Kauṭilya Uvāca
Seeking Interest in the Adversary's Prosperity

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The understanding of warfare is varied, in terms of means, modes and objectives across geographical, cultural and episodic contexts. However, there is a general acceptability regarding its outcome, i.e., victory over an adversary. This might be achieved either by increasing one's own capabilities, or by decapacitating the adversary. As an anomaly, while agreeing with these methods, Kauṭilya dictates a third, additional strategy. He dictates wishing for the prosperity of the adversary in specific situations such that one may derive self-interest in the process. In doing so, he systematically lays down the conditions suited to adopt the strategy, the means that must be employed, and its expected subsequent outcomes. This commentary aims to discuss the strategy so propounded by Kauṭilya and its relevance in the contemporary geopolitical landscape.

CONTEXTUALISING THE KAUṬILYAN ANOMALY: PRAKṚTIS, ŚAKTIS AND SIDDHIS

Before delving into the strategy, an understanding of the Kauṭilyan state becomes essential. The Kauṭilyan state is founded on three key concepts—

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the state's prakṛtis (constituent elements), its śaktis (powers), and its Siddhis (accomplishments). Every dictum and stratagem laid down by Kauṭilya, as part of his treatise on statecraft, popularly known as Kauṭilya's Arthaśāstra, concerns these variables and the means to alter them in alignment with the interests of the state.

According to the Arthaśāstra tradition (going beyond Kauṭilya's Arthaśāstra), a state comprises seven constituent elements, hence referred to as a saptānga rājya (a state with seven limbs). These constituent elements are called prakṛtis, listed as स्वामी–अमात्य–जनपद–दुर्ग–कोश–दण्ड–मित्राणि प्रकृतयः (6.1.1)[1], roughly translating as, "The king (svāmī), the minister (amātya), the territory and population (janpada), the fortified city (durga), the treasury (kośa), the military (daṇḍa), and the ally (mitra) are the constituent elements (prakṛtis) of the state." The king or the svāmī forms the central prakṛti with the remaining six acting as the sources (and by implication, measures) of the svāmī's collective power, hence, by implication, the state's power. This state power is referred to as śakti which comprises a culmination of mantra śakti (power of knowledge), prabhu śakti (power of authority) and utsāha śakti (power of valour).
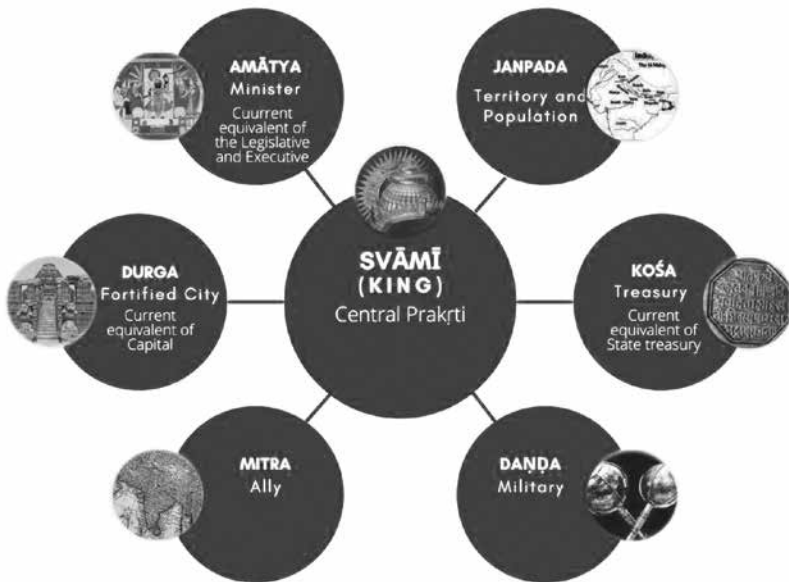

Figure I Authors' Annotations of the seven prakṛtis (constituent elements) with the king at the centre

शक्तिस्त्रिविधा ज्ञानबलं मन्त्रशक्तिः। कोशदण्डबलं प्रभुशक्तिः। विक्रमबलम्
उत्साहशक्तिः (6.1.33)[2]

Mantra śakti is accomplished through the existence and expansion of
knowledge. This includes knowledge available at the state's disposal (through
all its prakṛtis) while policies are being formulated. Hence, this knowledge
includes the personal awareness and qualifications of the king, the intellect of
the ministers, as well as the situational awareness of the army and the allies.
By extension, this also includes the influence the state commands through
this knowledge over its fellow states.

