

## **The Concept of National Security in Kautilya's Arthashastra**

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### **Abstract**

Kautilya's *Arthashastra* stands as a timeless testament to the enduring principles of political realism. Within its ancient pages, Kautilya delves into the intricate dynamics of power, conflict, and national interests with remarkable foresight. Central to his discourse is the notion of national security, a concept that remains as pertinent today as it was in antiquity. Kautilya's strategic genius is evident in his meticulous construction of military doctrines, aimed at ensuring the safety and sovereignty of the state. Through a blend of cunning diplomacy, espionage, and military prowess, he advocates for a proactive approach to safeguarding the realm against external threats and internal dissent. In the *Arthashastra*, Kautilya elucidates the multifaceted nature of national security, encompassing not only military strength but also economic prosperity, social stability, and ideological resilience. His realist perspective emphasizes the primacy of power dynamics in international relations, advocating for the acquisition and preservation of power as the cornerstone of national security. Kautilya's insights continue to resonate in contemporary discourse, where states grapple with complex geopolitical challenges and navigate the delicate balance between self-interest and collective security. As policymakers confront evolving threats in an increasingly interconnected world, the timeless wisdom of Kautilya serves as a beacon, offering

invaluable lessons on the enduring pursuit of national security in an ever-changing global landscape.

**Keywords:** International Relations, Kautilya, National Security, Strategy, War

## **Introduction**

“National security policy encompasses the decisions and actions deemed imperative to protect domestic core values from external threats” (Bock, 1966). The national security approach provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing foreign policy, prompting historians to assess the interplay between foreign and domestic factors that shape policy formulation. Realist historians argue that diplomatic behavior is predominantly shaped, or ought to be shaped, by the distribution of power in the international system (Leffler M. P., 1990).

*The term 'national security' represents an ambiguous construct. It encompasses a wide array of objectives, leading to a lack of consensus regarding its scope and thus precluding a universally accepted understanding of the concept. While it undoubtedly extends beyond mere national survival, the precise elements it encompasses often remain nebulous and undefined (Wolfers A. , 1952).*

Numerous scholars, hailing from both Western and non-Western backgrounds, have offered diverse interpretations of national security. Nonetheless, notwithstanding their comprehensive nature, classical perspectives on matters of statecraft, strategic formulation, foreign policy, warfare, and peace from non-Western sources frequently endure neglect within scholarly discourse.

Kautilya's *Arthashastra* was ‘lost’ to the world for over two thousand years before being rediscovered by Dr. R. Shamasastri, whose translations from the original Sanskrit script are used in the article, in 1904. It was "most likely completed in the available form between the second century BCE and the third century CE" (Olivelle, 2020). Despite its historical disjunctions, the *Arthashastra* experiences a notable resurgence, with scholars continuing to deem it pertinent to contemporary practices and perspectives. Some scholars draw parallels between the *Arthashastra* and Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*.

In his book, an Indian career diplomat states that "even today's Indian national security policy and Indian international politics are still highly influenced by the ancient political philosophies of *Arthashastra*" (Saran, 2017). Current Indian national security preferences exhibit a striking similarity to the principles outlined in Kautilya's *Arthashastra* (Saad & Wenxiang, 2020).

The writings of Kautilya (370–283 BC) have made a significant contribution to our understanding of the numerous facets of national security, including offensive strategy, the significance of dispositions, determining the strengths and weaknesses of the opponent, weather and topography, and the use of secret agents. According to the findings, nearly 70%

of the content in the Arthashastra is specifically focused on matters pertaining to national security (Saad & Wenxiang, 2020).

Apart from *palana* or maintenance of law and order within the state, and *yogakshema* or safeguarding the welfare of the people, a ruler's duty, according to Kautilya, "... was *raksha* or protection of the state from external aggression" (Rangarajan, 1992). The king occasionally must engage in hostilities with the aggressor in order to fulfill this crucial role of defending the state, he asserts.

The Arthashastra is divided into 15 books (Adhikarana). The two sections within Book 6 of Kautilya's work lay the groundwork for his "Theory of the State." Chapter {6.1} delineates the seven fundamental components inherent to any state, while chapter {6.2} elaborates on the Circle of States, also known as, the mandala theory) as the underlying principle guiding a foreign policy focused on territorial expansion achieved through conquest.

