War Mandates in the Peloponnesian War: The Agency of Athenian *strategoi*

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T O QUESTION the extent of the agency of Athenian *strategoi* might seem idle. Under the so-called radical democracy, the *demos* had most, if not all, decision-making power.[1] It is not surprising that some scholars recognise little agency in the *strategoi* because they were strictly bound by the *ecclesia*'s instructions.[2] Nevertheless, alongside the references to the *demos*' control and its harshness towards magistrates, several passages show the *strategoi* acting with a certain amount of independence.[3] This discrepancy is noteworthy and raises

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[1] On the power of the fifth-century *ecclesia* in comparison with that of the fourth century see e.g. E. M. Harris, *Democracy and the Rule of Law in Classical Athens* (Cambridge 2006) 82; R. Osborne, *Athens and Athenian Democracy* (Cambridge 2010) 67.

[2] C. W. Fornara, *The Athenian Board of Generals from 501 to 404* (Wiesbaden 1971) 37–38, W. K. Pritchett, *The Greek State at War* II (Berkeley 1974) 42–56, R. K. Sinclair, *Democracy and Participation in Athens* (Cambridge 1988) 82, 146. D. Hamel, *Athenian Generals: Military Authority in the Classical Period* (Leiden 1998) 1, 115–117, 158–159, deserves special mention because her formulation of the issue has been particularly influential on later scholars.

[3] On the Athenians' harshness see e.g. Theopompus *FGrHist* 115 F 105 (Ath. 532A–B); Pritchett, *Greek State* II 18–19; M. H. Hansen, *The Athenian Democracy in the Age of Demosthenes* (Oxford 1991) 216; Hamel, *Athenian Generals* 117–118, 133–136. On the *strategoi*'s power in the field: M. H. Hansen *The Athenian Assembly at the Age of Demosthenes* (Oxford 1987) 51–54, and *Athenian Democracy* 268–271; S. Hornblower, *The Greek World: 479–323 BC*[4] (London 2011) 147–148; J. Crowley, *The Psychology of Athenian Hoplite: The Culture of Combat in Classical Athens* (Cambridge 2012) 116. These scholars recognise

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pressing questions about the *strategoi*'s agency and degree of control.

This article aims to shed light on this conflicting evidence by discussing the mandates issued to *strategoi* in the period of the Peloponnesian War. "Mandate" denotes the tasks, along with their related instructions and constraints, that the *ecclesia* assigned to one or more *strategoi*. By comparing reported mandates with the actions and behaviour of the *strategoi* in the field, we are able to perceive and assess their agency and independence. The paper is divided into two parts. The first focuses on the power and role of the *strategoi* in setting and then executing the mandate, which shows the extent of their authority and the independence they could exercise. The second addresses the discrepancies in the evidence and offers an explanation of the 'precise' mandates.

This line of enquiry could have significant ramifications: if the *strategoi* are found to have greater agency and power than usually supposed, our perception of the Athenian radical democracy may change significantly.

1. *Discussing and executing the mandate*

The *ecclesia* voted on every military expedition, deliberating on the objective, the resources allotted, and which magistrates to appoint.[4] The tasks assigned could be extremely various, from collecting money from the allies[5] to verifying that oaths had been sworn correctly[6] to undertaking lengthy military

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these powers as extensive, but without a proper examination of the conflicting sources.

[4] P. J. Rhodes, *The Athenian Boule* (Oxford 1971) 113–114; Hamel, *Athenian Generals* 5, 14–25, 40–44; M. R. Christ, "Conscription of Hoplites in Classical Athens," *CQ* 51 (2001) 399; Crowley, *The Psychology* 27–35.

[5] E.g. Thuc. 3.19, 4.50.1; Xen. *Hell.* 1.1.8, 1.4.8. For discussion, L. Kallet-Marx, *Money, Expense, and Naval Power in Thucydides' History 1–5.24* (Berkeley 1993) 134–138.

