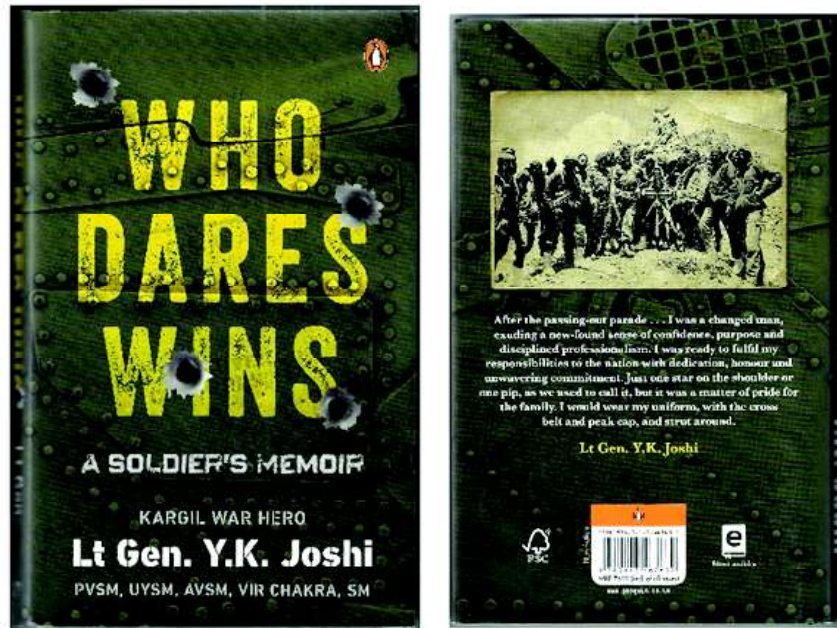


Review Articles and Book Reviews

Review Article 1



Introduction

Who Dares Wins: A Soldier's Memoir is not just the story of Lieutenant General Yogesh Kumar Joshi but a culmination of his experiences, shared with remarkable officers and soldiers who shaped his life and career. The high point, of course, was the outstanding achievements of his Battalion under his command during Operation Vijay, and he unhesitatingly states that "13 JAK RIFFLES, whose loyalty and bravery are quintessential, has been the wind beneath his wings". But while helping him soar, it was also "The cushion that broke his fall whenever he fell".

Writing an autobiography comes with significant challenges, the principal one being that the events covered have impacted the author in ways they may be unaware of, thereby, shaping their perspective and perceptions. However, Joe— as General Joshi is called— has displayed rare clarity while simultaneously providing an intimate glimpse into his thoughts and experiences, as well as insights into the various dimensions of conflict.

Who Dares Wins by Lieutenant General YK Joshi, PVSM, AVSM, Vir Chakra, SM, (Penguin Veer), Pages 240, Price ₹ 699.00, ISBN 9780143467632

Journal of the United Service Institution of India, Vol. CLV, No. 640, April-June 2025.

The book's opening chapters reveal how a young boy, the first from his family to join the army, is shaped by his time at the National Defence Academy, Khadakwasla, and the Indian Military Academy, Dehradun. He emerges from his passing-out parade as "A changed man, with a new sense of confidence, purpose, and disciplined professionalism". Upon joining his Battalion in Nagaland, his Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Kulbir Singh Jamwal ensured that he was groomed in a manner that provided him with a strong foundation, enabling him to excel in every assignment he undertook.

About the Author

Lieutenant General YK Joshi served as the Northern Army Commander during Operation Snow Leopard. He had the distinction of commanding his brigade in Eastern Ladakh, his division in the same area, as well as the 14 Corps. Additionally, he served as the Additional Director General of the Military Operations Branch at Army Headquarters during the critical period of the surgical strikes against Pakistan in 2016, where he was responsible for planning the operations. Fluent in Mandarin, he also served as India's Defence Attaché in China and can rightfully be regarded as one of the army's finest strategic minds on China.

During the Kargil War, as the Officiating Commanding Officer (CO) of 13 JAK RIFLES, Lieutenant General Joshi was awarded the Vir Chakra for his courage and leadership. Under his command, the Battalion launched four attacks, the most successful being on Point 4875, now known as Batra Top. The Battalion was honoured with the title 'Bravest of the Brave' as it was awarded two Param Vir Chakras.

The Book

The book covers multiple aspects, as General Joshi's career in the army spanned over 40 years. He served in diverse terrains across the country and held some of the most prestigious appointments. Throughout this period, he witnessed the transformation of India's security environment, providing readers with insights not only into his exceptional leadership qualities but also into the inner workings and ethos of the Indian Army as it navigated multiple challenges. However, the heart of the memoir lies in his first-hand account of the Kargil War.

Consider this: After serving in a challenging assignment with his battalion in counterinsurgency operations in Sopore, Jammu and Kashmir, he is sent as the Officer Commanding the Advance Party to Shahjahanpur in the summer of 1999. Now focused on the administrative tasks of handing and taking over, he is shortlisted, along with two coursemates, for an interview for the coveted appointment of Adjutant of the Indian Military Academy. Unfortunately, he is not selected and returns crestfallen to his duties—overseeing the takeover of equipment and assets in Shahjahanpur, swimming in the evenings, and setting up his house.

But the events in Kargil soon changed everything. Within a week, he and his men were ordered to report to Dras. That was the day Lieutenant Colonel Vishwanathan of 18 GRENADIERS made the supreme sacrifice at Tololing. Just days later, on 10 Jun 1999, he was leading a convoy from Srinagar to Ladakh—his first visit to an area that would soon become his *karambhoomi* (Land of Duty). On 12 Jun, he had a ringside view of the attacks on Tololing by 2 RAJPUTANA RIFLES, and on 13 Jun, he found himself climbing to the heights, reaching Tololing at 0230 hours on 14 Jun after negotiating enemy minefields and braving relentless fire. Early that morning, he received an urgent communication—the General-Officer-Commander (GOC), Major General Mohinder Puri wanted to speak to him on the radio. The message was brief but life-changing: “Joe, you are now to take over command of the battalion, as your CO has fallen ill”. Five days had changed everything.

