

## Kautilya's *Arthashastra* and governance as an element of state power

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The Indian subcontinent has long been subjected to invasions and extended periods of warlordism, fragmentation and anarchy. The success of the invading powers has often depended a great deal upon the prevalence of internal dissolution. There is a direct link, for instance, between the collusion of certain Afghan notables, such as the governor of the Punjab, Daulat Khan Lodhi, and the establishment of Mughal imperial rule in the subcontinent in the 1520s. One can also cite the collaboration of the former Mughal nobility in Bengal and the ascendance of the British Empire in India in the 1750s.<sup>1</sup> In each case, the "softness" of the Indian states and their relative lack of internal discipline and order facilitated their eclipse and penetration by imperial agents.<sup>2</sup> The ability of states to maintain order and discipline within their frontiers appears, therefore, to be a critical component of state power.<sup>3</sup> Without order, the ability of the state to raise revenues is compromised, thereby diminishing its capacity to raise effective military forces. A lack of order would also facilitate internal rebellions and enable such acts of defiance to coalesce with the malevolence and ambitions of external rivals.

Kautilya's *Arthashastra*<sup>4</sup> is one of the most comprehensive treatises ever produced on state power, its acquisition, exercise and disruption. Several characteristics of the *Arthashastra* render it particularly relevant to the present context. The first is that the *Arthashastra* neither is nor claims to be a theoretical work of political science or political philosophy.<sup>5</sup> Kautilya does not debate the merits or demerits of different forms of government. For Kautilya, that issue has already been settled in favour of absolutist monarchical states that operate through salaried professional bureaucracies and military forces. The *Arthashastra* is thus more of an administrative manual and advice on policy making and execution that reflects not just Kautilya's perspective but the collectivity of classical Indian thought.<sup>6</sup> Second, Kautilya was no arm-chair academic. As Chandragupta Maurya's co-conspirator against the Nanda dynasty and his prime minister after

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their conspiracies were successful in bringing the Mauryas to power in Magadha, Kautilya had a practical understanding of the exercise of power. Third, at the time of

Kautilya's rise to favour and influence, Magadha was one of the many different states competing for control of the Indo-Gangetic plain. This means that the *Arthashastra* is not a work concerned with India during the Mauryan imperial peace (300-180 BC), but the period leading to its establishment. Kautilya's goal was to turn Magadha and his Mauryan masters into the supreme hegemonic power in the Indian subcontinent.<sup>7</sup>

The relative attention paid to different subjects by Kautilya also sheds light on his appreciation of the relationship between governance and the power of the state in relation to other states. More than eight-tenths of the *Arthashastra* is devoted to explaining the internal working of the state and what can be done to improve it. This is not because Kautilya regarded diplomacy and use of military force as unimportant. Given that there were many hostile competing states in the region, dealing with them was an inevitable part of statecraft.<sup>8</sup> The relative neglect of foreign policy reflects Kautilya's perspective that it was the internal condition of a country that constituted its real strength.<sup>9</sup> Tempting though it was to spend time entertaining foreign emissaries and engaging in flattering or acrimonious diplomatic exchanges, it was domestic policy that merited the greatest part of the ruler's attention and efforts.<sup>10</sup>

The *Arthashastra's* explanation of the relationship between governance and the overall power of the state is multidimensional. One of these dimensions is the paramount importance of internal peace, which is regarded as the prerequisite for all other attainments.<sup>11</sup> Of these attainments, economic wealth and military power count for much, and constitute the material dimension of state power. These "hard" aspects of state power, however, need to be guided by solid intelligence. Combined and balanced, these dimensions constitute sound policy.

### **Internal Order amid International Anarchy**

Around 500 BC there emerged in the Gangetic plain dynastic states ruled by absolute monarchs. In these states a bureaucratic administration and professional military enabled an unprecedented concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the supreme executive who effectively became the proprietor of the country under his control. The principal advantage that such states had, including Magadha, was derived from their ability to establish order more efficiently over a relatively large area. Autonomous village communities, tribal republics, aristocratic confederacies and wild tribes, lacked unity and order and could not effectively exercise control within their frontiers.<sup>12</sup> The *Arthashastra* state thus aspired to increase the zone of internal order until it either became the paramount power or

ran into determined opposition from another comparably well-ordered state.<sup>13</sup> In a critical sense, therefore, the expansionist drive was powered by the existence of zones of relative disorder into which the *Arthashastra* state could project itself. Internal peace and stability were the foundations of a policy of controlled aggression against relatively unstable rivals. It is thus that the problem that commands Kautilya's attention is the maintenance of order within a state as the fundamental operative condition which, if neglected, renders all other activities of the state marginal, futile or counterproductive. The elements that must be assembled and amalgamated to attain this primordial end include the wisdom of the sovereign,<sup>14</sup> the formal organization of the state, the quality of the royal servants,<sup>15</sup> and consistency<sup>16</sup> in applying the principles of effectiveness and justice.

