

MUNSA'25

First Peloponnesian War

Open Agenda

STUDY GUIDE



FIRST PELOPONNESIAN WAR

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Letter From Secretary General

Esteemed participants of the Model United Nations Conference of Sakıp Sabancı Anatolian High School 2025,

As Secretary General, I am deeply privileged to be a part of a conference that upholds the values of education, excellence, and collaboration. Working alongside a team of incredibly talented individuals, I am enthusiastic about organizing an event that truly showcases the essence of our club. Our conference offers a diverse array of committees, including engaging crisis committees and a variety of topics spanning different time periods and regions.

Just like every year, this year's conference is being organized by SSAL MUN Club too. Our club's academic and organizational teams are working tirelessly to bring you the best MUN conference you've ever experienced. We believe that our conference will not only provide you with three unforgettable days but also significantly enhance your academic and personal development.

This year's MUNSA will feature 9 unique committees, each led by a team of passionate people. With that being said, the tenacious team of MUNSA'25, promises to challenge delegates to engage and think critically. Through our General Assembly committees GA1: DISEC and GA3: SOCHUM, two cooperation organizations which are the African Union and League of Nations, the main body and the most important committee of UN which is UNSC, the mysterious Consiglio dei Dieci and two crisis committees which are JCC and HCC; delegates will have access to a broad range of committee forms and topics. From this wide range of options, delegates have the opportunity to find a committee that fits their interests and matches their preferred style of debate.

To apply for MUNSA 2025, simply visit our website and register. Before doing so, I encourage you to explore our website, sakipsabancimun.org where you can find detailed information about our team, registration deadlines, conference policies, and committees. Should you have any questions, feel free to reach out to our Public Relations team at munsabancipr@gmail.com.

On behalf of the Sakıp Sabancı Anatolian High School Model United Nations Club and the MUNSA'25 Team, I eagerly anticipate welcoming you all to our conference this September!

Mert Taşcı

Secretary General, MUNSA 2025

Letter from Under Secretary General

Valuable Participants and distinguished delegates,

It is my honor to serve you and the perennial tradition of MUNSA as the Under Secretary-General of this Committee. My team of diligent Crisis Team Members and Academic Assistants have worked tirelessly under time constraints and within the pages of innumerable academic resources to give you a guide that is both worthy of the most inquisitive delegates and equally worthy of the hectic setting in which you will be released.

In this Committee, my colleagues and I will give each delegate the opportunity to create their own version of Ancient Greece. In order for you to establish your factions and become the undisputed architects of the Leagues, we have developed a comprehensive simulation of the various forces at play in Ancient Greece. We pledge to push ourselves to entertain and be entertained, all while you turn the wheel of fate.

Ceren Güneyman



Introduction to the Committee

The Peloponnesian War (431–404 BC) was a major conflict between the Athens and Sparta in ancient Greece with the two being the most powerful city states compelled other city states to withdraw into two alliances, one of them being the Peloponnesian league with the hegemony of Sparta, and The Delian league which Athens emerged as the indisputable leader. The main alibi for this conflict to break out was the contention and rivalry about power dynamic between the two states, as Sparta being the land-formed force in the ancient Greece and dominating most of the city states with the power they upheld however, their facade of control began fracturing with the raising power of Athens after the Persian Wars. Athens obtained great triumph during the war with the bravery and success they demonstrated, especially the battles of Plataea and Mycale. As their reputation gradually grew throughout Greece, Sparta started facing allegations which claimed they offered bribery to the Persian King, furthermore people also claimed that they didn't have the necessary mindset to deal with the Persians overseas and become a naval power. Eventually the Greeks started to think that maybe Athens was the better option to emerge as the sovereign power over ancient Greece. Their ideologies exceedingly contradicted, Athens absorbed a democratic and imperial point of view, despite Sparta being oligarchic and conservative. The final straw to break out the already expected war was Sparta's refusal to accept the help from Athens after the devastating earthquake they just witnessed due to the lack of trust between the two sides. Sparta's rejection made Athens feel insulted and started alliance bonds between the enemies of Sparta. After all the threat and intimidation Sparta installed, finally one of the allies, Thebes, attacked an Athenian ally, Plataea, and officially the open war had begun. During the war, Sparta was the strongest on the land, but Athens maintained their superiority of naval power.

Delian League

The league was established in 478 BC after the Persian wars and Athens emerged as the hegemon, but the league gradually turned into an Athenian empire. Athens pursued the aim of repelling the Persians completely and preserving the peace in the allied city states. All the members were obligated to either tribute or supply hardware such as ships, and they kept their independence. All member states had the right to vote, however, Athens dominated and controlled the whole decision-making and implementation process. The existence of the league was a clear threat to Sparta, thus the Delian league strained further the relationship between Athens and Sparta and provoked conflicts.

