

THE SIX-FOLD POLICY OF THE ARTHASASTRA

History and Background

Authored by Kautilya in 300 BCE the *Arthashastra* was written as a “science of politics” (Boesche 9-10). As the key advisor to the Indian king Chandragupta, Kautilya offered the *Arthashastra* as discussions on war and diplomacy. Kautilya’s desire was for his king to conquer the world, through teachings of “how to defeat his enemies and rule on behalf of the general good” (ibid. 10-11). As opposed to the idealism of Plato, Kautilya’s *Arthashastra* is typically classified as a book on political realism. It does not offer how the world should or ought to work, but rather how the world does work and the measures that a king must sometimes take to maintain common good and the state (ibid. 13-14).

Kautilyan Foreign Policy

Kautilyan foreign policy offers the theory that “an immediate neighbouring state is an enemy and a neighbour’s neighbour, separated from oneself by the intervening enemy, is a friend” (Rangarajan 542). The conqueror would thus affect the line of allies and enemies, as well as the differing types of allies and enemies a conquering king has. Kautilya describes a Circle of States like a wheel with the conqueror at the hub. His allies are pulled towards him along the spikes although they may be parted by enemy territory (ibid. 561). When appropriate, the conquering king shall apply the six methods of foreign policy, regularly known as the six-fold policy, to the various components of his Circle of States. These methods work interdependently and bind others to the conqueror so he may do as he pleases with them when necessary.

Six-Fold Policy

Different teachers believe different policies. For example, Vatavyadhi taught that there were only two approaches to foreign policy: make peace or wage war. Kautilya however believes that there are spin-offs of these, thus providing six methods of foreign policy. These are making peace, waging war, staying quiet, preparing for war, seeking support, and the dual policy of making peace with one while waging war against another (Rangarajan 563). One's circumstances will dictate which methods should be used.

To make peace, one must enter into an agreement, such as a treaty, with specific conditions. Treaties can have specific conditions, or will not have any obligations. Treaties without conditions are mainly used for gaining information on the enemy, so the king may strike after learning of the antagonists' weak points (ibid. 581). Treaties with commitments allow a "wise king to make a neighbouring king fight another neighbour to prevent them from uniting and attacking him" (ibid. 582). The only time a king will make peace is when he finds himself in relative decline compared to his enemy (ibid. 563).

When a king is in a superior position compared to his enemy, he will attack and wage war (ibid. 568). There are three types of war as part of this second method of foreign policy. There is open war which has a specified time and place; secret war that is sudden, terrorizing, threatening from one side and attacking from another, etc.; and undeclared war which uses secret agents, religion or superstition, and women as weapons against the enemies (Rangarajan 568-569; Boesche 10). Kautilya approved weapons-of-war that tricked unsuspecting kings and fought in unconventional ways. The use of secret agents to befriend and then kill enemy leaders, "religion and superstition to bolster his troops and demoralize enemy soldiers" (Boesche 10), and

women who seduced the enemy as means of war (ibid.) were all examples of the way Kautilya believed one should wage an undeclared war.

By neither making peace nor waging war, one acts indifferently to a situation and stays quiet. If a king feels that his enemy and he are equal and neither can harm the other nor ruin the other's undertakings, then he shall choose to do nothing (Rangarajan 563-565).

When a king increases his own power and has special advantage over his enemy, he will take part in the forth approach of Kautilyan foreign policy by making preparations for war (ibid. 563). While preparing for war, the king must ensure that the enemies' undertakings will be destroyed while his own will come to no harm (ibid. 565).

In contrast to preparing for war, a king may require the help of another to protect his own undertakings. This idea of building an alliance is Kautilya's fifth method of foreign policy. A king seeking an alliance must ensure that he finds a king more powerful than the neighbouring enemy. Sometimes it is not possible to find a stronger king than the enemy; in this case one should make peace with the enemy (ibid. 573).

Lastly, having a dual policy of befriending one through peace and promoting one's own undertakings, whilst ruining another's mission by waging war against them is the sixth method (ibid. 563-565). Under this method the conqueror may have supplies and reinforcements provided from allies, prevent an attack from the rear where the Circle of States warns us there is an enemy as a neighbour, and have twice as many troops as the other. After discussing waging a war with allies and agreeing on terms a treaty is concluded. However, if the allies do not accept the obligations they are considered and treated as hostile (ibid. 575).

REFERENCES

- Boesche, R. (2003) "Kautilya's Arthashastra on War and Diplomacy in Ancient India." *Journal of Military History*, 67, 1, 9-37.
- Rangarajan, L.N. (1992) *The Arthashastra: Edited, Rearranged, Translated and Introduced*. New Delhi, India: Penguin Books India Ltd.

Further Readings

- Jatava, D.R. (2003) *Riddles of Indian Politics*. Jaipur, India: ABD Publishers.
- Kangle, R.P. (ed. and trans.) (1960-61) *Kautilya's Arthashastra*. Bombay: University of Bombay.
- Sharma, P. (1975) "Kautilya and modern thought." *Proceedings of the First International Sanskrit Conference*, 2.2, 247-252.
- Rangarajan, L.N. (1992) *The Arthashastra: Edited, Rearranged, Translated and Introduced*. New Delhi, India: Penguin Books India Ltd.
- Roberts, James Deotis (1965-66) "Religious and political realism in Kautilya's Arthashastra." *Journal of Religious Thought*, 22.2, 153-166.

Related Research Topics

Kautilyan State and Society

King Chandragupta

Different Books/ Parts of the *Arthashastra* (e.g. Law and Justice, Sources of Revenue,

Departments of the Government, Defence and War, etc.)

Notable Websites

<http://www.swaveda.com/elibrary.php?id=89&action=show&type=etext&PHPSESSID=76860abbd304db649f15371d328d>

<http://www.hinduism.co.za/newpage115.htm>

http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~wldciv/world_civ_reader/world_civ_reader_1/arthashastra.html

Written by Janelle Tibbatts (Spring 2006), who is solely responsible for its content.