#### **Outline of Arthashastra**

Book 1: "Concerning Discipline"

Book 2: "The Duties of Government Superintendents"

Book 3: "Concerning Law"

Book 4: "The Removal of Thorns"

Book 5: "The Conduct of Courtiers"

Book 6: "The Source of Sovereign States"

Book 7: "The End of the Six-Fold Policy"

Book 8: "Concerning Vices and Calamities"

Book 9: "The Work of an Invader"

Book 10: "Relating to War"

Book 11: "The Conduct of Corporations"

Book 12: "Concerning a Powerful Enemy"

Book 13: "Strategic Means to Capture a Fortress"

Book 14: "Secret Means"

Book 15: "The Plan of a Treatise" ( (Shamasastri, 1915)

#### ***Elements of national security***

The Arthashastra eloquently elucidates various aspects of national security through poetic expression, rendering comprehensive insights into strategic imperatives and governance principles relevant to safeguarding the state's interests. Highlighting the significance of citizens within the state, Kautilya states: *In the happiness of his subjects lies his happiness; in their welfare his welfare; whatever pleases himself he shall not consider as good, but whatever pleases his subjects he shall consider as good.* (Shamasastri, 1915)

**Economic security**

Kautilya accentuates the pivotal role of resources in bolstering national security through the verse in question.

*Man, without wealth, does not get it even after a hundred attempts. Just as elephants are needed to catch elephants, so does wealth capture more wealth. {9.4.27}*

He has also expressly elucidated the significance of incorporating individuals from diverse varnas when establishing settlements in uncharted territories.

*When it comes to settling people in virgin territory, it is preferable to induct the [three] lower varnas [practicing the three main areas of economic activity] because of the variety of benefits which flow from them. Farmers are dependable and productive; cowherds make agriculture and other activities possible [by opening up pasture lands]; and rich traders are a source of goods and loans [of money]. {7.11.18-21}*

The subsequent verse delineates the critical role of dams in fostering the economic prosperity of a nation.

*Dams built to store water from a flowing source [such as a river] are preferable to those built to store water brought by canals [i.e. dug for that purpose]. Among reservoirs built by damming rivers, the one which irrigates a larger area is better. {7.12.4, 5}*

The concept of trade routes is expounded upon in the ensuing verse.

*Some teachers say that a trade-route by water is preferable to one on land because water routes can be used to transport a large quantity of goods at less expense and exertion. Kautilya disagrees. A water route is not usable at all times, accessible at only a few places, full of dangers and indefensible in contrast to land routes. {7.12.17-28}*

**Physical security/military security**

In articulating the significance of intelligence in national security, Kautilya employs metaphorical language in the following verse.

*No enemy shall know his secrets. He shall, however, know all his enemy's weakness. Like a tortoise, he shall draw in any limb of his that is exposed. {1.15.60}*

The verse in question delineates the classification and significance of forts based on their geographical positioning.

*Among forts of different types - a land-fort, a river fort or a mountain fort - one later in the list is preferable to one earlier [i.e. order of ascending importance] .Whoever gets an impregnable fort built on a place best suited for it at less cost and labour is said to outmanoeuvre the other. {7.12.2-3}*

He draws a comparison between different types of lands and concludes that the land which provides shelter to its inhabitants is of paramount importance, as a kingdom is comprised of its people.

*Of all the qualities of land, the best is affording shelter. As between land providing the protection of forts and one providing the support of people, the latter is preferable for it is the people who constitute a kingdom. Like a barren cow, a kingdom without people yields nothing. {7.11.22-25}*

### **Environmental security**

Kautilya emphasizes the significance of afforestation in enhancing the national security of a country, as articulated in the following verses.

*Whoever plants [for exploiting the timber resources] a large forest, near the border of his country, watered by a river and yielding material of high value is said to outmanoeuvre the others. A forest watered by a river is self-sustaining and provides shelter in times of calamities. {7.12.6, 7}.*

*Whoever creates an elephant forest near the border of his country, near a weak neighbour, stocked with many brave animals and capable of harassing the enemy is said to outmanoeuvre the others. Some teachers say that a forest with a few brave elephants is preferable to one with a large number of dull ones, on the grounds that, since [success in] war depends on the brave, a few animals can rout many cowardly ones and the defeated ones [turn around and] destroy their own army. Kautilya disagrees. It is better to have many dull elephants [than just a few brave ones]; they can be made to do many things in the army camp, provide protection to the troops and terrify the enemy troops by their numbers. It is also possible to make the many dull elephants valorous by [suitable] training. But the few, however brave, can never be made many. {7.12.8-12}*

He formulates a principle aimed at safeguarding wildlife in the verse that follows.