Prabhu śakti is accomplished as a cumulative sum of कोशदण्डबलं, or
economic and military power. This includes a state's individual hard power as
well as that of its allies who are of assistance to the state when needed. While
these two offer reminiscences of the widely discussed concepts of soft and
hard power, Kauṭilya mentions a third kind of power, namely, Utsāha śakti,
meaning the power of valour or courage (विक्रमबलम्)). It is notable that despite
the ownership of both tangible and cognitive variables constituting a collective
state power, the presence of courage, existent in the seven prakṛtis, especially
the svāmī, is crucial to accomplishing a superiority among surrounding,
competing states. This 'courage' translates as valour while making optimum
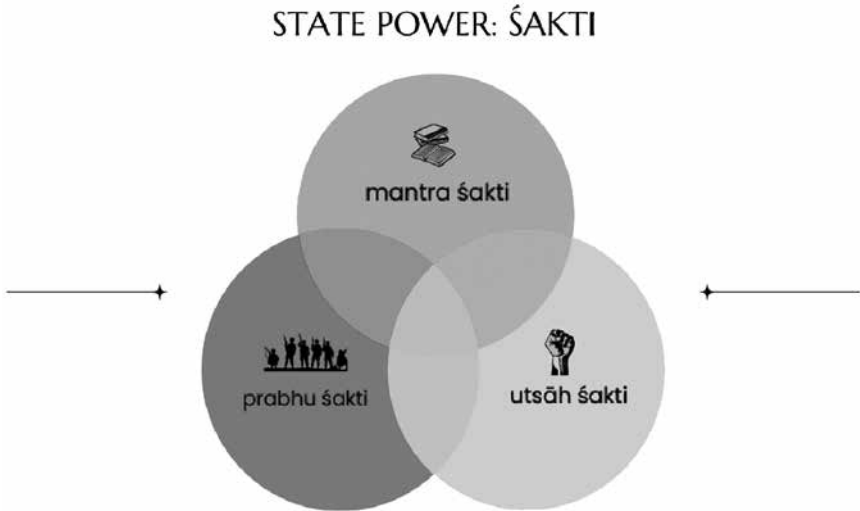use of the existing hard and soft elements of power.

Figure 2 Authors' Annotations about three kinds of śaktis that constitute
State Power

An accomplishment (Siddhi) of Mantra śakti ensures Mantra Siddhi. An accomplishment of Prabhu śakti ensures Prabhu Siddhi. An accomplishment of Utsāha śakti ensures Utsāha Siddhi. The comparative judgement of these accomplishments defines a state's power in a highly competitive, dynamic political landscape—where every king acts to conquer the maximum for expanding his state power, hence the king being referred to as the vijigīṣu (the conqueror king). While in ordinary scenarios, war and peace are prescribed as means of decapacitating the adversary, or capacitating oneself, or both—a Kauṭilyan anomaly contextualised amidst these variables offers an extraordinary stratagem of warfare.

The Kauṭilyan Anomaly: Self-Interests in Adversary's Power and Accomplishments

Kauṭilya lists six situations where wishing for the adversary's power and accomplishments shall eventually lead to securing the vijigīṣu's state interests.

