



American Expression E0703 Thucydides trap

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The "Thucydides Trap" is a concept in international relations that takes its name from the ancient Greek historian Thucydides. Thucydides wrote about the Peloponnesian War, a conflict between Sparta and Athens that occurred in the 5th century BC. The term "Thucydides Trap" was popularized by political scientist Graham Allison in his book "Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?" published in 2017.

The Thucydides Trap refers to a situation where a rising power (like China) challenges the established dominant power (like the United States), leading to a heightened risk of conflict between the two. The underlying idea is that throughout history, such power shifts have often resulted in war, as the rising power seeks to assert itself, and the established power seeks to maintain its position.

Thucydides famously observed that the primary cause of the Peloponnesian War was the fear that Sparta felt towards the rise of Athens. He stated, "It was the rise of Athens and the fear that this instilled in Sparta that made war inevitable." Similarly, today, some argue that the rapid rise of China economically and militarily poses a challenge to the long-standing global dominance of the United States, which could lead to a conflict scenario.

This concept is particularly relevant in the context of the 21st century, as China's economic growth and geopolitical influence have expanded significantly, and it is increasingly seen as a potential challenger to the United States' global leadership.

It is important to note that the Thucydides Trap is not a deterministic theory, but rather a cautionary observation about historical patterns. Not all power shifts have resulted in war. Some cases, like the rise of Germany in the late 19th century, did lead to conflict, as seen in World War I. However, other power transitions, such as the peaceful end of the Cold War, are examples where war was avoided.

To avoid falling into the Thucydides Trap and prevent the outbreak of conflict, communication, cooperation, and diplomacy are crucial. Understanding each other's intentions, managing differences, and finding ways to coexist peacefully can help mitigate the risks associated with power transitions. The key is for both the rising and established powers to find common ground and work towards a stable international order that accommodates the interests of all parties involved.

In conclusion, the Thucydides Trap is a concept in international relations that warns of the increased likelihood of conflict when a rising power challenges an established dominant power. By learning from history and employing effective diplomatic strategies, nations can work towards peaceful coexistence and avoid the trap that may lead to destructive confrontations.

#### Questions for Discussion

1. How does the concept of the Thucydides Trap apply to the current geopolitical landscape, particularly in relation to the rise of China and its implications for the United States and other global powers?
2. Can you think of historical examples where power shifts between nations have led to conflict? What were the key factors that contributed to these conflicts, and what lessons can be learned from them?
3. In light of the Thucydides Trap, what are some potential strategies and approaches that countries can adopt to manage power transitions and prevent the outbreak of conflicts?
4. Are there instances in history where power shifts between nations were peacefully managed? What were the contributing factors that facilitated a peaceful transition of power, and how can these lessons be applied to current international relations?
5. Beyond the Thucydides Trap, what other factors do you think play a significant role in shaping international relations and influencing the behavior of nations on the global stage? How do these factors interact with power transitions between countries?