



ISSN 23939729

CLAWS

No. **121**

2025

MANEKSHAW PAPER

GAINING ADVANTAGE IN THE GREY ZONE: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE FROM THUCYDIDES AND KAUTILYA

P LOKCHANDAR

CENTRE FOR LAND WARFARE STUDIES

Field Marshal Sam Hormusji Framji Jamshedji Manekshaw, better known as Sam “Bahadur”, was the 8th Chief of the Army Staff (COAS). It was under his command that the Indian forces achieved a spectacular victory in the Indo-Pakistan War of 1971. Starting from 1932, when he joined the first batch at the Indian Military Academy (IMA), his distinguished military career spanned over four decades and five wars, including World War II. He was the first of only two Field Marshals in the Indian Army. Sam Manekshaw’s contributions to the Indian Army are legendary. He was a soldier’s soldier and a General’s General. He was outspoken and stood by his convictions. He was immensely popular within the Services and among civilians of all ages. Boyish charm, wit and humour were other notable qualities of independent India’s best known soldier. Apart from hardcore military affairs, the Field Marshal took immense interest in strategic studies and national security issues. Owing to this unique blend of qualities, a grateful nation honoured him with the Padma Bhushan and Padma Vibhushan in 1968 and 1972 respectively.



Field Marshal SHFJ Manekshaw, MC
1914-2008

CLAWS Occasional Papers are dedicated to the memory of Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw

GAINING ADVANTAGE IN THE GREY ZONE: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE FROM THUCYDIDES AND KAUTILYA

P Lokchandar



Centre for Land Warfare Studies
New Delhi



Editorial Team : CLAWS

ISSN : 23939729



Centre for Land Warfare Studies

RPSO Complex, Parade Road, Delhi Cantt, New Delhi 110010

Phone +91-11-25691308 Fax: +91-11-25692347

Email: landwarfare@gmail.com, website: www.claws.co.in

CLAWS Army No.33098

The Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS), New Delhi, is an independent Think Tank dealing with national security and conceptual aspects of land warfare, including conventional & sub-conventional conflicts and terrorism. CLAWS conducts research that is futuristic in outlook and policy-oriented in approach.

CLAWS Vision: To be a premier think tank, to shape strategic thought, foster innovation, and offer actionable insights in the fields of land warfare and conflict resolution.

CLAWS Mission: Our contributions aim to significantly enhance national security, defence policy formulation, professional military education, and promote the attainment of enduring peace.

© 2025, Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS), New Delhi.

Disclaimer: The contents of this paper are based on the analysis of materials accessed from open sources and are the personal views of the author. The contents, therefore, may not be quoted or cited as representing the views or policy of Government of India, or the Ministry of Defence (MoD), or the Centre for Land Warfare Studies.

Published in Bharat by



Sabre & Quill Publishers, New Delhi, India

www.sabreandquill.com/sabreandquill@gmail.com

Contents

• Abstract	5
• Introduction	6
• Causes and Objectives of War: Thucydidean and Kautilyan Conception.....	11
• Recognising the Grey Zone: Thucydides and Kautilya	23
• Thucydidean Thinking on Gaining Advantage in Grey Zone...	28
• Kautilyan Thinking on Gaining Advantage in Grey Zone	33
• Common Points of Departure	36
• Points of Change from Thucydides	37
• Points of Change from Kautilya	38
• Grey Zone: Promotes or Prevents Rapid Escalation?	42
• Waypoints for Further Application and Enquiry	49
• Conclusion	54

Gaining Advantage in the Grey Zone: Continuity and Change From Thucydides and Kautilya

Abstract

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the study of Thucydides' *History* and Kautilya's *Arthashastra*. Concurrently, the idea of strategic competition within the 'Grey Zone' has gained significant popularity. The paper endeavours to bring these two trends together. It seeks to identify the points of continuity and change from Thucydides and Kautilya from the perspective of gaining advantage in the Grey Zone. Moderation of the target state's fear by benign narratives, legal rhetoric, and limiting the scope of challenge, with an acute attention to the target's capacity and perception, are found to be the principal points of continuity from Thucydides. Kautilya's observations on the supremacy of relative gains over the absolute, the efficacy of counter-action as deterrence, and considerations for *fait accompli* in the Grey Zone are of direct relevance for pursuing advantage below the threshold of war. However, given the specific character of war avoidance, and the coexistence of competition with cooperation in the Grey Zone, their observations on war—either as an outcome of compulsion or as an acceptable means of securing national interests—mark the points of departure. The research finds that continuities from Thucydides and Kautilya define the key constraints—breaching them risks escalating the Grey Zone competition into open war.

Introduction

This paper explores the extent to which Thucydides and Kautilya offer conceptual guidance and practical waypoints for competing and gaining advantage in the Grey Zone. The reasons for this research interest are two. Firstly, the term 'Grey Zone' has seen growing significance in military literature and in security documents in recent years. While the origins of the term may be traced to the early 1950s as 'grey areas', somewhere between 2010 and 2015, the term found frequent mention in multiple US military documents, and the trend has continued to grow since then.¹ Not only the use of the term, but there is indeed a growing frequency of strategic contestation and consideration of options in the Grey Zone. Although there is no agreed definition of the term Grey Zone, combining various academic works on the subject, the paper adopts a simple description: a conceptual space between the states of war and peace as the extremes.² The growing significance of contestation in the Grey Zone can be attributed to the decline of war and the availability of alternative means for strategic contests.

Secondly, there is concurrent and growing attention to classical works, particularly the ones by Thucydides and Kautilya. While the '*History of the Peloponnesian War*' (henceforth referred to as the *History*) was always studied in Western universities, there has been a visible increase in the intensity of institutional attention to the *Arthashastra* in India over the last few years as well as to the Peloponnesian War for their learning value. On the one hand, numerous scholars contend that Kautilya remains as valid as ever in matters of statecraft. By inference, then, application of Kautilya to the Grey Zone is only a matter of interpretation and discovery. On the other hand, Colin Gray strongly asserts that "[Thucydides'] understanding and explanation of how and why states behave as they do have profound advisory implications for our contemporary choices in policy and strategy."³ Implicit in Gray's assertion is that

Thucydides can help states navigate the policy challenges of the Grey Zone as well.

Apart from the growing popularity of these works, the paper has sought to consider the *History* and *Arthashastra* in light of their unique nature. The two are quite different, although they deal primarily with intra-state and inter-state relations and challenges. Thucydides presents a history of the Peloponnesian War with attention to the multitude of influences and compulsions that govern both individual and collective decision-making. As Steven Forde observes, the *History* is more of a case study that seeks to shed light on the underlying psychology and motives of actors, key processes at work, and their origins, and to filter the superficial from the deeper causes.⁴ Kautilya's work, as RP Kangle infers, is not a treatise of general principles but rather a compendium of actions and policies that may be adopted under the circumstances as visualised in a political life.⁵ In other words, the *History* tells what was actually done by the political leaders of the Greek city-states under some of the most challenging circumstances. *Arthashastra*, in contrast, tells what ought to be done by a king who seeks to conquer the Indian subcontinent. Therefore, the two do not lend themselves to direct comparison, particularly with reference to their relevance in the Grey Zone. So, instead of a comparative commentary, the object of this paper is to seek out the points of continuity and change from Thucydides and Kautilya, for gaining advantage in the Grey Zone, as the former tells what happened and the latter tells what ought to be done to expand power.

Before laying out the organisation of the paper, a short justification of the above research focus is in order. A detailed survey of concerning literature shows that there exists a clear gap in the research that directly seeks to identify any resonance between the idea of contestations within the Grey Zone and the conception of inter-state conflicts in the *History* and *Arthashastra*. In

addition, there is also a strong debate on whether the idea of the Grey Zone is really a new concept or if it is only a revised term for older means of conflict management that have generally been practiced in the past. The debate gets further intensified by the advocates of classical theorists who argue that nothing is new from those ideas and concepts which have been enunciated by classical military theorists. For some, a clear distinction of peace and war enables better policy decisions, while for others, a nuanced understanding of the entanglement within the spectrum of conflict enables identifying efficient alternatives to war. Taking extreme positions of either discarding the idea of Grey Zone as nothing new or seeking to approach the idea as absolutely new may not be a fruitful endeavour.

Furthermore, as Clausewitz aptly asserts, “the first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish the kind of war on which they are embarking.” To paraphrase Clausewitz, contemporary statesmen have to decide whether their state is at peace with an adversary or at war or in a competition within the Grey Zone wherein the violence of war is absent, but the character of the competition is above the threshold of peacetime adversarial engagement. While Thucydides offers an exhaustive historiography of a major ancient war, Kautilya’s *Arthashastra* offers ways and means of statecraft to secure power and thereby enable territorial expansion. Given their enduring presence in the strategic discourse of over two millennia, an academic exercise to locate the aspects of continuity and change from their observations on the character of inter-state competition, with specific reference to the actions in the Grey Zone, will be of interest to statesmen and military leaders alike. A better conceptual grasp of the contours of the contemporary inter-state strategic competition, which the exercise seeks to achieve, will enable policymakers to find efficient

ways and means, either from the past or by seeking newer ideas, to consistently gain advantage in such a competition. For professional military education, too, such furtherance of conceptual clarity is important: an idea of where the balance exists between continuity and change.

The paper is scoped within a few limitations. While examining the works of Thucydides and Kautilya, the paper restricts itself to those observations which relate to the use of or the threat of force as the primary or as an alternative means to secure any desired outcome. The paper does not incorporate observations related to other aspects of statecraft or cultural and ethical issues. The paper approaches the challenge of gaining advantage in the Grey Zone through the lenses of classical and structural realism and does not account for the possible alternative arguments of other international relations theories on inter-state strategic competition. The analysis also limits itself to the actions and strategies of nation-states below the threshold of a large-scale war. Consequently, the findings of this paper shall be relevant only to such actions and strategies. The paper also makes a preliminary assumption that there exists a space between war and peace, and this, for the research, may be referred to as the Grey Zone, although the extent of novelty of the concept shall be challenged.

The paper presents two central arguments. Firstly, the study of Thucydides and Kautilya can provide the enduring considerations for limiting the strategic competition below the threshold of war. And secondly, the observations and assumptions of the two, premised on the necessity, acceptability, and utility of war, will be insufficient as a guide for pursuing advantage in the Grey Zone. The paper advances these arguments by seeking answers to the following questions:

- What are the principal causes and objectives of war as

enunciated by Thucydides and Kautilya, and are they yet relevant?

- Within Thucydides' and Kautilya's conception of conflicts and their objectives, do the means of Grey Zone find a mention, in any form, towards achieving the objectives of war?
- What aspects of these theorists' ideas find continuing relevance to gain an advantage in the Grey Zone?
- From the perspective of gaining advantage in the Grey Zone, what aspects of their ideas necessitate a changed interpretation or have lost relevance for further study and application?
- Within the contemporary inter-state competitions, what has been the impact of the popularisation of the Grey Zone on the causation of war, as otherwise conceptualised by Thucydides and Kautilya?

The following analysis and discussion are organised in six sections. Since the Grey Zone has relevance only in reference to the extremes of war and peace, the black and the white, the first section shall identify and summarise the principal causes and objectives of war as enunciated by Thucydides and Kautilya. Consequently, the relevance of these causes and objectives in contemporary interstate relations shall be examined. This shall facilitate an understanding of the motives that drive the transition of any two states from the condition of peace to war and, in effect, into the Grey Zone that lies in between. The next one shall seek to identify the direct or indirect references to the concept of the Grey Zone or such means within the Thucydidean and Kautilyan conception of conflicts and their objectives. The paper will then classify those observations and

arguments which may be of continuing relevance to gain advantage in the Grey Zone.

Section four shall examine and summarise those ideas of Thucydides and Kautilya which may necessitate a changed interpretation given the specific character of inter-state competition in the Grey Zone. In doing so, it will also bring out those conceptions that may have lost relevance in this context. The paper will then explore the kind of impact which the popularisation of the Grey Zone ideas has had on the causation of an open war, as previously conceptualised by Thucydides and Kautilya. Finally, the concluding section shall draw together the conceptual and practical waypoints on gaining advantage in the Grey Zone as derived from the two classics as a useful outcome of the study. Concurrently, it will also bring out the limitations in their contemporary relevance and thereby highlight the areas which necessitate further analysis and creative thought.

Causes and Objectives of War: Thucydidean and Kautilyan Conception

Why is the discussion on the causes of war necessary? The paper seeks to gain further insight into the challenge of how to gain an advantage in the Grey Zone, while taking the observations and conception of Thucydides and Kautilya on the phenomenon of war as the general points of reference. The analysis is, thus, situated within the conceptual or operational space between war and peace. It will be reasonable to assume that the factors which drive any two or more states from a condition of peace to war are the same factors that push these states into the Grey Zone. In other words, the states will have to traverse the Grey Zone as part of their transition from peace to war. However, it must be noted that for some reasons, states choose to remain within this transition zone, without materially engaging in an act of war. Therefore, a broad discussion

on the causes and objectives of war is necessary to set the frame of further analysis.

