



The Arthashastra of Chanakya

(2nd-3rd Century BCE, the Indian Machiavelli's *Principe*)

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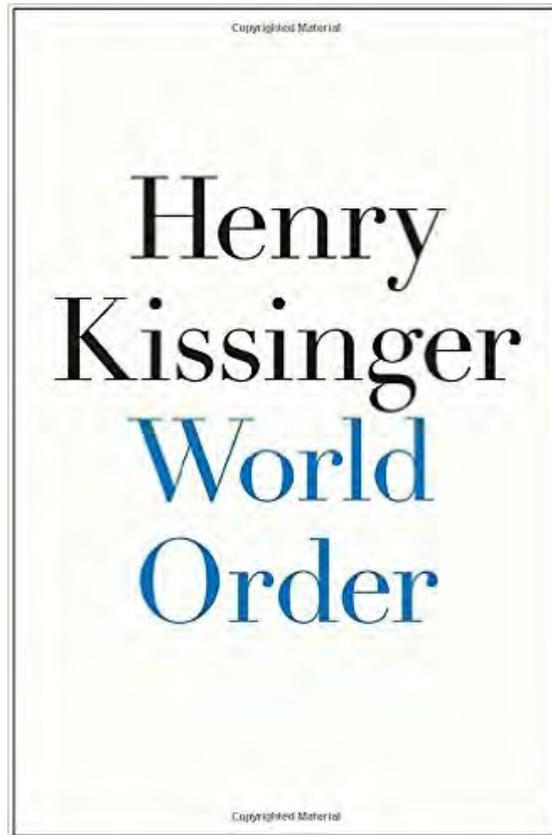
THE ARTHASHASTRA OF CHANAKYA



One cannot easily escape, forget, erase, or even scorn his/her own culture and education. Most cultures –present or past- privilege a set of carefully selected references, beliefs, heroes, victories (mostly unreal), local cuisines, prejudices, and the list augments exponentially with modern sophisticated media and databases.

Despite my efforts, I remain trapped in my past with all the goodies, but also the warts I sorted and made mine. It takes a Herculean effort to recover a passable objective view –if it exists at all- on other philosophies or beliefs. The scales cover the eyes. The wax plugs the ear. The brain-generated opiates anesthetize. My normal inclination is to choose a reference in the West –and, at times, recently in China, Japan or Africa. The Indian continent delivers its spices, its erotic temples, its caste system, even its Ayurvedic medical and health compendia. But a model for today’s polity, based on writings dating back 2,400 years remained hidden in plain sight; my heritage blinded me.

This essay is not an act of contrition; it is too late, and my life will soon come to end. It is another gem, a wonder that makes more sense than many orations or discourses. The wisdom of Chanakya (Kautilya being his *nom-de-plume* for the Arthashastra) is difficult to match; his quotes are as valid today as they were during the inception of the Gupta dynasty. I am just scratching the surface, and depended on a selection of chapters and articles that will confirm my biases; but I hope that you will be surprised and impressed, and –maybe, just maybe- tempted to conduct your own quest.



In his book, *World Order* (Penguin Books, 2014), Henry Kissinger refers to the ancient Indian treatise, the *Arthashastra*, as a work that lays out the requirements of power, which is the “*dominant reality*” in politics. For Kissinger, the *Arthashastra* contained a realist vision of politics long before the Prince, which Kissinger deems “*a combination of Machiavelli and Clausewitz.*”

In his paper, *Moderate Machiavelli? Contrasting the Prince with the Arthashastra of Kautilya*, author Robert Boeshe wrote: “*Max Weber was the first to see that the writings of Machiavelli, when contrasted with the brutal realism of other cultural and political traditions, were not so extreme as they appear to some critics. “Truly radical ‘Machiavellianism,’ in the popular sense of that word,” Weber said in his famous lecture “Politics as a Vocation,” “is classically expressed in Indian literature in the Arthashastra of Kautilya (written long before the birth of Christ, ostensibly in the time of Chandragupta [Maurya]): compared to it, Machiavelli’s The Prince is harmless.” In this article, I contrast Machiavelli’s writings to those of Kautilya (c. 300 B.C.E.) and question why Machiavelli omitted the harsher aspects of political domination such as spies,*

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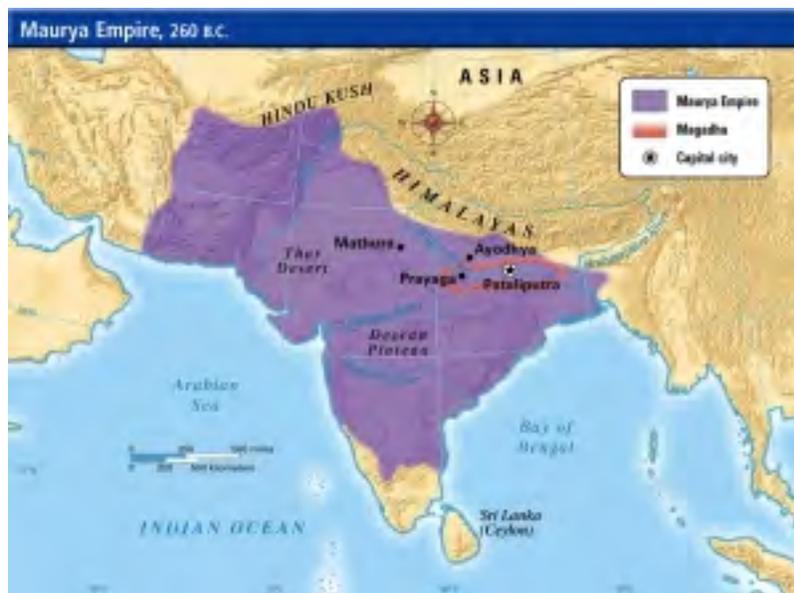
assassination of enemies, and torture. Could it be that he was afraid to tell a prince about the harsher characteristics of tyrannical rule? If so, why?"

Weber's observations were written in a 1919 essay called *Politics as a Vocation*. In it, Weber noted: "Truly radical "Machiavellianism", in the popular sense of that word, is classically expressed in Indian literature in the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya (written long before the birth of Christ, ostensibly in the time of Chandragupta): compared to it, Machiavelli's *The Prince* is harmless."

The *Arthashastra* is indeed a masterpiece of statecraft, diplomacy, and strategy and is an example of non-Western literature that should be read as part of the "realist" canon. Its prescriptions are especially relevant for foreign policy today.

Although the *Arthashastra* is ostensibly authored by **Kautilya** ("crooked"), most scholars agree that Kautilya was a pen name of the ancient Indian minister **Chanakya**.

