Thucydides is not only the first historian to record the war strategy of Perikles, he is also the first historian to comment on that strategy, and there seems to have been a general tendency to accept his evaluation without a detailed independent re-examination of that strategy. Two passages from Thucydides and two passages from more recent historians would seem to support this contention:

"He [Perikles] also gave the citizens some advice on their present affairs in the same strain as before. They were to prepare for the war, and to carry in their property from the country. They were not to go out for battle, but to come into the city and guard it, and get ready their fleet, in which their real strength lay. They were to keep a tight rein on their allies—the strength of Athens being derived from the money brought in by their payments, and success in war depending principally upon conduct and capital" 1). 

"When the war broke out, here also he [Perikles] seems to have rightly gauged the power of his country. He outlived its commencement two years and six months, and the correctness of his previsions respecting it became better known by his death. He told them to wait quietly, to pay attention to their marine, to attempt no new conquests, and to expose the city to no hazards during the war, and doing this, promised them a favourable result" 2).

"The more we reflect on the conditions of the struggle and the nature of the Athenian resources, the more fully will the plan of

1) Thuc. II 13, 2. R. Crawley's translation (Everyman's Library).
2) Thuc. II 65, 5-7 (Crawley). This strategy of Perikles has already been given at greater length in Book I 141, 2-144, 1.
Pericles approve itself as a strategy uniquely suitable to the circumstances... Within a few years this method would doubtless have been crowned with success and brought about a peace favourable to Athens, but for untoward events which he could not foresee” ¹).

“The strategy of Pericles was realistic. It recognised the inferiority of Athenian land power and the superiority of Athenian finance and sea power. In a war of attrition which was likely to ensue, because neither side could strike a decisive blow at the other, Pericles’ policy involved Athens in no serious risks and gave an assurance of ultimate victory” ²).

Perikles, Thucydides, Bury, and Hammond, along with many others, are confident that had the strategy of Perikles been followed the result of the Great Peloponnesian War could have been nothing other than an Athenian victory. The political successors of Perikles chose to disregard his strategy and so the outcome for the Athenians was not a ‘favourable result’, was not ‘crowned with success’, was not ‘an ultimate victory’. Perikles, naturally, was in no position to say why Athens lost the war, or to blame his successors for the outcome; but Thucydides is most explicit:

“What they did was the very contrary, allowing private ambitions and private interests, in matters apparently quite foreign to war, to lead them into projects unjust both to themselves and to their allies—projects whose success would only conduce to the honour and advantage of private persons, and whose failure entailed certain disaster on the country in the war” ³).

Yet there are those who maintain that Perikles’ successors did

---

²) N. C. L. Hammond, A History of Greece (Oxford 1959), 348. I have quoted Bury and Hammond as they still appear to be the basic Greek histories recommended in most School and first year University reading lists, where the medium of instruction is English, and because the view they express is that generally accepted by most Greek historians. There seems to be a certain amount of hindsight in the paragraph preceding this quotation, particularly where observations are made on what was likely to happen if Sparta sued for peace on terms adverse to her allies (cf. p. 386).
³) Thuc. II 65, 7 (Crawley).