Peloponnesian League

The league was formed in 550 BC due to the lack of safety Sparta felt because of helot revolts and its regional rivals to create an opportunity to preserve and defend themselves. The members were obligated to contribute troops (hoplites) and they were allowed to maintain their independence. The

league embraced a partially democratic structure; each member state had the right to vote but Sparta held the strongest influence on the league's decisions.

Historical Background of the First Peloponnesian War

Peloponnesian War (431–404 BCE) was a violent combat ignited between two main administrative forces in the Ancient Greece. The war represented an escalating power struggle between the states of Athens and Sparta, both sides knew that if one of them is demolished the other side is going to have complete sovereignty over Greece, thus a conflict of power, will and perseverance has commenced.

Persians launched invasions to independent Greek city states from 492 BCE to 490 BCE which were ordered by the Persian king Darius the Great who pursued retribution from the Athens and Sparta after they contributed to the earlier Ionian insurrection and murdered Persian envoys. As the threats from Persia gradually increased in course of time, the Greek world was compelled to rationalize and establish a united force to repel against the ongoing invasions and commotion. As a result, at the Congress at the Isthmus of Corinth took place in 481 BC under the presidency of Sparta and brought together several of the Greek city states. Athens was unwilling to place their forces under Sparta and its King Leonidas. Eventually, Athenian archon and political leader, Themistocles, agreed to contribute to the league with its formidable navy under the ascendancy of Sparta. The League's unity, however, was pragmatic rather than permanent; once the Persian menace subsided, divergent strategic priorities became evident. Sparta, constrained by its internal preoccupations and conservative outlook, displayed little inclination to sustain prolonged campaigns in Asia Minor. Athens, by contrast, seized the opportunity to project power across the Aegean, drawing the Ionian cities into its orbit and thereby sowing the seeds of the Delian League in 478 BC. In 479 BC, after the Spartan-led victory at Mycale, the Ionian Greeks revolted against Persia and sought admission to the Hellenic League. Sparta rejected their request, suggesting instead that the Ionians abandon Asia Minor and resettle in former pro-Persian cities in Greece. Athens, however, offered them alliance, laying the foundations of the Delian League.

For a brief episode, Athens and Spartans confederated to fight a common enemy, it concluded when the two emerged Powers of Greece repulsed their common enemy. This triumph of the Greece contributed Athens massive amount of glory, reputation and prestige as claiming them as the saviour of the Greece in the marine and making Sparta the defender on land. The occurrence of this power dynamic was the fired fuse to the upcoming tension between the two competent states.

Alliance system and the division of the Greek world

Once the threat that occurred because of the invasions of Persians faded, the Sparta and Athens short term unity has gradually and eventually utterly faded. Foreseeably, the Greek world has fractured into two opposing polars, one alliance held the maritime power which was led by Athens and Sparta which embodied land dwelling hegemony.

The Peloponnesian league had existed already way before the Persian - Greco wars, it was established by Sparta with allies besides the Peloponnesian territory, but Sparta always remained its hegemony in the alliance. Foundation and early growth of the league started when Spartans had to abandon their desire to conquer due to their failed attempt of subjugation of Tegea when Sparta succumbed in a war which occurred in the northern border of Tegea. Thus, Sparta embraced a diplomatic approach to the ongoing matter. During that time Tegea was facing a vital threat from the eastern neighbour Argos and sought an ally to depend on. And without further delay, Tegea and Sparta initiated the establishment of diplomatic correlations with a treaty which was soon followed by other cities threatened by Argos, such as Mantinea, Phlius, Corinth, and Epidaurus. The structure of the league was fundamentally bilateral, each member of the league signed a single separate treaty with only Sparta which means that the associates of the leagues related to Sparta, not intertwined altogether.

Each member of the league was obligated to bow down to Sparta which included preserving and defending Sparta if any hint of threat under any circumstance and be subsidiary to Sparta to suppress the ongoing revolts. In reciprocation, Sparta was bound and committed to the duty of repelling and guarding its allies to any kind of menace and invasion.

Sparta emerged as the incontestable hegemon of the Peloponnesian league, in accordance with this outcome, they commanded exclusive amount of dominance and administration on the army and displaying a decisive influence on the adjudications of the league. A Spartan king held supreme authority over the army of the Peloponnesian League. Spartan officers were attained to audit the levy of the troops within the league and responsible for supervising the recruitment and organization of troops from each allied city, carefully determining the number and type of soldiers—such as hoplites, cavalry, and light infantry—that each city was required to contribute to the League's army, ensuring that the overall forces were balanced and sufficient for any military campaign under Spartan command.

