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Introduction by David L. Anderson, California State University, Monterey Bay, and Naval Postgraduate School

One of the briefest chapters in histories of the American war in Vietnam is the one on diplomacy. Most surveys and monographs on the war concentrate on topics such as containment, colonialism, body count, pacification, anti-war protests, ideology, intelligence, and a host of other large and important subjects. With the exception of the Geneva Conference of 1954 and the Paris Peace Talks in 1972-1973 that marked the beginning and end of direct U.S. engagement in the politics of Vietnam, there has been only limited attention to the details of direct communication between diplomatic representatives of Washington and Hanoi. The conventional scholarly view of the conflict has been that a preference for force prevailed over negotiation in the strategies of both sides. George Herring, who edited for publication the negotiating volumes of the Pentagon Papers, declares that a “firm diplomatic impasse” persisted after the massive U.S. intervention in Vietnam in 1965 and that neither the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) nor the United States “was willing to make the concessions necessary to bring about negotiations.”¹

James G. Hershberg has taken a giant step forward in the examination of the opportunities for and obstacles against diplomacy in the face of the huge divide between Washington and Hanoi over the future of South Vietnam. His long and detailed volume reports virtually every scrap of detail that is known about “Marigold,” the American code name for one of the most often noted, but highly secret, of the various unsuccessful attempts to break the impasse that Herring notes. Although key evidence still remains hidden in Vietnamese and Chinese archives, documents from many nations made available since the end of the Cold War and interviews with surviving participants enable Hershberg to provide the best view to date of the chance for a negotiated settlement of the conflict years before it finally ended.

The four reviews that follow offer considered judgments of Hershberg’s diligent research and provocative argument. The central question that he and the reviewers analyze is whether or not these talks, mediated largely by the young Polish diplomat Janusz Lewandowski, represented a lost chance for peace in Vietnam. Although skeptical about the potential for peace in 1966, when this effort occurred, the reviewers give Hershberg well-deserved credit for his detective work and enthralling narrative. Beyond the immediate question of U.S.-DRV contacts, the book provides valuable insights into the politics of NATO and the Eastern Bloc and the triangular relationship between Moscow, Hanoi, and Beijing.

On the level of individual decision making, the book also continues the efforts of scholars to understand Lyndon Johnson as a war leader. Johnson personally authorized U.S. bombing near Hanoi that the DRV cited as its reason for breaking off the Marigold contacts through Poland. Although Johnson had given an unenthusiastic nod that allowed American

¹ George C. Herring, *America’s Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*, 4th ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2002), 201. See also, George C. Herring, ed., *The Secret Diplomacy of the Vietnam War: The Negotiating Volumes of the Pentagon Papers* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983).

representatives in Saigon and Warsaw to explore Lewandowski's claims of Hanoi's interest in talks, he remained unconvinced about the Vietnamese communists' sincerity. Hershberg's review of U.S. records confirms the President's thinking as recorded in his memoirs that "the Poles had not only put the cart before the horse, when the time of reckoning came, they had no horse."² Fredrik Logevall has argued that Johnson chose war in 1965 because he was "quite unable to contemplate extrication as anything but the equivalent of, as he might put it, 'tucking tail and running'."³ Hershberg continues the saga of Johnson's choice of war over peace in 1966.

There are, however, many suspects in the case of 'who murdered Marigold,' as Hershberg entitled a 2000 monograph on the same subject.⁴ Officials in Washington, Warsaw, and Hanoi all contributed. The story of Marigold is complex, and each of the reviewers brings perspectives from his own research to bear on Hershberg's lengthy account. A historian who has written on a variety of Cold War topics, Robert McMahon goes beyond the author's core questions to highlight some ways the work informs other international issues. Merle Pribbenow's expertise on Hanoi's politics and strategy leads him to probe Hershberg's discussion of the North Vietnamese Politburo. Wallace J. Thies has written on the limitations of bombing and bombing halts as negotiating tools, and his insights on that process are apparent in his analysis of this book. A respected analyst of China's role in the Vietnam War, Qiang Zhai indicates both the strengths and limits of Hershberg's account of Beijing's role in Marigold. Hershberg's book provides a treasure trove for discussion on many Cold War issues, and his thesis will continue to spark discussion about missed opportunities, as it has among these reviewers.

Participants:

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² Lyndon Baines Johnson, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives on the Presidency, 1963-1969* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971), 252.

³ Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and Escalation of War in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 393. See also, David L. Anderson, "A Question of Political Courage: Lyndon Johnson as War Leader," in *Looking Back at LBJ: White House Politics in a New Light*, edited by Mitchell B. Learner (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 101-27.

⁴ James G. Hershberg, *Who Murdered "Marigold"? New Evidence on the Mysterious Failure of Poland's Secret Initiative to Start U.S.-North Vietnamese Peace Talks, 1966*, Cold War International History Project Working Paper 27 (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2000).

Cold War: A Very Short Introduction (2003), and *The Cold War on the Periphery: The United States, India, and Pakistan* (1994), among other books. McMahon is a former president of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations.

Merle L. Pribbenow II, independent researcher, holds a Bachelor of Arts (Political Science), University of Washington, Seattle, WA, 1968. He was an Operations officer and Vietnamese language specialist with the Central Intelligence Agency, 1968-1995 and was translator of the official Vietnamese armed forces history of the war, published as *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1954-1975*, University Press of Kansas, 2002.

Wallace J. Thies is a Yale Ph.D. and Professor of Politics at the Catholic University of America. He is the author of *When Governments Collide: Coercion and Diplomacy in the Vietnam Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); *Friendly Rivals: Bargaining and Burden-Shifting in NATO* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2002); and *Why NATO Endures* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009). He is currently at work on a new book, *Why Containment Works*.

Qiang Zhai is Professor of History at Auburn University Montgomery. He received his doctoral degree from Ohio University. His primary field of interest is the history of the Cold War in Asia. He is the author of *The Dragon, the Lion, and the Eagle: Chinese-British-American Relations, 1949-1958* (Kent State University Press, 1994), and *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975* (University of North Carolina Press, 2000). He is currently working on a study of Sino-French normalization.

Review by Robert J. McMahon, Ohio State University

It takes great courage to write a densely packed, 900-page book about a failed peace initiative—particularly one whose most active phase lasted a mere matter of months. That James G. Hershberg manages to turn the intricacies and vagaries of the Marigold peace effort into a gripping, suspenseful tale provides ample testimony to more than just his fortitude. Equally impressive, his deeply researched book makes an invaluable contribution to our understanding of the Vietnam War writ large.

This fine-grained account of a hopeful, yet convoluted and seriously flawed, search for a diplomatic alternative to protracted war in Vietnam illuminates the wider contours of a Cold War international order plagued by the poisonous fallout from that war. *Marigold* makes clear that multiple actors, on each side of the East-West divide, displayed a surprising eagerness to facilitate a peace settlement in Indochina—for a multiplicity of their own reasons. With the instincts of a first-rate investigative reporter and the indefatigability of a dyed-in-the-wool empiricist, Hershberg leaves no stone unturned in his masterful reconstruction of what stands as the most significant missed opportunity for a diplomatic breakthrough in the years that preceded the Paris peace talks of 1968.

