

12.2. Demosthenes / The First Philippic

352 BCE, Athenian troops successfully opposed Philip II of Macedon at Thermopylae, but the Macedonian victory over the Phocians at the Battle of Crocus Field shook Demosthenes. The first of a series of speeches on the menace posed by Philip (351–350 BCE) was a rousing call for resistance, asking his countrymen to take the necessary action to protect their own freedom.

Dem. 1.4. Source: Demosthenes. *Demosthenes*, vol. 1. Trans. J. H. Vince. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U. Press, 1930.

If the question before us were a new one, men of Athens, I should have waited until most of the regular speakers had delivered their opinions, and if satisfied with any of their proposals, I should have remained silent, but if not satisfied, I should then have tried to express my own views. Since, however, it is our fortune to be still debating a point on which they have often spoken before, I can safely claim your indulgence if I am the first to rise and address you. For if in the past their advice had been sound, there would be no need for deliberation today.

Now in the first place, Athenians, there is no need to despair of our present position, however hopeless it may seem. For that which is worst in the days that are past and gone is just what affords the best assurance for the future. And what is that? It is that your affairs are in this evil plight just because you, men of Athens, utterly fail to do your duty; since surely, were you so placed in spite of every effort on your part, it would be hopeless to look for improvement.

In the next place, bear this in mind. Some of you have been told, others know and remember, how formidable the Spartans were, not many years ago, and yet how at the call of honor and duty you played a part not unworthy of your country, and entered the lists against them in defence of your rights. I remind you of this, Athenians, because I want you to know and realize that, as no danger can assail you while you are on your guard, so if you are remiss no success can attend you. Learn a lesson from the former strength of the Lacedaemonians, which you mastered by strict attention to your affairs, and the present arrogance of our enemy, which discomposes us because we ignore every call of duty.

But if anyone here, Athenians, is inclined to think Philip too formidable, having regard to the extent of his existing resources and to our loss of all our strongholds, he is indeed right, yet he must reflect that we too, men of Athens, once held Pydna, Potidaea, and Methone and had in our own hands all the surrounding territory, and that many of the native tribes now in his service were then free and independent and were indeed more inclined to side with us than with Philip.

If, therefore, Philip had then come to the conclusion that it was a difficult task to fight the Athenians while they held such strong outposts in his own territory and he was destitute of allies, in that case he would never have gained his present successes, never acquired his present power. But, men of Athens, Philip saw clearly that all these outposts were but the open prizes of war, that by natural right the property of the

absent belongs to those who are on the spot, and the property of the careless to those who can face toil and danger.

It was precisely by acting on this principle that he has mastered and now holds them all. Some he has seized by right of arms, others he has won by alliance and friendship. For indeed alliance and respect are willingly offered by all men to those whom they see ready and prompt to take action.

And you too, men of Athens, if you are willing to adopt this principle, now if never before, if each citizen is ready to throw off his diffidence and serve the state as he ought and as he best may, the rich man paying, the strong man fighting, if, briefly and plainly, you will consent to become your own masters, and if each man will cease to expect that, while he does nothing himself, his neighbor will do everything for him, then, God willing, you will recover your own, you will restore what has been frittered away, and you will turn the tables upon Philip.

Do not believe that his present power is fixed and unchangeable like that of a god. No, men of Athens; he is a mark for the hatred and fear and envy even of those who now seem devoted to him. One must assume that even his adherents are subject to the same passions as any other men. At present, however, all these feelings are repressed and have no outlet, thanks to your indolence and apathy, which I urge you to throw off at once.

For observe, Athenians, the height to which the fellow's insolence has soared; he leaves you no choice of action or inaction; he blusters and talks big, according to all accounts; he cannot rest content with what he has conquered; he is always taking in more, everywhere casting his net round us, while we sit idle and do nothing.

When, Athenians, will you take the necessary action? What are you waiting for? Until you are compelled, I presume. But what are we to think of what is happening now? For my own part I think that for a free people there can be no greater compulsion than shame for their position. Or tell me, are you content to run round and ask one another, "Is there any news today?" Could there be any news more startling than that a Macedonian is triumphing over Athenians and settling the destiny of Hellas?

"Is Philip dead?" you ask. "No, indeed; but he is ill." And what is that to you? Even if something happens to him, you will soon raise up a second Philip, if that is the way you attend to your affairs; for even this Philip has not grown great through his own unaided strength so much as through our carelessness.

Nor is this all. If anything happened to him, or if Fortune, which always cares for us better than we care for ourselves, should bring that result about, remember that you must be on the spot if you want to take advantage of the general confusion and to control the situation at your pleasure; but in your present condition you would be unable, even if the opportunity offered, to take over Amphipolis, having neither a force nor a policy ready to hand.