This section will initially bring forth the causes and objectives of war as argued by Thucydides and Kautilya. It will then compare and contrast these ideas with recent and prominent works on the causes of war. Consequently, a summary of enduring causes and objectives of war shall be drawn from a rationalist perspective to progress the study further.

The oft-quoted excerpt, “Hostage as we are to the three greatest motives of all: honour, fear, and self-interest,” is from the Athenian speech in Sparta before the great war, and it succinctly summarises Thucydides’ central argument on causes of war based on human nature or the human way.⁶ These three causes need examination individually, while their effect may be present in varying degrees in all decisions that choose the instrument of war as the ultimate means. The discussion of these factors shall proceed in the order of honour, interest and fear – from the obvious to the innate.

Thucydides’ *History* places a unique emphasis on honour as one of the principal motives for war. Sthenelaidas, an ephor of Sparta, the Corinthians and Pericles all laid their argument, either in full or in part, to the call of honour while impressing their audience in favour of war. Sthenelaidas, at the Spartan assembly, calls upon the allies to vote for war as ‘the honour of Sparta demands’ such a response to disallow ‘further aggrandisement of Athens.’⁷ The Corinthians question the Spartan sense of honour by blaming Spartan inaction for the likely subjugation of its allies by Athens: the true author of subjugation is the power that allows it, despite having the means to prevent it.⁸ Pericles, on his part, asserts that a firm refusal to Spartan demands will force them to treat Athens as equals and that a command from one equal to the other only means

slavery.⁹ All these eloquent arguments directly target the collective human emotion of honour to justify the resort to war.

Similarly, individual and collective interest do play their part. Many scholars have rightly observed that the Corcyraeans, rather than justice and morals, appeal to Athenian interests to ally. The Corcyraean envoy argues that such an alliance will bring the Corcyraean and Athenian navies together and put Athens in a place of unprecedented strength.¹⁰ Moreover, Donald Kagan presents a view that Pericles may have chosen Corcyra over Corinth under the assumption that war with Sparta was inevitable and that Corcyra, given its geographic location, may secure access to the resources of the rich western Greek city-states.¹¹ Athens' Sicilian expedition, thus, may be seen as a decision driven by interest of gaining control over all of Sicily and thereby securing resources for Athens' war efforts.¹² In the Melian dialogue, the Athenian envoy clearly states that the subjugation of Melos serves Athens' interests: besides extending the empire, Athens would gain in security.¹³ Thus, some of the most important triggers for the Peloponnesian War and associated events were driven by acute attention to national self-interests.

However, the *alēthestátē próphasis* (truest reason) of the war, according to Thucydides "was the growth of Athenian power and the fear which this caused in Sparta."¹⁴ The issue for analysis here is what was the fear about? In other words, why should Sparta fear the rise of the Athenian empire? Was it because Sparta feared losing its hegemonic status—fear of losing honour? Or was it the fear of losing its interests to the hegemony of Athens at a subsequent time frame? Or was it an existential fear of even the survival of Spartan identity which Athens may subsequently challenge? Corinthian appeal to the Spartans explains all these fears at once. The Corinthians, at the Spartan assembly in the summer of 432 BCE, argue: the Athenian power has risen beyond what the Spartans are

willing to accept; the Athenians have put matured plans of aggression into action against Spartan indecision; the Athenian progress will be insidious; by deferring the decision to act, the Spartans have allowed Athens to grow stronger and stronger; and, for their own safety, the Corinthians and others of the league may seek new alliances if Sparta yet fails to act.¹⁵ In this, Corinth has appealed to the honour and interest of the Spartans, but has kept fear as the foundation of its argument.

Fear as a cause of decision and action is true for Athens as well, although Thucydides did not highlight it in the same way as for Spartans. Pericles, while considering the Spartan demand for repeal of the Megarian decree, argues that “If you give way to them, you will at once receive some greater order on the assumption that you will obey that too from fear.”¹⁶ In other words, it can be argued that Pericles refused to acquiesce to the Spartan demand because he feared that such a concession would disallow him the opportunity of being seen as an equal and also result in further demands of a higher order. While on the surface, Pericles’ argument appeals to the honour of the Athenians, the underlying cause is fear. Similarly, Corcyra’s apparent plea to Athens’ interest to secure an alliance was indirectly an appeal to Athens’ innate fears. The Corcyraean envoy argues that if Athens fails to accept their offer of an alliance, then Corinth may eventually gain control over the Corcyraean navy, and Athens will have to face the combined naval might of the stronger Corinth and the Peloponnesus.¹⁷ This is a voicing, in other words, of Athens’ fear of losing its primacy as a naval hegemon.

The above discussion on honour, interest, and then fear helps in drawing three key observations for further correlation with the topic of concern. The first is on the complex interplay of interest and honour leading to the genesis and maturation of fear as a motive for war. Fear does not exist in a vacuum. It gains form as fear of a threat to one’s interests or of losing honour. More often than not,

these two fears are also woven into each other. The second observation is that fear will often be the precipitating cause of several conflicts, although the other two play their part. The third, states can moderate the outcome of their actions in an adversarial relationship by regulating the quotient of fear, which such actions may cause, within the popular mind of the adversary. Such moderation will essentially involve a prudent compromise of one's interests and honour. In other words, the triptych is also useful for maintaining peace.¹⁸

Contrary to *History's* view of war as an outcome of fear, honour, and interest, *Arthashastra*, in essence, preaches the ideal of conquest as the supreme foreign policy end.¹⁹ The term '*Arthashastra*', by one interpretation, means the science of acquisition and protection of earth or territory, which is the source of wealth.²⁰ L.N. Rangarajan, in his translated work, observes that the first guiding principle of Kautilyan theory of foreign policy is that the king shall augment the power of the state to pursue a campaign of conquest.²¹ These two observations provide for three inferences. One, for Kautilya, the principal objective of foreign policy is to create wealth for the state. Two, wealth was synonymous with territory as land was the singular source all livelihood. And three, as conquest was the principal way to expand, a state must maintain and augment its capacity for conquest. Within these three interrelated inferences, the role of war is located.

Arguably, the concern of honour does not find mention as a direct causal factor in *Arthashastra*. As Kajari Kamal avers, the idea of honour or bravery was immaterial to Kautilya when threatened by a stronger adversary.²² *Arthashastra* advocated prudence and the idea of living to fight another day rather than dying in a fight for honour.²³ Kautilya plainly advises that a king should make peace with the stronger and the equal, for there is no progress in waging war against either of these two.²⁴ In his methods of foreign policy,

he directly advises war with the weaker, although if the purposes of war can be achieved by peaceful agreements as well, then peace is preferred.²⁵ On the contrary, if the stronger king were not to desire for peace, then Kautilya says, the weak “should resort to the conduct of one submitting with troops”, in addition to other measures relevant to a weaker king.²⁶ Thus, for Kautilya, kings and states may not be compelled into war, rather a king prefers war, although based on relative strength, only to the advancement of his territorial possessions. This contradicts Thucydides' assertion that Sparta was forced or compelled into war against Athens, albeit under certain unique circumstances.

Similarly, fear as a compulsion to go to war also does not find favour in Kautilyan thought. For instance, according to the *sadgunya* construct (the group of six foreign policy options), the *vijigisu* (would-be conqueror) must seek peace when in relative decline as compared to the enemy.²⁷ Concurrently, he says that if the progress made by the king and his enemy is equal, then the *vijigisu* must again make peace.²⁸ Moreover, when an equal power, does not agree to a peace proposal, the *vijigisu* must cause proportional harm to the former, but only for the purpose of creating conditions of peace.²⁹ In this, Kautilya is amply clear in the proportionality of harm and its purpose. He does not suggest any recourse to war after such harm has been caused. It can, thus, be argued that the Thucydidean logic of fear is not visualised by Kautilya as a reasonable motivation for war.

There can be two possible reasons for the limited influence of fear as a cause of war within the *Arthashastra*. One, Kautilya sees a state passing through a cycle of decline, stability and advancement on a temporal plane by either the use or misuse of *sadgunya*.³⁰ Thus, these stages are seen as transient, and the *vijigisu* must adopt such policies that may be suitable to move from decline to stability and then to the stage of advancement. For instance, while adopting the

policy of *asana* (waiting-in-neutrality) or *samsraya* (seeking shelter), the king is expected to first secure his stability from a point of decline. He then shall work on improving his *prakritis* (the seven constituent elements of state power) to change the correlation of power to embark upon a conquest to regain his independent status.³¹ Thus, Kautilya has other policy recommendations to overcome the fear of decline, rather than a recourse to war.

The other reason is the general absence of a balance of power construct as a governing structure for sustained peace in the Kautilyan era. Roger Boesche rightly argues that Kautilya did not offer an equivalent of the modern balance of power theory through the *mandala* framework.³² For Kautilya, as discussed above, peace was only a transitory stage of stabilisation wherein the king works to upgrade his strength. The *vijigisu* must either undertake war if strong or one must submit to the strong. The issue of peer competitors fighting with each other does not find significance in Kautilya's argument, as only the superior in strength shall pursue *vigraha* (policy of hostility); otherwise, peace was sought with the equal.³³ The ultimate aim is the conquest of the *chakravarti shetra* (the Indian subcontinent) by the *vijigisu*.³⁴ On the contrary, the balance of power theory's implicit objective is to ensure that no single entity is allowed to become the predominant power in the system and thereby ensure the security of the member states—a sustainable peace.³⁵ The contradiction is evident. Fear, therefore, as a causation of war, has larger significance within the European balance of power theory rather than Kautilyan idea of *chakravartin*—the world (essentially, the subcontinent) conqueror.

On numerous occasions, scholars have argued that war is seen as an inevitable phenomenon in the *Arthashastra*.³⁶ This argument is debatable. Scholars attribute this assertion to Kautilya's observation that in the absence of a just and strong ruler, the law of the fishes—strong swallowing the weak—shall prevail in the

society. Kautilya makes this observation in relation to the internal administration of a state, wherein the king must exercise his power with full consideration towards the well-being of his subjects.³⁷ This observation has been extended by other scholars to the international state of structural anarchy and thus, the claim on the inevitability of war. While the extension is reasonable, Kautilya did not necessarily mean it. Kautilya advises the king to exercise his power with consideration to mitigate *matsya-nyaya* (the law of fishes). This advice evidently shows that his observations on anarchy were not in reference to inter-state relations. On the contrary, it can be seen that within his six-fold foreign policy options, war is but a choice.³⁸ In addition, war must be undertaken against only a weak king with due consideration of various factors of security.³⁹ Moreover, Kautilya suggests three different forms of war: open warfare, concealed warfare and silent warfare. The king may choose the form of warfare based on the assessment of his strengths and weaknesses.⁴⁰ In sum, there exists reasonable ground to infer that for Kautilya, war, in its general sense, was not an inevitable phenomenon, but a conscious choice with a purpose.

So, the cause of war, for Kautilya, is primarily the purpose of territorial expansion. The treatise sees territory as the source of wealth.⁴¹ Accordingly, Rangarajan interprets the Kautilyan idea of 'welfare of state' as "ensuring the security of the state within its existing boundaries and acquiring new territory to enlarge it."⁴² Consequently, the *vijigisu*, by necessity, was required to embark upon a conquest of new territory for the purpose of securing more wealth and thus the welfare of his state. By inference, the principal cause of war in the Kautilyan world is interest—territorial expansion. By extension, if wealth can be secured from sources other than land, then the means of war should lose its primary relevance, provided the new source of wealth can be secured by an alternate way.

The above discussion on the causes and objectives of war as observed by Thucydides and Kautilya can be summed up as follows: Fear, honour, and interest interact in a complex way when states are pushed down the path of conflict escalation. The objectives of war as inferred from Thucydides' observations, include preservation of hegemony, security through balance of power, and securing access to resources. In the Thucydidean conception, states may be compelled into war, even if they want to avoid it. For Kautilya, interest remains the principal driver of war; the objective being territorial expansion. Within his conception, states need not be compelled into war if the king can prudently apply the six foreign policy options. To establish the scope of current relevance and continuity of these conceptions of Thucydides and Kautilya, a contrast against the contemporary works on the causes of war is necessary.

While a detailed survey of the literature on causes of war is well beyond the scope of this paper, a brief discussion on the broad schools of thought is a necessary part. The quantum of literature on the subject is immense, and it has grown manifold since the end of the Second World War. The three broad and interrelated questions addressed by recent literature on the subject are: Why do wars occur in the first place? Why do wars occur sometimes and not at other times—reasons for variations in the occurrence of war and peace? What are the origins of a particular war?⁴³ The focus here is primarily on the first question. To answer it, the paper shall briefly contrast some of the key theories on causes of war, at dyadic and system levels, against their alternative parallel arguments.