At first glance, this volume will strike many prospective readers as much ado about very little, especially since the peace effort that Hershberg explores in such granular detail in the end went nowhere. The basic story recounted here can be fairly easily summarized. In mid-November 1966, Polish diplomat Janusz Lewandowski, stationed in Saigon as his country's representative on the three-member International Control Commission, learned from North Vietnamese Premier Pham Van Dong, during a meeting in Hanoi, that North Vietnam would be willing to engage in informal talks with the Americans. Dong, and presumably others within the North Vietnamese leadership, found some merit in recent proposals that emanated from Washington via its ambassador in Saigon, Henry Cabot Lodge. Lewandowski had carried Washington's new position (which he distilled into ten points) with him to Hanoi. Its modification of earlier U.S. conditions included, most significantly, an implied willingness to consider the possibility of a neutral South Vietnam as well as the *eventual* unification of the divided country under communist rule.

Lewandowski's promising intervention, which had received the active and enthusiastic backing of Lodge and Giovanni D'Orlandi, Italy's ambassador to the Saigon regime, set the stage for a melodramatic non-meeting that forms this book's crucial pivot. On December 6, 1966, with full authorization from a still-skeptical President Lyndon B. Johnson, John Gronouski, the U.S. Ambassador to Poland, was ready to meet, in Warsaw, with the North Vietnamese ambassador, Do Phat Quang. The purpose of the clandestine rendezvous was to see if sufficient common ground existed to commence face-to-face negotiations at a more senior level, aiming toward a diplomatic resolution of the ongoing conflict. Hanoi had sent a senior diplomat to Warsaw for the meeting, Nguyen Dinh Phuong, bearing instructions for North Vietnam's ambassador and to serve as translator between him and the U.S. ambassador to Poland, John A. Gronouski. But due to miscommunications, missed signals, and diplomatic bungling for which Hershberg apports blame, in descending order of

responsibility, to the Americans, the Poles, and the North Vietnamese, they never met. “Through the fog of war and diplomacy, across barriers of enmity and distrust, in the Polish capital half a world from the fighting,” reflects Hershberg, “John Gronouski and Do Phat Quang (and Nguyen Dinh Phuong) came tantalizingly close to meeting, to crossing the bridge, to breaking the taboo on direct official U.S.-DRV conversations, and to confirming at least provisionally a set of principles for subsequent, higher-level negotiations” (496-97).

Whether the non-meeting of December 6 constitutes “a date that should live in diplomatic infamy” or “a diplomatic disaster of grievous proportions,” as Hershberg asserts, remains open to debate (xiii, 722). In describing the historical implications of the story that unfolds in this narrative as “immense,” moreover, the author almost certainly overstates the case. Yet the central findings here, all rooted in meticulous, multinational research, certainly challenge the conventional wisdom about early Vietnam War peace initiatives in fundamental ways. Hershberg demonstrates conclusively that the North Vietnamese were willing to engage in exploratory talks with their American adversaries and, to that end, sent a special emissary to Warsaw. Further, they did so without a prior commitment from Washington to halt its bombing campaign against North Vietnam. The author also establishes that President Johnson’s refusal to suspend bombing attacks around the city of Hanoi, in the week that followed the December 6 non-meeting between Gronouski and Quang, drove a final nail into the coffin of the barely breathing Marigold overture.

Given the prevalent belief among Vietnam War scholars that the differences between Washington and Hanoi at this stage were so great as to preclude any serious negotiations, those findings alone constitute a substantial historiographical achievement. What difference actual U.S.-North Vietnamese talks in Warsaw might have made remains a more elusive question, as Hershberg is quick to acknowledge. His central contention—and it is certainly a plausible one—holds that direct conversations in the Polish capital could have begun a process that would have “chart[ed] a course toward a quicker end to the war.” In a measured and well reasoned concluding assessment of the Marigold initiative, Hershberg summarizes his case: “The ‘lost chance’ for peace was by no means a sure thing, but it genuinely existed, and if handled better had a reasonable shot at tangible, if now inscrutable, results. Instead, it was squandered” (731).

Unfortunately, one must wade through an amazing amount of verbiage, detail, and not a little minutia before getting to those important, sober-minded judgments. For the reader interested in evocative descriptions of places and people, the intricacies of encrypting and decoding diplomatic cables, commercial airline timetables and the mechanical shortcomings of certain aircraft, weather conditions in various locales at different points in time, the personal idiosyncrasies, health problems, drinking habits, and favored athletic pursuits of key and minor actors, and much more, this book will be a delight. For those eager to get to the main themes and impatient with meandering narratives choked with detail, *Marigold* may prove frustrating in the extreme. The sheer number of words devoted to the initiative, its prelude, and its aftermath, is staggering. Hershberg expends 300 pages alone—exceeding the average length of the typical historical monograph—just on his exposition of developments during the months of November and December 1966. And he devotes nearly 200 pages to an extended examination of the leaks, recriminations, and

controversies that followed the collapse of the Marigold initiative. Surely no one will ever be able to accuse this author of inattention to detail.

On the other hand, the book's excesses also yield their own set of rewards. *Marigold* represents a kind of fresh hybrid in historical scholarship: a rich micro-history set on a sprawling international canvas. Successful micro-histories have received considerable acclaim of late, especially within the fields of social and cultural history, not least for their ability to train an intensive lens on the seemingly small event or the bit player in a historical drama while opening out to shed fresh light on big historical trends and processes.¹ Hershberg does precisely that here—and does it with unparalleled verve. In that sense, the ancillary stories, asides, vignettes, and personality sketches; the explorations of the possibilities and limitations of diplomatic practice; and the analyses of the fractious nature of multiple state-to-state relationships during a critical phase of Cold War international order all take us well beyond the bounds of *Marigold*. The range and depth of sources Hershberg has consulted, in some fifteen countries, supplemented by his extensive personal interviews with Lewandowski, Phuong, and other leading figures, enable him to illuminate such important issues as the impact of the Sino-Soviet split on the Vietnam War; the relative independent-mindedness of Poland and other Soviet “satellites”; the even greater freedom from superpower control exercised by such NATO allies as Italy, Canada, and Great Britain; the bewildering complexity of the Hanoi-Moscow-Beijing triangle; the tangled personal and political relationships within LBJ's inner circle; the fraught nature of U.S. interactions with their nominal South Vietnamese allies, and much more.

In addition, Hershberg proves himself a superb writer. His skill as a stylist enables him to bring to life personages, places, and events in so evocative a manner that, despite its length, the narrative never really bogs down. The following description of mid-1960s Saigon hints at the keen novelistic eye that Hershberg brings to this study, and that enlivens the text throughout: “Hot, fetid, noisy, edgy, its verdant neighborhoods of villas and commercial core now surrounded and infiltrated by a mushrooming honeycomb of slums, the capital was no longer the ‘Paris of the East’ (as colonial travel writers had rhapsodized). Violence still hit the city only rarely, yet the conflict's impact was visible in everything from the street urchins and beggars dislocated from peasant villages to the lumbering U.S. military vehicles interrupting the stuttering stream of taxis, pedicabs, motorbikes, and bicycles” (85).