The political convention of the league was inclined as a total oligarchy rather than a democracy. As an inevitable result of this circumstance the member allies deprived most of their autonomy due to the authoritarian providence of Sparta, they maintained their presence and appendage to the league to retain their status in their city. Oligarchs from various city states held a potency over their citizens, and Sparta guaranteed their power over their community thoroughly. Moreover, many of them had friendship ties with Spartan citizens, or even the kings. The Spartan king Agesilaus II was especially known for his guest friendships (*xenia*) among his allies. As a result of these personal networks amongst Sparta and the prominent members of city states, leading oligarchs could send their sons to the agoge, the Spartan education system, where they became *trophimoi xenoi*, and further developed their attachment to Sparta.

A major change in the administration and organization of the league altered due to lack of intercommunication and rapport underlying in the basis of the league. Around 506 BC, the Peloponnesian League underwent a major institutional change following the failed attempt by King Cleomenes I of Sparta to seize Athens and install his ally Isagoras as either tyrant or oligarchic ruler. The full League army was mobilized and marched on Athens; however, the Corinthians withdrew upon discovering the true objective of the expedition, a decision reinforced by the opposition of the other Spartan king, Demaratus. The failure of this campaign compelled Sparta to establish a formal

League congress, granting allied states the right to participate in decisions concerning war and peace. Prior to this reform, Sparta could mobilize its allies without providing any explanation or consultation regarding the objectives of military campaigns.

Consequently, The Peloponnesian League therefore became a bicameral organization, with two assemblies: the Spartan ecclesia and the congress of the League, both administrated by an ephor. The Spartan ecclesia (citizens' assembly) first debated proposals internally and determined Sparta's stance. Upon a favourable decision in the ecclesia, a congress of the League convened, chaired by a Spartan ephor, allowing allies to determine and vote on Spartan proposals. Each member city had one equal vote, regardless of its size or military contribution, while Sparta itself did not participate in the vote, as its decision had already been made in the ecclesia. Decisions of the League congress were binding on all members, even those who opposed the proposal. Approval by the congress became mandatory for the declaration of war or the negotiation of peace.

Instances of allied rejection highlight the political influence and autonomy within the League. For example, in c. 504 BC, Corinth led a unanimous refusal of Sparta's proposal to attack Athens and install Hippias as tyrant, and again in 440 BC, the allies refused to support renewed hostilities against Athens. Allies frequently invoked religious or sacred obligations to justify non-participation in military campaigns, reflecting both the legal and cultural flexibility within the League.

Sparta after the Persian war

The state land of Sparta played a crucial and indispensable role in the repulsion of Persians by constructing the backbone of the defiance and combat leagues on overland forces, particularly in Thermopylae and Plataea.

After Sparta played a pivotal role in the united Hellenic endeavour to banish Persians, Sparta obtained advanced esteem and reputation prevalent in the Greek world. The battle of Thermopylae was one of the most important events occurred during the Greco Persian wars, even though it was a defeat for Sparta it concluded with redounding prominence to the ruler Leonidas and the army he ruled over. Around the start of the invasion, a Greek force of approximately 7,000 men led by Leonidas marched north to block the pass of Thermopylae. However, the Persian army was superior by number with between 120,000 and 300,000 soldiers estimated by modern historians. The persians arrived at Thermopylae by late August or early September; the outnumbered Greeks held them off for seven days (including three of direct battle) before their rear-guard was annihilated in one of history's most famous last stands. During two full days of battle, the Greeks blocked the only road by which the massive Persian army could traverse the narrow pass. After the second day, a local resident name Ephialtes revealed to the Persians the existence of a path leading behind the Greek lines. Subsequently, Leonidas, aware that his force was being outflanked by the Persians, dismissed the bulk of the Greek army and remained to guard their retreat along with 300 Spartans and 700 Thespians. Led by King Leonidas -who was killed later by the Persian king Xerxes by cutting his head off and displaying it to his army-, the Spartans heroically held the Persians at bay for nearly a week until - outnumbered, betrayed and outflanked - they were finally defeated. Another similar example to this battle occurred in Plataea. Xerxes retreated with much of his army, leaving his general Mardonius to finish off the Greeks the following year. In the summer of 479 BC, the Greeks assembled a huge army and marched out of the Peloponnesus. The Persians retreated to Boeotia and built a fortified camp near Plataea. The Greeks, however, refused to be drawn into the prime terrain for cavalry around the Persian camp, resulting in a stalemate that lasted eleven days.

While attempting a retreat after their supply lines were disrupted, the Greek battle line fragmented. Thinking that the Greeks were in full retreat, Mardonius ordered his forces to pursue them, but the Greeks, particularly the Spartans, Tegeans and Athenians halted and gave battle, routing the lightly armed Persian infantry and killing Mardonius. A large portion of the Persian army was trapped in its camp and killed. The destruction of this army, and the remnants of the Persian navy, allegedly on the same day at the Battle of Mycale, decisively ended the invasion. Both battles gave Sparta enormous prestige amongst the Greek, especially as the “liberators of Greece”. It was a great example of how a nation with a collected mindset to repel against a common enemy can fight with every fibre of their being, till death.