First, the 'Balance of Power' theory and 'Hegemonic' theory, seemingly opposite in their line of argument, are both premised on maintaining the status quo distribution of power. The balance of power theory pursues security by ensuring that no single power can gain overwhelming superiority over the others in the system,

which, in turn, assures security of all member states in the system.⁴⁴ Any challenge to this perceived balance, either by the growth or decline of a member state in the system, may become a cause of war if the balance is not restored by other means.⁴⁵ A causal condition inherent in this proposition of war is the fear of insecurity created by the change in the extant balance of power. Hegemonic theory, on the contrary, argues that peace prevails as long as there is an uncontested hegemon.⁴⁶ Combining with the arguments of Kenneth Organski's 'Power Transition' theory, any challenge to the extant hegemon by a rising power may cause war.⁴⁷ Here again, the cause resides in the fear resulting from the threat posed to the extant hegemon. As Howard has noted, the most dangerous of all moods is that of a great power which sees itself declining to the second rank."⁴⁸

Second, the Expected Utility Theory and Prospect Theory are based on the cost-benefit calculus of war. The former argues that states are more likely to initiate war if the expected benefits of the endeavour outweigh the likely costs.⁴⁹ A similar argument is presented by Stephen Van Evera, wherein he contends that when conquest is easy—i.e., at lesser cost and with a higher probability of success—states are motivated to initiate war.⁵⁰ Conversely, the prospect theory contends that statesmen are more likely to choose war to avert an impending loss from a given reference point than to secure additional gains.⁵¹ Thus, the cause of war is different for these two theories: for expected utility, it is the expansion of interests; and, from the prospect lens, it is the fear of losing access to interests that was hitherto available.

Third are the arguments based on human nature and the anarchic structure of the international system. Hans Morgenthau, the principal proponent of the human nature criterion, contends that politics among nations is governed by the objective laws rooted in human nature.⁵² This human nature, simply, is evil with endless

lust for power and the will to dominate others.⁵³ Such a nature, in turn, pushes states into conflict. Kenneth Waltz's theory of structural anarchy, on the contrary, argues that in the absence of a central governing authority in the international system to prevent war, states would ultimately resort to the use of force to settle any conflict of interest or to address their fear of being constrained by any other state.⁵⁴ Although Morgenthau and Waltz have sought to locate the cause of war differently, the immediate cause for both is either interest or fear, while the permissive cause or condition is the state of anarchy.

Fourth and last are the arguments of the security dilemma by Robert Jervis and rationalist explanations of war by James D. Fearon. Relying on Waltz's anarchy argument, Jervis contends that a constant sense of mistrust exists among states, which precludes sustained cooperation and promotes the use of force based on expected utility. This mistrust is created by three interrelated conditions. First, states which may choose to cooperate in the present may choose to compete in the future with a change in relative power. Second, even to maintain their possession, states may have to expand to secure assured access to resources. Third, preparations of a state to increase its security may decrease the sense of security in the other, defensive and offensive capabilities not being clearly distinguishable.⁵⁵ Under such conditions of mistrust and when offence has an advantage, war occurs as an outcome of spiralling tensions. Fearon contends that the cause of war lies in two realities of inter-state relations. Firstly, states have an incentive to misrepresent private information on their capability and willingness to use force to secure a better bargain. This essentially results in a disagreement over relative power which in turn causes war out of a false sense of easy victory, or due to miscalculation of the opponent's willingness to fight against a change in the status quo. Secondly, wars may become a rational

choice as states, under anarchy, may always have an incentive to renege on an agreement of peace or cooperation. Preventive and pre-emptive wars become rational choices under this premise.⁵⁶ Interest and fear due to mutual mistrust are embedded within the arguments of both Jervis and Fearon on the causes of war.

The above discussion on contemporary theories of war does show that fear and interest continue to remain the fundamental causes of war, while their operative mechanisms can be different. The aspect of honour is, however, not seen to play a direct part in the above theoretical explanations. Nonetheless, honour can be located as a secondary factor of influence within Morgenthau's argument of '*animus dominandi*' (desire to dominate) and the hegemonic theory. Fearon's contention on the information problem is partly at crossroads with Kautilya's implicit assumption that reliable information about the enemy's relative strength shall be available to make a wise choice from the *sadgunya* cluster of options. He proposes to achieve such information through an elaborate intelligence structure. In the absence of such reliable and complete information, the *vijigisu* may succumb to the information problem and embark upon a conquest even when he is weak.

Thus, to answer the first of the questions set out initially in the paper, it is found that the primary causes – fear and interest – have seen explicit continuity since Thucydides and Kautilya. Despite this continuity, the occurrences of war have reduced notably and the preference for actions below the threshold of war – within the so-called 'Grey Zone' – has increased. In other words, while the fundamental causes for the transition from the state of peace towards that of war are enduring, for some other reasons, states do not complete this transition and remain within the Grey Zone. Hence, the point of interest for the next section is to ascertain whether a similar phenomenon was observed by Thucydides and Kautilya. It will endeavour to identify whether there are any direct

or indirect references to the concept of Grey Zone or such means within their conceptions of conflicts and their objectives.

Recognising the Grey Zone: Thucydides and Kautilya

Although there is no direct mention of the 'Grey Zone' in the *History*, Thucydides did recognise the existence of a political situation that is neither peace nor war. At the end of the Archidamian war, Sparta and Athens signed a treaty and made an alliance for peace that was to be for fifty years. In describing this period, Thucydides makes two observations:

First, "For looked at carefully in the light of the relevant facts, it will be seen that one cannot describe as 'peace' a situation in which the two sides neither restored nor received back everything that had been agreed by treaty."⁵⁷

Second, "For six years and ten months the two sides refrained from invading one another's territory, but elsewhere the truce failed to hold firm and they inflicted as much damage on each other as possible; and then they were finally driven to break the treaty concluded after the ten-year war and reverted again to open warfare."⁵⁸

The above observations provide for three inferences. One, that a situation existed which was legally and nominally peaceful, but could not be seen and acted upon as peace. Two, there existed a level of strategic competition between the two blocs of Greek city-states during this period, which was technically below the threshold of open warfare. And three, while peace existed at the system level, a state of war coexisted at the dyadic level. These inferences do resonate with the contemporary understanding of conflicts within the Grey Zone.

Thucydides' account of the political behaviour of the Greek city-states also shows that there was a clear understanding of the

nuances of limiting military response through ambiguity of intent, deniability of purpose, and *fait accompli* change of status quo, all of which are characteristic of the competition in the Grey Zone. To bring these characteristics into action, the principal means adopted were to act within treaty obligations or the general religious faith of the Greeks, primarily in letter rather than in spirit. A few direct examples are the building of city walls and the fortification of Piraeus by Athens—ambiguity of intent;⁵⁹ Corinthian defence against their rejection of the 'Peace of Nicias' on the grounds of their alliance with Thraceward people, while the real purpose was to retrieve their lost territories—deniability of purpose;⁶⁰ and the destruction of Panactum by the Boeotians in the spring of BCE 420—a *fait accompli* against Athens.⁶¹

Furthermore, the Greek city-states had an explicit comprehension of conducting war by other means. The Corinthians, while impressing the Spartan assembly for a war against Athens, observe that, "We have also other ways of carrying on the war, such as revolt of their [Athens] allies, the surest method of depriving them of their revenues, which are the source of their strength..."⁶² The Corinthian support for the Potidaean revolt in BCE 432 against Athens, despite not being in open conflict with Athens, is a case of non-attribution. However, it is quite likely that such measures were predominantly perceived as part of or preparation for a war rather than as a means of sustained competition below the threshold of war.

The principal reason for such perception is evidently the greater facility with which any Greek state could label an action of the adversary as an act of war. For instance, the Spartan assembly decides that the thirty-year treaty was broken because Athens accepted Corcyra into an alliance and besieged Potidaea. However, the Corcyraean envoy cogently contends in Athens that the alliance was not a breach of treaty, as Corcyra was a neutral state.⁶³

Sthenelaidas, arguing in favour of war says, “nor by lawsuits and words decide the matter, as it is anything but in words we are harmed, but render instant and powerful help [to our allies].”⁶⁴ A preference for direct use of force is apparent. Similarly, the Athenians decide to besiege Potidaea to prevent a suspected revolt, knowing well that it may not be in the interest of peace.⁶⁵ Thus, for the Greeks, actions in the Grey Zone were of limited utility in constraining the scale of escalatory military response.

Kautilya, on the other hand, does not explicitly recognise a space between peace and war. However, he refutes the claim that peace and war are the only two measures of foreign policy. Instead, he presents six measures because of the “differences in situations.” The other four measures include staying quiet, marching on expedition, seeking shelter and dual policy.⁶⁶ He sees peace as making a treaty and war as causing an injury, while the other four measures are either to advance the king’s interest or to preserve a stable condition. The different situations that he expounds are governed by the relative power of the king with that of the enemy and his allies. For instance, the *vijigisu* (would-be conqueror) must attack the weak but seek peace with both the stronger and the equal. Also, when the *vijigisu* advances his undertakings faster than his enemy, he should stay quiet—remain indifferent. On the contrary, if both make equal progress, he should make peace.⁶⁷ Thus, while Kautilya may have visualised different policy measures other than peace and war, his work does not directly recognise the idea of the Grey Zone, wherein the aim is to secure strategic interests while simultaneously limiting military retaliation.

Such recognition of the Grey Zone was probably not necessary within the Kautilyan worldview for two key reasons. One, war was always a possible and preferable option for Kautilya. He observes that ‘open war’ must be resorted to under favourable conditions,

and it is the most righteous form of victory.⁶⁸ He also strongly suggests that the destruction of the enemy must be brought about by war, even at great losses and expenses.⁶⁹ Echoing a similar view, Howard observes that war was seen as inevitable and desirable by societies in the past.⁷⁰ Two, the other four foreign policy measures suggested in *Arthashastra* are merely points of transition under unfavourable circumstances, with the resort to war being the final choice. For Kautilya, the consequences of these policy measures are decline, stability, and advancement. Therefore, he suggests that the *vijigisu* must seek shelter when in decline, progress his undertakings to a stable condition, and then pursue advancement, which ultimately involves expansion by conquest.⁷¹ It can, thus, be argued that Kautilya could not have visualised a situation wherein war was necessarily avoided even under favourable circumstances.

Some scholars have incorrectly interpreted Kautilya's idea of concealed war as grey zone warfare.⁷² While discussing the three types of wars, Kautilya says that when the king is superior in strength and when other conditions are favourable, he must engage in open war. He immediately then asserts, "in the reverse case, concealed fighting."⁷³ In the succeeding verses from 10.3.3 to 10.3.25, he then goes on to explain the methods of concealed fighting on the battlefield. Thus, according to Kangle and Mirza Faiyaz, *kuta-yuddha* or concealed fighting refers to the commonly recognised deceptive tactics of combat.⁷⁴ Rangarajan calls it a deceptive battle. He further adds *upajapa*, or psychological warfare, as part of it with the purpose of instigating treachery in the enemy camp.⁷⁵ In other words, it would be contextually appropriate to see concealed fighting as a variation in combat at the operational and tactical levels to harass the enemy in a battle and not as part of the Grey Zone.

Nonetheless, *tusnim-yuddha*, or silent war, has some elements of the Grey Zone. While describing silent war, Kautilya posits, "that

which concerns secret practices and instigations through secret agents is the mark of silent war.”⁷⁶ The secret practices discussed in Book 14 of *Arthashastra* primarily deal with assassinations of political and military leaders. Boesch, in his interpretation, adds that it is a kind of warfare wherein the adversaries act as if they are at peace while their secret agents are involved in assassinations, sponsoring instigations, and spreading disinformation.⁷⁷ Rangarajan calls it *guda-yuddha*, or clandestine war, involving similar methods. Thus, while instigations, propaganda, and disinformation are some of the means employed in the Grey Zone, Kautilya’s silent war is about weakening the adversary for a subsequent conquest. Grey Zone, on the contrary, is more about limiting opportunities for a conventional military counter-response, while yet making strategic gains.

Some scholars and commentators have interpreted *dvaidhibhava*, or dual policy, part of the six foreign policy options, as overt peace and covert war. Although such an interpretation has the characteristic of the Grey Zone, it is incorrect. Kagle argues that dual policy means peace with one, to get help from him to execute war with another.⁷⁸ This interpretation is validated by Kautilya’s subsequent observations on the policy. In verse 7.1.18, Kautilya asserts, “In a work that can be achieved with the help of an associate, [the king] should resort to a dual policy.”⁷⁹ And in verse 7.3.19, he advises that even the stronger should adopt a dual policy if he were to gain from peace at one place and war at another.⁸⁰ These verses quite clearly explain the idea of dual policy and when it is to be applied. Thus, *dvaidhibhava* cannot be seen as a form of conflict in the Grey Zone.

