

AFTER THE PEACE OF NICIAS: DIPLOMACY AND POLICY,
421-416 B.C.*

In memoriam Eric Marsden

Dissatisfaction with Thucydides' account of the years of confusion and inconclusive action that followed the Peace of Nicias has perhaps been too strong a stimulus to modern scholars.¹ In their eagerness to repair the historian's omissions and illuminate his obscurities they have sometimes offered answers to questions of policy and motive that seem needlessly elaborate, complex, and far-fetched, often basing their views of the foreign policy of cities on assumptions about internal political dissensions as unnecessary as they are implausible. It is the aim of this paper to present an exposition of relations between Athens, Sparta, Corinth, Boeotia, and Argos that is intelligible and convincing, but at the same time burdens the evidence with a minimum of supposition and conjecture.

I

The Peace of Nicias was doomed to failure from the first. Of the major powers involved in the Archidamian war only Athens and Sparta had cogent grounds for seeking peace, dictated partly by their experience during the war, partly by their fears for the future. The confidence of Athens had been sapped by her defeats at Delium and Amphipolis, and she was afraid that her weakness might cause further defections in the empire.² The failure of the strategy of annual invasion had prolonged the war beyond Sparta's initial expectation; that and the occupation of Pylos and Cythera had made her ready for peace, while in the Peloponnese the immediate future looked bleak. Her thirty years' peace with Argos was running out, and there was considerable discontent within the Peloponnesian League. If the war with Athens was not brought to an end, Argos might join forces with Athens, taking the malcontents with her, for Argos was reluctant to renew the treaty unless Sparta ceded Cynuria. Thus Sparta might find herself fighting in isolation against a combination considerably stronger than anything she had faced so far.³

* I am grateful to Prof. A. Andrewes and Josette Jackson for their comments on a draft of this paper; they are not of course responsible for the views expressed or for any errors that remain.

¹ It is not my purpose to present a detailed discussion of the peculiar nature of Thucydides' fifth book. (For a valuable recent account of the problems with bibliography, cf. H. D. Westlake, *CQ* 65 (1971), 315 ff.) It is clear from the absence of speeches, the inclusion of undigested documents, and the frequent harshnesses of style and thought that the book is unfinished. Many difficulties of detail are caused by this fact. But the real problem is perhaps more fundamental. Despite revolt in the Athenian empire, which he dealt with, and discontent in the Peloponnesian League,

which he tended to ignore or gloss over, Thucydides was for the most part able to write about the war as a contest between two monolithic blocks, whose policies and strategies were decided by Athens and Sparta. From the Peace of Nicias to the Sicilian expedition the picture was much more complex. Events were determined, in more or less equal measure, by the actions and ambitions of no less than five major powers. This created problems, not perhaps so much of gathering information as of organizing material into a comprehensible form, which in his text as it survives Thucydides had not yet solved.

² 5.14.1 f. (References without indication of author are to Thucydides.)

³ 5.14.3f. On the text, cf. Gomme ad loc.

These motives for making peace were compelling, but they took little account of the temper of Sparta's allies. Boeotia, Corinth, Elis, and Megara voted against peace at Sparta.⁴ In examining their attitude three questions must be considered: what detriment, if any, each state incurred under the peace, what other grievance, if any, each had against Sparta, and what political alternative would best suit the interests of each.

Elis, as far as is known, suffered no disadvantage from any particular clause of the peace. Her objection was no doubt to the ending of the war on any terms, since peace would leave Sparta free to turn her attention to her squabble with Elis over Lepreum.⁵ Her advantage would best be served by a renewal of the war or some other development that would keep Sparta occupied.⁶ Corinth was chiefly disturbed at Sparta's acquiescence in the loss of Corinthian possessions in the north-west, notably Sollium and Anactorium. Thucydides contrasts this, her real motive, with the reason she later paraded, her inability to abandon her allies in the Thraceward area.⁷ This dichotomy is perhaps too crude: the north-west may have rankled most, but surely Corinth felt sincere displeasure at Sparta's readiness to leave Chalcidice to Athens' mercy. Thus Corinthian interests were damaged by the peace, while her only hope of recouping her losses was if the Peloponnesian League again attacked Athens, this time with greater success. Megara too was inconvenienced by the peace.⁸ Her principal aim was the recovery of Nisaea. This might have given her cause for resentment against both Sparta and Boeotia. That Sparta did not care about Nisaea was clear, while Athens was unlikely to return it as long as the Thebans refused to hand back Plataea. But Megara did not quarrel with Sparta,⁹ and what little evidence there is shows her acting in concert with Thebes.¹⁰ Her ground for rejecting the peace must therefore have been implacable hostility to Athens, which reinforced her dissatisfaction with the terms of the peace. But if she did think that a renewal of the war would serve her ends, she seems to have made no effort to bring it about. The Boeotians had lost nothing in the war, and their only cause of complaint against the treaty was that it called upon them to restore Panactum to Athens,¹¹ not to secure any gain for themselves, but to benefit Sparta, who needed some counter to recover from Athens Pylos, Cythera, and her prisoners.¹² More important, however, they probably saw no reason to make peace at all: they had been victorious at Delium and had suffered no setbacks—there was no ground whatever for them not to prefer to go on fighting. But they considered themselves to have no grievance against Sparta, and their policy after the peace was dictated by a desire to retain Sparta's friendship and further her interests.¹³

Thus although Sparta had cause for alarm, it is clear that the reluctance of certain states to share in the peace did not of itself offer any great prospect of

On Argos and her exploitation of her neutrality during the Archidamian war, cf. 5.28.2, *Arist.Pax* 475-7, *Diod.* 12.75.6.

⁴ 5.17.2. For Boeotia, cf. *Arist.Pax* 464-6; for Megara, *ibid.* 481-3, 500-7. Cf. V. Martin, *La Vie internationale dans la Grèce des cités*, 449 f.

⁵ Cf. 5.31.1 ff., 49.5-50.1.

⁶ Another state which would surely have been happy to see the war continue was Mantinea, whose parochial dominion in Arcadia was bound to be threatened as soon as Sparta was liberated from the burden of war with Athens: cf. 5.29.1. It is surprising

that Mantinea voted to accept the peace, but her readiness to disown it leaves little doubt as to her real desires.

⁷ 5.30.2. For the relevant clause in the peace, cf. 5.18.8.

⁸ Cf. Martin, *op. cit.*, 449.

⁹ Cf. 5.31.6.

¹⁰ Cf. 5.31.6, 38.1.

¹¹ 5.18.7.

¹² Cf. 5.36.2, 39.2.

¹³ Cf. 5.38.3. The war became particularly profitable for the Boeotians after the occupation of Decelea, but it had been so to some degree even earlier: cf. *Hell.Oxy.* 17.3 f.

success to the would-be instigators of an anti-Spartan coalition. Of those states that refused to swear, only Elis had a manifest grievance against Sparta that went beyond the terms of the peace itself, while Megara and Boeotia felt no hostility at all towards Sparta, so that, despite their attitude to the treaty, there was no reason to suppose that their loyalty could be shaken.

II

It seemed at first as if the Spartans intended to try to placate the Athenians by meticulously carrying out their obligations under the peace. They handed back their Athenian prisoners and sent envoys to the Thraceward area, who instructed Clearidas to return Amphipolis to Athens and urged their other allies in Chalcidice to accept the peace. Up to this point there is no hint of Spartan duplicity. However, the Chalcidian cities refused to swear, for obvious reasons, and Clearidas also proved recalcitrant.¹⁴ That he had no wish to surrender Amphipolis is plain, though there was probably also some truth in his claim that he could hardly do so against the Chalcidians' wishes. He returned to Sparta, ready to defend himself if the Spartan embassy chose to accuse him,¹⁵ and to see if the terms of the peace were not open to amendment. The Spartans sent him back to Amphipolis, with instructions to hand the city over to Athens if he could, or, failing that, at least to evacuate the Peloponnesians.¹⁶ These orders are a clear indication that in one case at least Sparta was not prepared to force observance of the peace on reluctant allies and was ready to plead her inability as an excuse for failure to carry out her obligations. There was some justice in her position: short of open war her allies could not be forced.¹⁷ But many men at Athens were suspicious of Sparta's good faith, while others may have felt that, even if Sparta was sincere, a treaty that Sparta was powerless to implement was hardly of great value to Athens.

The alliance between Sparta and Athens therefore comes as a surprise. The initiative probably came from Sparta.¹⁸ She thought that Argos would not be dangerous if her hopes of an alliance with Athens were disappointed, while the rest of the Peloponnese, which might otherwise move towards Athens, would, if Athens allied herself with Sparta, keep quiet.¹⁹ It is harder to see why Athens should have agreed to the alliance. On paper she was running the risk of involvement in a war against Argos in the Peloponnese, a war that would further only Sparta's interests, not her own, while the reciprocal clause was of little apparent value, since Athens herself was under no immediate threat of attack.²⁰ However, explanations can be found. The defenders of the Peace of Nicias at Athens may well have thought that the risk of war against Argos was very remote. Such a belief would accord with the considerations that prompted the Spartans to

¹⁴ 5.21.2.

