These sentiments were echoed in the 1976 interviews. Air Marshall Nguyen Cao Ky complained about South Vietnam's loss of identity. "... most of the time, because [of] your role, because [of] your responsibilities, [the] Americans were playing a dominant role, and at the end we lost our own identity." This sentiment was also voiced by Colonel Vu Van Uoc, an operations officer in the Air Force.

"... during the years 1964-72 when U.S. troops were actively fighting in South Vietnam, most campaigns and big military operations more placed under American command. Even in joint U.S./Vietnamese operations, ARVN was only given a minor role and air force strategies were placed under the supervision of American advisors. In that situation, ARVN felt a too-heavy dependence upon U.S. forces and one can hardly say these operations were under Vietnamese jurisdiction. The same policy was applied to high-ranking and also to combat officers, so that ARVN completely lost the notion of being an independent army."

In the same vein, Bui Diem adds, "For the South Vietnamese, interference in their internal affairs was a sort of natural consequence stemming from the presence of the foreign troops in the country, a fact of life against which they could not do anything." Major General Lam Quang Tho noted the adverse effects this obvious dependence had on South Vietnam's people. "Since the dependence and subordination of the Vietnamese government was so obviously demonstrated by the predominant presence and power of the Americans, the Vietnamese general public could not refrain from viewing their government as a puppet deprived of all national prestige."

Nguyen Huy foi's suggestions for reorganizing South Vietnam's armed forces so that they would be better able to take over the defense of the country when the Americans departed were rebuffed by his own superiors. "They said that they didn't want to hear anything about this..."

to the older soldiers as Saigon Parisiens. Sometimes they used a more powerful Vietnamese word, no boa, which means lackey or slave, as the people conquered by the Vietnamese in the past were called no boa. These former French NCOs now took their orders from a new set of foreigners, Americans, whose views they reflected. The young officers felt that the South Vietnamese army which was being created with American assistance and American guidance was merely an extension of the American army, which had failed in Vietnam. This was true also of the National Palace, which in their view had become an extension of the American Embassy.
because now the Americans are responsible for everything. It is up to them to decide and we don't want to discuss anything like this." On another occasion he was told "not to worry about this. The Americans will find a solution for us because we can't do anything. And a lot of generals, good friends of mine, felt this way." Loi was once even told to drop his argument that the Americans were not always going to be able to help South Vietnam, "because there are suspicions that you are influenced by the Communists."

Nguyen Ban Can summed up noting that "A paternalistic-like policy by the U.S., and the political immaturity of the Vietnamese people and its leaders made them depend on their U.S. patrons so much that their country seemed to be, in some respects, under direct U.S. administration." In Can's view, South Vietnam's leaders had grown accustomed to foreign tutelage. "Living and fighting under continuing tutelage, they used to rely on the French General Commissioner, and later got accustomed to dealing with the U.S. Ambassador in Saigon, rather than directly with Washington. When the country was partitioned in 1954, they did rightly say that the war was lost in Paris, not in Vietnam, but thereafter they did not do what was needed so that the war would not be lost in Washington."

Regardless of the prevailing pessimism with regard to the overall situation, there were some suggestions for change. These ranged from overthrowing President Thieu to totally reorganizing the armed forces for a protracted war. A number of the respondents also thought that South Vietnam should and would have held out longer than it did in 1975.

As has been pointed out in Part I of this Report, in the eyes of the South Vietnamese respondents, President Thieu comes in for much of blame for the collapse. He was viewed as a bad general and a poor politician surrounded by inept cronies selected solely for their loyalty. He delegated no authority but was indecisive in times of crisis, suspicious, secretive, and corrupt. It is not surprising then that several of the respondents suggest that changes in national leadership would have made a difference. They are more or less frank in revealing their support for such a measure.
According to Bui Diem, President Thieu himself was "aware of the seriousness of the situation and even receptive to the idea that he should reform his government and reorganize the armed forces [although presumably not to remove himself] to make the whole apparatus of the government more responsive to the needs of the country . . ." but Bui Diem was unable to convince him that these reforms were urgently needed "because he did not feel the sense of urgency required by the situation.