[6] E.g. *IG* I³ 11, 40; II³ 412.

campaigns. The *ecclesia* also received regular reports from the *strategoi*, which might hint at the power of the assembly to recall the *strategoi* if their performance was deemed unsatisfactory.[7] To say that the *demos* was in charge is not an understatement.[8]

Yet, the *strategoi* were involved in the decision-making process. The clearest example is Nicias and Alcibiades' debate in the *ecclesia* discussing the appointment of the *strategoi* for the Sicilian expedition and the chances of success of the campaign.[9] Hamel points out that the Athenians voted against Nicias' advice, demonstrating that the *strategoi* did not speak from a privileged position but were treated the same as other citizens in the assembly.[10] However, while Hamel may be

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[7] In the fourth century, in every *prytany* the *ecclesia* voted to reconfirm the *strategoi* in their mandate: Lys. 30.5; [Ar.] *Ath.Pol.* 43.4, 48.3, 61.2. Cf. Pritchett, *Greek State* II 28−29; P. J. Rhodes, "ΕΙΣΑΓΓΕΛΙΑ in Athens," *JHS* 99 (1979) 110; J. T Roberts, *Accountability in Athenian Government* (Madison 1982) 15−17, 21; M. H. Hansen, *Eisangelia: The Sovereignty of the People's Court in Athens in the Fourth Century B.C.* (Odense 1975) 26; Sinclair, *Democracy and Participation* 157. There is no similar evidence for the fifth century. The only known case of a *strategos* being recalled is Alcibiades in 415 (Thuc. 6.61.5, Plut. *Alc.* 22); this however was only to be tried for parodying the Eleusinian mysteries. But A. C. Scafuro, "*Epicheirotonia* and the So-called '*euthynai* of generals,'" in B. Biscotti (ed.), *Kállistos Nómos. Scritti in onore di Alberto Maffi* (Turin 2018) 201−203, hypothesises that the *ecclesia* already had the power to recall *strategoi* in the fifth century. On reports: Thuc. 4.27.3−4, 7.8−9; Pritchett II 45−56.

[8] E.g. Hamel, *Athenian Generals* 14, 19, 21−23, 40; R. Balot, "Democratising Courage in Classical Athens," in D. M. Pritchard (ed.), *War, Democracy and Culture in Classical Athens* (Cambridge 2010) 94−95; Scafuro, in *Kállistos Nómos* 199, 201.

[9] Thuc. 6.9−26. See also Hdt. 6.132; Thuc. 1.140−144, 4.2.2; Plut. *Per.* 29.

[10] Hamel, *Athenian Generals* 12−14, 26. The *strategoi* were involved in the summoning of the *ecclesia* (Thuc. 2.22.1, 4.118.1−4; *IG* I³ 93.20−21 mentions the *strategoi* setting a meeting of the Assembly, but their participation is not clear) and could add items to the agenda, presumably for the discussion of military matters (*IG* I³ 61.51−56). Cf. Rhodes, *Athenian Boule* 45; Hansen,

correct from an institutional point of view, there is reason to believe that the *strategoi* were more influential than the average Athenian. Plato writes that the most στρατηγικοί Athenians were the most influential in discussions of military matters.[11] The fifth century does not seem different. In 425 the *strategos* Demosthenes requested authority over the fleet being led toward Sicily by Eurymedon and Sophocles (Thuc. 4.2.2):

> Δημοσθένει δὲ ὄντι ἰδιώτῃ μετὰ τὴν ἀναχώρησιν τὴν ἐξ Ἀκαρ-
> νανίας αὐτῷ δεηθέντι εἶπον χρῆσθαι ταῖς ναυσὶ ταύταις, ἢν
> βούληται, περὶ τὴν Πελοπόννησον.

> Demosthenes held no command after his return from Acar-
> nania, but at his own request, the Athenians granted him leave
> to use these ships at his discretion on their voyage round the
> Peloponnese. (transl. Hammond)

The Athenians approved Demosthenes' proposal even though it was only vaguely formulated.[12] The Athenians discussed and

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Athenian Assembly 19, 24–25, 51.

[11] *Grg.* 455B–C. Plato writes in general terms, but he plausibly refers to the Athenian experience, as this was familiar to him. Cf. A. Andrewes, "The Mytilene Debate: Thucydides 3.36–49," *Phoenix* 16 (1962) 84, for a similar argument on financial savviness.

[12] V. J. Hunter, *Thucydides: The Artful Reporter* (Toronto 1973) 61–62, argues that no public decree granted Demosthenes his authority because otherwise Eurymedon and Sophocles would have been aware of his plan. However, this would not be the first case in which the *ecclesia* granted poorly defined powers to a successful commander, if we can trust Herodotus on Miltiades' mandate in 488 (Hdt. 6.133). For doubts on this tradition see Hamel, *Athenian Generals* 168–170; J. Boëldieu-Trevert, *Commander dans le monde grec au Vᵉ siècle avant notre ère* (Franche-Comté 2007) 83. Furthermore, the only other governing body which might have issued Demosthenes' mandate is the *boule*, which doubtfully had the authority to assign a military mandate. See Rhodes, *Athenian Boule* 113–114. F. S. Russell, *Information Gathering in Classical Greece* (Ann Arbor 1999) 196–197, argues that the *boule* might step in to preserve the secrecy of the missions. Nevertheless, the passages relating to military expeditions are either doubtful (Diod. 11.39.4–5, 13.2.6; see n.33 below) or controversial. In 397/6 Demaenetus joined Conon with one ship, but the well-to-do Athenians vehemently protested

voted upon what the *strategoi* proposed, and while they could disagree with the *strategoi*, more often than not the proposals were accepted.[13]

