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Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra* on War and Diplomacy in Ancient India

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Abstract

Kautilya was the key adviser to the Indian king Chandragupta Maurya (c. 317–293 B.C.E.), who first united the Indian subcontinent in empire. Written about 300 B.C.E., Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra* was a science of politics intended to teach a wise king how to govern. In this work, Kautilya offers wide-ranging and truly fascinating discussions on war and diplomacy, including his wish to have his king become a world conqueror, his analysis of which kingdoms are natural allies and which are inevitable enemies, his willingness to make treaties he knew he would break, his doctrine of silent war or a war of assassination against an unsuspecting king, his approval of secret agents who killed enemy leaders and sowed discord among them, his view of women as weapons of war, his use of religion and superstition to bolster his troops and demoralize enemy soldiers, the spread of disinformation, and his humane treatment of conquered soldiers and subjects.

KAUTILYA's *Arthaśāstra* was one of the greatest political books of the ancient world. Max Weber recognized this. "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 *Arthaśāstra* 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."[1]

1. Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," in *Weber: Selections in Translation,* ed. W. G. Runciman, trans. Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 212–25, see 220.

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Although Kautilya proposed an elaborate welfare state in domestic politics, something that has been called a socialized monarchy,[2] he proved willing to defend the general good of this monarchy with harsh measures. A number of authors have explored these domestic policies, but very few scholars have focused on Kautilya's discussions of war and diplomacy. And yet, his analyses are fascinating and far-reaching, such as his wish to have his king become a world conqueror, his evaluation of which kingdoms are natural allies and which are inevitable enemies, his willingness to make treaties that he knew he would break, his doctrine of silent war or a war of assassination and contrived revolt against an unsuspecting king, his approval of secret agents who killed enemy leaders and sowed discord among them, his view of women as weapons of war, his use of religion and superstition to bolster his troops and demoralize enemy soldiers, his employment of the spread of disinformation, and his humane treatment of conquered soldiers and subjects.

Historical Background

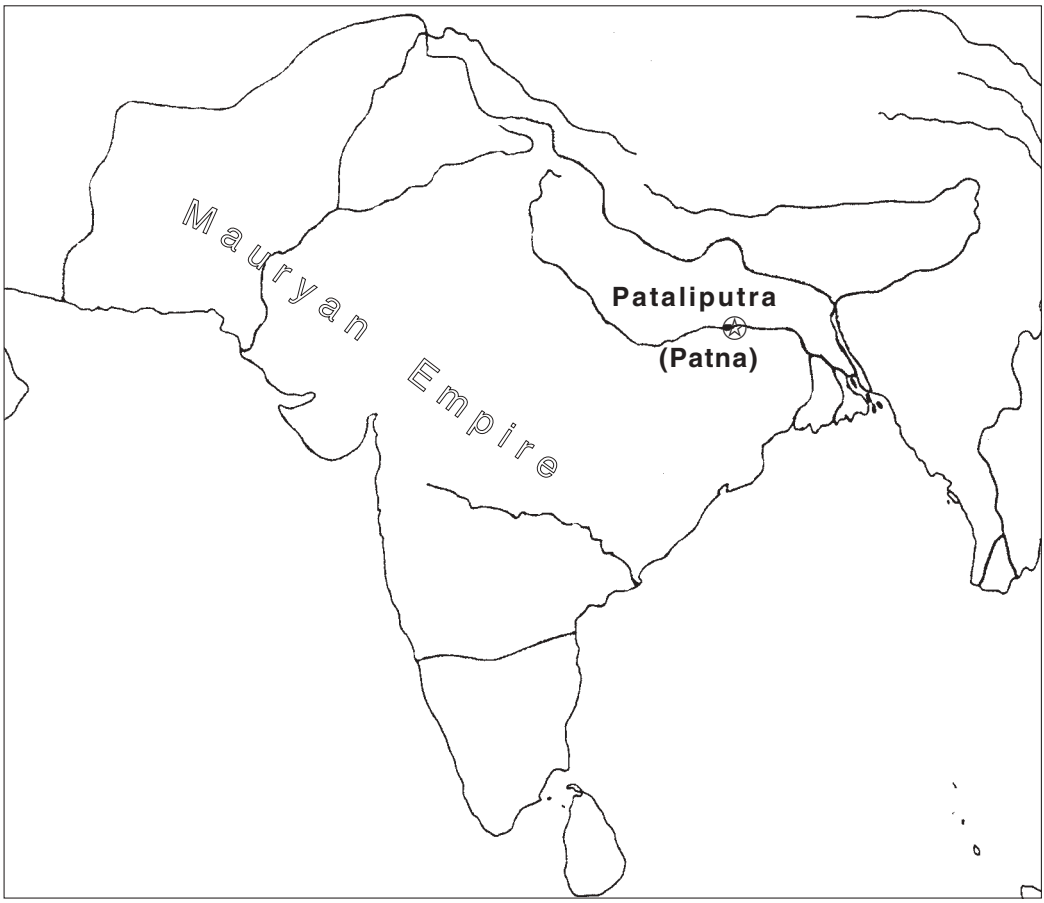
Kautilya was the key adviser to—and the genius of the strategy undertaken by—the Indian king Chandragupta Maurya (c. 317–293 B.C.E.), who defeated the Nanda kings (several related kings trying unsuccessfully to rule India together), stopped the advance of Alexander the Great's successors, and first united most of the Indian subcontinent in empire. Kautilya—sometimes called chancellor or prime minister to Chandragupta, something like a Bismarck[3]—composed his *Arthaśāstra,* or "science of politics," to show a wise king how to defeat his enemies and rule on behalf of the general good. He was not modest in his claims as to how much he helped Chandragupta, noting "This science has been composed by him [Kautilya], who . . . quickly regenerated the science and the weapon and [conquered] the earth that was under control of the Nanda kings."[4]

Just after Alexander's death in 323 B.C.E., Chandragupta and Kautilya began their conquest of India by stopping the Greek invaders. In this effort they assassinated two Greek governors, Nicanor and Philip, a strategy to keep in mind when I later examine Kautilya's approval of

2. Stanley Wolpert, *A New History of India,* 2d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 60.

3. Romila Thapar, *Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1978), 12.

4. Kautilya, *The Arthaśāstra,* 2d ed., ed. and trans. R. P. Kangle, Part II of *The Kautilīya Arthaśāstra* (Delhi: Motilal Banardisass, 1992), book 15, chapter 1, line 73, page 516; hereafter, 15.1.73: 516. In quotations from the Kangle translation of *The Arthaśāstra,* parentheses indicate insertions by the translator, and brackets indicate insertions by the author.



Mauryan Empire at its greatest extent in the reign of Ashoka, middle third century B.C.E.

assassination. "The assassinations of the Greek governors," wrote Radha Kumud Mookerji, "are not to be looked upon as mere accidents."[5] By taking much of western India (the Punjab and the Sindh) from the Greeks and concluding a treaty with Seleucus (Alexander the Great's Greek heir to western India), Chandragupta and Kautilya succeeded in bringing together almost all of the Indian subcontinent. As a result, Chandragupta

5. Radha Kumud Mookerji, *Chandragupta Maurya and His Times,* 4th ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988 [1966]), 31, 28–33.

was, and is now, considered the first unifier of India and the first genuine emperor or king of India.[6]

The Mauryan Empire established by Chandragupta and continued by his son Bindusara (c. 293–268 B.C.E.)—whom Kautilya also advised—and by his grandson Ashoka (c. 268–232 B.C.E.) was, and still is, astonishing. With a population of about fifty million people, the Mauryan Empire was larger than the Mughal Empire two thousand years later and even larger than the British Empire in India, extending in fact all the way to the border of Persia and from Afghanistan to Bengal.[7] (The map on the previous page shows the extent of the Mauryan Empire under Ashoka.) Pliny—borrowing from Megasthenes, the ambassador of Seleucus to Chandragupta—wrote that Chandragupta's army totaled about six hundred thousand infantry, thirty thousand calvary, eight thousand chariots, and nine thousand elephants.[8] Chandragupta's capital was Pataliputra (near modern Patna in northeast India, just below Nepal), which he apparently seized from the Nandas sometime between 324 and 322 B.C.E. Pataliputra was probably the largest city in the world at that time, a city eight miles long and a mile and one-half wide, with 570 towers and sixty-four gates, all surrounded by a moat six hundred feet wide and forty-five feet deep. Also protecting the city were wooden walls—stone was very scarce—with slits to be used by archers.[9] Pataliputra "was about twice as large as Rome under Emperor Marcus Aurelius."[10]

Chandragupta Maurya consolidated an empire and passed it down intact to his son Bindusara, about whom we know little, and to his grandson Ashoka. Some argue that the extreme measures that we will see Kautilya advocate, and some of which Chandragupta surely must have employed, were necessary to bring order and the rule of law out of chaos,[11] making possible the emergence of Ashoka, who was widely regarded as one of the finest kings in world history. M. V. Krishna Rao contends, "As a result of the progressive secularisation of society due to the innovations contemplated by [the *Arthaśāstra*] and the administra-

6. Arun Bhattacharjee, *History of Ancient India* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1979), 143–48, 173; Purushottam Lal Bhargava, *Chandragupta Maurya: A Gem of Indian History,* 2d rev. ed. (New Delhi: D. K. Printworld, 1996), 114.

