

RIVAL CRITICIZES THIEU ON LIBERTY

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Minh Cites Guarantees in
Cease-Fire Agreement
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SAIGON, South Vietnam, Feb. 26—Gen. Duong Van Minh, a political rival of President Nguyen Van Thieu, criticized the Thieu Government today for failing to restore civil and political liberties guaranteed by the Vietnam cease-fire agreement.

The General, a tall, soft-spoken man known among Americans in Vietnam as Big Minh, issued what he called an open letter to the 13-party international conference on Vietnam, which convened in Paris today.

In his open letter General Minh said that there was a third force, or "entity," that opposed the Thieu Government and the Communists and comprises the majority of the people of South Vietnam. It "is the key to peace," he said.

In his characteristically enigmatic way, General Minh did not formally announce a plan to mobilize those who think like him into a new political body, although such a group may be formed soon following many days of negotiation among anti-Thieu dissidents.

How formidable or representative such a new political coalition would be is far from clear.

General Minh also said today, in response to written questions and through friends who spoke for him, that he was not interested in placing himself or his friends on a proposed National Council of National Reconciliation and Concord if the neutral elements were to be appointed by the Government and the Vietcong. This, however, is exactly what the cease-fire agreement provides.

The events at General Minh's villa in Saigon constituted a characteristic Vietnamese political happening, full of ambiguities and blind alleys.

Journalists were invited first at 4 P.M. and arrived under the scrutiny of secret police of the Thieu Government, wearing sport shirts and lounging conspicuously near the curb. The reporters were given General Minh's two-and-a-half-page open letter to the Paris conference.

Under present law, press conferences are illegal in South Vietnam without a permit. However, an aide of General Minh took down in writing some questions offered by the press.

At 5 P.M. a reception and cocktail party began for the press and other guests, including about 80 anti-Government political figures.

Ky Not Present

Factions of several political parties were represented—but few parties in Vietnam today consist of more than such splinters. The former vice president, Nguyen Cao Ky, another rival of President Thieu, did not attend.

General Minh, dressed in a brown suit and narrow red tie and wearing dark glasses, gave a short speech of welcome and then drifted with Buddha-like detachment around the reception as others read in three languages his open letter and an aide gave answers to the written questions. The answers were in most cases vague.

One passage of General Minh's letter had a quiet eloquence when he said that the third force in South Vietnam consisted of "those who loved their country but refused to be subjected or bound by foreign ideologies, those who had been caught between the apparatuses of the two sides or had been oppressed by those apparatuses, those who had fought for national independence but had bid farewell to arms after the war had become a senseless mutual killing of Vietnamese, those who had dreamed of real democracy but had only encountered dictatorships—in a word, all those who followed neither this side nor the other side and who, to this date, were never given the chance to speak their minds."

People close to the General, who ~~had~~ ~~intended~~ to oppose Mr. Thieu in the last presidential election but withdrew, indicated that Mr. Thieu must first restore democratic freedoms before General Minh would try to form a political action group.

In his open letter General Minh said that the international conference in Paris had an obligation to demand that Article 11 of the cease-fire agreement be carried out. The article requires both the Government and the Vietcong "immediately" to insure freedom of speech, press, political activities and movement, among others.

One guest at the reception who spoke for General Minh and demanded the restoration of such freedoms in impassioned conversation was Thon That Thien, who as a former information official for the Thieu regime before his dismissal from office had closed and suppressed a number of newspapers.

Mr. Thien also was once an aide to the late Ngo Dinh Nhu, who as brother and counselor to the late President Ngo Dinh Diem, had suppressed almost every freedom and civil liberty in Vietnam in 1962 and 1963.

"Without the democratic freedoms guaranteed in Article 11 the whole concept of self-determination is meaningless," Mr. Thien said solemnly to a group of Western journalists.