Furthermore, the *ecclesia*'s prerogative to issue a binding mandate constitutes great power, but how the *strategoi* achieved the objectives needs to be discussed. Did the *ecclesia* specify this as well?

After gathering a substantial number of texts, Hamel concluded (115–117) that the assembly could issue very specific instructions, which the *strategoi*, mindful of their accountability, followed to the letter. In general terms, that is correct, but it should be noted that mandates with precise instructions are attested less frequently. Only six of the passages collected by Hamel have detailed instructions on how to conduct their campaigns. This amounts to less than a quarter of her examples.[14] The remaining passages mention an area of operation,[15] campaign objectives or enemies to fight,[16] only occasionally providing other vague details.[17] This ratio decreases even more

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the lack of discussion of this mandate (*Hell.Oxy. FGrHist* 66 F 6 ix.1–2 = McKechnie and Kern vi.1–2). Cf. K. Simonsen, "Demaenetus and the Trireme," *Mouseion* 9 (2009) 284–286.

[13] As to the example of Nicias in 415, it should be emphasised that another *strategos*, Alcibiades, was involved in the debate endorsing the Sicilian expeditions and rousing the Athenians to war.

[14] Thuc. 1.45.2–49.4, 1.57.6, 3.3.3–4, 35-36, 7.20; Diod. 13.2.6. A seventh passage, Xen. *Hell.* 2.1.31–32, can be added to Hamel's list (see 12 below).

[15] Thuc. 2.26.1 (= Diod. 12.44.1), 2.85.5–6, 4.2.3, 7.29. Hansen, *Eisangelia* no. 90, sees Dem. 23.104 as a mandate; the hypothesis is plausible, but the terms are extremely vague.

[16] Thuc. 2.69.1, 4.2.3; Diod. 12.44.1, 65.1–2, 81.4.

[17] E.g. Thuc. 2.26.1; Diod. 12.81.2; Dem. 15.9. Hamel, *Athenian Generals* 115, interprets Thuc. 3.86.4 as a precise mandate as well. However, Thucydides implies a difference between the effective mandate, helping Leontini, and the truer cause for the expedition, which was not necessarily

when one considers the many examples in which the mandate is only implied in our sources,[18] or is not particularly clear.[19]

Such a low percentage demands an explanation. It is possible that the authors only recorded the details either when it suited their agenda or when this was necessary to understand the narrative,[20] but we should not overlook the possibility that 'precise' mandates, those containing detailed instructions on how to carry out a mission, were relatively rare. In other words, the *ecclesia* decided *what* was worth pursuing, while the *how* was left to the *strategoi*.

A perfect example of this is the planning of the second Sicilian campaign (415). The *ecclesia* deliberated over who should lead the campaign, the resources to allot, and the main objectives to achieve. However, Thucydides does not report any discussion of tactics or strategy in the assembly. Instead, he records a discussion among the three *strategoi* assigned to the campaign concerning their strategies to approach Sicily. Nicias wanted to pursue the objectives specified in the official mandate: support Egesta against Selinus and limit hostilities against Syracuse to a show of force (Thuc. 6.47).[21] Alcibiades intended to build an advanced base in Messene along with a network of alliances, then attack Syracuse (6.48). Lamachus proposed a

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part of the mandate. Cf. Kallet-Marx, *Money* 153 n.1.

[18] E.g. Thuc. 1.114.1, 1.115.2, 2.23.2–3, 2.58.1, 2.95.3, 3.91.1.

[19] E.g. Thuc. 1.111.2–3, 3.51, 3.91, 4.76, 5.2, 8.15–16.

[20] E.g. van Wees, *Greek Warfare: Myths and Realities* (London 2004) 152; Boëldieu-Trevert, *Commander* 55–56; M. Whitby, "Reconstructing Ancient Warfare," in P. Sabin et al. (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Warfare* I (Cambridge 2007) 65.