For Kautilya, the ruler could safeguard the interests of his domain for only so long as he was secure against the intrigues of his enemies, family members and immediate circle of associates.<sup>17</sup> The ruler was the "embodiment of the state";<sup>18</sup> and the price of absolute power was perpetual vigilance. Since external pressure could forge alliances with internal dissent, the ruler had to be ruthless enough to act effectively on the advice of spies and eliminate potential traitors even if it entailed trampling on his own family and closest friends.

The ruler was advised to organize his day into a strict routine that gave him some ten hours of personal time and fourteen hours of official work.<sup>19</sup> The personal time was necessary for the ruler needed to be able to think without pressure about both philosophical and practical questions pertinent to his administration and the interests of the state. Of the fourteen hours of official work, the bulk of the time was to be spent on conferring with his advisers, spies, civil servants and senior military officers. Intriguingly, no time was regularly allocated for diplomatic protocol or receiving foreign dignitaries from other states.<sup>20</sup> Decisiveness and the ability to understand and alter ground realities through the exertion of state power mattered<sup>21</sup> the most -not longwinded exchanges. The cultivation of a strong work ethic and sound judgment by the ruler could not amount to very much unless they served to energize the state machinery.

What is remarkable about the state apparatus described by Kautilya is its vastness and complexity. Nearly three dozen administrative departments headed by *adhyakshas*, the equivalent of a federal secretary in the Pakistani bureaucracy, and a vast range of auxiliary and clandestine operations meant that state apparatus was too large to be personally supervised by the ruler.<sup>22</sup> The territorial extent of the Mauryan Empire further militated against direct supervision.<sup>23</sup> The key to exercising personal control, therefore, was for the ruler to have at his disposal several hundred trusted senior officials, such as councillors, governors, generals, spymasters, and departmental heads, upon whom the ruler could at an individual level impress the

validity of his policies. It was important for the ruler to be more competent and charismatic than his senior officers so that they in turn could convincingly impress their subordinates with tales of the ruler's high calibre. Thus, for the all-important area administration, officers analogous to the hierarchies of later empires were appointed for 1, 10, 200, 400 and 800 villages starting from the village headman and culminating in the *sthanika* (governor) and *pradeshir* (magistrate).<sup>24</sup> Similar hierarchies existed for revenue, justice, public works, etc., although it was the area administrators that acted as the coordinators and facilitators of state policy.

The formal organization of the state, however impressive on paper, counted for little if the quality of the officers and advisers ranged from poor to indifferent. Kautilya recommends that aspirants to state service be tested for knowledge of law and morality, economics, aesthetics, and courage.<sup>25</sup> Those successful in all tests were to be employed as palace officials and advisers to the ruler. Those less successful in the tests were to be employed in accordance with the area of their best performance. With a little imagination one can see how a good mathematician lacking literary skills could be appointed a tax collector or accountant or how a refined aesthete lacking physical courage or mathematical skills could be appointed in charge of training musicians or managing inns.

The remuneration of the officers varied, but depended on certain principles.<sup>26</sup> Those officers with direct access to the ruler, such as the army chief, chancellor, comptroller and councillor, plus key members of the royal family, were remunerated lavishly. Thus, the army chief and special royal adviser drew salaries of 4,000 *panas* (silver currency units) per month (48,000 *panas* per year). Senior palace officers such as the chamberlain and treasurer, received 2,000 *panas* per month (24,000 *panas* per year), while comptrollers, governors, auditors and generals commanded annual remuneration in the range of 8,000 to 12,000 *panas*. Every possible effort was made to ensure that the best and brightest individuals would join the state service and if they got to the higher levels they could expect to be extremely well taken care of.

The middle-ranking officers were to be paid generously but not excessively. Thus, divisional commanders, magistrates, judges, spies, and those in charge of the recreational establishments could expect 1,000 to 8,000 *panas* per year depending on the exact requirements of the work. The subordinate officials, who reported on a daily basis to the middle order, including military specialists, village headmen, customs agents, etc., were to be paid a decent wage that could enable them to live comfortably. Their remuneration ranged from 500 to 1,000 *panas* per year. The mass of runners, menials, petty clerks, occasional spies, informers, soldiers, guards, etc., employed by the state were paid in the range of 60 to 500 *panas* per year or enough to subsist within the price-controlled economy of the *Arthashastra* state.

In order to ensure that his servants were performing their duties, the ruler had a number of instruments of control at his disposal. One was to set an example of hard work and discipline and motivate his senior officers to emulate their master.<sup>27</sup> Another was to take personal tours of inspection and hold public and private audiences to hear complaints against the royal servants. A regular network of reports and recommendations on personnel management existed within the apparatus. The ultimate instrument of control the ruler could rely on was the secret service. The resulting surveillance and planted intrigues combined with the number and types of spies no doubt created administrative problems of their own, but Kautilya felt them to be a necessary evil if the ruler was to be obeyed. The ruler's servants had to be made to fear their master's omniscience. The internecine rivalries ignited by the secret service had the added benefit of preventing the royal servants from uniting against their master. It also guaranteed that with a competent ruler his servants would have a powerful incentive to do his bidding and so enable the royal will to bring relative order to the state apparatus. Order within the state apparatus secured the writ of the ruler and made it effective.