The preceding discussion has yielded four key findings towards answering the second research question. One, the Greek city-states, pursued their inter-state strategic competition within the Grey Zone by means of ambiguity, deniability, non-attribution, and fait accompli. Two, as war was a well-accepted means of settling inter-

state disputes, their preference for making sustained gains in the Grey Zone was severely constrained. Three, for Kautilya, some of the means that find utility in the Grey Zone were of relevance only when the *vijigisu* was weak. However, when the *vijigisu* was stronger than his adversary, he ought to seek open war, as it was righteous and perhaps even the most prudent policy. Four, both Thucydides and Kautilya do not recognise the competitive space of the Grey Zone in any explicit way, although the *History* accounts for a political state that is neither peace nor war. Thus, further discussion on the specific points of continuity from their thought will rely largely on contextual interpretations.

Thucydidean Thinking on Gaining Advantage in Grey Zone

As Colin Gray asserts, despite the passage of over two and a half millennia, the larger challenges of inter-state relations have “remained all but constant.” Gray attributes this continuity to the enduring characteristics of human nature, political processes, and the strategic logic and method of achieving political ends.⁸¹ Accordingly, a degree of continuity can be inferred with regard to the broader aspects of gaining advantage in the Grey Zone of inter-state competition. It must be noted that gaining advantage involves both making incremental gains and denying such gains to the adversary, and as Kautilya says, any decline of the enemy is also one’s advance.⁸² The points of continuity shall, therefore, be discussed based on the influence of these three elements or driving forces.

Moderation of Fear. One of the foremost continuities is the role of fear. The inference from Thucydides’ observations that fear, on most occasions, compels states to act remains quite valid even when competing below the threshold of war. Fear, in this context, is seen in two forms. One, the fear of escalation, which influences the

behaviour of the initiator. And two, the fear that the initiator's action invokes in the target polity, which determines the intensity of retaliation. The aspect of continuity is in the latter – the initiator must cause only so much fear in the target that any escalatory response seems unreasonable. This idea of moderating fear has received hardly any direct attention in contemporary literature on the Grey Zone, although some relevant means have been discussed. Such moderation can be achieved by avoiding any direct threat to the adversary's core interests, limiting the quantum of change in the status quo at a given instance, and maintaining seemingly constructive communication or allaying the concerns of future predation. For instance, had Pericles allowed the continued admission of Spartan heralds or embassy immediately before the onset of war, additional deliberations may have moderated the fears of Spartans. Similarly, the dissimilar responses of the world to Russian actions in Georgia in 2008, Crimea in 2014, and Ukraine in 2022 are all outcomes of the associated degree of fear that these actions stoked within the EU and NATO.

Narrative of Benignity. States pursuing advantage in the Grey Zone must sell a narrative that portrays their actions as limited and not against the interests of anyone. RW Maass argues that such rhetoric helps divide the moderates and hardliners of the adversary and thereby drains energy for counteraction.⁸³ Conversely, an offensive narrative must draw unanimous support for escalation. For instance, at the Spartan assembly, Themistocles justifies the rebuilding of Athenian walls in BCE 478, saying that the walls are not only in the interest of Athens but all of Greece.⁸⁴ He persuasively sold the narrative to prevent the escalation of animosity, although the Spartans may not have been fully convinced. However, had he directly conveyed the strategic interests behind those walls, Spartans might have initiated counteractions.

Overt Legalism (Covert Realism). To operate in the Grey Zone, states should have a legal basis in defence of their action. This is part of the above narrative requirement, but there is a subtle difference – the emphasis is on being legally just, in addition to the condition of benignity. The Athenian envoys in BCE 432, presented their case at the Spartan assembly, but failed. They bluntly advanced a realist argument. Sthenelaidas correctly observes, “They [Athenians] said a good deal in praise of themselves, but nowhere denied that they were injuring our allies.”⁸⁵ Consequently, the Spartan assembly voted for war against Athens. On the contrary, Russia, after it annexed Crimea, presented numerous legal arguments as well in defence of its action, rather than simply relying on its stated strategic interest in the Sevastopol base. Roy Allison argues that Moscow’s legal rhetoric was aimed at dividing the international community, garnering domestic support, and allaying the concerns of other European states.⁸⁶ Russian efforts did find some success.

Adversary’s Capacity and Perception. The relative capacity of the adversary to respond and its perception of the threat posed by a Grey Zone action determine the possibility of escalation. Pericles’ decision to accept Corcyra within a defensive alliance was, from his perception, a choice of moderation that was not to be seen as a challenge to the Spartan leadership. The Peloponnesians, however, perceived this as a breach of treaty. This perception was motivated by the dangerous prognosis that the Corinthians presented if Athens were allowed to grow unhindered.⁸⁷ They, therefore, chose to act when they still had the capacity to act – before Athens became too strong to be contested.⁸⁸ A strong line of continuity is seen here. From the Russian perspective, NATO’s eastward expansion may be seen as a persistent threat to the former’s security interests.⁸⁹ However, such an expansion cannot be termed belligerent – an action arguably in the Grey Zone. While NATO expanded in 1999

and 2004, adding nine new states, Russia chose to act only in 2008 against Georgia, in 2014 against Ukraine to regain Crimea, and against main-land Ukraine in 2022. Essentially, Russia's escalatory response is simply an outcome of its changing threat perception and its improved military capacity.

Avoid Overreaching. While pursuing advantage in the Grey Zone, there is a natural tendency to overreach with each successive gain. This tendency must be consciously avoided. Diodotus's argument on the natural impulse of states to overreach out of hope and greed is instructive. He argues that these two tendencies together blind states and humans alike to the dangers that may lie ahead.⁹⁰ While this argument was not in particular reference to the Grey Zone, it has continuing relevance for states operating in this zone. The West overreached by entertaining the idea of Ukraine's membership to NATO and Russia overreached by launching special operations into Kiev. Consequently, the room for pursuits in the Grey Zone has reduced, and the conflict has escalated.

Punitive Deterrence is Difficult. To deny advantage in the Grey Zone, the first step is to discourage or deter states from operating in this space. However, given the cost efficiency of acting in the Grey Zone, it is quite difficult to do so. While arguing for peace among the Sicilian cities, Hermocrates asserts that states will surely choose war when the expected advantages outweigh the disadvantages.⁹¹ The assertion implies that the post-hoc punishment and cost-inefficiency that the state may suffer by choosing war have already been incorporated in their calculus of making the choice. Consequently, punitive deterrence will fail in this case. The Grey Zone, invariably, is one such case. In response to any action in the Grey Zone, immediate retaliation, in general, may not be in the kinetic or conventional domain. And from an expected utility perspective, an open war against such actions will seldom seem justified. Consequently, the anticipated gains of the

initiator will almost—if not always—be greater than the costs. Therefore, states seeking to make gains in the Grey Zone can be effectively deterred by ex-ante denial rather than ex-post punishment. In other words, the perceived cost of an action in the Grey Zone must be made to outweigh the likely benefits.

Respond Early and Respond Effectively. All states shall, in general, act to advance their interests when there is an opportunity. While this cannot be completely prevented, state A must act appropriately, at the very first instance, against those actions of state B that challenge A's interests even in the Grey Zone. Steven Forde convincingly argues that the balance of power between Athens and Sparta may have held had the Spartans acted early enough.⁹² Thucydides too observes that the Spartans, while aware of Athenian expansion, remained inactive for most of the *pentekontaetia* (the fifty years between the Persian and Peloponnesian Wars).⁹³ Drawing a parallel, the world could have responded resolutely in 2008 against Russia's grey zone intervention in Georgia and against Chinese claims in the South China Sea in 2009, but for a complex set of reasons did not. Failing to respond early against adversarial actions in the Grey Zone can make later endeavours costlier.

Deniability and Ambiguity. These two aspects help actors in the Grey Zone avoid immediate and direct counter-action.⁹⁴ The use of proxies, a common means of deniability, has seen a stark continuity from Thucydides to the current times. Corinthians' covert support for the Potidaean revolt against Athens or Pakistan's support for the separatists in Kashmir is all about deniability through proxies. Athens' acceptance of Corcyra into a defensive alliance was aimed at ambiguity on the question of whether it tantamounted to a breach of the 'Thirty Years Peace' treaty.⁹⁵ However, despite their attempts to avoid war, escalation ensued. Such an outcome validates the importance of an adversary's

capacity and perception in governing the scope of counter-measures against actions in the Grey Zone.

Kautilyan Thinking on Gaining Advantage in Grey Zone

As brought out earlier, Kautilya's recognition of or reference to the Grey Zone is hardly any. Kautilya also posits that acquisition and security come from peace and activity, while the means for these two are the six-fold policy measure.⁹⁶ By inference, activity encompasses the other five measures, including war. Thus, Kautilya does not evidently see a continuum of conflict escalation by degree of violence. Rather, he advocates six clear lines of action which may be pursued in isolation or in a specific combination based on circumstances. Nonetheless, a few practical points of continuity, albeit indirectly, for operating in the Grey Zone can be discerned.

Ease of Acquiring and Sustaining. Territorial gain by *fait accompli* is a preferred option in the Grey Zone. Kautilya in verse 9.4.5 says, "That which is easy to obtain and protect, and cannot be recovered by the enemies, is the gain which can be seized."⁹⁷ In verse 7.10.11, Kautilya posits that the acquisition of land with a strong neighbour is ruinous on one's treasury for want of additional and persistent security.⁹⁸ Closely aligned to these two observations, Maass asserts that territories that may be a target of occupation by *fait accompli* are those that are easy to occupy, the chance of reversal is low, and the cost of retaliation for the adversary is high. China's occupation of features in the South China Sea, now virtually a *fait accompli*, exemplifies the point of continuity.

Instigation of Revolts. The *Vijigisu* must cause revolts in the enemy state and suppress them against himself.⁹⁹ While the Greek city-states used proxies to instigate such revolts, Kautilya relies on the use of secret agents. The purpose, however, is the same –

weakening the target state. The elaborate ways that Kautilya lays down for instigating such revolts have, nonetheless, lost relevance. Within the Grey Zone, the use of proxies is aimed at deniability and non-attribution so as to discourage direct retaliation. However, Kautilya's idea of using secret agents does not mention such a concern. It can, rather, be understood that he advocated the use of secret agents to enhance the effectiveness of the process of instigation by minimising the preventive efforts of the target state's leadership. Thus, while there is continuity in the means of instigation to weaken the enemy, the logic is different in the Grey Zone.

Attention to Relative Gains over Absolute. Kautilya explicitly advocates attention to relative gains rather than absolute gains, and it is fully aligned with the core logic of the Grey Zone. For instance, in verses 7.1.20 to 35, while discussing the choice of foreign policy measures, the idea of the king's advancement or decline is predicated on how, in relation to the enemy, the change occurs. At 7.13.29, he qualifies, "the flourishing of an enemy's undertaking is decline for the leader, advancement in the reverse case."¹⁰⁰ The works of Kenneth Waltz, Joseph Grieco, Robert Powell, and many other contemporary political theorists advance the same view as Kautilya.¹⁰¹ One of the principal motivations for pursuing advantage in the Grey Zone is that relative gains can be secured in this space at the least possible cost, as the room for retaliation is constrained by design. So, to deter actors in the Grey Zone, states need to focus on reducing perceived relative gains, although this is the most difficult part.

Counter Action as Deterrence. In trying to resolve the above difficulty, Kautilya offers a viable answer. In verses 7.3.7-8 Kautilya says, "If the equal were not to desire for peace, he should do harm to him in return to the extent that he may have done to him. For heat is the means of joining together."¹⁰² Essentially, he advocates a

proportionate counter-action to attempt deterrence and ensure peace. In the contemporary literature on deterrence failure, Paul Huth and Bruce Russett convincingly argue that the strategy of reciprocity is likely to be of successful deterrent value.¹⁰³ A clear continuity is evident. Although Kautilya specifies this recourse against an equal, its relevance extends to the Grey Zone confrontations—where the application of conventional power asymmetries rarely persist long enough to influence outcomes decisively. Pakistan, thus, prefers to compete against India in the Grey Zone, and the Balakot strike or Operation SINDOOR are examples of India's counteractions with a deterrent purpose.

The arguments and evidence presented above do show that both Thucydides and Kautilya did not see the space between war and peace—the Grey Zone—as it is being seen and exploited in the twenty-first century. Nonetheless, some of their observations do find continuing relevance when contrasted against contemporary literature on the Grey Zone and the current behaviour of states pursuing relative advantage within this space. With this, the third issue of inquiry initially outlined is addressed. Since both the *History* and the *Arthashastra* are bound within a historical context, there will certainly be some aspects which may have lost relevance or may need reinterpretation. The two were written at a time when states could readily and legitimately resort to war in pursuit of their interests. However, in current times, there are more severe constraints on the use of force for a range of reasons. Consequently, competition in the Grey Zone has gained more attention. Thus, while there remains a level of continuity from Thucydides and Kautilya, it is but necessary to ascertain the points of change through the current web of constraints on inter-state competition. Identification of such changes shall be the object of discussion in the following section.