¹ Influential works in the microhistory genre include the following: Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth Century Miller*, trans. John and Ann Tedeschi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980); Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard based on her Diary, 1785-1812* (New York: Knopf, 1990); Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Alan Taylor, *William Cooper's Town: Power and Persuasion on the Frontier of the Early American Republic* (New York: Knopf, 1995); and Kevin Boyle, *Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civil Rights, and Murder in the Jazz Age* (New York: Henry Holt, 2004).

In sum, *Marigold* warrants an honored place on the bookshelf of any serious student of the Vietnam War and the Cold War. Its length may be excessive, to be sure, but the book's merits prove as numerous as they are substantial.

James Hershberg's massive work, *Marigold: The Lost Chance for Peace in Vietnam*, represents a significant contribution to the history of the Vietnam War. The book provides, in copious and sometimes excruciating detail, the day-by-day, and sometimes almost hour-by-hour, history of Marigold, a 1966 covert diplomatic effort that became the best known of the "secret" peace feelers launched by the administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson during the period 1965-1968 after a series of news articles about this peace effort were published in 1967 and after the publication of a book by David Kraslow and Stuart Loory titled "The Secret Search for Peace in Vietnam" (New York: Random House, 1968). In the course of his research for this book the author unearthed a veritable treasure trove of hitherto untapped documents and memoirs from a wide range of sources, both official and unofficial, and he conducted extensive interviews with a number of those who were directly involved in this operation. Hershberg author has skillfully woven this new information into a coherent account filled with fascinating new information and vignettes that I believe will be of great interest and significant value to all students of the Vietnam War. Unfortunately, however, in my opinion the author's claim that *Marigold* truly represented a "lost chance for peace in Vietnam" is not accurate. Instead, I believe that Marigold represents an object lesson in the foibles and frailties of covert diplomacy, especially when this diplomacy is conducted through third parties. It also is proof of the fact that diplomatic efforts to find solutions to conflict are doomed so long as the parties involved have not yet given up their hopes of military victory.

Briefly, Marigold was an effort in late 1966 to arrange a secret direct meeting between U.S. and North Vietnamese government officials in Warsaw in order to conduct discussions aimed at reaching an agreement to end the Vietnam War. The key figures involved in this effort were Janusz Lewandowski, a young Polish diplomat who headed the Polish delegation to the International Control Commission (a toothless international organization established by the 1954 Geneva Agreement to police the ceasefire in Indochina); the Italian Ambassador to South Vietnam, Giovanni D'Orlandi; the American Ambassador to South Vietnam, Henry Cabot Lodge; and the American Ambassador to Poland, John Gronowski.

While all of these men were talented and dedicated public servants, their fervent desire to end the war sometimes seems to have clouded their judgment and to have led each of them, perhaps even including Henry Cabot Lodge, to exceed his authority at one point or another and even to bend the truth regarding the positions of the respective parties. These actions resulted, in my opinion at least, in a series of misunderstandings and misrepresentations that led directly to the collapse of the Marigold effort. More importantly, I believe that it was only because of these misrepresentations, only because the United States and North Vietnam were each given distorted and even inaccurate information about their opponent's position and what each side was offering to the other, that *Marigold* ever got off the ground in the first place. In his book Professor Hershberg details the following specific instances in which one of the diplomats involved exceeded his instructions or exaggerated or distorted a negotiating position in order to try to get direct talks between the two parties started:

First, in June 1966 Ambassador Gronowski told the Polish government that the U.S. government was prepared to halt the bombing of North Vietnam if the North Vietnamese would simply agree to enter into talks with the U.S. Gronowski was not authorized by anyone in authority in the U.S. government to make this offer and he did not inform any of his superiors of what he had done (*Marigold*, 118-119).

Second, after a meeting with North Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Van Dong in early June 1966, Lewandowski turned what was a recitation of the standard South Vietnamese Liberation Front propaganda line by the Prime Minister into a position that seemed to represent a significant softening of the North Vietnamese position. Lewandowski then began spreading word of this new “softer” position to his contacts in the Western diplomatic community (*Marigold*, 107, 120-122, 128-130).

Third, after Lewandowski “confided” the news of the supposed softening of the North Vietnamese position to Italian Ambassador D’Orlandi in Saigon, D’Orlandi then embellished the supposed North Vietnamese position even further when D’Orlandi passed the news along to American Ambassador Lodge in Saigon (*Marigold*, 130-133). When he learned decades later of what D’Orlandi had told Lodge about what Lewandowski had told him, Lewandowski complained that the Italian had exaggerated and gone “too far” in his description of North Vietnam’s supposedly softened position and its willingness to negotiate (*Marigold*, 136).

Fourth, when the Americans took the bait and Lodge asked Lewandowski to pass along to the North Vietnamese an offer from the American government to begin talks based on what the Americans called the Phase A/Phase B formula (which offered a halt to the American bombing of North Vietnam only after the North Vietnamese agreed to take steps on their side to deescalate the fighting), Lewandowski’s presentation of the Phase A/Phase B formula to the North Vietnamese in November 1966 “fuzzied up” the formula in such a way that it appeared that Phase A would be the U.S. cessation of the bombing and that Phase B would be the subsequent discussions and negotiations (*Marigold*, 221-224), meaning that the bombing would be stopped without any preconditions.

Given this string of distortions, exaggerations, and even outright lies (one cannot view Ambassador Gronowski’s statement to the Poles as anything other than an outright lie about the negotiating position of the American government), the collapse of the entire effort appears to have been inevitable.

Hershberg indicates in his narrative that the collapse of the Marigold initiative may have caused in a shift in the balance of power inside the Vietnamese Politburo and that it enabled the hard-liners who favored a military solution to the war to beat back soft-liners like Prime Minister Pham Van Dong who were more open to diplomacy and political compromise. The author argues (539) that the Vietnamese position on negotiations with the U.S. had shifted and hardened between the period from October-November 1966, when the draft Politburo resolution on initiating “talk-fight” was debated and approved and when the North Vietnamese agreed to the proposed Warsaw meeting with the U.S., and

December 1966, when the Vietnamese informed the Poles that they were not interested in pursuing the Marigold effort any further.

While it is true that there were conflicts within the Politburo over war strategy, the problem with the author's argument is that the text of the October-November Politburo resolution is identical in substance, and virtually identical in wording, to the resolution formally adopted by the Politburo and approved by the Thirteenth Plenum of the Party Central Committee in January 1967. Without having direct access to the actual Politburo archives, there is no way to know for certain whether at the time the Marigold meeting was to be held (early December) the Politburo resolution was still being debated. However, if the dates of October-November 1966 that are printed on the Politburo resolution that Hershberg acquired (and that I translated) are accurate, the implication is that the North Vietnamese policy was already set in stone before Marigold ever got off the ground.