यदि वा पश्येत् "अमित्रो मे शक्तियुक्तो वाग्दण्डपारुष्य–अर्थदूषणैः प्रकृतीरुपहनिष्यति। सिद्धियुक्तो वा मृगयाद्यूतमद्यस्त्रीभिः प्रमादं गमिष्यति। स विरक्तप्रकृतिरुपक्षीणः प्रमत्तो वा साध्यो मे भविष्यति। विग्रहाभियुक्तो वा सर्वसंदोहेनैकस्थोऽदुर्गस्थो वा स्थास्यति। स संहतसैन्यो मित्रदुर्गवियुक्तः साध्यो मे भविष्यति। बलवान्वा राजा परतः शत्रुम् उच्छेत्तुकामः तमुच्छिद्य मामुच्छिन्द्याद् इति बलवता प्रार्थितस्य मे विपन्नकर्मारम्भस्य वा साहाय्यं दास्यति"। मध्यमलिप्सायां च। इत्येवमादिषु कारणेष्वमित्रस्यापि शक्तिं सिद्धिं चेच्छेत्। (6.2.38)[3]

In the *first situation*, he says if the adversary has amassed sufficient power (śakti-yukta) and is possessed with it such that he is injuring his own prakṛtis through verbal or physical means, or is confiscating their property, the increase in the adversary king's power is beneficial for the vijigīṣu. The more this power increases, the more shall the king be possessed with this power and unable to use it for capacity-building, deplete his own overall state power. He shall do that himself by injuring the fundamental elements that constitute his state. This may occur in the form of an authoritarian king using his military power to suppress his ministers that are loyal but disagree with him; royal encroachment of the public land and property for non-essential personal usage; or strained relations with allies due to arrogance. The more the adversary king's power increases, the more he shall deplete his own assets, leading to an eventual decline in state power, even without the vijigīṣu's external intervention. The arrogance of power in the adversary destroys them, eventually.

The unpredictable American foreign policy trajectory under Donald Trump reflects a classic case of the same. Over a dozen notable members

of his cabinet and the administration were either dismissed by him or quit within a year of his taking over as President of the United States in 2016.[4] As US Presidential elections are approaching in November 2024, the fears of a potential 'mayhem' in the White House have started appearing if he assumes power.[5] This was equally observed in America's approach to interacting with allies, especially NATO members who were asked to pay their share of the NATO budget,[6] and the US withdrawal from the World Health Organization in the middle of a global pandemic,[7] the Paris Climate Agreement,[8] as well as the JCPOA (popularly called the Iran Nuclear Deal) under Trump.[9] Joe Biden in 2020 assumed power over a country that was comparatively weaker in terms of its relations abroad, as well as the administration within the White House, because the state's power and accomplishments were ill-directed at weakening its own constituent elements.

In fact, the case of Liberation of Bangladesh and dismemberment of the erstwhile state of Pakistan presents another example of the same. The Pakistani state, as a newly independent state with active support from the United States, ended up using its powers to suppress its own people (janapada) in the then-East Pakistan while extracting resources from the territory. Military power was used such that millions of Bengali students were shot dead inside the Dhaka University for protesting against linguistic suppression and political negligence. Injuring its own prakṛtis, the Pakistani state unconsciously encouraged a secessionist movement that ended with the dismemberment of their state, and liberation of a new state of Bangladesh.

In the *second situation*, Kauṭilya mentions, the adversary may progress if they are Siddhi-yukta (accomplished in all ways) but are indulgent. While their accomplishments increase, they will become more negligent ill-spending their resources elsewhere, which would make it easier to overpower them. The case of Sri Lanka and its economic downfall best explains such a scenario. With the resources it had, it chose to spend them in such a way that its debts increased while creation of infrastructure with abysmally low returns. This is true for its dealings with the Chinese enterprises for infrastructural development as well as for its domestic policies often based on knee-jerk reactions. While ill-thought investment resulted in an entire port of Hambantota leased out to the Chinese for 99 years in 2017,[10] its combination with misjudged economic policies at home has brought it to a chaotic economic situation it has been attempting to recover from for some time now.[11] The economic helplessness gave China an easy route to control a strategic warm water port—a direct assault on Sri Lankan sovereignty as well as a security threat for South Asian region without any military intervention.