Chanakya was the minister to Chandragupta Maurya, founder of the Mauryan Empire, which emerged in an environment resembling a Westphalian Europe of many states that encompassed most of present day South Asia. In his role as minister, Chanakya was said to have played a leading role in assembling and administering this large empire. In the *Arthashastra*, he compiles his observations of statecraft based on this experience.



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Kautilya's Arthashastra is a prescriptive text that lays out rules and norms for successfully running a state and conducting international relations. Like Sun Tzu's *Art of War*, the Arthashastra abounds in generalities and is not descriptive of specific, historical events or battles. In this way, Kautilya sought to make the text useful and relevant in a variety of situations, across eras, a sort of "textbook for kings."

The Arthashastra belongs to a class of ancient Hindu texts called *shastras*, which lay out general rules for a variety of subjects, such as architecture, alchemy, astronomy, and pleasure. The term Arthashastra itself means rules or norms of *artha*, a concept translated as "means of life" or "worldly success." Like *Il Principe (The Prince)*, then, Arthashastra is a guide for rulers on how to successfully govern a state.

The text of the Arthashastra is divided into fifteen books that discuss a variety of military, political and economic subjects. The underlying basis of the Arthashastra's prescriptions is the notion that reasons of state justify various actions and policies regardless of ethical norms, a view shared by Machiavelli's *Il Principe*. Pragmatism and utility are thus of key importance to Kautilya. For example, the Arthashastra suggests that a king ought to fake divine miracles at state temples, to increase his revenue from pilgrimages. This is even though Kautilya himself was a Brahmin, or a member of Hinduism's priestly caste.

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Niccolò Machiavelli

Some of the Arthashastra's most timeless observations are on **international relations and foreign policy**, found mostly in books seven, eleven, and twelve. Kautilya lays out a theory of the international system called the "*circle of states*," or *rajamandala*. According to this theory, hostile states are those that border the ruler's state, forming a circle around it. In turn, states that surround this set of hostile states form another circle around the circle of hostile states. This second circle of states can be considered the natural allies of the ruler's state against the hostile states that lie between them. Put more succinctly, "*the enemy of my enemy is my friend*." Elements of this logic are found in India's foreign policy today, which sees states such as Japan and Afghanistan as natural allies against China and Pakistan, respectively.

The idea of the *rajamandala* also holds that relations between two contingent states will generally be tense, a fact that was true of many regions, such as Europe, until

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recently (this does not preclude the possibility of a neighbor being friendly or a vassal). This idea may explain the perception among India's smaller South Asian neighbors that India is an overbearing and dominating neighbor.

The theory of a circle of states entails that every ruler within an international system will find his (or her) state at the center of its own circle of states. This ruler is described as a *vijigishu*, or would-be conqueror, whose power ought to gradually radiate into ever more distant circles. According to Kautilya's view of human nature, *"the possession of power and happiness in a greater degree makes a king superior to another; in a lesser degree, inferior, and in equal degree, equal. Hence, a king shall always endeavor to augment his power and elevate his happiness."* Thus, a ruler will always try to increase his (or her) power and territory to the greatest extent possible. Such a viewpoint is like offensive realism in International Relations theory, which depicts states as being power maximizers (although suggesting the drive for power that is rooted in human nature is consistent with the kind of Classical Realism Henry Kissinger is associated with). The ultimate strategy of a state is not to maintain a balance of power between states but to overcome this equilibrium to establish stability through hegemony.

Nonetheless, in the Arthashastra, the cardinal virtue is *realpolitik*, which emphasizes the state's self-interests and security above all else. This necessitates policies and attitudes that subject the ultimate objective of a state—to maximize power—to temporary objectives such as the creation of various alliances, coalitions, and balances of power. This viewpoint fits with the idea that states only have permanent interests, and will do whatever necessary to pursue these interests. The attainment of these possibilities is a practical necessity and is the subject of Kautilya's discussion on foreign policy.

The Arthashastra speaks at significant length on the policies necessary to secure the goals of the state. There are several guiding principles that govern Kautilya's views on foreign policy. These include:

- a ruler ought to develop his state by augmenting and exploiting its resources and power;
- the state ought to try and eliminate enemy states;
- those who help in this objective are friends;

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- a state ought to stick to a prudent course;
- a ruler's behavior must appear just; and
- peace is preferable to war in attaining a goal.

Under the framework of these principles, the Arthashastra describes six methods of foreign policy, all of which are designed to enhance the power of one's state relative to other states and, if possible, to conquer or dominate them.

These six methods are interdependent but can variously be used as the circumstances dictate:

1. **Making Peace** (*samdhi*). Kautilya describes this method as one in which a state enters an agreement with specific conditions for a period of time. This method is to be used when a state is in relative decline compared to other states. For example, the states that fought against Napoleon entered various coalitions to defeat him. However, this did not necessarily entail cooperation after Waterloo. The Western allies and the Soviet Union likewise entered an agreement to defeat Nazi Germany, but their partnership dissolved after that goal was achieved.
2. **Waging War** (*vigraha*). This strategy occurs when a state is more powerful than another state and can defeat it through military strength, strategy, tactics, or internal conditions in the enemy's country. Countless examples of this abound throughout human history.
3. **Doing Nothing** (*asana*). This method is used when there is nothing to be gained from either waging war or establishing a treaty with another state. It could also be a state of prolonged waiting to consider the circumstances at hand before making a policy decision. Consider, for example, Japan's alleged period of isolation during the Tokugawa Era. While often described as a period of isolation, Japanese rulers during this time observed the changing world order around them and determined it was best to not get actively involved in hostilities or treaties with foreign powers during this time.
4. **Preparing for War** (*yana*). This method requires building up one's forces. This could entail intimidating the enemies or forcing them to use resources to build up their own forces. However, if not done right, mobilization and

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preparation of war could lead to the ruin of one's own country. American military build-ups during the 1980s hurt the Soviet economy. Germany's relatively rapid mobilization during World War I compared to the speed of France and Russia's mobilization gave Germany an initial advantage on the battlefield.

5. **Seeking Protection** (*samsraya*). This strategy essentially entails bandwagoning with a stronger state for one's own security. Various small states in Europe, for example, derive security from allying with the United States.
6. **Dual Policy/Alliances** (*dvaidhibhava*). This strategy deals with multiple states at once, by binding some together with one's own state in an alliance to fight enemy states. For example, a British alliance with France and Russia before the First World War allowed it to stave off hostilities with these states while containing Germany.

The Arthashastra also contains foreign policy advice for special cases. Some of these deals with neutral states or potentially treacherous allies. Others deal with how to deal with oligarchies (or democracies), recommending sowing dissension among such states to weaken them. This policy has often been used by China and Russia in dealing with nomadic confederations in Central Asia. Kautilya also recommends using bribery or conciliation as necessary.

