

## Vietnam's Offspring: The Lesson Of Legitimacy

by  
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### INTRODUCTION

More than ten years ago, in late April 1975, Saigon was the scene of jarring and contrasting images that spelled the end of a long war. On April 30 three North Vietnamese tanks slammed through the gates of the Presidential Palace and Hanoi's flag flew on the courtyard flagpole, while the day before "Huey" helicopters plucked the final line of American refugees from the rooftop of the U.S. Embassy in "Operation Frequent Wind." Seeing the newsclips of this last evacuation, President Gerald Ford remarked to an aide, "It's over. Let's put it behind us."<sup>1</sup>

Whatever else Americans have done with Vietnam, they have certainly not put it behind them. Everywhere in the Third World where the remotest prospect for American intervention in some local contretemps looms, the ghost of Vietnam again casts a shadow. Currently, the "lessons" of Vietnam are invoked by both sides to the debate over the proper extent of American involvement in El Salvador and over the propriety of aid to the *contras* in Nicaragua.<sup>2</sup> In the 1984 presidential campaign, President Reagan defiantly called the *contras* of Nicaragua "freedom fighters". Painfully aware of the possibility of another Vietnam in Central America, his Democratic challengers worried over American involvement. Walter Mondale, though not as confident about the region's prospects, worried about the consequences of "pulling the plug" on yet another friend — El Salvador. Gary Hart fretted over the spectre of American blood being spilled in a new conflict. In a reflective mood after the campaign, former U.N. Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick said in an interview that "the U.S. should never have gotten into the Vietnam War 'in the first place,'" and, as a result of this debilitating legacy, America should commit military force to Central America only "as a last resort."<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger, in outlining six tests for the future commitment of U.S. military force, specifically invoked the lessons of Vietnam to reassure the nation that it would not be "dragged into a quagmire in Central America."<sup>4</sup>

People draw their lessons from their memories, from a set of images. Some, with Ronald Reagan, remember Vietnam as a "noble crusade," while others relive with Daniel Ellsberg his nightmare of the war as a heinous "crime."<sup>5</sup> Despite the elusiveness of the 'truth' of the Vietnam experience, discovering that truth remains an important task if any coherent, useful lessons are to emerge from these memories and that experience.

### HISTORICAL LESSONS

The war can be most clearly understood if it is seen as having been fought at two levels. On one level, it was an international struggle between the American foreign policy of containment and the communist strategy of people's war. On another plane, it was a national struggle in Vietnam between Communists and "Nationalists" (for lack of a better word for the likes of Ngo Dinh Diem and Nguyen Van Thieu) for the mantle of legiti-

macy.<sup>6</sup> The two struggles never truly fit together well, but they were both always there. In part, the clash of people's images, memories, and lessons stems from this frustrating antinomy.

For Americans, it was the international struggle that brought the U.S. to Vietnam and it is questions emanating from the international level, as the U.S. continues to attempt to recapture a coherent global foreign policy, that compels America to sift through the wreckage for the 'lessons' of Vietnam. There are two points of focus: first, there emerges a philosophical question and second, an instrumental question. Philosophically, are Marxist, people's wars, or, more generally, communist-supported insurgencies, a threat to American foreign policy interests? To answer this, one must consider the international view of the world and what role America envisions for itself in this world. America's role had been clear — it had a Containment Doctrine up until the time it slammed into the hard wall of Vietnam, or, as some would prefer, fell into a quagmire. If America needs to be concerned about the outcomes to these insurgencies, what is the optimal level of Western intervention necessary to prevent the success of Marxist, people's wars? Answering this question lands one squarely in the local context in which the insurgency is being fought out. This context is best understood as the struggle for legitimacy between the domestic insurgents and incumbents. Bard O'Neill, for one, supports this contention by opening his book, *Insurgency in the Modern World*, with the assertion that "insurgency is essentially a political legitimacy crisis of some sort."<sup>7</sup>

In coming to terms with this larger question of the lessons of Vietnam one should perhaps answer the instrumental question first, to determine if Western interventions in behalf of an insurgency-ridden ally are feasible and useful at all, before considering the philosophical (or international level) question of intervention as a normative value of foreign policy objective. While conceding that this philosophical question is ultimately the more important of the two, it is the instrumental question, in the author's opinion, which must be answered first. Without knowing whether, or under what conditions, an intervention could be successful, the debate over the philosophical question is abstract, charged with moral rhetoric and posturing, and basically groundless.