As Hershberg notes (44), the "talk-fight" formula adopted by the Politburo and the Central Committee was not a new idea. In a secret speech to the Party Central Committee in December 1965 Vietnamese Communist Party First Secretary Le Duan had already raised the possibility that North Vietnam would adopt the very same "Talk-Fight" formula that was approved by the Politburo and the Central Committee a year later. This is the way Le Duan described the "talk-fight" formula in his December 1965 speech:

"...[A]t some point in time, under certain specific conditions, we may be able to fight and talk simultaneously with the objective of restricting our opponent's military actions [ending the bombing of North Vietnam], of winning broader sympathy and support throughout the world, and of concealing our strategic intentions. The issue right now is the question of a favorable opportunity to employ this stratagem. The opportunity will come when our forces have won greater and more complete victories on the battlefield, when the enemy's situation has become more desperate and confused, and when the enemy's will to commit aggression has deteriorated further. That opportunity will also be the result of agreement between the fraternal socialist nations and parties about the concept of fighting and talking."¹

In fact, this is the same "talk-fight" formula that the North Vietnamese had used during the Geneva negotiations on Laos in 1962.

By far the most likely explanation for the failure of Marigold is that the North Vietnamese misunderstood the actual U.S. government position on opening direct talks as the result of Ambassador Gronowski's unauthorized statement to the Poles that the U.S. would stop the bombing of North Vietnam if the North Vietnamese would simply agree to meet with a U.S. representative and by Lewandowski's apparently deliberate 'fudging' of the American Phase A/Phase B formula when he presented it to the North Vietnamese in late November

¹ Pham Thi Vinh, editor. *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap, Tap 26: 1965* [Collected Party Documents, Volume 26: 1965] (Hanoi: National Political Publishing House, 2003), 595; James Hershberg, *Marigold: The Lost Chance for Peace in Vietnam* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 44.

1966. The North Vietnamese leaders did not realize that the U.S. government was still demanding some kind of reciprocal de-escalation of communist military activity *before* the U.S. would agree to stop the bombing of the North. They thought that all North Vietnam needed to do to obtain a halt to the U.S. bombing of North Vietnam was to have the North Vietnamese ambassador in Warsaw simply show up for the initial meeting in Warsaw. When it became clear that this was *not* the American position on the requirement for stopping the bombing, everything fell apart. The American bombing attacks against Hanoi in early December 1966, just as the initial Warsaw meetings was scheduled to begin, may have hastened the collapse of Marigold, but clearly the entire Marigold effort was built on a foundation of sand. It was a like a sandcastle, preordained to collapse the moment anyone touched it.

Rather than labeling Marigold as a “lost chance for peace,” perhaps this well-intentioned but ultimately doomed effort might better be described as a “false chance for peace.”

In February 2000, as part of the Cold War International History Project, James Hershberg published a scholarly monograph, provocatively titled: *“Who Murdered ‘Marigold’? New Evidence on the Mysterious Failure of Poland’s Secret Initiative to Start U.S.-North Vietnamese Peace Talks, 1966.”*

Twelve years later, after scouring diplomatic archives on three continents and interviewing practically everyone connected to the Marigold initiative who is still alive, Hershberg has published the definitive account of a crucial episode in Vietnam War-era diplomacy. The monograph was a mere 99 single-spaced pages; the book weighs in at just under 900 pages. One reason why the book is so long is that Hershberg includes all sorts of nuggets of information that he came across while writing his manuscript—gossip, rumors, hearsay, who traveled to what city on what airline, who almost crossed paths with whom, and the like. The book tells us just about everything we could possibly want to know about Marigold—the American code-name for a joint Polish-Italian diplomatic initiative intended to lead to talks on how to end the Vietnam War—and a lot that many readers will likely find to be of little or no use.

One of the book’s great strengths is the patience and determination Hershberg has shown while assembling his account. For almost every meeting attended by representatives of the interested parties—the United States, North Vietnam, Poland, Italy, and the former Soviet Union—Hershberg has located and retrieved from various archives the accounts sent to their governments by the participants in those meetings. This allows him to show how each of the participants viewed the results of their work and why agreement among them proved so elusive.

Much of Hershberg’s book is taken up by describing the many and varied efforts made to persuade North Vietnam to enter into peace negotiations with the United States. Marigold gets most of Hershberg’s attention, but he discusses other peace initiatives too. At times, the book focuses so intently on efforts to get peace talks started that it loses sight of the fact that there is a difference—a very big difference—between beginning peace talks and ending a war. In the context of 1965 and 1966, the search for a formula that would allow peace talks to begin served only to confirm to the parties what they already knew—namely, that they differed over who should rule in Saigon, and there was no way to compromise on this issue or to put it off until later. Each side was willing to offer a face-saving exit to the other, but neither was willing to accept such an escape hatch themselves. Both preferred to fight on rather than accept a humiliating withdrawal from South Vietnam. As long as both sides thought in zero-sum terms, opening negotiations would do little to foster a settlement.

On the other hand, a research strategy that aims to understand a case like Marigold by subjecting it to ever more detailed examination runs the risk of losing touch with the broader context within which diplomacy was played out. In practical terms, this means that

further gains in knowledge about Marigold are more likely to come from placing it in a larger context rather than putting it under an increasingly powerful microscope.

To illustrate this last point, consider the following counterfactual question. What might have happened if the ambassadors from the United States and North Vietnam had actually met in Warsaw on December 6, 1966, as suggested by the North Vietnamese side? What makes this a significant issue, and the centerpiece for much of what Hershberg has written, is a meeting that occurred in Saigon on December 1, 1966, shortly after the Polish diplomat Janusz Lewandowski returned from a visit to Hanoi. At that meeting, Lewandowski showed the U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam, Henry Cabot Lodge, a ten-point summary—drafted by Lewandowski—of the U.S. position on opening peace talks. He then told Lodge that, “I am authorized [by the North Vietnamese] to say that if the U.S. are really of the views which I have presented, it would be advisable to confirm them directly with the North Vietnamese ambassador in Warsaw” (248). Lodge sent Lewandowski’s ten points to Washington for review, and on December 3, Lodge and Lewandowski met again, during which time Lodge told Lewandowski that the U.S. Embassy in Warsaw would contact the North Vietnamese embassy there on or about December 6 (263).

Except that it did not. Hershberg makes a compelling case that the U.S. Ambassador to Poland, John Gronouski, did not attempt to contact the North Vietnamese directly, instead limiting himself to discussions at the Polish Foreign Ministry. Hershberg further makes a strong case that the North Vietnamese were indeed waiting to be contacted by the Americans. Hershberg’s case could be made even stronger, and the Johnson administration’s behavior rendered even more puzzling, by comparing Marigold to three previous peace initiatives: 1) the Mayflower contact in Moscow in May 1965; 2) the XYZ contact in Paris in August 1965; and 3) the Pinta contact in Rangoon in December 1965. In all three cases, the U.S. representatives involved initiated contact with their North Vietnamese counterparts, either by telephone or by visiting the North Vietnamese mission in their respective cities. In two other prior peace initiatives, the U.S. initiated contact with the North Vietnamese by using two Canadian diplomats, J. Blair Seaborn and Chester Ronning, to convey messages to Hanoi. A North Vietnamese official who had knowledge of previous dealings with the Americans would likely have concluded that standard procedure was to wait at their embassy for the American representative to show up, which is what the North Vietnamese Ambassador to Poland, Do Phat Quang, did on December 6 and thereafter.

