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# Analysis of Leaders from the Peloponnesian War

Submitted by: Luke Klein

A leader in nearly any society needs many characteristics to be effective for the people they rule and for the land they serve: an effective leader needs to be an eloquent speaker so as to inspire the people to serve the state and inspire loyalty; simultaneously, a leader needs to be open to opinions of others, accept a certain amount of opposition, and take criticisms and suggestions in stride; a leader must think for the good of the people and state in both the short and long term as opposed to exclusively the short-term; and a leader must lead by example, meaning they should not live extravagantly and should attempt to be humble. The Peloponnesian War witnessed the rise of three influential leaders of the time: Pericles of Athens, Alcibiades of Athens, and King Archidamus of Sparta; these men led their people through a war that lasted twenty-seven years and would have dire consequences for Greece.

Eloquence in speeches has been important in efficient leadership since before the Peloponnesian War; in fact, in Athenian democracy, eloquence in the Assembly could mean the difference between peace and war or whether or not a law was passed, as every citizen was given the opportunity to speak if they so desired (Perry, 42.) Pericles, a general in the Peloponnesian War for Athens, was able to sway those at the public funeral for the first of the fallen soldiers in the war to support the war, the people of Athens, and the army, inspiring patriotism and fervor throughout the

populous of Athens (Thucydides, 144-151.) Alcibiades's eloquence also served him well in convincing the Assembly to attack Sicily explaining that to not attack would embolden their enemies and potentially cause them to think Athens weak; his argument was so compelling that it caused a rival commander's argument against going to war with to Sicily to backfire and further harden the Athenian resolve for war (419-425.) King Archidamus of Sparta spoke regarding waging war with Athens to the Spartan assembly, recommending that, instead of ignoring the Athenian aggression or meeting them immediately in the field, the Spartans wait and consolidate their power and money while helping their allies against Athens (83-84); the Spartans, however, were swayed by the arguments of Sthenelaidas (86) and Sparta's allies (73-77) in addition to the seemingly-haughty speech from the Athenian representatives (78-82.) All of the leaders were eloquent and confident in their speeches, even though only Alcibiades and Pericles were effective in gaining what they desired.

For a leader to be open to opinions, criticism and opposition takes time and experience, and to accept change takes wisdom and strength; in addition, a leader must reply appropriately to whatever criticisms and attacks they come under. Pericles faced much opposition and criticism during the Peloponnesian War during the plague that devastated Athens from the populous; he replied to them by attempting to guide their anger and

frustration at their situation at hand away from him to the conflict with the Peloponnese (158-9); Pericles was removed from his title of general, only to be re-instated for a short time before his death, after the Athenian Assembly realized Pericles had been right to attempt to re-direct their anger (163.)

King Archidamus was also criticized by his allies, in addition to Sparta on the whole. Archidamus invited delegates from the city-states that were claiming Athenian aggression to state their cases, and then Sparta would consider what action to take. The Corinthian delegates were the ones who mainly pointed out that the Spartans were usually very wary when it came to conflicts, and only became involved when it could directly influence their state (73-77.) Archidamus, after the foreign delegates had taken a recess from the chambers, pointed out to his fellow Spartans that to wage war against Athens would be a massive undertaking that would influence not just the present rulers, but would likely involve the next generation of leaders (82-83). In addition, Archidamus believed that to charge head-first into battle without proper knowledge and resources would be suicide and he said that to delay and be prepared is better than to take action only to be later caught off-guard and destroyed (84-85.) Archidamus then opened the floor to a vote as to whether or not to go to war with Athens or to wait a few years; in spite of his proposal being defeated by an overwhelming margin, Archidamus supported the decision of his people and his allies, and led them during the war. The decision to wage war on the Athenians by Sparta not only influenced the next generation of leaders as Archidamus predicted, but began the rapid decline of the Greek city-states, eventually leading to their fall at the hands of Philip II of Macedonia (Perry, 44.)

Alcibiades, in much a similar manner to Archidamus and Pericles, faced criticism from his rivals. Unlike Pericles and Archidamus, the attacks regarded Alcibiades' character and actions outside the Assembly; in his reply, instead of merely attempting to persuade the Assembly to attack Sicily and ignoring the attacks on his personal life, he commenced justifying his supposed extravagance outside the Assembly, and began to speak of himself as though he were a hero who deserved some extra liberties.