¹⁵ The implied possibility that it might not be perhaps the first sign that Sparta was playing a double game.

¹⁶ 5.21.3.

¹⁷ For their renewed refusal, cf. 5.22.1.

¹⁸ 5.22.2. This may be the implication of the imperfect *ἐποιῶντο*; however, the presence of Athenian envoys at Sparta may suggest that Athens' thoughts were running in the same direction.

¹⁹ The text of 5.22.2 presents grave

difficulties, cf. Gomme ad loc. The most economical solution is to bracket *νομίσαντες* and *ὃν* in line 19 of the Oxford text.

²⁰ For the relevant clauses, cf. 5.23.1 f. Gomme on 5.22.3 suggests that Athens may have hoped to recover Panactum and Plataea while keeping Nisaea. But though the alliance might make Sparta even less concerned than before about the interests of Megara, it is hard to see why Boeotia should be moved to make any concessions.

propose the alliance. Sparta regarded the agreement as a deterrent: her hope was not that Athens would join with her in fighting Argos, but that the threat of their combination would prevent Argos from beginning hostilities, so that neither Sparta nor Athens would be called on to fight at all.²¹ Peacefully inclined Athenians might feel the same. Similarly the alliance might have a deterrent effect on any state eager to renew the war against Athens, if it realized that Sparta was formally committed to help Athens. But perhaps more important from the Athenian point of view was the effect on Sparta herself. Athens must have known that there were those at Sparta who were unhappy with the peace and would be ready, if the chance arose, to renew the war. Once Sparta had taken the first step towards the alliance, a rebuff from Athens would offend all Spartans, discredit those who had committed themselves to the peace and strengthen the hand of their opponents, whereas acceptance seemed likely to keep Argos in check and Sparta peaceful, both highly desirable ends for those at Athens who wanted the Peace of Nicias to have a chance of working. For both sides the alliance will have represented an insurance policy rather than a commitment to action, and for both sides, seen in that light, it made good sense.

III

The apparent *rapprochement* between Sparta and Athens was not to go unchallenged. Corinth took the lead both in fostering resentment against Sparta among her allies and in stimulating Argos to action.²² The Corinthian envoys went from Sparta to Argos and claimed, in conference with some Argive magistrates, that the explanation of Sparta's paradoxical move was to be found in her intention of enslaving the Peloponnese. They called on Argos to take the lead in averting this disaster by setting herself up as a rallying-point and offering a defensive alliance to all autonomous Greek cities, which many, they insisted, would join out of hatred for Sparta.²³

This proposal was put before the Argive assembly, which voted in favour and chose twelve negotiators, as the Corinthians had suggested before their departure.²⁴ These were to be empowered to conclude an alliance with any state except Sparta and Athens: any agreement with either of these was to require the assent of the people. The first state to accept the Argive offer was Mantinea.²⁵ Interest was aroused throughout the Peloponnese: men thought the Mantineans must have some special knowledge that had led them to commit themselves so quickly and conclusively.²⁶ Presumably it was believed that Mantinea had cause to think there was at least some measure of truth in the Argive accusation. This belief was reinforced by the general discontent and suspicion provoked by the clause in the Peace of Nicias which provided for bilateral revision by Sparta and Athens.²⁷ In short the Argive story was widely believed, and so many states were ready to join the alliance through fear of Sparta.²⁸

Sparta sent envoys to Corinth to complain and to point out that, if Corinth allied herself with Argos, she would be breaking her oaths to Sparta and was already out of order in refusing to accept the peace in accordance with the

²¹ Cf. 5.22.2. For the part of Nicias in persuading the Athenians to accept the alliance, cf. Plut.*Nic.* 10.2.

²² 5.25.1.

²³ 5.27.2, Diod.12.75.2 ff.

²⁴ 5.28.1, cf. 27.2.

²⁵ 5.29.1.

²⁶ 5.29.2.

²⁷ 5.29.2 f., cf. 5.18.11, Diod.12.75.4.

²⁸ 5.29.4.

majority decision of the Peloponnesian League.²⁹ Corinth replied that she was doing no wrong in rejecting the peace, since her alliance with the Thraceward peoples constituted an impediment involving gods and heroes and so supplied a valid reason for abstention. This, according to Thucydides, was a cover for her real motive, which was that Sollium, Anactorium, and other places remained lost to her under the peace. About Argos, the Corinthians continued, they would do whatever seemed just after discussion with their friends.³⁰ So the Spartans went home, while the Argive envoys at Corinth urged the Corinthians to conclude the alliance without delay. The Corinthians, however, told them to come to the next Corinthian assembly.³¹

The next state to enter the alliance was Elis. Elean ambassadors came first to Corinth and concluded an alliance with that city, then proceeded to Argos and made an agreement there.³² This was sufficient to encourage Corinth, who immediately after the alliance between Argos and Elis allied herself at last with Argos. Corinth's Chalcidian allies followed suit.³³ Boeotia and Megara, however, remained quiet, in accord with one another. They had no affection for Argos and her democratic constitution and proposed to wait to see what Sparta would do before committing themselves.³⁴

The Corinthians and Argives now set out to detach Tegea from Sparta, feeling that if they succeeded in this they would have the whole of the Peloponnese on their side.³⁵ However, Tegea refused point blank, producing a striking reaction. Up to this point the Corinthians had been acting enthusiastically, but now their *philonikia* deserted them and they were afraid that none of the other states would come over.³⁶ Nevertheless they set off for Boeotia, to request the Boeotians to ally themselves with Corinth and Argos and in general to pursue a common policy with them. They also asked the Boeotians to go with them to Athens and help to arrange a ten-day truce for Corinth on the Boeotian model, or, if Athens refused, to repudiate their own truce with Athens and make no future accommodation that did not include Corinth.³⁷ The Boeotians were reluctant to give any firm answer to the matter of joining the Argive alliance, but agreed to accompany the Corinthians to Athens. The Athenians refused to conclude a truce with Corinth, pointing out that if Corinth was an ally of Sparta there was a peace ready and waiting for her to join. The Boeotians would not repudiate their own truce, and so Corinth remained technically at war with Athens.³⁸

Sparta's first response to these developments was directed against Mantinea and Elis. An expedition under Pleistoanax was sent to detach the Parrhasii from Mantinea, in answer to an appeal from Spartan sympathizers, and to destroy a Mantinean fort. Despite the efforts of the Mantineans to prevent them they succeeded in dismantling the fort, proclaimed the Parrhasii autonomous, and went home.³⁹ As a safeguard against Elean expansion a garrison of liberated helots

²⁹ 5.30.1.

³⁰ 5.30.2 ff. On the meaning of *ιδίᾳ* in 5.30.2, cf. Andrewes ad loc., G. E. M. de Ste Croix, *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War*. 82 ff.

³¹ 5.30.5.

³² 5.31.1, 5.

³³ 5.31.6.

³⁴ For the text of 5.31.6 and the meaning of *περιωρώμενοι*, cf. Gomme ad loc.

³⁵ 5.32.3.

³⁶ 5.32.4.

³⁷ 5.32.5.

³⁸ 5.32.6 f. For the two possible meanings of *ἀνοκωχή δσπονδος*, cf. Gomme ad loc.; Grote's view seems to me the more plausible.

³⁹ 5.33.1 ff. For the topographical problems, cf. Andrewes ad loc. It is noteworthy, as Andrewes points out to me, that Pleistoanax had spent his exile in Parrhasian territory, on Mt. Lycaeus (5.16.3); no doubt he retained connections in the area.

and *neodamodeis* was established at Lepreum.⁴⁰

Corinth's conduct is curious.⁴¹ It is generally accepted that her ultimate aim throughout these years was to provoke a renewal of the war against Athens, and that at this point she hoped that the war would be carried on by the new alliance led by Argos.⁴² This view has little to commend it. It is true that Corinth hated Athens and that she spread the story that Athens was about to join with Sparta in enslaving the Peloponnese. But she can hardly have believed that Argos would ever be persuaded to lead a Peloponnesian crusade against Athens, whether Sparta lent her support or not.⁴³ Corinth's only hope of achieving her positive objective, the recovery of her lost possessions, was for Sparta herself to renew the war. But Corinthian efforts to rouse Argos to action and to build up the Argive alliance were not calculated to damage Athens or make Sparta eager for war. The opposite result was more likely to ensue: the more belligerent Argos became and the wider her alliance spread, the closer Sparta would be driven to Athens. It was after all the threat from Argos that had moved Sparta to make the Athenian alliance in the first place. So either Corinth in her blindness pursued a policy entirely inimical to her own supposed interest, or her immediate concerns were elsewhere. Much depends on whether or not she believed her own story about Sparta's intention of enslaving the Peloponnese.⁴⁴ If she did, her conduct was a simple case of self-preservation.⁴⁵ To break up the Peloponnesian League and create an anti-Spartan alliance under the leadership of Sparta's old enemy Argos was an obvious and reasonable counter to an assumed Spartan threat to the freedom of the Peloponnese. If, as is more likely, the story was pure propaganda, Corinth's behaviour is intelligible only on the assumption that she temporarily set aside her positive aims and followed at this point a totally negative policy designed solely to diminish Sparta. In Corinth's eyes Sparta had failed in her duty as leader of the Peloponnesian League by neglecting the legitimate concerns of her allies and concluding first a peace, then an alliance with Athens. Corinth set out to take revenge by destroying the League and depriving Sparta of her hegemony within the Peloponnese. To the effects that these developments might have on relations between the Peloponnese and Athens she seems for the moment to have given no thought. Hatred of Athens no doubt sharpened her resentment against Sparta, but it played no constructive part in the framing of her policy.