*One-sixth of live animals such as birds and beasts shall be let off in forests under State-protection. (Shamasastri, 1915, p. 173)*

### **Food Security**

Illustrating the significance of food security, Kautilya elucidates: *As between cultivable land and land with mines, cultivable land is preferable. For, mines fill the treasury while grains fill both the treasury and the storehouses. To begin construction of forts and other defensive works, grains are a prerequisite. {7.11.3-17}*

Kautilya has also instituted a regulation to penalize individuals who attempt to disrupt food production. *Persons who obstruct, or make any kind of mischief with the flow of water*

*intended for cultivation shall be punished with the first amercement* (Shamasastri, 1915, p. 245).

### **Methods of counteracting the famine**

In verses 4.3.17-20, Kautilya elucidates the following instructions for mitigating the consequences of famine;

- Distributing seeds and food from the royal reserves to the populace on concessional terms. Chanakya states: “*During famine, the king shall show favour to his people by providing them with seeds and provision (bījabhaktopagrāham)*” (Shamasastri, 1915, p. 296).
- “Undertake”ing “food-for-work programmes such as building forts or irrigation works” (Rangarajan, 1992, p. 130).
- Disseminating the food reserves from the royal stocks among the population.
- Authorizing for the requisition of privately owned food stocks for public distribution.
- Seeking the help of *Mitra* (friendly kings).
- Moving the affected population to a different area.
- Encouraging, temporary, migration to another country.
- Relocate the entire population, including the King and Court, to a region or country abundant in harvests or situated near bodies of water such as seas, lakes, or rivers. Kautilya articulates in a verse that: during the famine the king  
“*may remove himself with his subjects to seashores or to the banks of rivers or lakes. He may cause his subjects to grow grains, vegetables, roots, and fruits wherever water is available. He may, by hunting and fishing on a large scale, provide the people with wild beasts, birds, elephants, tigers or fish* (Shamasastri, 1915, p. 296).
- Augmenting the agricultural yield through additional cultivation of grains, vegetables, roots, and fruits, supplemented by fishing and hunting of deer, cattle, birds, and wild animals.

### **The elements of a sovereignty**

In verse 6.1.1 of the Arthashastra, Kautilya elucidates that the *vijigishu* (the king), the *amatya* (the assembly of councilors, ministers, and other high-ranking officials), the *janapada* (the territorial expanse of the state coupled with its resident population), the *durga* (the fortified towns and cities), the *kosa* (the treasury), the *sena* (the defense force) and the *danda* (law enforcement forces) and the *mitra* (the allies) are the elements of sovereignty. These constituent elements are metaphorically likened to the limbs of a state and are commonly referred to as *saptanga*. Figure 1 illustrates how the elements of national security converge around the conqueror, who is himself one of the elements.

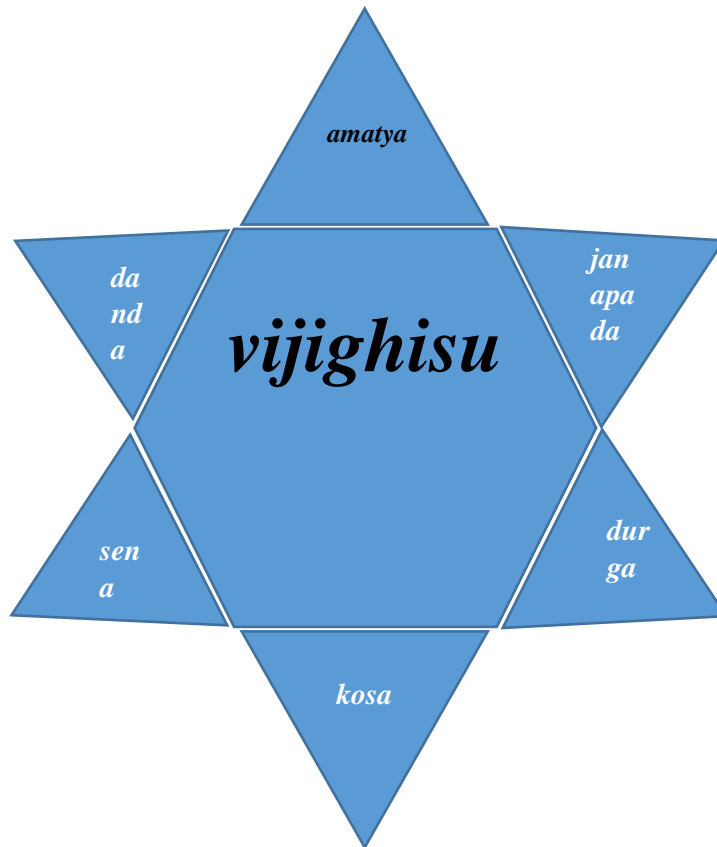


Fig. 1: Saptanga concept

### **Types of kings**

Categorized by their relationships and strategic positions to the *vijigishu* (the conqueror), the following types of kings emerge:

