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Kautilya's Spycraft in the Digital Age: Ancient Wisdom Meets Cyber Warfare

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Abstract

This paper argues for the enduring relevance of the espionage theory propounded by the ancient Indian strategist Kautilya in his text, the Arthashastra, for understanding modern cyber warfare and intelligence diplomacy. It posits that Kautilya's foundational principles of intelligence gathering, covert operations, and information manipulation to acquire state power and sovereignty find direct resonance in today's context of digital espionage and cyber threats. The study first explores Kautilya's espionage system, highlighting spy recruitment, deception tactics, and counter-espionage methods. It explores the ethical and political dimensions that underpinned his pragmatic approach. The central aim is to draw a parallel between the classical espionage model and contemporary cyber warfare's digital infiltration. The paper underscores that Kautilya's strategic prioritization of intelligence as a critical tool of statecraft remains essential for comprehending and combating modern cyber conflicts. Furthermore, the research delves into the role of intelligence diplomacy, examining how states wield espionage as diplomatic leverage to balance power and deter aggression. The study also addresses the ethical and legal dilemmas of the digital age, contrasting Kautilya's pragmatism with modern cyber debates, highlighting the complexity of balancing security needs with normative constraints. The paper also aims to reassess how Kautilya's ancient Indian espionage theory provides invaluable historical perspective and strategic clarity for managing the multi-dimensional threats of cyber war. This paper tries to bridge ancient wisdom with modern technology, in order to enhance the knowledge of 21st-century policymakers and intelligence professionals, thereby strengthening national security and diplomatic efficacy.

Keywords: Cyber Sovereignty; Diplomatic Efficacy; Espionage; Intelligence Diplomacy; National Security.