This article will be confined to the instrumental question and to presentation of an analytical framework or model of *legitimacy*, which the author considers the central issue of an insurgency. The explication of this framework is but a part of the larger process of drawing lessons from history. According to E. H. Carr, the first task in drawing lessons from history is the interpretation of the event under investigation from a clearly defined vantage point.<sup>8</sup> Elucidation of this vantage point allows the context of one event to be compared with the context of another. In this way, Carr avers, one can discern "what is general in the unique."<sup>9</sup> This is the process the author attempts to use with regard to the Vietnam war, gaining a "vantage point," a perspective on which to base research questions. The process of drawing lessons by relating one context to another and thereby determining what is relevant to a lesson, and what is not, W. H. Walsh calls "colligation."<sup>10</sup>

Ernest May has added an important refinement to this process by insisting that historical lessons are properly drawn only from comparing one component of an event to a similar component in another event, not from applications of an entire event wholesale.<sup>11</sup> No victory is ever total, nor is every loss final. Even in victory there are things done wrong and stupidly, and in defeat there are yet deeds of intelligence and glowing success. Hence, the lessons from any conflict do not derive from the general outcome of success or failure, but from the constitutive components of the victory or the defeat. The German *blitzkrieg* was not the origin of the German defeat in World War II, nor was people's war the strategy by which the Vietnamese Communists came to power in 1975.<sup>12</sup> These "facts" may make no difference to the Vietnamese and Germans of today, but they do to the Salvadoran guerrilla commandante who may think that "history" is on his side because he is following a people's war strategy which had "soundly defeated" the Americans in Vietnam a decade earlier.

In pursuing this process of colligation, Robert Jervis contributes the further insight that a candidate lesson can be established only after passing it through an array of competing analogies or cases to see if it retains validity.<sup>13</sup> An examination of the single case of Vietnam may suggest that if a Western intervention in support of an incumbent regime escalates to the point of introducing ground combat troops, the intervention has gone too far because the undermining of the local regime's legitimacy becomes irreparable with the massive presence of foreign troops. From this, the lesson to the Reagan administration in El Salvador from the single case of Vietnam would indicate the efficacy in not going beyond the current "Advisor War." Examining an array of competing cases, however, one finds that this thesis is not always proven. In other cases of Western intervention in Marxist, people's wars, one finds it valid for the earlier French intervention in Indochina, but not for the insurgencies in Malaya and Greece, where, in both cases, large numbers of British soldiers intervened in support of the incumbent regimes with no cost to the regime's legitimacy. With the addition of an array of competing but similar cases, the lesson for the Reagan administration in El Salvador is no longer quite as clear as it was from the single case of Vietnam.

The method of "colligation" in deriving the lessons of Vietnam involves several steps. First, in answering the instrumental question "What is the optimal level of Western intervention, if any, in Marxist, people's wars?", the thesis is advanced that insurgencies are manifestations of legitimacy crises. The focal point then, in sifting through the debris of the Vietnam experience for lessons, is the issue of legitimacy. Second, to determine "the generalizable from the unique" in this investigation, an analytical framework of legitimacy is developed that divides this political objective into component parts and levels. The framework, with its set of questions, and attendant structure and common variables flowing from it, can then be superimposed on other cases. Third, the framework is used to analyze the case of Vietnam for a provisional answer to the instrumental question. To provide the array of similar cases suggested by Jervis for comparative lessons, the war in Vietnam is placed in a class of events that might be categorized as 'Western Interventions in Marxist People's Wars.'

The fourth step, then, is to use the framework of legitimacy to perform analyses on interventions similar to that in Vietnam: Mao's "long march" to power in China (1920-1949), the three rounds of the Greek civil war (1941-1949), the campaign against the Huks in the Philippines (1946-1956), the Malayan Emergency (1948-1960), the history of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia (1967-1975), and the pursuit of power by the Pathet Lao in Laos (1955-1975). More definitive answers to the initial instrumental question are offered. Finally, the implications drawn from these lessons can suggest answers to the more important philosophic question, "Should Western powers intervene in Marxist people's wars?" While operating within the context of this scheme, the present article will be confined to discussion of the first two steps: the determination of insurgence, as legitimacy crises, and the presentation of the devised analytical framework of legitimacy.