[21] Thuc. 6.8.2 records the following objectives: fighting for Selinus, participating in the rebuilding of Leontini, if feasible, "and to do in Sicily whatever they knew to be best for the Athenians (καὶ τᾶλλα τὰ ἐν τῇ Σικελίᾳ πρᾶξαι ὅπῃ ἂν γιγνώσκωσιν ἄριστα Ἀθηναίοις)." Nicias evidently wanted to keep the campaign as contained as possible, sticking to the explicit objectives.

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direct attack on Syracuse, relying on the element of surprise (6.49).[22] It is quite evident that Nicias, Alcibiades, and Lamachus did not receive precise instructions on how to pursue the assembly's objectives.[23]

One might conclude that the freedom of these three *strategoi* was due to their unusual position as *strategoi autokratores*; other *strategoi*, however, showed similar independence. In 432 Archestratus and his (unnamed) colleagues were initially sent to Macedonia to fight against Perdiccas (Thuc. 1.57.6, 59.2). But when the news of Potidaea's revolt reached Athens, the *ecclesia* issued new instructions: quash the rebellion in Potidaea and nearby cities, dismantle Potidaea's city walls, and take hostages.[24] Once they had arrived in the area, however, the *strategoi* evaluated their forces as insufficient to engage Potidaea and instead attacked the Macedonian cities Therme and Pydna (1.59.2, 1.61.2). Admittedly, the *demos* sent Archedamus and his colleagues to achieve both objectives, and Thucydides is not very clear on whether the two mandates were both valid or if the latter replaced the former.[25] It is worth mentioning that the

[22] For discussion see G. Cawkwell, *Thucydides and the Peloponnesian War* (London 1997) 82–83.

[23] Hamel, *Athenian Generals* 117–118 n.7, argues correctly that Alcibiades and Lamachus did not depart from their mandate. But it is undeniable that the difference between the three strategies denotes the absence of the *ecclesia*'s indications on the matter, otherwise the entire discussion would have been useless. There is reason to believe that a council of *strategoi* and higher officers discussed these matters in the field, deciding by majority vote: see e.g. Hdt. 6.109 ff.; Thuc. 7.60, 8.25–27; Plut. *Nic.* 20.6–7. Cf. E. F. Bloedow, *Alcibiades Rexamined* (Wiesbaden 1973) 10–11; Hansen, *Athenian Democracy* 237; Hamel 95–99; E. M. Harris, "The Rule of Law and Military Organisation in the Greek *polis*," in *Symposion 2009* (Vienna 2010) 410. S. Johnstone, *A History of Trust in Ancient Greece* (Oxford 2011) 118–121, convincingly suggests that the *strategoi* looked for consensus in their decisions.

[24] Thuc. 1.57.6. Cf. G. E. M. de Ste Croix, *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War* (London 1972) 79–85.

[25] A. W. Gomme, "*I.G.* i.² 296 and the Dates of τὰ Ποτειδεατικά," *CR* 55

strategoi analysed the situation in the field and interpreted the mandate accordingly. There is no doubt that taking Potidaea and stopping the revolts in the area was the priority, but the circumstances obliged the *strategoi* to take an operative decision.

Similarly, Demosthenes, Eurymedon, and Conon displayed some agency when dealing with their mandate in 413. Once he had escorted Charicles to raid the Peloponnese as instructed (Thuc. 7.20, 7.26), Demosthenes raised additional troops in Zacynthus and from the Messenians. When he encountered Eurymedon returning from Syracuse, they decided together to send their ten best ships to Conon, who was deployed in Naupactus and feared a Corinthian fleet (7.31). The mandate says nothing about holding ships back; it seems unlikely that Conon had the assembly's approval for his request. Demosthenes and Eurymedon made an independent decision in light of the circumstances.

The above examples are corroborated by several other passages that hint at independent decisions made by the *strategoi*. For example, in 430 Carcinus, Proteas, and Socrates, returning from an expedition "around the Peloponnese," became aware of the invasion of Megara and decided to join the enterprise (Thuc. 2.23.2, 2.31.1). Phormio was highly successful in defending Naupactus and controlling the gulf of Crisa, where he was sent in 428, but he also took the liberty of making a brief expedition to the interior of Acarnania to secure the area after the Spartans' departure (2.69, 2.102–103). The *strategoi* Demodochus and Aristeides were sent to collect funds in the Hellespont, but this did not stop them from attacking Antandrus, which was fortified by the Mytileneans (4.75.1). Thu-

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(1941), esp. 59, 64, believes in two concurrent mandates and associates them with the expedition. In Gomme's defence, a double mandate is attested in Thuc. 4.2.3; but S. Hornblower, *A Commentary on Thucydides* (Oxford 1991–2008) ad 1.57.6, questions the connection of this inscription (*IG* I³ 365) to Thucydides' account. Cf. Kallet-Marx, *Money* 79.

cydides implies that this was an impromptu decision triggered by the news of the Mytileneans' interest in Antandrus. The *demos* neither sent additional troops nor seemed to be involved in any sense in the planning of the attack.