<i>ari</i>	-	antagonist
<i>shatru</i>	-	enemy
<i>mitra</i>	-	friend, ally
<i>ari-mitra</i>	-	enemy's ally
<i>mitra-mitra</i>	-	friend of the ally
<i>ari-mitra-mitra</i>	-	enemy's ally's friend
<i>parshnigraha</i>	-	enemy-in-the-rear
<i>aakranda</i>	-	ally in the rear
<i>parshnigraha-asara</i>	-	rear enemy's ally
<i>aakranda-asara</i>	-	rear ally's friend
<i>antardhi</i>	-	weak intervening king
<i>udhasina</i>	-	neutral king
<i>madhyama</i>	-	middle king

(Rangarajan, 1992, pp. 551-552)



**Types Enemies-In-the Rear**

Kautilya emphasizes that kings who possess the ability to harass the conqueror from the rear and hinder his movements are classified into three categories: the neighboring group situated behind the conqueror, as well as “the two groups on either side of him” {7.13.24}. Figure 3 (Rangarajan, 1992, p. 560) visually illustrates the types of Enemies-in-the-Rear, while Figure 4 points out the position of the “Intervening” or the weak king.

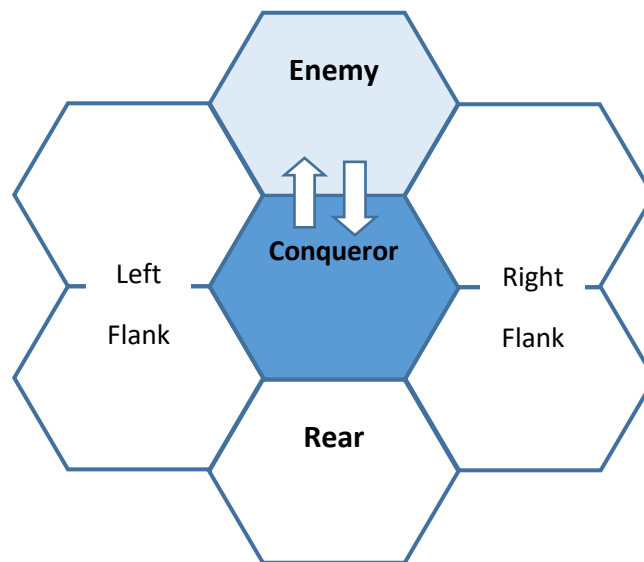


Fig 2: Types of Enemies-in-the-Rear

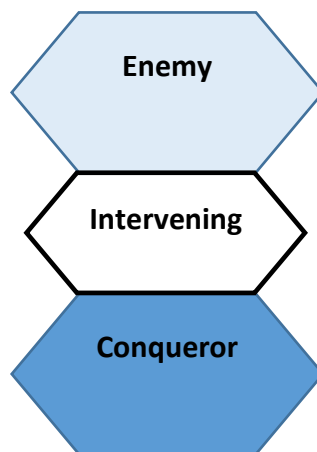


Fig3. The Intervening King



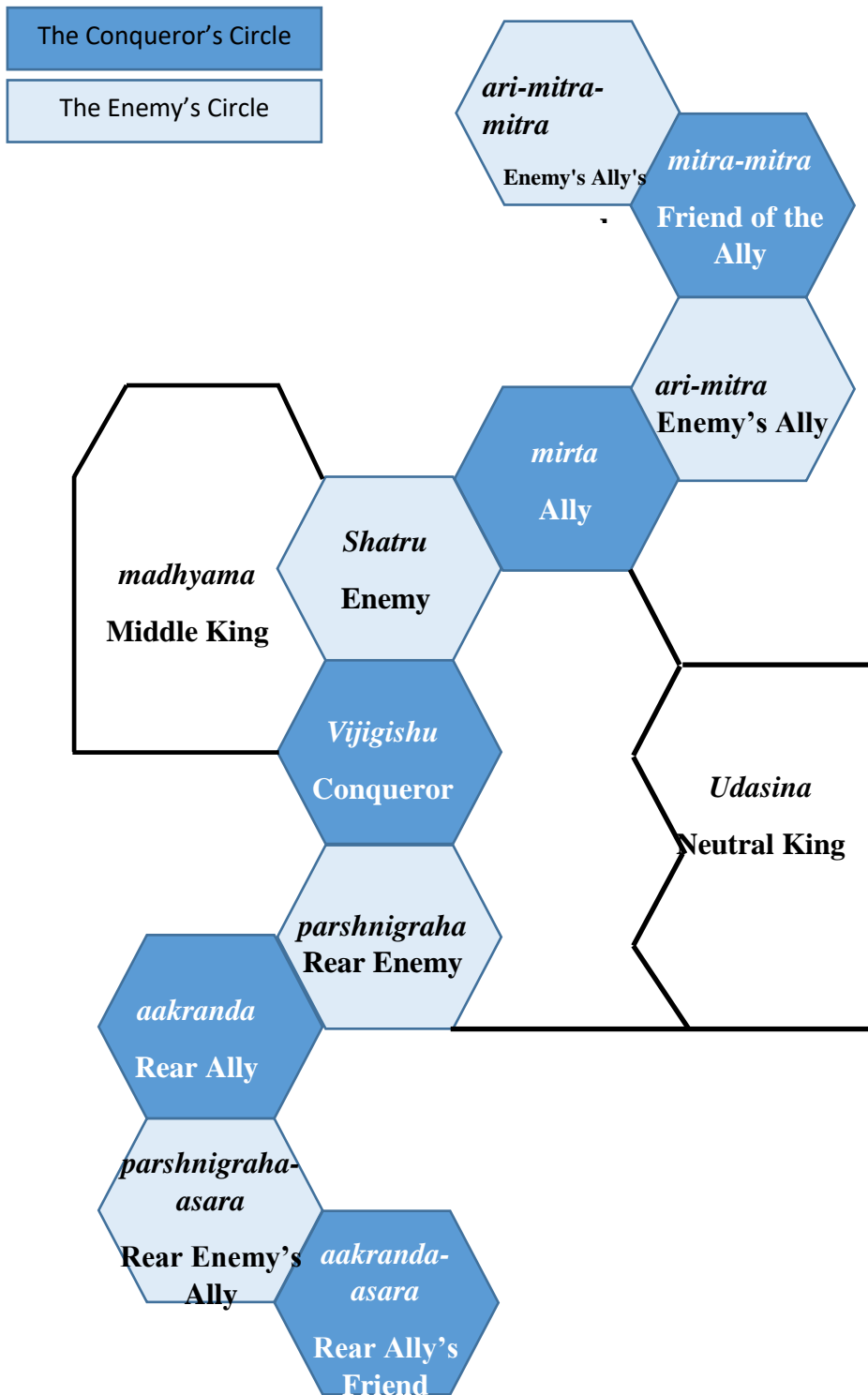


Fig3: The Circle of States

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## The circle of states

“The word *mandala* means circle in Sanskrit. It is a geographical concept of division of lands of the king (the *vijigishu*) and the neighboring kingdoms” (Chakraborti, 2016).