Corinth's delay in concluding her alliance with Argos may have been caused by internal dissensions.⁴⁶ But simple caution would be an adequate explanation both of this hesitation and the Corinthian response to failure at Tegea. If Spartan

⁴⁰ 5.34.1, cf. 31.4.

⁴¹ However, the element of secrecy discerned by D. Kagan (*AJP* 81, 1960, 293 ff.) in her dealings with Argos seems largely imaginary. It was the Argive assembly which accepted the Corinthian plan and appointed the negotiators (5.28.1): τὸν δῆμον and τὸ πλῆθος in 5.27.2 refer of course not to the Argive people but to the masses in those states to be approached by the negotiators. Nor is there any reason to suppose that the Corinthian envoys were acting without the knowledge and approval of their government.

⁴² Cf. Westlake, *AJP* 61 (1940), 416, Kagan, *op.cit.*, 291, 297. Westlake believes that Sparta would take the Athenian side, Kagan that she would accept a subordinate

place in the coalition under Argive leadership.

⁴³ Westlake (*op.cit.*, 416) recognizes that the mass of Argives was friendly to Athens and believes that this was why Corinth could not divulge her aims. But Corinth would have had to make her intentions clear some day, and however long she waited she would inevitably have been rebuffed, provided that Argos remained a democracy.

⁴⁴ In favour of Corinth's sincerity, cf. G. T. Griffith, *Historia* 1 (1950), 236; against: Westlake, *op.cit.*, 414.

⁴⁵ Cf. Griffith, *op.cit.*, 237.

⁴⁶ Thus Kagan (*op.cit.*, 299). Such dissensions might or might not stem from socio-political divisions like those posited by Kagan (*op.cit.*, 295).

reprisals were to come, Corinth would be a prime target. She was thus reluctant to join the alliance until two other states, both with serious grievances against Sparta, had already done so. The more allies Argos acquired, the safer Corinth would be and the easier it would be for her discreetly to slip into the background. Hence her alarm at the rebuff administered by Tegea, which, says Thucydides, made her afraid that 'none of the others' would join the alliance. This is at first sight hard to reconcile with the hope that if Tegea did come over the whole of the Peloponnese would be on their side. It is perhaps most likely that by 'the others' the Corinthians now had in mind not Peloponnesian states but Boeotia and Megara.⁴⁷

The Corinthian approach to Boeotia follows the same pattern.⁴⁸ Of the alternatives that Corinth put forward, the first, that Boeotia should join the alliance, fits in with her policy so far. The adhesion of Boeotia would strengthen the alliance and so make it easier for Corinth to minimize the risks to her own safety. The second was clearly an insurance policy. If Sparta did move against the allies of Argos, Corinth was in a very perilous position. She had offended Sparta gravely by stirring up trouble and refusing to join the peace, while the hatred for her felt by Athens and the technical state of war that persisted between the two cities might make her a tempting target for Athens too. A truce like that enjoyed by the Boeotians would at least afford her a modicum of protection. The Athenian reply underlines that Corinth was not yet ready to bow the knee to Sparta. If fear was prompting her towards a *rapprochement*, the solution was indeed that suggested by Athens, to accept the Peace of Nicias. That Corinth did not think of doing so makes clear her continuing defiance of Sparta at this point.

Argos was plainly ready to challenge Sparta for the hegemony of the Peloponnese.⁴⁹ It is significant that the Argive assembly is said by Thucydides to have believed that war between Argos and Sparta was inevitable and that it would therefore be wise to acquire allies before it came. Thus if the statesmen of Sparta and Athens who negotiated the alliance between their two cities had hoped that it would serve as a deterrent to Argive ambition, the attitude recorded here proves that hope unfounded. Argos was prepared to face Sparta, even if Sparta had the support of Athens.

The motives of Mantinea and Elis require no discussion. Nor does Tegea's refusal present any problem: loyalty to Sparta was the best policy for her in any local rivalry with Mantinea. The resentment of Boeotia and Megara against Sparta for her neglect of their interests did not extend to a readiness to fight her in the company of Argos, whose constitution was distasteful to them; their unwillingness to join the Argive alliance is natural enough. Boeotia's reluctance for further involvement at this point shows again in her refusal to repudiate her truce with Athens. She was in a strong position in relation to both Athens and Sparta. The psychological advantage of Delium probably made the ten-day truce seem ample security against any hostility in Athens and her control of Panactum ensured that Sparta would hesitate to offend her. So, feeling themselves superior to Athens and possessing a valuable diplomatic handle against Sparta, the Boeotians could well afford to wait and see.

⁴⁷ This would give full value to *ὅμως* in 5.32.5: the Corinthians did not think that Boeotia and Megara would join, but nevertheless they approached Boeotia.

⁴⁸ For a more positive view of Corinth's

intentions, cf. Westlake, *op.cit.*, 418, based on the assumption, rejected above, that Corinth was trying to direct the Argive alliance towards war with Athens.

⁴⁹ 5.28.2.

The Athenian answer to Corinth deserves comment. Athens was still committed to friendship with Sparta and maintenance of the peace despite Sparta's failure to fulfil her responsibilities: the formulation of the Athenian reply stressed that Corinth was acting in defiance of Sparta and putting her in an embarrassing position. But the refusal to grant a separate truce to Corinth might well drive Corinth further apart from Sparta and into the arms of Argos. Therefore those at Athens who were eager to weaken Sparta and see the peace undermined may have been equally satisfied, since Sparta would be deprived of an ally and the Argive coalition strengthened.

The manner in which the alliance was formed reveals quite clearly, before its cohesion and strength were ever put to any diplomatic or military test, its inherent weakness and lack of common purpose. This is most apparent in Thucydides' account of reaction in the Peloponnese to Mantinea's adhesion to Argos.⁵⁰ The states who were tempted to ally themselves with Argos were acting first of all out of ignorance. They had no real knowledge of Mantinean motives or of Spartan intentions, and their interpretation of Spartan and Athenian aims was certainly unproven and probably false. Their own motivation was negative: fear of Sparta. They had no definite positive aim in common; indeed most did not even have positive individual aims.⁵¹ Nor did they have any positive commitment, general or individual, to Argos: Argos offered only the vague advantages of being large enough to serve as the centre of a movement and perennially hostile to Sparta.⁵² The absence of purpose and the selfishness which characterized the activities of the alliance were already inherent in the motives that led to its formation.⁵³

IV

Despite the alliance between Athens and Sparta, suspicion still reigned on both sides throughout 421, for neither side was willing or able to carry out all the provisions of the peace.⁵⁴ Since Sparta continued to put off the time by which she promised to hand over Amphipolis and compel the Chalcidians, Boeotians, and Corinthians to accept the peace, Athens refused to give back Pylos and her other holdings and began to regret that she had returned the Spartan prisoners.⁵⁵ Discussions continued throughout the summer, and Sparta insisted that she had done all she could and promised yet again to try to win over Boeotia and Corinth and to recover Panactum and the Athenian prisoners in Boeotia. In exchange she kept asking for the return of Pylos, or at least the evacuation of its garrison of Messenians and helots. This latter request the Athenians eventually granted.⁵⁶

There is no reason to suppose that these negotiations were affected to any great degree by internal political dissensions on either side. At Athens those who

⁵⁰ 5.29.2 ff.

⁵¹ Elis is an exception.

⁵² Cf. 5.29.1.

⁵³ Cf. Westlake, *CQ* 65 (1971), 320 f.

⁵⁴ In 5.35.2 ff. Thucydides speaks of mutual suspicion, whereas in 5.25.2 he refers only to the suspicions of Athens. This is understandable: since the lot had made it Sparta's responsibility to act first, her failure to do so made Athens suspicious so that she

in her turn refused to hand back her gains and incurred Spartan suspicions. This is not to deny that the passages were probably written at different times; it explains why Thucydides chose to make a slightly different point on each occasion.

⁵⁵ For the return of the prisoners, cf. 5.24.2.