In the *third situation*, Kauṭilya mentions, if the adversary is virakta-prakṛti, i.e., the constituent elements of his state (or prakṛtis) are endowed with sufficient power and accomplishments, but do not support him, this power and accomplishment might be encouraged to grow. This makes the state essentially lose internal stability because the prakṛtis grow in isolation using their individual power competing against the svāmī, thereby creating a situation of chaos and rebellion. In situations where the military or the ministers, with power concentrated in them often rise in rebellion, or worse, operate like a deep state. This makes the state internally hollow and vulnerable to external offensives.

The case of Pakistan's deep state is a clear testimony of the same. An over-ambitious military coupled with extraordinary power concentration with the intelligence agencies for the past seven decades have rendered the political authority and constitutional institutions solely operating at the mercy of this deep state. This has created a situation such that no democratically elected government in Pakistan has completed a full five-year term in over 75 years of the state's creation.[12] Military rule has punctuated the political history of the state such that the de facto power centre has remained in Rawalpindi (the Army Headquarters) instead of Islamabad, the state capital and de-jure power centre.

This has resulted in the state's foreign policy being directed at the military's interests, instead of a larger state interest. Peace initiatives with India at the political level have always failed due to this power diffusion, ultimately leading to strained relations. This may be traced back especially to the 1999 Lahore bus service under Prime Minister Vajpayee and his counterpart Nawaz Sharif.[13] The Kargil infiltration that led to the subsequent conflict was crafted and launched by the then Pakistan Army Chief General Parvez Musharraf the same year without any information or participation by the Nawaz Sharif government.[14] With battle casualties, attempted territorial occupation, and instances of mutilation of the bodies of Indian soldiers, the conflict immediately changed the course of political engagement with Pakistan. This was followed by a military coup in Pakistan with General Musharraf usurping power from the democratically elected Nawaz Sharif. A repetition of the same was noticed during NDA 1.0 (2014–2019) that noted terror incidents in Uri and Pulwama almost immediately after political engagement between the two countries was initiated. Apart from the ministers or military, similar situations may occur in the case of the population or janapada becoming too powerful and rising against the state in a popular uprising, thus creating a situation of internal instability or chaos. In such situations, the increased power of the

prakṛtis compete resulting in an eventual collapse of the internal stability of the state—thus, either insignificant or vulnerable for being overpowered.

In the *fourth situation*, Kauṭilya mentions that if the adversary is too ambitious and is engaged in wars far away from his state, encouraging their ambitions bears positive results. The adversary, gaining more ambitions and progress in state power, shall be regularly engaged in faraway territories—with a limited number of troops, often war-fatigued, and allies far apart. This leaves both the adversary engaged elsewhere and his capital left behind, vulnerable to being overpowered. Often war-fatigued armies and unattended home-states suffer such vulnerabilities borne out of over-ambitious foreign policies. The 9/11 attacks in the heart of New York City presented a similar vulnerability of the United States that was busy fighting overseas—unprepared and unaware of the fact that their homeland security could be equally at risk by non-state actors. The bombings of 9/11 thereby changed the way the world understood at modern warfare. This stands equally true for state actors engaged at multiple fronts that can be overpowered at the right time.

In the *fifth situation*, if there is a common enemy of the vijigīṣu and his adversary engaged in a conflict with the vijigīṣu's state, the adversary's expanded powers often play in self-interest. The adversary, apprehensive of being attacked by the common enemy after having defeated the vijigīṣu, shall help the vijigīṣu against the common enemy through logistics or troops in self-defence. Here, the interests of the vijigīṣu and their adversary state converges against another graver, common threat. In continuation with this, in the final *sixth situation* pointed out by Kauṭilya instead of threat, the interests of the vijigīṣu and the adversary state converge at seizing another proximate king, who was difficult to overpower either individually or is a common threat. In both these situations, the need-based alliances of states during the World Wars against a common threat or interest offer prime instances. Moreover, this becomes more relevant as warfare entered its fourth generation with the entry of non-state actors, and later the fifth generation with hyperactivity in the cognitive domain. The war against Islamic State (a non-state actor) in Syria witnessed a fascinating alliance between the United States and Russia against a common terror threat, possibly the most remarkable instance of the two coming together in the post-Cold War era.