7. Wolpert, *A New History of India,* 59; Mookerji, *Chandragupta Maurya and His Times,* 2; Bhattacharjee, *History of Ancient India,* 173.

8. Wolpert, *A New History of India,* 59; Romila Thapar, *A History of India* (Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books, 1966), 79.

9. Wolpert, *A New History of India,* 58; H. C. Raychaudhuri, "Chandragupta and Bindusara," in K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, ed., *Age of the Nandas and Mauryas,* 2d ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1996 [1967]), 132–70, see 158; A. L. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India,* 2d rev. ed. (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1963), 350.

10. Hermann Kulke and Dietmar Rothermund, *A History of India* (New Delhi: Rupa and Co., 1991), 60.

11. Bhargava, *Chandragupta Maurya,* 102.

tion of Chandragupta, the country was prepared for the reception of the great moral transformation ushered in by Aṡōka and his administration."[12] K. A. Nilakanta Sastri has written, in a fairly typical statement, "The reign of Aṡōka forms the brightest page in the history of India."[13]

After witnessing the suffering that occurred during his invasion of the kingdom of Kalinga, Ashoka turned toward Buddhism and nonviolence. He declared that in the future he would conquer only by morality or by *dhamma*—which is a Prakrit word, often replaced by the more familiar Sanskrit word *dharma*—a word meaning right conduct, duty, religion, law, social justice, and responsibility.[14] *Dhamma,* or *dharma,* was Ashoka's all-encompassing principle. In his First Pillar Edict, he announced, "For this is my principle: to protect through *Dhamma,* to administer affairs according to *Dhamma,* to please the people with *Dhamma,* to guard the empire with *Dhamma*."[15]

What specific reforms did Ashoka make in his wish to conquer the world by morality or *dharma*? These included tolerance and respect for others, even those with different religions and backgrounds, or, as the Twelfth Rock Edict states, "other sects ought to be duly honoured in every case";[16] love of the family; compassion, which includes respect for others, kindness even toward slaves and prisoners, "reverence toward elders, and gentleness to animals";[17] honesty; liberality toward relatives, friends, and neighbors; moderation and self-control, or as the Seventh Rock Edict says, "but even one who practises great liberality but does not possess self-control, purity of mind, gratitude, and firm devotion, is very mean";[18] a system of social welfare, including medical centers for human beings and animals, the construction of roads for good communication, along with the digging of wells and the planting of trees for shade, and so on, all policies that he thought best carried out by the centralized administration of government;[19] an unusual concern for the poor in rural areas, a concern that led him to tour the countryside frequently;[20]

12. M. V. Krishna Rao, *Studies in Kautilya,* 2d ed. (New Delhi: Munshi Ram Manohar Lal, 1958), 232.

13. K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, "Aśōka and His Successors," in Sastri, *Age of the Nandas and Mauryas,* 202–48, see 202.

14. V. R. Ramachandra Dikshitar, *The Mauryan Polity* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1993 [1932]), 240–59; John W. Spellman, *Political Theory of Ancient India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), 98; Julius Lipner, *Hindus: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (London: Routledge, 1994), 83–88.

15. Romila Thapar, *Aśōka and the Decline of the Mauryas* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 174.

16. Sastri, "Aśōka and His Successors," 235.

17. Thapar, *Aśōka and the Decline of the Mauryas,* 162.

18. Sastri, "Aśōka and His Successors," 235.

19. Thapar, *Aśōka and the Decline of the Mauryas,* 70, 152, 180, 158.

20. Ibid., 180–81.

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and *ahimsa* or nonviolence, which prohibited both the slaughter and sacrifice of animals.[21] According to V. R. R. Dikshitar, in the Sixth Rock Edict Ashoka said he was promoting *dharma* for "the common good of the world," and in the Tenth Rock Edict, Ashoka stated plainly that he put forth the doctrine of *dharma* for "happiness in the next world."[22]

Many Indian historians are proud to embrace Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra* as a practical book of rugged political realism—instead of the impotent idealism of, say, Plato—that actually shaped history. D. D. Kosambi notes, "The Greeks make excellent reading; the Indian treatise [*Arthaśāstra*] worked infinitely better in practice for its own time and place."[23] Ram Sharan Sharma maintains, "Kautilya furnishes us as full and complete [a] definition of the state as was possible in ancient times. The Greek thinkers hardly discuss the constituent elements of the state."[24]

Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra* is thus a book of political realism, a book analyzing how the political world does work and not very often stating how it ought to work, a book that frequently discloses to a king what calculating and sometimes brutal measures he must carry out to preserve the state and the common good. One important question lurks in discussions of Kautilya. Were the harsh actions he often recommended necessary for the common good of India? Did Chandragupta and Bindusara have to act in a violent and sometimes brutal fashion to defend India, bring order, and establish unity?[25] With the old order crumbling, with the Nanda kings having proved cruel and inept, with enemies on India's borders, and with the threat of anarchy within, were not Kautilya's harsh measures necessary and have not his critics failed "to note the nature of the times in which he lived"?[26] In defense of Chandragupta and Kautilya, Bhargava says, "all kinds of means might have been considered necessary to restore peace with honor."[27] Put more bluntly, did India need the harsh measures of Kautilya the realist in order to enjoy the luxury of Ashoka the idealist?

21. Sastri, "Aśōka and His Successors," 237.

22. Dikshitar, *The Mauryan Polity,* 258.

23. D. D. Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India* (Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1994 [1964]), 141.

24. Ram Sharan Sharma, *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India,* 3d rev. ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991), 38.

25. Romila Thapar, *The Mauryas Revisited* (Calcutta: K. P. Bagchi and Company, 1987), 6; Mookerji, *Chandragupta Maurya and His Times,* 51, 59.

26. Bhasker Anand Saletore, *Ancient Indian Political Thought and Institutions* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1963), 51.

27. Bhargava, *Chandragupta Maurya,* 102.

Kautilya and His "Science of Politics"

R. P. Kangle translates the word *arthaśāstra* as "science of politics,"[28] a treatise to help a king in "the acquisition and protection of the earth."[29] Others translate *arthaśāstra* in slightly different ways: A. L. Basham says it is a "treatise on polity,"[30] Kosambi emphasizes the economic importance of the word in calling it a "science of material gain,"[31] and G. P. Singh labels it a "science of polity."[32] I happen to prefer to translate *arthaśāstra* as a "science of political economy," but however one translates the word, Kautilya claimed to be putting forth what Heinrich Zimmer rightly calls "timeless laws of politics, economy, diplomacy, and war."[33]

Because he was offering his readers a science with which they could master the world, Kautilya believed that having a passive stance toward the world—for example, trusting in fate or relying on superstition—was outlandish. "One trusting in fate," noted Kautilya, "being devoid of human endeavor, perishes."[34] His philosophy called for action, not resignation: "The object slips away from the foolish person, who continuously consults the stars; . . . what will the stars do?"[35] In urging the king to rely on science and not the precepts of religion, Kautilya separated political thought from religious speculation.[36]

Like Thomas Hobbes, Kautilya believed the goal of science was power. His statements "Power is (possession of) strength" and "strength changes the mind"[37] show that Kautilya sought the power to control not only outward behavior, but also the thoughts of one's subjects and enemies. Probably his science could not promise all of that, but the power offered by this science was extensive: "An arrow, discharged by an archer, may kill one person or may not kill (even one); but intellect operated by a wise man would kill even children in the womb."[38] Having as his first and primary goal to "destroy the enemies and protect his own

28. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 1.1.1: 1, and 7.18.43: 384.
29. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 1.1.1: 1.
30. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India,* 51.
31. Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India,* 14.
32. G. P. Singh, *Political Thought in Ancient India* (New Delhi: D. K. Printworld, 1993), 7.
33. Heinrich Zimmer, *Philosophies of India* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967), 36.
34. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 7.11.34: 358.
35. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 9.4.26: 419.
36. Sharma, *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India,* 265–66.
37. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 6.2.31: 319, and 7.14.2: 366.
38. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 10.6.51: 453.

people,"[39] the king could certainly accomplish this with Kautilya's science; in fact, "he, who is well-versed in the science of politics, . . . plays, as he pleases, with kings tied by the chain of his intellect."[40] Beyond protecting the kingdom, the king who uses Kautilya's science can bring to himself and his subjects the three goods of life—"material gain, spiritual good and pleasures."[41] Wealth is the key to raising successful armies and having a peaceful and just kingdom, and Kautilya's political science brings wealth: "The source of the livelihood of men is wealth, in other words, the earth inhabited by men. The science which is the means of the attainment and protection of that earth is the Science of Politics."[42] Put another way, Kautilya's book is the greatest weapon a king can have, and political science is more important than—or at least brings about—wealth, armies, and conquests.