Similar discretionary power was allowed when making tactical decisions. In 412 Phrynichus and his colleagues were in charge of a fleet sent to combat the Spartan offensive in the eastern Aegean (Thuc. 8.24–25). However, when he became aware that the Peloponnesian fleet was approaching, Phrynichus urged his colleagues to retreat (8.27.1–2):[26]

Φρύνιχος δὲ ὁ τῶν Ἀθηναίων στρατηγός, ὡς ἀπὸ τῆς Λέρου ἐπύθετο τὰ τῶν νεῶν σαφῶς, βουλομένων τῶν ξυναρχόντων ὑπομείναντας διαναυμαχεῖν, οὐκ ἔφη οὔτ᾽ αὐτὸς ποιήσειν τοῦτο οὔτ᾽ ἐκείνοις οὐδ᾽ ἄλλῳ οὐδενὶ ἐς δύναμιν ἐπιτρέψειν. ὅπου γὰρ [ἔξεστιν] ἐν ὑστέρῳ σαφῶς εἰδότας πρὸς ὁπόσας τε ναῦς πολεμίας καὶ ὅσαις πρὸς αὐτὰς ταῖς σφετέραις ἱκανῶς καὶ καθ᾽ ἡσυχίαν παρασκευασαμένοις ἔσται ἀγωνίσασθαι, οὐδέποτε τῷ αἰσχρῷ ὀνείδει εἴξας ἀλόγως διακινδυνεύσειν.

But when the Athenian general Phrynichus received clear information about this fleet from Leros, although his fellow commanders wanted to stay where they were and fight it out at sea, he said no: he would not undertake such a fight himself, nor would he allow them or anyone else to do so if he could help it. When it was open to them to postpone battle until they had precise knowledge of the number of enemy ships they faced and the relative number they could muster themselves with time spent on proper preparation, he would never take such an unconsidered risk simply to avoid an accusation of dishonour. There was nothing dishonourable in Athenians making a strategic retreat from an enemy navy. (transl. Hammond)

This episode demonstrates that the *strategoi* could have direct control over tactical decisions, and that casts light on the

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[26] Thucydides highly praises Phrynichus for his wisdom; see Hornblower, *Commentary* ad 8.27.5.

retreat from Syracuse in 413. After a disastrous night offensive against Epipolae, Demosthenes and Eurymedon advocated for retreating from their position (Thuc. 7.47.3–4). But Nicias strongly opposed the idea, arguing that the Athenians would disapprove and prosecute the *strategoi* when they returned home (7.48.3–4). Comparison with Phrynichus' example suggests that Nicias' reservations were due not to his lack of authority but rather to his concern over what the Athenians might think of him. Demosthenes disagreed with Nicias, confirming that Nicias' actions did not necessarily represent what a *strategos* was expected to do, but a *strategos*' personal choice, which was open for debate.[27]

Thus, there is reason to think that *strategoi* could exercise some agency and independence within the limits of their mandate. This conclusion is corroborated by several mandates that we can confidently call vague. The sources record several mandates in terms of the area of action,[28] allies to support,[29] or enemies to fight.[30] These mandates imply that the *strategoi* were in charge of figuring out the details of a campaign, whilst the *ecclesia* defined the campaign's objectives and grand strategy.[31]

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[27] At Thuc. 7.49.2 Demosthenes refers to the *ecclesia*'s vote to end the mission not as a fact but as an eventuality. And yet he still argued that it was imperative to move the army from their position.

[28] E.g. Bottieia and Chalcidice, Thuc. 2.79.1; Chalcidice, 5.2, 8.64.2; "on the other side of the Peloponnese," 3.94.3.

[29] E.g. the king of Egypt, Thuc. 1.112.2; Selinus, 6.8.2.

[30] Thuc. 2.69.1. Some fourth-century examples are Teleutias (Xen. *Hell.* 4.8.25) and Philip II (Dem. 12.16: "saying to everybody that you ordered him to fight [me], if there was the chance, πολεμεῖν αὐτῷ προστάττετε, ἂν καιρὸν λάβῃ)."