That the battalion performed incredibly under his command is a matter of fact. The capture of the strategically important features of Point 5140 and Point 4875, along with the awarding of two Param Vir Chakras, is well documented. What stands out in his account is the rare granularity with which he details how the ‘Impossible was made possible’ and how his leadership shone in the most adverse situations. The battalion’s achievements were nothing short of extraordinary.

Through a gripping narrative of decisive moments on the battlefield and the responsibilities of leadership, he provides insights into the emotions, resilience, discipline, determination, and innovations demonstrated during the conflict, including the Indian Army’s use of the Bofors gun in a direct firing role. He also acknowledges that the media played a crucial role during the war, stirring nationalist sentiments among the youth of the nation.

But adjusting to normal life after experiencing the trauma of war was a challenging journey. The loss of colleagues is undoubtedly a heavy burden, and the emotions conveyed deeply affect the reader. However, as he reflects on Captain Vikram Batra, he states, “His infectious enthusiasm and never-say-die spirit live on in each one of us who had the privilege and honour of serving with him”. He also highlights how the Indian Army, out of professional courtesy and respect, gave a befitting burial to enemy soldiers in accordance with their religious customs—despite their own country having disowned them.

In keeping with the traditions of the Indian Army, he, along with his wife Ina and the Subedar Major, visited the families of all those from his battalion who had laid down their lives for the nation. The bonds remain strong, and even as the Northern Army Commander, he and his wife continued to visit these families. This book covers much more—his tenure in China at a time when the focus was on maintaining peace and tranquillity rather than altering the status quo along the borders. Unfortunately, China’s then-recent aggression had shattered that trust. He provides deep insights into the Chinese military mindset and their use of psychological operations. His experience as a United Nations Military Observer in Angola, caught in the middle of the conflict between the Angolan Army and National Union for the Total Independence of Angola, is also well documented, as are his multiple tenures in the Military Operations Branch of the Indian Army—where ‘The Cage’ remains the nerve centre of strategic decision-making.

The book also provides insights into the leaders he served under, such as Lieutenant General Mohinder Puri, describing how a fleeting encounter evolved into something sacred as he became his mentor and guide. He also reflects on General Bikram Singh, under whom he served in the Military Operations Branch, and acknowledges how frequent interactions—alongside his colleague Brigadier (later Lieutenant General) Arvind Datta—during General Bikram Singh’s tenure as the Chief of the Army Staff made him realise that a military leader must ride the knowledge wave or risk being overwhelmed.

He acknowledges Lieutenant General Ranbir Singh, whom he succeeded as a Brigadier in the Military Operations Directorate and later as the Northern Army Commander, describing him as “A

thorough professional with whom he shared a phenomenal working relationship". The book also provides insights into his colleagues and subordinates, including Major General Alok Kacker, who, as a Captain at Infantry School, Mhow, had once taught him to fire an anti-tank missile—a skill that years later proved decisive when firing the missile on an enemy bunker at Point 4875 became a battle-winning factor. He also highlights Major General Pratik Sharma (later Lieutenant General and Northern Army Commander) as "The most stoic and balanced GOC", while recognising the contributions of his staff officers—Lieutenant Colonel Harsh Vardhan, who consistently offered "Blunt yet sane advice", and Colonel Munish Tamang, whose "Industriousness and dedication stood out in the most stressful conditions".

However, one crucial chapter remains unwritten—Operation Snow Leopard, which unfolded during his tenure as Northern Army Commander. With much anticipation, we now await the sequel, one that will shed light on Operation Snow Leopard through his lens.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that this memoir is exceptionally well-written, rich in facts, and offers a sharp, professional perspective on India's contemporary military history. The book presents valuable leadership lessons across various domains and provides a rare insight into the ethos of the Indian Army as well as the complex challenges faced by those who wear its uniform.

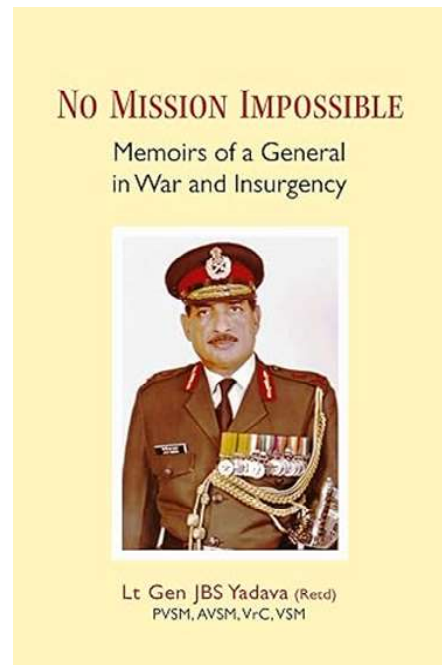
It is a difficult book to put down once picked up—an easy yet profound read. The immense canvas covered through the lens of General Joshi explores multiple facets of modern warfare, spanning from counterinsurgency operations to conventional warfare across India's diverse terrains, with a particular focus on the northern borders.

This book is not only an essential reading for students of India's security environment but also a crucial resource for decision-makers and those interested in India's military history.

By weaving personal anecdotes with pivotal military events, *Who Dares Wins* deserves a wider readership as it offers a compelling glimpse into the values, leadership, and sacrifices of those who serve the nation with courage, commitment, and purpose.

