Chomsky: A Journey to North Viet Nam

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By Harvey Baker

(Right) Prof. Noam Chomsky, the Department of Linguistics, who recently visited North Viet Nam and has sent dispatches back to the States, with the author. For the past few years, Chomsky has been spending much of his time in the country, trying to learn about it from the ground up.

The Tech: Did your group return with names of American prisoners whose fate was hitherto unknown in this country?

Chomsky: Yes. We did. For the past few years, we have tried to get into action in a group that there were perhaps about 80 new names. There are a number of people who have been in these countries that have come through this fashion, and that is apparently just about the total list.

The Tech: We have heard through various sources that there are about 1400 Americans missing and unaccounted for, just in North Viet Nam.

Chomsky: Well, the United States government gave a figure of 11,000 missing in action. Vietnam has been one of the total of Americans missing or lost anywhere in Indochina. This includes, of course, lots of people who were lost in action in Laos. If you check, you find the American command says 200 Americans are listed as missing in Laos alone, and so that, for example, has to come out of the 1400, and there are some nifty men hoping to find action in North Viet Nam. It’s not unreasonable that out of the 1400 missing in action, the total Indochinese theater that only 400 are living in Viet Nam, according to US sources.

LAOS

The Tech: Could you begin by telling us Prof. Chomsky, about your last visit to Laos. What did you all go, how did you get there, and what’s the plan for tonight?

Chomsky: Surely. Actually, we went there in the same most interesting part of the journey. I made some contacts in Laos who are quite knowledgeable and who have contact with a broad spectrum of Laotian intellectuals, neutrals and others. Many of them I met last year. We were, in fact, predictably sympathetic to the Pathet Lao. I spent a few days talking to refugees who had been evacuated from the Plain of Jars area.

The Tech: What did you learn from them about life in the Plain of Jars, and from conversations with them, do you think you can do anything positive about this?

Chomsky: Well, that was quite interesting, and in fact by talking to them, I was able to construct a history of the last 7 years in that part of Laos, a history which is by no means unfamiliar to the American people. There are virtually no documentary histories of this period, and so it is necessary to reconstruct what happened from light of clandestine sources.

The Tech: You mentioned that you spent a number of hours flying around, taking in the sights of the country.

Chomsky: That’s right. It’s a great contrast to what you see in the films, that you have a great sense of the country being very dense, and being behind barbed wire. It’s actually quite open.

The Tech: It was noted that the plane carrying your group was flying over the Plain of Jars, and that you were able to see the ruins.

Chomsky: Yes, we were. I think it’s a great contrast to what you see in the films, that you have a great sense of the country being very dense, and being behind barbed wire. It’s actually quite open.

The Tech: You concluded your trip in Laotian, and in fact that the planes flying over the Plain of Jars were, in fact, reason to the 1400 Vietnamese prisoners.

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The Tech: We were able to see the ruins of the Plain of Jars, and why they had to leave.

Chomsky: Yes, we were. I think it’s a great contrast to what you see in the films, that you have a great sense of the country being very dense, and being behind barbed wire. It’s actually quite open.

The Tech: Anyone who accompanied you on the trip, Prof. Chomsky?

Chomsky: I travelled with Doug Dredow, a professor at Cornells and Richard Fernandes, head of the English and Language Departments. About Viet Nam, many people of know little about it.

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