In the world of international politics, it is only "natural" that nations interact with each other through "dissension and force."[43] A political realist typically argues that there will always be conflict in international relations and, in effect, rule by the strongest. Kautilya was writing about 300 B.C.E., a century after Thucydides composed his *History of the Peloponnesian War* and several decades after the Sophists Callicles and Thrasymachus said to Plato that rule by the stronger was "natural." Kautilya, in the boldest of his promises, claimed that one who knows his science of politics can conquer the world, that "one possessed of personal qualities, though ruling over a small territory . . . conversant with (the science of) politics, does conquer the entire earth, never loses."[44] There is no modesty here. Kautilya's science brings an abundance of wealth and details correct strategies in politics and war. With this science anyone can succeed: "And winning over and purchasing men of energy, those possessed of might, even women, children, lame and blind persons, have conquered the world."[45] Kautilya did not see this conquest as something unjust. A king who carries out his duties, rules according to law, metes out only just punishment, applies the law equally "to his son and his enemy," and protects his subjects not only goes "to heaven" but "would conquer the earth up to its four ends."[46] Whereas Kautilya did not talk of glory, I do believe he was thinking of something we might call "greatness," but this would come only with social justice and the morally correct ordering of the world. The king, "after conquering the world, . . .

39. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 14.3.88: 509.
40. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 7.18.43–44: 384.
41. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 9.7.60: 431.
42. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 15.1.1–2: 512.
43. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 9.7.68–69: 431.
44. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 6.1.18: 317.
45. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 9.1.9: 406.
46. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 3.1.41–43: 195.

should enjoy it divided into *varnas* [classes, sometimes castes] and *āśramas* [Hindu stages of life] in accordance with his own duty."[47]

Kautilya apparently meant by the phrase "conquering the world" something like conquering up to what Indians regarded as the natural borders of India, from the Himalayas all the way south to the Indian Ocean, and from the Arabian Sea to the Bay of Bengal, although Kautilya said, "the region of the sovereign ruler extends northwards between the Himavat and the sea, one thousand *yojanas* [about nine thousand miles!] in extent across."[48] As Kangle puts it, in the Indian tradition, the world conqueror, or *cakravārtin,* was not one who conquered "regions beyond the borders of India."[49] In short, India did not include the land of "barbarians" or *mlecchas,* those outside of Indian culture.[50] *Cakra* means wheel; it is possible that the Indian concept of the world conqueror involved someone who ruled as far as his chariots could roll, without obstacles or opposition.[51] At any rate, surely Dikshitar is correct in saying that this ideal of a world conqueror in ancient India led to an "imperialism" that was "one of the causes of chronic warfare,"[52] although the Mauryan dynasty did bring comparative peace for more than a century. As Narasingha Prosad Sil notes, "For Kautilya a world conquest is the true foundation for world peace."[53]

Diplomacy and Foreign Policy as Extensions of Warfare

As a political realist, Kautilya assumed that every nation acts to maximize power and self-interest, and therefore moral principles or obligations have little or no force in actions among nations. While it is good to have an ally, the alliance will last only as long as it is in that ally's as well as one's own self-interest, because "an ally looks to the securing of his own interests in the event of simultaneity of calamities and in the event of the growth of the enemy's power."[54] Whether one goes to war or

47. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 13.4.62: 491.

48. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 9.1.18: 407.

49. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 407, footnote by Kangle; see also V. R. Ramachandra Dikshitar, *War in Ancient India,* 2d ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987 [1948]), 38–39; Raychaudhuri, "Chandragupta and Bindusara," 156; L. K. Mahapatra, "Kingship in India and Southeast Asia: A Field of Transcultural Interaction," *Journal of the Indian Anthropological Society* 30 (November 1995): 201–15, see 205.

50. Indra, *Ideologies of War and Peace in Ancient India* (Hoshiarpur, India: Vishveshvaranand Institute Publications, 1957), 54–55.

51. Spellman, *Political Theory of Ancient India,* 173.

52. Dikshitar, *War in Ancient India,* 38.

53. Narasingha Prosad Sil, "Political Morality vs. Political Necessity: Kautilya and Machiavelli Revisited," *Journal of Asian History* 19, no. 2, 101–42, see 123.

54. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 8.1.59: 389.

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remains at peace depends entirely upon the self-interest of, or advantage to, one's kingdom: "War and peace are considered solely from the point of view of profit."[55] One keeps an ally not because of good will or moral obligation, but because one is strong and can advance one's own self-interest as well as the self-interest of the ally, for "when one has an army, one's ally remains friendly, or (even) the enemy becomes friendly."[56] Because nations always act in their political, economic, and military self-interest, even times of peace have the potential to turn abruptly into times of war, allies into enemies, and even enemies into allies. Burton Stein notes correctly that Kautilya was describing a foreign policy not of a great empire like that of the Mauryas, but of small warring states in incessant conflict, such as India experienced before the Mauryan empire.[57] Kautilya probably assumed that peaceful empires cannot last forever, and that conflict among smaller states is more common in history.

For Kautilya, this principle of foreign policy—that nations act in their political, economic, and military self-interest—was a timeless truth of his science of politics, or *arthaśāstra.* He did not believe that nations never act in an altruistic manner—indeed, Kautilya advocated humanitarian acts that also coincided with one's self-interest—but he did believe that one must assume, if entrusted with political or military power, that one's neighbors will eventually act in their own interests. Put another way, one would be betraying one's own people if one did not assume a worst-case scenario. A nation forced to rely on the kindness of neighboring states is weak and, unless it can change rapidly, doomed to destruction. This same assumption can be seen in the work of Thucydides, who discussed foreign policy a century before Kautilya, and in the thoughts of the Chinese Legalist Han Fei Tzu, who wrote about fifty years after Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra.*

Kautilya is most famous for outlining the so-called Mandala theory of foreign policy, in which immediate neighbors are considered as enemies, but any state on the other side of a neighboring state is regarded as an ally, or, the enemy of my enemy is my friend. Imagine a series of states to one's west, and then number them starting with oneself. States numbered 1, 3, 5, 7, and so on will likely be friends, whereas states 2, 4, 6, 8, and so on will probably be enemies. (The same thing can be done with concentric circles, which would look more like a mandala, but it is difficult to envision these circles as states.) Kautilya put this basic principle in a number of different ways, but most simply as, "One with immedi-

55. Kalidas Nag and V. R. Ramachandra Dikshitar, "The Diplomatic Theories of Ancient India and the *Arthashastra,*" *Journal of Indian History* 6, no. 1 (1927): 15–35, see 15.

56. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 8.1.56: 389.

57. Burton Stein, *A History of India* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 78.

ately proximate territory is the natural enemy."[58] Elsewhere he stated this Mandala theory of foreign policy in more detail: "With respect to the middle king [he himself], the third and the fifth constituents are friendly elements. The second, the fourth, and the sixth are unfriendly elements."[59]

Kautilya 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. After analyzing a king's unique configuration of potential enemies and allies, Kautilya then coldly calculated how that king must think and act. "The king, endowed with personal excellences and those of his material constituents, the seat of good policy, is the would-be conqueror. Encircling him on all sides, with territory immediately next to his is the constituent called the enemy. In the same manner, one with territory separated by one (other territory) is the constituent called the ally."[60] This much just repeats the principles of foreign policy discussed above, but then notice how Kautilya regarded neighboring states: "A neighboring prince possessed of the excellences of an enemy is the foe; one in calamity is vulnerable; one without support or with weak support is *fit to be exterminated*; in the reverse case, fit to be harassed or weakened. These are the different types of enemies."[61] When Kautilya wrote of "exterminating" an enemy, he meant killing only the leaders. As we will see in more detail later, he thought the best policy toward ordinary soldiers and subjects was to treat them well and recruit them.