### INSURGENCIES AS LEGITIMACY CRISES

Put simply, legitimacy means "rightful rule." Any social system maintains itself by having one group, class, or sector of the society possess a sufficient concentration of power to control and guarantee the functioning of the society as a whole. In the context of each of these social systems, societies, or states, this concentration of power requires justification. The relative success of this power-wielding group's justification is its degree of legitimacy. In Eqbal Ahmad's words, legitimacy is "that crucial and ubiquitous factor in politics which invests power with authority."<sup>14</sup> Thus, to such social scientists as Harry Eckstein, "The issue of support and opposition, legitimacy and illegitimacy, stands at the crux of all political study."<sup>15</sup> Every government or political regime lives on a grant of legitimacy from its populace. Without such a grant, an incumbent regime either freezes into a rigid totalitarianism, or rots in corruption and incompetence. Usually and eventually as a result, it faces a challenge to its rule, through a *coup d'état*, revolutionary insurrection, or festering insurgency. Insurgencies stand out from their counterparts' immediacy and surprise by being revolutions "on the slow burn," feeding gradually on their incumbent regimes' illegitimacy.

Insurgencies have almost come to be a characteristic of the process of development or modernization in the so-called Third World. Orthodox economic theorists like Albert O. Hirschman describe economic growth as being, inevitably, an imbalanced process which results in frequent bottlenecks as the pendulum swings between forward and backward linkages, striving for balance and stability.<sup>16</sup> In many ways, insurgencies occur as a result of imbalances in the process of political development and impede further political progress. Either the regime will break through the political and military challenge represented by the insurgents, thereby reestablishing its legitimacy, and move on, or it will eventually be overwhelmed by the insurgents who have to establish their own justification for rule (legitimacy) and themselves move on to the next challenge. In any insurgency, the period in the middle (the bottleneck) when it is unclear whose claim to, and brand of, legitimacy will triumph can seem to be an endless and hopeless interregnum.

A difficult concept and goal in the best of circumstances, legitimacy is particularly elusive in an insurgency where at least two sides try to establish

their own vision of legitimate rule. The government has to defend both its vision of, and its performance of, legitimacy while the insurgents seek only to destroy the government's capability to perform. They, in turn, often have a vision which is vague, lacks authenticity in the culture, or is better hidden. Marxism-Leninism, after all, is a European import saddled with such unpalatable tenets as atheism and agricultural collectivization. Bufeted by these two forces, an insurgency becomes a legitimacy crisis, in regard to what legitimacy is and to the possessor of its mantle.

Especially in a crisis, but more generally as well, legitimacy has many facets. As Max Weber once put it, "compliance with authority is almost invariably determined by a combination of motives."<sup>17</sup> Regardless of the combination of motives, authority has to justify itself at three levels of legitimacy: at the level of the social system and of social values, at the level of the regime that upholds this system, and at the level of the efficacy of the regime's particular policies. A "legitimate authority" or regime is basically judged or indicated by three sets of corresponding questions. Is the regime adhering to agreed upon moral principles of fairness and justice? Is the regime duly constituted and performing its functions? Is the regime effective in its performance and fair in its particular policies? Answering these questions defines the dynamic process of legitimation. Legitimacy crises come in two degrees of severity: the first occurring if the answer to any of the questions is no, and the second, more serious crisis, if the terms of the questions themselves are in dispute. An insurgency is clearly a legitimacy crisis of the second degree.

### **LEGITIMACY FRAMEWORK: FIRST CUT**

The author's analytical framework of legitimacy can be best understood if it is presented in two cuts: first, as a general overview of the struggle itself and then as a more detailed introduction to the types of legitimacy goals and issues or variables involved.

