The Tech: Within Hanoi were there any signs of American damage? Chomsky: In Hanoi itself, there seemed to be no signs of damage. A bridge over the Red River was heavily bombarded, and there was one small factory near Hanoi. But one could hardly say that the Polytechnic University was shut down by large bomb damage in Hanoi as far as I could see.

Once you go outside the city limits, there is almost total destruction of buildings. The highway, there is only rubble all the way to Hanoi from there. In Thanh Hoa province, the provincial capital, which was an old town, 70,000, had almost nothing left. Only an occasional building is standing.

The Tech: The North Viet Nam hasn't been bombed through the bombing campaign for about a year and a half.

Chomsky: Right, but there's been a lot of destruction in the city. If you talk about the bombing will begin again, so everything is still not safe.

The Tech: What makes them think the bombing will begin again?

Chomsky: Well, actually, I think they're just in a state of precaution. One of the things that Nixon said was that the province was really important to the North Viet Nam and that that was correct, was the choice of the decisions of the United States to bomb the North Viet Nam. He didn't put it in exactly those words, but that's what it amounts to.

The Tech: That amounts to a war on the province.

Chomsky: Well, Vietnamization can't work. It can only work if the United States maintains the war in South Viet Nam. Well which means is that they won't withdraw because they think that South Viet Nam is just scattered around the province. There's no reason why they should. So, with Vietnamization failing, the war will expand into Laos, Cambodia, and perhaps Thailand.

The Tech: So, the North Viet Nam assume that rather than further weakening of their position, which could mean a resurrection of the bombing, and hence they don't want to waste time economically from any other small group of tanks. The same is true for any other small group of tanks. They say they're keeping economic development fully devoted to the war effort. However, the war is beginning to interfere with their economic development. This is a very high potential for hydroelectric power, but they haven't even started to build it. It seems, therefore, that is an easy target.

The Tech: What government officials call it? Chomsky: They wanted a new prison system. They were the only ones who could get it. North Viet Nam is at war with the United States, and we refuse to accept a State Department representative to deal with the problem. So the only people who have any information about the prison system are in the peace movement.

The Tech: Did the North Viet Nam receive any information from the International Accords specifying that during a state of war the names of prisoners would be exchanged with the enemy? Chomsky: Yes, but you see it's not totally a state of war, as far as they're concerned the prisoners are just criminals. They treat them as prisoners of war as far as we are concerned, but not to any great extent, they don't treat them as prisoners as we do. We treat the prisoners as POWs or as war criminals.

The Tech: How do the North Viet Namee view the negotiations? Chomsky: They wanted prisoners from us, and we were the only ones who could get it. North Viet Nam is at war with the United States, and we refuse to accept a State Department representative to deal with the prison system. So the only people who have any information about the prison system are in the peace movement.

The Tech: Did you talk to Pham Van Dong, the Premier of North Viet Nam?

Chomsky: We talked to Pham Van Dong in the days after the Geneva Accords. It was a little bit awkward, but the people were very friendly. They explained the prison system.

The Tech: Did all your colleagues get to speak to him?

Chomsky: Oh, yes, we spoke to a fair number of other government and party officials, a province chief, a mayor, a factory manager, and so forth.

The Tech: Did you learn from him anything that might affect the war?

Chomsky: Well, a lot of specific things of course, but what they said, and I believe it to be true, is that the society regards the war as just another war of aggression against their country. They see their whole history as just a history of resistance to aggression, to the Chinese, the Mongols, the Japanese, and now the Americans. They feel that they were conquered in this light, and they are very determined to resist all aggressors for hundreds of years unless necessary until the war is won. And they say the current war is just another instance of aggression.

The Tech: They seem to have a healthy sense of what they're fighting for, of what they're fighting against.

Chomsky: Yes, it's perfectly predictable. Now, as I said, either he's just stupider than we thought, or else he's cynical and is trying to capitalize on it. The Americans need this information that the prisoners are coming through the International Red Cross and that the government certainly would like the North Viet Nam prisoners to do the same thing. But look how Perot comes on. Like a rich Texan saying that he can buy up anything he wants. The Tech: Couldn't Mr. Perot just say something stupid?

Chomsky: It's possible. The Tech: Well, you're not leaving him much of a choice, are you?

Chomsky: I wasn't making a distinction between naivety and stupidity. The Tech: Can you give us your overall impression of North Viet Nam?

Chomsky: Yes. The impression one gets is of a very determined and possibly unbalanced people who are soured by war, but with an obvious concern to also build a future for the country, for lots of university students, for example. Aside from that, generation after generation is able to see their country as a modern society. There are standards, and that was about it.

The Tech: What was his role in the Provisional Revolutionary Government of North Viet Nam? Chomsky: His role was in the Provisional Revolutionary Government of North Viet Nam. The Provisional Revolutionary Government was the precursor to the present Government of North Viet Nam. The Provisional Revolutionary Government was headed by a third level bureaucracy, and it was pretty much as I expected it to be.

The Tech: Why do the North Viet Namee bother to negotiate at all? What do they hope to gain?

Chomsky: Well, they want to get rid of the war. Their terms for negotiation are quite clear, and they're perfectly realistic. The Tech: How do the North Viet Namee see the negotiation table?

Chomsky: It's pretty simple. The United States delegation is now headed by a third level bureaucrat. There was some talk until the US sends someone of higher rank. The Tech: Will you return to North Viet Nam?

Chomsky: No, not from the United States.

The Tech: What do you think may happen in the future? Chomsky: I think that the American government is in the same position as the North Vietnamese government.

The Tech: That's a potentially optimistic statement.

Chomsky: Well, I've said it before and I'll say it now. I think there ought to be a popular campaign for rehabilitation and reconstruction, which could include things like supply of technical journals, books, etc. The real question is, the American government was really interested in long term peace in the area of course. It would welcome this, because the North Vietnamese government is not going to be perpetually subordinate to the Soviet Union. By blocking it, what we're doing is we're driving them to potential subversion to the USSR. It's the U.S. in fact that is trying to do that. We prefer to be powerful, independent, modernizing country. Of course, we'd prefer them to be modernizing country that we can sell to. We can't get that we'd prefer them to be a Russian colony. But, you know, we could let the people have people to accept that.

The Tech: May we quote you on that?

Chomsky: Yes, sure. I think the American government is not for a moment going to accept that we can have an independent, modernizing country.

The Tech: The American executive branch of the American government is one of the main enemies of the human race...