In his excellent discussion of Kautilya's Mandala theory of foreign policy, Singh continues by correctly stating that this is ancient India's most notable contribution to political theory.[62] Although Singh analyzes Kautilya's theory well, he makes a mistake in labeling the Mandala theory an argument based on the doctrine of the balance of power. Kautilya, in fact, was not offering a modern balance of power argument. In the twentieth 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

58. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 6.2.19: 318.
59. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 7.18.1: 380.
60. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 6.2.13: 318.
61. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 6.2.13: 318, my emphasis.
62. Singh, *Political Thought in Ancient India,* 115–30, especially 127; see also N. N. Law, "Studies in Kautilya," *Indian Historical Quarterly* 7 (1931): 464–74 and 709–15; and N. N. Law, "Studies in Kautilya," *Indian Historical Quarterly* 8 (1932): 54–63.

of equal strength] are equal, there should be peace; if unequal, fight,"[63] or, "the conqueror should march if superior in strength, otherwise stay quiet."[64] Whereas these balance of power theorists suggest that a nation arm itself so that it can ensure peace, Kautilya wanted his king to arm the nation in order to find or create a weakness in the enemy and conquer, even to conquer the world, or at least the subcontinent of India.

In reading his *Arthaśāstra,* we find no moral considerations other than a king doing what is right for his own people. Rather, we discover merely what Kautilya regarded as the nature of power. The king, he wrote, "should march when by marching he would be able to weaken or exterminate the enemy."[65] And Kautilya assumed that every other state would act in a like manner because "even the equal who has achieved his object tends to be stronger, and when augmented in power, untrustworthy; prosperity tends to change the mind."[66] Just as did Thucydides, Kautilya regarded a request for negotiations as a sign of weakness, indeed a desperate act of a weak nation trying to survive: "A weaker king may bargain with a stronger king with the offer of a gain equal to his troops, when he is in a calamity or is addicted to what is harmful [that is, women, wine, or gambling] or is in trouble. He with whom the bargain is made should fight if capable of doing harm to him; else he should make the pact."[67]

Whereas Carl von Clausewitz said that war is just an extension of domestic politics,[68] Kautilya argued that diplomacy is really a subtle act of war, a series of actions taken to weaken an enemy and gain advantages for oneself, all with an eye toward eventual conquest. A nation's foreign policy should always consist of preliminary movements toward war: "In this way, the conqueror should establish in the rear and in front, a circle (of kings) in his own interest. . . . And in the entire circle, he should ever station envoys and secret agents, becoming a friend of the rivals, maintaining secrecy when striking again and again. The affairs of one, who cannot maintain secrecy, . . . undoubtedly perish, like a broken boat in the ocean."[69] In Kautilya's foreign policy, even during a time of diplomacy and negotiated peace, a king should still be "striking again and again" in secrecy.

Consider some of the measures Kautilya supported during times of peace. If opposed by an alliance of nations, a king should secretly "sow dissensions" within the alliance until one or more of the parties in the

63. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 7.6.3: 338.
64. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 9.1.1: 406.
65. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 9.1.44: 408.
66. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 7.5.47: 337.
67. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 7.7.7: 343.
68. John Keegan, *A History of Warfare* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 3–24.
69. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 7.13.42–44: 366.

alliance becomes weak.[70] When he has weakened a neighbor, the king "should violate the treaty."[71] Or, in another example, "The wise (conqueror), making one neighboring king fight with another neighboring king, should seize the territory of another, cutting off his party on all sides."[72] In Kautilya's view, two kinds of kingdoms confront any king—those weak kingdoms fit to be exterminated and those strong kingdoms that, over a long period of time, one can only secretly harass and hope to weaken. He advised, "As between an enemy fit to be harassed and an enemy fit to be exterminated, acquisition of land from an enemy fit to be exterminated is preferable. For, the king fit to be exterminated, being without support or with a weak support, is deserted by his subjects when, on being attacked, he wishes to flee taking with him the treasury and the army."[73] It is best to attack an enemy that is "disunited," rather than an enemy in which the subjects have organized themselves into "bands."[74] During times of peace and negotiations, Kautilya wanted spies and secret agents to exploit the divisions within a country. Most countries, he maintained, have four kinds of unhappy subjects—the enraged, the frightened, the greedy, and the proud. Secret agents can widen and deepen these divisions by inciting these four types of people to act against their king. The opposing king "should win over the seducible in the enemy's territories by means of conciliation and gifts and those not seducible by means of dissension and force."[75]

Because a king abides by a treaty only for so long as it is advantageous, Kautilya regarded all allies as future conquests when the time is ripe. He wrote, for example, "That ally who remains common to the enemy (and himself), he should divide that rogue from the enemy (and) when divided, exterminate him, thereafter (exterminate) the enemy."[76] Kautilya also sought to take a nation trying to remain neutral or "indifferent" and secretly provoke war between that nation and a neighboring kingdom, until the neutral nation sought his help. Then Kautilya's king could "place him under (his) obligations."[77] Kautilya himself had no moral qualms about breaking obligations or trust: "That ally who might do harm or who, though capable, would not help in times of trouble, he should exterminate him, when trustingly, he comes within his reach."[78]

70. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 7.14.2: 366.
71. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 7.14.7: 367.
72. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 7.6.15: 339.
73. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 7.10.26–27: 354.
74. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 7.11.18: 356.
75. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 1.13.12, 1–11: 32.
76. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 7.18.36: 383.
77. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 7.18.37: 383.
78. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 7.18.40: 383.

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Because foreign policy is just an extension of a nation's wars, the goal of foreign policy is not to end wars, but rather to ward off defeats and to make sure one is successful in subsequent warfare. For Kautilya, all ambassadors were potential spies with diplomatic immunity.[79] Indeed, he wrote an entire section about how to "fight with the weapon of diplomacy."[80]

War

Kautilya thought there was a "science" of warfare, presumably part of a larger science of politics. The Commandant of the Army, he suggested, should be "trained in the science of all (kinds of) fights and weapons, (and) renowned for riding on elephants, horses or in chariots."[81] Just as Machiavelli advised his prince to attend to matters of warfare constantly, so did Kautilya advise the king not to leave military matters entirely to others: "Infantry, cavalry, chariots and elephants should carry out practice in the arts outside (the city) at sun-rise. . . . The king should constantly attend to that, and should frequently inspect their arts."[82] Just as the king's agents spied on officials in the state bureaucracy, so too must the king have spies to assess the loyalty of soldiers. What greater threat is there to a king than having a military coup remove him from power? Kautilya recommended that "secret agents, prostitutes, artisans and actors as well as elders of the army should ascertain with diligence, the loyalty or disloyalty of soldiers."[83]

In his section on foreign policy, Kautilya wrote a startling sentence: "Of war, there is open war, concealed war and silent war."[84] Open war is obvious, and concealed war is what we call guerrilla warfare, but silent war is a kind of fighting that no other thinker I know of has discussed. Silent war is a kind of warfare with another kingdom in which the king and his ministers—and unknowingly, the people—all act publicly as if they were at peace with the opposing kingdom, but all the while secret agents and spies are assassinating important leaders in the other kingdom, creating divisions among key ministers and classes, and spreading propaganda and disinformation. According to Kautilya, "Open war is fighting at the place and time indicated; creating fright, sudden assault,

79. Bimal Kanti Majumdar, *The Military System in Ancient India* (Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1960), 64.

80. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 12.2: 462; see Indra, *Ideologies of War and Peace in Ancient India,* 80–81.

81. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 2.33.9: 180.

82. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 5.3.35–36: 304.

83. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 5.3.47: 305.

84. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 7.6.17: 339.

striking when there is error or a calamity, giving way and striking in one place, are types of concealed warfare; that which concerns secret practices and instigations through secret agents is the mark of silent war."[85] In silent warfare, secrecy is paramount, and, from a passage quoted earlier, the king can prevail only by "maintaining secrecy when striking again and again."[86] This entire concept of secret war was apparently original with Kautilya.[87]

Open warfare, Kautilya declared, is "most righteous,"[88] but he was willing to use any and all kinds of warfare to achieve consolidation and expansion of the kingdom. There is no question of morality here—other than the general good of one's kingdom—but only of strategy. Kautilya advised the king that "When he is superior in troops, when secret instigations are made (in the enemy's camp), when precautions are taken about the season, (and) when he is on land suitable to himself, he should engage in an open fight. In the reverse case, (he should resort to) concealed fighting."[89] How different all this is from the image of war, certainly exaggerated, found in the Hindu epics, the *Mahābhārata,* or the *Rāmāyana,* of the central figure being the great hero in the chariot who frightened all before him.[90]

In Book 12, Kautilya faced the situation in which one rules a weak kingdom and is about to be attacked by a stronger king. He maintained that "there are three kings who attack: the righteous conqueror, the greedy conqueror and the demoniacal conqueror."[91] Whereas one can satisfy a righteous conqueror simply by submitting to his rule, one must surrender "land and goods" as well as money in order to satisfy a greedy conqueror. The demoniacal conqueror, however, will stop only when he has seized "land, goods, sons, wives and life."[92] (Kautilya apparently saw himself as advising a righteous conqueror, although he did seek some tribute from defeated peoples.) A weak king must give up everything if it is inevitable, but he must find a way to survive to fight another day, preserving "his body, not wealth; for, what regret can there be for wealth that is impermanent?"[93] However, Kautilya did not advocate giving in to a conqueror without countermeasures and recommended that the king use "diplomatic or concealed warfare"; attempt to conciliate his enemy

85. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 7.6.40–41: 342.
86. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 7.13.43: 366.
87. Majumdar, *The Military System in Ancient India,* 63.
88. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 10.3.26: 440.
89. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 10.3.1–2: 438.
90. Majumdar, *The Military System in Ancient India,* 29.
91. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 12.1.10: 460; see Nag and Dikshitar, "The Diplomatic Theories of Ancient India and the *Arthashastra*," 28.
92. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 12.1.11–16: 460.
93. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 12.1.32: 462.

with gifts; direct secret agents to wield "weapons, poison or fire" to destroy the enemy's fort or camp; instruct secret agents to promote a coup by a "pretender from his family or a prince in disfavour"; send the demoniacal king listless elephants, which had been poisoned; give to the enemy king treasonable or alien troops; surrender to an entirely different king and give him all but the capital city; have secret agents instigate a revolt among the subjects of the enemy king; "employ assassins and poison-givers"; use an astrologer to persuade a "high officer" of the enemy king to try a coup; command secret agents to declare that the Regent of the king is about to take power, while the agents kill leaders at night and blame the murders on the Regent of the enemy king; use secret agents in the countryside to protest oppression of the enemy king's bureaucracy and kill agents of the king hoping to start a revolt; or finally, set fire to palaces and stores of grain and blame this on the Regent of the enemy king.[94]

Kautilya often advocated using women as weapons of war. He certainly regarded women as a source of satisfaction for troops at war, writing that when setting up camp for the army, "courtesans (should be encamped) along the highways."[95] And Kautilya certainly saw women as an addictive source of pleasure, worse than wine or gambling, that a good king must enjoy only in moderation: "Deliverance is possible in gambling, without deliverance is addiction to women. Failure to show himself, aversion from work, absence of material good and loss of spiritual good by allowing the right time to pass, weakness in administration and addiction to drink (result from addiction to women)."[96] Precisely because women are such a powerful addiction, a king can use them against an enemy; for example, if a king is trying to undermine a ruling oligarchy, he "should make chiefs of the ruling council infatuated with women possessed of great beauty and youth. When passion is roused in them, they should start quarrels by creating belief (about their love) in one and by going to another."[97] A woman supposedly in love with one leader should go to another, profess her love for him, urge him to murder the first leader, and "then she should proclaim, 'My lover has been killed by so and so.'"[98] Obviously such tactics create mistrust among leaders of an oligarchy and also bring about the death of key enemies. In the chapters about how a weak king can stave off disastrous conquest by a stronger king, Kautilya again turned, as just one possible tactic among

94. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 12.17–32: 461–62; 12.2.8–33: 462–64; see also N. N. Law, "Dvaidhibhava in the Kautilya," *Indian Historical Quarterly* 7 (1931): 253–58, see 258.

95. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 10.1.10: 434.

96. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 8.3.53–54: 395.

97. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 11.1.34–35: 457.

98. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 11.1.37, 39: 457.

many, to women as weapons of war, stating that "keepers of prostitutes should make the (enemy's) army chiefs infatuated with women possessed of great beauty and youth. When many or two of the chiefs feel passion for one woman, assassins should create quarrels among them."[99] Secret agents can destroy high officers in the enemy army either with poison or with "love-winning medicines."[100]

Speaking of justice to an enemy about to conquer is the last tactic of the weak, just as Thucydides showed in his recreation of the debate about Melos. In Thucydides's *History of the Peloponnesian War,* the Melians try to talk about justice and fair play when facing the prospect of conquest by the Athenians, who contend that such arguments are the last, desperate tactic of those facing defeat, which the Melians "know as well as we do." The Athenians tell the Melians "that, when these matters are discussed by practical people, the standard of justice depends on the equality of power to compel and that in fact the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept."[101] After that both the Melians and the Athenians debate only what is in the self-interest of Athens. Similarly, willing to try all tactics, even desperate ones, Kautilya made up a powerful speech to be given by a weak king to the king about to conquer, a speech offering a mixture of moral exhortation and arguments based on the self-interest of the conqueror. In this speech, Kautilya depicted an envoy saying to the conquering king that he should accept a treaty and "pay regard to [his] spiritual and material well-being"; that conquering a kingdom willing to surrender on reasonable terms is an "impious act"; that battle is not in the conquering king's self-interest, since "to fight with brave men who have given up all hope of life is a rash deed" and the conqueror will lose troops and "material good"; that such a conquest will only unite his enemies all the more; that the conquering king's enemies are only waiting for him to be weakened in order to attack; that he himself is risking death; that war itself in which men on each side die is "an impious act"; and that he should not listen to "enemies masquerading as friends" who are giving him false advice as to his real self-interest.[102] In much the same way as Thucydides, only more dramatically, Kautilya demonstrated the realities of diplomacy and war as well as the ineffectiveness of moral pleas when confronted by a superior power.

Machiavelli longed for the legions of ancient Rome; Kautilya wanted legions, but he wanted them preceded by elephants, which acted in the

99. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 12.2.11–12: 463.

100. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 12.2.14: 463.

101. Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War,* trans. Rex Warner (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1972), 402.

102. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 12.2.1–7: 462.

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ancient world a bit like modern tanks. So valuable were they that Kautilya wrote, "destruction of an enemy's forces is principally dependent on elephants."[103] As shown earlier, Kautilya considered the treasury most valuable in raising an army, procuring equipment (including elephants), and preparing for war. After the treasury and the army, Kautilya focused on the importance of the fort, on which depends "the treasury, the army, silent war, restraint of one's own party, use of armed forces, receiving allied troops, and warding off enemy troops and forest tribes. And in the absence of a fort, the treasury will fall into the hands of enemies. . . . those with forts are not exterminated."[104] (A mountain fort is more valuable than a river fort, because it "is easy to protect, difficult to lay siege to, difficult to climb."[105])

Kautilya was inconsistent in ranking the importance of the treasury, the army, and forts, but it seems that the people, or a popular army, are the most important of all. As he put it, "one should seek a fortress with men."[106] Well before Machiavelli defended a republican army, well before Mao Zedong defended a people's war as invincible, Kautilya urged the king to be popular with the people and rely on the countryside. "If weak in might, [a king] should endeavor to secure the welfare of his subjects. The countryside is the source of all undertakings; from them comes might."[107] The "undertakings" of forts, the treasury, and the army all depend ultimately on the people of the countryside, where are found "bravery, firmness, cleverness and large numbers."[108] Kautilya here was cautiously making a revolution in warfare, relying not quite as much on the warrior class of *kshatriyas*. India was divided into four classes or castes (*varnas*): *brahmins* or priests; *kshatriyas* or warriors and rulers; *vaishyas* or farmers and traders; and *shūdras* or laborers. The *Dharmasūtras,* or law codes, written before Kautilya, urged an army of *kshatriyas* and, in an emergency, also *brahmins* (priests) and *vaishyas* (farmers or merchants). Kautilīya had no use for *brahmin* troops—"by prostration, an enemy may win over Brahmana troops"—but he liked the energy, numbers, and strength of *shūdras*, agricultural laborers treated much like serfs.[109] Kautilya's praise of ordinary men from the lower two *varnas* was unusual in the ancient world. He wrote, "As

103. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 7.11.16: 356; see Arvind Kumar Srivastava, *The Ancient Indian Army: Its Administration and Organization* (Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1985), 80–81.

104. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 8.1.38–40: 388.

105. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 7.10.33: 355.

106. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 7.15.11: 370.

107. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 7.14.18–19: 368.

108. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 8.1.29–30: 387.

109. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 9.2.21–24: 412; Ram Sharan Sharma, *Sudras in Ancient India,* 3d rev. ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1990), 173–74.

between land with the support of a fort and one with the support of men, the one with the support of men is preferable. For, a kingdom is that which has men. Without men, like a barren cow, what could it yield?"[110] Says Sharma, "Kautilya alone holds that the army made up of vaishyas and sudras is important."[111] Kautilya apparently believed that an army of *kshatriyas* was best; warriors were supposed to find their "highest duty and pleasure" by dying in battle.[112] Megasthenes, a Greek ambassador to Chandragupta Maurya's court, suggested that as much as one-fifth of the population under Chandragupta's empire were warriors or *kshatriyas*.[113] In addition, Kautilya clearly argued that sections of the army should consist "mostly of persons from the same region, caste or profession."[114] Using a little common sense, we can see that he is suggesting that men of an army should know one another, that an army of friends fighting side by side is the most difficult to defeat. On the subject of the king's location during battle, for example, he wrote: "A bare army, without standards, consisting of warriors related as fathers, sons and brothers, should be the place for the king. An elephant or a chariot should be the vehicle for the king, guarded by cavalry."[115] (Kautilya wanted a man who looked like the king to lead the army into battle.[116])

And thus, a king's power, for Kautilya, is in the end tied to the power and popular energy of the people, without which a king can be conquered, for "not being rooted among his subjects, [a king] becomes easy to uproot."[117] Although Kautilya wrote of using money to raise an army and even of "purchasing heroic men,"[118] he was not advocating mercenaries who fought only for pay, but he was merely outlining the cost of paying, supplying, and feeding soldiers. He believed that "hereditary troops are better than hired troops"[119]; in other words, troops made of men born in the kingdom and thus loyal to the king since birth are better than strangers fighting for money, as Machiavelli noted so often later. It is not at all clear, remarked Kautilya, that "inviting alien troops with money"[120] is an advantage or a disadvantage.

110. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 7.11.23–25: 357.
111. Sharma, *Sudras in Ancient India,* 237.
112. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 9.2.24: 412.
113. Swaswati Das, *Social Life in Ancient India: 800 B.C.–183 B.C.* (Delhi: B. R. Publishing Corporation, 1994), 143–44.
114. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 9.2.9: 411.
115. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 10.3.39–40: 441.
116. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 10.3.42: 441.
117. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 8.2.18: 392.
118. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 9.1.7: 406.
119. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 9.2.14: 412.
120. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 9.7.10: 428.

Which States to Attack

In Kautilya's view of the world, expansion by a prosperous kingdom was inevitable, natural, and good, and as a consequence, moral considerations did not enter into his deliberations, only what was for the good of the kingdom. If a king can win, then he should go to war. As Kangle says, the *Arthaśāstra* "preaches an ideal of conquest."[121] But who should be attacked? This is not an ethical question. The decision takes only careful calculation and observes the principle that a king should attack weakness. Certain states are vulnerable. If a state is unjust, then its people will welcome a deliverer from a tyrannical king; if a kingdom is weakened from a poor economy, or if a state has experienced some kind of calamity ranging from fires to flood or famine, then a king "should make war and march."[122] As Rajendra Prasad says, Kautilya believed that "whenever an enemy king is in trouble, and his subjects are exploited, oppressed, impoverished and disunited, he should be immediately attacked after one proclamation of war."[123]

Every adjacent kingdom should be looked upon as an enemy and classified. If a kingdom is strong, Kautilya called it a "foe"; if a kingdom is suffering calamity, then it is "vulnerable"; if a kingdom has weak or no popular support, then "it is fit to be exterminated." Even if one cannot attack a strong neighbor or "foe," one can harass it silently and weaken it over time.[124] What Kautilya called an enemy "fit to be exterminated" was an enemy with little or no popular support, an enemy whose subjects quite likely would desert to Kautilya's attacking army.[125] And Kautilya argued, or perhaps assumed, that imperial expansion was the correct goal: "After conquering the enemy's territory, the conqueror should seek to seize the middle king, after succeeding over him, the neutral king. This is the first method of conquering the world. . . . And after conquering the world he should enjoy it divided into *varnas* . . . in accordance with his own duty."[126]

In Kautilya's mind, treaties were agreements between kingdoms of roughly equal power, agreements a king should break if they are no longer advantageous, and thus, believing that a treaty will provide a wall of protection against a strong enemy would be a foolish act. If an ally with whom a king has a treaty becomes weakened, that is, if the treaty

121. R. P. Kangle, *The Kautilīya Arthaśāstra,* vol. 3, *A Study* (Delhi: Motilal Banardisass, 1992 [1965]), 263.

122. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 7.4.15: 332–33.

123. Rajendra Prasad, *Politico-Geographical Analysis of the Arthashastra* (New Delhi: Inter-India Publications, 1989), 58–60.

124. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 6.2.16: 318.

125. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 7.10.26–27: 354.

126. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 13.4.54–55, 62: 490–91.

is no longer to a king's advantage, then the king "should violate the treaty,"[127] or, "when after making a pact he intends to violate it, . . . he should demand a gain not received or more."[128] Because Kautilya thought that promises or agreements were strategies and not moral obligations, he had no moral qualms about violating a promise and recommended that "The commander of a frontier fort, by offering the surrender of the fort, should get part of the (enemy's) troops inside and destroy [them] *when full of trust.*"[129] To protect his own people, a king has an obligation to weaken or destroy any potential enemy: "That ally who might do harm or who, though capable, would not help in times of trouble, he should certainly exterminate him, *when trustingly, he comes within his reach.*"[130] Charles Drekmeier is certainly correct in saying that, "In outlining military campaigns Kautilya disregards the traditional humanitarian principles laid down to regulate the conduct of war."[131] In Book 9, Kautilya listed various "hindrances to gain"; among them were pity, piousness, and "regard for the other world."[132] In short, in waging war, compassion and morality and religious principles have no place, unless they are useful for bringing victory.

In another way, moral considerations did enter into Kautilya's calculations. Whereas it is best to wage war against an unjust king who has no public support, it is wise to avoid war with a righteous king whose subjects will fight energetically on his behalf. Kautilya noted that if one has a choice about where to attack, it is always best to attack an unjust kingdom, because "The subjects help the king who is justly behaved. . . . Therefore, [a king] should march only against [an enemy] with disaffected subjects."[133] Once more, morality is sometimes advantageous and in one's self-interest, for "The unjustly behaved [king] would cause even settled land to be laid waste."[134] By being unjust, a king loses all popular support, thereby weakening the kingdom and making it easily conquered: "The king fit to be exterminated, being without support or with weak support, is deserted by his subjects when, on being attacked, he wishes to flee taking with him the treasury and the army."[135] If a king has a choice of attacking a strong king who is unjust or a weak king who is just, he should actually attack the stronger king, because the stronger

127. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 7.14.7: 367.
128. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 7.8.8: 347.
129. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 12.5.25: 472, my emphasis.
130. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 7.18.40: 383, my emphasis.
131. Charles Drekmeier, *Kingship and Community in Early India* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1962), 212.
132. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 9.4.25: 419.
133. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 7.5.10–11: 334; Nag and Dikshitar, "The Diplomatic Theories of Ancient India and the *Arthashastra,*" 18.
134. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 7.11.31: 358.
135. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 7.10.27: 354.