After Persia was defeated and the battle eventually came to an end, Sparta’s internal conflicts come forth from obscurity. Sparta contained a vast amount of helot population which described as a subjugated population constituted as primarily agricultural labourers for their Spartiate masters, occasionally performing domestic tasks which would be attained to the slaves elsewhere. They were ritually and constantly mistreated, owing to their own numerical inferiority, the Spartans were always preoccupied with the fear of a helot revolt, they maintained a truly brutal and absolute control over their enslaved population. The ephors (Spartan magistrates) of each year on entering office declared war on the helots, allowing them to be killed and abused by members of the Crypteia without fear of religious repercussion. In the aftermath of the 464 BC Spartan earthquake which destroyed much of Sparta and many other city-states in Ancient Greece, helots and Messenian subjects took advantage of the turmoil of devastation in Sparta and revolted against them. Sparta invoked other city states in the league to profit their assistance to put down the rebellions, which they were already obligated to in accordance with the alliance. Athens, whose aid the Spartans sought because of their "reputed experience in siege operations," sent approximately 4,000 hoplites under the leadership of Cimon, but this contingent was sent back to Athens, while those from other cities were allowed to stay. The Spartans were concerned that the Athenians would switch sides and assist the helots; from the Spartan perspective, the Athenians had an "enterprising and revolutionary character," and by this fact alone posed a threat to the oligarchic regime of Sparta. The Athenians were insulted and therefore repudiated their alliance with Sparta. The alliance between Sparta and Athens was never revived, and disagreements continued to intensify until the outbreak of war in 460 BC. Since the Helot population used the earthquake as their opportunity to rebel, the Spartans were forced to wait to reform their society until after they had suppressed the Helots. Even after the helots were suppressed, Sparta faced serious strain of their population due to the constant declining rate of the Spartiate’s (original and pure Spartan’s, non-helots)

Sparta withdrew their power from the overseas despite the bravery and military hegemony they demonstrated during the Persian wars in consequence of various political and militarily reasons in addition to their conservative perspective over foreign policy and their reluctance to be present overseas. Pausanias was a Spartan regent and a general. In 479 BC, as a leader of the Hellenic League's combined land forces, he won a pivotal victory against the Achaemenid Empire in the Battle of Plataea. Despite his role in ending the Second Persian invasion of Greece, Pausanias subsequently fell under suspicion of conspiring with the Persian king Xerxes I. After an interval of repeated arrests and debates about his guilt, he was starved to death by his fellow Spartans. Consequently, his behaviour made Sparta look untrustworthy and corrupted to the Greeks. Spartans didn’t have the necessary imperial mindset to expand and adopted a land-based notion and focused on Peloponnese. Therefore, Athens seemed more appealing to be a lead authority against the war with Persia. And with that Sparta lost direct influence in the Aegean Sea, they no longer had bases or fleets operating. Athens quickly cleared the seas of Persian garrisons and fleets.

Despite the increasing prestige and reputation after the Persian wars, Sparta persistently struggled to maintain dominance and preserve hegemony over the Peloponnesian league. The members of the alliance were obligated to provide troops to Sparta to further extend their campaigns however, some city states such as Corinth and Elis infrequently resisted due as their intentions contradicted to the Sparta's foreign policy. Sparta pursued a cautious, conservative and defensive foreign policy, avoiding extensive campaigns outside the Peloponnese, more focused on prioritizing the control of the helots at home. Because of Sparta's reluctance of intervening in the outside matters, they rejected the Ionian Greeks' request to join the Hellenic League, suggesting instead that they abandon Asia Minor, which allowed Athens to step in and form the Delian League. Corinth's approach was more outward-looking and aggressive: as a wealthy maritime and commercial polis, Corinth had strong interests in maintaining and expanding trade networks in the Aegean and beyond. Because of this, Corinth was often frustrated by Sparta's reluctance to confront Athens, especially when Athenian expansion threatened Corinthian trade routes. Especially when Athens interfered with Corinth's western colonies (Corcyra, Potidaea, and others), Corinth demanded decisive Spartan action, while Sparta hesitated at first. Consequently, the conflicts between the members of the alliance and Athens were a circuitous reason to commence a war between the Athens and Sparta.

Core Allies in the Peloponnesian League (before the Peloponnesian War, c. 431 BC)

- Corinth → major naval/commercial power; often influential in League policy.
- Megara → strategically important, controlled access between Attica and the Peloponnese.
- Elis → controlled Olympia and provided cavalry.
- Tegea → a key Arcadian polis, traditionally loyal to Sparta.
- Mantinea (Arcadia) → sometimes opposed Sparta, but part of the League before the war.
- Phlius → small but consistent ally in the northeastern Peloponnese.
- Sicyon → close ally located near Corinth.
- Achaia → northern Peloponnese, generally under Spartan influence.
- Boeotia (Thebes and its allies) → not in the Peloponnese proper, but tied to Sparta through alliance.
- Phocis & Locris → central Greek allies.