WHY STRATEGISE THUS?

The non-state actors have increased the ambiguity of modern warfare. Additionally, with the cognitive domain making it more unpredictable,

strategising for victory has become more complicated and nuanced. Beyond conventional wars, the states are engaged in hybrid wars every minute such that every move is swift, with plausible deniability, and below the threshold of a conventional war. Hence, there is not always a conventional war situation, but also hardly any sustainable peace. In this context, the use of power and nature of offensives becomes crucial to understand. Here, the outcome takes precedence over power projection, highlighting the fact that activity is not a necessary requirement of victory. Often, inactivity founded on microscopic situational awareness serves efficient use of resources as well as attainment of foreign policy objectives. Notable that in this entire landscape, the objective is the attainment of foreign policy goals, and activity or inactivity in terms of 'war' or 'peace' are the policies so adopted to realise these goals at *minimum personal cost*. Hitopadeśa mentions: 'विजेतुं प्रयतेतारीन्न युद्धेन कदाचन। अनित्यो विजयो यस्माद् दृश्यते युध्यमानयोः ।।', which roughly translates as 'No one should try to get victory over the enemy by war because it is always experienced that victory is uncertain for both the teams.' (Hitopadeśa-Vigraha 31).

The cost of foreign policy—material (monetary, military, civilian losses) and immaterial (international image, plausible deniability, etc.)—may be placed at the base of the emergence of unconventional warfare where accomplishment of objectives at the lowest cost is central to any policy formulation. This constant state of unconventional, hybrid warfare offers sufficient situations of anomaly that require anomalous stratagems, which at times require the adversary's prosperity in the short-term for an eventual protection of self-interests, as discussed in the commentary.

Notes

1. R.P. Kangle, *The Kautilya Arthasastra*, 1995.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. 'Chris Christie Predicts "Huge Personnel Problem" if Trump is Reelected', MSN, 6 February 2024, available at https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/politics/chris-christie-predicts-huge-personnel-problem-if-trump-is-reelected/ar-BB1hQWHZ.
5. Ibid.
6. A. Applebaum, 'Trump will Abandon NATO', *The Atlantic*, 14 December 2023, available at https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2024/01/trump-2024-reelection-pull-out-of-nato-membership/676120/.
7. E. Wolfson, 'Trump Said He Would Terminate the U.S. Relationship with the W.H.O. Here's What That Means', *TIME*, 4 June 2020, available at https://time.com/5847505/trump-withdrawal-who/.

8. B.M. McGrath, 'Climate Change: US Formally Withdraws from Paris Agreement', *BBC News*, 4 November 2020, available at https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-54797743.
9. 'President Donald J. Trump is Ending United States Participation in an Unacceptable Iran Deal – The White House', The White House, 8 May 2018, available at https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trump-ending-united-states-participation-unacceptable-iran-deal/.
10. 'China Signs 99-year Lease on Sri Lanka's Hambantota Port', *Financial Times*, available at https://www.ft.com/content/e150ef0c-de37-11e7-a8a4-0a1e63a52f9c.
11. S. Bhowmick, 'Understanding the Economic Issues in Sri Lanka's Current Debacle', Occasional Paper, Observer Research Foundation, available at http://hdl.handle.net/11159/12457.
12. A. Jazeera, 'No Pakistani Prime Minister has Completed a Full Term in Office', *Al Jazeera*, 9 April 2022, available at https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/4/9/factbox-no-pakistani-prime-minister-has-completed-a-full-tenure.
13. N. Basu and N. Basu, 'When Vajpayee Took a Bus Ride and It Seemed Peace with Pakistan was Possible', *The Print*, 19 February 2019, available at https://theprint.in/politics/when-vajpayee-took-a-bus-ride-and-it-seemed-peace-with-pakistan-was-possible/194551/.
14. E. Desk, 'How Pervez Musharraf Played a Role in the Kargil War', *The Indian Express*, 6 February 2023, available at https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-global/pervez-musharraf-death-legacy-kargil-war-8425366/.