In an insurgency, two sides, the incumbents and the insurgents, struggle for the prize or goal of legitimacy. They struggle partly between themselves over who should possess this mantle, but they both also struggle with the concept and goal itself, trying to meet exacting standards especially those accepted by the populace. An insurgency, seen as a legitimacy struggle, is a race up a mountain by the two claimants making appeals on three levels (or types of calculation) for the support of the people.

The most basic calculation or level of support is that of *interest*. Here the individuals and the masses move with the prevailing winds. They calculate their personal security to blend in and become inconspicuous to both sides. At this level, they take personal advantage of those programs and policies that benefit them, and grumble about those that do not. This "legitimacy" of interest, at best, offers *passive* support to the contending sides.

A second or intermediate level of support is that of *opportunity*. Here some individuals and some groups calculate that real advantage can be had by actively joining one side or another, whether for the opportunity of command and influence with the insurgents or riches and prestige with the

incumbent regime. Calculation at this level requires an *active* commitment to the side of choice and produces the tier of cadre leaders so vital to any side's quest for legitimation. This is basically the level at which organization and mobilization take place.

Finally, at the summit, there is the consideration of ideology or belief, having moved from calculation of individual interest and opportunity to a calculation that sublimates these individual concerns to a largely selfless devotion to "the cause." Few in a society, on either side, will rise to this level of support but, as Andrew Molnar points out, an insurgency gains staying power only insofar as it is able to transform its earlier, cadre level, motivation of opportunity to commitment, for a fair percentage of these stalwarts, to its cause and ideology.<sup>18</sup> The requisite of a core number of "true believers," applies equally to the incumbent regime.

An insurgency and reacting counterinsurgency, then, is a struggle for a working minority, a "steel frame," of true believers. This working minority believes in the legitimacy of their side, ensuring an organization that offers enough opportunities to enlist active commitments toward sustaining its activities as well as ensuring an acquiescent majority whose calculations at least will not hinder the respective campaigns for legitimacy.

#### LEGITIMACY MODEL: SECOND CUT

There is, generally, an essential duality to an insurgency. Insurgency, as observed above, is a legitimacy crisis "of sorts," but it is also a revolution "on the slow burn." The struggle concerns both national legitimacy and revolutionary legitimacy. Regarding the quest for national legitimacy, virtually all theorists of political development characterize developing countries as transitional societies caught between the persistent hold of tradition and beckoning of modernity. Fred Riggs calls these transitional societies "prismatic," viewing the process of development as movement from traditional "fused" societies through the intermediate "prismatic" phase to culminate in the modern, fully "diffracted" society. By a "fused" society Riggs means a society with essentially one, undifferentiated set of values secured by one authority structure. A "diffracted" society, is a completely modern society with a set of differentiated and pluralistic values, with pluralistic and competitive authority or institutional structures to match. The intermediate stage, a "prismatic" society, is marked by conflicting systems with some values tightly fused and others in the process of breaking up.<sup>19</sup> Thus, prismatic societies are ones plagued by political bottlenecks which provide the fertile social soil for nurturing insurgencies.

Most early theorists of political development viewed it, as Riggs did, as a difficult, turbulent process, but one which, nevertheless, moved in a linear direction gradually tracing a path of political reform, economic growth, and social progress similar to that undertaken centuries earlier by the advanced Western industrial democracies. Samuel Huntington was one of the first of these theorists to challenge this confidence in a linear path. He warned that although modernity, as a goal, would bring about stability, the modernization process itself might instead become derailed and lead to decay or even revolution. The key for Huntington in deciding the direction of this process lay in how each society resolved the issue of the "Green Uprising," the integration of the rural masses *into* the existing

political system rather than the mobilization *against* it. That rural mobilization held the potential for breaking the political system, Huntington shrewdly pointed out, was due to the regime's dilemma in balancing the largely traditional aspirations, for example, land reform, of the peasantry against the more Western and utopian values of the urban middle class.<sup>20</sup> The problem faced by Huntington's "Green Uprising" presented the same legitimacy crisis mapped out in this framework.