Well, assuming that you are thoroughly convinced that you must all be ready and willing to make this necessary effort, I say no more on that point. But as to the nature and size of the force

which I think adequate to relieve the situation, the means of defraying the cost, and the best and speediest method of providing for its equipment, I shall now endeavor to state my views, making just this appeal to you, Athenians.

Wait till you have heard everything before you pass judgement. Do not be premature; and even if at the outset I seem to be suggesting a novel kind of expeditionary force, do not imagine that I am trying to postpone our operations. It is not those who cry "at once" or "today" that really speak to the purpose, for no dispatch of forces now could prevent what has already happened; but it is the man who can indicate the nature, the size, and the source of the expedition that will be able to keep the field until we either defeat the enemy or consent to a termination of hostilities; for that is how we shall avoid trouble in the future. Now I believe that I can indicate this, without prejudice to anyone else's proposal. That is a bold promise, but it will soon be put to a practical test, and you shall be my judges.

First then, men of Athens, I propose to equip fifty war-galleys; next you must make up your minds to embark and sail in them yourselves, if necessary. Further I recommend the provision of transports and other vessels, sufficient for the conveyance of half our cavalry.

All this is a necessary provision against Philip's sudden raids from Macedonia against Thermopylae, the Chersonese, Olynthus, or where he will. You must present to his mind the consideration that you may possibly shake off your excessive apathy and strike out as you did at Euboea, and before that, as we are told, at Haliartus, and quite recently at Thermopylae.

That, even if you should not act as I, personally, think you ought, is not an altogether trivial matter; for its purpose is that he may either hold his hand through fear, knowing that you are on the alert—he will know it sure enough, for there are some on our side, yes, too many, who report everything to him—or that he may overlook it and so be taken off his guard, provided there is nothing to hinder you from sailing against his country, if he gives you the chance.

Such, in my opinion, are the resolutions which you ought to adopt, and the force which must be equipped, at once. But in addition to this, Athenians, I propose that you should get ready a corps to carry on a continuous war of annoyance against Philip. Not an imposing army—on paper—of ten or twenty thousand mercenaries! It shall be a real Athenian contingent, and whether you appoint one general or more, whether it is this man or that or the other, him it shall strictly follow and obey. I also urge you to provide for its maintenance.

And what will this force be, and how large? How will it be maintained, and how far will it consent to effect its purpose? I will tell you, describing each detail separately. Of mercenaries I propose—and beware of the mistake that has so often thwarted your efforts. Thinking that the utmost is too little for the occasion, you choose the biggest scheme in your resolutions,

but when it comes to performance, you fail to realize even the smallest. You should rather act and provide on a small scale, adding more if this proves insufficient.

So I propose that the whole force should consist of two thousand men, but of these five hundred must be Athenians, chosen from any suitable age and serving in relays for a specified period—not a long one, but just so long as seems advisable; the rest should be mercenaries. Attached to them will be two hundred cavalry, fifty at least of them being Athenians, serving on the same terms as the infantry. There will also be cavalry transports provided.

So far, so good; and what besides? Ten fast-sailing war-galleys. Since Philip has a fleet, we must have fast vessels if our force is to sail in safety. Now how is this army to be maintained? That also I will explain fully, when I have told you why I think so small a force sufficient, and why I insist that those serving shall be citizens.

I name a force of this size, Athenians, because it is not in our power now to provide one fit to meet him in pitched battle: we must adopt guerilla tactics to start with. The force must therefore be neither unwieldy—for we cannot afford the pay and maintenance—nor altogether insignificant....

Truly, men of Athens, I do think that Philip is drunk with the magnitude of his achievements and dreams of further triumphs, when, elated by his success, he finds that there is none to bar his way; but I cannot for a moment believe that he is deliberately acting in such a way that all the fools at Athens know what he is going to do next. For of all fools the rumor-mongers are the worst.

But if, putting rumors aside, we recognize that this man is our enemy, who has for years been robbing and insulting us, that wherever we once hoped to find help we have found hindrance, that the future lies in our own hands, and if we refuse to fight now in Thrace, we shall perhaps be forced to fight here at home—if, I say, we recognize these facts, then we shall have done with idle words and shall come to a right decision. Our business is not to speculate on what the future may bring forth, but to be certain that it will bring disaster, unless you face the facts and consent to do your duty.

For my own part, I have never yet chosen to court your favor by saying anything that I was not quite convinced would be to your advantage; and today, keeping nothing back, I have given free utterance to my plain sentiments. Yet, certain as I am that it is to your interest to receive the best advice, I could have wished that I were equally certain that to offer such advice is also to the interest of the speaker; for then I should have felt much happier. But, as it is, in the uncertainty of what the result of my proposal may be for myself, yet in the conviction that it will be to your interest to adopt it, I have ventured to address you. Whatever shall be to the advantage of all, may that prevail!