In short, the Arthashastra contains a wealth of recommendations on a variety of situations that can be useful and practical in modern times. Implicit in it is a warning to avoid idealizations and abstractions while remaining pragmatic.

The Arthashastra was influential in ancient and classical India, but disappeared from widespread usage sometime in the 12th or 13th centuries because of invasions and conquest. It was not rediscovered until 1904, when an old manuscript was found in a private collection (other manuscripts were subsequently discovered).

Since then, many of its maxims and ideas have influenced Indian thought, and especially among the realist school of Indian political thinking. Another Indian work, the epic the Mahabharata continued to exert substantial influence across India and featured similar ideas on power and realism. However, for much of the modern era, independent India's thinking on politics and international relations were derived not

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from the Arthashastra or similar works, but from the non-alignment and pacifism of Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi, who were perhaps loosely inspired by the example of Asoka, grandson of Kautilya's king. Asoka abjured realpolitik and attempted to run his empire on the principles of morality and peace (the Mauryan Empire fell apart quickly after Asoka's death).

Despite this, the influence of the Arthashastra and its ideas have found their way into Indian thinking, as well as influencing many non-Indians. While Indians can and do read Western political thinkers, including realists like Machiavelli and Hobbes, many policymakers feel more comfortable if they can find a precedent for their policies in their own country's literature and history. The modern Indian concept of non-alignment itself may reflect Kautilya's advice for a nation to only follow its self-interest and not get locked into permanent enmity or friendship with any other nation. After the end of the Cold War, India has begun to apply more of the Arthashastra's maxims as it has grown in confidence and ability and realized the necessity of pursuing its own interests, regardless of their normative component. Expect this to continue for the foreseeable future.



Short Overview of the Arthashastra

The Arthashastra, a treatise on Economic Administration was written by Chanakya (Kautilya, Vishnugupta) in the 4th century BC. It consists of 15 chapters, 380 Shlokas and 4968 Sutras. Probably, this treatise is the first ever book written on **Practice of Management**. It is essentially on the art of governance and has an instructional tone.

As mentioned above, Chanakya (350 BCE-283 BCE) was a Guru (Teacher), adviser and a prime minister to the first Maurya Emperor Chandragupta (340-293 BCE), and architect of his rise to power. Chanakya was a professor at Taxila (or Takshashila) University and is widely believed to be founder of the first Indian empire.

Chanakya wrote the Arthashastra, as a guide for *“those who govern”* and, as Kautilya (“Crooked”) was interested in the establishment and operation of the governance machinery through which the king (governing head) preserves the integrity and solidarity of the State and generates power. It is not surprising that several concepts described in the Arthashastra, vividly described by Chanakya in his work, are still



being acknowledged into present day management theories.

For instance, the present-day management emphasizes the importance of vision, mission and motivation, which was captured in the Arthashastra. Chanakya advises his king to rule through *Prabhu Shakti* (vision/belief), *Mantra Shakti* (mission/rules and law) and *Utsah Shakti* (motivation/inspiration).

Chanakya's concept of the objectives for a king proposes "**Economic Performance**" as the key governing objective and highlighted its constituents as being:

- **Efficiency:** Making the present economic state effective;
- **Growth:** Identifying the growth potential and realizing it; and
- **Adaptability:** Adopting an economic model that will adapt to changes in the future.

The objectives for the Government to establish good administrative and governance systems are:

- **Acquire:** Take control of economic entities;
- **Consolidate:** Monitor, Control and Stabilize various systems;
- **Expand:** Establish, Grow and Improve various economic entities; and
- **Prosper:** Continually adapt to changing environment and govern dynamically.

Chanakya states that for efficient running of the State, elaborate systems need to be established. He emphasizes on the organizational aspects, human dimensions of an organization, as well as on the leadership requirement of an organization.

On the **organizational aspects**, Chanakya evolves an elaborate hierarchy under the king. The king appoints *Amatya*, the Prime Minister. *Amatya* operates the day-to-day machinery of the State through a council of officials consisting of *Mantris*, the Ministers; *Senapati*, the warlord or the Defence Minister; *Purohit*, the Chief Justice and *Yuvaraj*, the Heir Apparent or identified successor to the throne. Chanakya weaves a design of a tall hierarchy for governance going down to the level of *village through his concept of Mandalas*.

The *Gram Panchayats and Panchayati Raj* set up that was adopted by the Government of India can be considered as a logical derivative of Chanakya's attempt to bring administration to the lowest appropriate level in the machinery of State.

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It is indeed interesting to note that Chanakya, having woven an elaborate organization, moves to set up policies and procedures i.e. business processes. Arthashastra has detailed policies for the society, individual industries, labor and employment, calamities and control of vices. At this stage, he shows the depth of his knowledge of the major element of effective and efficient implementation of business processes, namely, the human aspect of management. He observes that the State (*Rajaya*/Kingdom), as an organization, is a social organization with economic aim.

Chanakya at this stage, reminds his Emperor that sound knowledge of complex human nature is essential in effective, efficient and honest running of the State machinery. He warns of two undesirable attitudes of human nature, *Pramada*, meaning mindlessness/intoxication/insanity due to excess and *Alasya*, meaning inactivity, to be watched for and avoided. This is where, according to Chanakya, the leadership counts.

The essence of leadership, he stresses, lies in its acceptance by the subjects. He therefore, advises the Emperor never to forget the two pillars of the art of governance: *Nyaya*, the justice and *Dharma*, the ethics. He also decries autocratic behavior, as a leader is visible and people follow the leader. Hence, he advises the Emperor to introspect to identify his *aatma doshas*, i.e. self-deficiencies, to improve or develop himself. He further advises his Emperor to study deficiencies of his cabinet members and take steps to improve upon them. He states that *Mantris* could be incompetent, *Senapati* could be over ambitious, *Purohit* may not consider the present-day practices or traditions while enacting laws or justice, which might lead to injustice. About *Yuvaraj*, he advises specific training to prepare him for the eventual succession.

He states that the *Yuvaraj* (future king) should be trained in three specific areas: *Arthashastra* (economic administration), *Nitishastra* (foreign affairs) and *Dandaniti* (political science).

Chanakya seems to have given a lot of thought to **human resource development** for the government machinery. He is specific about the qualities *Mantris* (ministers) must possess. These qualities are: *Drudhachitta* (power of concentration), *Shilavan* (character), *Pragna* (thinking capability), *Vangmi* (communication skills) and *Daksha* (observation / vigilance). In addition, he highlights the competencies that a

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Mantri must possess. These competencies are the same as the competencies advocated by the management gurus of the present times, namely, Knowledge, Skills and Attitude.