Common Points of Departure

Simultaneity of Cooperation and Competition. In the prevailing order of globalisation and economic interdependencies, cooperation and competition coexist to a degree which may not have been visualised by either Thucydides or Kautilya. The Delians and the Peloponnesians could clearly align against each other in all aspects of political and economic affairs and fight with clarity about who the enemy was. Similarly, Kautilya's guidance is based on the classification of other states as *ari-bhavin* (hostile intent), *mitra-bhavin* (friendly intent), and *bhrytya-bhavin* (subservient).¹⁰⁴ Even if states can be classified as specified, economic affairs are such that cooperation continues alongside serious competition. For instance, although Russia is technically an *ari-bhavin* against the West, the net import of gas by the European Union block from Russia increased by 18 per cent year-on-year in 2024, even after almost three years of indirect war.¹⁰⁵ Andrew Erickson, in his article on competitive coexistence between the US and China, advocates that the US should not suppress China wholesale but rather oppose its harmful behaviour. For Kautilya, however, the *ari* must be destroyed, even at great cost.¹⁰⁶ Erickson further adds that, even as China advances, the US cannot retreat.¹⁰⁷ For Thucydides, this dynamic of advance and no retreat should ultimately, if not ab initio, create a condition of fear in either of the contestants and then a compulsion for the use of force. By this inductive logic, it is better to pre-empt, and the US must initiate war now rather than later.¹⁰⁸ However, such logic does not find favour given the economic interdependence and the political costs of war. Consequently, the contestation shall continue in the Grey Zone, provided the contestants do not overreach at once.

Persistent Contestations below the Threshold of War. An outcome of the above situation is the rise of serious and persistent contestation below the threshold of war. Again, in such a political

environment, Thucydides and Kautilya serve only a limited purpose. On the one hand, the Spartans and Athenians could take recourse to war to settle inter-state disputes, and such settlements had some level of durability, if not more. On the other hand, for Kautilya, the war of conquest was a natural course of progression from decline and stability. Contestations in the Grey Zone, on the contrary, are never meant to breach the threshold of war but yet make strategic gains. For instance, Dan Altman's dataset shows that there have been 112 territorial gains by *fait accompli* from 1918 to 2016, while only 13 territorial concessions in the face of direct coercion.¹⁰⁹ How can states prevent such *fait accompli* and make one against the enemy without breaching the threshold of war? For such practical difficulties, the *History* and *Arthashastra* do not provide any workable alternatives.

Points of Change from Thucydides

Emotive Drivers under War Avoidance. Under the yoke of the necessity and compulsion for war, Thucydides brings forth the emotive drivers of fear, honour, and the irrational passion they stoke, along with the associated decision dilemmas. But when war avoidance is central to the plan, then these emotional influences should probably have a lesser impact. Here, these emotive drivers are in relation to the initiator (Refer discussion on 'Moderation of Fear'). As Altman argues, war is not expected to occur – at least in plan – when states pursue strategic advantage in the Grey Zone.¹¹⁰ Similarly, given the degree of ambiguity and deniability incorporated by necessity in the Grey Zone, the issue of honour or loss of face does not pose a serious concern, although for Archidamus and Pericles it did.¹¹¹ Consequently, the question of interest is whether these emotive challenges still count the same way, or are there other issues at play when planning below the threshold of war. An attempt shall be made to answer this, in part, in the next section.

Decisive Wars versus Relative Advantage. Thucydides' insights on the dynamics of inter-state relations may also find lesser utility when states are competing in the Grey Zone. For Thucydides, states pursued decisive outcomes and resorted to war as the surest means for such outcomes. The political processes of the Greek city-states were influenced by the possibility of an all-out war and a cultural virtue which saw war as a necessity.¹¹² The determinants of inter-state business, such as the systems of hierarchical relations, sharp alignments of alliances, and assured punitive responses for breaking alliance commitments, were all within the construct of war being an outside option of bargaining. On the contrary, in the Grey Zone, states by design adopt measured revisionism and strategic gradualism.¹¹³ Ventures in the Grey Zone, therefore, can result in only limited and gradual outcomes—a degree of relative advantage that may accumulate as decisive only if pursued consistently over a period of time. Consequently, states, big and small alike, assert sovereign behaviour to a greater extent, which poses a challenge, particularly for those who look for answers in the *History*.

Points of Change from Kautilya

The Decline of War. While the cause of the phenomenon is debatable, there is indeed a decline in the frequency of interstate wars. Under such an external political situation, Kautilya's *Rajamandala* construct is perhaps outdated. The *Rajamandala*, although a dynamic concept, is predicated on *Vijigisu's* direction of conquest and also the existential threat of territorial wars.¹¹⁴ It is based on the principal assumption that states sharing land borders will be enemies of each other. Therefore, the weakness in this construct emerges from two changes. One, the general decline in wars of conquest. Since 1945, European countries have not started any new war, while they saw at least two new wars per year in the preceding 600 years.¹¹⁵ Two, it does not account for economic

relations and political alignments, which may be different from what the territorial boundaries dictate, as per the above assumption. While one may seek to force-fit the idea discursively in the current times, it seems to have lost much of its relevance as a lens to 'prospectively analyse state behaviour.' The difficulty is more pronounced in the Grey Zone, where ambiguity and deniability further blur the distinction between enemies and allies, let alone the classification of rear-ally or rear-enemy.

Actor Centricity. The Kautilyan manual of statecraft is for a would-be conqueror of the *cakravarti shetra* (Indian sub-continent), for whom the state may be seen as a means to an end. Kautilyan guidance to a weak king at verses 7.15.13, 7.15.24-25 and 9.7.35-36 should substantiate this claim. In these, he recommends that a king must escape and leave the country if the enemy besieging his fort is vastly superior in strength, or he may even ask for another land for himself.¹¹⁶ However, in the prevailing political situation, the survival of the state rather than the king assumes primacy. This changed paradigm of foreign policy will change the state's approach to various means of inter-state competition, particularly the preference for war as an instrument of policy. But in Thucydides' view, state-centricity is evident. Such attention to the state's survival rather than the principal actor, alongside the other contemporary constraints against war, brings to pre-eminence the tools of the Grey Zone for pursuing national interests without the threat of war.

Division of Power in Domestic Polity. The prevailing system of democratic and party politics, calls for a change in the reading of the *Arthashastra*. For Kautilya, the power of decision-making was fully vested in the king, although he was to consult his ministers.¹¹⁷ But with the division of power for decision-making, actors in the Grey Zone consciously seek to convince the 'doves' of the adversary's polity that a particular act does not call for military

response.¹¹⁸ Thucydides, however, recognises such a division of power in his observations on the influences of peace and war parties in Sparta.¹¹⁹ Thus, the compulsions of parliamentary politics and the flexible narrative of the Grey Zone make it the preferred zone of contestation. In other words, Kautilya's approach to decisions on the use of force from a strict monarchic lens fails to account for the attractiveness of pursuing advantage in the Grey Zone. Conversely, operations in the Grey Zone are difficult to sustain against those states where power is concentrated because the leader's view of friend and foe may be clearer and undisputed. China is a good example of this.

Non-territorial Wealth and Expansion. Kautilya insists on territorial expansion as the supreme means of wealth and power maximisation.¹²⁰ Such a view constrains the application of his thoughts to the spectrum of competition in the Grey Zone. A simple case in point is Beijing's alleged use of Huawei as a means of exercising strategic influence or its ability to limit counter-response for its actions in the Grey Zone by exploiting the world's dependence on its industrial infrastructure.¹²¹ Such newer forms of power and wealth maximisation in inter-state competition demand a newer lens to constantly examine any state's behaviour, which may not necessarily threaten another state's territorial integrity.

Definition of the Weak and the Strong. Kautilya's demarcation of the strong, the equal, and the weak for his foreign policy options is problematic for competition in the Grey Zone. While competing in this zone, the comprehensive balance of power matters less than the local balance of power.¹²² And since the opportunity for the complete application of military force does not arise in the Grey Zone, all states are seemingly equal when the contest is limited to this space. Kautilya advocated peace with an equal. Then, if one were to extend this thought to the Grey Zone, should every state seek peace with every other state? Further exacerbating the

difficulty is the nuclear dimension. A threat of a possible nuclear exchange can seriously limit the escalation of conflict.¹²³ In other words, the distinction in relative power amongst states competing in the Grey Zone is highly ambiguous. Hence, Kautilyan policy prescriptions based on relative power have very limited relevance in the Grey Zone.

Signalling and Perception under Incomplete Information.

Kautilya's belief in the availability of optimal information on the adversary's capacity and intentions for policy formulation is another point of departure. Kautilya advocates an elaborate use of secret agents and spies for obtaining complete information about all – the circle of kings and the constituent elements of the state.¹²⁴ This is connected to the above aspect of being able to clearly discern the enemy's relative power. While the currency of espionage is undisputed, Kautilya does not discuss the contingency of information being sub-optimal and the challenge of decision-making when one cannot discern if the adversary is weaker or an equal. As Fearon argues, states have incentives to misrepresent private information on their capability and resolve so as to achieve better bargains.¹²⁵ Therefore, under circumstances of incomplete information on the adversary's perception, capacity, and intent, and when it employs actions in the Grey Zone as a means of signalling, Kautilya fails to offer any viable way out.

The above discussion has brought out the pertinent aspects from the *History* and *Arthashastra* that necessitate a changed interpretation, while some of them may have even lost relevance. It was, however, limited exclusively to those issues which could be related to the primary challenge of gaining advantage in the Grey Zone. Building on this understanding of continuity and change, the next section – partly an extension of the current – will turn to the last focal point of the study: the question of whether the popularisation of the Grey Zone has increased the probability of

conflict escalation or, conversely, diminished the necessity for open warfare, as traditionally conceived by Thucydides and Kautilya. The section will endeavour to analyse both sides of this debate. On the one hand, there is the argument that the proliferation of Grey Zone terminology has increased the chances of inadvertent conflict escalation. On the other hand, it is contended that the preference for contestation in the Grey Zone has provided an alternate way of managing the stresses of inter-state disputes, thus reducing the necessity for conflict escalation.

Grey Zone: Promotes or Prevents Rapid Escalation?

Donald Stoker and Craig Whiteside, in a popular article entitled “Blurred Lines: Grey-Zone Conflict and Hybrid War—Two Failures of American Strategic Thinking,” have tried to argue that the continued use of the term [Grey Zone] may risk the dangerous possibility of an avoidable war.¹²⁶ Contrary to this and similar assertions by others, the use of the term ‘Grey Zone’ should rationally not lead to the escalation of conflicts. At the very least, such assertions portray a lack of understanding of the causes of war, as discussed earlier, which have seen phenomenal continuity since the times of Thucydides. Actions in the Grey Zone, by design, deny any obvious justification for conflict escalation.¹²⁷ Consequently, whether the target state wants to escalate the conflict or not depends on how such actions and the losses they present are perceived, the target’s capacities for escalation and the expected utility of escalatory options. In other words, as Hermocrates argues, the target state will choose war only if it believes that it can gain more by escalation rather than relenting to the change imposed in the Grey Zone.

Similarly, Stoker’s observation that “the angst over shadowy activities short of war by malevolent actors could push US policymakers to counter minor threats to US interests rashly, in

ways that backfire” also lacks the strength of argument.¹²⁸ The manifestation of such angst against persistent losses in the Grey Zone is not disputed. But the problem is to think about what constitutes a minor threat, and does angst alone push states to war? Stoker himself rejects a particular definition of the Grey Zone given in relation to a ‘major war’, because the latter itself is an undefinable term.¹²⁹ So is the difficulty in defining a minor threat and the consequent moderation of response. With reference to angst, Thucydides offers a better explanation. The angst must be associated with fear, interest, or honour. States resort to the use of force because they can, supposedly, discern the danger before it becomes immediate.¹³⁰ Athens and Sparta did so. By inference, the so-called minor threats must cumulatively pose a danger, and only then should states, as rational actors, choose war.

