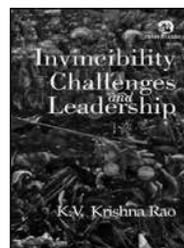

Book Review

Invincibility, Challenges and Leadership

General KV Krishna Rao

(New Delhi: Orient Blackswan Private Limited, 2011)

₹ 788/-



In its depth and analysis of the developments that give rise to empires, civilisations and nations, and the role played therein by great leaders of the world, *Invincibility, Challenges and Leadership* is a unique book. Gen Krishna Rao has covered a very wide canvas in his research and then used his knowledge and professional military and civil experience to write about several defining moments of the history, emergence of great leaders of that period, the challenges they handled under critical and complex situations, and the consequences of their intervention. He then goes on to discuss future challenges, emphasising the need to learn from the past so that mistakes are not repeated.

He underlines the historical fact that in most crisis situations, political and military leaders have affected nations and their future. Nations which did not understand the very close connection between political and military spheres, or neglected it, ultimately met with disaster. Effective diplomacy, economic progress and internal stability always need the backing of appropriate military strength, and its deterrent and response value.

In Part 1 of the book, after briefly covering ancient civilisations, middle ages and modern nations, the author sums up the essentials that enabled their rise and fall. The essentials, highlighted with examples for the 'rise' are national unity and stability, economic strength, progress in science and technology. His two very

relevant comments are: “While economic development is necessary, effective military strength is even more essential to survive and progress” and “Corruption, indiscipline, divisive activities and oppression destroy the confidence of the people.” According to him, ethnic differences, racial hegemony, class conflicts, religious intolerance and bad governance weaken nations and make them vulnerable to exploitation by adversaries. The conclusion in this part is, “So, empires either arose or declined generally due to availability and use of force, or otherwise.”

His study of two world wars and major wars since then (including the Indo-Pak War of 1971 in which he participated as a division commander) makes him believe that, “Power is an irresistible allurements but in the larger interests of the people at large, has to be strictly controlled.” He recommends that war on two fronts must be avoided and that close cooperation and coordination among the army, navy and air force as well as between the civil and military are of vital importance. Also, “a supreme commander controlling the three Services, as in the Second World War, is a great asset.”

In Part 3 of the book, he briefly covers the life sketches and contributions of great political and military leaders of the world, starting with George Washington and ending with Gen Giap of Vietnam.

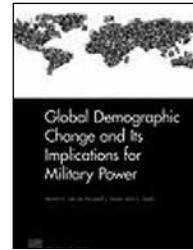
In the last part, the author analyses characteristics that made nations and leaders great, and the likely challenges to be met in the future. Each characteristic is described and exemplified with the actions of several leaders. For example, George Washington displayed “firm will power” in defeating colonial masters and then laying solid democratic foundations for his country. Sardar Patel is credited with being a “visionary” in forging the unity and integrity of India by making the 565 princely states join the Indian Union. Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Nehru are included among those who displayed “outstanding moral character.” On future challenges, his arguments support President Obama who during the Nobel Award ceremony stated, “Violent conflicts would not be eradicated in our life times and nations would need to fight just wars.”

Invincibility, Challenges and Leadership is an absorbing book for those interested in learning what makes nations and leaders great.

A piece of interest: the author has donated the royalty proceeds of this book to the Army Central Welfare Fund.

General VP Malik (Retd)
Former Chief of Army Staff (India).

**Global Demographic Change and Its
Implications for Military Power**
Martin C Libicki, Howard J Shatz, Julie E Taylor,
(RAND Corporation, 2011)
\$ 22.40



The impact of a declining population on the economic performance of nations has been debated over the years. The general belief is that societies with ageing populations are likely to have slower growth than those with a productive youth bulge under the presumption that the young contribute to national productivity while the old consume economic resources in the form of health care, welfare and pensions. The impact of demographic change on national power and security has, however, received less attention and this RAND study attempts to fill this gap in security studies. Given the evolution of the information age in warfare, which creates a perception of reduction of the importance of men vis-as-vis intelligent systems, the study has increased relevance.