Chanakya's knowledge about **human behavior** is astounding. He advises his Emperor about six emotional devils which he should avoid and ensure that his cabinet members also avoid. He makes it amply clear that these emotional devils do not allow appropriate decision making in any operation. The emotional devils are: *Kama* (lust), *Krodha* (anger), *Lobha* (greed), *Mana* (vanity), *Mada* (haughtiness) and *Harsh* (overjoy).

Having looked at the key areas of an efficient and effective organization, Chanakya looks at external realities that the government machinery would face. He starts by systematically studying what he calls 'the essentials' of an organized State. He identifies the essentials as the **territory** of the kingdom, the **population** of the kingdom, the **organization** through which the kingdom is being run and last but not the least, the **unity** within the kingdom. According to Chanakya, the essentials of the State should be taken care of through '*constituents of the State*' identified by him. These constituents are: Emperor (King), *Amatya* (Prime Minister), *Janapada* (populated territory), *Durga* (fort), *Kosha* (treasury), *Bala* (force / army) and *Mitra* (ally). His choice of *Mitra* as a constituent of the State is interesting. He thinks of a network of allies to fortify a kingdom. *Mitra* is a king who would come to the support of Emperor, if Emperor's kingdom is attacked by another king. It will also be the duty of the Emperor to extend all help if the *Mitra* is attacked by another king. In today's world of globalization, the same concept is applied when corporates form alliances to fortify their territories from external dangers such as cheap imports and the entry of strong competitors.

At this stage, Chanakya refers to diplomacy as an important element in *Nitishastra* (foreign affairs). His clarity of thought is evident from the identification of six attributes of diplomacy. The attributes he talks about are: **Intelligence, Memory, Cleverness of Speech, Knowledge of Politics, Morals and Readiness to Provide** resources. Though he is not shy of launching an attack as an external strategy, he also advises the use of diplomacy as a useful strategy to be explored showing his pragmatic approach to the external realities. He identifies the external threats as the superiority of strengths of other kingdoms as well as ambitions of other kingdoms.



The advice Chanakya provides to handle a strong king who has evil designs as well as a weak king who was catapulted on the throne. To defeat designs of a strong king, Chanakya advise networking with other kings defeated or threatened by the strong king on one hand and develop nuisance value through '*nibbling by the sides*'. He also advocates the concept of *Upeksha*, the studied indifference, in the face of strength as a diplomatic move. To a weak king who easily surrenders, Chanakya advises his Emperor to give the king his dignity and not to rub his nose in the defeat. This way, he suggests, the Emperor will have a useful friend who will never forget the treatment received and will remain ever so grateful.

Finally, from the management of the kingdom, Chanakya's advice to his Emperor is indeed introspective and valid to the corporate world of the 21st century: "*The Emperor should run a diversified economy actively, efficiently, profitably and prudently. Diversified economy should consist of productive forests, water reservoirs, mines, productive activities, trade, markets, roads, ports, and storage.*"

Efficient management means setting up of realistic targets and meeting targets without using overzealous methods.

Wealth lies in economic activities. Proper direction and guidance from the Emperor will ensure current prosperity and future gains. Inactivity of the Emperor in the economic sphere will bring the kingdom close to destruction. The Emperor must bear in his mind that a king with depleted treasury is a weak king and the easiest target for a takeover.

The Emperor should ensure enactment of prudent policies. Prudence should be based on *Dharma* (Righteousness/Ethical Conduct) and *Nyaya* (Justice) that will ensure equal opportunity for all to earn a decent living.

Profitability should not only mean surplus over costs. It should also include provision of investment for future growth.

Availability of water is important. It is more practical to acquire a small tract of land with flowing water than a large tract that is dry and would need substantial investment to generate water.

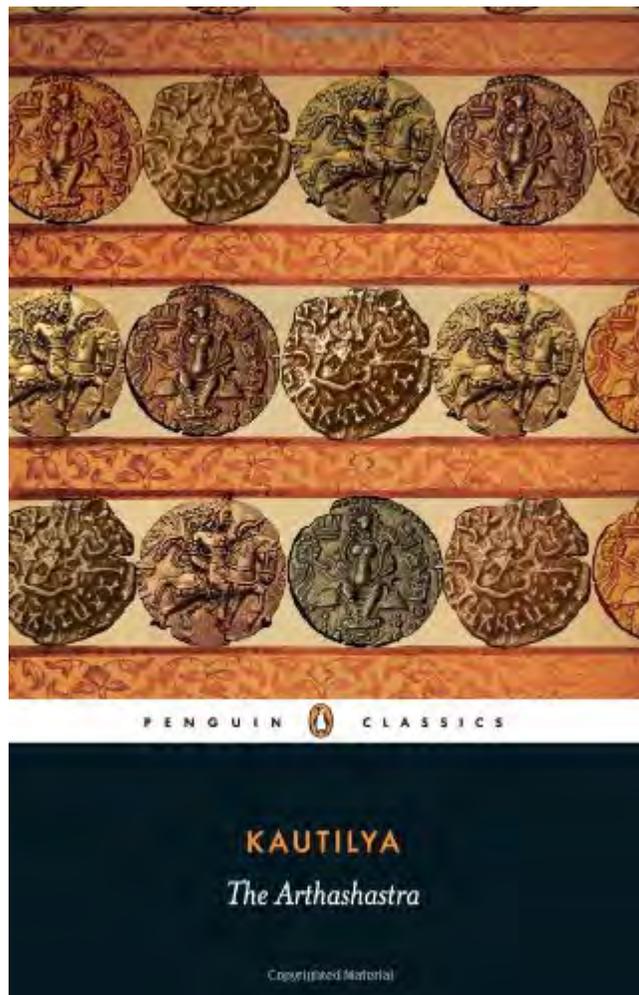
An ideal Emperor is the one who has the highest qualities of leadership, intellect, energy and personal attributes. The Emperor can reign only with the help of others. He should appoint not more than four advisers and sufficient number of *Mantris* to

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look after the governance of the State machinery. While limiting the span of control for the Emperor, Chanakya warns against centralization of power in the hands of the Emperor by stating “*one wheel alone does not move a chariot*”.

The Emperor should take proper care in appointing advisers. He should have clarity in terms of qualities an adviser should possess. Most important being practical experience, thinking prowess, sound judgement and ability to differ while keeping total devotion to the Emperor.





A Short list of Contemporary Relevance of the Arthashastra

In 2004, the Indian Merchants' Chamber published a *Summary of Kautilya's Arthashastra: Its Contemporary Relevance*. It reviews and analyzes 13 Chapters of the Arthashastra. I have selected (and edited) six of these assigned contemporary valid concepts and recommendations. They could (SHOULD!) be applied in today's Modi's India.

