pursue more wealth and glory. This

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<sup>1</sup> Brent L. Sterling, (n.d.). Do Good Fences Make Good Neighbors? 42.

subjective sense of security had already affected people's judgment of objective security. Athens' security depended on the combined defense of the walls and the navy. Sending the main army to such a distant region while the war with Sparta was still ongoing was not a wise move. Even if one could ignore the weak strength of the Spartan navy, one should not have disregarded the Persian Empire across the sea. Ultimately, Alcibiades' speech gained the approval of the majority. This serves as an example of how strategic defense can exacerbate a great power's tendency to distort risk calculations and adopt provocative actions. While the surface motive was to aid an ally, disrupt Sparta's trade routes and food supplies, and defeat Syracuse before it attacked Athens, the expedition was more accurately aimed at increasing the city-state's wealth and power. However, Syracuse proved to be a wealthy, powerful, and challenging target. Ultimately, this war severely undermined Athens' power base, with Athens losing a massive army of 45,000 men and its main naval fleet in the campaign. Imagine if Athens had not sought distant targets but instead used this force to attack the Peloponnesian League—could it have achieved better results?

#### **4. Comparative Analysis: The Strategic Choices of Athens and Sparta**

Pericles' defensive strategy and Sparta's military strategy were fundamentally different. First, the core of Pericles' strategy was defense and attrition. He knew that Athens could not match Sparta's powerful army on land, so he adopted a defensive strategy of avoiding land battles, holding the walls, and relying on Athens' powerful navy to harass and strike Sparta, forcing it into a protracted war of attrition. Athens maintained its war resources by controlling maritime trade and tribute from its allies, aiming to retain strategic initiative in the prolonged war of attrition. In contrast, Sparta's strategy was entirely opposite. As a land power, Sparta relied on its powerful land forces to pursue an aggressive offensive strategy. They sought to defeat the enemy's main forces through large-scale land battles, particularly by engaging the Athenian army in direct combat in the Attica region, destroying Athens' agricultural base, and forcing it to surrender. Spartan tactics emphasized swift victories, seeking to end conflicts through decisive battles as quickly as possible. This strategy aligned with Sparta's military capabilities and resource constraints, as it could not sustain the high costs of prolonged warfare like Athens, which relied on maritime resources and trade.

In terms of resource utilization, Athens' naval strategy was costly, dependent on substantial fiscal resources, and had limited effectiveness. While naval raids inflicted some damage on Spartan agricultural production, they did not decisively influence Spartan strategic decisions. In contrast, Spartan land warfare was relatively low-cost, with its army consuming fewer resources when fighting on home soil and able to quickly demonstrate military superiority. In terms of the sustainability of the war, Athens' strategy emphasized protracted warfare, while Sparta sought to resolve the conflict in the short term through overwhelming superiority. Pericles' defensive strategy helped Athens avoid a decisive land battle in the short term, but due to neglecting internal crises (such as the outbreak of plague) and long-term risks (such as overreliance on the navy and excessive fiscal expenditure), it ultimately led to Athens' decline. Although Sparta was unable to defeat Athens in the early stages, as the war dragged on, it gained financial support by allying with Persia and ultimately broke Athens' naval superiority through the rise of its own naval power, securing victory in the war.

#### **5. Modern Strategic Implications**

Pericles' defensive strategy played a crucial role in defending Athens during the Peloponnesian War, but it failed to achieve long-term success due to multiple internal and external factors. By analyzing this defensive strategy and comparing it with Spartan strategies of the same period, we can draw some insights for modern strategic design.

First, in terms of balance, it is essential to strike a balance between offense and defense. Pericles' strategy was overly defensive, relying on the Long Walls and the navy to avoid a decisive land battle with Sparta. While effective in the short term, the lack of sufficient offensive capabilities eventually led Athens to lose its initiative. In modern warfare, strategic planners must find a balance between offense and defense. While pure defense can temporarily ensure safety, offensive strategies help weaken the enemy's combat strength and resources. Sometimes, offense is the best defense, and appropriate offensive strategies can help a nation gain strategic initiative.

Second, in terms of adaptability, it is essential to prepare for flexible responses to unknown events and long-term dynamic adjustments. Pericles failed to anticipate the outbreak of the plague when designing his strategy, and this sudden external event dealt a severe blow to Athens' strength, weakening its combat capabilities. Modern strategists must leave sufficient room for flexibility to accommodate potential uncontrollable factors. In today's complex globalized environment, wars are not only influenced by military strength but may also undergo significant changes due to political, economic, or natural disasters. Strategic planning should include mechanisms for rapid response and adjustment to address potential crises. Additionally, as wars persist, the war situation continues to evolve. Athens' defensive strategy lacked sufficient dynamic adjustments in the later stages of the war, which led to its strategic framework, though initially successful in the short term, failing to sustain its

effectiveness in the long run. Pericles' strategic framework was meticulously designed but lacked flexibility, resulting in rigidity after prolonged implementation. Modern strategic planners should establish flexible strategic frameworks to ensure timely adjustments in the face of new challenges, thereby maintaining long-term competitive advantages.

Finally, in terms of environmental awareness, it is essential to allocate resources reasonably and guard against multiple threats. The Athenian navy was extremely costly, but its raids failed to yield the expected returns, greatly increasing Athens' financial pressure. In modern strategy, the rational allocation of resources, especially how to efficiently utilize limited resources, is of critical importance. Prolonged conflicts are costly and place enormous pressure on the domestic economy. Therefore, modern strategy must not only consider the deployment of military forces but also pay attention to the economic situation to ensure the efficient use of resources and avoid financial pressures that could undermine the war effort. Strict control over military spending and war budgets is an important aspect of avoiding strategic failure. Additionally, Athens either failed to anticipate or overlooked Sparta's determination to build a navy and Persia's intervention, exposing its limitations in environmental perception. Modern strategy involves dimensions far beyond those of the Peloponnesian War era. The current world is characterized by numerous non-traditional security issues and non-state actors, and new forms of warfare and means of warfare pose threats equivalent to traditional military threats, with lower thresholds and greater effectiveness. In the process of formulating strategy, it is necessary to thoroughly assess the possible forms of strategic competition that may arise. It is not only necessary to focus on the direct threats posed by current adversaries but also to conduct thorough assessments and precautions against potential external forces and non-traditional threats, designing response mechanisms and systems to address different types of threats.

## 6. Summary

Pericles' strategy relied on the long walls to protect Athens from land attacks while utilizing a powerful navy to maintain pressure on hostile forces. This strategy produced different effects in the short and long term. In the short term, Pericles' strategy basically achieved its original goal, effectively defending the city-state of Athens and suppressing the attacks of the Peloponnesians. However, in the long run, Pericles' strategy led the Athenian leadership and people to make wrong strategic judgments and distort their assessment of risks, which ultimately resulted in significant losses for Athens. Through an analysis of Pericles' strategy, we can recognize that the overall impact of a strategy is not merely reflected in its design and execution. Even plans that deviate from the original strategy may be influenced by its underlying strategic thinking. This provides valuable insights for modern nations in designing and executing strategies, and incorporating the influence of the post-strategic era into strategic design will be a new challenge that modern strategic planning must address.

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