⁵⁶ 5.35.4 ff.

wanted to break the peace would no doubt press for Sparta to fulfil her obligations in the hope of stirring up feeling against her when she kept on failing to do so, while defenders of the peace were alarmed by Sparta's failure, realizing that it was bound to discredit the peace and with it their own position. Bellicose Spartans will have favoured obstruction and delay in the hope of undermining the peace, while the defenders of the peace were helpless: it was to a large extent true that they had no control over Amphipolis or their allies, and unless they could secure Panactum from the Boeotians they had no bargaining counter to offer in exchange for Pylos.

The deadlock was broken in the following winter when the new ephors came into office.⁵⁷ After a fruitless conference two of them, Cleobulus and Xenares, privately approached the Boeotian and Corinthian envoys. They suggested that Boeotia and Corinth should pursue a common policy and that Boeotia should subvert the purpose of the Argive alliance by first joining it and then persuading Argos to ally herself with Sparta.⁵⁸ They explained what advantages this would have for both sides: Boeotia would be least likely to have to accept the Peace of Nicias,⁵⁹ while Sparta would acquire the friendship and alliance of Argos, which she had always wanted, even at the price of earning Athens' hatred and breaking up the peace. Such an alliance with Argos, as they made clear, would leave Sparta free to renew the war outside the Peloponnese. To this end they asked the Boeotians to hand Panactum over to Sparta so that Sparta could exchange it for Pylos.⁶⁰ This was justified in terms of the coming war with Athens, to keep Sparta from starting at an obvious disadvantage.⁶¹

The motives of the Spartan war-party are clearly stated. It may be added that if defenders of the peace had known of the scheme they might have approved of it for entirely different reasons. If Sparta could bring Argos into alliance with herself while maintaining her alliance with Athens, war was more likely to be averted than by any other course, while no Spartan could do other than welcome the chance of recovering Pylos. The readiness of the Boeotians to try to bring over Argos is explicable. After such a favour to Sparta there would be little danger that Sparta would continue to press Boeotia to accept the Peace of Nicias, even if Cleobulus, Xenares, and their supporters did not succeed in renewing the war with Athens. If they did, then the support or neutrality of Argos would be most valuable to Sparta and Boeotia. A readiness to renew the war with Athens may also explain the willingness of the Boeotian envoys to surrender their trump card by handing over Panactum to Sparta. If war with Athens was to come it was essential for Boeotia that Sparta's contribution should be as effective as possible. For that to be the case, Sparta had to recover Pylos, and the warmongers in Boeotia must have thought that the return of Panactum was not too high a price to pay. Whether Argos would ever have accepted the scheme is open to doubt, but in the light of the Argive reaction a little later to their erroneous assumption that Sparta, Athens, and Boeotia were united against them, the Spartan hope that they would choose any escape from isolation cannot be dismissed as absurd.⁶² Corinth's attitude has been debated, but the emergence of

⁵⁷ 5.36.1.

⁵⁸ Reading *ταύτῃ* in 5.36.1; cf. Gomme and Andrewes ad loc.

⁵⁹ On the text of 5.36.1 at this point, cf. Gomme and Andrewes ad loc., but the sense seems to be clear.

⁶⁰ 5.36.2.

⁶¹ This answers the argument of T. Kelly, *Historia* 21 (1972), 161, that to hand back Panactum would promote peace, not war.

⁶² Andrewes on 5.36.2 is less optimistic about Sparta's chances of winning acceptance from Argos.

militancy at Sparta should have pleased her. Now that the Spartans might renew the war, Corinth had a motive for reconciliation with Sparta and for strengthening rather than weakening the Spartan alliance. The ephors' plan would further her aims, and so it ought to have received Corinthian support.⁶³

The meeting of the Corinthian and Boeotian envoys with the two Argive magistrates reveals yet again the confident ambition of Boeotia at this time.⁶⁴ The Argives, with some subtlety, in urging the Boeotians to join the Argive alliance, pointed out that if they did so the alliance would be able to stand up without fear to any state in Greece, including Sparta. Their use of such an approach suggests that they thought that Thebes might already be tired of playing second fiddle to Sparta and would best be tempted by the opportunity of freeing herself from any further dependence.⁶⁵ When the envoys made their report, the Boeotarchs were delighted.⁶⁶ They and the envoys of Corinth, Megara, and the Chalcidians decided that the best course would be for the four parties to conclude a defensive alliance, with a clause guaranteeing that no state would make peace or war without the agreement of the others, and that Boeotia and Megara should then make an alliance with Argos.⁶⁷ Unfortunately the deception to be practised on Argos made it impossible for the Boeotarchs to reveal their motives when they communicated their proposals to the federal councils. So the scheme never got off the ground: the Boeotarchs had no chance even to mention Argos, since the councils were essentially loyal to Sparta and refused to make an alliance even with Corinth, since Corinth was in revolt from Sparta.⁶⁸

The Boeotian councils may well have hoped for the same results from loyalty to Sparta as their leaders had sought from furthering the plan of Cleobulus and Xenares. The councils may have wanted a renewal of war against Athens, and they too will have realized that such a war was practicable only with the effective participation of Sparta. Not knowing of the ambitious plan to force Argos into alliance with Sparta in preparation for the war outside the Peloponnese, they will have seen the Boeotarchs' proposal as a measure designed to threaten and weaken Sparta and so calculated to make the prospect of war against Athens recede.⁶⁹

With the failure of this scheme the Spartans fell back on their contingency plan of persuading the Boeotians to give them Panactum and the Athenian prisoners in Boeotia so that they could offer them to Athens in exchange for Pylos.⁷⁰ This move was no doubt supported both by those who wanted to make the peace work and those who wanted to create a position in which they would feel strong enough to break it.⁷¹ The Boeotians, whose attachment to Sparta did not blind them to the strength of their own position, now played their trump card, agreeing

⁶³ Thus Westlake, *op.cit.*, 418; against: Kagan, *op.cit.*, 304, followed by Kelly, *op.cit.*, 162 f.

⁶⁴ 5.37.1 f. On these events, cf. Westlake, *Rylands Bull.* 53 (1970), 235 ff. He believes (236, n. 1) that the envoys did not realize that the aims of the Argives were entirely different; it seems to me more likely that the Boeotians intended from the first to deceive Argos.

⁶⁵ This tells against Kelly's conjecture (*op.cit.*, 162) of previous communication between the Argives and Cleobulus and Xenares.

⁶⁶ 5.37.3 ff.

⁶⁷ 5.38.1.

⁶⁸ 5.38.2 ff. It was of course also impossible for Corinth to clarify the change in her position, for fear of putting Argos on her guard.

⁶⁹ Or, if war with Athens was to come, the proposal seemed to bring closer a clash of Boeotia and Argos against Sparta and Athens. The councils can hardly be blamed for preferring the prospect of Boeotia and Sparta against Athens and Argos, a more likely eventuality if Boeotia cleaved to Sparta.

⁷⁰ 5.39.2.

⁷¹ Cf. Kelly, *op.cit.*, 164, 168.

to do as the Spartans asked, but only on condition that Sparta made an alliance with Boeotia.⁷² The Spartans knew that this would be a breach of their agreement with Athens that neither city should make peace or war without the consent of the other.⁷³ But even adherents of the peace were so eager to recover Pylos that they were ready to run the risk of offending Athens, while those who wanted to renew the war needed Boeotia's friendship.⁷⁴ So the alliance was made in spring 420.⁷⁵

The immediate gain for Boeotia was obvious. Sparta had condoned her refusal to accept the peace, and the possibility that Sparta might combine with Athens to force her into compliance, always remote, had now vanished for ever.⁷⁶ But the Boeotians at once dismantled Panactum.⁷⁷ This was clearly done without the consent or knowledge of the Spartans at large: the first they learned of it was when their envoys arrived at Panactum and saw with their own eyes what had happened.⁷⁸ The Boeotians may have had complementary political and military reasons. Militarily the destruction of Panactum would render it useless to Athens until it was rebuilt. Politically it was likely to anger Athens and increase friction between Athens and Sparta. It would therefore seem as if the Boeotians were trying to provoke a war in which they and Sparta would face Athens together, a policy that would be consistent with their attitude earlier. Indeed their policy may be said to have hardened. Before, they had apparently thought it worth while to sacrifice Panactum so that Sparta could recover Pylos and so be in a strong position for renewing the war. But they can hardly have imagined that if Sparta could offer Athens only a heap of rubble Athens would hand back Pylos. They must therefore have decided that war was desirable even if Sparta lacked the advantage of Pylos. But Sparta might still have thought otherwise, and the destruction of Panactum may be seen as an attempt to take the decision out of Sparta's hands. For if Athens were sufficiently outraged by what had happened at Panactum she might declare war on Sparta, and so Sparta would find herself forced to fight, Pylos or no Pylos.

At Argos recent developments were viewed with considerable alarm. Instead of the hoped-for alliance with Boeotia came the news of the Boeotian alliance with Sparta and the destruction of Panactum.⁷⁹ This made the Argives afraid that their own alliance might collapse and leave them completely isolated in the Peloponnese.⁸⁰ Their fear was aggravated by a total misinterpretation of Boeotian policy and Athenian reaction to it. They had hoped, if the differences between

⁷² 5.39.3.