In alignment with Stoker, some scholars have also wrongly argued that the proliferation of such doctrinally incorrect terms encourages revisionist schemes.¹³¹ On the contrary, the correct cause of concern is the increase in the feasibility of contestation in the Grey Zone, under the belief that the target state will not escalate the conflict due to cost inefficiency or a lack of *jus ad bellum*. Empirical evidence does support this observation. For instance, consider the idea of territorial change by *fait accompli* in the Grey Zone. Altman’s research has shown that the presence of grey areas in territorial boundaries results in a 67% probability of land grabs, implying increased chances of contestation. However, of all the land-grabs between 1918 to 2007, only 22% resulted in war when the grab was in a grey area or unsettled boundaries. Conversely, 59% of the land-grabs over settled boundaries resulted in war.¹³² Thus, while a higher frequency of contests is observed in the Grey Zone, the very methods adopted (targeting grey areas for *fait accompli*) to maintain the contest within this zone limit the number of such contests resulting in war.

Consequently, the question of interest is when might a contest in the Grey Zone lead to war? Diodotus' hope and greed offer an answer to this question. The hope of getting away without serious punishment and the greed of making easy gains promote an increased frequency of contestations in this space. The subsequent causal mechanism for war can be inferred from Fearon's rationalist explanations for war. Fearon observes that due to incomplete information on the target's capability and resolve for escalation, the initiator grabs more than what otherwise would have been prudent under complete information.¹³³ As a result, war becomes a rational option for the target state rather than conceding to the initiator. In other words, when states seeking advantage in the Grey Zone try to overreach, it may result in war.

The argument that the Grey Zone terminology confuses the distinction of war and peace and consequently leads to war is also untenable. To support his argument, Stoker quotes a hypothetical example of the US inadvertently committing an act of war—blockading a newly constructed island [possibly by China]—under the assumption that it is operating in the Grey Zone.¹³⁴ This is a clear failure to understand the operating environment of the Grey Zone. Whether one is operating in the Grey Zone or not is dependent not on unilateral assumptions. It, rather, depends on the means employed, the threat posed to the target, the narrative sold in support, the overt legal grounds that are presented for action and the level of deniability.

An argument at the other end of the spectrum is that the Grey Zone offers options to nation-states, particularly the dissatisfied ones, to express and protect their interests without the risk of war. Sean Monaghan calls it a relief valve for motivated revisionists.¹³⁵ There is a degree of consensus on Monaghan's view. The RAND publication on '*Gaining Competitive Advantage in the Grey Zone*' observes that "Russia and China are using Grey Zone

techniques as a way of expressing dissatisfaction with aspects of the regional power and territorial status quo.”¹³⁶ Mazarr argues that persistent and forceful strategies in the Grey Zone will come from revisionist states.¹³⁷ An obvious inference from these observations is that the Grey Zone provides an alternative space to contest and secure interests, which would have probably been more difficult within the binary of peace and war.

As an extension of the above, signalling in the Grey Zone is more effective and affordable than in the conventional sense of sabre rattling. A signal is taken with more seriousness by the intended audience when it involves a reasonable cost, which an unresolved state will not be willing to incur.¹³⁸ However, the signal should not seem to be a resolute preparatory action for any pre-emptive option. Actions in the Grey Zone offer a viable option to navigate this challenge of signalling, albeit with a different difficulty. While traditional signalling ideas, such as force posturing, may not involve any change in the status quo, certain actions in the Grey Zone may involve some change in the status quo. So, the actor has to consciously limit the level of change to prevent escalation – avoiding overreach and maintaining a peace narrative.

The Grey Zone also affords exit options without any serious loss of face. While warning the Spartans against embarking upon a war in haste, Archidamus asserts that “our honour will be pledged to keeping on, if it be the opinion that we began the quarrel.”¹³⁹ In other words, once a costly signal for war is sent, backing down will involve a loss of reputation. Leaders may, thus, prefer escalation to minimise reputational costs. However, the intentional ambiguity of intent and deniability in the Grey Zone should allow the actor to withdraw without any serious reputational costs if the venture results in any unintended outcomes. Thus, contestation in the Grey Zone has the inherent advantage of limiting conflict escalation. However, both the actor and the target must exercise prudence in

deciding how far to go and how far to accept. The Thucydidean triptych of fear, interest, and honour can provide an answer to this puzzle.¹⁴⁰ And Kautilya's guidance on the notion of advancement and decline can tangibly refine the answers further.

The preceding discussion has shown that sustaining advantage in the Grey Zone involves a fine balance of risk and threat, while avoiding war eternally. How can this be practiced? There is a debate on whether Thucydides really saw war as an inevitable outcome. Some translations say Spartan fear of Athens' rise made war inevitable. Others say the fear of the Athenian rise, forced or compelled Sparta to go to war.¹⁴¹ Although the *History* does not answer the question directly, a deeper analysis of how fear manifests materially in decision-making can offer a sustainable explanation. Fear is a function of interest and honour. Stated differently, unless a state has an interest or honour to preserve, it shall not fear losing either of them. As stated earlier, the escalation curve that pushes states on the path of war involves a complex interplay of these three elements. A closer examination of the *History* shows that the path begins as a necessity to act, wherein interests or, at times, honour may have the immediate influence. It then moves to a point of compulsion to act, wherein fear should be more evident alongside the other two. And then, it peaks into a perception of inevitability, wherein fear, in general, takes the lead. For instance, Pericles accepted Corcyra's alliance out of necessity. The Spartans interpreted this as a breach of the treaty and voted for war out of compulsion. Subsequently, as Kagan says, "For him [Pericles], the Spartan vote made war inevitable."¹⁴² Pericles, therefore, refused to revoke the Megarian decree. Thus, an understanding of whether the adversary is acting out of necessity or compulsion can prevent the inevitability conundrum. Such understanding can be discerned through the lenses of fear and interest, primarily, and honour to a lesser degree. Therefore, to

sustain an advantage in the Grey Zone, the adversary must never perceive that escalation is inevitable.

As argued earlier, fear has two components that have an opposite influence on the feasibility of gaining advantage in the Grey Zone: fear of losses for the defender (f_d) and fear of retaliation or conflict escalation for the initiator (f_i). In securing an advantage in the Grey Zone, if the quantum of f_d is assessed to be high, then the initiator should reconsider the intended size of the change in status quo—moderation of interests. Kautilya argues that “smallness of profit and excess of expenditure is decline, advancement in the reverse case.”¹⁴³ There is a strong continuity in this expected utility model. Ahmar Tarar, in his formal proposition on territorial gain by fait accompli in the Grey Zone, argues that if escalation were to be avoided, the size and location of the land-grab must be such that the defender sees escalation to regain the loss as costlier in comparison to the acceptance of loss.¹⁴⁴ In other words, the size must be such that the target state sees a decline rather than advancement if it were to retaliate to enforce the status quo ante. The costs involved will include the material expense, the strategic value of the area (interests), and reputational costs (honour).

Conversely, if f_i is assessed to be low, then the defender must initiate additional measures to escalate costs for the initiator. This the defender can achieve by better conventional military preparedness and by ensuring a favourable local balance of power at the points of likely contest. Here again, the initiator must perceive a higher expenditure than profit—cumulative loss of either interest or honour. A graphical representation of this argument is given below:

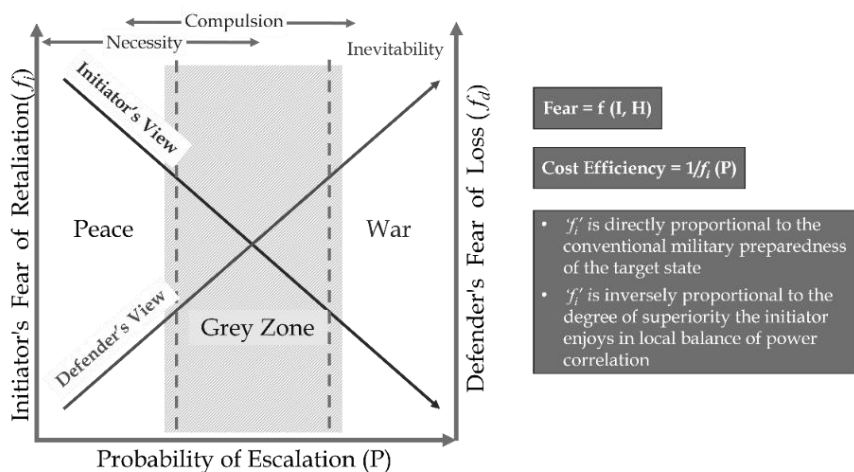


Figure 6.1: Relationship Between Fear and Probability of Contest in Grey Zone¹⁴⁵

The component of fear, exclusively in the mind of the challenger, also has two facets based on the likely outcomes: fear when seeking an easy gain and fear when avoiding a possible loss. To deny any advantage to the adversary, the defender should focus more on the former. Therefore, states trying to protect the status quo against any Grey Zone threat must, in the first place, endeavour to prevent the genesis of the idea of easy gain in the mind of the adversary. This finding again supports the earlier finding of deterrence by denial being effective in the Grey Zone.

Some have argued that a focus on the Grey Zone denudes strategic attention away from the principal business of maintaining readiness for a conventional war.¹⁴⁶ The preceding discussion on the manipulation of fear has shown that conventional preparedness is an essential requirement to limit the size of the challenge which the initiator may be willing to pose. There is a strong thread of continuity in this observation. Thucydides posits that the rise of Athens was also an outcome of its allies' reluctance for military service—a failure to prepare for war.¹⁴⁷ Kautilya unequivocally

advocates for a strong standing army to favourably influence the minds of adversaries.¹⁴⁸ And Howard argues that if states do not prepare for war in pursuit of their political ends, then those that prepare shall accomplish their ends without even the need for war.¹⁴⁹ Thus, it is by maintaining supremacy in the conventional domain that fundamental changes to the status quo may be prevented. But to prevent changes of lesser stature, states must embrace intellectual and military capacity to fight in the Grey Zone.

In sum, the evidence available and the arguments made in this section do not conclusively establish whether the popularisation of contestation in the Grey Zone has led to an unwarranted escalation of inter-state disputes or has reduced the necessity of war in managing these. However, more evidence exists to support the latter position. It is seen that only when the gains made in the Grey Zone create a sense of fear beyond a tolerable limit, while the target state still retains the relative power to wage a war, a strong possibility of a war emerges. The ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict is an apt example. Conversely, the means available in the Grey Zone offer cost-efficient alternatives to pursue national interests that are limited in scope and gradual in prospect. Altman's data set and the gains made by China in the South China Sea substantiate this view. In other words, by prudently—in the absence of Diodotus' hope and greed—pursuing advantage in the Grey Zone, states can secure their nominal interests without the risk of war.

Waypoints for Further Application and Enquiry

The study of Thucydides and Kautilya, from the perspective of gaining advantage in the Grey Zone, has offered highly relevant insights into the fundamental concern: what can lead to conflict escalation? Stated differently, the findings from the two classics provide us with clear way points to limit the conflict within the Grey Zone. The key aspects of continuity that will necessitate

consideration by statesmen and military commanders while contesting in the Grey Zone for relative advantage are as follow:

- States must take measures aimed at **moderating the fears** of the target state. It is out of serious fear that the target state will, more often, choose to escalate rather than acquiesce with any challenge in the Grey Zone.
- **Narrative of benignity** and **legal rhetoric** partly serve the purpose of fear moderation. But more importantly, these two points of continuity enable division of the target state's allies and their support for escalation, irrespective of the target's decision to escalate.
- States operating in the Grey Zone must **avoid overreaching**, lest conflict escalation may become inevitable.
- The objectives pursued in the Grey Zone, particularly territorial gains by fait accompli, must be **easy to acquire and sustain**. Otherwise, it will become a liability and a cause of escalation.
- In addition, there is a strong continuity in states' preference for **ambiguity of intent** and **deniability of purpose** when they pursue advantages without the risk of an escalatory response.
- However, attention must be given to the **adversary's perception** of threat and extant **capacities**. The effectiveness of the above limiting measures is dependent on this point of continuity. While past behaviour is suggestive of future, any change in capacity is likely to change the target's perception of the strategic competition and its response.
- While trying to deny advantage to an adversary competing in the Grey Zone, punitive **deterrence is difficult**. Actors

believe in the cost efficiency of operating in the Grey Zone and their ability to discourage escalation by paying attention to the above aspects. Therefore, **deterrence by denial is more effective.**

- A corollary of the above is that a **counteraction**, also in the Grey Zone, can be a means of successful **deterrence** or can facilitate **the return of the status quo.**
- In case a state suffers a loss in the Grey Zone, it must be **contested early** enough to prevent consolidation by the adversary. Furthermore, the **contestation must persist** till the return of the status quo ante.
- States continue to focus on **relative gains over the absolute.** States seeking to deny advantage in the Grey Zone must reduce the scope of perceived relative gains, ex-ante, without the option of conflict escalation.

The foregoing summary substantiates the first central argument: the observations of Thucydides and Kautilya find a large measure of continuity with reference to the limiting considerations for competing below the threshold of war. In other words, these continuities give us an idea of what can cause war and, therefore, how the vicious cycle of escalation from competition to war can be averted. The significance of these findings lies in the fact that they provide unambiguous and enduring counsel on the general boundaries of contest while pursuing advantage in the Grey Zone.