Notable Exceptions

- Argos → *not* a member; Sparta's traditional rival in the Peloponnese.
- Elis → sometimes conflicted with Sparta, but generally allied until later tensions.

Athens after the Persian war

When Persians launched the first invasion to Greece due to Athenians' encouragement and involvement in the Ionian revolt, Athenians reflected great courage and audacity to preserve their homeland.

The Battle of Marathon (490 BC) was fought during the first Persian invasion of Greece between Athens (aided by Plataea) and the Persians under Datis and Artaphernes. It was Persia's response to Athenian and Eretrian support in the Ionian Revolt, during which they burned Sardis. King Darius I swore revenge and launched a campaign to punish Athens and Eretria. After conquering Eretria, the Persians landed at Marathon. The Athenians, led by Miltiades, chose terrain that neutralized Persian cavalry and used a strategy of strengthening the flanks to encircle and rout the Persian infantry. The Persians fled to their ships, suffering heavy losses, and retreated to Asia. The triumph ended the first Persian invasion and boosted Athenian prestige, proving that the Persians could be defeated and that Athens could win without Spartan aid.

The Battle of Salamis (480 BC) was a decisive naval clash during the second Persian invasion of Greece. Fought in the narrow straits near Salamis Island, the outnumbered Greek fleet, led by Themistocles, defeated Xerxes' much larger Persian navy. After earlier defeats at Thermopylae and Artemisium, the Greeks had retreated, and Persia captured much of central Greece, including Athens. With the contributions of the Athenian statesman Themistocles in 483/2 BC after using his political skills and influence to persuade the Athenian assembly to start the construction of 200 triremes which later used as an efficient. Themistocles then lured the Persian fleet into the confined waters of Salamis, where their numerical advantage became a disadvantage. Disorganized and unable to manoeuvre, the Persians were overwhelmed by the Greek ships. Following the defeat, Xerxes withdrew with much of his army, leaving Mardonius behind, who was later defeated at Plataea (479 BC) alongside the Persian navy at Mycale. These victories ended Persia's attempts to conquer mainland Greece and marked the turning point of the Greco-Persian Wars, shifting the momentum to the Greeks. Furthermore, Athenians also showed great contribution at Plataea & Mycale with fighting alongside Sparta as a land-based military rather than their actual province which is maritime force.

During the second Persian invasion of Greece, which took place from 480 to 479 BCE, Athens was captured and subsequently destroyed by the Achaemenid Empire. A prominent Greek city-state, it was attacked by the Persians in a two-phase offensive, amidst which the Persian king Xerxes the Great had issued an order calling for it to be torched. The Persian army commander Mardonius oversaw the razing of several structures of political and religious significance throughout the city, including the Acropolis, the Old Temple of Athena, and the Older Parthenon. Two years later, the Greek coalition retook Athens and dealt a devastating defeat to the Persian army during the Battle of Plataea, killing Mardonius and setting the stage for the eventual expulsion of all Persian troops from southern Greece. Athens' destruction by the Persians prompted the Greeks to build the Themistoclean Wall around the city to deter future invaders, and the event continued to have an impact on Greek society for a prolonged period.

Although Sparta had initially commanded the Pan-Hellenic coalition, the misconduct and arrogance of the Spartan regent Pausanias, coupled with Sparta's broader unwillingness to maintain prolonged overseas commitments, led many of the Ionian and Aegean states to lose confidence in Spartan leadership. These cities, still vulnerable to Persian retaliation and eager for security, actively sought a new protector. They turned to Athens, whose naval supremacy and recent prestige made it

the natural candidate. In response, Athens convened an assembly on the sacred island of Delos, where the participating states swore solemn oaths of mutual defence and committed either ships or financial tribute to a collective treasury housed in the sanctuary of Apollo. This moment—when Sparta's abdication of responsibility directly intersected with the Ionian and island states' appeal to Athens—constituted the immediate occasion for the League's establishment, transforming Greek resistance against Persia into a formalized and enduring naval alliance under Athenian hegemony. The Delian League was established in 478 BCE when many Greek city-states, especially the Ionian cities and Aegean islands, wanted continued protection against Persia. They first turned to Sparta for leadership, but Sparta withdrew from overseas campaigns after the Persian Wars and left them without support.

As a result, these states invited Athens to take charge, since Athens had the strongest navy. The alliance was formally founded on the sacred island of Delos, where members swore an oath to fight Persia together and contributed either ships or money to a common treasury. The original membership probably included most of the Aegean islands, except Aegina, Melos, and Thera, most of the cities of Chalcidice, the shores of the Hellespont and Bosphorus, some of Aeolia, most of Ionia, and a few eastern Dorian and non-Greek Carian cities.