Colonel Duong Thai Dong, the deputy commander of the artillery, believes that since the overthrow of Ngo Dinh Diem in 1963, "the political situation in Vietnam began to decline due to the lack of a leader endowed with talent, virtue, and honesty to lead the country." To Dong, a change in leadership was essential "at least after the Paris Agreement." "Before that," Dong thought, "maybe the Americans could maneuver with a man like that, but certainly not afterwards, when good leadership in Saigon became a vital necessity." Then, seeming to place the responsibility for removing Thieu or the Americans, Dong adds, "We all waited and waited for a change in leadership, but it never came."

Major General Lam Quang Tho was blunt in his view that Thieu had to go and that the South Vietnamese Army should have seen to it.

The tragic and sudden end of Vietnam was partially the responsibility of the Generals and Admirals. Since different religious and political groups failed to overthrow President Thieu, the Army -- and the Army alone -- could have done so, or at least could have convinced him to adopt sounder policies or to make reforms. But then the great majority of those who were holding positions of influence and predominance were so servile to the President that they would not dare to even think of such a possibility. And also, they were so completely involved with him.
As the communist offensive rolled on, thoughts of removing Thieu quickened. Action, however, seemed to await some sign from the Americans. Thieu's old rival, Air Marshall Nguyen Cao Ky, describes how he initiated an effort to remove Thieu.

... right after [the fall of] Banmethout, ... I went around and talked with Vien, and many other leading general officers. I told them about the need to have Thieu out. I told them that we actually don't need a coup. I think that [if] five or six of us, leading commanding officers, sit [down] together and write out a petition, asking Thieu to go, he will accept it. Cao Van Vien told me, 'You're right, it's time that we get rid of Thieu, but you know, I'm too old. I don't think I can be any help, so why don't you go ahead. The general headquarters compound is open the day you tell me, you can come in and sit here.' The commander of the marines [and] all [others] agreed with me.

Ky's co-conspirators then apparently had second thoughts about removing Thieu. According to Ky, they told him that American officials did not favor such an action.

Colonel Do Ngoc Nhan describes a similar effort which failed for the same reasons.

A small group of people (most of whom were colonels who had participated in the 1960 and 1963 events [an attempted and a successful coup]) met at the home of General Vinh Loc a few days after the fall of Danang. During the meeting we tried to find a solution whereby we could improve the worsening situation. We agreed that SVN had not been defeated and that we had to have a new leadership at once if we were to persuade the Communists to come to an honorable political solution. The meeting was deadlocked when it came to concrete planning. The reason was that we did not have all the information and we did not know exactly what the American embassy's stand on a change of leadership was.

Several of the respondents saw a need for reorganizing the army. Colonel Nguyen Thai Dong declared that he fundamentally disagreed with the entire army organization which was set up for conventional warfare for which neither the enemy strategy nor the terrain was
suited. In the 1950s when the South Vietnamese Army was being organized and trained with American assistance and advice, Dong was convinced that South Vietnam "would never have to encounter a conventional type of war as the American Advisory Groups, from TRIM [Training Relation and Instruction Mission] to MAAG, had shaped the ARVN to fight it." "At that time," Dong says, "I raised those questions for discussion with the U.S. Advisors in my unit. They answered that we were adopting modern methods of training and organization which had been carefully appraised by high echelon Staff Commands, and couldn't be erroneous." Colonel Nguyen Huy Loi, who is quoted to that effect earlier in this report, stressed that Vietnamization should have begun earlier.

Dong, a former province chief, felt that the Strategic Hamlet Program had produced "encouraging results" in dealing with a "People's War." "Had the Strategic Hamlets Policy been fully supported, the situation in South Vietnam would have been different..." In dealing with the enemy's offensive in 1975, Colonel Dong believes that "adequate fire power supply [massed artillery with abundant ammunition, tactical air strikes, and bombing by B-52s] could have reversed the war situation in 1975." Asked by the interviewer, did not the enemy himself field large units eventually so that conventional military organization and forms of warfare were needed to meet him? Dong answered, "No, by then it was too late to meet him at all."

Colonel Nguyen Huy Loi agrees that the American military organization was unsuited for the war in Vietnam and describes how he would have reorganized the Vietnamese armed forces.

