



James G. Hershberg. *Marigold: The Lost Chance for Peace in Vietnam.* Washington DC: Stanford University Press, January 11, 2012. Illustrations. xix + 890 pp. \$39.50, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8047-7884-8.



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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

Marigold: The Lost Chance for Peace in Vietnam delves deep into the diplomatic maneuvering that transpired in the shadows of the American war in Vietnam. James G. Hershberg offers a book that strikes a near perfect balance between macro and micro history. Organized into sixteen chapters, not including the prologue and epilogue, *Marigold* is a detailed account of the diplomatic wrangling during the apogee of the Vietnam War. With a trove of primary sources from all parties, including diplomatic exchanges, interviews, and diaries, Hershberg weaves a masterful analysis of the clandestine world of Cold War-era diplomacy. The author's work adds further depth to Lien-Hang T. Nguyen's *Hanoi's War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam* (2012). In that pathbreaking monograph, Nguyen emphasizes the true motives and decisions of the North Vietnamese in their handling of the war against Saigon. In *Marigold*, Hershberg complements *Hanoi's War* by reinforcing the steadfast determination of North Vietnam to achieve unification only under their banner and terms. Furthermore,

Hershberg presents what he deems a missed opportunity for the United States to end the war in 1966, arguing that the lives of many Americans and Vietnamese could have been spared.

Beyond an American war in Vietnam, the Vietnam War involved the governments of the nations from both sides of the Iron Curtain. Central to *Marigold's* analysis are the efforts of key individuals and the actions of Communist Poland to obtain peace in Vietnam through diplomatic channels. Poland's representative to the International Control Commission (ICC) in Saigon, Janusz Lewandowski, used his connections to push forward a diplomatic solution to the Vietnam War in late 1966. The Pole, reflected Hershberg, "functioned as a kind of 'invisible bridge'--hidden from public view, concealing his actions from diplomatic colleagues in the ICC, able to transit from the Communist and capitalist worlds and open a unique communications channel between bitter enemies--and, more important, he had fashioned an ethereal span between Washington and Hanoi" (p. 496). Lewandowski developed connections

with Giovanni D'Orlandi, the Italian ambassador to South Vietnam; Henry Cabot Lodge, the American ambassador to South Vietnam; and John Gronowski, the American ambassador to Poland. In Hanoi, Lewandowski found a receptive partner in North Vietnamese Premier Pham Van Dong. During a November meeting with Pham Van Dong, Lewandowski conveyed peace overtures from Lodge. Most significant for the author, an implied willingness of the United States to consider some of North Vietnamese conditions resulted in Hanoi's readiness to engage in informal talks with Washington.

Yet such negotiations were rife with half-truths. As Hershberg's narrative unfolds, it becomes clear that many of the participants in *Marigold* were responsible for the failure of the operation. Lewandowski twisted the vagueness of the premier's response into what seemed a legitimate desire for negotiations with the United States. With Hanoi demanding a halt to America's bombing of North Vietnam as a major condition for peace talks to occur, Lewandowski's American partners lacked the authority to suspend such an activity. Yet Gronowski informed his Polish hosts that the United States would stop bombing North Vietnam if Hanoi agreed to peace talks. D'Orlandi, who often conveyed messages from Lewandowski to Lodge, embellished Hanoi's seemingly softer diplomatic position. Ultimately, these actors in *Marigold* greatly distorted the true intentions of Washington. What *Marigold* demonstrated was the willingness of Hanoi and Washington to entertain peace offers while remaining unwilling to exit the war on the others conditions. Both sides preferred to continue the war than accept a face-saving peace offer. Moreover, this affirms the idea that instead of "last chance," *Marigold* confirmed no chance at peace at the juncture of the war.

Admittedly, Hershberg dabbles in counterfactual history in his epilogue, guessing at what might have happened if Washington and Hanoi had indeed resolved their issues at the peace table

in 1966 and not 1973. Although this has some value in emphasizing the author's point that Washington and Hanoi were firmly entrenched in their positions, a comparison of real events could have accomplished the same feat. Instead of what-ifs, Hershberg could have examined what happened in 1966 as compared to the late war diplomatic wrangling between Henry A. Kissinger and Le Duc To. Looking at the intense and perhaps equally murky exchanges between those two negotiators would likely demonstrate that only a new government in Washington and growing frustrations over the war would have allowed for "peace with honor." This approach would have reinforced the author's contention that the steadfastness of the Lyndon B. Johnson administration helped prevent an early end to the war. Moreover, it took a significant change in the Cold War climate to afford an American exit from South Vietnam more palatable to Washington.

In *Marigold*, Hershberg provides the reader with a study grounded in political intrigue and diplomatic maneuvering. While at times excessive in terms of minutia, the book offers one of the most detailed retellings of a particular facet of the Vietnam War. If read more like a murder mystery than a traditional monograph, one will enjoy Hershberg's detailed packed study. All students and scholars of both the Vietnam War and Cold War will want to own a copy of *Marigold*.

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