Athens emerged as the superior and undisputed leader of the Delian league, with the power they upheld with unsurpassed strength of their army. While the League was nominally an alliance of equals, Athens gradually turned it into a tool of Athenian influence, guiding decisions and military campaigns according to its own interests.

Athens often preferred monetary tribute and member states were obligated to contribute either ships or money, which allowed it to build up its own fleet, fund public projects, and strengthen the city's economy while keeping control over League operations.

Athens used League resources to defend against Persia, but increasingly also intervened in the affairs of member states, enforcing loyalty and suppressing revolts which conceived resentment among the members by indicating that they started to lose autonomy in their own land. Athens also promoted their own democratic politics, which they adopted in their territory to the League. Athens was a direct democracy at home: male citizens could vote on policies, military actions, and laws. Athens tried to extend this political view in the council too, but it stayed representative and performative. The council discussed military campaigns, tribute, and policies, but Athens enforced compliance with its policies using naval power even though every member state either small or substandard had the right to vote. Athens having the largest navy yielded them military leverage made many smaller states were intimidated or dependent, so their votes were often symbolic and not remarkable. Tribute collection and military commands were centralized in Athens, so while it looked democratic on paper, Athens basically ran the League like an empire.

Some of the more prominent members of the Delian League, aside from Athens, included:

- Byzantium.
- Lesbos.
- Naxos.
- Paros.
- Samos.
- Euboea.
- Miletos.

The Causes of War

When Athens summoned the Delian league as their empire after the Persian wars and commenced its expedition as a growing naval force in the Greek world, concerning Sparta that the previous competence balance in the two sides starting to fade. This was a result of Athens indisputable dominance over its allies through tribute and force, gaining enormous wealth and a strong navy. Athens' transformation into the strongest naval power in Greece was the result of geography, leadership, and historical opportunity. The city's position on the Attic peninsula, surrounded on three sides by the sea, naturally encouraged reliance on maritime trade. Unlike Sparta, which had fertile land and an agrarian economy, Athens depended heavily on imports, especially grain, making naval strength a necessity rather than a luxury. This advantage was cemented in the early fifth century BCE, when the statesman Themistocles persuaded the Athenians to use the silver discovered in the Laurion mines not for personal distribution, but to finance the construction of a fleet of triremes. His foresight ensured that Athens would enter the Persian Wars with a powerful navy, and the decisive role of the Athenian fleet in the victory at Salamis in 480 BCE established Athens' reputation as the preeminent maritime power in Greece.

In the aftermath of the Persian Wars, Athens assumed leadership of the Delian League, an alliance originally created to continue the struggle against Persia. While allies initially contributed ships and manpower, many soon preferred to pay monetary tribute instead. Athens used these funds to build and maintain its own permanent fleet, while also tightening its grip on allies by suppressing revolts and seizing their ships. This process turned the league into an Athenian empire, giving the city not only unrivalled naval strength, but also the wealth to sustain it. The construction of the Long Walls linking Athens to its harbour at Piraeus further reinforced this maritime strategy, ensuring that Athens could withstand invasions on land so long as its navy controlled the sea and secured the city's lifelines of trade and grain imports.

Finally, naval power in Athens was deeply connected to its democracy. The crews of the triremes were largely made up of thetes, the poorest citizens, whose vital role in defending the city gave them greater political influence. Thus, the navy was not only the foundation of Athens' empire abroad but also of its democratic system at home. Through this combination of geographical necessity, visionary leadership, imperial tribute, and democratic manpower, Athens rose to dominate the seas and sustain itself as the leading naval power of the Greek world.

After Sparta struggled through a devastating earthquake, helots started revolting against the Spartan government, thus Sparta sought the aids of their allies to suppress the revolts. Many Greek city states send their resources as aid which they were obligated to in accordance with their contract, including Athens, but Sparta dismissed their efforts to help them out of mistrust. This lack of trust made Athens feel insulted, which later reflected as open hostility and destroyed any chance of cooperation while Sparta concerned Athenian interference.

Athenians attempt to expand on land broke the unwritten understanding that Sparta led on land, Athens at sea. Athens was traditionally a naval power but started intervening in mainland politics by allying with Megara (key city near Corinth and gateway to Peloponnesus) and intervening in Boeotia and Phocis, central Greek regions important to Sparta. This sudden change of demeanour happened in the Athens made Sparta feel threatened as a land-based hegemony over Greece and further paved the way to strain their already antagonized perspective over each other.

