EPIS Basics: Thucydides' Trap

29 FEBRUARY 2024
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What Sets and Springs Thucydides' Trap?

Reading the introductory quote, the reader will find that security concerns play a substantial role in escalating tensions. Both the hegemon and its challenger perceived the other as a security threat. However, Thucydides eventually goes beyond these security concerns, stipulating that "fear, honour, and interest" were the three strongest motives that set Thucydides' trap.

If fear, honour and interest set Thucydides' trap, what springs it? Naturally, a panoply of flashpoints can act as catalysts for armed great power conflicts. A recurrent flashpoint throughout history regards the involvement of allies. The Peloponnesian war was preceded by a conflict between Sparta's ally Corinth and Athen's ally Kerkyra (Corfu). Despite Athens and Sparta being uninterested in war, both feared showing weakness in backing down, eventually spelling war. A similar picture is presented at the onset of the First World War. In the future, a war between China and the US over Taiwan would constitute a tragic continuation of this theme.

Escaping Thucydides' Trap

DOI 10.69790/epis03.66045