

Kautilya's Arthasastra on war and diplomacy in ancient India.

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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 Arthasastra 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

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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.

Roger Boesche is Professor of Politics and Arthur G. Coons Professor of the History of Ideas at Occidental College in Los Angeles. His most recent book is *The First Great Political Realist: Kautilya and His Arthashastra*.



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