Major General Jagatbir Singh, VSM (Retd)

Review Article 2



Introduction

The initial impression was that the book would be a narration of the 1971 war, during which Lieutenant General Jai Bhagwan Singh Yadava, PVSM, AVSM, VrC, VSM (Retd) was wounded and awarded the Vir Chakra for gallantry. A glance through the contents suggested it might be an autobiography of a General, closely tied to his military career. However, *No Mission Impossible* is beyond all that. This engaging memoir by Lieutenant General Yadava chronicles his early life, ancestry, and extraordinary journey through war, insurgencies, and the diverse challenges of military life, presented in a chronological sequence. The author's writing style is in an easy, clear, and simple flow of language. His narrative captures the reader's attention with vivid descriptions of military operations and frank personal reflections.

No Mission Impossible: Memoirs of a General in War and Insurgency by Lieutenant General JBS Yadava, PVSM, AVSM, VrC, VSM (Retd), (Pentagon Press LLP), Pages 340, Price ₹ 1,995, ISBN: 9788198000248

Journal of the United Service Institution of India, Vol. CLV, No. 640, April-June 2025.

A cat is believed to have nine lives, and the author has already lived six—beginning with a leopard pounce during a hunt in the Shivalik jungles of Dehradun, shortly after passing out of the National Defence Academy (NDA) and before joining the Indian Military Academy (IMA). He survived the encounter by shooting the leopard just in time, a moment that ensured he lives to tell the tale. Second was during the 1971 war with Pakistan in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), when the bullets scraped his skull and pierced through his trousers. On another occasion, while swimming across the Narmada River, he developed cramps on the return and was carried away by the strong current, only to be rescued by a local. Now, at around 80 years of age—having survived war as a decorated hero and faced death at close quarters multiple times—General Yadava shares his life story, beautifully interwoven with the history of a nation whose significant moments he has witnessed and shaped. The 1947 Kashmir conflict, the Indian Army's defeat by China in 1962, the 1965 War, the liberation of Bangladesh, and the turmoil in Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) have been effectively recapitulated for the reader.

The seasoned General provides a genuine and credible perspective on life in the military. The memoir delves deeply into the socio-political and operational challenges faced during his service, making it a detailed researched and informative document. The memoir spans a career that is both inspiring and thought-provoking, shedding light on wars and counterinsurgency operations. From battlefield strategic decisions to negotiations at the highest levels, the author takes readers through pivotal moments in his career, offering valuable insights into the interplay between military strategy and politics. Going through each chapter has been an enlightening experience. The author briefly highlights key issues from a few chapters.

Ancestry and Early Life

Initially, the reviewer felt that providing a space of 27 pages to cover ancestry and early life were on the plus side for a book titled *No Mission Impossible*. The author has delved deeply into his family background and childhood, providing historical insights into his ancestral roots—tracing his lineage from the Yadhuvanshis to the Bhattis, Yadavas, and Ahirs. He discusses General Reginald Dyer, infamous for the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, who was

indicted by the Hunter Commission and asked to resign—yet continued to justify his actions. Rudyard Kipling even raised a sum of GBP 30,000 for Dyer's rehabilitation. His former residence in Jalandhar now serves as an officers' mess. Alongside recounting his early life, the author vividly illustrates the historical significance of the places where his father, an army officer, was posted and where he accompanied him for schooling. While acknowledging the NDA and IMA as premier training institutions, the author remarks that they have increasingly become factories producing operationally efficient officers, but not necessarily military leaders who are thinkers and strategists—drawing from his own experience as an alumnus of both.

1965—A War of Lost Opportunities

The 1965 war has aptly been titled 'A War of Lost Opportunities'. Similarly, in retrospect, Pakistan believes that it missed the chance to annex Kashmir while India was engaged in the 1962 war with China. The author offers an honest narration, sharing lessons learned as a young officer and detailing higher-level operational planning. He highlights incidents of poor leadership, inadequate coordination among senior commanders, and a lack of aggressive initiative. His tenure in Ladakh (Darbuk) is described with vivid references to its flora, fauna, and the lakes Pangong Tso and Tso Moriri. A brief historical overview of Ladakh is also included.

The War for Liberation of Bangladesh

This is a chapter of real-life war battles during Dec 1971, where the author himself was wounded and saw death of his soldiers at close quarters. The peak winter in the riverine terrain witnessed the Gorkhas wading through the cold water without food and still fighting when bullets were whizzing past. Only someone who has experienced such situations can truly narrate them. It was a battle of wits and courage of the Indian Army, ably led by its young officers. The author has credited the Mukti Bahini for its support, along with the defected officers of the Pakistani Army who led its ranks. Brigadier Shabeg Singh and others who trained the Mukti Bahini have been given due credit.

In hindsight, given present circumstances, several of the author's earlier remarks appear even more relevant today. He reflects, "Many of us will continue to think whether our sacrifices

went waste or was it worth it to let go of Pakistan and Bangladesh scot-free at the cost of our national security. If Mrs Indira Gandhi had shown statesmanship, we would be a safer and secure country today. She failed both India and Bangladesh despite a brilliant victory”.

The Intervening Years

Various tenures including the staff college and a tenure as the military attaché to the Indian High Commission of Malaysia at Kuala Lumpur have been covered. The author has described the functioning of a High Commission office, and the intricacies involved. An excellent narration of the working environment, this section will be particularly useful for any officer posted to a High Commission—especially one heading to Malaysia.

Punjab Insurgency

Anti-militancy operations in Punjab was a brilliant success, mainly due to political will and correct execution of policy by all instruments of the state after a long period of flawed policies and decisions. He commanded the brigade during the peak of militancy in Punjab and gives due credit to his units and officers for the excellent conduct of anti-militancy operations. At the same time, the Iraq War was ongoing and has been discussed in great detail—though it is felt that this section could have been omitted.

