

# Minh's Pullout Dismays U.S. Officials in Vietnam

*Anxiety Expressed Over Move Leaving  
Thieu Sole Presidential Candidate—  
Bunker Hears Charge of Rigging*

By ALVIN SHUSTER AUG 21 1971

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, Aug. 20 — United States officials expressed private dismay and embarrassment today over the withdrawal of Gen. Duong Van Minh from the presidential race.

The sudden decision of General Minh, who said he did not want to join in an electoral "farce," left President Nguyen Van Thieu as the only candidate in the elections scheduled for Oct. 3.

[In Washington, Robert J. McCloskey, the State Department spokesman, said: "We regret that General Minh has withdrawn his candidacy. We favor a fair, honest and contested election—one that would lead to a choice for the South Vietnamese people."]

American officials in South Vietnam had urged General Minh, who is known as Big Minh, not to withdraw. The 55-year-old retired general, in a statement distributed today by aides, charged President Thieu with blatantly attempting to rig the contest through intimidation and suppression.

As American officials expressed apprehension over the possible consequences of a one-man election. Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker met again in the evening with Mr. Thieu. Officially, however, the chagrined embassy was saying only that it regretted the general's decision.

There seemed little that American officials could say or

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do at this point to banish the specter of a one-man race in a country where the United States has spoken of a constitutional and democratic government.

The only hope, a slim one, was that the Supreme Court would reverse itself and allow the candidacy of Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky, who had failed to meet the requirements of a stiff electoral law pushed through the National Assembly in June by President Thieu.

## Court Delays Decision

The court had been scheduled to announce its final decision on Mr. Ky by evening but put it off until tomorrow. This raised the possibility of a surprise ruling, but most officials remained skeptical. Mr. Ky's aides insisted that he would quit even if the court allowed him to run.

Mr. Thieu and his aides remained silent, although one of his close advisers had said earlier that if General Minh dropped out, the election would nevertheless go on and be regarded by the President as a referendum that would provide him with the mandate to govern.

Some officials did not rule out the possibility that the Government, instead of offering a choice of candidates, would change the wording of the ballots to enable the South Vietnamese to express their confidence, or lack of it, in the Thieu Government.

Among observers and diplomats in Saigon, the prospect of an uncontested contest was generally viewed as a failure for American policymakers of South Vietnam. And aides to General Minh charged that the American Embassy shared the blame with President Thieu.

## Minh Termed Furious

"How can the United States fight for self-determination for so long in this country and then not do everything to see that the people have a chance to exercise it?" said one of the general's close aides.

The aides described General Minh as furious after meeting last night with Mr. Bunker, who returned from Washington

in the morning and then met with him in an 11th-hour attempt to persuade him to run. They said the ambassador had brought nothing with him from Washington except the often expressed view that Washington wanted to see reasonably fair and honest elections.

There was no word on the topics discussed at the latest meeting between Mr. Bunker and Mr. Thieu, who also met before the ambassador's 90-minute session with the general.

Mr. Bunker was accompanied at the outset of the talks by Senator Robert Dole of Kansas, chairman of the Republican National Committee. The envoy then met privately with Mr. Thieu, presumably on the political situation.

## 'Critical Reaction' Expected

The election will have an impact in America, Senator Dole said. "There will be some very critical reaction to a one-man race."

In his meeting with General Minh, Mr. Bunker was said to have presented the American case in strong terms, appealing to the general's patriotism and stressing that a one-man contest could lead to a Congressional reluctance to provide future economic and military support to South Vietnam.

According to Vietnamese sources, Mr. Bunker said it was President Nixon's view, and his own, that the general's presence in the contest would be "good for South Vietnam."

"At one point General Minh listened while the Ambassador praised Thieu," one of the general's aides said.

"And he never gave Minh what he wanted — firm assurances that the United States would do all it could to insure the fairness and honesty of the elections.

"Minh felt that the Americans merely wanted to use his name and reputation so that it would look to the world that South Vietnam had chosen a president who wants to continue the war."

According to the general's friends, he did not tell Mr. Bunker of his intention to withdraw. They said he had all

but made up his mind to quit but wanted to hear from the Ambassador before making the final decision.

General Minh, a Buddhist who gained fame for leading the 1963 coup d' état against President Ngo Dinh Diem, had wanted to make up his mind before morning, when the Supreme Court began its meetings on the "final posting" of presidential candidates.

For weeks, General Minh has been threatening to pull out if he felt that the elections would be dishonest. In his meetings with Mr. Bunker and with the Deputy Ambassador, Samuel D. Berger, on Aug. 12, the general offered what he said was documented proof that he would have no chance to be elected.

General Minh had given documents to Mr. Berger and had referred to them in his talk with Mr. Bunker. Among them were photocopies of what he said were multiple voting cards, enabling a person to vote more than once, and a secret directive for Thieu-appointed province chiefs outlining methods to "neutralize" the opposition by using military and civilian officials.

The 5,000-word directive, described by the general's aides as authentic and a major factor in his decision, suggested that the "police can best be used to sow confusion and intimidate the opposition." It said that each province should have a special staff in charge of the election campaign plan, that "it must be kept a secret and that every effort must be made to harass anti-Government elements.

"If they are civil servants they can be transferred," it said. "If they are elected village or hamlet chiefs, they can be neutralized by other village councilors and, in general, we can always dig up in our files to see if any of them have personal files of bad conduct or even guilty conduct and we use these documents to persuade them to work for us or, if they refuse, arrest them."

The general's supporters said that last night Mr. Bunker did not offer to have the general's documents investigated.