Without order on the ground, all other desirable attainments – wealth, justice, enlightenment, military success and aesthetic refinement – were beside the point. The ruler needed order and stability to raise revenues with which to run the administration and maintain his military forces and secret service. The military deterred the aggression of dissidents within and covetous neighbours without. The secret service provided the intelligence that enabled the ruler to predict the moves of his enemies and quietly, and economically, deal with or defuse internal and external crises. A relatively just and efficient administration made the ruler gain prestige in the eyes of his subjects, and thus reduced the potential for subversion. Kautilya actually advises in favour of attacking an enemy who has a larger or stronger army but is tyrannical and incompetent in administration due to the likelihood that such an attack can precipitate rebellion. Kautilya also advises against aggression against a militarily weaker but better governed state due to the difficulty of undermining such a kingdom from within. That said, Kautilya was neither a spiritualist nor an idealist and maintained that the principal aim of any state was to accumulate to the greatest extent possible the material strength it needed to survive in the highly corrosive atmosphere of international anarchy that prevailed at the time in the Indian subcontinent.

### **Wealth and Force (*Kosadanda*)**

“From wealth (*kosa*) comes the power of the government (*danda*).”<sup>28</sup> Without a strong treasury, the state would either fail to maintain order and defend itself or become a subsidiary or dependency of another wealthier and more powerful state.<sup>29</sup>

The object of internal order was to create stable conditions for economic expansion and the growth of state revenues through effective taxation.<sup>30</sup> The collection of revenues was necessary for the sustenance of the military and intelligence apparatus needed to defend the realm and project its power abroad.

Although taxes on land were the largest source of revenue, the efficient operation of state-owned businesses, the promotion of domestic and international trade, anti-corruption measures, and strict accounting procedures, merited the sovereign's attention. It was of vital importance that the ruler and his servants had sound factual knowledge of the economic assets directly and indirectly controlled by state. They must also have the means to punish violations of taxation discipline with fines, confiscations and imprisonment. This discipline extended to a host of indirect taxes on leisure activities, such as liquor and gambling, as well as service charges for irrigation, transport and technical support. Royal monopolies over mines were particularly critical so that the state could use the amount it needed for equipping its armies and court consumption and sell any surplus on the market for an additional profit. Indeed, "the power of the state comes out of these resources."<sup>31</sup> If the regular sources of revenues failed to meet requirements, Kautilya advises confiscating temple properties, preying on the superstitions of people to get them to make donations to government agents posing as holy men, engineering property disputes within families as a pretext for royal confiscation, and defrauding subjects through fake business operations.

Financial discipline was to be maintained through budgeting, accounting, auditing and espionage, with senior officers held personally liable for any major discrepancies.<sup>32</sup> Kautilya advises the ruler to reward upright financial administrators who increase the revenues without resorting to heavy-handed or arbitrary measures. Kautilya also appreciates that a country can indefinitely sustain a moderate level of taxation. Thus, financial administrators who collect too little or spend too much are as bad as overzealous officers who collect too much and spend too little.<sup>33</sup> Laxity in the financial administration breeds chaos and disintegration in the country. An overly high level of taxation destroys the basis of future productivity, deprives people of their subsistence and provokes rebellions, thereby making the state vulnerable to external pressure.

The conversion of economic wealth into military assets for defensive and offensive purposes comprised the second aspect of *kosadanda*. Kautilya's paradigm was inherently expansionist in that more wealth yielded greater military power and greater military power yielded more territory and resources.<sup>34</sup> The attainment of supreme hegemony was the aim of the *Arthashastra* state. Achieving this end necessarily entailed military conflict with rivals, some of which were also organized as absolute monarchies on the *Arthashastra* pattern. It is significant that in his

reflections on defence and foreign policies, Kautilya typically designates his own sovereign as the protagonist or conqueror. That Magadha did in fact unify the subcontinent under Mauryan dynastic rule indicates that Kautilya's advice was remarkably sound and fairly well-heeded.

The numerical strength of the Mauryan armed forces has been estimated in the range of 300,000 to 600,000.<sup>35</sup> These armed forces, however, comprised separate classes of armies including the highly trained and well-paid standing army, a less prestigious territorial army raised for particular campaigns and then demobilized,<sup>36</sup> local militias and auxiliaries including tribal units, allied forces and mercenaries. Insofar as the command structure went, the standing army was divided into chariot, elephant, cavalry and infantry corps, further subdivided into divisions and battalions.<sup>37</sup> Ordnance had a parallel structure enabling it to assist all the fighting units. An extensive network of spies and informers was deployed to ensure the loyalty of the officers and soldiers and learn about the military dispositions of rivals.