We talked for a long time in 1966-67 on how the Vietnamese Army had to reorganize in order to become a really effective armed forces and to get by alone, with just some support from the U.S. because the American forces wanted to train the Vietnamese army in the image of the American forces, and, as you know, even with American forces we cannot fight this kind of war... I tried to convince our leaders... we have to reorganize the Vietnamese armed forces into two forces. One is a territorial force and one is a [mobile] main force, ready to move anywhere we want.
Colonel Loi's, however, was unable to persuade the Joint General Staff or the Americans. "... the JGS just stayed there and did nothing. They just did nothing until the end ... they only receive instructions ... everything is done in MACV Headquarters and sent to us, that is all."

Lieutenant General Tran Van Don was one of the leading proponents of a "people's army." The "people's army" was an idea advanced by those who doubted that South Vietnam could support the costly military machine and lavish fighting style that South Vietnam was bequeathed by the Americans. Drawn from Vietnam's own military history, the people's army was built upon the principle of local self defense. Every able-bodied man, and woman, would serve a fixed tour of duty with the armed forces after which they would return to production remaining in an armed reserve to defend their own locality or to augment the regular forces when needed. The regular army would thus be free for larger operations against the North Vietnamese. Part-time soldiers, part-time producers. The development of a people's army would ease the economic and manpower burden of maintaining South Vietnam's large armed forces while not reducing the country's defense needs through demobilization. A people's army was something between the Minutemen of the American revolution and Israel's reserve system, but the idea predated both. Using similar concepts, Vietnam had historically defended its frontiers and developed its territory.

An idea similar to Don's people's army was expressed by the commander of the First Infantry Division. According to one of his subordinates in the First Division, this General had spoke about reducing the strength of the army's support units and putting them with the Regional Forces and Popular Forces who would be reorganized as "Rice Producer Units." "When the situation is favorable and quiet," he reportedly said, "they can work in the rice-fields, and when there is increased enemy activity, they fight."
The people's army concept was not universally accepted. To most Americans and American-trained officers, a people's army was an alien concept. To some, the term itself smacked of the enemy's vocabulary. Some objected to the socialistic ideas inherent in the economic endeavors of armed production units. To many, it was simply a military anachronism unsuited to face an enemy armed with tanks and heavy artillery. Proponents of the idea, including Tran Van Don, admitted that providing adequate leadership at the national level and at the unit level to motivate and lead the people's army was a major problem. Mr. Buu Vien dismissed the idea.

In the aftermath of the Vietnam debacle, some people have severely criticized the government of the RVN for not having organized a people-based army; of not knowing how to fight a war with less costly expenditures; of having relied too much on foreign assistance, etc. . . . There might have been some justification in this so far as people's motivation is concerned, but the outcome would have been the same.

A senior army officer also thought the idea inapplicable to South Vietnam. "It sounds good but it is not logical from the standpoint of strategic analysis . . . To use the 'Rice Producer Units' in case we need them, will not be easy. Israel can do it that way, but S.V.N. can't. In Israel, they have a very low percentage of enemy infrastructure in the population. I'd say none. But in S.V.N. this element is very great . . . If the communists will find out that is our concept, they will not attack us, but just harass the 'Rice Producer Units' every night and day. How can they produce?"
Lieutenant General Nguyen Van Minh would have organized more units along the lines of the 81st Airborne Ranger Brigade, a crack unit that often operated in small teams at night to harass the enemy and relied solely on its organic weapons (primarily mortars) for fire support instead of artillery. "... the use of the organic equipment and the fighting at night-time are more effective. If we could reorganize our troops, most of them into special Airborne brigades and try to reorganize as the enemy was doing for their sappers, independent sappers, then we could hold the territory."

A more conventional approach was to create more divisions. A number of the respondents mentioned this.

Mr. Buu Vien described the problem.

The main weakness of our Army was the lack of reserves. The strength of ARVN was equally distributed between the Regular Forces and the Territorial Security Forces. In a conventional type of war the Regional Forces were of limited help and the Popular Forces even less so. The 11 ARVN combat divisions, excluding the General Reserve Marine and Airborne divisions, were thinly spread over the vast areas of the four military regions and could not withstand concentrated attacks from an enemy who could use several divisions in any assault. "... "when the enemy's intention to resort to conventional warfare became clear, we should have taken necessary steps to create more divisions to add to our regular forces, by reducing the strength of the Regional and Popular forces.