[31] On the difference between tactics, strategy, and grand strategy see A. G. Platias and C. Koliopoulos, *Thucydides on Strategy. Athenian and Spartan Grand Strategies in the Peloponnesian War and their Relevance Today* (Athens 2006) 20–23.

2. *The peculiarities of precise mandates*

The evidence we have seen is consistent, but how do we integrate it with the undeniable examples of precise mandates? To address the issue, the six examples of precise mandates will be discussed in detail to bring out the patterns, the significant characteristics, or the scenarios that prompted the *ecclesia* to issue more precise instructions.

It is significant that four of the six passages record precise instructions regarding acceptable terms of surrender and how to handle prisoners.[32] The *ecclesia* gave precise instructions to the *strategoi* about the demands to be made of Potidaea (432/1) and Mytilene (428/7) when they were sent to crush their revolts: destruction of the city walls for both *poleis*, surrender of hostages for the former and of the fleet for the latter (Thuc. 1.57.6, 3.3.3–4). The same should be said for Diodorus' dubious report that the *strategoi* and the *boule* agreed to enslave Selinus and Syracuse at the beginning of the second Sicilian campaign.[33] The last example, once again involving the revolt of Mytilene, is slightly different (3.33–34). After taking the city, the *strategos* Paches sent word to Athens asking for instructions concerning the fate of the Mytileneans, which sparked the famous debate between Cleon and Diodotus.[34]

A pattern seems to be unfolding. The *ecclesia* wanted control

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[32] Hamel, *Athenian Generals* 51–55, underlines the intense activity of the *ecclesia* in these areas.

[33] Diod. 13.2.6, 13.30.3. Rhodes, *Athenian Boule* 41, reasonably doubts this tradition because of its discrepancy with Thucydides' account. It might also be stressed that Diodorus implies that the *strategoi* received instructions on how to handle the prisoners from the assembly as well, which might reflect some conflict in his sources or even his confusion.

[34] Thuc. 3.37–45. Cf. P. Debnar, "Diodotus' Paradox and the Mytilene Debate (Thucydides 3.37–49)," *RhM* 143 (2000) 161–178, esp. 168–170; A. Andrewes, "The Mytilene Debate: Thucydides 3.36-49," *Phoenix* 16 (1962) 65–85.

over the acceptable terms of surrender for the enemy and deliberated on the handling of war prisoners. This interference by the assembly limited the *strategoi* from a diplomatic point of view, but not necessarily in practical matters such as tactics and strategy.[35] For instance, it is worth noting that Paches showed himself to be very keen and receptive to the *ecclesia*'s instructions and will, but did not ask for guidance regarding tactical matters.[36] The battle of Aegospotami partially confirms this conclusion. Xenophon (*Hell.* 2.1.31–32) states that it was decreed that the right hand of every Peloponnesian prisoner be cut off, but there is no mention of instructions regarding which strategies or tactics the *strategoi* had to adopt. When Alcibiades showed up, advising them to move the fleet to Sestos and promising troops, the *strategoi* chased him away, saying not that their mandate was different, but that they, not he, were in charge of these matters.

Nevertheless, on three occasions the *ecclesia* demonstrated its power to instruct the *strategoi* on how to conduct a campaign: the campaign of Corcyra in 433, that of Mytilene in 428/7, and the second Sicilian expedition in 413. All three of these fascinating episodes seem to belong to very specific—if not exceptional—scenarios.

The mandate for the fleet sent in aid of Corcyra shows the same concern for politics and diplomacy as the previous examples. The first contingent received unequivocal instructions on how to engage the Corinthians:[37]

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[35] *Pace* Hamel, *Athenian Generals* 40–41, 97, these are not "limited military action(s)." She admits that the *strategoi* had the authority to call a truce with the enemy (e.g. Thuc. 3.4.2–4), which is hardly negligible.

[36] H. D. Westlake, "Paches," *Phoenix* 29 (1975) 110; Hornblower, *Commentary* ad 3.28.2. However, Westlake also emphasises Paches' initiative during the campaign.

[37] Thuc. 1.45.3; cf. 1.49.4, 53.4.

προεῖπον δὲ αὐτοῖς μὴ ναυμαχεῖν Κορινθίοις, ἢν μὴ ἐπὶ Κέρ-
κυραν πλέωσι καὶ μέλλωσιν ἀποβαίνειν ἢ ἐς τῶν ἐκείνων τι
χωρίων· οὕτω δὲ κωλύειν κατὰ δύναμιν. προεῖπον δὲ ταῦτα τοῦ
μὴ λύειν ἕνεκα τὰς σπονδάς.

