

Within the sanctified portals of the National Defence College NDC in New Delhi, Kautilya, India's legendary strategic thinker is all-pervading. He has the main lecture hall to himself and remains a popular research entity for its student officers. Foreign course participants get familiarised to Kautilya's legacy on statecraft in general and strategic matters in particular.

However, while juxtaposing Kautilya with popular contemporaries elsewhere in the world is praiseworthy, banking too much on him or other ancient thinkers for strategising against current military problems is debatable and poses a challenge in balancing the competing narratives. India's national security discourse, though under-developed, is all about designing pathways for ends, ways and means for handling current and future security problematic. The logical assumption would be to look for guidance in contemporary best practices, guidebooks, strategic thoughts and appropriate tools and techniques. However, we may need to look back, for academic knowledge-building, towards the ancient Indian texts that are a rich repository of statecraft, diplomacy and war fighting.

Institutional initiatives to promote dissemination of knowledge and tactics ingrained in these scriptures are, therefore, understandable as they endorse an Indian perspective to the global audience. For the hardcore protagonists, however, there could be further reasons for seeking inspirations from ancient scriptures and strategic thinkers. First, unlike many developed countries in the west, strategic decisions and policy making in India are largely unaffected by big data analysis. There is no systematic information processing of war-related events in India such as the Correlates of War project in the USA. It becomes, therefore, convenient to harp on ancient scriptures on statecraft for guidance. Second, the absence of a rich legacy of prominent strategic thinking in contemporary times also complicates the issues. One of the reasons why.