The estimates of how many divisions were needed vary. According to a senior general in the Joint General Staff, a minimum of from two to three divisions would have been needed to handle the Communist threat. One general expressed his opinion that five more divisions were needed. General Pham Quoc Thuan thought that it would have taken six more divisions to successfully defend South Vietnam against the size of attack the Communists could mount.
Additional divisions could not easily be created, however. One general cited the problem of desertions, which were running at about 10,000 to 12,000 men per month, as evidence that South Vietnam was approaching its limits of mobilization. With a population of 19 million, there were limits on how many persons could be mobilized. Mr. Buu Vien cited the problem of arming and equipping the new divisions adding that "only the U.S. could have helped us to solve it."

In the view of several of the respondents there were untapped sources of manpower. Several had recommended lowering the draft age to 17. Mr. Hantho Touneh, an ethnic Highlander who held the position of Secretary General of the Ethnic Minorities Council, thought that with a more constructive policy toward the Highlanders, granting them greater autonomy, South Vietnam could have created a "special force to protect the Highlands," manned and led by Montagnards. The Montagnards, Touneh pointed out, had demonstrated their military effectiveness under French and American leadership in the First and Second Indochina Wars, but who owing to traditional ethnic antagonisms, did not serve well under South Vietnamese leadership.

Colonel Do Ngoc Nhan argues that the 200,000 communist ralliers (those who had defected from the communists) in South Vietnam could have been recruited to carry out "continuous and effective attacks on the Communists' logistical corridor to cut off their war system as much as possible...That way we could force them to reduce their local operations and withdraw their troops to defend their trail." Nhan estimated that "We only needed to use 1/10 or 1/20 of that manpower to give them good training and weapons, and they would do something for the country because they longed to have a chance to serve." Nhan goes on to describe the creation of a study committee which included representatives of the various offices of the Joint General Staff.

Despite many months of discussions this committee did not reach any concrete proposals except for a report of unoriginal observations. Members of the committee did not dare to offer frank criticism for fear of offending the government policy. It was very difficult to change the subjective views, prejudices, the bureaucracy, and the proud generals' mind. Some members of the committee voiced their opinion, "We really need a revolution to change the situation."
Colonel Nguyen Huy Loi mentions the same or a similar committee in
the JGS which he participated in.

We had a committee right in the JGS. After talking about not
having enough forces to defend, we tried to set up a committee
in order to make a study about this. I was invited to partici­
 pate and talk about this. But this committee during three
months did nothing because we had no instructions about what
we have to do. We tried to work out some consolidated position
about leaving some areas we were able to defend, but this com­
mittee just sat once in two weeks, just talking, and we came
up with nothing.

Attacking North Vietnam was a recurring idea among South Vietnam's
leaders. Major General Nguyen Khanh (Prime Minister from February to
August 1964 and briefly President) had publicly announced a "March North"
campaign in July 1964, although it was largely for propaganda purposes.
Several of our respondents, however, felt that South Vietnam's armed
forces should have initiated some military operations against the North
as the only way to limit, perhaps ultimately end, North Vietnam's military
operations in the South. Said Lieutenant General Tran Van Minh, "We
were not able to go up north and that is the real crux." Air Marshall
Ky suggested the creation of guerrilla bases in North Vietnam to tie
down North Vietnamese troops.

... at the Guam Conference [held in 1967]
I told General Vien to brief President Johnson and [the]
American delegation about a plan to have us go North. Not
[a] full invasion but to establish a set zone like the
communists had, Zone D and C down south ... the idea was at
least to have a big military camp in the mountainous area
where we could defend ourselves easily, to keep the communist
troops there in the north and second, serving as a rallying
point to other anti-communist [people in the North].

Ky believed that the establishment of guerrilla zones in North Vietnam would
show the North Vietnamese that the South Vietnamese "have the guts to go
up there, to fight in their own territory." Second, the guerrilla zones
would "rally all the population in the North." Asked by the interviewer
if he actually believed that the population in the North would have rallied,
Ky used an anecdote to assert that there were no unfriendly feelings.
When pressed by the interviewer that there is a great difference between
the absence of unfriendly feelings and actually joining the other side, Ky agreed but added, "If you didn't try, how do you know that?"