Insurgency in the Srinagar Valley

Kashmir was the cradle of Hindu civilisation and a great centre of learning till 1339 when it came under the Islamic rule. Shaivism came to the fore after the visit of Adishankaracharya in the 8th Century. The Shiva temple on the top of the Shankaracharya hill in the heart of Srinagar is a living testimony of that glorious period. Kashmir was also famous because of Sharda Peeth, a famous university and centre of great learning, which was destroyed by the Muslim rulers. Islam spread into the Valley through Sufi saints, with Sufism in the region representing a continuation of the Hindu Rishi tradition.

Major Brown and Captain Matheson of the Chitral and Gilgit Scouts incited Muslim troops to revolt and actively instigated accession to Pakistan. They hoisted the Pakistani flag on 04 Nov 1947. The disloyalty and treachery of these British officers led to

the imprisonment of Brigadier Ganshara by the rebellious Muslim troops of the Scouts and the 6 J&K Infantry Battalion, followed by the massacre of all the Hindu and Sikh soldiers of the battalion. The accession of Gilgit to Pakistan can largely be attributed to the actions of these two British officers.

India fell into the trap and agreed to the UN ceasefire and resolution. The Indian Army was three times larger than the Pakistani Army—so what was the urgency in accepting the ceasefire, questions the author. “It was a political and military blunder for which the country is paying dearly even today”, he concludes.

A war against terrorists cannot be won unless external support is neutralised. The terrorists, on the other hand, received support and unlimited funding from Pakistan as well as various Arab and Muslim countries in the name of *Jihad* (Islamic religious war against non-believers). The author points out that India adopted a ‘Reactive counterterrorism policy’ rather than a ‘Proactive Counterterrorism’ approach.

Back to Punjab, Kargil, and Jammu and Kashmir Insurgency

Pakistani support for ‘Operation Enduring Freedom’ was deemed more important to the United States (US) than India’s security concerns. Yet, India chose to rely on the US. The author was reprimanded for his offensive plans and cautioned against escalating the situation. General Powell succeeded in winning over the Indian leadership with vague assurances, effectively achieving his objective of keeping Musharraf on board in the war against Afghanistan.

‘Operation Parakram’ has been dealt with in great detail. The mobilisation ended after 10 months of deployment. It cost the nation INR 8,000 cr. Nearly INR 300 cr was paid to evacuees from border areas as compensation. However, Operation Parakram is termed as a failure and a futile exercise that exposed the weakness in decision making, political will to fight war, excessive dependence on the US and knee-jerk actions. The author concludes that “India chickened out” under American pressure not to attack Pakistan. He also offers an observation on the functioning of Army Headquarters, where he served as the Deputy Chief, describing it as “Overstaffed and slow-paced”.

Key Takeaways from *No Mission Impossible*

- **Courage and Leadership.** The book explores the core qualities of military leadership, emphasising decisiveness, adaptability, and ethical responsibility in high-pressure situations, such as those encountered during the war and insurgency. It also provides examples of how leaders led their troops and made critical decisions under battle conditions.
- **Military Strategy.** It provides a glimpse into the nuanced planning and execution of operations in challenging terrains and against unpredictable adversaries. The book provides a rare perspective on India's military history post-independence through the eyes of a fighting General.
- **Human Element of War.** The author does not shy away from discussing the emotional and psychological toll of war on soldiers. The book also portrays the experiences and emotions of soldiers involved in combat and the impact on their lives and their families back home.
- **Counterinsurgency.** Drawing from his first-hand experiences, the author recounts the complexities and challenges of counterinsurgency warfare. He discusses the multi-faceted nature of insurgencies, emphasising the importance of understanding local environments and employing a balanced blend of hard and soft power.
- **Personal Life Journey.** As a memoir, the book provides insights into General Yadava's personal journey, his motivations, and his reflections on his career and the events he witnessed. He has expressed satisfaction with his career in the army and his post-retirement roles, having served both in the corporate sector and as a bureaucrat with the Government of Haryana.

Conclusion

Having read *No Mission Impossible*, it can honestly be stated that it is a masterpiece—masterfully integrating the events of the author's life with the broader sweep of history. The ongoing events, such as the 1965 Indo-Pak War, the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War, and the insurgencies in Nagaland, Mizoram, Punjab, and J&K have been artistically knitted into the text. The author presents

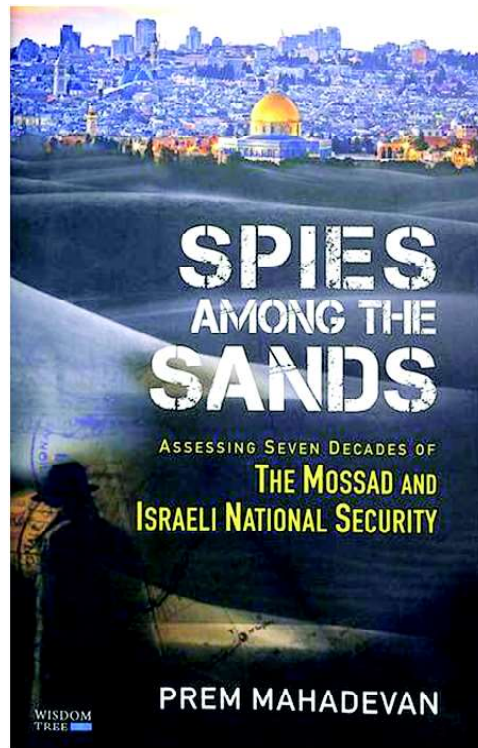
an honest account from his perspective as a young officer, supplemented by well-researched lessons linked to higher-level planning and strategic locations, along with his own analytical insights. General Yadava has duly acknowledged his seniors, colleagues, and juniors where appropriate, and, drawing on his remarkable memory, has clearly identified the formations, units, and officers who led or participated in various operations. The author as a frank critique has brought out the often-overlooked gaps in strategic vision in India's political and military leadership, which over the years have impacted national security in the long run.