So why did the U.S. Ambassador to Poland, John Gronouski, unlike his colleagues in Moscow, Paris, and Rangoon, not contact the North Vietnamese embassy, either by phone or by knocking on the door? As recounted by Hershberg, that the Johnson administration viewed with contempt the Polish and Italian diplomats involved in Marigold, and they thus kept Gronouski on a very short leash. Gronouski could meet with the North Vietnamese if they contacted him, or if the Poles arranged such a meeting, but he was not to initiate contact himself.

Hershberg’s account very convincingly suggests that the Poles did indeed share some of the responsibility for the failure of the much-anticipated Warsaw meeting to take place. The

Poles repeatedly told Grounoski that they wanted the Americans and the North Vietnamese to meet, but their actions suggest they also wanted to haggle over the wording of some of Lewandowski's ten-point statement of the American position. If the Poles really wanted a meeting to occur, two phone calls inviting each of the two ambassadors to come to the Polish Foreign Ministry at the same time could have broken the diplomatic log-jam. Or they could have told the North Vietnamese that the U.S. ambassador was seeking an appointment with them at a certain time and place, but the Poles seem not to have tried that, either.

Suppose, however, that somehow Gronouski and the North Vietnamese had managed to make direct contact with one another. Wouldn't such a meeting have been an important first step toward ending a war that was growing increasingly costly and frustrating for all the parties involved? On the American side, the Johnson administration was both explicit and consistent in its approach to how the Marigold peace initiative (and all the others as well) should progress. The Johnson administration wanted to talk about mutual de-escalation, whereby both sides would do less of what they already were doing. Ideally this would mean that the United States would stop bombing North Vietnam; the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong would halt their attacks in and around Saigon; *and* the North Vietnamese would cut back and ultimately halt infiltration of soldiers, weapons, and supplies into South Vietnam.

It's not difficult to understand why the North Vietnamese resisted this approach. Even if the United States had stopped bombing North Vietnam, there were lots of targets associated with the infiltration routes through Laos and Cambodia, in the so-called demilitarized zone between the two Vietnams, and in South Vietnam itself. The United States would also have been free to continue moving troops, equipment, and supplies into South Vietnam, because these activities were *not* infiltration across a recognized international frontier; this was simply one sovereign state helping another.

In effect, the Johnson administration saw mutual de-escalation as a pathway to victory, because once infiltration from North Vietnam into South Vietnam had been halted or even largely reduced, communist forces in South Vietnam would have been no match for American and South Vietnamese forces. Hershberg by and large concedes the point when he describes a plan for de-escalation that was formulated by British Foreign Secretary George Brown as having no chance of stopping the fighting or starting peace talks (477).

Seen this way, there was no "lost chance for peace in Vietnam," at least not in 1966, when the events covered by Hershberg's book were played out. Each side was willing to hold the door open while the other walked away, but neither was willing to walk away itself. The war for South Vietnam was a civil war. Civil wars rarely end in negotiated compromises. Usually one side wins, and the other escapes into exile (if it can). Marigold was no exception in this regard. Even if the two sides had somehow managed to meet in Warsaw, there was still the matter of the unbridgeable gap between their respective views of how and when the war should end. Both preferred fighting to talking, and several more years of fighting is what they got.

Review by Qiang Zhai, Auburn University Montgomery

James Hershberg's prodigiously researched tome makes an important contribution to the literature of the Vietnam War. With painstaking and careful scrutiny of multi-national and multi-lingual sources, he succeeds in clarifying many aspects of the mystery that has shrouded the Marigold peace initiative. His work exemplifies the best of the new international history of the Vietnam War. By illuminating and highlighting the motives, calculations, and conduct of Italian, Polish, and other East European players in Vietnam peace diplomacy, Hershberg's research meshes with a recent "de-centering" trend in the study of the Cold War that seeks to challenge conventional methods which privilege super-power politics and locate the Soviet Union and the United States at the center and the "rest of the world" in the periphery.¹

Hershberg has been a major promoter and practitioner of international collaboration and teamwork in the study of the Cold War. He helped connect scholars of Cold War studies in different parts of the world when he served as the director of the Cold War International History Project based at the Wilson Center in the late 1990s. His own investigation into the history of the secret diplomacy of the Vietnam War has benefited enormously from his cooperation with more than a half dozen scholars of different national backgrounds, who translated for him archival documents from various countries, including Poland, Italy, Russia, Hungary, Germany, and the Czech Republic.

The Marigold contact has remained a murky event in the saga of the Vietnam War. Officials from the Johnson administration tended to dismiss the initiative either as a Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) deception designed to create an atmosphere of false hope that sought to undermine the American negotiating position or as wishful thinking by naive third parties. They believed that Hanoi never truly authorized the Poles to mediate on its behalf. George Herring, the dean of Vietnam War historians, called Marigold the "most intriguing" and "most controversial" of all Vietnam peace probes.²

Drawing on previously-closed Communist archives and interviews with surviving participants, Hershberg demonstrates that Hanoi did in fact authorize Warsaw to help arrange direct talks with Washington, that Janusz Lewandowski, a Polish Foreign Ministry official, worked closely with Polish Foreign Minister Adam Rapacki, who in turn had received the blessing of the Polish Party chief Wladyslaw Gomulka and the Soviet Communist leader Leonid Brezhnev, and that the Johnson administration bungled the

¹ Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Hope M. Harrison, *Driving the Soviets up the Wall: Soviet-East German Relations, 1953-1961* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Hal Brands, *Latin America's Cold War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010); Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, *Hanoi's War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

² George C. Herring, *The Secret Diplomacy of the Vietnam War: The Negotiating Volumes of the Pentagon Papers* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), pp. 211-212.

whole matter. By emphasizing the confusion, misunderstanding, and incompetence at the highest levels in the Johnson administration, Hershberg's findings confirm the conclusion of previous scholars like Wallace J. Thies that Marigold was likely the real deal and that LBJ "was not attuned to the subtleties of DRV decision-making, and this lack of understanding would ultimately prove fatal for the Marigold contact."³ Hershberg argues persuasively that President Johnson's mishandling of Marigold represented "a diplomatic disaster of grievous proportions" (722) and a "lost chance" for peace in Vietnam.

Hershberg is a gifted historian, and his narrative and analytical skills are on full display in this remarkable volume, which reads like a historical detective story. He is able to use the Marigold case to shed light not only on the patterns and motives in North Vietnamese and American approaches to the Indochina conflict but also on larger trends and developments in the Cold War, such as the Sino-Soviet rift.