Having a well-paid, organized, and highly motivated standing army and the economic wealth needed to raise a territorial army along with local militias and auxiliaries were but one component of warfare. Kautilya, like Clausewitz,<sup>38</sup> regarded war as a means to an end – or an extension of policy through the application of force. And, like Sun Tzu,<sup>39</sup> Kautilya regarded the period before the actual fighting began as critical to the outcome. It was vital that the ruler and his servants be able and willing to undertake a dispassionate and rational appreciation of the total assets of their state in relation to the enemy (or enemies) modified by the contributions of allies. Thus, geography, timing, seasonal variations, mobilization schedules, preparing for internal rebellions and discontent, estimating the material losses in relation to strategic gains, and the risks involved to the stability of the dynasty all had to be carefully weighed. There was no point in attacking a more powerful state without first consulting one's allies. Similarly, committing troops to a limited engagement without factoring the possibility of escalation and the likely losses was to be avoided. While the military was trained and drilled into believing in itself and the power of positive thinking, for the ruler and his senior servants, optimism was a dangerous and potentially catastrophic luxury. Indeed, for Kautilya the power of solid advice was greater than military strength, and by combining superior intelligence and comprehension of politics the conqueror could prevail against militarily more powerful adversaries.

### **Unseen but not Unfelt: Intelligence, Governance and State Power**

The secret service (*gudapurusha*) of the *Arthashastra* state had three principal

strategic objectives.<sup>40</sup> The first was that it kept the ruler and his trusted servants informed of developments within and without the empire. The second was that the secret service conducted covert operations aimed at undermining both internal and external enemies. And third, the secret service was mandated with the maintenance of the internal discipline and loyalty of the bureaucracy and military. A major operational principle that was not to be violated except in cases of extreme emergency was that intelligence reports from three different sources were needed for the state to authorize action.

At a formal level the intelligence apparatus was organized into distinct categories. Stationed agents constituted the heart of the intelligence machine and comprised all those operatives who stayed in more or less one location and reported to the well-paid and highly trained intelligence officers (*kapatikas*).<sup>41</sup> Mobile agents comprising the secret operative (*sattri*), the assassin (*tikshana*), poison specialist (*rasada*) and wandering nuns (*pariuvajrika*) stood at hand to execute covert action and also report on happenings within their zone of movement.<sup>42</sup> Double-agents, counter-espionage, and financial surveillance, all had distinct hierarchies and operational ambits. Kautilya advises the ruler to ensure that the intelligence officers and secret operatives be particularly well-paid, highly honoured, and well-educated so that they may be able to make sense of the information and pass it on in a digested form.<sup>43</sup> It was equally vital that spies of one category and in one post did not know who the spies in other categories and posts were. The collectors and interpreters of intelligence ought not to know much about field agents engaged in gathering intelligence. Inefficient, disloyal and indiscreet spies were to be killed without hesitation. Disguise, secrecy and silence were vital to the entire enterprise for, “Miraculous results can be achieved by practicing the methods of subversion.”<sup>44</sup>

Disloyal elements within the country with the power and wealth to collude effectively with external rivals were particularly worthy objects for the secret service’s attention. In essence the *Arthashastra* state waged a continuous and largely unseen war to retain its internal cohesion and disrupt the internal equilibrium of its rivals. The most valuable intelligence operation toward this end was to successfully corrupt or compromise high officials in both hostile and friendly states. This secured valuable insights into the inner workings of other states and led to a more accurate estimation of their motivations and capabilities. The next best use of spies was the assassination of rival rulers and troublesome dissident elements. Given the highly personalized nature of absolutist states, the assassination or incapacitation of the ruler was likely to trigger a civil war which the conqueror could take advantage of. Properly deployed, “A single assassin can achieve, with weapons, fire or poison, more than a fully mobilized army.”<sup>45</sup>



## **Balancing the Components of State Power and Making Policy: Lessons from the *Arthashastra***

There are a number of important lessons that can be learned from the *Arthashastra* that states like India and Pakistan would do well to heed. These lessons and insights are perhaps applicable to the wider world as well where weak or failing/failed states pose an increasing risk not only to their own people but also to their neighbours and the international community at large.<sup>46</sup>

Perhaps the most important of these lessons is the role of governance in the augmentation or diminution of the total power of a state.<sup>47</sup> An effectively governed state with the ability to raise sufficient revenues and maintain internal security may not necessarily make better foreign policy than a state that is relatively weaker on the domestic front. However, a stable, well-ordered, and highly motivated state that excels in internal management will be in a better position to calibrate itself to meet challenges from its rivals, absorb shocks and defeats, and have a slightly larger margin of error that may well make the difference between survival and oblivion or success and failure.<sup>48</sup>

By the same token, a well-governed state will have less to fear from subversion and revolt and be in a better position to disrupt the domestic stability of its adversaries. It would also be able to move with greater surety toward the execution of any foreign or defence policy related tasks that necessitate the large-scale mobilization of economic and military power. Faster, enthusiastic, properly trained and well-remunerated bureaucracies reduce the friction inherent in converting the intentions of the rulers into effects on the ground. A state that neglects the quality of the administrative elite and institutions upon which the execution of policy depends does so at the greatest possible peril to itself.

