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Power Play and No Surrender? Thucydides and the U.S.-Iraq Conflict (2002-2003 C.E.)

A recurring situation in Thucydides presents a powerful state making demands upon a smaller, weaker state under threat of force: e.g., Athens and Melos (5.84-116) or Sparta and its allies threatening Plataea (2.71-78). This analysis will focus on three features: the ultimatum, the rationale presented, and any psychological insight into the response of the weaker, vulnerable state. Similar situations present these three features, but the weaker side's response is often unexpected and counterintuitive (Chuter, "Triumph of the will? Or, why surrender is not always inevitable," *Review of International Studies* 1997, 381-400). The greatest surprise both in antiquity and in the modern world occurs when the weaker state rejects such demands. The first half of this talk analyzes the demands made of Melos and Plataea during the Peloponnesian War; the second half will explore the diplomatic conflict in 2002-2003 C.E. leading up to the U.S. (and Coalition) invasion of Iraq in March 2003. In addition to examining the threats themselves and the rationale put forth by the U.S. and contained in U.N. resolutions, I speculate upon the options available to Iraq.

Many theorists find a type of realism in the *History*: e.g., with regard to the Athenians excluding moral arguments in the Melian dialogue, Forde ("Varieties of Realism: Thucydides and Macchiavelli," *Journal of Politics* 1992, 378) believes that "The Athenians may wish to make the Melians better realists" (cf. Doyle in *Hegemonic Rivalry. From Thucydides to the Nuclear Age* 1991, 489-501). Intriguingly, Bosworth (*JHS* 1993, 33) calls the Athenian goal "humanitarian," since a Melian surrender would avert bloodshed and the destruction of the city. The ancient and modern situations are not precisely parallel: there is no ancient analogue to the U.N., though there are Panhellenic gatherings of various sorts. A connecting thread between Melos and Iraq may be the lack of flexibility on both sides. Blix noted the "unchanging mindset of the West" leading up to the invasion itself. This view is reinforced by recent reports that in mid-February 2003--before the invasion--the Iraqis broached the idea of allowing U.S. experts and troops into Iraq to verify the absence of weapons of mass destruction (Landay and Strobel, "Saddam wanted secret negotiations with U.S., officials say," *Knight Ridgers Newspapers*, 5 Nov., 2003).