In **Chapter 2:** One of the core themes of this chapter is that the Arthashastra of Kautilya equates political governance with economic governance. The end is economic governance while political governance is a means. Good governance is basic to the Kautilyan idea of administration. Good governance and stability are inextricably linked. If rulers are responsive, accountable, removable, recallable, there is stability. If not, there is instability. This is even more relevant in the present democratic set up. Kautilya's precepts may have been in the context of the monarchical set up. However, present rulers and administrators should be endowed with similar qualities. In countries where they are, the progress has been meteoric.

In **Chapter 3:** Some of the ground rules and measures suggested in Arthashastra, particularly those which pertain to matters relating to budget, accounts and audit, are applicable to present day India. In Kautilya's state, the king could severely punish corrupt officials, however highly they were placed. In today's India, those in political office are rarely convicted even if they are corrupted or proved guilty of committing certain offences.

In **Chapter 5:** It is interesting to note that Kautilya tried to establish guidelines for professional service providers also, including weavers, washer men, boatmen, shipping agents, and even prostitutes. Modern States are still grappling with the complexity of setting such 'services'-oriented guidelines and, in that light, Kautilya's attempts to do so show the sheer breadth of his vision at such an early point in history. He also established explicit guidelines for the practice of the medical profession, incorporating ideas that seem ahead of his time.



In **Chapter 8:** The connotations of harassment and obstacles to trade may have changed. However, the fact that anti-dumping measures exist or that cartelization should be coped with, or adverse terms of trade have to be accounted for in certain sectors underscore that safeguards are essential even in current times, and those responsible for managing these measures should be responsible. Furthermore, Kautilya was cognizant of the fact that the terms of trade were not just dependent on the economics but also on other various parameters. The traders had to keep in mind the political or strategic advantages in exporting or importing from a given country. The proliferation of free trade agreements in recent times underscores this point since there is a definite political dimension to trade treaties and agreements.

In **Chapter 12:** The Arthashastra is very instructive in the context of conservation of water resources. It is unfortunate that in today's India, despite five decades of planning, efficient and equitable water management remains a pipedream.

In **Chapter 13:** The emphasis that Kautilya assigned to human capital formation is increasingly validated in current times. A rule of thumb in the realm of economics is that development is not possible without human capital accumulation.



Sun Tzu and Kautilya (Chanakya)

In 2016, Colonel Harjeet Singh published in the Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS) based in New Delhi, India a comprehensive, comparative review: ***Evolution of Strategic Culture based on Sun Tzu and Kautilya – A Civilisational Connect***. The following pages are excerpted from this review, with some editing and updates.



Sun Tzu

The military tradition and culture of both China and India, in ancient times, had a vigorous military culture promoted by various kingdoms competing for supremacy. But there is a crucial difference: Chinese Generals and analysts sustained military thinking as an independent discipline. For instance, even after Sun Tzu had passed from the scene, his descendant Sun Bin, who lived more than a hundred years later, wrote a treatise on Military Methods, which expounded on some practical issues in war, by elaborating on Sun Tzu's ideas. The essence of traditional Chinese military thinking has been both inherited and updated by contemporary Chinese statesmen and strategists. In the subsequent centuries, other great Generals amplified further

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the basics on war in the light of their experiences and the changed times. Even Mao Zedong, a great military strategist, cited Sun Tzu in his writings on war.

Both strategic cultures also invested a moral dimension to wars, such as righteous war to restore moral order (China) and *dharmayuddha*, or just war to punish the unjust (India).

The vital difference is that China's strategic culture was constantly debated down the centuries. Both Sun Tzu and Kautilya, while systematically exploring the taxonomy of strategy, the mechanics of wars and the architecture of peace, considered the ideas and practices of the earlier epochs. Kautilya particularly, makes repeated references to these – either in terms of affirmation or repudiation. Their genius lay in absorbing the essence of the past and formulating in innovative and unique fashion the fundamentals of war and peace. Both were sage-like personalities. Sun Tzu had practical experience of war.

On the other hand, Kautilya learnt about war by constant observation and analysis. However, in popular perception, the latter is more renowned for his exhaustive dilations on management of the state, and on foreign policy. His contribution to the study of war, which is equally outstanding, has, for inexplicable reasons, not been adequately studied or understood.

One of Sun Tzu's most famous aphorisms is, "*To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill.*" Rather than a call for peace, Sun Tzu recognized the inherent risk of armies entangled in a protracted war that depresses a soldier's will power, drains the state's resources, and presents third party states with an opportunity to take advantage of your weakness. According to Sun Tzu, even if a state can win many battles and master tactics, if it engages in protracted warfare, it will not benefit. To win with a minimal use of force, The Art of War encourages Generals to use deception to shape circumstances so that they can win the war before the first battle.

In The Art of War, Sun Tzu describes four offensive tactics in order of effectiveness. The first tactic is to attack the enemy's strategy, the second is to disrupt an enemy's alliances, the next is to attack the enemy's Army, and the least preferred is to attack the enemy's cities. In Sun Tzu's list, the two most effective strategic choices do not depend on the use of force, but instead rely on adroit diplomacy and deception. Sun Tzu's higher order tactics require a deep knowledge of both the enemy's and one's own capabilities. He makes the vital importance of such knowledge clear, warning



that *“if ignorant both of your enemy and of yourself, you are certain in every battle to be in peril.”*

Sun Tzu also puts high value on the gathering of intelligence and the use of spies. In fact, he devotes the whole of his last chapter to the use of secret agents, and delineates a variety of agents by purpose and origin. For example, some agents are to be used as traditional spies who gather information and report to the General, inside agents who are enemy officials, enemy spies who are bribed into becoming double agents, and expendable agents who are given false information to disclose to the enemy after being captured. With knowledge of the enemy, and knowledge of one’s own capabilities, the General and the sovereign can make plans carefully and shape the enemy’s perceptions. In this way, secret agents are vital, and akin to an Army’s eyes and ears.

Sun Tzu clearly puts deception above the use of force in warfare, but *The Art of War* also includes instructions about the best manner to fight a war. Sun Tzu advocates an indirect form of warfare that is dependent on maneuver rather than focusing on attacking and destroying the enemy’s Army, like Clausewitz advocates. Such a strategy depends on restraint and timing, shaping the situation so that when the enemy makes a mistake or presents a weakness, it is possible to strike so that the battle is won before it starts. Even when engaged in fighting, the actual outcome depends on the use of deception and psychological factors. In this way, it is more important to attack an enemy’s will than to win a tactical battle. Sun Tzu describes this as the moral factor, and advises to *“avoid the enemy when his spirit is keen and attack him when it is sluggish and his soldiers homesick.”* As a corollary to this point, it is necessary to maintain the morale of your own troops through fair treatment and proper administration of rewards and punishments to maintain loyalty. The attention to moral factors, deception, timing, and diplomacy that are necessary to preserve the state and to prevent a prolonged war that is costly and enervating, and threatens state survival, is the core of Sun Tzu’s strategic thought.