A comparable peril against which a state must guard is the tendency to allow the individual components of state power to fragment the making and execution of policy. For Kautilya, whose emphasis is on the integrated nature of state power, it would be the height of absurdity for the administrative, economic, military and intelligence assets of a state to be deployed without a proper coherent vision and understanding of the common goals they seek to achieve. For, the individual components of state power to be thus divided and operate at cross-purposes would breed chaos and indiscipline within the state.<sup>49</sup> The synthesizing element is that of leadership -political, bureaucratic, military, and intelligence. Without effective leadership, disorder will prevail within the state apparatus and gravely diminish the ability of the state to either control or effectively respond to challenges. Unless a country has an exceptionally high margin of geographic security, the consequences of such discord are likely to be fatal.<sup>50</sup>

Finally, the *Arthashastra* is a monument to evanescence of states and empires and a reflection upon the fluidity of their fortunes. The Mauryan Empire that Kautilya helped nurture attained the objective of supreme hegemony only to fall prey to internal decay rapidly followed by predatory attacks from former allies and barbarians. A similar pattern reasserted itself in the 2200 years since the eclipse of the Mauryan Empire with the rise and fall of the Guptas, the Delhi Sultanate, the Mughals and the British. In many respects, the subcontinent has, over the past 60 years, become more like the internally divided, fractious, and turbulent region it was between its imperial unifications or at the time Kautilya presented his prescriptions.<sup>51</sup> The successor states to the British Empire in India are failing to maintain internal order, ensure fiscal stability, military strength and sound intelligence, thereby greatly exacerbating their mutual vulnerabilities and increasing their susceptibility to external pressure. Reflection and sober analysis would indicate that what is happening now has happened before and that a point is fast being reached beyond which the breakdown of order will become impossible to arrest. Strangely, South Asian elites have an unusually large appetite for the foreign and defence policy paradigms produced in Western academia. Regrettably, these imported paradigms do not connect with the historical realities of this region and seem to have led to the neglect of the quality of the state apparatus and governance even though they are essential to the maintenance of state power. If India and Pakistan are to play a role on the international stage commensurate with their size or at least avert the tragic fate that so many states in the subcontinent's history have succumbed to, they must first put their own houses in order and address the crisis of governance.

## Notes & References

1

A similar situation prevailed in the Punjab. During the reign of Ranjeet Singh (1799-1839), the British were unable to penetrate the region. But once he died, the Sikh army split up into rival groups and warlordism took hold. This greatly facilitated British imperial expansion. For more on the nature of Sikh rule, see Andrew J. Major, *Return to Empire: Punjab under the Sikhs and British in the mid-Nineteenth Century* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1996), esp. pp. 19-21.

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The conquest of Sindh in the 1840s by Charles Napier is another case in point. Once the Talpur rulers were defeated, the populace made terms with their new masters. For more, see H. H., Dodwell, ed., *The Cambridge History of India*, vol. 5, *British India 1497-1858* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921; reprint, New Delhi: S. Chand & Company (Pvt.) Ltd., 1987), p. 538.

3

At some level, it is also necessary for the enforcement of international commitments such as trade agreements or, in more recent times, environmental regulations. If a state cannot maintain order within its borders, it will have a very hard time enforcing international obligations as well.

4

A number of versions of the *Arthashastra* have been used in this paper. The most important of these is Kautilya, *The Arthashastra*, trans., L. N. Rangarajan (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1992). Rangarajan arranges the treatise by subject and thus greatly enhances its readability and utility. An honoured, but in terms of its practical utility, distant second is Kautilya, *The Arthashastra*, trans., R. Shamasastri. (Bangalore: Government Press, 1915). This is the original translation and is marked by a great deal of rambling and repetition. It is, however, the translation upon which later editions, including Rangarajan's, depend. The third is B. P. Sinha's *Readings in Kautilya's Arthashastra* (New Delhi: Agam Prakhasan, 1976). Sinha paints a picture of the *Arthashastra* state that would lead one to believe that it was the original socialist utopia. It does, however, shed light in an organized fashion on state and society as elucidated in the treatise.

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The *Arthashastra* is often "mistakenly believed" to be "a text on Hindu political thought." This is highly misleading, given that Kautilya is not concerned with presenting a philosophy of government. In fact, the treatise is "a text-book on administration in a monarchical state." Romila Thapar, *Cultural Pasts: Essays in Early Indian History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 411.

6

Ibid.

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That is the *chakravartin* or supreme hegemon.

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The other major state formations/power centres were Kamboja and Gandhara in the north-west (today Pakistan); Kuru, Surasena, Panchala, Kosala, Vatsa, Kashi, Malla, Vriji, and Anga, along the Ganges and Yamuna; Matsya, Chedi and Avanti in the area roughly corresponding to Gujarat, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh; and Asmaka near the Godavari river. Deep into south India were the Satya Putras, Kerala Putras, Pandyas and Cholas. Magadha occupied a central position and shared frontiers with Anga, Vriji, Malla and Kashi.