In examining the core issues, a relationship among manpower, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and human talent is established to link it with demographic trends. The study starts with forecasting working age populations through 2050, wherein broad conclusions of the declining rate of growth in affluent societies of the West and developing ones in the East, with exceptions in the Middle East and Africa, are well known. India is the only country with a split demographic profile – continuing growth in the Gangetic plains and a receding one in the south. The United States is the only affluent nation which will not have a declining population due to a balance between birth rates and immigration.

In the next chapter, a comparison between population and economic growth as constituents of national power is carried out which derives conclusions which are well established. Testing the hypothesis that ageing nations may not be able to finance militaries, in the following chapter, the authors conclude that this may not necessarily be so for maximum medical costs for the old occur in the last two years of their lives. This is also evident with the large elderly middle class population in India contributing substantially to national savings induced by

attractive interest rates for senior citizens (over 60 years) denoting that their medical costs may not be impinging on their capability to save.

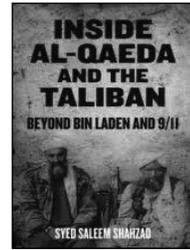
In attempting to relate peace to demographics, in the next chapter the correlation is not very well established but a general trend that poverty will generate internal conflicts does emerge. In examining what amongst the three related factors of demographics, “manpower, money, and software,” is necessary to succeed in specific military missions, the authors conclude that none of these may have an impact in nuclear stand-offs which would be determined by intangibles. Money and technical expertise will be the key factors for roles such as controlling the commons and surveillance. All three, in balanced proportions, may be required for a conventional conflict, with greater emphasis on technology and money. Counter-insurgency and military operations other than war (MOOTW) will be determined by manpower though skilled troops will make a major difference along with logistics.

In the concluding chapter, the authors presage continuance of the United States as the dominant global power through 2050 despite the rise of China. However, given that traditional US allies are unlikely to have the population mass to contribute to military alliances, America may have to look for new allies, with India as a suggestion. The zone of violence is also likely to shift to areas having a large youth bulge: West Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Indus and Gangetic plains.

While most of the conclusions drawn by the authors are relatively well known, by providing evidence rooted in quantitative and qualitative research, in many cases what were presumptions have now been substantially proved. To that extent, this would be a seminal study for those interested in how demographics will shape national power, inter-state alliances, as well as dictate structuring and shaping of military missions for success in the future.

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Independent Defence Analyst.

**Inside Al-Qaeda and the Taliban:
Beyond Bin Laden and 9/11**
Syed Saleem Shahzad
(London: Pluto Press, 2011)
₹ 1295/-



When an author of a book is killed before its publication and that too supposedly by the intelligence agencies of the state, there must be something which the author knew, which the state does not want revealed. Syed Saleem Shahzad, a journalist writing for the *Asia Times*, wrote about the level of Al Qaeda penetration within the Pakistani armed forces and paid for it with his life. The book is a treasure trove of information for anybody wanting to unravel the mystery of linkages between the radical Islamists and Pakistan's all powerful armed forces. The book highlights how a number of officers from the elite special forces have not only resigned to join Al Qaeda, but have also used their links with the army to further Al Qaeda's agenda. The repeated attacks by the Taliban on Pakistan's naval assets, including the widely publicised attack on PNS *Mehran*, give credence to Shahzad's claims.

The book answers a very relevant question that has been plaguing the minds of the analysts for long—what is Al Qaeda, primarily, an Arab organisation doing in Afghanistan and Pakistan, when its primary support base lies in West Asia and North Africa? There is certainly no dearth of anti-US sentiments in the region and the Palestinian issue will ensure that it does not disappear soon. Despite this favourable environment, Al Qaeda has chosen to launch its struggle from the Af-Pak (Afghanistan-Pakistan) region. The answer to this riddle, according to the author, lies in Islamic literature. The Prophet is believed to have prophesised that “*Khurasan*” will be the initial theatre of “End of Times” battles. According to Islamic lexicon, ancient *Khurasan* broadly incorporates Afghanistan and parts of Iran, Pakistan and the Central Asian Republics. The Taliban has set out to fulfil this prophecy. As the *hadith* also talked of *Ghazwa-e-Hind* (Battle for India), Al Qaeda occupied the space between Afghanistan and Bangladesh. It is significant to note that according to the book, the members of Al Qaeda, including former Pakistan Army officers, believe that they are winning the battle of *Khurasan*, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) will be forced to withdraw from the region.