China's opposition to a political settlement constituted a major complicating factor in the secret diplomacy of the Vietnam War. As Hershberg acknowledges, neither Hanoi nor Beijing has opened its archival holdings on their interactions over the issue of Vietnam peace initiatives. But Hershberg was not deterred by this obstacle. Through his innovative and indefatigable efforts in Italian, Russian and East European archives, he is able to compensate for the lack of hard Vietnamese or Chinese evidence and to reconstruct a highly revealing and convincing picture of the intricate and convoluted dimensions of the Marigold contact.

As Hershberg recounts in an early chapter of his fascinating account, Hanoi's sudden hardening of attitudes toward talks with the United States in July 1966 was a result of Beijing's arm-twisting. When Ho Chi Minh visited China in June 1966, he "got a full blast of his [Mao's] belligerence toward the war," and Mao "rejected a political solution and stated that this problem can only be solved by the crossing of the 17th Parallel" (157). The Chinese party chief not only urged the Vietnamese Communists to invade South Vietnam but also asserted that the Soviet Union should use missiles to strike the U.S. Seventh Fleet and military bases (157). According to Hershberg, Vietnamese and Chinese archival data on Ho's 1966 trip to China are sparse, but the Soviet bloc evidence can shed new light on those Sino-Vietnamese exchanges. Until Hanoi opens its Politburo records, our knowledge about the positions and divisions among top leaders in the Vietnam Workers' Party (VWP) over how to deal with the United States remains limited. For the moment, we have to rely either on third-party archives as Hershberg has creatively done or on non-archival Vietnamese sources. One such Vietnamese source that Hershberg failed to consult is the memoirs of Hoang van Hoan, a member of the VWP Politburo who later defected to Beijing after the breakdown of Sino-Vietnamese relations in 1979. Hoang van Hoan indicates in his volume

³ Wallace J. Thies, *When Governments Collide: Coercion and Diplomacy in the Vietnam Conflict, 1964-1968* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 339.

that Le Duan, the first secretary of the VWP, was eager to pursue talks with the United States, but Ho Chi Minh disagreed with him.⁴

Despite Hershberg's lamentation at the end of his book about the unavailability of the DRV Foreign Ministry's archival files, there are encouraging signs, however, that the Vietnamese government has recently begun to open its official documents to researchers.⁵ I hope that more Vietnamese archival holdings will soon become available to help resolve such remaining Marigold mysteries as exactly what happened in and between Hanoi and Warsaw in the first week of December 1966 concerning the arrangements for the first U.S.-North Vietnamese contact.

Hershberg has produced a unique and stimulating account that illuminates critical aspects of the Vietnam War. Every serious student of the Cold War should read it.

⁴ Hoang van Hoan, *Canghai yishu: Huang van Hoan geming huiyilu* (A Drop in the Ocean: Hoang van Hoan's Revolutionary Reminiscences) (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 1987), 308.

⁵ Kosal Path, "Hanoi's Responses to Beijing's Renewed Enthusiasm to Aid North Vietnam, 1970-1972," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (Fall 2011): 101-139; Harish C. Mehta, "Soviet Biscuit Factories and Chinese Financial Grants; North Vietnam's Economic Diplomacy in 1967 and 1968," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (April 2012): 301-335. Both Path and Mehta used the collection of government documents of the DRV housed at National Archive Center No. 3 in Hanoi. The collection contains the files of the Office of the Prime Minister that include memoranda of exchanges between the Prime Minister's office, the Vice Prime Minister, and the Ministry of Foreign Trade.

Author's Response by James G. Hershberg, The George Washington University

I thank H-Diplo and especially Thomas Maddux for organizing this symposium, and deeply appreciate the comments from four colleagues from whose scholarship I have profited over the years. I am grateful for their various compliments, but will focus here on the criticisms.

I'd first quibble with Robert McMahon's doubt as to whether Marigold, had it produced direct U.S.-North Vietnamese discussions, might have had "immense" historical consequences. In doing so I do not so much take the debatable position that a meeting between U.S. and Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) diplomats in Warsaw in December 1966 would have genuinely or rapidly produced "peace"—a debate I will join below in responding to Merle Pribbenow and Wallace Thies—but in two other respects. Both of these imagined consequences of the opening of a direct and sustained Washington-Hanoi dialogue beginning in late 1966/early 1967 are inevitably counterfactual and speculative, but they are also potentially "immense" and, to my mind, at least plausible.

The most important and likely consequence concerns U.S. domestic politics. Had direct "peace talks" then started, this would at least have neutralized or seriously weakened the most potent objection to President Lyndon Johnson from the anti-war left wing of the Democratic Party: his failure to enter negotiations with Hanoi, or even make evident progress toward doing so, and persistent reports that he had 'bungled' or, worse, deliberately sabotaged promising peace overtures. Even had U.S.-North Vietnamese discussions later collapsed or (as with the Paris talks starting in the spring of 1968) dragged on yet failed to end the fighting, Johnson could have made a far stronger argument that he had done all he could on the diplomatic front, and that Hanoi's obduracy had blocked progress toward peace. Consequently, it is difficult to imagine that a serious challenge to his re-nomination would have emerged. In the event, antiwar activists were repeatedly turned down by leading Democratic Party figures before Minnesota Senator Eugene McCarthy grudgingly agreed to make what he assumed would be a purely symbolic, token challenge—and, without McCarthy (let alone his true nemesis, Bobby Kennedy) running against him, it seems unlikely that even the tumult surrounding the Tet Offensive would have driven Johnson to withdraw from the race, and to relinquish voluntarily the prize he had sought his entire life, as of course he did on March 31, 1968.

And what if Tet had not then taken place? A less clearly foreseeable consequence of direct U.S.-North Vietnamese talks brought about by "Marigold"—but certainly "immense" if it had happened—is the possibility that they might have significantly influenced Hanoi's secret decision-making on military strategy during 1967, and most importantly, of course, that this might have altered the process that led to decision to launch the Tet Offensive in early 1968. Had the nationwide attempted uprising throughout South Vietnam not taken place when it did (on 30-31 January 1968), or even had it been delayed by a few months, that would have dramatically altered the context and thus the dynamic of events in the first months of 1968, including of course the New Hampshire presidential primary (which saw

McCarthy nearly upset the incumbent, prompting Kennedy to enter the race and severely weakening Johnson's bid for the nomination).

I'll turn now to the chief criticism leveled by Merle Pribbenow and Wallace Thies—that Marigold did not really constitute a “lost chance” to end the Vietnam War, since this diplomatic initiative, like others, was “doomed,” its collapse “inevitable,” because both sides had “not yet given up their hopes of military victory.” (Pierre Asselin recently argued a comparable position, stressing Hanoi's determination to achieve military victory and the consequent futility of peace efforts, in *Diplomatic History*.¹) Before doing so I would like to stress my profound debt to Vietnamese studies experts who, unlike me, are able to read Vietnamese sources in the original; who have enriched the field through their scholarship; and who aided my inquiry into Marigold through their publications and, in many cases, collegial conversations, translations of sources, conference papers, etc. These include such scholars as Pribbenow, Asselin, William Duiker, Mark Bradley, Robert Brigham, Christopher Goscha, Stein Tønnesson, David W.P. Elliott, and Lien-Hang T. Nguyen—and in particular, among Vietnamese scholars, Nguyen Vu Tung and the late (and greatly missed) Luu Doan Huynh. So it is with great humility that I venture to disagree.