Attempting a review of such a book—painstakingly interwoven with geography, history, and personalities through detailed and accurate research spanning 75 years—is bound to fall short. The author has candidly highlighted shortcomings and flaws in decision-making where necessary. However, it is noted that it would have been valuable had the author also offered his thoughts or suggested a 'Way Forward' on the Kashmir issue and the Bangladesh question.

No Mission Impossible offers invaluable lessons in leadership, resilience, and strategic thinking. The author's account is not just a recounting of military exploits but also a reflection on the values and sacrifices that define a soldier's life. For those aspiring military leaders, defence analysts, interested in military history, and strategy, this book is must-read. This gripping memoir stands apart for its candid narration of significant historical events of the time.

Colonel (Dr) RC Patial, SM, FRGS (Retd)

Review Article 3



Spies Among the Sands: Assessing Seven Decades of The Mossad and Israeli National Security (for brevity's sake, hereafter, referred to as *Spies Among the Sands*) by Prem Mahadevan delves into the world of espionage. The author is a researcher on intelligence studies and a terrorism analyst for the Centre for Security Studies, and as such provides a meticulous and insightful analysis of the Mossad, Israel's famed intelligence agency, and its role in shaping Israeli national security over the past seven decades. The book examines the Mossad's evolution, as well as its successes and failures, and the broader implications of Israeli intelligence operations in the volatile Middle East. Mahadevan's approach is both academic and engaging, making it a valuable read for scholars, intelligence professionals, and general readers interested in espionage, geopolitics, and military strategy.

Spies Among the Sands: Assessing Seven Decades of the Mossad and Israeli National Security by Prem Mahadevan (Wisdom Tree), Pages 360, Price ¹ 895/-, ISBN: 9788183286282

Journal of the United Service Institution of India, Vol. CLV, No. 640, April-June 2025.

The book is not just a historical account of the Mossad's operations; it explores the methodologies, philosophies, and ethical dilemmas faced by Israeli intelligence. Mahadevan also examines whether Israel's intelligence edge can be maintained in an era of changing warfare, advanced technology, and shifting geopolitical alliances. Through careful analysis and comprehensive case studies, he offers a balanced perspective on one of the world's most secretive intelligence agencies.

Summary of the Book

Mahadevan structures the book around key moments in Israeli intelligence history, analysing its impact on national security and global espionage. He traces the Mossad's origins, its operations, its approach to counterterrorism, and its involvement in cyber warfare and covert diplomacy.

The Origins of the Mossad.

- Mahadevan begins with the foundation of Israeli intelligence, providing context on how the state of Israel, emerging in 1948 amidst hostility from neighbouring Arab nations, saw intelligence as a matter of existential survival. He details the early years of the Mossad, its initial struggles, and the institutional philosophy that shaped its ethos—a blend of military pragmatism, resilience, and deep-seated concerns about existential threats.
- This chapter explores the influence of European intelligence traditions on the Mossad, particularly the legacy of British and Soviet espionage tactics. Mahadevan also discusses how early Zionist militias, such as the Haganah and Palmach, laid the groundwork for Israel's future intelligence services.

Legendary Operations and Key Successes. Mahadevan dedicates significant portions of the book to detailing the Mossad's most famous missions including:

- **The Capture of Adolf Eichmann (1960).** The daring Mossad operation in Argentina, where agents captured the Nazi war criminal and brought him to Israel for trial, cemented the agency's reputation as one of the most effective intelligence services in the world.

- **The Assassination of Black September Members (1970s).** Following the 1972 Munich Olympics massacre, the Mossad launched Operation Wrath of God, a targeted assassination campaign against members of the Palestinian terrorist group Black September. Mahadevan examines the moral and strategic implications of these assassinations.
- **The Destruction of Iraq's Nuclear Program (1981).** Operation Opera, which involved the Israeli Air Force destroying Saddam Hussein's Osirak nuclear reactor, is discussed in the context of Israeli intelligence's role in preventing existential threats.
- **Counterterrorism and Intelligence Sharing.** The book details how the Mossad has played a role in counterterrorism worldwide, collaborating with western intelligence agencies to neutralise threats beyond Israel's borders.

The Ethical Dilemmas and Failures of Israeli Intelligence. Mahadevan does not shy away from discussing the failures and ethical dilemmas that the Mossad has encountered. He highlights cases where intelligence miscalculations led to significant consequences, including:

- **The 1973 Yom Kippur War Intelligence Failure.** Despite multiple warning signs, Israeli intelligence underestimated the likelihood of a coordinated attack by Egypt and Syria, leading to a near-catastrophic military situation for Israel.
- **The Failed Assassination Attempt on Khaled Mashal (1997).** Posing as Canadian tourists, Mossad agents attempted to assassinate Hamas leader Khaled Mashal in Jordan. However, they were caught, resulting in an embarrassing diplomatic crisis.
- **The Rise of Cyber Threats and Iran's Nuclear Program.** The book delves into how Israeli intelligence has adapted to cyber warfare, notably through its role in the Stuxnet virus attack on Iran's nuclear program. Mahadevan also questions whether Israeli intelligence can maintain its dominance in the cyber domain, especially as adversaries like Iran and Hezbollah continue to increase in sophistication.

The Future of Israeli Intelligence. Mahadevan concludes the book by discussing the future of Israeli intelligence in an increasingly digital and interconnected world. He questions whether Israel's traditional intelligence advantages—such as superior Human Intelligence (HUMINT), advanced surveillance, and covert operations—will remain effective in the face of Artificial Intelligence (AI)-driven warfare, drone technology, and cyber threats. The book also examines geopolitical shifts in the Middle East, particularly the Abraham Accords and Israel's evolving relationships with Gulf states. Will intelligence cooperation with countries like the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia provide new strategic advantages? Or will internal political divisions and technological disruptions weaken Israel's intelligence dominance?

