

'BIG MINH' IMPLIES HE'LL FIGHT THIEU

General Says People Have
Lost Faith in Leaders—
Urges Reconciliation

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, Nov. 1—Maj. Gen. Duong Van Minh, one of the most popular figures in South Vietnam, broke a year-long political silence today with a broad hint that he would challenge Nguyen Van Thieu for the presidency next year.

The 53-year-old general, the most serious potential rival to President Thieu, declared that South Vietnam was becoming more destitute, its society more heart-rending and the life of its people more miserable. He charged that the nation's sovereignty was increasingly impaired and that the people were losing faith in their leaders.

[Vietcong gunners shelled Saigon early Monday for the first time in three months, reportedly killing six persons, The Associated Press said.]

The general, known throughout the country as Big Minh, called for "national reconciliation" as a way to end the war and implied that he was the man who could achieve it.

His prepared statement was

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in sharp contrast to the state of the nation speech delivered yesterday by President Thieu. The President painted a bright picture of military, economic and social progress, declared that the Communists had no serious intentions of negotiating a settlement and denounced as cowards and defeatists those who proposed compromise as a way out.

General Minh's statement, though vague, led his supporters to talk of a major political clash next year when Presiden-



Associated Press

Duong Van Minh

Thieu's four-year term ends. One of the general's supporters said tonight that the Vietnamese "are realistic and they know that to have a change they must have someone—and it is him."

The general issued his statement as leader of the group of generals who overthrew Ngo Dinh Diem seven years ago. He met with many of the same generals amid the orchids in his garden this afternoon.

After posing for pictures on the steps of the villa, the retired generals went inside to relive their finest hour by listening, pensively, to a tape of the 1963 broadcast announcing the coup d'état. Then they joined General Minh for lunch.

President Thieu marked the anniversary by a visit to the national cemetery, where he attended ceremonial rites and distributed envelopes of money to a group of war widows. He then held a diplomatic reception at the Presidential Palace.

"We Are Ready"

At a reception tonight at An Quang pagoda, Government opponents greeted General Minh as a conquering hero. But he declined to declare that he would run, saying only that "we are ready" and "many changes can be expected between now and election time."

In his earlier statement, General Minh, who did not mention President Thieu by name, talked of the lack of progress, South Vietnam's tradition of conciliation, the overwhelming desire for peace here and the need to finish the mission started with the 1963 coup. He made no reference to Communist aggression.

"If the military situation has favorably improved," he said, "the political, economic and social situations are in an apprehensive deterioration. An ever-changing political position, a dependent economic policy void of any control and a society divided to an awesome degree, cause the people to lose faith in their leaders and to doubt their own capability of reconquering their nation's sovereignty."

Foreign Involvement Criticized

In his repeated references to national sovereignty, General Minh seemed to be implying criticism of the large scale of United States involvement here. He said that as long as the war continued, the dependency of both North and South Vietnam on foreign powers would increase.

He spoke of the "dark designs of all adversaries who intend to colonialize our people under one form or the other." He said that the Government should strive to consolidate "the national sovereignty, which at the present time is drastically impaired."

"We should acquire sovereignty because only with sovereignty can we achieve peace in accord with our people's aspirations," he said. "The obvious truth is, even with all the goodwill in the world, foreigners can neither entirely grasp the psychology nor fully understand the aspirations of the people of Vietnam, nor the genuine needs and the special conditions of Vietnamese society."

"For these reasons, the problem of Vietnam must be conceived by the Vietnamese in the interest of the Vietnamese, but not in the interest of this bloc or that bloc."

General Minh, who served after the 1963 coup as chief of state until he was ousted in 1964 and sent into exile, said that he had left office with the great sadness of a man who has not yet accomplished his mission.

"That sadness has grown heavier and heavier on my soul," he said. "It is a deep sorrow to see that with every passing day, our fatherland has become more and more destitute, our society more and more heart-rending, our people's life more and more miserable, our national sovereignty more and more impaired."