⁷³ It has of course been repeatedly noted that no such clause appears in the alliance between Athens and Sparta. It may have been a later addition, but an informal understanding, as suggested by Andrewes on 5.39.3, is perhaps the most likely explanation.

⁷⁴ It should not be assumed that they would be happy to offend Athens, since, as the elaborate moves before the Archidamian war show, even those who were resolved to go to war might still be eager not to be branded as aggressors.

⁷⁵ 5.39.3.

⁷⁶ Cf. Andrewes on 5.39.3.

⁷⁷ 5.39.3.

⁷⁸ 5.42.1. Kelly's suggestion (*op. cit.*,

165 ff.) that the destruction of Panactum was carried out with the approval, if not actually at the suggestion of Cleobulus and Xenares is attractive: it would certainly serve their purpose, and they might be content to see Sparta's hand forced. Thus what is said here of the Boeotians might equally apply to them.

⁷⁹ Kelly (*op. cit.*, 159, 165 ff.) believes that Argos did, as Thucydides says, learn what was happening at Panactum before the world at large, and that the news, suitably slanted, was passed to them by Cleobulus and Xenares. Though not susceptible of proof, this may well be right.

⁸⁰ 5.40.1.

Sparta and Athens remained unsettled, that they might make an alliance with Athens when their own peace with Sparta ran out: that is, that when the crunch came Athens would refuse to fight against Argos and so would be forced to repudiate the Spartan alliance and, presumably to avoid isolation, change sides. But now they assumed that the destruction of Panactum was being carried out with the approval not only of Sparta but of Athens too, and that Boeotia was about to join the Peace of Nicias. So they suddenly saw themselves confronted with the prospect of facing in isolation Sparta, Athens, Boeotia, and Tegea. Not surprisingly perhaps they panicked, and sent envoys to Sparta as fast as they could to renew the peace on whatever terms they could get.⁸¹

The negotiations at Sparta progressed favourably enough despite initial difficulties over Argive pretensions to Cynuria.⁸² All shades of opinion at Sparta wanted alliance with Argos: the defenders of the peace to avoid any fresh war which might lead to complications, its opponents to remove the potential challenge from Argos in readiness for a new war with Athens. So the Spartans sent the envoys back to Argos to secure the approval of the Argive assembly for a renewed fifty years' peace that even incorporated the ludicrous challenge clause.⁸³

Meanwhile the Athenians had been confronted by the embarrassed Spartan envoys. Presented by the Boeotians with the *fait accompli* of a totally dismantled Panactum, they did their best to put a bold face on their position, handing over the Athenian prisoners and asserting that Athens was suffering no disadvantage, since the fort, now destroyed, was no longer under enemy occupation. The Athenians were not impressed by this argument. The fate of Panactum and the Spartan alliance with Boeotia, made despite Sparta's repeated promises to coerce the Boeotians into accepting the peace, reminded them of Sparta's failure in other respects to implement her obligations under the peace. They sent the envoys home with an unfriendly answer, convinced by what had happened of Sparta's bad faith.⁸⁴

V

The opponents of the peace at Athens, led by Alcibiades, were quick to seize their opportunity and press for alliance with Argos.⁸⁵ They saw the Spartan desire for peace with Argos as a first move toward fresh hostilities against an isolated Athens.⁸⁶ This was indeed the objective of the Spartan war-party in seeking the friendship of Argos, while the principal motive of those who guided Athens towards Argos was probably defensive.⁸⁷ If Athens joined the Argive alliance she would avoid that isolation which they feared, and the imperilled alliance itself would be revived and strengthened to serve as a counterweight to Sparta in the Peloponnese. Thus while the Spartans looked for unity and quiet in the Peloponnese to be free to attack an isolated Athens, the Athenians were

⁸¹ 5.40.2 f. In 5.40.2 *καθελεῖν* should not be changed to *παράδοῦναι* even if Kelly's views are rejected, cf. Andrewes ad loc. The Argives' panic is all the more comprehensible if they thought that Sparta was ready to approve such an extreme step by the Boeotians.

⁸² 5.41.1 ff.

⁸³ 5.41.3.

⁸⁴ 5.42.1, cf. Plut.*Alc.* 14.4 f., *Nic.* 10.3.

⁸⁵ 5.43.1 ff., Plut.*Alc.* 14.2 ff., *Nic.* 10.4.

⁸⁶ 5.43.3. The sense required for *ἐξέλωσι* is that given by Hobbes's translation, 'to get the Argives . . . away from them', cited by Gomme ad loc.

⁸⁷ Cf. J. Hatzfeld, *Alcibiade*, 102 f.

trying to ensure that if attacked they would not have to fight alone, while by bolstering up the Argive alliance they hoped to present a threat to Sparta in the Peloponnese itself sufficient to save them from being attacked at all.

The attitude of Athens made the Argives realize that they had been mistaken about Athens' response to the alliance between Sparta and Boeotia. This gave them new heart, for they thought that Athens would support them if they went to war against Sparta, and that the naval power of Athens would complement their own strength on land. So they abandoned the idea of peace with Sparta, and envoys from Argos, Elis, and Mantinea came to Athens, as Alcibiades had suggested.⁸⁸ Spartan envoys also arrived in haste—no doubt men of all shades of opinion at Sparta were alarmed at the possibility of alliance between Athens and Argos. Their task was to dissuade the Athenians, to demand the return of Pylos in exchange for Panactum, and to defend the alliance between Sparta and Boeotia, by which no harm had been meant to Athens.⁸⁹

They were deceived by Alcibiades' notorious though mysterious trick.⁹⁰ The Athenians had clearly been prepared to be convinced yet again, but the success of Alcibiades' stratagem left them ready to conclude the alliance with Argos, if an earth-tremor had not intervened.⁹¹ Nicias seized this chance to delay the decision and persuaded the people to send him on an exploratory mission to Sparta.⁹² His arguments suggest that the people was confident and ready to throw over the peace to prove Athens' strength, for he claimed that Athens gained credit from preserving the peace, while Sparta's affairs were in such a bad way that only by war could she hope to mend them. His embassy was to instruct the Spartans to rebuild Panactum, hand over Amphipolis, and renounce the Boeotian alliance unless the Boeotians accepted the Peace of Nicias, reminding the Spartans that it had been agreed between them that neither side should make new agreements without the assent of the other, and pointing out that if Athens had wanted to adopt a similar attitude she could already have allied herself with Argos.⁹³

Nicias must have known that his task was hopeless.⁹⁴ Indeed it looks as if the terms had been dictated by those who would not be sorry to see the peace broken and were chiefly concerned to shift the blame for hostilities on to Sparta. Even if Sparta had been prepared to humiliate herself over Panactum, there could be no progress over Amphipolis, while too many people at Sparta were already committed to the Boeotian alliance.⁹⁵ But by now the friends of Xenares had gained the ascendancy, perhaps helped by Athens' movement towards Argos and the trick played on Sparta's envoys, which was bound to have angered all Spartans, including any who had previously been well disposed towards Athens. Despite the open threat that if Sparta did not repudiate the Boeotian alliance Athens would proceed with her own alliance with Argos, Sparta refused, though she did go so far as to renew the Peace of Nicias at Nicias' request.⁹⁶ This last

⁸⁸ 5.44.1 f., cf. 43.3.

⁸⁹ 5.44.3.

⁹⁰ 5.45.1 ff., *Plut. Alc.* 14.6 ff., *Nic.* 10.4 ff. For attempts at elucidation, cf. Hatzfeld, *op. cit.*, 89 ff.; better: P. A. Brunt, *REG* 65 (1952), 65 ff. It is not the purpose of this paper to add to the debate on the degree to which Alcibiades personally determined the course of world history; for recent statements of extreme

positions, cf. M. F. McGregor, *Phoenix* 19 (1965), 27 ff., E. F. Bloedow, *Alcibiades Reexamined*.

⁹¹ 5.45.4.

⁹² 5.46.1, *Plut. Nic.* 10.7.

⁹³ 5.46.2 f., *Plut. Alc.* 15.1.

⁹⁴ Cf. Gomme on 5.46.5.

⁹⁵ Cf. *Plut. Nic.* 10.8 on the influence of the *βουλευταὶ*.