Kautilya strongly believed that the economy of a state keeps it running. The government and the Army cannot be effective if the treasury is decrepit. *“Spiritual good and sensual pleasures depend on material well-being.”* In other words, the well-being of the state and its people will never happen if the economy is poor. *“All undertakings are dependent first on the treasury.”* Every good in political life – peace,

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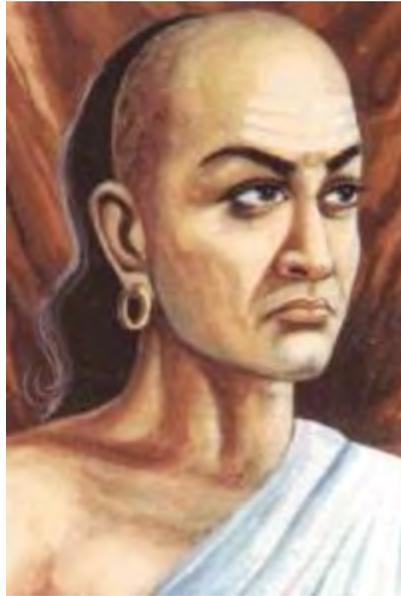


conquest, order, the correct social and class structure – depends on the state acquiring wealth and using it wisely. He believed that the king can be happy only if his people are happy and, *“therefore, being ever active, the king should carry out the management of material well-being.”*

An analysis of most insurgencies in the world shows that Kautilya was accurate in his belief that the greatest cause of insurgencies is societal discontent and advocates that the state should attach great importance to the well-being of the people for, if they become impoverished, they become greedy and rebellious. He also averred that *“an internal rebellion is more dangerous than an external threat because it is like nurturing a viper in one’s bosom.”* Rebellions (insurgencies) were classified based on the affected region and on who their sponsors were.

The similarities in the methods used today and those espoused by Kautilya are salient. In the Kautilyan system, the Generals and their chief, the *Senapati*, were privileged elite. In fact, the *Senapati* was paid the highest salary, at the same scale as the five other high categories of officials, the priests, and the crown prince. This was to dissuade him, among other things, from acts of treachery. However, the king ruled with the help of councilors, ministers and other officials down to the village level. These high civilian officials, particularly the Chancellor, controlled the purse-strings and conducted the affairs of the state. And a tight-knit intelligence system kept a watch over their conduct. In this sense, the military was subordinate to the civil authority. The Arthashastra is not only concerned about making conquests, it also discusses the strategies and tactics for the prevention of conquest by others. Thus, a large portion of the book is devoted to statecraft and administration of the state. But, whether in conquering others or in preventing conquest, the Arthashastra takes conflictual relationships between states as the norm. Therefore, management of these occupies an important place in Kautilya’s thinking.

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Kautilya

Despite the great similarities between the ideas of Sun Tzu and Kautilya, there remains one major difference which has to do with the different social systems of India and China.

Sun Tzu's idea was that subjugating the enemy's Army without fighting is the true pinnacle of excellence. Such a doctrine would have been inconceivable for Kautilya because that would have devalued the entire hereditary warrior *varna*. For them, it was a disgrace to die anywhere except on the battlefield. A world without war was, even theoretically, inconceivable to Kautilya. In India, a professional warrior class (*Kshatriyas*) was institutionalized as part of the four-fold caste system. They were looked upon as a distinct group of people to lead the nation at war, although the Army itself was conscripted from the merchant and peasant classes.

Ancient China did not have a professional warrior class, although men of nobility led the Army. Kautilya argued that national interest should override moral principles since the moral order depends upon the continued existence of the state. Yet, Kautilya never advocated the conquest of lands outside of South Asia. This line of thought is still visible in modern Indian foreign policy. India has never taken the initiative to invade a foreign country, and it has never shown interest in areas beyond

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South Asia. Kautilya warns against calamities which adversely affect the functioning of the Army which include not giving due honor, insufficient salaries and emoluments, low morale, etc. He makes an incisive observation that an unhonored Army, an unpaid Army, or an exhausted Army will fight if honored, paid and allowed to relax but a dishonored Army with resentment in its heart will not do so.

There are important similarities between Sun Tzu and Kautilya in delineating strategic and tactical issues relating to war and peace. The principles laid down by them remain, though the march of technology has rendered specific issues and battle formations outdated. However, their approach to issues of war and peace, intelligence and foreign policy has contemporary relevance. Both despised unbridled aggrandizement without thought or unplanned adventurist offensives. Both considered ensuring the safety of the state and the welfare of its people as the ultimate objective. If a state could achieve its objectives without war, that should be the most preferred course, said Sun Tzu. He observed: *“Attaining one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the pinnacle of excellence. Subjugating the enemy’s army without fighting is the true pinnacle of excellence”*. Likewise, Kautilya said: *“An archer letting off an arrow may or may not kill a single man, but a wise man using his intellect can kill, even reaching unto the very womb”*. Kautilya was not a war-monger but a calculative and cautious statesman. If the end could be achieved by non-military methods, even by methods of intrigue, duplicity and fraud, he would not advocate an armed conflict.

Sun Tzu’s ideas have seen some criticism by Chinese Communist Military Generals, who waged a *“protracted war”* and defeated their Nationalist rivals and established the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. The main observation is that the advice of not fighting protracted wars may have been valid in Sun Tzu’s time when states were small, and populations and resources limited. In fact, even before the *“war of liberation”*, there were wars of longer duration in China. In the contemporary context, it may be pointed out that the enemy also has a vote in the prosecution of a war and the conflict termination goals may not be easily achieved. Hence, the proposition that the duration of the war is determined by resources, morale, and other factors, both internal and external, remains a valid ancient truism.

Many scholars have addressed the concept of strategic culture in India: George Tanham touched off the debate, with the hypothesis that India has not had a strategic

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thinker nor a tradition of strategic thought. Others have argued that India possessed a strategic culture, though it was subsumed by foreign rule over several centuries. The term strategy has traditionally been used to refer to the way that military power is used by governments in the pursuit of their interests.

How are these interests shaped? A strategic culture approach tackles this question by considering the relevance of the cultural context in influencing strategic preferences. Moreover, strategic culture does not merely deal with the traditions of using military power but also diplomacy, foreign policy, internal/external threats, international relations, etc. to protect and promote national interest to achieve political, economic, military, national and international goals.