“Kautilya devised the *mandala* system for his king to realize the twin objectives of foreign policy: security and interest” (Bhagat, 1990). Kautilya explains that; “the would-be conqueror, the ally and the friend of the ally are the three constituents of the circle of kings” (Rangrajan p.559). Together with the other integral elements; including the kings; of their respective states (the ministers, the countryside, the fortified cities, the treasury and the armies), a circle of states, comprising eighteen elements, is constituted.

Together with the other integral elements of their respective states, a circle of states, consisted of eighteen elements, constitutes. Similarly, the enemy, the Middle king, and the Neutral kings each have a circle of eighteen elements. “Thus there are four primary Circles of States, twelve kings, sixty elements of sovereignty, and seventy-two elements of states” (Shamasastry p.367-368). Figure 3 (Rangarajan, p. 557) provides a visual representation of the circle of states.

## Conclusion

Chanakya, often criticized and ridiculed for promoting unethical practices, is frequently misunderstood. Scholars specializing in ancient Indian history have extensively studied the comprehensive nature of the Arthashastra, acknowledged it as a seminal work on statecraft covering various aspects. His teachings to aspiring rulers primarily emphasize the security and well-being of the people, whom he considers the central component of national security. The purportedly "non-traditional" components of national security were intricately woven into the remarkable treatise, Arthashastra, composed in antiquity. This underscores the depth of non-Western theories and methodologies in the realm of statecraft.

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