⁹⁶ 5.46.4.

move should not be regarded as entirely futile, though it was naturally not enough to satisfy the Athenian people or protect Nicias from criticism on his return. It suggests that there were still some men at Sparta who were at least ready to try to avoid starting a war, though they would fight if Athens took the responsibility of opening hostilities off their consciences. Such feelings must have been prevalent at Athens too, for although Nicias was attacked when he returned and the Athenians at once concluded the alliance with Argos, Athens, like Sparta, did not renounce the Peace of Nicias.⁹⁷

The terms of the alliance require little comment.⁹⁸ Both sides were protected against the making by the other party of a separate peace with any aggressor, and Athens, as in her alliance with Sparta, was at least on paper putting herself at a disadvantage. In the Spartan alliance it had been most unlikely that Athens would be attacked, whereas Argos might attack Sparta and Athens be called upon to go to Sparta's aid. Now it was much more likely that Sparta would move, if not against Argos herself, at least against Mantinea or Elis, before attacking Athens: even Cleobulus and Xenares had wanted to deal with Argos first before renewing the war with Athens. But this time Athens need not feel that she was being exploited, since an attack on Argos and the other allies could be plausibly construed as a preliminary to aggression against herself. Therefore it might be in her own interest to check the Spartan threat within the Peloponnese and, if all went well, to put an end to it before she herself became the principal target.⁹⁹

The conclusion of the alliance between Argos and Athens produced strong reactions at Corinth.¹⁰⁰ She had already begun to dissociate herself from the allies; when the agreement between Argos, Elis, and Mantinea had been transformed from a purely defensive into an offensive and defensive alliance, Corinth had refused to join, saying that she was content with the existing arrangement.¹⁰¹ Now she refused to ally herself with Athens and indeed, as Thucydides says, broke with her allies and began to turn once more towards Sparta.¹⁰² The direction of Corinthian policy is clear enough. While Sparta remained on friendly terms with Athens, Corinth had tried to take a short-sighted revenge by fostering the ambitions and power of Argos. When it seemed, with the alliance between Sparta and Boeotia, that Sparta might be once again thinking of war, the Corinthians had grown lukewarm towards their allies and more sympathetic to Sparta. Finally, now that Athens had joined Argos, Corinth's course was clear. She could not

⁹⁷ 5.46.5, 48.1, Diod.12.77.2, Plut.*Alc.* 15.1, *Nic.* 10.8 f.

⁹⁸ Cf. 5.47, Tod, *GHI* 72.

⁹⁹ Cf. Plut.*Alc.* 15.2 on the advantage of fighting a long way from Athens.

¹⁰⁰ 5.48.2.

¹⁰¹ The precise date of this offensive and defensive alliance is not made clear in 5.48.2. It was probably recent: it is hardly likely to have been made before the first Corinthian change of heart in 5.32.3, otherwise Corinth would probably have joined. It should also perhaps be later than the Boeotian councils' refusal to ally themselves with Corinth because of Corinth's breach with Sparta (5.38.3).

Argos is unlikely to have devised such a scheme during the period of her loss of confidence in spring 420 (5.40.1). Perhaps the most plausible moment is therefore in the renewed flush of enthusiasm that came when Argos realized the truth about Athens' attitude to the alliance between Sparta and Boeotia, but before the alliance between Argos, her allies, and Athens was actually concluded—perhaps before the envoys of Argos, Elis, and Mantinea set out for Athens (5.44.2).

¹⁰² 5.48.3; Diod.12.77.3 suggests that the initiative for the *rapprochement* came from Sparta.

tolerate alliance with Athens, whom she hated: that hatred and the desire to recover her lost possessions both dictated a return to the Spartan fold.¹⁰³

The withdrawal of Corinth was a major blow for the alliance and for Athens. Previously Athens had been protected against Spartan invasion by a solid block of states hostile to Sparta. Now there was a gap through which the Spartans could move against Athens and the Boeotians send forces into the Peloponnese. To the extent that this development had been provoked by the Athenian alliance with Argos, the alliance may be said to have damaged Athens' interests as well as those of the coalition.

VI

Despite the defection of Corinth Argos showed considerable enthusiasm and aggression throughout most of the duration of the alliance.¹⁰⁴ She supported the initial act of provocation, when Elis excluded Sparta from the Olympic Games of 420: Argos, like Mantinea and Athens, supplied a contingent to guard against a possible use of force by Sparta.¹⁰⁵ After the games Argos took the lead in a further attempt to persuade Corinth back into the alliance, but does not seem to have been unduly disheartened by its failure.¹⁰⁶

Indeed it was Corinth's continuing adhesion to Sparta that did much to determine the first major military action undertaken by the alliance, the attack on Epidaurus.¹⁰⁷ In one sense this was very much an Argive affair, since Epidaurus was the second city of the Argolid. The fate of Epidaurus can have been of little concern to Mantinea or Elis. They sent no contingents to assist the Argives; on the other hand there is nothing to suggest that they were asked to do so and refused. It may have been felt that the Argive and Athenian forces should suffice. Even for the Argives the principal object of the Epidaurian war was perhaps to bring enough pressure to bear on Corinth to force her into the alliance.¹⁰⁸ Two unsuccessful conferences were held at Mantinea: Thucydides' account is tantalizingly brief, but it is hardly likely that their aim was to achieve a lasting and general peace in the Peloponnese, and the attitude of Corinth was plainly of vital interest to the allies.¹⁰⁹ The initial hope may have been that Corinth would agree to join the alliance if Argos and Athens called off the attack on Epidaurus. This was the bait that the Corinthian Euphamidas appeared to offer at the first conference, and it was enough to win the agreement of the allies and persuade the Argives to disengage their forces. Only when the second conference failed to produce any agreement did a further invasion of the territory of Epidaurus take place.¹¹⁰

Argos was deeply concerned about Epidaurus, but of her allies only Athens

¹⁰³ If Corinth thought that the alliance between Athens and Argos was likely to bring war closer, rather than to put Sparta off, she may have welcomed it, as Kagan claims (*op. cit.*, 306).

¹⁰⁴ Cf. 5.69.1 on what Argos was fighting for at Mantinea.

¹⁰⁵ 5.49.1, 50.3.

¹⁰⁶ 5.50.5.

¹⁰⁷ 5.53.1.

¹⁰⁸ For Corinth and Epidaurus, cf. Andrewes on 5.53.1. Such pressure could be only psychological or diplomatic; diffi-

culty of communications by land made Epidaurus useless as a base for operations against Corinth.

¹⁰⁹ 5.55.1 ff.; cf. Hatzfeld, *op. cit.*, 101.

¹¹⁰ Kagan (*op. cit.*, 307) believes that Corinth hoped the Epidaurian war would force Sparta to fight and so sabotaged the talks at Mantinea. This is not impossible, but a more straightforward interpretation, that is, that Corinth wanted to protect Epidaurus, but not at the price of excessive concessions, is equally satisfactory.

was showing any interest. This may help to explain her exaggerated reaction to the establishment of the Spartan garrison at Epidaurus in the winter of 419/18.¹¹¹ The Argive complaint against the Athenians, though not as unreasonable as Thucydides makes it sound, betrays a degree of nervous suspicion that suggests Argos' earlier confidence had been sapped by the failure to achieve anything concrete at Epidaurus. However, she did receive help from her allies when she marched out to counter the Spartan offensive of mid-summer 418.¹¹² The size of the Spartan force and the fact that all her allies had been summoned to contribute no doubt made the move seem a major threat to the whole Argive alliance, and so both Mantinea and Elis exerted themselves as they had not done during the Epidaurian war. This was apparently enough to restore the confidence of the Argive people and indeed to boost it beyond all measure.¹¹³ However, the Spartan *proxenoi* at Argos, Thrasyllus and Alciphron, negotiated a truce with Agis before any fighting took place, pretending that Argos was ready not only to make peace but to pay reparations.¹¹⁴ They may have had the best interests of Argos at heart as well as their own credit with Sparta. But the angry reaction to the truce at Argos shows that the Argive assembly was still confident of victory.¹¹⁵ Nevertheless the Argives were reluctant to break the truce, despite the arrival of a force from Athens.¹¹⁶ They may have wished merely to avoid the charge of aggression against Sparta, or perhaps some of the Argive magistrates realized the justice of Thrasyllus' and Alciphron's position: it must have been the magistrates who refused the Athenians access to the people until pressure was applied by Mantinea and Elis.¹¹⁷ The allies of Argos too thought it opportune to fight, and it was enough for Alcibiades and his fellow envoys to remind the assembly of its duty to the alliance to secure the renewed participation of Argos, though even then the Argives were slow to join the expedition against Orchomenus.¹¹⁸

At Athens, though Alcibiades and others may have been eager to challenge Sparta, there were probably many who still saw the alliance with Argos as an insurance against Spartan aggression rather than a positive commitment to action against Sparta. Thus Athens, like Sparta, did not formally renounce the Peace of Nicias.¹¹⁹ The incident at the Olympic Games of 420 shows Athens ready to take action in the Peloponnese, but she probably hoped, justifiably in the event, that Sparta would not resort to force, so that any direct clash would be avoided. It is uncertain whether there was any fighting when Alcibiades marched through the Peloponnese in 419, persuading Patrae to destroy its seaward fortifications.¹²⁰ His attempt to build a fort at Rhium was prevented by the arrival of forces from Corinth and Sicyon, but Thucydides' narrative does not make it clear whether or not the Athenians withdrew without a struggle.¹²¹ It is noteworthy that Alcibiades had with him only a small number of Athenian hoplites and archers: he may not have asked for more, since he seems to have had no major objective in view. There

¹¹¹ 5.56.2.

¹¹² 5.58.1.

¹¹³ 5.59.4.