Megara's compliance to Athens directly threatened Corinth with controlling the route from the Peloponnesus to central Greece (the Megarid) thus Athens' new alliance gave it a base right on Corinth's borders ending up frustrating the Corinth with facing direct economic competition permanently. Athens supported helot revolts happened in Sparta's territories and drew smaller and more underdeveloped states into its orbit. This meant Sparta was diminishing authority over its alliance, which made the already expected conflict even more inevitable. With Athens controlling Megara, Boeotia, and naval dominance, Sparta feared being surrounded on both land and sea. Further, the Athenians were better prepared financially than their enemies, owing to the large war chest they had amassed from the regular tribute they received from their empire. The possibility of Athens pressuring Peloponnesus from the north made Sparta anxious.

The political approach of these two sides was completely opposite and clashed constantly. Athens assimilated a democratic, imperialist, aggressive in expanding influence point of view. However, Sparta was an oligarchic, conservative state and more focused on controlling Peloponnesus and preventing helot uprisings. Consequently, each saw the other's political system as dangerous and destabilizing.

Sparta had initially been seen as the natural leader of Greece after the Persian Wars after the great triumphs they obtained in the mainland with their strategies and intelligent spartan commanders, but they didn't show any intention of expanding overseas with lacking imperial mindset. With their reluctance to battle overseas due to their desire to maintain their sovereignty over Peloponnese, combined with the idea of they were corrupted and arrogant after Pausanias' actions shifted other Greek city states tend to be in Athens' side to repel and defend Greece against Persians and other possible threats. Meanwhile, many Spartans believed Athens had stolen their rightful role, and Athens believed Sparta was jealous and ungrateful.

First Peloponnesian War

Beginning of the War:

In 464 BC, a massive earthquake stopped a Spartan invasion of Attica, which resulted in a helot revolt. Unable to suppress the revolt, Sparta summoned their allies from the war against the Persians. Athens sent 4,000 men to support Sparta by besieging the city. But after Athens failed in their siege, Sparta feared that the Athenians might side with the helots. This resulted in Sparta taking immediate action and sending the Athenian army back to their country. Athens was insulted by this hostility and started establishing relationships with enemies of Sparta. After all the events that thinned out the relationship between Sparta and Athens, this crisis made the long-expected war between Sparta and Athens inevitable. In 460 BC, the war began. By the time the war started, Athens had already established their alliances with some of the major states in Greece, such as Thessaly, Argos, and Megara, and they founded the Delian League. Meanwhile, Sparta summoned the Peloponnesian

League (founded way back in 550 BC), which consisted of Sparta's old allies such as Thebes and Corinth.

Army Compositions:

During the Hellenic era, military service was a duty of every man in most of the city-states. Even though some states hired them, mercenaries were not popular at the time. Even if the military service policies of the states were similar, their armies specialized in different areas. For example, the Spartan army consisted of their famous hoplites, who were trained from a young age, and these hoplites gave them the upper hand in land battles. However, Sparta could never match the naval power of other city-states like Athens. Athens, however, could not afford to train warriors as powerful as Sparta's but owning most of the major ports in southern Greece allowed them to build a powerful fleet. Besides this, all states had militia troops (armed citizens that were much less trained than actual soldiers) supporting their main armies and protecting their cities.

First Several Years:

In the first several years of the war, Sparta avoided involving themselves in battles. As a result, Athens usually fought other members of the Peloponnesian League during this time. Until 457 BC, the majority of the battles that Athenians fought were against other members of the Peloponnesian League. Since the Athenian army was powerful in sea battles but weaker in land battles compared to the highly trained hoplites of the Peloponnesian League, the Athenian army was defeated by the armies of Corinth and Epidaurus at Halieis, but at sea they were victorious at Cecryphaleia. Athenian dominance in the Aegean Sea alarmed Aegina (one of the Saronic Islands), which joined the war against Athens. Athens then won a sea battle against Aegina, resulting in the loss of the Peloponnesian League's only major naval force. Athens then landed on Aegina and laid siege to the city, thus blocking them from aiding the Peloponnesian League anymore. But this siege did not last long, as Athenians lifted the siege when Corinth invaded Megara. Megara was a gateway to both Athens and Sparta, so Athens quickly lifted the siege, established a force, and held onto their territory. Eventually, Athens came out on top and Corinth had to retreat from Megara. These years of early battles without Spartan forces came to an end when Spartan forces joined the war in 457 BC.

Athens' Campaign in Egypt:

An important fact to keep in mind is that Athens was running another campaign besides their war against the Peloponnesian League. Sometime near the beginning of the Peloponnesian War, a Libyan king named Inarus revolted against the Persians and led almost all of Egypt. Athens supported this revolt by sending 200 ships led by Charitimides and significant resources to Egypt. This campaign is important because it would eventually change the outcome of the Peloponnesian War.

