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James G. Hershberg. *Marigold: The Lost Chance for Peace in Vietnam*. Stanford University Press, 2012. 936 pp. ISBN: 9780804778848 (cloth, \$39.50); 9780804783880 (eBook, \$39.50).

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## Response by Robert Jervis, Columbia University

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James Hershberg's marvelous study and the excellent reviews of it bring out several issues I would like to comment on.

The most important is the unanswerable question of what would have happened had the American and North Vietnamese envoys actually met. It is interesting that the latter were under instructions to make decisions based in part on whether the former were "polite and not arrogant" (*Marigold* p. 286). Ambassador Gronouski presumably would have adopted such an attitude because he wanted the talks to succeed. But although the North was willing to have the first meeting without a bombing halt, it is unlikely that subsequent discussions could have taken place without one. The U.S., of course, was willing to halt the bombing, but only in return for the sort of reciprocal de-escalation that the North was willing to provide. Nothing in Hershberg's account disputes the previous judgment that on this point the North was not willing to bend. So the question is whether the U.S. would have, and little in Hershberg's research indicates that Johnson and his colleagues were not inclined to do so. I do not think Hershberg's greater confidence is entirely unwarranted, however. As he shows, although Washington authorized Gronouski to go ahead, it was very skeptical that anything at all would come of it. A successful first meeting that showed that the third parties who had arranged it were not dissembling and that the North was interested in talks might have led Johnson to reconsider. The prospect, even slight, of ending the war would have been enticing despite the fact that a bombing halt carried significant costs in terms of lowering South Vietnamese morale and allowing the North to send more men and material south, and if the subsequent talks led nowhere they could hurt him domestically. But, as Hershberg notes, he could also gain with his critics in his own party by showing that he had been

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willing to go the extra mile for peace.

If this hurdle had been overcome, predicting the course of talks becomes even more difficult. As Pribbenow and Thies stress, neither side was willing to compromise on the essential question of who would rule in Saigon. For the past 15 or 20 years, political scientists have looked at the problem of issue-indivisibility as a cause of why some conflict cannot be resolved short of total victory.<sup>1</sup> But, as the 1973 agreement showed, compromises are possible. The obvious one, which the 1973 agreement in effect enacted, involved time--there would be a 'decent interval' in which the anti-communist regime would rule, to be replaced some time later by the North. Second, although this may just be saying the same thing differently, each side could have settled for a probability of prevailing. That is, by agreeing to a political process in the South, each side would have relinquished the certainty of prevailing, but would not have given up all prospects. This is what Nixon and Kissinger pushed for when formal negotiations did open, stressing that they would accept a political verdict in the South that went against them. Third would have been forms of power sharing, either by allowing the NLF and the North to control some areas of the country or by installing a coalition government. American officials doubted whether this would have worked, and nothing I have seen in the case that they were wrong, and so such arrangements probably would have produced the 'decent interval' referred to above.

My sense is that reaching a settlement along any of these lines would have been unlikely. Certainly little in the records of either side indicates otherwise. But, as Hershberg argues, the opening of negotiations could have altered positions on both sides, in part by strengthening the hands of the 'doves.' I think this was unlikely, but this kind of counterfactual history is particularly difficult because we have to try to think about what would happen one or two steps out, and actors would be maneuvering both internally and internationally based in part on what others were doing and what they expected others to do. This would have been a very dynamic situation and I think makes it harder to exclude the possibility of successful negotiations.

Finally, I would indicate my surprise that Washington was willing to endorse the Ten Points (pp. 245-46) as the basis for discussions. They leaned heavily toward the North Vietnamese position, especially in point 2 that said "A political negotiation would be aimed at finding an acceptable solution to all the problems, having in mind that the present status quo in South Vietnam would be changed in order to take into account the interests of the parties presently opposing the United States in South Vietnam" and point 8 that declared that the US would stop the bombing "if this will facilitate such a peaceful

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<sup>1</sup> James Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War," *International Organization*, vol. 49, Summer 1995, pp. 379-414; Stacie Goddard, *Indivisible Territory and the Politics of Legitimacy: Jerusalem and Northern Ireland* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Ron Hassner, *War on Sacred Grounds* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).

solution....[and] is ready to avoid any appearance that North Vietnam...has negotiated in exchange for cessation of bombing.” Even though Washington tried to open some wiggle room in its response, it went much further than it had before, and, thorough as Hershberg’s account is, I am uncertain as to exactly how and why Washington agreed.

I hope the reviews if not my comments have whetted your appetites—the entire 900-page meal is definitely tasty and nutritious, and leaves me wanting even more.

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