Their instructions were not to engage with the Corinthians
unless they sailed against Corcyra and were about to land on
Corcyra itself or any territory belonging to it: in that case, they
should do what they could to prevent them. The purpose of
these instructions was to avoid a breach of the treaty. (transl. M.
Hammond)

Thucydides draws attention to the terms of the peace of 446
between Athens and Corinth and the concern for the close re-
lationship between Corinth and Sparta.[38] He explicitly stresses
that the Athenians did not intend to break the treaty and they
declared that they had not done so when accused by the
Corinthians (1.53). The situation was controversial and delicate
enough to allow for the *strategoi*'s initiative, thus honoring pre-
cise instructions.

This reading is corroborated by two episodes in the fourth
century, in which the *ecclesia* gave peremptory orders of re-
deployment because a new treaty had been signed.[39] These
underline the *ecclesia's* concern for the geopolitical scenario and
how this limited the *strategoi*. A passage of Demosthenes' *Against
Timotheus* is particularly explicit in this regard. Demosthenes

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[38] On the complexity of the diplomatic scenario: de Ste Croix, *Origins* 76–
77; Hamel, *Athenian Generals* 18. L. J. Samons, *Pericles and the Conquest of
History: A Political Biography* (Cambridge 2016) 135–137, underlines the
Athenians' caution in avoiding a rupture with the Corinthians. Hornblower,
Commentary ad 1.53.4 and *Greek World* 114–115, suggests that the *strategoi*
overstepped their mandate, which only authorised them to protect Cor-
cyra's territory. However, Thucydides reports the *strategoi*'s claim not to
have broken the treaty, suggesting that they did not recognise their inter-
vention as a proper act of war but a necessary operation to protect Corcyra.

[39] Xen. *Hell.* 6.2.2, 6.4.1, 7.4.1. Cf. Hamel, *Athenian Generals* 40–44; Horn-
blower, *Greek World* 192.

claims that Timotheus received the mandate to help the satrap Ariobarzanes while avoiding the enmity of the Great King of Persia at all costs (15.9). Timotheus had a bad track record in the matter; in 374 he jeopardised the Athenians' effort to end hostilities with Sparta by reinstating the exiles in Zacynthus (Xen. *Hell.* 6.2.1–4). Although he did not explicitly disobey the *ecclesia*'s orders to stop fighting, his behaviour still went against the Athenian agenda. Unsurprisingly, the assembly now went the extra mile to avoid the creation of a similar situation, especially if Timotheus' actions might have caused hostilities with Persia. Consequently, it is plausible that the *ecclesia* felt the need to issue more detailed instructions in delicate situations, which need not imply that this was a habitual practice.

The case of the first expedition to Mytilene in 428 is more complicated. After hearing of Mytilene's defection, the *demos* approved an expedition against the Lesbian *polis*, indicating precise terms for Mytilene's surrender and ordering Cleippides and his two colleagues to attack by surprise, having received intelligence regarding a festival outside of Mytilene's walls (Thuc. 3.3.3–4). Two aspects of this passage are particularly noteworthy. First, this is one of three precise mandates related to Mytilene's revolt. The *demos*' involvement does not seem casual; Thucydides' rendering of the debate over the fate of Mytilene's inhabitants after its surrender shows the strong emotions the Athenians felt on the matter.[40] Thus it is plausible that the Athenians wanted more control of the campaigns in which they were more emotionally invested.

Second, the passage warns us against the practicability of tactical discussion in the assembly. The information about the festival was precious intelligence; it is significant that it was discussed in the *ecclesia*.[41] However, a man overheard the

[40] Cf. Andrewes, *Phoenix* 16 (1962) 75, 81; Debnar, *RhM* 143 (2000) 170–171; Balot, in *War, Democracy* 97–98.

[41] Cf. J. Ober, "Thucydides on Athens' Democratic Advantage in the

Athenians' intentions and rushed to Mytilene with this piece of intelligence.[42] The Athenians' surprise attack failed: when the army arrived, they found the Mytileneans ready and defending the city walls. The risk of leaking essential information was concrete, and the *strategoi* were aware of the importance of keeping their plans secret, even from their own men.[43] Thus it seems unlikely that public discussion of tactical matters in the *ecclesia* was a common practice.[44] If this had been the case, we would hear of several other leaks, especially given the traffic in Athenian harbours.