Yet I do. First a word of clarification about the subtitle seems necessary. Pribbenow contends that, rather than *The Lost Chance for Peace in Vietnam*, a more accurate subtitle for *Marigold* would be *The False Chance for Peace in Vietnam*. But I should stress—as I do in the book—that what I believe was indeed a *missed* chance was not necessarily a *very good* chance. As the book acknowledges quite clearly, it was possible, even probable, that direct U.S.-North Vietnamese talks, had they started in December 1966, would have broken down, most likely over the presence of regular North Vietnamese (i.e., People's Army of Vietnam, or PAVN) troops in South Vietnam—Washington demanded their withdrawal, Hanoi refused to acknowledge their existence; and of course, hawks in Washington would have been loathe to abandon the option of escalated military force rather than the acceptance of painful compromise.² Still, I argue that the “lost chance” was real—“by no

¹ Pierre Asselin, “We Don't Want a Munich”: Hanoi's Diplomatic Strategy 1965-1968, *Diplomatic History*, vol. 36, no. 3, (June 2012): 547-81. (However, Asselin does not specifically address the evidence and arguments presented in *Marigold: The Lost Chance for Peace in Vietnam*, and his analysis and evidence center on the period from 1965 to early 1966, when we agree that Hanoi resolutely rejected diplomacy or negotiations and remained fixated on a military triumph. See *Marigold*, prologue.) Another expert able to use Vietnamese sources, after reading an early version of my Marigold findings, seems to find plausible the idea that at least some senior figures in the North Vietnamese leadership in late 1966 wished to enter direct discussions with the Americans, although she does note that the powerful VWP first secretary, Le Duan, “remained apprehensive of a diplomatic solution and moved to block the powerful ‘peace’ proponents.” See Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, *Hanoi's War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), p. 78. Conversely, in his comment, Zhai Qiang cites Hoang van Hoan's assertion that Le Duan was actually eager to pursue talks with the Americans but Ho Chi Minh disagreed with him. Suffice to say that much mystery and uncertainty still surrounds Le Duan's precise positions during the war.

² See James G. Hershberg, *Marigold: The Lost Chance for Peace in Vietnam* (Washington, DC: Wilson Center Press/Stanford University Press, 2012), epilogue (esp. pp. 726-31).

means a sure thing, but it genuinely existed.” But for what? By *peace*, the subtitle did not mean that “Marigold” constituted a realistic opportunity to attain *peace on American terms*—that is, to achieve the iron-clad, permanent entrenchment and assurance of a non-communist, even anti-communist government in Saigon of a separate South Vietnamese state. I fully agree with Pribbenow and Thies (and many other specialists) that Hanoi had no intention of relinquishing its aim of national unification under its own, communist, control. However, what *Marigold* does argue is that in late 1966, at least some key figures in the North Vietnamese leadership—appalled at the damage inflicted by the war and the prospect of fighting the Americans for years to come, at even higher levels of violence, and intrigued at the revised U.S. terms related by Lewandowski—seriously considered the dangled potential alternative of attaining that objective more slowly, but at far lesser cost, by negotiating an exit for American military forces that would allow the North Vietnamese to finish the job later (after a ‘decent interval,’ to coin a phrase)—by a political process in Saigon if possible, but militarily if necessary.

Though unable to read the original Vietnamese sources—which, alas, are in any case still quite limited in their illumination of internal high-level debates and decision-making in Hanoi—I *did* benefit from some significant and contemporaneous non-Vietnamese records from communist nations in close contact with the DRV, which, in turn, fit at least some of the Vietnamese evidence that has emerged.

What sort of evidence? In the book I lay out in much greater detail my case for the North Vietnamese being serious about Marigold.³ Most significant, of course, is the contemporaneous evidence contained in the ciphred telegrams from Hanoi of Janusz Lewandowski, the Polish delegate to the International Control Commission (ICC), reporting his conversations with Pham Van Dong on 25 and 28 November 1966. In those talks, the Pole reported, North Vietnam’s premier not only conveyed authoritatively his government’s agreement to receive an official U.S. government representative at its Warsaw embassy to confirm America’s adherence to the positions the Pole had reported hearing in Saigon from Lyndon Johnson’s ambassador, Henry Cabot Lodge, but also promised that his government would take a “positive attitude” in ensuing direct discussions.⁴ (This essential agreement for substantive direct contact with the U.S. government, despite the absence of any prior agreement by Washington to stop bombing North Vietnam—Hanoi’s endlessly reiterated precondition for direct talks—is corroborated by internal Vietnamese histories, citing still-closed records, as well as the testimony of a Vietnamese foreign ministry official secretly dispatched from Hanoi to

³ Hershberg, *Marigold*, chaps. 4 (esp. pp. 234-40), 11 (esp. pp. 493-7), 12 (esp. pp. 538-42), and—for the counter-factual speculation—epilogue (esp. pp. 724-31).

⁴ Hershberg, *Marigold*, pp. 229-31 (November 25), 232-4 (November 28). For the full texts of Lewandowski’s ciphred telegrams on these meetings, translated from Polish, see the author’s Electronic Briefing Book on the website of the National Security Archive, “Cracking a Vietnam War Mystery” (15 January 2012) at <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB369/index.htm>

Warsaw to carry instructions for the DRV ambassador, Do Phat Quang, and to translate the planned meeting with his American counterpart.)⁵

I agree with Pribbenow that the Marigold story “represents an object lesson in the foibles and frailties of covert diplomacy, especially when this diplomacy is conducted through third parties.” Yet, the examples he correctly cites of diplomatic distortions, inaccuracies, or exceeded instructions do not detract from the crucial fact—which the book establishes firmly, contrary to claims or insinuations by leading U.S. officials, including Lyndon Johnson, his National Security Advisor, Walt Rostow, and his Secretary of State, Dean Rusk—that Lewandowski *accurately* reported Hanoi’s consent to enter direct contacts with the Americans in Warsaw, based essentially on the “ten points” that Washington agreed “broadly represented” U.S. policy. (As for Lewandowski’s apparently “fuzzier” description of the Phase A/Phase B procedure, it’s not clear whether that would have been a serious obstacle had contacts actually started, since mutual agreement, even tacit, on the “ten points” essentially constituted the advance accord on a “Phase B” that could have justified a bombing halt; at least Hanoi would have put the ball in the American court.)