Furthermore, the analysis of the *History* and *Arthashastra*, alongside the contemporary works on competition within the Grey Zone, has brought forth the following points of change or departure:

- Both these works fail to offer any clear guidance for pursuing **cooperation and competition** simultaneously.

The self-limiting character of this duality challenges Thucydides' logic of necessity to compulsion and then to the inevitability of war. Similarly, Kautilya's observations on *bhavin* or orientation (*ari*, *mitra*, *bhrytya*) have lost relevance substantially in such a construct.

- Their observations also fail to provide any useful guidance against the challenge of **persistent contestation below the threshold of war**.
- Thucydides' **emotive drivers** of fear and honour **may not operate the same way** in the Grey Zone, where war is avoided as part of the plan. The competitors, therefore, are likely to be more aggressive and risk-tolerant in the Grey Zone.
- In the **absence of decisive wars**, Thucydides' construct of interstate relations based on an implicit, ready, and ever-present threat of war may not help compete effectively in the Grey Zone.
- While the construct of *Rajamandala* may yet find some measure of relevance in diplomatic affairs, it does not offer any direct practical advice for pursuing advantage in the Grey Zone, wherein a war of conquest is absent and the distinction of *ari* and *mitra* is blurred.
- Kautilya's **actor** (*vijigishu*) **centric approach**, wherein the survival of the king is the supreme purpose, is a serious weakness for application in the Grey Zone.
- Connected to the above, the contemporary **division of power in domestic polity**, contrary to Kautilyan concentration of power in the king, marks another point of departure for competing in the Grey Zone, wherein the

focus is on working through the fault lines between various power centres of the state polity. The *History*, however, does not suffer this weakness.

- The ongoing competition in the Grey Zone for **non-territorial wealth** and expansion is yet another important aspect of change from Kautilya's absolute focus on territory being the only real means of wealth.
- Given the general absence of war in the Grey Zone, the **distinction of the weak and strong**, from the Kautilyan sense, is lost. This further precludes effective application of some of his policy options.
- Kautilya's policy prescriptions are premised on the assumption that optimal information is available to the King. Under the current conditions of using **incomplete information** as a means of gaining advantage in the Grey Zone, the logic of these prescriptions loses much of its relevance.

From the aforesaid, it is evident that these points of departure fundamentally stem from two reasons. First, the observations and assumptions of Thucydides and Kautilya are founded upon the historical acceptability, necessity, and utility of war. And second, on the contrary, the specific character of competition in the Grey Zone inherently aims at war avoidance. These findings, hence, strongly support the second central argument: the *History* and *Arthashastra* are insufficient as a guide for pursuing advantage in the Grey Zone, given the character of persistent competition in this space and the broader decline of war. The implications of these results are substantial, as they demonstrate the rationale for further enquiry into effective strategies for competing in the Grey Zone, by both the academic and military think-tanks, as opposed to dismissing the very existence of this realm between war and peace.

Given the pre-eminence of open war as a principal policy option in both the *History* and *Arthashastra*, the paper also analysed the differing views on the impact of popularisation of the Grey Zone ideas on the occurrences of open wars. The analysis has found that reliable evidence exists to support the argument that the Grey Zone has reduced the need for open wars in pursuit of at least limited interests. Concurrently, this finding substantiates the broader thematic continuity from the two texts. The idea of moderating the fear quotient in the target polity emerges as the principal governing factor in preventing a necessity or compulsion to contest from turning into an inevitable war. This moderation can be achieved by minimising the perceived threat to the target's key interests and honour.

Although the popularisation of Grey Zone ideas has seemingly denuded the need for open wars, retaining an effective capability to wage an open war is an essential condition. This is of more value to the defenders of the status quo because it instils a higher degree of fear in the challenger's mind. Moreover, the quantum of fear of retaliation is inversely proportional to the size of the gain that the challenger may wish to seek within the Grey Zone.

Conclusion

Given the growing level of attention and quantum of literature on competing within the Grey Zone, the concept merits due consideration. Concurrently, the study of classical texts on interstate competition serves the purpose of understanding the enduring influences on political decision-making. However, E. Baker correctly asserts, "no political philosophy can be detached from its environment in history."¹⁵⁰ Thus, the need for identifying and appreciating the aspects of both continuity and change cannot be overstated.

Although some scholars and military leaders have contested that there is nothing new in the idea of Grey Zone, it is an idea with greater relevance when open wars are not feasible and they cannot be decisive enough. So, while Thucydides and Kautilya may offer broad guidelines for limiting the escalation of conflict, there is a concurrent necessity for further study of the Grey Zone to consistently gain advantage in that space. In this regard, the following observation by Colin Gray is instructive:

“There is no adequate substitute for current knowledge of the details that change. We can and should learn from history about the nature and even the character of future threat. Threat always matures and emerges from causes inherent to the nature of international politics, its statecraft, and its strategy.”¹⁵¹

- 1 Donald Stoker and Craig Whiteside, “Blurred Lines: Gray-Zone Conflict and Hybrid War—Two Failures of American Strategic Thinking,” *Naval War College Review* 73, no. 1 (Winter 2020): 7,9-10.
- 2 Elizabeth K. Kiessling, “Gray Zone Tactics and the Principle of Non-Intervention,” *Harvard National Security Journal* 12 (2020): 117; John Chambers, *Countering Gray-Zone Hybrid Threats: An Analysis of Russia’s “new Generation Warfare” and Implications for the US Army* (West Point: Modern War Institute, 2016), 4.
- 3 Colin S. Gray, *Thucydides Was Right: Defining the Future Threat*, Advancing Strategic Thought Series (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute and US Army War College Press, 2015), 35.
- 4 Steven Forde, “Thucydides on Ripeness and Conflict Resolution,” *International Studies Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (2004): 178.
- 5 R.P. Kangle, trans., *The Kautilya Arthashastra - Part 3*, First (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1988), 264.
- 6 Johanna Hanink, *How to Think About War: An Ancient Guide to Foreign Policy by Thucydides*, E-Book (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2019), 23.
- 7 Robert B. Strassler, ed., *The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Richard Crawley (New York: Free Press, 1996), 48.
- 8 Strassler, 39.

- 9 Strassler, 81.
- 10 Strassler, 22.
- 11 Donald Kagan, *The Outbreak of the Peloponnesian War* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1994), 240–43.
- 12 William Desmond, “Lessons of Fear: A Reading of Thucydides,” *Classical Philology* 101, no. 4 (2006): 368.
- 13 Strassler, *The Landmark Thucydides*, 353.
- 14 P. J. Rhodes, “Thucydides on the Causes of the Peloponnesian War,” *Hermes* 115, no. 2 (1987): 155.
- 15 Strassler, *The Landmark Thucydides*, 38–41.
- 16 Raphael Sealey, “The Causes of the Peloponnesian War,” *Classical Philology* 70, no. 2 (1975): 104–5.
- 17 Strassler, *The Landmark Thucydides*, 24.
- 18 Sudarshan Shrikhande, “Pitfalls in Making Assumptions About Chinese PLA’s Military-Political Behaviour,” *ORF Occasional Paper*, no. 191 (May 2019): 15.
- 19 Kangle, *The Kautilya Arthashastra - Part 3*, 263.
- 20 R.P. Kangle, trans., *The Kautilya Arthashastra - Part 2*, First (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1988), 514; Kangle, *The Kautilya Arthashastra - Part 3*, 1–2.
- 21 L.N. Rangarajan, trans., *Kautilya The Arthashastra* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1992), 510.
- 22 Kajari Kamal, *Kautilya’s Arthashastra: Strategic Cultural Roots of India’s Contemporary Statecraft* (Chennai: Routledge, 2023), 6.
- 23 Kangle, *The Kautilya Arthashastra - Part 2*, 371, 460, 462.
- 24 Kangle, 327.
- 25 Kangle, 325; Kamal, *Kautilya’s Arthashastra: Strategic Cultural Roots*, 14–16.
- 26 Kangle, *The Kautilya Arthashastra - Part 2*, 327.
- 27 Kangle, 321.
- 28 Kangle, 322.
- 29 Kangle, 327.
- 30 Rangarajan, *Kautilya The Arthashastra*, 518.

- 31 Subrata K Mitra and Michael Liebig, *Kautilya's Arthashastra: An Intellectual Portrait: The Classical Roots of Modern Politics in India* (New Delhi: Rupa Publications, 2017), 109; Kangle, *The Kautilya Arthashastra - Part 3*, 254.
- 32 Roger Boesche, "Kautilya's Arthashastra on War and Diplomacy in Ancient India," *The Journal of Military History* 67, no. 1 (January 2003): 19-20.
- 33 Kangle, *The Kautilya Arthashastra - Part 2*, 321, 327.
- 34 Boesche, "Kautilya's Arthashastra on War and Diplomacy in Ancient India," 17.
- 35 Partha Chatterjee, "The Classical Balance of Power Theory," *Journal of Peace Research* 9, no. 1 (March 1, 1972): 51.
- 36 Kamal, *Kautilya's Arthashastra: Strategic Cultural Roots*, 6.
- 37 Kangle, *The Kautilya Arthashastra - Part 2*, 9-10.
- 38 Kangle, 321.
- 39 Kamal, *Kautilya's Arthashastra: Strategic Cultural Roots*, 6-9.
- 40 Kangle, *The Kautilya Arthashastra - Part 3*, 259; Kangle, *The Kautilya Arthashastra - Part 2*, 342, 438, 440.
- 41 Kangle, *The Kautilya Arthashastra - Part 3*, 263.
- 42 Rangarajan, *Kautilya The Arthashastra*, 510.
- 43 Jack S. Levy, "The Causes of War and The Conditions of Peace," *Annual Review of Political Science* 1, no. 1 (1998): 142.
- 44 Chatterjee, "The Classical Balance of Power Theory," 51-52.
- 45 Shih-yueh Yang, "Power Transition, Balance of Power, and the Rise of China: A Theoretical Reflection about Rising Great Powers," *China Review* 13, no. 2 (2013): 43; Levy, "The Causes of War and The Conditions of Peace," 146-48.
- 46 Robert Gilpin, "The Theory of Hegemonic War," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 18, no. 4 (1988): 592.
- 47 David Lai, "The Power Transition Theory," *The United States and China in Power Transition* (Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2011), 5-7.
- 48 Quoted in Graham Allison, *Destined for War. Can America and China Escape Thucydides' Trap?* (Wilmington: Houghton Mifflin Co, 2017), 49.
- 49 Greg Cashman and Leonard C. Robinson, "Introduction," in *An Introduction to the Causes of War: Patterns of Interstate Conflict from World War I to Iraq* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), 6-8.
- 50 Stephen Van Evera, "Offense, Defense, and the Causes of War," *International Security* 22, no. 4 (Spring 1998): 7-9.

- 51 Cashman and Robinson, "Introduction," 7.
- 52 Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, Sixth (New Delhi: Kalyani Publishers, 1991), 3–4.
- 53 Keith L. Shimko, "Realism, Neorealism, and American Liberalism," *The Review of Politics* 54, no. 2 (1992): 290–92.
- 54 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 188, 227, 234–37.
- 55 Robert Jervis, "Cooperation Under Security Dilemma," *World Politics* 30, no. 2 (January 1978): 168–170, 175, 199, 214.
- 56 James D. Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War," *International Organisation* 49, no. 3 (Summer 1995): 379–414.
- 57 Jeremy Mynott, trans., *Thucydides: The War of the Peloponnesians and the Athenians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 339.
- 58 Mynott, 338.
- 59 Strassler, *The Landmark Thucydides*, 49–51.
- 60 Robin Seager, "After the Peace of Nicias: Diplomacy and Policy, 421–416 B. C.," *The Classical Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (1976): 253.
- 61 Seager, 259.
- 62 Strassler, *The Landmark Thucydides*, 67.
- 63 Strassler, 23.
- 64 Strassler, 38, 45, 48, 49.
- 65 Strassler, 33.
- 66 Kangle, *The Kautilya Arthashastra - Part 2*, 321.
- 67 Kangle, 322, 327.
- 68 Kangle, 438–40.
- 69 Kangle, 364.
- 70 Michael Howard, "Causes of War," in *Causes of War and Other Essays*, Second (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 9.
- 71 Kangle, *The Kautilya Arthashastra - Part 2*, 324.
- 72 Hunter Stoll, "Kautilya in the Gray Zone: How Russia Has Successfully Adopted Two-Thousand Year Old Teachings," *Georgetown Security Studies Review*, April 9, 2021, <https://georgetownsecuritystudiesreview.org/2021/04/09/kautilya-in-the-gray-zone-how-russia-has-successfully-adopted-two-thousand-year-old-teachings/>.