With this in mind, national legitimacy is divided into the twin calls of traditional legitimacy — the continuing operative remnants of a polity's pre-modern political culture and institutional structure — and modern legitimacy — those orientations and institutions tied to the engine of modernization. The quest for national legitimacy presents the challenge of steering a passage between these two. The quest for revolutionary legitimacy, on the other hand, is troubled at the outset by having to start from the context of this national legitimacy struggle even as it seeks to impose an entirely new social order on the polity. The dilemma for the revolutionary is that he must be true to his vision, and to the strategy devised to achieve it, such as people's war, and yet attract people and groups to his banner in the context of the existing national culture and its standards of performance and legitimacy.

Taking these two legitimacy *goals* — national and revolutionary — together, one can view the over-arching legitimacy struggle between insurgents and incumbents as separating into three types of legitimacy *appeals* targeted on different groups of people and corresponding sets of issue fields or variables. The issue fields are not discrete but instead form overlapping circles.

First, there is the legitimacy appeal of ideology or belief. Pre-eminently, it is the leadership group of both sides which responds to, and indeed shapes, this level of appeal. This is the grand cause of the movement or "bandit suppression" campaign. In this group are the charismatic leaders and fanatics, Eric Hoffer's "true believer," Buddhist martyrs (Madame Nhu's "barbecues"), the sacrificial public servant, and the person exemplified in Bakunin's "Catechism of a Revolutionary." In traditional terms, it is the appeal of nationalism and whatever else stimulates societal loyalties, illustrated by slogans such as "throw out the foreign devils." In modern terms, it is a general appeal to a more "open society" built around such concepts as "political participation" and "societal access." In various guises, this is the ideology of modern democratic societies. In revolutionary terms, it is the high road of strategy and the chance for a glorious contribution to the international anti-imperialist struggle. At this level, for all appeals, one is speaking individually about the "societal orientations" of Harry Eckstein's congruence theory of legitimacy,<sup>21</sup> and more generally or collectively about the political culture of the much maligned structural-functionalists.

Second, there is the legitimacy appeal of opportunity. The primary target of this group is the cadre level for the revolutionaries, and the officers, NCO's, and public servants for the incumbents. This is the most overlooked level and yet it perhaps is the most vital — at least initially — because for both sides this is the level which provides the hard-core

activists who man the organizations that breathe life into the ideological appeals. At the outset, this group does not respond so much to appeals of ideology, nationalism, and the grand cause as much as it does to intermediate and group causes that are more pragmatic and relate to the competing social and economic structures of the two sides. This is close to Max Weber's legitimacy of structure or, more currently, to Ron Rogowski's "rational legitimacy."<sup>22</sup> Seen another way, though the motivation and calculations may be individual, the effects are subgroup and national because the opportunist is now committed to one or the other of the competing structures. He has helped to provide active legitimacy in that, for whatever personal reasons, he has offered his general support to the incumbent regime or to the insurgent revolutionaries. In traditional terms, the evaluative standard is not high-flown appeals of nationalism or communism, but communalism. As Jeffrey Race pointed out, there is an overriding salience of this standard of appeal to groups in rural Asia, the arena of the "Little Tradition" where insurgencies are fought out.<sup>23</sup> Although there are other indicators, the most important for communal legitimacy is land reform. In modern times, this "group," as opposed to nation and individual, responds to the programs, policies, and institutions that made up "societal access" and "political participation," including elections, political parties, land reform, and employment and educational opportunities. Therefore, in revolutionary terms, the task at this level is to repeat Mao's investigation in his *Hunan Report* (1927)<sup>24</sup> and ferret out the "objective conditions" that impinge on the social horizons of villagers and devise appeals to recruit cadres who join for opportunities of mobility, redress of various grievances, and new lives.

Finally, there is the "legitimacy" appeal of interest. This is the "legitimacy" of the masses (as in leaders, cadres, and masses) or, alternatively, of the individual (as in nation, group, and individual). This is David Easton's legitimacy interest,<sup>25</sup> perhaps, or the personal cause of Samuel Popkin's "political entrepreneurs."<sup>26</sup> The other two legitimacies require active and voluntary support for their cause, national or intermediate, but "legitimacy" of interest requires only passive support or compliance by the masses. It is either bought or coerced from the people in a variety of over-lapping traditional, modern and revolutionary ways. The watchword here is not nationalism or communalism, but *security*. This is demonstrated in ways common to the modernizer and to the revolutionary; though, since the modernizer is the incumbent, he is held to standards of governmental performance that the revolutionary can evade. Positively, both sides can compete through offering various rewards — a better deal in a liberated zone, or "Honda economy," as Frances FitzGerald in effect called it,<sup>27</sup> in government areas. Negatively, of course, both sides can punish and force submission through terror and counter-terror.