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king's subjects, weary of injustice, will not help the strong king and might even join the war against him.[136] An unjust state is really two states, already at war with one another, the rulers and the ruled.[137] Kautilya paused to remind a king how practical it was to be just toward his subjects because "Subjects, when impoverished, become greedy; when greedy they become disaffected; when disaffected they either go over to the enemy or themselves kill the master. Therefore, [a king] should not allow these causes of decline, greed and disaffection among the subjects to arise, or, if arisen, should immediately counter-act them."[138] A domestic political policy of social justice is, in the long run, the best defense against outside enemies, because "one attacking a righteous king is hated by his own people and by others; one attacking an unrighteous king is liked (by them)."[139]

Kautilya maintained that a humanitarian policy toward a defeated people was practical. If a king massacres those whom he has defeated, then he frightens all those kingdoms that surround him and terrifies even his own ministers.[140] Rather, one gains more land and new and loyal subjects if one treats the defeated in a magnanimous manner. Certainly a conquering king must silently kill those former leaders loyal to the defeated king, but those who approach him promising loyalty should be treated generously: "He should not use towards them insults, injuries, contemptuous words or reproaches. And after promising them safety, he should favour them like a father."[141] Because a conquering king intends to expand his territory and acquire new subjects, he must treat a defeated people well. The victor, "after gaining new territory, . . . should cover the enemy's faults with his own virtue, his virtues with double virtues. He should carry out what is agreeable and beneficial to his subjects by doing his own duty as laid down, granting favours, giving exemptions, making gifts and showing honour."[142] Indeed, the conquering king should "order the release of all prisoners and render help to the distressed, the helpless and the diseased."[143] It is sound military policy to "establish a righteous course of conduct."[144] What is moral is once more practical. Just as one can kill a traitor, but cannot use force "against a

136. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 7.5.16–18: 335.

137. Harit Krishna Deb, "*The Kautilīya Arthaśāstra* on Forms of Government," *Indian Historical Quarterly* 14 (June 1938): 366–79, see 370.

138. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 7.5.27–28: 335.

139. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 7.13.12: 362; V. Nagarajan, *Evolution of the Social Polity of Ancient India from Manu to Kautilya,* vol. 2 (Nagpur: Dattsons, 1992), 165.

140. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 7.16.30–31: 375.

141. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 7.16.22–23: 374.

142. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 13.5.3–4: 491.

143. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 13.5.11: 492.

144. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 13.5.14: 492.

multitude of people,"[145] so one can kill the leaders of a defeated kingdom, but must bring the great majority of the citizens peacefully into one's own kingdom. In this instance, Kautilya was following the traditional advice given in the *Dharmasūtras* that "Aryans condemn the killing of those who have thrown down their weapons, who have dishevelled hair, who fold their hands in supplication, or who are fleeing."[146] And by these actions, Kautilya fit his own definition of a righteous conqueror who sought victory and the submission of the enemy, but not greedy pillaging or lawless killing.[147]

Kautilya demanded much of his soldiers, because they had to be brave and fierce in battle, but gentle and kind toward those whom they had defeated: "When attacking the enemy's fort or camp, they should grant safety to those fallen down, those turning back, those surrendering, those with loose hair, those without weapons, those disfigured by terror and to those not fighting."[148] After a king has subdued the country and taken care of the people, he should "grant safety to the countryside," settle subjects down to farm the land, and "induce" even those who had fought against him to settle down and farm (even by giving tax exemptions), all because the countryside needs farmers and the new kingdom wants prosperity. "For," according to Kautilya, "there is no country without people and no kingdom without a country," meaning a prosperous—not a ravished—countryside.[149]

Both Sun Tzu (c. 400–320 B.C.E.) and Machiavelli, in books entitled *The Art of War,* pointed out that a general should always give an enemy the hope of escape and never surround a nearly defeated enemy completely.[150] Enemy soldiers who have hope of living will eventually run for

145. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 9.6.2–5: 422.

146. *Dharmasūtras: The Law Codes of Ancient India,* ed. and trans. Patrick Olivelle (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 53; see also *The Laws of Manu,* ed. and trans. Wendy Doniger and Brian K. Smith (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 137–38.

147. Daya Krishna, *The Problematic and Conceptual Structure of Classical Indian Thought About Man, Society, and Polity* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), 96.

148. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 13.4.52: 490.

149. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 13.4.2–5: 485–86.

150. "To a surrounded enemy you must leave a way of escape. . . . Show him there is a road to safety, and so create in his mind the idea that there is an alternative to death. . . . Wild beasts, when at bay, fight desperately. How much more is this true of men! If they know there is no alternative they will fight to the death." (Sun Tzu, *The Art of War,* trans. Samuel B. Griffith [London: Oxford University Press, 1963], 109–10.)

"It is necessary, above everything that has been mentioned, to be careful not to bring the enemy into utter despair. About this Caesar was careful when fighting the Germans; he opened a road for them, seeing that since they could not run away necessity was making them bold." (Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Art of War,* in *The Chief*

safety, and they are easily killed, but soldiers surrounded with no choice but to fight or die will fight with an unimagined ferocity. Kautilya was arguing something similar, to let the enemy soldiers know that the king will be generous in victory, will allow defeated soldiers to return to their land, and will take no reprisals except toward the leaders of the opposing kingdom, against whom "he should act as in 'the infliction of (secret) punishment.'"[151] After such humanitarian policies toward the defeated populace have become widely known, ordinary enemy soldiers will surrender in great numbers. By contrast, if a king announces that he will massacre every soldier, then all will fight to the death. Said Kautilya, "The vehemence of one returning again to the fight and despairing of his life becomes irresistible; therefore, [a king] should not harass a broken enemy."[152] Similarly, he advised that "to fight with brave men who have given up all hope of life is a rash deed."[153]

A conquering king should reassure a defeated people that not much, except their rulers, will change. The king who has triumphed "should adopt a similar character, dress, language and behavior (as the subjects). And he should show the same devotion in festivals in honour of deities of the country, festive gatherings and sportive amusements."[154] He should keep his promises, especially to those who helped him win, he should honor the local "deities," and he should make grants of land and money to men distinguished in wisdom and piety.[155] And the conquering king should show his goodwill toward the defeated by instituting "a righteous custom, not initiated before."[156] While the victorious king is reassuring the general population with generous policies, he must continue to kill anyone who is dangerous and those who are disgruntled: "He should put down by silent punishment those capable of injuring [him] or those brooding on the master's destruction."[157] In what might be a surprising observation about those whom the king has killed, Kautilya commented that if one must kill a dangerous person, the king must leave his

Works and Others, vol. 2, ed. and trans. Allan Gilbert [Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1965], 561–726, see 700.)

John of Plano Carpino, a contemporary of Genghis Khan, described one of his tactics this way: "If it happens that the enemy fight well, the Tartars make a way of escape for them; then as soon as they begin to take flight and are separated from each other they fall upon them and more are slaughtered in flight than could be killed in battle." (Gérard Chaliand, ed., *The Art of War in World History: From Antiquity to the Nuclear Age* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994], 469.)

151. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 9.6.5: 422.
152. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 10.3.57: 442.
153. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 10.2.4: 462.
154. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 13.5.7–8: 491.
155. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 13.5.11, 6: 491–92.
156. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 13.5.24: 493.
157. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 13.5.17: 492.

property untouched and "shall not covet the land, property, sons or wives of the slain one."[158] Kautilya had the same insight into human emotions that Machiavelli had nearly eighteen hundred years later. Said Machiavelli, "And when [the prince] is obliged to take the life of any one, . . . he must abstain from taking the property of others, for men forget more easily the death of their father than the loss of their patrimony."[159] A king becomes hated more readily for taking the property that belongs to a family than for killing the head of the family.

Using Secret Agents, Assassins, Disinformation, and Propaganda

Kautilya was ready to use almost any means of violence in fighting a war, although he wanted his king to direct his violence toward the leaders of the opposing kingdom and not toward ordinary people. For example, Kautilya discussed at length how to employ poison, but almost always directed its use at key enemy commanders. He advised that when "giving unadulterated wine to the army chiefs, [the secret agent] should give them (wine) mixed with poison when they are in a state of intoxication."[160] Whereas Kautilya did suggest that an army laying siege to a fort try to "defile the water,"[161] this measure seems designed to make those in the fort surrender from illness, not to kill everyone in the fort. Mostly, Kautilya addressed the question of how to assassinate a king—by hiding "inside the image of a deity or a hollow wall" and emerging at night, by making something heavy fall on the king, or by using women as secret agents to "drop on him serpents or poisonous fire and smoke."[162] Kautilya was willing to use any possible means to assassinate an enemy king—drown him, burn him with fire, suffocate him with smoke, or even use crocodiles as assassins, not to mention employing women and children as poison-givers.[163] The wonder of assassination, according to Kautilya, is that it is so efficient, "for, an assassin, single-handed, may be able to achieve his end with weapon, poison and fire. He does the work of a whole army or more."[164] In an unrealistic passage in the *Dharmasūtras* that Kautilya most certainly ignored, the authors directed that a king should not "strike with barbed or poisoned weapons"![165]

158. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 7.16.26: 374.
159. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince and The Discourses,* trans. Luigi Ricci, E. R. P. Vincent, and Christian E. Detmold (New York: Modern Library, 1950), *The Prince,* ch. 17.
160. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 12.4.6: 467.
161. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 13.4.9: 486.
162. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 12.5.43–48: 473.
163. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 12.4.22–28, 9–10: 468–69.
164. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 9.6.54–55: 425.
165. *Dharmasūtras,* 159.