Scholars disagree over what culture is, how it can be identified and what it does. This has obvious implications for any attempt to develop a concept of strategic culture. Moreover, they also disagree over the extent to which culture plays a role in shaping the concept of strategic culture. However, the fact remains that culture is an inherent (strong) factor that influences policy-makers in shaping national strategy, though its effectiveness may differ from nation to nation and situation to situation, depending upon their strategic environment.

Unlike many other contemporary Indian thinkers who focused on religion and thought of heavenly realms, Kautilya had his feet firmly planted on the ground and thought about the ways to make a country rich and powerful. The Arthashastra is one of the first books by any Indian author to highlight the importance of the military in the smooth functioning of the state. In other words, he was a realist who understood the power of a strong standing military in sending out a clear signal to other countries and its contribution to bolstering national pride. Elements of a calculated realism, as well as idealism, are found in both traditions. Classic Indian texts like the Arthashastra and Mahabharata, paint an even more vivid picture of a zero-sum world of conquest than Chinese texts such as The Art of War. The classical traditions of both countries must also share space in today's leadership curricula with many modern (including Western) works on strategy and politics. References to ancient texts are, thus, not sufficient grounds to differentiate expectations about modern Chinese or Indian strategic preferences or behavior. In India, there has been no tradition of using, as a constituent of strategic culture, a sense of history, of a recording of it, evaluating and assessing it, and then utilizing it as an input in



decision-making. This can be variously explained: a lack of unity, there being no one India; that the Indian tradition is more oral; that religious texts, in any event, have always had greater merit. No matter what the causes, the consequence of this absence (of a sense of history) has significantly affected the development of India's strategic thought. History is an integral part of military science but, while ancient Indian texts on every conceivable subject abound, there is none, other than Kautilya, that has detailed the military science of India. There is another factor of geography, of a sense of territory. Indian nationhood being largely cultural and civilizational, and Indians being supremely content with what was theirs, feared no loss of it, for it – the civilizational – was as unconquerable as the spirit. Thus, both were absent: a territorial consciousness, and a strategic sense about the protection of the territory of residence.

Neither China nor India has any record of international conquest, but each has a significant record of using force on its periphery, often in disputed border regions. China's recent escalatory behavior in the East and South China Seas has raised the risk of an armed clash there. Both Beijing and New Delhi may become more willing to contemplate the use of force as they redefine their interests in line with growing relative power. The Arthashastra is testimony to the constant and unchanging nature of war. Studies of military history show that certain features of conflict and warfare constantly recur; that relationships between type of action and success often remain the same; that certain circumstances and moments have, time and time again, proved decisive. The past being a prologue, underscores the relevance and significance of studies of military history such as propagated by the Arthashastra. It also underscores an ancient verity regarding the relationship of a state and its society: that nothing can be crushed by a blow from without until it is ready to perish from decay within.

A significant shortcoming of Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* is that it does not discuss the nature of war. Another dichotomy in his work can be observed when he writes: *"Regard your soldiers as your children", and "Command them with civility but keep them under control by iron discipline."* It seems that he was propagating concern for soldiers and attention to discipline in the Army. But he went so far as to maintain that the commander *"should be capable of keeping his officers and men in ignorance of his plans . . . He drives his men now in one direction, now another, like a shepherd*



driving a flock of sheep, and none knows where he is going ... The business of a General is to kick away the ladder behind soldiers when they have climbed up a height.” These can be said to be reactionary ideas of looking down upon one’s men.

The second shortcoming in Sun Tzu’s work is that he has overemphasized the function of Generals. He stated: *“The General who understands how to employ troops is the minister of the people’s fate and arbiter of the nation’s destiny.”* Related to this was another view of his: *“There are occasions when the commands of the sovereign need not be obeyed.”* There have been quite a few Generals who, affected by this view, used it as a pretext for not obeying orders from the supreme command. It causes irremediable damage to the nation if the long-term and overall interests of the state are given up for the sake of local interests in the battlefield. It is argued that in ancient times, communications were poor and difficult and situations at the front changed quickly, so commanders had to act arbitrarily to cope with the changing situation.

Tenable as the argument might be, the situation today has greatly changed. Nowadays, with the help of telecommunication, television and satellites, the supreme command has every small change in the battlefield at its fingertips. It is, therefore, entirely able to readjust its deployment or tactics in accordance with the new situation. A commander is in no way allowed to disobey orders from the supreme command for local interest. A common rule of war, Sun Tzu’s principle *“there are occasions when the commands of the sovereign need not be obeyed”* is considered controversial. Some of Sun Tzu’s principles are too rigid and mechanical. For example: *“Do not thwart an Army which is returning homewards. One must leave a way of escape to a surrounded enemy, and do not press a desperate enemy too hard.”*

These principles are contradictory to many others in The Art of War itself. For instance, consider his advice to *“... avoid the enemy when its spirit is keen and attack it when it is sluggish and the soldiers are homesick”*. It is just the opposite of the former. The latter principle is, perhaps, the correct one. Sun Tzu also suggested surrounding an enemy when you are ten to his one. This is the idea of a *“war of annihilation”*, which is certainly correct. Of course, you should not leave a way of escape to the enemy if you surround him. Therefore, his doctrine to *“not press a desperate enemy too hard”* is more complex than stated.

When Chanakya wrote the Arthashastra, he was positing from a position of strength – an empire he had helped to create. This obviously gave a certain amount of



certitude to his pronouncements. Chanakya assumed that he lived in a world of foreign relations in which one either conquered or suffered conquest. He did not say to himself, *'Prepare for war, but hope for peace,'* but instead, *'Prepare for war, and plan to conquer.'* Diplomacy was just another weapon used in the prolonged warfare that was always either occurring or being planned for. Chanakya never advocated a *"balance of power"* theory: in the 20th century, international relations theorists have defended the doctrine of the balance of power, because equally armed nations will supposedly deter each other, and, therefore, no war will result. One does find this argument occasionally in Kautilya: *"In case the gains [of two allies of equal strength] are equal, there should be peace; if unequal, fight,"* or, *"The conqueror should march if superior in strength, otherwise stay quiet"*. Chanakya wanted his *vijigisu* to arm the nation to find or create a weakness in the enemy and conquer it. Sun Tzu has attached primary importance to defeating the enemy's strategy, followed by diplomacy to break his alliances, before actually using the Army. In other words, *"knowledge"* of the adversary's thinking and plans enables a more effective use of power which is augmented by destroying his alliance systems. Moreover, Sun Tzu also believed that the economics of war has both short-term and long-term implications for the welfare of the king. Finally, what the Chinese refer to as *ch'i* is the individual and collective psychological condition to promote the cause of victory.

