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## '... But Thinking Makes It So'

A BIT of Shakespearean philosophy helps in assessing the latest plan for peace in Vietnam.

"There is nothing either good or bad," according to Hamlet, "but thinking makes it so." Thus with the nine-point cease-fire proposal, it's all in how you think about it.

Both sides see what they want in the ambiguous formulas that leave such critical questions as the political future of South Vietnam unanswered. The South Vietnamese see pitfalls, but will be able to argue that the existing government remains in place, contrary to Hanoi's repeated demands. But there will also be a National Council of Reconciliation. The division of labor between the two is left unclear.

Saigon says the council is not a government. The Communists insist it will have full and genuine power." Clearly, for each side thinking makes it so."

SAIGON CAN also take comfort in the veto power it has over whatever it is the council will do, because that body must act by unanimity, according to presidential adviser Henry A. Kissinger.

Since the unanimity re-

quirement can be used by either side to paralyze the council, South Vietnamese President Thieu can argue that there will be a cease-fire without any viable political arrangement, a situation he has said he can live with. If this is so, the council becomes a fig leaf to cover a seemingly significant concession by Hanoi.

But whatever it may be called, the council does set up a means for sharing power. The Communists, calling a spade a spade, say it's a coalition. Kissinger insists it is not. Again, for each side, thinking makes it so.

Whatever the arrangement, however, Hanoi has the security of knowing its troops can remain in place and be resupplied, meaning the Communists can protect their political cadres. (At one time the thought that Hanoi could keep what it had won was known as rewarding aggression.) In Hanoi's view, apparently, the cease-fire arrangement and the promise of a political process are sufficient to undermine Thieu. Again, thinking makes it so.

The Nixon administration is pleased with the clause that prohibits replacement of forces, in contrast to the permitted replacement of

weapons. Attrition is expected to diminish the number of North Vietnamese troops in the South. But experts also suggest that if the two sides ever reach agreement to demobilize, the North Vietnamese are perfectly capable of "melting" into the population and continuing their bid for power.

According to the proposed agreement, North Vietnam gets an end to the bombing and the reopening of its harbors that have been blocked by mines. It gets a crack at new elections and, presumably, a new constitution in the South. It gets U.S. funds to rebuild. The United States gets its prisoners of war. It gets the right, just barely, to say that it did not join its enemy in scuttling its ally. It gets out. Saigon, if only temporarily, keeps Thieu and maintains a veto over council action.

THE VIEW from any side is selective. It's a little like 1968 all over again. At that time Hanoi, the National Liberation Front, Saigon and Washington were struggling over the shape of the table for the Paris talks. In a "triumph of mental reservation," as one official then described it, the Communists saw four separate delegations, Saigon insisted

there were only two sides. If the current peace program is accepted, reserve will have triumphed again.

The plan finesses the most difficult problems. Each side can claim his view is the correct one but only the future shape of South Vietnam will prove which was seeing clearly.

One can just imagine Kissinger trying to explain to Thieu that it will be all right, trying to lead him as Hamlet did Polonius. Many remember Hamlet looking up at a cloud. "That's almost in shape like a camel," said Hamlet. "... Like a camel indeed," replied Polonius. "Methinks it's a weasel," suggested Hamlet. "It is back'd like a weasel," agreed Polonius. "Or like a whale?" offered Hamlet. "Very like a whale," Polonius agreed again.

Thieu has not yet started playing the part of an Asian Polonius but it would not be unexpected in the scenario.

But it's the North Vietnamese who seem prepared to celebrate. Hanoi's spokesman in Paris, Thanh Le, who repeated yesterday that it was time to initial the agreement, suggested that if Kissinger wants to come to join in a drink of champagne the night before signing he would be welcome.