They also believe that by 2012, Imam Mahdi will reveal himself and command the Muslim forces to defeat the Western forces led by *Dajjal* (Antichrist).

The book highlights the growing fascination for Al Qaeda and its ideology amongst the junior- and mid-level officers of the Pakistan Army. It briefly covers the case studies of Captain Khurram, his brother Major Haroon Ashik and his friend Major Abdul Rahman – the alleged masterminds of the attack on Mumbai. However, of these, the most fascinating is the ideological journey of Major Haroon Ashik, who fought during the Kargil War, resigned from the Army to join the Lashkar-e-Tayyeba, and then left the Lashkar to join the Taliban as he realised that the Lashkar was nothing but an extension of the Pakistan Army. He not only fought against NATO with the Taliban in the battlefields of Afghanistan, but also helped them to evolve new guerrilla tactics to counter NATO's superior firepower. His *salafist* indoctrination eventually saw him emerge as a member of the inner circle of Al Qaeda. His commitment to the cause saw him personally kill on the streets of Islamabad Maj Gen Ameer Faisal Alvi (Retd), who had led the Special Services Group (SSG) operation against Al Qaeda in Angkor Ada. Though he was subsequently arrested, Haroon remains convinced about the righteousness and the eventual success of his cause. The attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team in Lahore was ostensibly launched with the intention of taking some of the players as hostage, to be exchanged with Haroon.

The book also quotes various Islamic ideologues to give their views on *jihad* and helps the reader to understand the viewpoint of Islamic fundamentalists, as well as to acquaint himself with the essential ingredients of *jihad*. It elaborates on certain important terms within the Islamic lexicon like *khurij* (revolt) and *takfeer* (heresy) and their significance on the radicalisation of Islamic societies. It highlights that radicalisation was inherent in the Pakistan state's acquisition of the right to *takfeer*. It also highlights how the state facilitated the indoctrination of a *jihadi* mindset to attain Pakistan's security objectives in Afghanistan. The book also articulates how many senior army commanders bought peace with the Taliban by paying them huge sums of money.

The book highlights that today Al Qaeda has succeeded in being able to influence key policy decisions within most of the major Islamic outfits in the region. It has also succeeded in bringing diverse groups of Chechens, Uzbeks and Uighurs under one umbrella. Most significantly, it articulates that Al Qaeda is not keen to come to some sort of accommodation with the Western world, but would like the United States and NATO to remain embroiled in the conflict in *Khurasan*. Accordingly, it has been preventing any rapprochement between the Taliban and

allied radical elements and the state of Pakistan. This was best demonstrated in its instigation of the crisis in Lal Masjid. Al Qaeda wants to exhaust the West and pronounce victory in Afghanistan and then expand the theatre of war to India. It hopes that the promised messiah, Imam Mahdi, will then emerge in the Middle East and with the help of forces from *Khurasan*, will liberate Palestine, which will usher in a global Muslim Caliphate.

The book opens new vistas for students of Al Qaeda, Taliban, Pakistan and Afghanistan. It unveils the secret world of Al Qaeda for its readers and highlights its penetration of the Pakistani security establishment. To someone acquainted with the salience of the armed forces in Pakistan, this does pose the grave danger of Pakistan's nuclear weapons falling into the hands of forces allied to Al Qaeda. The book has been supplemented with maps for better understanding of the Af-Pak region. However, the book has its pitfalls. It is not only repetitive, but also keeps moving back and forth in time, thereby affecting readability. Shahzad was also used at times by the agencies to put across their viewpoints and at places, he appears to be expounding their views, especially as far as the planning for Mumbai is concerned. Nevertheless, despite these minor flaws, the book is a must read for anyone wanting to understand the thinking of the myriad warriors of Al Qaeda and the Taliban.

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