*"...[S]ince Nicias has made this attack on me, I must begin by saying that I have a better right than others to hold the command and that I think I am quite worthy of the position. As for all the talk there is against me, it is about things which bring [honor] to my ancestors and myself, and to our country profit as well. There was a time when the Hellenes imagined that our city had been ruined by the war, but they came to consider it even greater than it really is, because of the splendid show I made as its representative at the Olympic games, when I entered seven chariots for the chariot race...and took first, second, and fourth places...it is quite natural for my fellow citizens to envy me for the magnificence with which I have done things in Athens..."* (Thucydides, 419)

The impression Alcibiades gave to his rivals after delivering this speech was that of one looking to become a dictator and destroy the democracy in Athens (419). Alcibiades' rivals used his extravagance against him, claiming that he and other extravagant young men defaced Hermæ around Athens as an act against democracy; Alcibiades denied the charges, and set out for Sicily before he could stand trial (426-427.)

An effective leader also holds the long-term stability of the people and state above the short-term success that one attains while in

power. Pericles and Archidamus both realized this about their states and worked toward that goal: Pericles realized that holding back a portion of the Athenian navy to defend from the Peloponnesian navy was more advantageous to the Athenian cause than would sending out the entire navy and not attempt to expand until after the war, even though his successors did the precise opposite (163). Archidamus, meanwhile, thought if Sparta and its allies were to have a chance against Athens, the Spartans would need to consolidate their power for another few years before being strong enough to defeat Athens as quickly as possible, even though the majority of the other Spartans did not share his sentiments (82-87.) Alcibiades, unlike Pericles and Archidamus, cared less for the good of the state; rather, he cared more for personal gain and glory in his command in the forces going to Sicily, as Nicias pointed out and Alcibiades, for the most part, confirmed the allegations (415-422.)

Finally, a leader must set an example for its people to follow, and not act as though he or she is better than any other person under their leadership. For any Spartan, the same rigorous training was undertaken by all men in the culture, even the king; this training made certain that the Spartans would fight, and potentially die, bravely and with honor for their state (Perry, 38.) Archidamus personally led the Spartan army around Attica, devastating the countryside while the Athenians were dealing with the plague (Thucydides, 151.)

Pericles, being a general of the Athenian army, also set an example for his troops to follow; he led his troops to what he believed to be a more tactical strategy in defending the territory they had taken from the Peloponnese (101). Pericles also made attempts to leave some of the navy back to defend Athens as opposed to conquering while at war with Sparta;

this would have likely saved the Athenians from their destruction had they done so (163.)

Alcibiades, unlike Pericles and Archidamus, did not lead by example very often. The examples Alcibiades set for his troops off the battlefield were abhorred by nearly everyone in Athens as he lived a grandiose and questionable lifestyle, for which he had drawn much negative attention. One of his fellow commanders and rivals, Nicias, pointed this out when attempting to dissuade Athens from attacking Sicily. The fact that Alcibiades did not attempt to hide his extravagance—indeed, to an extent he flaunted it—made him despised by many, and took away from the leadership quality he had in their eyes.

In analyzing Thucydides's *History of the Peloponnesian War*, we encounter three leaders during that time who heavily influenced the outcome of the war: King Archidamus of Sparta, Pericles of Athens, and Alcibiades of Athens. The most impressive of the three aforementioned leaders was Pericles in that he was able to inspire the Athenian population to take up arms for the state, and fight to their last; some of what he advised the Athenians to do, such as not to expand while simultaneously fighting a war, was not heeded after his death, and likely resulted in the downfall of Athens, and thus he was not the most effective of the three. The most effective of the three leaders was King Archidamus of Sparta: in spite of not wanting to go to war immediately, Archidamus let the Spartan assembly and Sparta's allies decide whether or not to wage war on Athens; when the assembly and Sparta's allies voted for war, Archidamus led them to devastate Attica and defeat Athens. The victory came at a heavy cost, however, and left the Greek city-states both weaker and in more turmoil, leaving them vulnerable to outside invaders.

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