But even before Lewandowski journeyed to Hanoi in mid-November, intriguing Polish and Chinese evidence suggests that at this juncture—just as the Politburo was debating whether to accord greater weight to the diplomatic struggle—at least some in the Hanoi leadership were contemplating a move to the negotiating table. Contemporaneous Chinese sources corroborate intelligence relayed from Poland’s ambassador in Hanoi (quoting an unidentified yet allegedly “quite reliable” North Vietnamese source) to establish that the powerful first secretary of the Vietnamese Workers Party (VWP), Le Duan, secretly visited Beijing to inform the Chinese leaders of Hanoi’s intent, “after arduous military effort,” to “accede to peace talks.” (Despite China’s well-known bellicose preference for armed struggle, Mao Zedong told Le Duan that Beijing would follow Hanoi’s lead, since “After all, it is you who are fighting on the front line.”)⁶ Moreover, around this time Poland’s hard-line (even neo-Stalinist) ambassador in Hanoi, Jerzy Siedlecki—normally quite happy to parrot North Vietnamese propaganda proclaiming confidence in inevitable victory—reported signs of fatigue. In a striking departure from his usual fervid endorsement of Hanoi’s confident military focus, Siedlecki reported that behind its firm front, troubles were mounting. His “quite reliable” Vietnamese informant described growing war-weariness—“People’s tiredness can be seriously felt”—and rising rates of desertion and non-reporting for duty in the North Vietnamese army (PAVN); enforced drafts of older and younger men, leaving behind “mostly girls” in villages and factories; a “very difficult situation” in the south recently presented by a National Liberation Front delegation to the VWP Politburo; Le Duan’s aforementioned secret trip to China “to present the need [for] talks with the US”;

⁵ Luu Van Loi and Nguyen Anh Vu, *Tiep xuc bi mat Viet Nam-Hoa Ky truoc Hoi nghi Pa-ri [Secret Interactions between Vietnam-US Before Paris Negotiations]* (Ha Noi: Vien Quan He Quoc Te [Institute of International Relations], 1990; 2002 edition); and Nguyen Dinh Phuong, interview with author, Hanoi, June 1999.

⁶ See sources quoted in Hershberg, *Marigold*, pp. 219-20.

and a decidedly more pragmatic, less ideological line purveyed by the VWP first secretary to his propaganda department.⁷ If Siedlecki's source proffered even roughly accurate data, it meant the purportedly more appealing U.S. stand that Lewandowski conveyed might have strengthened those in the leadership, such as Pham Van Dong, who were willing to give peace—or at least peace talks—a chance.

Another potentially important factor that may have led North Vietnamese leaders to be more willing to consider exploring a diplomatic track in order to achieve a U.S. military exit—fortuitously coinciding with the *Marigold* initiative—was a clear decline in Beijing's influence in Hanoi due to the Cultural Revolution, which had exploded in the summer of 1966 and progressively turned China's focus inward. The North Vietnamese were reportedly aghast at the excesses taking place in their northern neighbor, but also recognized a fall-off in the steady and often shrill Chinese pressure to reject diplomacy in favor of 'armed struggle' against the imperialists. During *Marigold*, the Soviet leader, Leonid I. Brezhnev—who had been kept informed by the Poles of the diplomatic initiative and given it his personal blessing—concluded that Hanoi, in an abrupt change, now seriously considered talking to the Americans (which they had refused to do, despite Soviet-bloc urging, for over a year). "[T]he Chinese leadership has other things to worry about than the Vietnamese," Brezhnev told a closed communist party audience on 12 December 1966, according to his notes. "This is what the Vietnamese comrades think, in any case, and they are beginning certain probing about talks."⁸

Of course, the North Vietnamese could have been telling their Soviet-bloc patrons and allies what they wanted to hear, and even a genuine commitment to enter discussions with Washington—which *Marigold* clearly establishes—hardly proves an authentic willingness to bargain seriously, or make the compromises necessary to reach any agreement. As Thies astutely notes, "there is a difference—a very big difference—between beginning peace talks and ending a war." Even if those direct talks had rapidly failed, however, they at least would have broken the taboo on such discussions, which might well have eased the process of resuming them later. That would have been preferable to what in fact happened, which was worse than nothing at all—a failure before direct talks, which both sides blamed on the other's bad faith, making it even *harder* to move toward direct or serious discussions.

How serious Hanoi would have been in negotiations indeed hinges on whether it was firmly committed to the primacy of the military and political struggle, relegating diplomacy to a supporting role. As Pribbenow correctly points out, a Politburo resolution with the date October-November 1966 on top was "identical in substance, and virtually identical in wording," to the resolution approved by Politburo and then the Vietnam Workers Party Central Committee in January 1967 enshrining the "Talk-Fight" strategy that Le Duan had secretly outlined in December 1965. However, only the final Politburo resolution has

⁷ See sources cited in Hershberg, *Marigold*, pp. 235-36.

⁸ See Hershberg, *Marigold*, pp. 354-56.

actually emerged from secret Hanoi archives (in published form). In contending that the January 1967 VWP Politburo resolution may have been altered—that is, significantly hardened—since its initial drafting in October/November 1966, most likely due to Marigold’s collapse, I in fact relied heavily on Pribbenow’s own judgment, which he communicated when we electronically discussed the question. “Politburo resolutions frequently exist in many forms, some shortened and some longer, as they are disseminated to various audiences and revised and reworded several times while they work their way up to the Central Committee,” he e-mailed me. “So I am certain that the above passages”—referring to the Fight-Talk, Talk-Fight strategy—“are simply a later rework of the originally-approved November 1966 Politburo resolution.”⁹ Of course, the key question is whether such a “later rework” may have been merely cosmetic or stylistic, but not substantive, or, by contrast, a significant stiffening in terms.

Ultimately, a firmer determination must await the opening of additional North Vietnamese archival records.¹⁰ In this respect I am happy to conclude optimistically by noting the comments of Qiang Zhai. While working on Marigold, for well over a decade I tried to obtain—through myriad means—original Vietnamese archival sources that could resolve many key mysteries regarding the affair. In the end I was able to obtain some crucial evidence through oral history interviews and internal Vietnamese-language sources that quoted archival records, but not the original files themselves.

To conclude: Could direct U.S.-North Vietnamese discussions have started in December 1966 rather than in May 1968—in other words, did conditions and consent exist for them to begin on both sides, only to be derailed by misjudgments and contingent events? The evidence presented in *Marigold* suggests that the answer, contrary to previous assumptions and historiography, is *yes*. Could those discussions, once begun, have achieved significant progress toward some sort of settlement (at least a provisional one permitting the extraction of U.S. military forces), or were they inevitably doomed to collapse—or to essential irrelevance, given the North Vietnamese “Talk-Fight” strategy and/or military hawkishness on the American side, until battlefield developments proved decisive? That remains unclear. Could the Hanoi archives clear up Marigold’s remaining mysteries, and the key question of how serious North Vietnam was about the matter? Absolutely.

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⁹ Probbenow e-mail to author, 22 March 2007.

¹⁰ In particular, the DRV foreign ministry files should contain, among other items, cable traffic between Hanoi and its embassy in Warsaw (and ambassador Do Phat Quang) in December 1966 and an internal post-mortem of the affair that was prepared immediately after its collapse (as DRV foreign minister Nguyen Duy Trinh told the Polish ambassador in Hanoi).

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