Putting it all in a chart, this "of sorts" of the over-arching legitimacy struggle between incumbents and insurgents can be portrayed as in Chart 1.

Unfortunately, the very presentation of a table like this, while it does map out a conceptual framework, also conveys distortionary images. In this case it seems to imply that the legitimacy crisis is static and that the



categories are discrete, air-tight compartments. A legitimacy crisis, and the insurgency that springs from it, is a highly fluid and dynamic phenomenon with national and revolutionary legitimacy interacting with each other and contesting the three appeals, levels, and various issues in such a blur that, at times, the best place to put this chart, in terms of its most accurate rendering, is on a pin wheel during a hurricane.

The appeals, levels and issues of legitimacy need to be properly overlapped as well. For example, while generally it is the leaders that concern themselves with ideology, some peasants may respond to this appeal. Conversely, no matter how fanatic a leader's devotion to his cause, he is certainly not immune to calculations of his own individual interest.

Finally, one does not wish to suggest, as the chart may, a sharp distinction between individual and group or collective motivations and decision-making calculations. In the author's view, individuals reach their decisions on what is rational and what is right for them on the basis of both individual and collective factors. It is hoped the two will converge, but occasionally they do not. This divergence constitutes a moral crisis and raises an individual's horizons above the legitimacy of interest to that of opportunity and ideology. The collective factors are both the institutional structures that define and confine his environment and the cultural orientations that circumscribe his intellectual horizon or paradigm. No matter how rational a peasant, as an individual, may be in the calculations of his interest, the structure may not let him choose his best interest and his political culture may not allow him, intellectually, to see it. On the other hand, no matter how ripe a particular society may be for a revolution or insurgency, in terms of whatever indicators are set as the diagnostic signs, if no leaders step forward as individuals and set up an appropriate organization to channel this insurgent sentiment, the revolution or insurgency will still not break out.<sup>28</sup> This actually is nothing more than a restatement of the great mystery from Plato's "Myth of the Cave" — what makes the future philosopher (or future insurgent leader) turn his head toward the light in the first place?

## **EXTERNAL LEGITIMACY**

Having presented the domestic dynamics that comprise the struggle between incumbents and insurgents for the mantle of legitimacy, one must also observe that within internal society, where every state, and frequently individual, takes an abiding interest, in the actions of others, seldom is one allowed to have a civil war or insurgency in isolation. Thus there is a fourth legitimacy, an external legitimacy that interacts with the three domestic ones. Foreign intervention, whether on the side of the incumbent or of the insurgent, raises the stakes of the struggle, and fundamentally alters it, in at least three ways. Most obviously, and most crucially in terms of the immediate arena of the struggle, there is the impact of the intervention on each of the various domestic legitimacies. This impact on domestic legitimacy is the key factor in a judgement call on whether, and at what level, one intervenes in an insurgency. For a potential intervenor, it is important to understand that legitimacy struggles are fought over battles that ultimately win the peace. Just winning the war, in purely military terms, may not be

enough and, often, may be a mistake or may deflect one from grasping the prize of legitimacy itself. This was the essence of Chinese Defense Minister Lin Piao's classic warning to his Vietnamese communist comrades to rely ultimately on themselves because no victory can be consolidated if it is won by compromised methods.<sup>29</sup>

An external intervention also affects the legitimacy of the intervenor's role in the international system. Due to the lack of uniform norms and institutional authority, that is, a world government, in the international system, this effect on systematic legitimacy may be rather weak, but Hedley Bull makes it clear that there are certain minimal standards of legitimacy or behavior expectations that come with great power and superpower status. To ignore these standards, Bull argues, will eventually entail real costs to the violator's foreign policy and basic international role.<sup>30</sup> Thus an intervention must be "right" internationally as well, or at least not be too blatantly "wrong."

