The name ‘Arthashastra’, is derived from the Indian political philosopher Chanakya’s magnum opus literature in statecraft, international relations, strategic studies, economics and sociology. Chanakya, who is often referred to as the Indian Machiavelli, was an Indian teacher, philosopher and strategist, who owning to his exceptional versing of politics and strategy rose to prominence as not the king but the kingmaker. He is one of the most prominent figures in the establishment of the Maurya Empire, which archaeology proves as the first empire to rule most of the Indian subcontinent.

The Arthashastra is a political treatise on statecraft, life and geopolitics which Chanakya wrote, predating Machiavelli’s ‘The Prince’ by about 1,800 years. Indian academia, policymakers, military strategists and diplomats frequently predicate their thoughts on this seminal work. The grand design which Chanakya offered in his influential work motivates scholars to historically examine its validity and reinterpret it for modern times. This review concerns a book written on similar lines.

‘The New Arthashastra’ is a security strategy treatise covering an extensive array of themes pertaining to defence production, regional challenges, internal security, intelligence, cyber warfare, outer space, nuclear warfare, economics, maritime security and proxy warfare amongst others. Brigadier Gurmeet Kanwal (Retd.), the editor of the book, and a distinguished fellow at the Institute for

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Defence Studies and Analysis (IDSA), New Delhi, undertook a laborious and resplendent academic work by compiling 20 chapters from 20 different authors ranging from serving and retired armed forces personnel, diplomats, journalists and academicians.

This seminal collection of essays on various subjects regarding India’s national security architecture is a ground breaking text which can serve to fill the strategic void in New Delhi’s long-term and integrated strategic planning, and to materialise its global ambitions. The review briefly goes through the chapters underscoring the gist of the arguments offered by scholars and warriors alike.

The preface of the book written by Professor Gautam Sen and the introductory chapter written by General V.P. Malik set the mood for later chapters in the book, as the former highlights the conceptual frameworks pertaining to national security strategy while the latter chapter provides an edifying look into the probable outline of national security strategy.

The second chapter ponders over international experience written by General Dhruv Katoch. It focuses on the defence policies of major powers across the globe. The following third, fourth and fifth chapters are written by General B.S. Pawar, General Aditya Singh and C. Raja Mohan, covering threats, challenges and vulnerabilities as primary elements of national security and beyond non-alignment, notwithstanding bureaucratic frictions in reforms of security sections, pressing a case for defence diplomacy and strategic autonomy, the new contours of India’s national security will defeat the ideology of the past i.e. non-alignment.

Succeeding chapters by Vikram Sood, Manpreet Sethi and Ambassador Kanwal Sibal focus their attention toward the future of intelligence, nuclear deterrence and managing external threats. Sood maintains that owning to rapidly evolving modern warfare, the traditional methods of intelligence should be readjusted to meet modern challenges by facilitating and embracing technological and psychological dimensions of intelligence. Sethi argues in her chapter that India needs to build up its nuclear capability and greater transparency of the existence of its Strategic Forces Command. Ambassador Sibal on the other hand offers a keen insight into the external threats which India confronts. He propounds a cogent case for strong naval force and its
ability for power projection, establishing an indigenous defence industrial base, improving the internal security grid to confront the challenge of radicalism primarily religious and Muslim in character, and the imperative for sustenance of strategic autonomy.

The chapter on Maritime Security written by Admiral Arun Prakash analyses it with grit and experience prescribing for stronger coastal security, advanced technologies' incorporation for ship building and interaction with foreign navies to gain valuable experiences. The chapter on Countering Proxy War Strategy in Jammu and Kashmir is written by General Ata Hasnain who underscores that India should prioritise asymmetrical methods in dealing with separatist movements by intellectual understanding, financial control of terrorist funding, deradicalisation and exploitation of social media etc.

Dr. Ajai Sahni ponders over Managing Internal Security Challenges by being attendant to administrative desynchronisation between the Centre and State governments in dealing with internal security challenges. He also presses the case for ameliorate police and intelligence to address foreign sources of domestic security challenges. Amit Cowshish explores the Budgetary Allocation and the necessity to ensure the full preparedness of Indian Armed Forces at all times. Themes of outer space and cyber warfare are exhaustively covered by General Davider Kumar.

Subjects pertaining to Defence Research and Development Strategy along with Energy Security are discussed by Professor Amitav Malik and Shebonti Ray Dadwal. Professor Malik, though covered his subject ably, does not bring in the specifics such as the necessity of a separate organisation concentrating on critical technologies. The chapter regarding Indigenous Defence Production written by Commodore Shridharan Shekhar critically highlights the fact that whilst Indian Army and Navy are endowed with distinct bureaus for designs, the Indian Airforce does not possess such a design bureau, these design bureaus are critical for indigenous defence production.

The chapter pertaining to India's Grand Strategy has been excellently covered by General Raj Shukla. Besides underscoring the fundamentals for Indian grand strategy, he shared his perspective of synergising the conversations between Parliamentary Standing Committees, National Security Council and
think tanks to offer a more cohesive and coherent Indian perspective on grand strategy. This chapter holds more significance in contemporary, and future, times as India is proactively seeking to assert its power onto the global stage.

The concluding chapter is covered astutely by Brigadier (Retd.) Gurmeet Kanwal as he explains on the imperative synergising decision making among the Ministries of Defence, External Affairs and Home. Lack of harmony among these Ministries and their distinct planning cultures complicates the construction of a consistent and methodical Indian national security strategy. Moreover, it also offers the essence of the previous discussions in the book by varied set of authors.

The contemporary age offers a new array of challenges and complexities in decision making vis-a-vis national security and defence. Traditional demarcations in context of conversations and decision making between various Ministries within nation states are becoming redundant. Conventionally, a scholar was considered distinct to warrior, mind being distinct to gun, but evolving challenges have cremated these distinctions. They are no longer relevant in an increasingly intricate, changing and exigent geostrategic environment where Medievalism is reincarnating itself in defence, foreign, security, economic and even in societal terms as well.

Therefore, in this backdrop, it is imperative that Indian state architecture should redefine its preconceived notions regarding civil-military relations. In a transitioning and volatile world, India, in order to pursue its global ambitions should consider national security institutions as an active participant in conversations regarding national security and defence decision making processes than being merely subordinate to rotating politicians.

‘The New Arthashastra’ is not the literal reinterpretation of Chanakya’s seminal text per se. It relates to the political treatise in the sense that it presents to its readers the new vision of Indian grand strategy as Chanakya did. The historic imperial notions which Chanakya’s Arthashastra propounded were in accordance with the political zeitgeist of his times and the book in review takes some of those core ideas and develops them according to the modern times.

Further, in recent years, another book produced by the Indian intellectual
community, ‘Non-Alignment 2.0: A Foreign and Strategic Policy for India in the 21st Century’, included advanced conversations on more pressing challenges for India by some of the most illustrious thinkers in the country. Taken together, both of these books, the one in review and Non-Alignment 2.0, could be viewed as a compendium on Indian strategy and could serve as significant texts on India for scholars and policymakers alike across the world. They evidently serve as the sociology of Indian grand strategy in the 21st century.