Kautilya and Sun Tzu formulated their power theories in an amazingly similar fashion. They are valid even in the contemporary context of war and peace and safeguarding of national security, in general. Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* contains many doctrines, principles and rules that are still of practical and universal significance. The work is an asset for military professionals and will remain so in the future. He is pithy and epigrammatic and each principle of his could be expanded into a detailed statement. On the other hand, Kautilya is meticulous in his details and has woven a tapestry of thoughts. Sun Tzu's work has a disciplined elegance, while Kautilya's treatise has solid details. Sun Tzu was a thinking General who knew the multifaceted compulsions of a state, while Kautilya was an all-pervasive strategist who understood the components and compulsions of war. Their teachings, though representative of the socio-political milieu of their times and rooted in their geographical environment, still have plenty to offer to the practitioners of military art and national security, in general, around the world. *The Art of War* and the *Arthashastra* are testimony to the constant and unchanging nature of war. Studies of

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military history show that certain features of conflict and warfare constantly recur; that relationships between type of action and success often remain the same; that certain circumstances and moments have, time and time again, proved decisive. Their texts underscore the relevance and significance of ancient wisdom. They also emphasize an ancient verity about the relationship of a state and its society – that nothing can be crushed by a blow from without until it is ready to perish from decay within. There is need for a critical investigation of the Arthashastra with an objective of making it relevant to today's conditions. It would bring out the true worth of the Arthashastra and situate it in the body of Indian strategic thought.



In an increasingly complex world, the missions of the armed forces are more diverse and complex than ever before. The challenges they face today constitute myriad problems such as proxy war, insurgency, terrorism and unresolved border issues. However, the march of time has not changed the fundamentals of warfare. In times of peace and tension, the armed forces are a powerful instrument of the nation's foreign policy. In times of crisis and conflict, they are the foremost expression of the nation's will and intent. Thus, the expectations of a nation from its military are



diverse and wide-ranging.

Modern warfare encompasses military, political, economic and diplomatic aspects. Warfare continues to be based on principles and precepts to be followed and applied. These verities are eternal. Modern warfare is differentiated from its earlier forms by the expansion of technology. War is a constituent element of the history of mankind. Control of the armed forces rests with the state, which can limit the use of the military when it manages violence. The margin of superiority is generally assumed to determine the degree to which violence can be limited. It is also accepted that the greater the degree to which a margin of superiority is predominant, the less is the likelihood of it being challenged through war. If there is a challenge, the greater the margin of superiority, the more quickly can the challenge, in theory, be suppressed and the less sustained the violence would be.

The rationale for strong armed forces is, thus, axiomatic. Kautilya understood this and enunciated many military strategies. He does not make much distinction between military strategy and statecraft as he believed that warfare is an extension, and an integral part, of statecraft. War is fundamentally a human endeavor. It is a clash of wills involving political leaders, soldiers, and civilian populations of opposing states and non-state actors. In today's world, the challenges of global security are no different from those that vexed the Mauryan Empire in 300 BCE. A cogent and dispassionate analysis of the Arthashastra reveals stark similarities between the problems faced by Kautilya's ideal state and the modern scourge of terrorism and insurgencies. Present-day warfare adheres to ancient patterns. The truism that "*those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it*" applies in military affairs. If a society seeks to live in peace, it should be prepared for war; a unilateral desire for peace cannot ensure peace.



From the Arthashastra to Current Regimes

The advices of Chanakya are dated; they proved successful for a few decades –and then the Mauryan Empire collapsed. Many more political philosophers and strategists emerged along the centuries with highly variable successes, and even rarer achievements. In French, the proverb “*Les conseillers ne sont pas les payeurs*” is poorly translated as “*advice is cheap*”; in fact, the French is more relevant: to be a successful adviser you need to have a treasure trove. This does happen, but rarely lasts longer than a snowflake on a warm day.

Kautilya’s quotes remain famous and are widely disseminated; they too fly and die. In fact, Niccolò Machiavelli, through his many publications (most posthumous) is probably more influential these days than the Arthashastra; India being a last bastion that cites Kautilya, but –as mentioned above- without any success.

The major difference between the 3rd century BCE and our 21st one is the speed of transformation of the nature of Power. Today, for example, a few teenage nerdy hackers can (and do) change the result of a national election in an adversarial nation. The exponentially growing mass of data, available at a click by whoever knows the basic access algorithms, make our era a permanent mutant. The only constant is human nature, with a proliferation of billionaire *Dr. Strangeloves*. The core preoccupation and concern of both Chanakya and Machiavelli was the good of the masses; both stressed the vital importance of happiness percolating down to the paupers, together with their education and involvement that guaranteed the stability of the State. In the so-called *Western democracies*, the power is harpooned by the puppeteers who essentially buy every level of the process by owning the required trove of data and algorithms. The tools are not anymore, the bow and the arrow, the catapult or the cannonball, the machinegun or the tank; not even the atomic or hydrogen bomb –so far.

Who owns these billions owns (or controls) the media with their manipulative power –ever increasing, thanks to progress in cognitive, emotional, social, and neurosciences.

The other revolution is the Artificial Intelligence one. In today’s news, one can read: Google is about to open an AI research center in Beijing. Fei-Fei Li, chief scientist at

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Google's cloud unit, will lead the new center. She'll try to lure top-notch AI researchers from China, which has made artificial intelligence a national priority. Google faces fierce competition from Alibaba, Tencent, and other Chinese tech firms. Not to mention the leadership of the military with DARPA (Defense Advanced research Projects Agency) under the direction of Arati Prabhakar.

Besides DARPA, homologues in China, Russia, even Brazil and Japan are smitten with Artificial Intelligence, hi-tech, midget drones, novel materials, infectious plagues, and many mass-destructive (claimed being *carefully targeted*) weapons.

The results will always depend on human decisions. History is an infinite repetition of failures by the "conquerors", from the Pharaohs of the Middle- and Late-Dynasties, to Salah Ad-Din, Timur (Tamerlane), Napoleon, Adolf Hitler or even William C. Westmoreland. They all miserably failed; some earlier, some later –always at a monstrous cost in human lives and destructions of whole cultures. They should have studied Sun Tzu, Thucydides, or Darius.

We (definitely) live in interesting times.





Acknowledgements

The click that started my research –resulting in this laborious essay- was an email from a friend in France, forwarding an anti-Macron tract that quoted the Arthashastra. The wisdom of Kautilya was used as a mediocre assault on the current French president policies. That triggered a search, discoveries, major interest mixed with respect and admiration, and eventually a very arbitrary selection of sources (most quoted *verbatim*) that are listed in the References.

Kishor Chandran, of the Global Chef Academy At-Sunrice, in Singapore, applauded my decision, and provided most useful comments. And Yves P. Huin is the final editor and skilled webmaster.

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