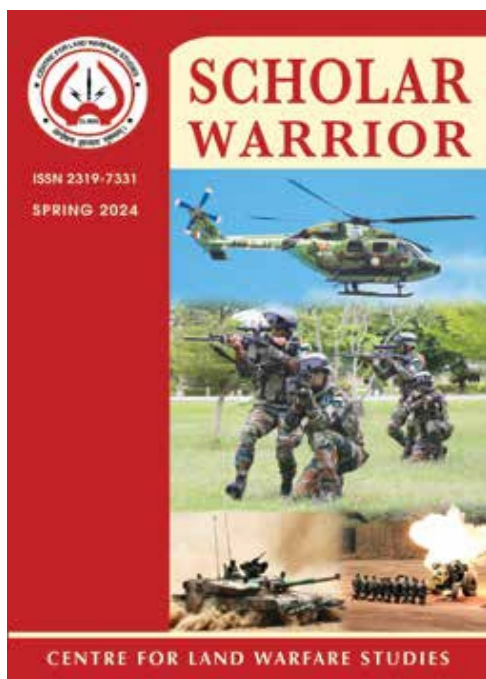
- 73 Kangle, *The Kautilya Arthasastra - Part 2*, 438.
- 74 Kangle, *The Kautilya Arthasastra - Part 3*, 258–59; Mirza Faiyaz, “Mirza Faiyaz Asked: What Is Kautilya’s Kootayuddha and Its Importance? | Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses,” accessed September 25, 2023, <https://www.idsa.in/askanexpert/kautilyas-kootayuddha-and-its-importance>.
- 75 Rangarajan, *Kautilya The Arthasastra*, 670–71.
- 76 Kangle, *The Kautilya Arthasastra - Part 2*, 342.
- 77 Boesche, “Kautilya’s Arthasastra on War and Diplomacy in Ancient India,” 22.
- 78 Kangle, *The Kautilya Arthasastra - Part 3*, 254.
- 79 Kangle, *The Kautilya Arthasastra - Part 2*, 321–22.
- 80 Kangle, 328.
- 81 Gray, *Thucydides Was Right: Defining the Future Threat*, 6–8.
- 82 Kangle, *The Kautilya Arthasastra - Part 2*, 361.
- 83 Richard W. Maass, “Salami Tactics: Faits Accomplis and International Expansion in the Shadow of Major War,” *The Scholar (Texas National Security Review)* 5, no. 1 (Winter 2021): 40.
- 84 Strassler, *The Landmark Thucydides*, 50–51.
- 85 Strassler, 48.
- 86 Roy Allison, “Russian ‘deniable’ Intervention in Ukraine: How and Why Russia Broke the Rules,” *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 90, no. 6 (2014): 1259.
- 87 Kagan, “The Peloponnesian War 431–404 BC,” 73–74.
- 88 Peter L. Hickman, “Cold Wars, Grey Zones, and Strategic Competition: Applying Theories of War to Strategy in the 21st Century,” *Military Strategy Magazine* 8, no. 4 (Spring 2023): 20.
- 89 John J. Mearsheimer, “Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West’s Fault: The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin,” *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 5 (2014): 77, 78, 82.
- 90 Strassler, *The Landmark Thucydides*, 181.
- 91 Strassler, 255.
- 92 Forde, “Thucydides on Ripeness and Conflict Resolution,” 181.
- 93 Strassler, *The Landmark Thucydides*, 65.
- 94 Chambers, *Countering Gray-Zone Hybrid Threats*, 17.

- 95 Strassler, *The Landmark Thucydides*, 23–28.
- 96 Kangle, *The Kautilya Arthashastra - Part 2*, 317.
- 97 Kangle, 417.
- 98 Kangle, 353.
- 99 Kangle, 415.
- 100 Kangle, 321–24, 361.
- 101 For further analysis on the problem of relative gains vs absolute gains, see Waltz, *Man, the State and War: A Theoretical Analysis*, 198; Robert Powell, “Absolute and Relative Gains in International Relations Theory,” *The American Political Science Review* 85, no. 4 (1991): 1303–20, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1963947>; Joseph Grieco, Robert Powell, and Duncan Snidal, “The Relative-Gains Problem for International Cooperation,” *The American Political Science Review* 87, no. 3 (1993): 727–43, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2938747>.
- 102 Kangle, *The Kautilya Arthashastra - Part 2*, 327.
- 103 Paul Huth and Bruce Russett, “Deterrence Failure and Crisis Escalation,” *International Studies Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (1988): 39.
- 104 Rangarajan, *Kautilya. The Arthashastra*, 656.
- 105 Pawel Czyzak, Nolan Theisen, and Tatiana Mindekova, “The Final Push for EU Russian Gas Phase-Out,” *Ember*, accessed May 31, 2025, <https://ember-energy.org/latest-insights/the-final-push-for-eu-russian-gas-phase-out>.
- 106 Kangle, *The Kautilya Arthashastra - Part 2*, 364.
- 107 Andrew S. Erickson, “Competitive Coexistence: An American Concept for Managing U.S.-China Relations,” *The National Interest* (The Center for the National Interest, January 30, 2019), <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/competitive-coexistence-american-concept-managing-us-china-relations-42852>.
- 108 Howard, “Causes of War,” 16.
- 109 Dan Altman, “By Fait Accompli, Not Coercion: How States Wrest Territory from Their Adversaries,” *International Studies Quarterly* 61 (2017): 881.
- 110 Dan Altman, “The Evolution of Territorial Conquest After 1945 and the Limits of the Territorial Integrity Norm,” *International Organization* 74, no. 3 (2020): 506.
- 111 Strassler, *The Landmark Thucydides*, 45, 81, 85.
- 112 Strassler, 85.

- 113 Mazarr Dr, *Mastering the Gray Zone: Understanding a Changing Era of Conflict*, 10, 11, 33.
- 114 Michael Liebig and Saurabh Mishra, eds., *The Arthasastra in a Transcultural Perspective: Comparing with Sun-Zi, Nizam al-Mulk, Barani and Machiavelli* (New Delhi: Pentagon Press and Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, 2017), 9–10.
- 115 Nils Petter Gleditsch et al., “The Decline of War,” *International Studies Review* 15, no. 3 (2013): 400.
- 116 Kangle, *The Kautilya Arthasastra - Part 2*, 371, 426; Rangarajan, *Kautilya. The Arthasastra*, 658–59.
- 117 Rangarajan, *Kautilya. The Arthasastra*, 216–17; Kangle, *The Kautilya Arthasastra - Part 3*, 282.
- 118 Maass, “Salami Tactics,” 40.
- 119 Kagan, *The Outbreak of the Peloponnesian War*, 355.
- 120 Kangle, *The Kautilya Arthasastra - Part 2*, 512; Rangarajan, *Kautilya. The Arthasastra*, 734, 741, 743.
- 121 Noah Berman, Lindsay Maizland, and Andrew Chatzky, “Is China’s Huawei a Threat to U.S. National Security?,” Council on Foreign Relations, accessed October 29, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/background/chinas-huawei-threat-us-national-security>; “Stoltenberg: ‘With China We Must Not Make the Same Mistake as with Russia,’” Nova.news, February 18, 2023, <https://www.agenzianova.com/en/news/stoltenberg-don%27t-make-mistake-with-china-made-with-russia/>.
- 122 Jialin Li, “Between Balance of Power and Balance of Resolve: Why Russia Used Fait Accompli in Crimea But Frozen Conflict in South Ossetia?,” in *Proceedings of the 7th International Conference on Humanities and Social Science Research (ICHSSR 2021)* (Atlantis Press, 2021), 1166–68.
- 123 Howard, “Causes of War,” 22.
- 124 Rangarajan, *Kautilya. The Arthasastra*, 37.
- 125 Fearon, “Rationalist Explanations for War,” 381.
- 126 Stoker and Whiteside, “Blurred Lines: Gray-Zone Conflict,” 14.
- 127 Mazarr Dr, *Mastering the Gray Zone: Understanding a Changing Era of Conflict*, 37.
- 128 Stoker and Whiteside, “Blurred Lines: Gray-Zone Conflict,” 14.
- 129 Stoker and Whiteside, 8.
- 130 Howard, “Causes of War,” 15.

- 131 Elkus, "Why the Gray Wars Concept Lacks Strategic Sense"; Bose, "Grey Zone in Blue Waters," 59–60.
- 132 Daniel Altman, "The Fait Accompli in Interstate Crises: Land Grabs from 1918 to 2007" (Dickey Centre, Dartmouth College, 2015), 34–37.
- 133 Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War," 393–95.
- 134 Stoker and Whiteside, "Blurred Lines: Gray-Zone Conflict," 15.
- 135 Sean Monaghan, "Bad Idea: Winning the Gray Zone," *Defense360*, December 17, 2021, <https://defense360.csis.org/bad-idea-winning-the-gray-zone/>.
- 136 Morris et al., *Gaining Competitive Advantage in the Gray Zone*, xiv.
- 137 Mazarr Dr, *Mastering the Gray Zone: Understanding a Changing Era of Conflict*, 10, 11.
- 138 James D. Fearon, "Signalling Foreign Policy Interests: Tying Hands versus Sinking Costs," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41, no. 1 (1997): 69.
- 139 Strassler, *The Landmark Thucydides*, 45.
- 140 Shrikhande, "Pitfalls in Making Assumptions About Chinese PLA's Military-Political Behaviour," 15.
- 141 Arthur M. Eckstein, "Thucydides, the Outbreak of the Peloponnesian War, and the Foundation of International Systems Theory," *The International History Review* 25, no. 4 (2003): 760, 763, 765.
- 142 Kagan, "The Peloponnesian War 431-404 BC," 73.
- 143 Kangle, *The Kautilya Arthashastra - Part 2*, 361.
- 144 Ahmer Tarar, "A Strategic Logic of the Military Fait Accompli," *International Studies Quarterly* 60, no. 4 (December 2016): 748–49.
- 145 Author's own interpretation of the relationship between fear and probability of contestation in grey zone.
- 146 Stoker and Whiteside, "Blurred Lines: Gray-Zone Conflict," 2, 6, 14–16; Elkus, "Why the Gray Wars Concept Lacks Strategic Sense."
- 147 Strassler, *The Landmark Thucydides*, 53.
- 148 Kangle, *The Kautilya Arthashastra - Part 2*, 319.
- 149 Howard, "Causes of War," 22.
- 150 Quoted in Kangle, 276.
- 151 Gray, *Thucydides Was Right: Defining the Future Threat*, 38.

SUBSCRIBE NOW



SUBSCRIPTION RATES

IN INDIA

☐ Rs.500/- per copy

☐ Rs.1000/- Annual Subscription (2 issues)

SAARC COUNTRIES

☐ US \$ 15 per copy

OTHER COUNTRIES

☐ US \$ 20 per copy

TO SUBSCRIBE SEND YOUR REQUEST TO



Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS)
RPSO Complex, Parade Road, Delhi Cantt, New Delhi - 110010
Tel: +91-11-25691308
• Fax: +91-11-25692347 • Army: 33098
E-mail: landwarfare@gmail.com
www.claws.co.in

This paper explores the extent to which Thucydides and Kautilya offer conceptual guidance and practical waypoints for competing and gaining advantage in the grey zone. The study is advanced by seeking the points of continuity and change from their observations on the character of inter-state competition, with specific reference to the actions in the grey zone. Based on a comprehensive survey of concerning literature and content analysis, the paper presents two central arguments. Firstly, the study of Thucydides and Kautilya can provide the enduring considerations for limiting the strategic competition below the threshold of war. And secondly, the observations and assumptions of the two, premised on the necessity, acceptability, and utility of war, will be insufficient as a guide for pursuing advantage in the grey zone. If Thucydides' claim—that knowledge of the past aids in understanding the future—holds, then this paper may serve to equip statesmen and military professionals with insights for competing in the grey zone, a domain that has some resonance in the past.

...



Colonel P Lokchandar was commissioned into the First Battalion of the Naga Regiment in June 2004. The officer has operational experience in counter-insurgency/ counter-terrorist operations and in high altitude warfare. He has commanded his battalion in Eastern Ladakh. The officer holds a post-graduate degree from the Australian National University in Military and Defence Studies. He also earned a Master's degree in Political Science in 2022 and is a graduate of the Naval War College, Goa.

The Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS), New Delhi, is an independent Think Tank dealing with contemporary issues of national security and conceptual aspects of land warfare, including conventional & sub-conventional conflicts and terrorism. CLAWS conducts research that is futuristic in outlook and policy oriented in approach.

CLAWS Vision: To be a premier think tank, to shape strategic thought, foster innovation, and offer actionable insights in the fields of land warfare and conflict resolution.

CLAWS Mission: Our contributors aim to significantly enhance national security, defence policy formulation, professional military education, and promote the attainment of enduring peace.

Website: www.claws.co.in

Contact us: landwarfare@gmail.com



MRP: ₹ 100.00 US\$ 5.00