The third legitimacy effect of an external intervention might be called a 'sleeper.' Sleep, unfortunately, does not last forever and the sleeper usually awakens at the cruellest of times during a long-sputtering insurgency. In the case of Vietnam, this sleeper — the impact of the intervention on the domestic legitimacy of the intervening state — awoke in the middle of the Tet Offensive. At some point, the domestic legitimacy and politics of the intervenor and "intervenee" become intertwined. Thus, currently in relation to El Salvador, one may see Roberto d'Aubuisson picnicking with Senator Jesse Helms, and Senator Helms, in turn, being villified for his action in a recent Senatorial campaign. Meanwhile, Jose Napoleon Duarte alternatively rallied around the highways and byways of El Salvador and then came to Washington to "Meet the Press" and lobby in the corridors of Congress. Through it all, Guillermo Ungo of the Farabundo Marti Liberation Front argued for a U.S. visa.

It is at this juncture, where the domestic politics of the "intervenor" and the "intervenee" become intertwined, that, from the perspective of the intervenor particularly, an intervention becomes sticky. Usually this point is reached with the dispatching of ground combat troops. In the case of Central America, however, thanks to the persistent nightmare of Vietnam, this point has been reached in the United States much earlier. These external legitimacy effects are depicted in Chart 2.

## **CONCLUSION**

The purpose of this article has been to provide an analytical framework for answering the instrumental question about the lessons of Vietnam: What is the optimal level of Western intervention, if any, in Marxist, people's wars? The approach toward an answer had been guided by the thesis that an insurgency is fundamentally a demonstration of a legitimacy crisis (as O'Neill "first" said) analytically described in the way presented above. Thus, the efficacy of a Western intervention must ultimately be judged by its impact on this crisis and not primarily in terms of the East-West struggle, although one must concede that this latter dimension cannot be entirely ruled out. Most insurgents seek outside help and if the insurgents are Communists, the East-West dimension will be there from the start.

From this thesis, several contentions must follow. In the domestic legitimacy struggle it can be contended that the key for both sides at the start is the legitimacy appeal of opportunity. This is the feeder mechanism or conduit for the appeal of ideology. It is the opportunity of cadre life for the insurgent or of regime access for the incumbent official that is crucial in persuading passive people to become actively involved on one side or the other. However, as Molnar argued, an insurgency gains life or staying power only insofar as it is able to transform its earlier cadre motivation of opportunity into a commitment to the cause and its ideology. Molnar's point is amply supported by Lucian Pye's study of guerrilla communism in Malaya (1956)<sup>31</sup> and by the Rand interviews in Vietnam.<sup>32</sup>

Regarding external legitimacy, one proposition has already been advanced: the danger point for the intervenor is reached when the intervention becomes a divisive feature of his own domestic politics. With respect to the effect of an intervention on the legitimacy of the insurgency-afflicted society, the intervenor can readily affect legitimacy in positive ways relating to legitimacy appeals of interest and opportunity. With regard to interest, through commodity import programs, massive construction projects, and the like, the intervenor can help make it rational for the masses to stay with the government by the creation of FitzGerald's "Honda economy."<sup>33</sup> For opportunity, the intervenor can also be of help in devising and financing land reform programs, in promoting elections, and in other steps toward improving "societal access" and "political participation" for previously blocked subgroups and social strata.

It is at the level of ideology or belief, however, that an intervenor may run afoul of legitimacy and utterly negate whatever successes he may have achieved at lower levels. In contemplating an intervention, it is at the level of belief where the intervenor must assess the legitimacy of his intervention in an overall context and hence provide a reasonable chance of success. This assessment must come from a careful reading of the historical definition of national legitimacy within the society in question and a determination of the levels of intervention (for instance, at the level of ground combat troops) at which the legitimacy of the regime itself may be undermined by the scale of the intervention. In the case of Vietnam, the call of modern legitimacy for national independence was enhanced by a traditional obligation of a ruler to throw out foreign invaders. Despite the fact that a program of land reform pushed by the Americans in support of the government did do some good in triggering calculations of interest and even of opportunity for the Saigon regime, these calculations were essentially reversed by the outrage engendered by the large numbers of intervening foreign troops whose very presence undermined calculation of belief in the government's right to rule. In Malaya and Greece, however, because the historical duties of legitimate rule were defined quite differently, the legitimacy of the incumbent regimes was not adversely affected by the introduction of large numbers of Western combat troops.

