

Minh Asks U.S. Pressure To Assure Fair Elections

By ALVIN SHUSTER JUL 6 1971

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, July 5—Gen. Duong Van Minh, a potential challenger for South Vietnam's presidency this fall, has charged in an interview that President Nguyen Van Thieu is using intimidation and pressure to insure his re-election and has urged that the United States apply all its influence for a fair and honest contest.

The retired general, known as Big Minh, delivered his sharpest attack so far on President Thieu for trying "to manipulate" the elections, set for Oct. 3. He said that "if the election is rigged then it is not worth running."

General Minh, who spoke in French during the interview at his home here over the weekend, met today with Henry A. Kissinger, President Nixon's national security affairs adviser, who ended a three-day visit this afternoon. Mr. Kissinger,

who met with President Thieu for two hours yesterday, also conferred with Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky, another presidential hopeful.

"If President Thieu is re-elected through his dishonest maneuvers," General Minh said in the interview, "South Vietnam would not have the smallest chance of survival."

"This Government only makes people go to the other side," he said. "The people do not have another choice; when you can no longer live in this atmosphere, you have to find another, when you are in a suffocating room, you try to get out. If I were a Communist, I would do all I could to help President Thieu be re-elected. Then their victory would be assured."

General Minh called on the United States to adopt a policy of "positive neutrality" by insisting on fair elections because he is unsure himself at the moment whether "the American Government really wants to have an honest and free election here." He said President Thieu's election in 1967 was disgustingly rigged, with American help, and that his friends believe Ellsworth Bunker is remaining on as Ambassador now for "one last masterpiece."

For the Americans to say

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Minh Urges U.S. to Assure Fair Election

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merely that they are taking a "hands off" attitude in the elections, he suggested, is not enough.

Relaxed and smiling easily, during the interview, the 55-year-old general again failed to say flatly that he would run against President Thieu, asking, "How can I conduct the campaign and how can the people vote freely if the Government continues to use such pressure?" He said there was "very little chance" of the Government shifting its policies before the election and so there was "very, very little chance" that he would run.

But it was clear from the tone of the general's remarks, that he would go ahead anyway after he gathers the signatures of support required under the strict provisions of a Thieu-backed electoral law. He said he had already selected a vice presidential candidate because he wanted to be ready for all eventualities.

Under the law, a presidential candidate must win endorsement from either 40 of the 195 national legislators or 100 of the more than 500 provincial and city councillors. The General confirmed that he would get the signatures from the legislators, while Mr. Ky would court the councillors.

Ky Picks Running Mate

Mr. Ky said today that he had picked Truong Vinh Le as his running mate. A successful businessman who owns a large printing firm in Saigon, Mr. Le is a Southerner and a Catholic.

Mr. Ky is from North Vietnam and, like General Minh, a Buddhist.

The Vice President's aides said today their man had enough signatures from the councillors, but they charged that President Thieu's agents were now trying to invalidate the endorsements.

General Minh, a popular figure who gained fame as the hero of the 1963 coup d'état against Ngo Dinh Diem, said that if elected his top priority would be peace through national reconciliation by unifying the South Vietnamese in their struggle. He expressed confidence that he could lead the nation to a political solution, but reiterated his opposition to a coalition government.

The Thieu Government lacks support of the people, he said, and so "we don't have the winning cards." A truly representative government, he said, is required to withstand the political and military challenge from the Communists.

Threat to North

"I must tell you frankly that the day we have an honest government with full popular support, the North will certainly begin to worry," he continued. "They won't like that. Only when we have such a government will be the North engage in serious negotiations because it will see that continuing the struggle will be impossible for them."

Moreover, he said, the importance of this year's presidential elections is underscored by the departure of American troops he said that he was against the bombing of North

Vietnam and the bringing of American troops here an part because such moves forced the Communists to raise their own war efforts to keep try to keep even.

"Now with the Americans withdrawing," he said, "we have to try to maintain the balance. I am not against the withdrawal of troops, but it means that there must be something more on this side, a future government, duly elected by the people in a free, honest election."

"That's why this election is vital," he went on. "It is imperative that the people vote freely for the man of their choice. Otherwise, if the election is rigged, then it will be the end of South Vietnam and the honor of America will be buried in this country. It will be a defeat for us and for you as well."

In accusing President Thieu of trying to manipulate the elections, General Minh said that "the President seeks to neutralize everyone he sees who is not favorable to him." He talked of pressure on provincial councillors and the legislature not to endorse anyone else and he said the entire governmental machinery was designed to propel President Thieu back into office.

He said the Phoenix program, aimed at Vietcong agents, could be used to jail non-Communist political opponents. He complained of intimidation of students and of provincial security councils which "gives a free hand to provincial authorities to arrest anyone and put people in jail anytime between one to three years without a trial."