Critical Analysis

Strengths. One of the greatest strengths of *Spies Among the Sands* is its meticulous research. Mahadevan draws on declassified materials, interviews, and historical records to present a nuanced view of Israeli intelligence. He avoids the sensationalism that often surrounds espionage literature, offering instead a grounded and objective analysis. At the same time, although the book is academic in nature, Mahadevan's writing style remains engaging by blending historical narrative with technical analysis, making complex intelligence operations accessible to a wider audience. The book also covers an impressive range of topics, from classic espionage missions to modern cyber warfare. It critically examines not only intelligence successes but also failures, providing a balanced perspective. Furthermore, the author places Israeli intelligence within the broader context of Middle Eastern geopolitics, allowing readers to see how intelligence operations both shape and are influenced by regional dynamics.

Weaknesses of the Book. One of the most notable criticisms the reviewer can levy on *Spies Among the Sands* is the lack of insider information. However, considering the secretive nature of the Mossad, this absence must be viewed in context. Regardless, much of the book relies heavily on second-hand sources, forcing Mahadevan to analyse the information available, though he does a commendable job. While he does this commendably, first-hand accounts from intelligence officials would have provided additional depth. At the same time, while the book discusses the impact of

intelligence on national security, it does not delve deeply into how domestic political shifts within Israel have influenced the Mossad's operations. Considering the growing political polarisation in Israel, a more thorough examination of how intelligence agencies respond to domestic pressures would have been enlightening. Furthermore, certain sections on cyber warfare and intelligence methodologies may be difficult for readers unfamiliar with the technical aspects of modern espionage.

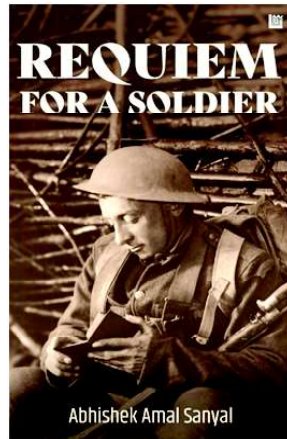
Conclusion

Spies Among the Sands is a must-read for anyone interested in intelligence, military strategy, and Middle Eastern geopolitics. Prem Mahadevan delivers a balanced and well-researched account of the Mossad's history, highlighting both its legendary successes and costly failures. The book is particularly relevant in today's world, where intelligence agencies are increasingly involved in cyber warfare, AI-driven surveillance, and asymmetric conflicts. Mahadevan's analysis prompts readers to consider whether the traditional strengths of Israeli intelligence—covert operations, strategic assassinations, and HUMINT—can remain effective in an era dominated by digital threats and political instability. While the book has minor shortcomings, particularly its limited access to Mossad insiders, it still is a compelling and informative read. Whether you are a scholar, a policymaker, or simply an enthusiast of espionage history, *Spies Among the Sands* offers a fascinating glimpse into the world of Israeli intelligence and the challenges it faces in the 21st Century.

Mr Vinayak Sharma

Requiem for a Soldier by Abhishek Amal Sanyal, (One Point Six Technologies Pvt Ltd), Pages 373; Price ₹ 299; ISBN: 9789358838589

About the Author



Abhishek Amal Sanyal, an alumnus of London School of Economics and a PhD scholar at IIM Kozhikode, is a passionate student of military history, with a focus on India's unsung role in the World Wars. Committed to honouring Indian soldiers, he is visiting all Param Vir Chakra award sites and plans to create a memorial. An adventurer at heart, he has completed scuba diving in the Andamans and aims to trek to Everest Base Camp, as well as retrace the 3 GORKHA RIFLES' journey during World War I (WW I). With a diverse career across finance, information technology, and shipping, Abhishek returned to India to raise his twin daughters. His book, *Requiem for a Soldier*, explores the human condition through the journey of an Indian soldier in WW I.

About the Book

In the ever-evolving landscape of Indian historical fiction, *Requiem for a Soldier* by Abhishek Amal Sanyal stands out as an emotionally charged and deeply immersive read. This novel is not just a story about a war; it is a tale of personal assessment of the cultural upheaval and the transformative power of experience set against the backdrop of India's noteless contributions to the WW I.

War, Identity, and the Personal Journey of Kumar Ganguly. The story follows the life of Kumar Ganguly, who is a privileged son of a Bengali *zamindar* (landlord). His life of wealth and tradition is upended when he gets enlisted in the British Indian Army. As Kumar journeys from the grandeur of colonial Bengal to the war-ravaged fields of Europe and Asia, his transformation is stark, both physically and psychologically. The author weaves a tale where the horrors of war become a crucible for self-discovery. The idyllic Kumar of his youth was replaced by a battle-worn soldier, forced to confront the fragility of human ideals and the weight of loss.

Colonial India and the Characters who Shaped a Soldier.

Sanyal's novel is filled with a set cast of characters, each of whom represents a facet of India's complex colonial identity. *Zamindar* Ganguly, who imparts wisdom through daily recitations of *dohas* (couplets); the enigmatic Mahua, a woman of striking beauty and unfulfilled love; Subhendu, the idealistic journalist; and the red-haired Daley Flanagan, Kumar's British comrade-in-arms—all play pivotal roles in shaping Kumar's evolution. Through them, the novel explores themes of cultural pride, rebellion, love, and even betrayal. Kumar's struggles with his own conscience are central to the narrative of the novel. Initially bound by tradition and reluctant to challenge convention, his experiences in war force him to redefine his beliefs. The trauma of personal loss, whether through the brutalisation of Mahua or his own unrequited love for Mary, deepens his introspection. When Kumar returns from the war, he is no longer the man he once was; his innocence is lost and is replaced by a hardened understanding of fate and survival.

