

***Nothing is Impossible: America's Reconciliation with Vietnam.* By Ted Osius. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2022. Hardcover: 332pp.**

*Nothing is Impossible* tells one of the most remarkable diplomatic stories of the past three decades: how the United States and Vietnam, two former implacable enemies, overcame the tragedy of war to build an enduring new relationship aimed at forging a better future for their people.

The book, written as a personal memoir of Ted Osius, who served as American ambassador to Vietnam from December 2014 to November 2017, makes an important contribution to the understanding of the history of US-Vietnam relations. It offers an outstanding account of a rare transformational journey in history when the two peoples, formerly divided by bitter ideological differences and engaged in one of the most devastating wars of the twentieth century, found their way towards a spirit of reconciliation. The book provides valuable insights into how this reconciliation came about and the role that different actors in both countries played from the early 1990s onwards. The book also brings analysts and historians rich materials to study the evolution of US–Vietnam relations. Prominent examples include the behind-the-scenes stories related to the historical visit of General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong to the United States in 2015, which Osius described as the most consequential accomplishment of his tenure, or the little-known details around President Barack Obama's visit to Vietnam one year later.

Thanks to Osius' outstanding knowledge of Vietnamese history and culture, the book is also a good primer of Vietnam's recent history since its adoption of *Doi Moi* (renovation) in 1986. Based on his experience as an embassy staff member in Hanoi between 1996 and 1998, Osius provides a detailed account of how the United States and Vietnam began to re-engage during that decade, mainly through small-scale cooperation over legacy issues, including the search for missing American servicemen and the clean-up of unexploded ordnance. Much of it documents Osius' travels across Vietnam, his interactions with ordinary people, and the lessons he learned from the diplomats and politicians that he encountered.

The book also tells an inspiring story of how international diplomacy can create a better world by describing a 20-year journey of daring diplomacy that led not only to the reconciliation between

the two former foes, but also the constant improvement in their bilateral ties. The book vividly illustrates how diplomacy—not just government to government, but also people to people and culture to culture—allowed the two countries to overcome seemingly irreconcilable differences. For example, engagement on issues such as human rights, once thought impossible, also progressed as bilateral relations developed.

Osius also offers a vivid account of the various forms of diplomacy that, starting in the 1990s, made this reconciliation possible. In his view, the leaders who put aside past traumas to work on a brighter future for both peoples played a crucial role in the reconciliation process. They include senators John McCain and John Kerry, two Vietnam War veterans and ideological opponents who set aside their differences for a greater cause, and Pete Peterson—a former prisoner of war who became the first US ambassador to post-unification Vietnam. Osius also drew upon his own experiences working with various Vietnamese leaders and his encounters with ordinary Vietnamese people during his trips across the country. These personal anecdotes make for a compelling story about how a multitude of individuals played equally important roles in bringing about the reconciliation between the two countries.

Taking a bottom-up approach, Osius demonstrates throughout the book his strong belief that America's reconciliation with Vietnam was primarily driven by individual cooperation and friendship. The openness of Vietnamese leaders, and the willingness of Americans to show respect for Vietnam, were the main driving forces behind this process, during which the two sides were able to overcome distrust and work together to promote their shared interests, be it trade and investment or strategic challenges in the South China Sea. Through various sections of the book, the author indicates that reconciliation involved deeply emotional matters, including acknowledging the pain and horrors of war. Therefore, the tools and behaviour needed to further reconcile the two former enemies should emphasize the significance of trust building and mutual respect. Towards this end, Osius makes several recommendations on how US-Vietnam relations should proceed in the future: establishing deeper people-to-people connections; increasing trade opportunities; and maintaining and improving existing partnerships.

Overall, as the book engrossingly tells, the remarkable transformation of the United States and Vietnam from bitter enemies into close friends and partners, in which the author himself played

a significant role, has truly shown that *nothing is impossible* in bilateral relations. The book will serve as a valuable reference for any researchers, historians, scholars, students and diplomats interested in US-Vietnam relations, a partnership that is becoming increasingly consequential not only for both countries but the wider region as well.

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