

FRIENDS SAY MINH IS READY TO LEAD

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But 1971 'Peace Candidate'
Is Silent on War Crisis

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, May 4—Associates of Gen. Duong Van Minh, President Nguyen Van Thieu's most respected political rival, said today that in the present crisis of leadership, General Minh stood "more ready than ever" to accept the reins of this country.

Asked about the general's reputation as the "peace candidate" in last year's presidential election campaign, his friends said that he would accept power only "a la de Gaulle and never a la Petain"—the implication being that he would not take the presidency to capitulate, but would resist those who made war against South Vietnam.

Characteristically, General Minh has remained silent in the crisis precipitated by military reverses and has declined to grant interviews.

Appeal of a Quiet Man

Nonetheless, the general is mentioned more often in political discussions now than he has been since the 1971 Presidential campaign, from which he withdrew, and more than any other possible alternative to President Thieu. To a war-weary people, largely indifferent to ringing rhetoric, the most reticent political leader appears to have a strong appeal.

General Minh is regularly briefed on military matters and receives a large circle of political supporters through whom his views are filtered to the public.

As the enemy advances contribute to the weakening of Mr. Thieu's position, and as rumors circulate about a possible deal between the United States and the Communist powers that might depose the president, the possibility of a new president before Mr. Thieu's term expires has become a subject of speculation.

When President Nixon made public his peace plan last Jan. 25, he disclosed that Mr. Thieu had offered to resign a month before a new presidential election that would be part of the agreement.

'Nationalism' Is Stressed

General Minh's friends say that he has at his disposal a group of associates whose talents could restore the battered position of South Vietnam. Apparently to reassure those who might suspect excessive readiness to conclude a peace arrangement that would be too favorable to the opposing side, the general's associates stress his "nationalism."

While strongly critical of United States support for Mr. Thieu, General Minh's camp expresses friendship for the United States. The general's supporters believe that President Thieu, because of his tendency to govern unilaterally and his apparent unwillingness to rally all elements of the nation, has lost all chance of redressing the military balance and is unlikely to retain control.