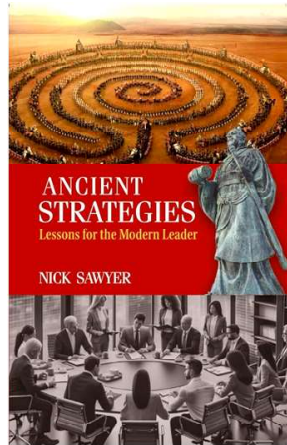
Historical Memory, Emotional Depth, and the Resilience of the Human Spirit.

The novel's strength lies in Sanyal's intricate detailing of historical and emotional landscapes. The contrast between the opulence of colonial Bengal and the grim trenches of war are vividly portrayed, allowing readers to experience the stark shift in Kumar's journey. The author's commitment to historical authenticity ensures that the lesser-known contributions of Indian soldiers in the Great War are acknowledged with the depth and respect they deserve. *Requiem for a Soldier* is more than just another historical novel; it is a conversation on the dual nature of humans, the internal wars individuals fight, and the resilience required to forge new identities in the face of overwhelming adversity. Sanyal's storytelling not only honours the forgotten Indian soldiers of WW I, but also goes on to present a deeply personal tale of transition. As Kumar walks along the train, reflecting on the war and his own journey, the metaphor is made clear, that this is a story not just of war, but of a man seeking himself in the shifting tides of history.

Colonel Ravinder Kumar (Retd)

Ancient Strategies: Lessons for the Modern Leader by Nick Sawyer (New Delhi: Pentagon Press), 2025, Pages 412, Price Hardcover ₹ 1,495, ISBN: 9788198000217

Introduction



Project Udbhav, initiated by the Indian Army in 2023, endeavours to unearth the profound Indic heritage of statecraft and strategic wisdom embedded within ancient Indian texts on statecraft, warfare, diplomacy, and grand strategy. A valuable addition to the literature on India's past is *Ancient Strategies: Lessons for the Modern Leader*. The author, Brigadier Nick Sawyer is an alumnus of India's National Defence College and served as the United Kingdom's Defence Attache to India from 2022 to 2024.

Structure and Scope of the Book

The book analyses the works of six ancient strategists and draws out the key lessons articulated by each. These lessons are then contextualised and contemporised for the modern leader into an easy to absorb and easy to apply set of guidelines. Common lessons from across the ancient works are also extracted to provide the ageless fundamentals of effective strategy. The eclectic choice of ancient works analyses Asian strategies and writings, with Julius Caesar being an outlier.

Developing a Strategic Mindset

The first part of the book looks at developing a strategic mindset and studies the works of Miyamoto Musashi, especially *The Book of Five Rings*, and the Indian epic *The Mahabharata*. The foremost requirement for successful strategy is that a senior leader possesses a strategic mindset. Before any analysis, planning, or process could be applied to a complex problem, the strategic leader must be in the right frame of mind. Developing this can take a lifetime, as experience plays a crucial role. Both can be used to help create the strategic mindset for senior leaders that is critical for tackling complex problems in the 21st Century.

Adopting a Strategic Approach

The second part looks at what the author calls 'Adopting a strategic approach'. It is the cultural approach opted within the highest levels of a government or organisation on the 'Tradecraft' of strategy rather than how to deal with a specific problem or situation. It examines Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, which encompasses statecraft, governance, and warfare. It also looks at the *Purananuru*, a collection of works that gives advice to kings on how to manage their subjects and lands and offers some thoughts on adopting strategic approaches to complex problems, besides analyses of the Tamil concept of valour. Beyond its importance for understanding the development of South Asia's history, culture, religion, and linguistics, the *Purananuru* stands as a remarkable work of literature, offering an accurate and profound reflection of life in southern India 2,000 years ago. It is a collection of 400 heroic poems about kings, wars, and public life, of which two are lost and a few have survived into the modern age in fragments. The collected poems were composed by 157 poets, of which 14 were anonymous and at least 10 were women. It is indeed a hidden gem of world literature.

Strategy Toolsets from the Ancient West and East

Finally, the third part analyses the works of Sun Tzu and Julius Caesar and presents some strategic toolsets to assist with developing and implementing specific strategies. Strategy is very different to simple plans and tactics as it needs creativity and flexibility. Sun Tzu's *Art of War* and Julius Caesar's *Commentaries on the Gallic War* give some useful toolsets that can help senior leaders and their teams devise a successful strategy to deal with a specific problem set which are designed more as a checklist and prompt rather than a rigid set of rules.

The study of history by professional military personnel is important, if for no other reason than to further their own education. By studying history, one can identify their strengths, weaknesses, and those of enemies. The battlefield and technology will continue to change but there are many ancient verities that deserve study to draw relevant lessons.

Contribution to Modern Strategic Discourse

Spanning a comprehensive spectrum and eliciting useful lessons for the modern leader in a very readable and pellucid prose, the book presents the ancient texts in an engaging manner. The straightforward language to highlight relevance retains the readers' interest. With a vision to integrate ancient wisdom into modern military pedagogy, the book provides insights drawn from centuries-old principles to navigate today's intricate strategic landscape. The book is a valuable addition to the literature on the subject and offers insights and lessons for military professionals, diplomats, business leaders, and students of ancient history.

Ancient military history has come a long way. Nevertheless, there is much work remaining to be done. While war was a central part of ancient cultures and civilisations, it is still rare to see a military historian who studies the classics. The book's relevance and clarity are likely to resonate strongly as it represents an additional arrow in the quiver of knowledge and find its application in myriad ways. The book is well researched and provides some thought-provoking insights worthy of imbibing.