Other military leaders felt that South Vietnam should have consolidated its territory to be in a better defensive position. In their view, South Vietnam's armed forces were spread too thin trying to hold on to every remote outpost in the country. As a result, the army had virtually no reserves to deal with a major offensive. In the opinion of one senior general, the degree of consolidation, that is, the amount of territory to be given up, would have depended on the level of U.S. military aid. As mentioned earlier, Thieu himself is reported to have said once in exasperation: "If they [the U.S.] grant full aid, we will hold the whole country, but if they only give half of it, we will hold only half the country." But suggestions to Thieu that some remote outposts be abandoned and the forces defending them be regrouped were rejected by President Thieu who "insisted that the outposts be kept at any cost." The object was "too sensitive" to press the president on, and that anyone who argued for consolidation risked being considered "a defeatist." One staff officer agreed that any talk of consolidating South Vietnam's forces into more defensible geographic areas was "too dangerous" as such talk might be considered defeatist. Colonel Nguyen Hoy Loi mentions the same problem. "... we know that we didn't have enough forces to defend the whole area, but there was one thing that no one dared talk about -- withdrawing from some areas -- because we would lose the ground to the communists. If Thieu hears something like this you would get into big trouble."

As already pointed out above, the South Vietnamese expressed enormous faith in air power, particularly in the B-52s, less so for their use in North Vietnam, but certainly against enemy troop concentrations in the South. Again, as General Thinh said, "In April 1975, they [the enemy] could never have placed their divisions around Saigon if the United States had intervened with B-52s. Truly, this bomber could have changed the face of the Vietnam War." Lieutenant General Tran Van Minh, the commander of the Air Force, felt that had
the Americans provided the South Vietnamese with F-4 Phantom jets, it could have made a difference as the F-4s, in his view, were "much, much, much better" for the kind of war being fought. Colonel Vu Van Uoc, the Air Force operations officer, thought that had South Vietnam's "air bases been securely protected [against enemy rockets, mortar, and artillery fire] it is certain that the war would have been prolonged and the issue been very much in the balance." In the view of these officers, the massive enemy troop concentrations would have provided splendid opportunities for the use of airpower.

By the time the enemy launched the final offensive in 1975, it was, of course, too late to consider reorganizing South Vietnam's armed forces or adopting new military doctrines which could have enabled them to hold out longer. As can be expected, the quality of the respondents' suggestions as to what could have been done at that time changes. Many of the respondents hold to the view that South Vietnam's armed forces should not have withdrawn so precipitately, that they could and should have held out longer, and that had they done so, the course of events might have been different.

More for political and psychological reasons than for military reasons, Mr. Buu Vien felt that Phuoc Long, which the enemy captured in January 1975, should have been counterattacked and reoccupied.

... the abandonment of Phuoc Long had probably been seen by the communists as a sign of weakness of ARVN and strongly influenced them in their decision to move forward. At the time it caused our troops to lose much of their enthusiasm and their confidence in their capability. In my opinion, a counter-offensive to recapture Phuoc Long would have given our troops a chance to fight against an enemy who had been so far elusive and was now in a defensive position. Of course, we would have had to take casualties but the same thing should also be true for the communists.

As several other South Vietnamese leaders who later argued for making stands at Hue or Saigon, Buu Vien saw the need for a South Vietnamese victory somewhere.
... we could not afford losing continuously, one battle after another; it was too detrimental to the morale of the troops. We should strive to win a battle, big or small, to concentrate our forces to take back a position we had lost to the communists, even at the risk of losing another position elsewhere. If we lose in one place we should do our best to win at another place. This would help maintain the fighting spirit of the troops and destroy the myth that the enemy was invincible. Fighting a war is sometimes comparable to competing in a game. Nothing is more discouraging than just to keep losing.

Most of the officers interviewed felt that the withdrawal from Pleiku and Kontum was a mistake. In their view, Pleiku and Kontum should have been held. Colonel Lu Khac Ly, the II Corps Chief of Staff, felt that if Pleiku and Kontum had been defended, which he believes they could have done for two weeks without resupply, and longer with it, the enemy would have had to put at least two full divisions into a direct attack. A senior army general thought that half of such an attacking force would have been destroyed trying to take the Highland cities had they been defended. One general noted that General Phan Van Phu, the Commander of II Corps, had from 15 to 30 days of supplies on hand and even though air resupply would have been inadequate to support a sustained defense, the defending units could have fought for some time, possibly into May or June. According to Lieutenant General Pham Quoc Thuan, General Phu himself believed that he could defend Pleiku with the forces on hand for at least three months (into June), and if he was provided with one more division and appropriate air support, he thought he could have defended Pleiku for six months.