Time Between 457 BC – 454 BC:

In 457 BC, Sparta finally joined the war. Their first move was not against Athens, but rather towards one of their allies, Phocis. At that time, Phocis was in a war against Doris, which was not a member but an ally of the Peloponnesian League. For that reason, Sparta sent an army of 12,000 men under the leadership of Nicomedes across the Corinthian Gulf. After learning about this army, Phocis surrendered and accepted Sparta without resisting. Meanwhile, Athens blockaded the Corinthian Gulf with their ships. Without a way to return back to Sparta, Nicomedes led his army to Boeotia, a city at the border of Athens. As Nicomedes rotated his army south, Athens and their allies gathered 14,000 men and marched to Boeotia, which led to the first major battle between Sparta and Athens: the Battle of Tanagra.

While Athenians had the upper hand in the battle, their warriors could not stand against Sparta's highly trained hoplites, and Sparta ultimately won. While both sides suffered heavy casualties, this victory temporarily delayed Athens' progress in Greece. However, it did not take long before they reorganized their army. After this battle, it is believed that Sparta and Athens made a four-month truce, and the Spartan army returned to their homeland. But Athens, now regrouped and ready, had their eyes on Boeotia. They marched there and were confronted by the Boeotian army, which led to the second major battle of the war: the Battle of Oenophyta.

Only two months after the Battle of Tanagra, Athens was once again in battle. But this time, Sparta was not able to help its allies. Without Sparta's elite hoplites, Boeotia could not stand against Athenian forces, and Athens eventually came out victorious. This showed all of Greece that besides being a naval superpower, Athens could also hold its ground in land battles. After this battle, Aegina surrendered and became tributary to Athens, and Athens finally completed their long walls to the port of Piraeus, which they had started building at the beginning of the war. At this point, Athens was free to make any move they wanted. Because the Spartan army was weakened and other Peloponnesian League members could not stand against Athens without Spartan help, Athens took this opportunity and captured the city of Chalcis. After this, they landed at Sikyon and captured that city too. Things were looking bright until events turned against them.

Crisis in the Aegean:

In 454 BC, an event that completely stopped Athenian campaigns occurred. Their forces in Egypt were crushingly defeated. After the Athenian army consisting of 200 ships moved into the Nile River, Persians blocked the river, trapping most of the army on a small island. After this, most of the Athenian army and Egyptian rebels were destroyed. The remaining armies (roughly about 100 ships and many wounded soldiers) returned to Athens, causing panic. This disaster shook the Delian League so much that Athens had to deal with its effects for years. This disaster also severely damaged Athens' naval dominance in the Aegean Sea. Finally, Athens recalled their exiled politician Cimon to arrange a truce with Sparta. Eventually, both sides agreed on a five-year truce in 451 BC. During this truce, Athens concentrated on fixing internal issues caused by the crisis and reasserting their dominance over other states of the Delian League.

During the Truce:

During this truce, each side dealt with internal issues. The first important event was the declaration of the Peace of Callias, which ended the Greco-Persian War. This was an important treaty because Athens no longer faced distractions and was now fully focused on winning the Peloponnesian War. Meanwhile, the Second Sacred War erupted. Sparta rendered Delphi independent from Phocis, which was an ally of Athens. So Athens sent an army under the command of Pericles, and a conflict occurred between Sparta and Athens, despite the truce. After these conflicts, a revolt broke out in Boeotia in 447 BC. Athens sent an army of a thousand hoplites to Boeotia. After some initial successes, this army was eventually defeated, which shook Athenian dominance over the Delian League. Until this time, the Delian League was more like an Athenian Empire, where every state did exactly what Athens wanted. But this revolt caused distress in the League, damaging Athenian influence. Shortly after the defeat, two other revolts occurred: one in Euboea and one in Megara. This was dangerous because, at this time, Sparta was re-establishing their army and preparing to attack Athens. Pericles led an army to Euboea to quell the revolt, but his army was called back when a

Spartan army led by the young king Pleistoanax invaded Attica, as the five-year truce had ended in 446 BC. But after negotiations, Pericles convinced the Spartan king to return home

Peace and Aftermath:

After Spartan king Pleistoanax retreated to Sparta, he was prosecuted and exiled for allegedly taking bribes from Athenian general Pericles and retreating when he had the chance to press the attack. This gave Athens breathing room, so Pericles moved back to Euboea to finally end the revolt. Finally, in 446 BC, both sides made a peace treaty known as the Thirty Years' Peace. According to this treaty, Troezen and Achaia would become independent, Aegina would remain tributary to Athens, and Megara was returned to the Peloponnesian League. This peace treaty may look like a victory for Athens, but in reality, it marked the beginning of Athens' downfall. The events in the Aegean opened scars in Athens so deep that they were never able to fully recover. Losing an important strategic point (Megara) to Sparta also gave the Peloponnesian League a huge advantage in the Second Peloponnesian War. Eventually, the two leagues once again went to war, known as the Second Peloponnesian War, and this time the results were decisive. Sparta completely annihilated the Athenian army, and Athens became part of the Spartan Empire.

Map of Corinth and the Isthmus