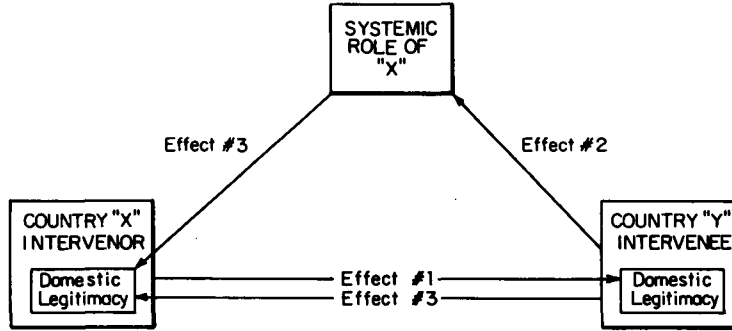
As a provisional lesson of Vietnam — in answer to the instrumental question of "What is the optimal level, if any, of Western intervention in Marxist, people's wars?" — one can do no better than to cite Secretary of State Dean Acheson's famous "missing component" press conference in

January 1950. His statement, in response to the criticism that the Truman administration “lost China,” should have been heeded as a pre-lesson for both Vietnam and El Salvador:

American assistance can be effective when it is the missing component in a situation which might otherwise be solved. The United States cannot furnish all these components to solve the question. It cannot furnish the determination, it cannot furnish the will, and it cannot furnish the loyalty of a people to its government. But if the will and if the determination exists and if the people are behind their government, then, and not always then, is there a very good chance. In that situation, American help can be effective and it can lead to an accomplishment which could not otherwise be achieved.<sup>34</sup>

Acheson's words of warning, more than ten years before the first American advisors came to Vietnam as a “missing component,” remind one, ten years after the collapse of South Vietnam despite as huge a number of “missing components” as any insurgency has ever seen, of Vietnam's most trenchant offspring — the lesson of legitimacy.

EXTERNAL LEGITIMACY EFFECTS



Key

- Effect #1: Intervention of "X" on Domestic Legitimacy of "Y"
- Effect #2: Intervention of "X" in "Y" on its role in International System.
- Effect #3: Ultimate effect of "X"'s intervention in "Y" on its own domestic legitimacy both from the intervention itself and from the effect of the intervention on its international role.

DOMESTIC LEGITIMACY CHART

		LEGITIMACY GOAL	LEGITIMACY APPEAL	LEGITIMACY LEVEL	LEGITIMACY ISSUES (Variables)
REVOLUTIONARIES	I. INCUMBENTS	National-Traditional active legitimacy	Ideology	National/Leaders	Nationalism, Mandate of Heaven, "Throw out foreigners", etc.
			Opportunity	Subgroups/Cadres, NCOS, Officers, Public Servants	Communalism, Land Reform
		passive legitimacy	Interest	Mass/Individual	Personal Security
	II.	National-Modern active legitimacy	Ideology	National/Leaders	Modern Nationalism, Modernization; sometimes equated with Democracy
			Opportunity	Subgroups/Cadres, etc.	Societal Access, (education, jobs, status), Political Participation (elections, land reform, parties)
		passive legitimacy	Interest	Mass/Individual	Physical Security: Obtaining rewards-- "Honda Economy", avoiding punishments up to "Establishment" terror
III. Revolutionary	active legitimacy	Ideology	National- International/Leaders	High Road of Revolutionary Strategy (People's War) and National Liberation. <u>Organization-Leadership Strategy</u>	
		Opportunity	Cadres	Mobility in a New World where previously frustrated. <u>Organization-Cohesiveness</u> , "Democratic Centralism"	
	passive legitimacy	Interest	Mass/Individuals	Obtaining Physical Rewards-- Life in Liberated Zones, avoiding punishments up to terror. <u>Organization-Outreach</u> , the "Mass Line"	

#### Footnotes

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6. Lomperis, *The War*, pp. 1-14.
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