Similar views were expressed by the respondents regarding the withdrawal from Hue and Danang. In their view, they should have been held. General Ngo Quang Truong, the Commander of I Corps, felt that he could have held Hue and argued to President Thieu that his forces should "stay in Hue and fight." He thought that the South Vietnamese government "needed to demonstrate a strong spirit to the enemy and to give confidence to the population." Another general states that he was told by the commanders on the scene that had the order been given to defend Hue, the South Vietnamese forces could have held the citadel for at least three
months. Colonel Nguyen Huy Loi disagrees that Hue could have been defender but argues that Danang, with its terrain features, would have been easier to defend.

Most of the respondents feel that with the loss of I and II Corps, the war was lost. Too many enemy divisions were closing on Saigon; there were not enough forces to put up a defense. A few, however, felt that the South Vietnamese forces could have fought on for several months. Lieutenant General Pham Quoc Thuan, for example, thinks that South Vietnam's forces might have fought on in III Corps for at least three more months. Major General Lam Quang Tho believes that had South Vietnam's forces withdrawn in a more organized manner and confronted the enemy with a strong defense of III Corps, the enemy would have halted its advance, being satisfied for the conquest of the northern half of the country, at least for the time being. A senior general agreed that a longer defense of Saigon might have been possible. Had this been done, the course of the war, at least in 1975, might have been different. The same general based his confidence on a reported remark by a VC division commander who "said that if they cannot occupy Saigon in May, they have to withdraw because of the rainy season. [Their] armor cannot move." He and also General Thuan believe that Thieu's decision to send an airborne brigade, two Ranger brigades, and the remainder of the Second Infantry Division to counterattack the enemy at Phan Rang was a serious mistake. This force was defeated depriving Saigon's defenses of its readily available reserves.

Air Marshal Ky still thought that Saigon might be defended. He described his idea in his book Twenty Years and Twenty Days.

My plan was really to make Saigon a Stalingrad. All the women, all the children, all the old people would be evacuated. The only ones to remain in the city would be volunteers, but there would be half a million of us to defend our capital as the Russians had defended Stalingrad. We had plans to blow up all the bridges, to isolate Saigon. As I told Father Thanh [a Catholic priest and a member of the National Salvation Committee], 'That is worth dying for. A battle the world will always remember.' An American correspondent said, 'If you try to turn Saigon into a Stalingrad, thousands will die. Finally you will die. Do you really consider that to be a useful act?'
'I don't know,' I replied. All I know is that I am a fighter. You mention the word Stalingrad. Do you realize after all these years people still know that name? That is enough for me. Stalingrad is one battle that changed the history of the world; maybe we could do the same thing.*

The interviewer questioned Ky further about the purpose and utility of a heroic but seemingly futile defense, asking, 'What do you think would have happened if your idea had been accepted... of turning Saigon into a Stalingrad, as you put in your book? If you had been able, let's say, to hold out against the North Vietnamese divisions for a while; as long as you were convinced that even then America would not help, what would [you] have foreseen as a result?' Ky's answer indicated that he had not entirely abandoned the idea of American intervention.

... right after Ban Me Thuot, I told Cao Van Vien that we need desperately a big military victory, not to try to bring American troops, but at least—with my knowledge about American public opinion—if you can show to them right now, one big action, [a] beautiful military action to show to them that we are [a] courageous people, we want to fight, they will help us.

The interviewer asked if he really thought that might have brought American opinion around. Ky replied, "Around [in] America and around [in] the world." A stubborn defense of Saigon would have, in Ky's view, at least given the South Vietnamese more time to withdraw south to the Delta and reorganize to fight on. "... if we have to accept defeat, then I want that kind of defeat [that] should be remembered by everyone, that we, the Vietnamese, had fought courageously before the defeat."