9

Von Metternich, the Austrian Chancellor and master diplomat of Europe from 1815 Congress of Vienna to his overthrow in 1848, was ever conscious of the domestic vulnerability of the Habsburg Empire (later Austria-Hungary) due to its immense diversity and relative backwardness. His system of police repression designed to maintain internal order and crush liberalism was linked to his efforts to commit the major states of Europe, including Russia and Prussia, whom he feared most, to an ideologically and territorially status-quo policy in Europe. In 1820, however, Metternich lamented that his life had "coincided with a wretched epoch" and wished that he had been born a century later so that he would not have been condemned to being the custodian of an ancient crumbling state paralysed by its internal weakness. Alan Palmer, *Metternich: Councilor of Europe* (London: Phoenix, 1997), p. 193. For Metternich, therefore, it was his domestic constraints that dictated his foreign policy; and it remains to his credit that he managed to delay the disintegration of the Habsburg Empire by securing for it some 40 years of peace.

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In more recent times, going for trips abroad with large delegations that return more or less empty-handed in terms of official business, would fall under this category of wasteful behaviour.

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In the Western tradition, Thomas Hobbes ranks as one of the greatest advocates of an

absolutist sovereign state capable of maintaining order against the inherently selfish and greedy propensities of men. See, Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, vol. III, *Hobbes and Civil Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). For the near eastern tradition, see, Hubert Drake, trans., *The Book of Government or Rules for Kings: The Siyasatnama or Siyar al-Muluk of Nizam al-Mulk* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960). In it the Seljuk vizier discusses the requirements of effective and strong government as a necessary condition for all other achievements.

12

Karen Armstrong goes to the extent of categorising the monarchical states such as Magadha and Kosala as “modern kingdoms” with “streamlined bureaucracies and armies” loyal to the monarch. They were thus “far more efficiently run” than the tribal oligarchies and aristocracies. Karen Armstrong, *Buddha* (London: Phoenix, 2002), p. 20.

13

The expansion of the Russian Empire (1500-1917) is one indication of this pattern. Westwards and southwards, where it ran into organized opposition from other European States and the Ottoman Empire, respectively, Russian expansion was a relatively slow and piecemeal affair. Across the Eurasian heartland, Siberia and Central Asia, expansion was relatively rapid. Perhaps one of the most interesting and oft-referred to exchanges in the context of Russian expansionism took place in September 1833 at Muchengratz. Nicholas I, the Russian Czar, asked: “Prince Metternich, what do you think of the Turk? Is he not a sick man?” Metternich, realizing where his interlocutor wanted to take their discussion, replied: “Is Your Majesty addressing the doctor or the heir?” Palmer, *Metternich*, p. 261. The point however remained that the *internal disorder* confronting the Ottoman Empire was both the pretext and the opportunity for expanding at its expense.

14

Writes Abu’l Fazl at the beginning of his account of imperial administration in Mughal India: “I shall now record the excellent ordinances of that sagacious intellect that energises the world.” Abu’l Fazl Allami, *A’in-i Akbari*, trans. H. Blochmann (Calcutta: Calcutta Madrassah, 1873; reprint, Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2003), p. 549.

15

Continuing in this vein, Abu’l Fazl asserts that the quality of the imperial servants is vital. For, starting from the provincial governors, “The troops and people of the provinces” are under their care as a trust vested in them by the sovereign. *Ibid.*, p. 570. Indeed, “the supreme authority and redress of grievances rests with the monarch, yet the capacity of a single person is inadequate to the superintendence of the entire administration.” *Ibid.*, p. 573.

16

And, that as the representatives of the ruler, the imperial servants must be conscious of their responsibility for projecting a proper image. A proper image could be projected only through just actions; for, if the imperial servants were unjust, it would reflect poorly on their master. *Ibid.*, p. 571.

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Kautilya, *The Arthashastra*, trans., L. N. Rangarajan, p. 154.

18

*Ibid.*, p. 157.

19

*Ibid.*, p. 147.

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*Ibid.*

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A point clearly lost on modern India's leadership which prides itself on its ability to engage others in tedious but essentially fruitless negotiations. See, for instance, Strobe Talbot, *Engaging India: Diplomacy, Democracy and the Bomb* (London: Penguin Books, 2004). The contrast between Indian cleverness and verbosity and the simultaneously philosophical and pragmatic aptitude of the Chinese is vividly brought out in Margaret MacMillan's *Nixon and Mao: The Week that Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2007). A week in 1972 in China preceded by a few years of secret diplomacy revolutionised international affairs and altered the global balance of power in favour of the United States even as it faced defeat in South-East Asia. In contrast, sixty years of engaging India have failed to secure for the United States a reliable regional ally. In the meantime, India has failed to develop a strategic military capability comparable to its Chinese neighbour.