Ancient military history has always enjoyed popularity, and this continues to be the case. The subject can also be studied through television, the internet, and documentaries—albeit of varying quality. It would be difficult to overstate the importance of warfare and military institutions in the ancient world. Beyond the prevalence of warfare itself, nearly every facet of life in the ancient world—art, literature, music, religion, trade, agriculture, manufacturing, gender roles, architecture, education, and science—is both influenced by these and by warfare and the military institutions associated with it. It is little surprise, then, that warfare and the military have been central components of historical narratives for as long as such narratives have existed. All successful military leaders did not expect a plan of operations to survive beyond the first contact with the enemy. They set only the broadest of objectives and emphasised seizing unforeseen opportunities as they arose. Strategy is not a lengthy action plan. It is the evolution of a central idea through continually changing circumstances.

Final Reflections: Learning from the Past to Shape the Future

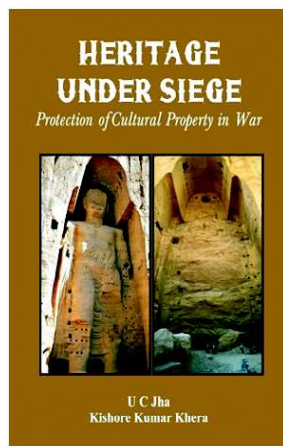
The book fills a critical gap in the literature on the subject and will be of keen interest not only to military formations and units but also to the diplomatic community and academic institutions as also individual researchers and readers. It has a useful bibliography which will be of interest to those who wish to study the subject further. This book is highly recommended for professionals and scholars alike who seek to comprehend the application of ancient military strategies to their modern context.

As war and national security have become subjects of increased public engagement, officers, defence analysts, and academics increasingly turn to the past to support or critique a wide range of national security issues, including doctrine, force structure, reform, and strategy. The past can certainly inform the future, and it would be unwise not to draw upon such accumulated experience.

Colonel Harjeet Singh (Retd)

Heritage Under Siege: Protection of Cultural Property in War
by U C Jha, Kishore Kumar Khera, (Vij Books, New Delhi), Pages 252, Price ₹ 995, ISBN: 9788119438518

Introduction



Heritage Under Siege: Protection of Cultural Property in War by Wing Commander (Dr) UC Jha (Retd) and Group Captain Kishore Kumar Khera (Retd) provides a comprehensive analysis of the intersection between cultural heritage and armed conflict. The book offers valuable insights into the historical, legal, and practical dimensions of protecting cultural property during times of war. Divided into three sections, it systematically explores the significance of cultural heritage, the evolution of legal frameworks, and the real-world challenges of safeguarding cultural property in conflict zones.

The Significance of Cultural Property in War

The first section of the book lays the foundation by explaining the importance of cultural property to communities and societies. The authors highlight how cultural heritage is often deliberately targeted

during armed conflicts to erase a community's identity and disrupt its historical continuity. They provide historical examples that illustrate how destruction of cultural sites has been used as a strategic tool in warfare, reinforcing the need for dedicated protection measures.

Legal Frameworks for Cultural Property Protection

The second section examines the evolution of international legal frameworks aimed at safeguarding cultural property. The authors provide an in-depth discussion of key international agreements, particularly the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its subsequent protocols. These agreements aim to prevent the destruction, theft, and illegal trade of cultural artifacts.

The authors also explore the role of international organisations, such as United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization and the International Criminal Police Organization, which collaborate with governments to enforce these protections. Despite these legal safeguards, the book underscores the persistent challenges in their implementation, citing examples where enforcement mechanisms have failed due to resource constraints, political resistance, and conflicting wartime priorities.

Challenges in Protecting Cultural Property in Conflict Zones

The third section shifts focus to the practical challenges of cultural property protection in active conflict zones. The authors analyse the difficulties in securing heritage sites during war, the role of military forces, and the involvement of international organisations. They examine recent case studies from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya, where cultural sites have been looted or destroyed despite existing legal protections.

The book argues that while international laws are well-established, their enforcement remains inconsistent. Many challenges arise due to inadequate funding, lack of political will, and the competing urgency of humanitarian crises. The authors emphasise the gap between international law and its real-world application, highlighting how cultural property often remains vulnerable in times of war.

The Ethical Dilemma: Cultural Heritage vs Human Lives

The authors delve into the ethical and moral dilemmas surrounding cultural property protection. They address the complex question of how to balance the safeguarding of cultural heritage with the

imperative to protect human lives during conflict. While acknowledging the tension between these two priorities, they argue that cultural heritage is not merely an aesthetic or historical concern but an essential component of a community's identity and continuity.

The book references notable cases, such as the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan and the looting of the National Museum in Baghdad, to illustrate the far-reaching consequences of cultural destruction. The authors equate the loss of cultural property with an assault on collective memory and identity, reinforcing the urgent need for proactive measures.

Practical Solutions and Policy Recommendations

One of the book's most valuable contributions is its discussion of practical solutions to enhance the protection of cultural heritage. The authors propose several strategies, including stronger international cooperation to enforce existing laws more effectively, the establishment of specialised military units trained to protect cultural sites, greater involvement of non-governmental organisations, academic institutions, and local communities in monitoring and preserving cultural property, and improved intelligence-sharing and real-time intervention rather than reacting to destruction after it occurs. The authors advocate for a more proactive approach, stressing that preservation efforts must be embedded within military and diplomatic strategies rather than treated as an afterthought.

Conclusion

Heritage Under Siege is a well-researched and thought-provoking book that provides both historical context and forward-looking solutions for cultural property protection during wartime. The authors present a compelling argument for stronger international cooperation and better enforcement of existing frameworks. Their clear and accessible writing style, combined with extensive research and case studies, makes this book an essential read for scholars, policymakers, military strategists, and anyone interested in the intersection of law, conflict, and cultural heritage. It serves as both a call to action and a crucial contribution to the ongoing global discourse on safeguarding humanity's irreplaceable cultural legacy.

Ms Komal Chaudhary