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On April 29, just one day before the surrender, Colonel Do Ngoc Nhan at the Joint General Staff still believed that Saigon might be held. According to Nhan, the JGS had managed to reestablish the chain of command, regroup a number of units, and even planned a counterattack to regain control of the air base and surrounding areas which were being occupied by the enemy. The idea was to buy time during which the JGS could be moved to the Delta if necessary and nationalist forces rallied. There also were suggestions to arm the Catholic, Caodaists and Hoa Hao Forces to resist the Communists. The counterattack had already begun on April 30, when the newly installed President Minh notified the headquarters of his decision to surrender. As mentioned earlier, Nhan was shocked. "This news caught me by surprise because up to that moment, the JGS had never been consulted on such an important matter. General [Vinh] Loc and we had done all we could to reestablish the vitality of the disintegrating Armed Forces. The troops were regaining confidence and got ready for the fight to defend the country."

One general thought that the government might have moved to IV Corps in the Delta and continued to fight there, in which case the appropriate tactic would have been to delay the enemy's advance into Saigon by using the substantial Self-Defense Forces positioned there. He remarked that it seemed to him that the Americans were trying to "hurry" South Vietnam's leaders out of the country. He implied that the rush may have resulted from a political decision on the part of the United States. Another general thought that the South Vietnamese forces could have held out in the Delta for another six months with the supplies on hand. No action was taken, however, due to the disruption of the chain of command.
To what end? What would have been achieved by trying to regain possession of Phuoc Long, by defending Pleiku and Kontum for three or six months, by making a stand at Hue or Danang, by a desperate defense of Saigon, by continuing to fight for another six months in the Delta? A more vigorous defense might, in the view of the South Vietnamese have persuaded the Americans to return or "do something." It was still inconceivable to them that the United States would stand idly by and watch South Vietnam collapse without taking some action. They reckoned, however, that it would be more difficult for the United States to take action on their behalf if the South Vietnamese did not appear to be putting up a good fight on their own. One general states that the JGS had developed a belief that South Vietnam had to put on a good show if the U.S. Congress was going to be moved to agree to U.S. air support. Corps commanders received instructions to hold defensive positions in the event of an attack so as to make a good impression on the U.S. Congress. Putting up a good defense was then seen primarily as a way of invoking American intervention. As Colonel Do Ngoc Nhan said, "... if the Vietnamese continued to prove their resistance bravely, the U.S. as the Free World's leader might return." Another senior officer agreed. "If in 1975 we stood there and we fought, and we destroyed the enemy, I do believe the Free World would come back to help us." General Pham Quoc Thuan believes that had Pleiku and Kontum been defended, the United States government might have brought its forces back into the war or at least persuaded it to increase its support for the South Vietnamese (it is not clear which). Had General Phu defended Pleiku for three months, which was within his means, the situation might have been quite different. "A vigorous defense of Pleiku might have persuaded the U.S. Congress that the Vietnamese wanted to fight and induced the Congress to change its position on aid to Vietnam." Another general thought that if Pleiku had been held to May or June 1975, this would have impacted on congressional opinion and brought in more American support. And as mentioned previously, Air Marshall Ky thought that a valiant defense of Saigon itself might just have turned American public opinion on the war. Only Major General Lan Quong
Tho disagrees with the view that the U.S. would be moved by a valiant defense. In his view, "The U.S. disengagement from Vietnam was more than final, and that no matter what would happen, Vietnam would be abandoned to her fate." It is however, intriguing to speculate if American sympathies would have been aroused by a heroic defense in the South.

In sum, our respondents say they should have removed Thieu (and by implication) the corrupt and incompetent others he appointed. They should have reorganized their armed forces and adopted a more austere style of fighting. They should have created more divisions. They should have attacked the North and harassed the enemy's lines of communication and logistics. They should have consolidated their territory to make it more defensible. They should have fought longer. They did none of these.

It would be incorrect to say that the South Vietnamese blame their defeat on the Americans. They admit to their own shortcomings, particularly in the area of leadership; and since they were part of that leadership, they accept, at least indirectly, part of the responsibility. It would, however, be fair to say that as they tell it, their story begins and ends with the Americans. Americans appear as the principal source of their problems and as the principal obstacles to change. The Americans, they say, imposed upon them a military machine and a doctrine ill-suited to their situation and beyond their capacity to support. The omnipresence of the Americans stifled initiative, fostered passivity, and rewarded toadyism. Once the Americans retreated from their commitment to oppose the expansion of communism, South Vietnam, in their view, was doomed.