¹¹⁴ 5.59.5–60.1. Kagan's assumption of treachery during the campaign by oligarchic Argive generals and an attempt by Thrasyllus and Alciphron to discredit the alliance with Athens (*CP* 57 (1962), 212 ff.) is hardly necessary.

¹¹⁵ 5.60.5 f., *Diod.* 12.78.5; cf. Kagan, *op. cit.*, 215.

¹¹⁶ 5.61.1.

¹¹⁷ There is certainly nothing here to support Kagan's suggestion (*op. cit.*, 215) that by this time oligarchic views were prevalent.

¹¹⁸ 5.61.2 f.

¹¹⁹ 5.48.1.

¹²⁰ 5.52.2, *Plut. Alc.* 15.6.

¹²¹ Gomme *ad loc.* thinks that they did; so too J. K. Anderson, *BSA* 49 (1954), 84.

was probably still a majority at Athens eager to limit the degree of Athenian intervention in the Peloponnese and to avoid any direct provocation of Sparta, while even Alcibiades may have been happy to let Argos do most of the work, since excessive aggression against Sparta might have led to trouble for him at home.

The attitude of the Athenians and Alcibiades to the Argive attack on Epidaurus in 419 bears this out. Alcibiades and the Argives are said to have wanted to secure Epidaurus for two reasons. First, the loss of Epidaurus would keep Corinth in check; secondly, it would facilitate the movement of Athenian troops into the Peloponnese by way of Aegina.¹²² The latter point suggests that Alcibiades was thinking in terms of greater Athenian involvement in the Peloponnese, which would no doubt have pleased Argos, and was perhaps contemplating a more aggressive policy. But the intention, even on Alcibiades' part, may have been limited to putting increased pressure on Corinth. Certainly this seems to have been the principal Athenian objective when the conferences of Mantinea, the first of which was summoned by the Athenians, took place.¹²³ Not only the other allies, who understandably had no great interest in Epidaurus, but also the Athenians were prepared to agree to the withdrawal of Argive forces from Epidaurus in the hope that this might persuade Corinth to join the alliance. The force of 1,000 Athenian hoplites which Alcibiades commanded after the failure of the negotiations represents, numerically speaking, a larger degree of Athenian participation, but it seems that even Alcibiades was not eager to risk a confrontation with Sparta.¹²⁴

The Athenian reluctance to become too deeply committed did not escape the Argives and may help to explain their neurotic response when Athens failed to prevent the Spartan garrison reaching Epidaurus by sea during the winter of 419/18.¹²⁵ Argos seized the opportunity of putting pressure on Athens to make up for her alleged negligence by positive action which would constitute a direct challenge to Sparta and increase the possibility of a clash between her and Athens.¹²⁶ The attitudes of Alcibiades and the Athenian people are instructive. Alcibiades was able to persuade the people to restore the erstwhile helots to Pylos and to underline the hostile nature of this move by formally recording that Sparta had not abided by her oaths.¹²⁷ But there was no aggressive sequel to this sabre-rattling; though Alcibiades was prepared to countenance hostilities against Sparta, provided that he could be sure of popular support, there was still at Athens a general hesitation to become more involved than was necessary.

The delay in the arrival of the Athenian force in summer 418 may not, however, have been caused by this reluctance.¹²⁸ It is true that in view of Sparta's decision to make an all-out effort in this year to crush opposition it must have been clear that if Athens was to play an active part in aiding Argos she was bound to be brought into conflict with Sparta. But the late arrival of the Athenians may

¹²² 5.53.1.

¹²³ 5.55.1 ff.

¹²⁴ Uncertainty over the text of 5.55.4 makes this assertion problematical. Andrewes ad loc. favours deleting *δέ* after *πυθόμενος* and taking the participle with *ἐβοήθησαν*. This would probably require *ἀπῆλθον* for *ἀπῆλθεν*, and even so, *καί* before *ὥς* would be strange: one would expect an adversative. If this reading were correct, it would suggest

that Alcibiades was prepared to fight the Spartans if the need arose. But if *πυθόμενος* be taken with *ἀπῆλθεν*, with *καί* *ὥς* = 'and even so', the view taken above may stand. With any text and any interpretation *καί* is awkward; 'but' would be more natural.

¹²⁵ 5.56.2.

¹²⁶ 5.56.2.

¹²⁷ 5.56.3, Plut. *Nic.* 10.9.

¹²⁸ Cf. 5.59.3, 61.1.

have been due solely to logistical problems, not to a deliberate dragging of their heels.¹²⁹ There is certainly no reason to suppose that the Spartan failure to move before mid-summer had anything to do with elections at Athens or Athenian politics in general.¹³⁰ When the Athenian force did arrive the roles were reversed: the Argive authorities were nevertheless reluctant to fight and it was now Alcibiades who argued in favour of a positive policy. This was aimed first of all at strengthening the alliance in Arcadia—Alcibiades and the Athenians seem to have been responsible for the choice of Orchomenus as the first target of the campaign, and they supported Mantinea in the view that Tegea should be the next objective against Elis' selfish and strategically unsound proposal.¹³¹ Such a policy was bound to lead to a clash with Sparta, but there is no sign of dissension among the representatives of Athens; indeed, though Alcibiades is singled out, the language of Thucydides suggests rather that they were united in pressing for war.¹³²

This hardening of the Athenian attitude to Sparta may be explained by the magnitude and obvious seriousness of the Spartan effort in this summer, which probably created a widespread feeling at Athens that if she did not intervene before it was too late Sparta was likely to crush the Argive alliance and would then be free, if her bellicose politicians still held the ascendant, to move at her leisure against an isolated Athens. In other words the defensive motives which had prompted the making of the Argive alliance in the first place now dictated that the alliance be vigorously supported for fear that if it was neglected the worst fears of Athens might be fulfilled. Thus a readiness to fight in 418 need not show that the mass of the Athenian people had come to adopt a posture towards Sparta as aggressive as that of Alcibiades. Essentially defensive considerations might now inspire the conviction that Sparta must be checked by a united front before she seized the chance to deal with her enemies piecemeal. This analysis is confirmed by Thucydides' statement of what the Athenians were fighting for at Mantinea: to defeat Sparta in the Peloponnese and thereby to secure and enlarge the Athenian empire and ensure that there would never be another Spartan invasion of Attica.¹³³ That is, Athens' basic aims were defensive and her action was designed to pre-empt any threat from Sparta to her position.

Like Athens, Sparta moved cautiously after the conclusion of the alliance between Athens and Argos. For the moment she preferred not to repudiate the Peace of Nicias,¹³⁴ and was content with the changed attitude of Corinth.¹³⁵ Thucydides does not bring out fully the significance of Corinth's action, and it is not clear what, if any, formal steps underlie his statement that the Corinthians began once more to turn their minds towards Sparta. But Sparta's acceptance of their overtures made it clear to Athens that there was now no hope that Sparta would try to force Corinth to accept the Peace of Nicias. Thus although Sparta did not reject the peace it was plain that she had no intention of fulfilling her obligations.

Yet Sparta bided her time, putting up with the Elean insult at Olympia in 420 and, despite her anger, with the Boeotian seizure of Heraclea in the spring of 419.¹³⁶ Perhaps she hoped that Argos would regard the Athenian alliance as no more than an insurance policy against Spartan aggression. It was only when Argos

¹²⁹ Cf. Andrewes on 5.59.4; against: Hatzfeld, *op. cit.*, 104.

¹³⁰ Cf. Gomme on 5.57.1.

¹³¹ 5.61.1 ff., 62.1 f., Diod.12.79.1 ff.

¹³² Cf. 5.61.2.

¹³³ 5.69.1.

¹³⁴ 5.48.1.

¹³⁵ 5.48.2 f., Diod.12.77.3.

¹³⁶ 5.52.1.

began hostilities with the attack on Epidaurus that Sparta made any move, and the Spartan expeditions of summer 419 (both in all probability aimed at Argos) were halted by unfavourable omens.¹³⁷ She may not have been unduly disturbed at the gods' displeasure. Epidaurus found it very difficult to muster aid, for some of her allies used the Carneia as a pretext, while others came no further than the border.¹³⁸ Perhaps Sparta too was content to avoid undue escalation of the conflict before she was ready. The placing of a garrison at Epidaurus in winter 419/18 was sufficient to ensure that the town did not actually fall into enemy hands,¹³⁹ and with this limited success she seems to have been content.