22

The departments were: Accounts, Treasury, Elephant Forests, Mining and Metallurgy, Metals, the Royal Mint, Mines, Salt, Precious Metals and Jewels, Warehouses, State Trading, Forest Produce, Ordnance, Weights and Measures, Survey and Timekeeping, Customs and Octroi, Textiles, Crown Lands, Alcoholic Beverages, Protection of Animals/Animal Slaughter, Entertainment, Shipping, Ports and Harbours, Crown Herds, Cavalry, Elephants, Infantry, Chariots, Passports, Pasture Lands, Gambling, Private Trade, Jails and finally Temples. *Ibid.*, pp. 307-8.

23

At its height, c. 200 BC, it included much of present day South India, Pakistan and Afghanistan, as well as the Gangetic plain. The capital was Pataliputra, near Patna, in what is today the Indian province of Bihar.

24

*Ibid.*, p. 179.

25

*Ibid.*, pp. 201-2.

26

*Ibid.*, pp. 289-292.

27

As the Mughal Emperor Jahangir would reflect in his memoirs centuries later: "Sovereignty and government cannot be managed and regulated by men of limited intelligence." *Memoirs of Jahangir*, trans., H. M. Elliot, ed., John Dawson (n.p., 1871 reprint; Lahore: Islamic Book Service, 1975), p. 44.

28

Kautilya, *The Arthashastra*, trans., L. N. Rangarajan, p. 254.

29

One might agree that prolonged dependence "on the continued goodwill of another sovereign state is demoralising" and to be avoided if possible. Henry Kissinger, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace: 1812-1822* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1957; reprint, London: Phoenix, 2002), p. 316.

30

A near contemporary of Kautilya and leading example of a different emergent bureaucratic tradition was Lord Shang (d. 338 BC). He was adviser to Duke Hsiao of the state of Qin which unified China in 221 BC. *The Book of Lord Shang*, a collection of legalist reflections and advice on statecraft, maintains that order, tax collection, and state power flowed in harmonious sequence through the exertion of the ruler and his officials. The establishment of an effective order, based on laws applied equally upon the subjects and subordinate officials, was essential to controlling the desire of officials to take a share of the imperial revenues for themselves and oppress (or collude with) the taxpayers. Taxes

were to be carefully calculated and applied as a proportion of actual yield with the long-term objective of weakening the autonomy of taxpayers and subordinate officials and strengthening the central state. Shang Yang, *The Book of Lord Shang*, trans., J. J. L. Duyvendak, intro., Robert Wilkinson (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1998), pp. 150, 135-144.

31

Kautilya, *The Arthashastra*, trans., L. N. Rangarajan, p. 259.

32

Ibid., pp. 275-6.

33

Ibid., p.253.

34

The title “Annexandrovitch”, which was used by Bismarck to describe the Russian Czar’s real personality, could well be applied to the *Arthashastra* state and its expansionist drive. Territorial acquisitions, however, needed to be digested before further expansion was undertaken. Edgar Feuchtwanger, *Bismarck* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 118. Bismarck was tormented by nightmarish visions of Russian hordes and vengeful French Jacobins descending into his newly founded Second Reich with traitors (*Reichsfeinde*) within collaborating with the invaders. His territorial ambitions met after a series of brief wars (1864, 1866 and 1870) against neighbouring states. Bismarck spent the remaining twenty years of his reign as Chancellor dealing with domestic policy – introducing *sozialpolitik* and creating a welfare state to undercut the socialists, waging a *kulturkampf* upon the Catholics to Prussianize them, and enforcing a conservative recruitment policy for the civil service through the Civil Service Regulations of 1882. As far as Bismarck was concerned, it was through sound domestic policy and the development of its economy and society that Germany could gradually become the strategic axis of Europe. *Realpolitik* demanded that restraint be Germany’s guiding principle in its external relations. Subsequent to Bismarck’s dismissal in 1890 and Kaiser Wilhelm II’s decision to conduct his own global foreign policy based upon securing rightful recognition of Germany greatness, Bismarck’s nightmare quickly came to pass. By 1894 France and Russia had signed a military alliance directed against Germany and would be joined by Britain after the Kaiser decided to build a blue-water navy capable of challenging the British Empire. The disasters that followed secured Bismarck’s reputation, and well into the twentieth century his three decades in power were popularly referred to as “The good old days”. Michael Strumer, *The German Empire* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2000), pp. 23-34.

35

E. J. Rapson, ed., *The Cambridge History of India*, vol. 1, *Ancient India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921; reprint, New Delhi: S. Chand & Company (Pvt.) Ltd., 1987), p. 371. Megasthenes, the Seleucid emissary to the court of Chandragupta Maurya put the size of Mauryan army at 400,000-strong. This would clearly include auxiliaries and the territorial army but perhaps not the local militias. Ibid.

36

Kautilya, *The Arthashastra*, trans., L. N. Rangarajan, p. 684.

37

Ibid., p. 686.

38

The notion that warfare was essentially “an act of policy” or the continuation of policy through military means. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans., Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 87.

39

Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* asserts that "a victorious army always seeks battle after its plans indicate that victory is possible under them, whereas an army destined to defeat fights in the hope of winning without any planning." Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans., Robert Wilkinson (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1998), pp. 27-8.

