

The Launch of Book ‘The Unending Game’

**Opening Remarks by Sunjoy Joshi, Chairman, ORF
13 August, 2018**

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen! It gives me great pleasure to welcome to you to this book launch and discussion on 'The Unending Game: A Former R&AW Chief's Insights into Espionage', written by my friend and colleague, Mr. Vikram Sood.

A specially warm welcome to Hon. Minister Smt Smriti Irani, Hon MP Shri Baijayant Panda, Amb. Kanwal Sibal, and Amb. Shiv Shankar Menon who have kindly consented to share with us their insights this evening and participate in this book discussion. Thank you to all our speakers for taking the time from your busy schedules to join us this evening. And a special word of thanks for our MC for the evening, Swati Chopra and her colleagues at Penguin, who have worked tirelessly to bring Vikram's vision to reality in such a short time.

As Vikram cautions, James Bond wouldn't survive a day in any Intelligence Agency worth the name. I know how many would be disappointed to discover that the perfect spy is nothing like James Bond and the business of espionage nowhere close to Ian Fleming's world of fast cars, vodka martinis and pretty women.

But read the book carefully and you will find that even if Goldfinger or Casino Royale are not the real world, there is still a fair amount of Mission Impossible hidden in there somewhere. For one, dead drops, are fact not fiction. They are not limited to the gnarled snake hole in the Jamun tree in Nehru park, a neatly (cut-out) hard cover edition of “The Unending-Game” in the ORF Library. The world has moved to cyber dead drops.

Then, as Tom Cruise keeps on discovering all the time, rogue agents are real. So are deep throat insider threats. The only difference being that while Ethan Hunt finishes them off in two hours, in the real world it takes years to discover them and that too only if you are lucky.

But the perfect spy in the end is not James Bond or Ethan Hunt, he is someone like our dear author.... who “performs (the) invaluable work assigned to him, at great personal risk in a hostile environment and then retires to live a quiet life”.

And the hostile environments are not necessarily the streets of Karachi. The corridors of North Block are probably even more dangerous to negotiate.

But, jokes apart, the moment you pick up the book you can see that unlike many which have preceded it in the trade, this one is not a memoir. It is not about the person and it is not about his musings in the afterlife. It is a down to earth book about the art and the craft of espionage. It is about a very keen understanding of the trade. It examines the position of Intelligence wings in the modern state and looks at their evolution and expansion through the Cold war. IT then ventures into their ongoing metamorphosis in a the very different world of today where disruptive technologies, various non-state and proto-state actors are busy overtime, and sometimes too often stealing the limelight from the stodgy old Westphalian entities owning these agencies..

Perhaps for many of us, the most alluring sections of this book will be on India and tales from the neighbourhood, and he indeed holds you there – with his a deep understanding of ISI and R&AW and its implications on how India and Pakistan interact with each other.

But beyond these ‘The Unending Game’ is a breath taking tour de force exposing us to a wide gamut of organisations in the world, including but not limited just to the usual suspects such as the CIA and the KGB, the ISI and R & AW. It looks at all kinds of organizations and entities, The network of the covert as well as overt institutions which often get overlooked - secret societies, think tanks, private corporations.

In fact it is the remarkable understanding of the old and the new, and the nuances of the grey zones, the in between, that distinguish this book from the flood of others we have seen in the past.

Vikram’s term as the Head of the Research and Analysis Wing, between 2000 and 2003, was in fact at a time in which India, like the rest of the world was undergoing some of these major transformations. As some of you would remember, just before Vikram took office – in December 1999 - Indian Airlines flight IC814 was hijacked, and gave the country its first taste of the use of media as a weapon against the state in the age of information. Then came 9/11 and completely changed the world. Not to forget the attack on the Indian Parliament in December of the same year.

Having spent 31 years as a career Intelligence Officer Sir you have been in the vanguard and then at the forefront, adapting the country’s intelligence practices

to align with these new unfolding dynamics. And he writes about the constant need to Form and Reform any intelligence agency.

You write about the successful spy who retires after 30 years to lead a quiet retired life. But I must say that your life, As part and parcel of ORF now for over 12 years, has hardly been quiet. You have been extremely busy writing regular op-eds on security and foreign policy and on our neighbourhood. And amongst the many milestones of your career in the service this book represents yet the most important one to date for chronicling the transformation in the world of Intelligence and information. An issue that perplexes us all and to which there are no easy answers.

Incidentally there is no sign that this is your first full length literary endeavour, because you take to the form as a fish to the water. This spymaster, also turns out be a wonderful storyteller - each chapter more insightful than the last. Fascinating anecdotes and little nuggets of information are peppered throughout the book, and the tales are told with Vikram Sood's typical wry understated humour and wit. There are no good guys and bad guys here. No emotive tales about betrayal and loss. It is first and last a book about the ethos of statecraft of, a dispassionate look at why we are where we are and it is a tale told clinically with a rare sense of humour and compassion,

So for anyone who is interested in crash course in the World of Espionage and the Deep State these short 269 pages will stand out. They will also stand out because this also is one of the few Indian voices on a theme largely dominated by Western authors, and so the insights too, whether into the rise of Osama Bin Laden, or the aftermath of 9/11 are refreshingly different.

For those who haven't yet read the book let me tell you that the sheer expanse of the subject covered in this volume holds you from page 1 far better than Tom Cruise in the latest Mission Impossible – Fallout. So do pick up a copy on the way out and we will make sure Vikram signs it for you. Meanwhile I would like all of you to join me in congratulating Vikram on this fascinating account.

Thank you