But by mid-summer 418 the Spartans had resolved, as Thucydides states, that the nonsense in the Peloponnese must be stopped before it went any further.¹⁴⁰ It is unlikely that the restoration of the Messenian garrison to Pylos, with its suggestion that Athens might be prepared to take a more positive role in anti-Spartan activities within the Peloponnese, played any great part in determining her decision. There were enough cogent reasons for Sparta to act regardless of the attitude of Athens. She intended to settle the pretensions of Argos once and for all, as is manifest both from the size of her own force and of the contingents summoned from all her allies.¹⁴¹

In one respect Spartan policy had not changed since the time of the intrigues of Cleobulus and Xenares. Sparta would fight Argos if she had to, but she would be quite satisfied if Argos could be frightened into lasting submission. Hence Agis was ready to arrange a truce that he hoped would lead to such a conclusion, though the criticism of his action suggests that many rank-and-file Spartans at least thought military action was required.¹⁴²

All through 419 and 418 the Spartans seem sure of ultimate success, and whether or not Agis was right to try to subdue Argos without resorting to force he was clearly not afraid to fight. The army that fought at Mantinea was again large, and once again the allies from outside the Peloponnese were summoned.¹⁴³ But after the battle Sparta had fully recovered her confidence along with her reputation and could afford to dismiss the Corinthians and those from beyond the Isthmus because their help was no longer necessary.¹⁴⁴

Corinth's position was now one of wholehearted support for Sparta. She found herself the immediate target of Argive and Athenian pressure in 419, first by the efforts of Alcibiades at Patrae and Rhium, then through the Argive campaign against Epidaurus.¹⁴⁵ But despite this she resisted all attempts to coerce her into alliance with Argos and Athens, and when Sparta at last exerted herself to crush the ambitions of Argos Corinth contributed a substantial contingent to the first expedition of Agis in 418.¹⁴⁶ Her troops found it impossible to link up

¹³⁷ 5.54.1 f., 55.3. On the Spartan objectives, cf. Andrewes ad locc.

¹³⁸ It is uncertain whether they took part in any fighting; the language of 5.55.1 need not entail any actual clash.

¹³⁹ 5.56.1.

¹⁴⁰ 5.57.1.

¹⁴¹ Cf. 5.57.1 f., 58.4, 59.1 ff., 60.3.

¹⁴² 5.60.1 f., cf. 63.1 ff., Diod.12.78. 4 ff. Thucydides clearly believed that Agis could have inflicted a crushing defeat on the Argives. The king's decision to make terms is nevertheless politically intelligible, but much of the criticism directed against him

was probably not based on political calculation, but sprang more simply from the anger and frustration that was felt at the waste of what was perhaps rightly seen as in purely military terms a golden opportunity. It is plain that criticism of Agis was immediate, though it was no doubt exacerbated when Argos chose to fight and Orchomenus fell. Cf. Kagan, op.cit., 215.

¹⁴³ 5.64.2 ff., 67.1.

¹⁴⁴ 5.75.2 f.

¹⁴⁵ 5.52.2, 53.1, Plut.*Alc.* 15.6.

¹⁴⁶ 5.57.2, cf. 58.4, 59.1, 3.

with the Spartans in time for the battle of Mantinea and the force was then sent home, but again Corinth had been prepared to fight.¹⁴⁷

Boeotia's behaviour is at first sight a little less consistent. Her seizure of Heraclea in spring 419 aroused considerable anger at Sparta.¹⁴⁸ The Boeotian excuse was fear that Heraclea might fall into Athenian hands while Sparta was too preoccupied with the upheavals in the Peloponnese to take steps to prevent it. There may be some truth in this,¹⁴⁹ but the move also reveals the beginning of the Theban desire to acquire dominion over the whole of central Greece. Despite the immediate fact of the alliance with Sparta, the Spartan presence at Heraclea might serve at some future date as a check on Boeotian expansion, and this consideration was surely present in the minds of the Thebans at least. But though Boeotia might not want a Spartan presence in central Greece, she was prepared to render full assistance to Sparta in the Peloponnese. No less than 11,000 Boeotian troops joined Agis before the truce of 418, and, like the Corinthians, the Boeotians did their best to reach Mantinea, though their services too were subsequently dispensed with.¹⁵⁰

The total dissolution of the Argive alliance followed swiftly after Mantinea. At first, when Epidaurus in the first flush of victory presumed to invade the territory of Argos, the alliance held together: Elis, Athens, and the rest joined in an attack on Epidaurus and began to fortify Heraeum. Only the Athenians seem to have shown any great interest in the task, though when they had completed it, a joint garrison was installed.¹⁵¹ This is understandable enough: pressure on Epidaurus meant pressure on Corinth, and this was still of more interest to Athens than to Elis or Mantinea.

Political dissension in Argos hastened the collapse of the alliance. The pro-Spartan element wanted peace and alliance with Sparta as a preliminary to the overthrow of the democracy, and despite the efforts of Alcibiades their arguments for peace prevailed with the apparently unsuspecting Argive assembly.¹⁵² The terms offered by Sparta were designed above all to put an end to the Athenian presence in the Peloponnese and to guarantee the Peloponnese in future against any outside intervention.¹⁵³ Once they had been accepted by the Argive assembly, Argos gave up her alliance with Athens, Mantinea, and Elis, and concluded a peace and alliance with Sparta.¹⁵⁴ The terms show plainly the degree of Sparta's self-assurance and also that she knew what was to follow at Argos.¹⁵⁵ Sparta and Argos were to share control over any war they might jointly undertake, though the Peloponnesian League would still presumably meet to ratify any declaration of war made by them.¹⁵⁶ Sparta's readiness to elevate the defeated Argos to an apparently equal share in decision-making and command is explicable only if she knew of the impending oligarchic revolution at Argos and was relying on Argos remaining in the hands of a puppet government dependent on Sparta for survival and so unwilling or unable to oppose Sparta's wishes in any major matter of policy.¹⁵⁷

The Spartans' immediate objective was to get the Athenians out of Heraeum. The first joint resolve of Sparta and Argos was to accept no Athenian herald until

¹⁴⁷ 5.64.4, 75.2.

¹⁴⁸ 5.52.1; according to Diod.12.77.4 Heraclea asked the Boeotians to intervene.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Andrewes on 5.52.1.

¹⁵⁰ 5.57.2, 64.4, 75.2.

¹⁵¹ 5.75.4 ff.

¹⁵² 5.76.2 f.

¹⁵³ 5.77.

¹⁵⁴ 5.78, Diod.12.80.1.

¹⁵⁵ 5.79.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Andrewes on 5.79.3.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Andrewes on 5.79.3.

the Athenians had left the Peloponnese, and this was followed by an Argive embassy instructing Athens to remove her garrison.¹⁵⁸ This the Athenians eventually did, though it is possible that Demosthenes' curious behaviour was an attempt to discover whether Athens could hang on to this foothold in the Peloponnese without the assistance of her former allies.¹⁵⁹

For a short time Mantinea tried to hold out alone, but by spring 417 she too had abandoned her claim to empire and had made a truce with Sparta for thirty years.¹⁶⁰ Sparta and the Spartan sympathizers in Argos worked together to organize the oligarchic revolution at Argos, while Sparta also established a narrower oligarchy at Sicyon and settled affairs in Achaea.¹⁶¹ But though the threat to Spartan control in the Peloponnese was now crushed for the foreseeable future, Sparta's positive gains were of brief duration. By autumn 417 Argos was a democracy again, and the feebleness of the Spartan response allowed her to erect long walls with Athenian assistance.¹⁶² In the winter of 417/16 Sparta succeeded in destroying the walls, but the absence of the Corinthians from the expedition hinted that discontent in the Peloponnese was not yet ended,¹⁶³ and the continuing tie between Argos and Athens was enhanced by their defensive alliance of spring 416, Alcibiades' visit to Argos to collect hostages, and the campaign of Orneae.¹⁶⁴ Sparta's triumph was as inconclusive and superficial as Argos' challenge to her power had been.

In conclusion it may be said that if this investigation has achieved its purpose the major gain made will be one of principle. It has of course been my aim to present a clear and cogent account of the policies of the various cities, especially of the apparent vagaries of Corinth. But it is more important to have demonstrated the need to examine the nexus of relations between the Greek states in this period as a whole, in an attempt to unravel their changing and intricate pattern, as Thucydides himself set out to do. Inquiries into the activity of single states may be of great value, but their usefulness is of necessity limited. In particular they may lead to a concern that can become excessive with the effects of internal divisions and fluctuations in the internal balance of power, frequently purely conjectural, on foreign affairs. It will perhaps serve as a warning that on several occasions when opinion is known to have been split at Athens and Sparta, the same immediate practical ends are seen to have been pursued for quite different reasons by men of opposite persuasions. Thucydides may in many cases have had good reasons for omitting such matters, even when he knew about them. At all events it is not always necessary to make up everything that Thucydides leaves out.

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¹⁵⁸ 5.80.1, 3.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Andrewes on 5.80.3.

¹⁶⁰ 5.81.1, X. *Hell.* 5.2.2, Diod. 12.80.2.

¹⁶¹ 5.81.2, 82.1, Diod. 12.80.2, Plut.

Alc. 15.4.

¹⁶² 5.82.2 ff., Diod. 12.80.3, Plut. *Alc.*

15.4 f.

¹⁶³ 5.83.1 f., Diod. 12.81.1.

¹⁶⁴ 5.84.1, Diod. 12.81.2 ff., Bengtson, *Staatsverträge* ii. 196 (on the date, cf. W. Kolbe, *CP* 25, 1930, 105 ff.).