Demosthenes' mandate in the winter of 414/3 provides a third example of precise instructions (Thuc. 7.20, 7.26). When he was appointed commander of the main contingent sent to Syracuse in response to Nicias' request for reinforcements, Demosthenes was also ordered to wait for Charicles, who was sent to Argos to ask for troops to undertake certain actions in the Peloponnese. It is possible that the *ecclesia* wanted to pair the inexperienced Charicles with a more seasoned *strategos*, but the Athenians might also have issued the order to save men and resources.[45] By temporarily redeploying Demosthenes'

Archidamian War," in *War, Democracy* 65–87, at 80–81, on the circulation of information in Athens. However, as Russell, *Information* 79–80, correctly stresses, some Lesbian informants brought the news of the revolt to Athens (Thuc. 3.2.3). Cf. Hornblower, *Commentary* ad 3.2.3, on the private motivations behind this intelligence leak. The intelligence on the festival probably came from the same informants too.

[42] Cf. Russell, *Information* 83–86.

[43] E.g. Thuc. 7.48.1, 7.49; Xen. *Hell.* 1.1.15. Cf. Russell, *Information* 192–193, 196.

[44] Cf. Rhodes, *Athenian Boule* 114. Hornblower, *Commentary* ad 3.3.5, wonders if the information leak occurred at a higher level than the assembly, raising the question whether the mandate was even discussed in the *ecclesia*. Cf. n.12 above. Russell, *Information* 197–198, notes the tendency of the commanders not to share their plans with their troops.

[45] Charicles was a prominent political figure in the period, but this is the

troops to Charicles' raids in the Peloponnese, the Athenians reduced the number of ships and men necessary for the latter. It seems reasonable to recognise a similar scenario in 425 (see above), when Demosthenes was granted vague powers over undisclosed operations in the Peloponnese region.

In sum, the discrepancy between *strategoi* acting reasonably independently and the assembly issuing precise mandates is less severe than expected. Precise mandates seem to occur in two scenarios: in terms of surrender, especially about the handling of prisoners, and in exceptional circumstances.[46] Delicate diplomatic situations, highly emotional campaigns, and even the rational use of resources made it necessary for the *ecclesia* to issue precise instructions to the *strategoi*, at least occasionally. Otherwise, the *strategoi* were bound to a specific objective but were reasonably independent in choosing how to attain it.

Conclusion: the power of the strategoi

From this examination, we can conclude that the sources suggest that the *strategoi* retained considerable agency. They seem to have exercised influence over the Athenians, especially in the discussion of military matters. This is not to say that they were always listened to, especially given that individual *strategoi* might favour different lines of action, but their role in defining the mandates should not be underestimated.[47]

Additionally, as many instances demonstrate, they were often able to exercise their agency within the mandates issued by the *ecclesia*. The assembly had the power to micromanage its

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only *strategia* associated with his name; see *PA* 15407, *PAA* 983120.

[46] Cf. Hamel, *Athenian Generals* 51.

[47] It should also be taken into consideration that the *strategoi* had an important role in defining the logistics and the practical aspects of campaign organisation. Scholars have given too little space to the issue, with the exception of D. Engels, "Logistics: Sinews of War," in B. Campbell et al. (eds.), *The Oxford Companion of War in the Classical Period* (Oxford 2013) 351–368. I intend to discuss this matter further elsewhere.

commanders, but there is reason to believe that it did so only in particular circumstances.

The situation is quite different regarding acceptable terms of surrender and what should be done with prisoners. The *ecclesia* retained control of these matters, probably because of the lasting nature of these provisions. Still, there were exceptions, which once again suggests that *strategoi* had considerable power in the field, kept at bay only by the threat of trials at the end of their term in office.[48]

Consequently, we should be wary of undervaluing the power and independence of Athenian *strategoi*, even under a radical democracy. The undeniable power and control exercised by the *demos* is only apparently antithetical to magistrates with substantial power, especially when operating outside of Athens. It seems reasonable to argue that the *demos* dictated the grand strategy and objectives of a campaign, thus the most 'political' aspects of the military effort. The challenges when micromanaging a complex military expedition with limited means of communication obliged the Athenians to allow some independence to the persons they elected to the highest military ranks. In these circumstances, the Athenians' harshness in the accountability trials would make more sense; it was a measure to keep abuses and selfish behaviour to a minimum.[49]

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[48] Prisoners: e.g. Hdt. 9.119; Thuc. 2.92.2, 6.61.3, 6.62.3–4; Xen. *Hell.* 1.2.12–13, 1.5.19; Plut. *Alc.* 29. Negotiations with other *poleis*: e.g. Thuc. 4.54.2; Osborne/Rhodes, *Greek Historical Inscriptions 478–404 B.C.* no. 185.