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Aside from assassination, another method used to defeat an enemy without full-scale battle was to arrange for the enemy to quarrel and fight among itself. We have already seen how Kautilya intended to use beautiful women to instigate fights among high officers or officials. If the promise of pleasure can ignite quarrels, so can the promise of power. One should arrange for a secret agent, disguised as an astrologer, to tell a high officer that he has all the marks of a king, and similarly arrange for a female secret agent, the wife of this officer, to complain that the king wants to keep her in his harem. A third secret agent who is a cook or a waiter should lie, saying that the king has ordered him or her to poison the high officer. "Thus with one or two or three means," according to Kautilya, the king "should incite the high officers one by one to fight or desert" the enemy king.[166] In a discussion about sowing dissensions among oligarchies, Kautilya suggested that "assassins should start quarrels by injuring objects, cattle or men at night," "should stir up princelings enjoying low comforts with (a longing for) superior comforts," and "should start quarrels among the followers of the chiefs in the oligarchy by praising the opponents in brothels and taverns."[167] The goals were constantly to "sow discord" and to foment and inflame "mutual hatred, enmity and strife."[168]

Much of this advice violated the tacit code of war found in the great Indian epics. The assassination of envoys and the use of poison were considered to be against the rules of warfare and thus not honorable. Said *The Laws of Manu,* "Fighting in battle, [the king] should not kill his enemies with weapons that are concealed, barbed, or smeared with poison or whose points blaze with fire."[169] Spies were common in Indian history, but not spies who assassinated enemy officials and started quarrels among enemy leaders.[170] An excellent book on warfare in ancient India discusses spies, but does not mention secret agents as assassins.[171] Once more Kautilya judged the means by the result, and the result he sought was the general good of his kingdom.

Another military tactic that Kautilya praised was what we now call disinformation or propaganda designed to demoralize or frighten enemy soldiers. For example, secret agents should appear as messengers to troops saying, "Your fort has been burnt down or captured; a revolt by a member of your family has broken out; or, your enemy or a forest chief-

166. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 12.2.24, 19–23: 463–64.
167. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 11.1.14, 9, 8: 455.
168. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 11.1.6: 455.
169. *The Laws of Manu,* 137.
170. *The Laws of Manu,* 141, 143–44, 151, 225–30; Majumdar, *The Military System in Ancient India,* 40–41, 65, 36.
171. Srivastava, *The Ancient Indian Army,* 101.

tain has risen (against you)."[172] After spreading the rumor that the Regent or a high administrator of the enemy king has announced that the king is in trouble and may not come back alive and thus people should take wealth by force and kill their enemies, secret agents should kill and steal at night, trying to cause civil upheaval: "When the rumour has spread far and wide, assassins should rob citizens at night and slay chiefs, (saying at the time), 'Thus are dealt with [those] who do not obey the Regent.'"[173] Then they should put bloody evidence in the Regent's residence. Again, secret agents should spread rumors, always in a confidential manner, that the king is furious with such and such a leader. Then these agents should assassinate key leaders and say "to those who have not been slain, . . . 'This is what we had told you; he who wants to remain alive should go away.'"[174] Kautilya was especially fond of the tactic of utilizing disinformation to flatter a second or third son and thus persuade him to try a coup against his own family.[175] Convinced that disinformation could also inspire his own troops, Kautilya wanted agents to announce fabricated victories and fictitious defeats of the enemy: "On the occasion of a night-battle, [secret agents] should strike many drums, fixed beforehand as a signal, and announce, 'We have entered it; the kingdom is won.'"[176]

Much of this disinformation made use of religion. Placed strategically, astrologers "should fill [the king's] side with enthusiasm by proclaiming his omniscience and association with divine agencies, and should fill the enemy's side with terror."[177] Once more the needs of the state are primary, and the king commands religion to serve the state: "He should make (Brahmins) recite blessings invoking victory and securing heaven."[178] Singers and poets should "describe the attainment of heaven by the brave and the absence of heaven for cowards."[179] Secret agents who have infiltrated the enemy side should use animal blood in order to "cause an excessive flow (of blood) from honoured images of deities," and then interpret that as a sure sign of future defeat for the enemy.[180] Kautilya wanted anyone associated with religion or superstition—"soothsayers, interpreters of omens, astrologers, reciters of *Purānas*" and so on[181]—to proclaim to his own troops and to the enemy the king's

172. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 10.6.48–50: 453.
173. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 12.2.26, 25–28: 464.
174. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 12.3.4: 465.
175. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 12.3.15: 466.
176. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 12.4.21: 469; Srivastava, *The Ancient Indian Army,* 89.
177. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 10.3.33: 440.
178. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 10.3.36: 440.
179. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 10.3.43: 441.
180. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 13.2.27: 479.
181. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 13.1.7: 475.

"association with divinities" or "his meeting with divinities,"[182] creating confidence on his own side and simultaneously terror and misgivings among enemy soldiers. Those priests in charge of interpreting omens must make certain that dreams and other signs are always favorable to the king's efforts and unfavorable to the enemy.[183] Every kind of superstition can be useful.[184] And for Kautilya, religious authorities must be for hire.

In addition to brave and well-equipped soldiers, warfare requires deception, and over and again Kautilya advocated the above measures and more for deceiving both his own and the enemy troops. If caught behind enemy lines, Kautilya outlined ways for one to escape "in the disguise of a heretical monk," "decked out as a corpse," or "wearing a woman's garb."[185] And he was eager to terrify the enemy by such multiple and varied means as by using "machines, by the employment of occult practices, through assassins slaying those engaged in something else, by magical arts, by (a show of) association with divinities, through carts, by frightening with elephants," and so on.[186] A favorite tactic in battle was to pretend to be defeated, retreat in apparent disorder, and then attack a disorganized and unsuspecting enemy. The leader, "feigning a rout with treasonable, alien and forest troops, . . . should strike at the (pursuing enemy when he has) reached unsuitable ground."[187] At all times, Kautilya wanted his king to use deception, play roles, and create appearances. Why risk heavy losses or even defeat in battle if deception and assassination can weaken or even defeat the enemy? Even if a king is forced to surrender in order to survive, Kautilya wanted him to pretend that his surrender was "an excellent thing" until he was clever or strong enough to fight back.[188] Warfare was violent, but it also called for one who could calmly create false impressions, like a poker player.

Conclusion

To return to Machiavelli's *The Art of War* after reading the military writings of Kautilya is jolting. It becomes readily apparent that Machiavelli is not even trying to tell us something new about warfare, because he believed the ancient Greeks and Romans knew it all—aside from such

182. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 13.1.1, 8: 474–75.
183. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 13.1.9: 475.
184. Ram Sharan Sharma, "Superstition and Politics in the Arthashastra of Kautilya," *Journal of the Bihar Research Society* 40, no. 3 (1954): 223–31, see 225–28.
185. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 12.5.38–40: 472.
186. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 10.6.48–50: 453.
187. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 10.3.1: 438.
188. Kautilya, *Arthaśāstra,* 7.15.29: 372.

things as artillery. What did Machiavelli want to resurrect from ancient Rome and transport to Renaissance Florence? He wanted Rome's battalions and legions and cohorts, and maybe Scipio once again arrayed across the plain from Hannibal. And thus compared to Kautilya and Sun Tzu, Machiavelli's writings on warfare are tired and tedious, filled with nostalgia for long-dead legions that once gained glory. He wanted the public battlefield, the grand spectacle, fame for some and cowardice for others. Sun Tzu and Kautilya did not care a whit for glory and fame. They wanted to win at all costs and to keep casualties—on both sides—to a minimum. Said Sun Tzu, "For to win one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the acme of skill. To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill."[189] They were also prepared to win in ways Machiavelli would regard as dishonorable and disgraceful—assassination, disinformation, causing quarrels between ministers by bribes or by means of jealousy over a beautiful woman planted as a secret agent, and so on. Machiavelli—who offers no systematic discussion of even guerrilla warfare—would have been easily outmatched by generals reading either Sun Tzu or Kautilya.

189. Sun Tzu, *The Art of War,* 77.