40

Writes Abdel Beri Atwan about the clandestine skills of the Arabs: "Secrecy and the necessity for secrecy... has historically been a part of the Arab experience, as is the ability to undermine an enemy with a patient watchfulness that will discover his secrets." The present struggle against Al Qaeda doesn't seem to understand that the movement can draw upon an ancient tradition of espionage and cryptography going back to the age of the Caliphs. Combined with the religious ardour of its followers, this enables it to survive against overwhelming material odds. Abdel Beri Atwan, *The Secret History of al Qaeda* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), p.

125. In Saudi Arabia, within the interior ministry and security police, some 80 per cent of the staff is sympathetic to Al Qaeda. Ibid., p. 168. The Saudi government may well face its day of reckoning, "When thousands of well-trained and battle-hardened *mujahideen* return from Iraq, ready to the bidding of al Qaeda" and coalesce with sympathetic elements within the Saudi intelligence apparatus. Ibid., p. 178.

41

Kautilya, *The Arthashastra*, trans., L. N. Rangarajan, p. 503.

42

Ibid., pp. 504-5.

43

Tim Weiner writes about the United States, its intelligence gathering operations and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) that, "To succeed, the CIA needed to find men and women with the discipline and self-sacrifice of the nation's best military officers, the cultural awareness and historical knowledge of the nation's best diplomats, and the sense of curiosity and adventure possessed by the nation's best foreign correspondents." Needless to say, "Americans like that were hard to find" and, "The CIA could not find enough talented Americans to serve as spies on a government salary." Tim Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), pp. 501-2. Moreover, as of 2005, half of the CIA's staff had less than five years experience on the job. Ibid., p. 503. It was therefore no surprise that private intelligence gathering had become a \$50 billion per year industry and that after 60 years of engaging the world as a great power, "...we Americans still do not understand the people or the political forces we seek to contain and control." Ibid., pp. 512-14.

44

Kautilya, *The Arthashastra*, trans., L. N. Rangarajan, p. 498.

45

Ibid.

46

Al Qaeda, Hezbollah, Hamas, Taliban, etc., appear to show up where the existing state is either too weak to deal strictly with them or friendly to them. More often that not, it is the former condition that compels a state to host such elements that are potentially a threat to its own existence.

47

It appears that "...the difference in the development outcomes between East Asia and Latin America since the 1970s is largely due to the greater competence and strength of state institutions in the former region, rather than to market-friendly policies." This, coming from Francis Fukuyama, the triumphal advocate of American "benevolent hegemony", neo-conservative thought and capitalism and democracy, indicates how badly the United States has underestimated the primacy of the quality of the state in the

overall framework of national development and power. Francis Fukuyama, *After the Neocons: America at the Crossroads* (London: Profile Books, 2006), p. 123. After the experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq, Fukuyama blandly asserts that it appears that “Before you can have a democracy, you have to have a state....” Ibid., p. 125.

48

In the context of India-Pakistan relations, both powers have taken to trying to destabilize each other even as they are themselves destabilized internally by the incompetence and weakness of their own political leaderships and administrative institutions. Other states in the region, such as Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, have also dissolved from within even as they try and manoeuvre from without. There is little doubt that the entire region is sinking into disorder and anarchy and the consequences of this process unfolding for region are not being seriously addressed. The Indian subcontinent appears to be headed towards “terminal chaos” reminiscent of the eighteenth century after the decline of Mughal power. Abraham Eraly, *The Mughal World: India’s Tainted Paradise* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2007), p. 382.

49

Pakistan in particular seems to have institutionalized indiscipline and compartmentalization at an early stage. Shuja Nawaz describes in painstaking detail how in the 1950s the civilian politicians lost their unity and were overpowered by cliques of civil servants and military officers who took it upon themselves to make policy and enter in arrangements and deals with foreign powers which, in turn, exacerbated internal contradictions. Shuja Nawaz, *Crossed Swords: Pakistan, Its Army and the Wars Within* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 144-149.

50

Such as the United States of America.

51

Reginald Massey presents an example of the Pax Britannica. He states: “In the 1930s, any Indian woman of any religion could be settled into a ‘Ladies Compartment’ of train at Howrah Station, Calcutta, without the slightest concern about her safety or security. After a couple of days the woman would be received by her relatives perfectly safe and sound in the city of Peshawar in the distant North West Frontier Province...sixty years after the demise of the Raj with two boastful nuclear powers at each other’s throats, no woman is safe on her own even in broad daylight in any city of the subcontinent.” Reginald Massey, *India: Definitions and Clarifications* (London: Hansib Publications, 2007), pp. 13-14. With over a third of India’s districts in a state of chaos and vast tracts of Pakistan, including major cities, ruled by mafias and insurgents, the attainment of nuclear weapons status has done little to offset the external pressure on either country. If anything, they have created a powerful justification for increased interference with the spectre of nuclear-armed failed or failing states haunting the imaginations of India and Pakistan’s foreign patrons.