

Q16 b) The Tet offensive of 1968 was highly significant to North Vietnam's victory in the Second Indochina War. Although it was not considered by the North Vietnamese themselves to be a military victory, the Tet offensive sent an especially damaging message to both South Vietnam and ^{home} to America.

The North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong ^{understand} ~~know~~ that their strength lay in the Guerrilla warfare strategies and tactics they had pursued throughout the Second Indochina War. Their small, well-trained units could easily conduct Guerrilla warfare for an ~~indefinite~~ indefinite period of time, but the Tet offensive was a departure from this. Launched during the Tet celebrations of 1968, the North Vietnamese ~~and~~ Viet Cong forces combined to simultaneously capture a number of cities right across South Vietnam.

As Vietnam was the first "television war", the people at home in America watched as the "Communist" forces demonstrated how ineffective the American and South Vietnamese defence really was.

The American government, up until Tet, had been convincing the majority of American public that they were dominating Vietnam and controlling the Viet Cong/North Vietnamese threat. However, Tet demonstrated that the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces could move and strike ^{anywhere, at any time.} ~~at any time.~~

Although the Viet Cong/North Vietnamese fighting forces were heavily damaged when they were finally removed from the cities, they created uncertainty about what they would do next. The aim of the Tet offensive was never to capture the cities for a extended period of time, but to remove the American belief that they were only under threat in the jungle. As such, Tet was largely responsible for a massive decline in

American troop morale and fear a rapid change in attitude to war among the American public.

Televised images of a small band of Viet Cong who captured the American Embassy for several hours were particularly unsettling for both American troops and civilians.

Changing attitudes to war at home in America were largely responsible for America's withdrawal in 1973. As America is a democratic nation, no administration could risk continued involvement in a war which the majority of the population actively opposed. The role of the Tet offensive in creating negative attitudes to war is ~~not~~ what makes it so significant to the ~~at~~ ~~the~~ eventual ~~work~~ ~~the~~ Vietnamese victory. A lack of public support behind American troops increased the incidence of soldiers who simply refused to fight. This was a growing concern for American forces, especially

after the Tet offensive.

However, the Tet offensive was only a PART of North Vietnam's strategy. North Vietnam's focus on Guerrilla warfare was not allowed them to continue fighting after they suffered massive damage during Tet. The loss of men on such a scale was unusual for the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong, and they too suffered a decline in morale. However, their ~~strict~~ Guerrilla warfare strategy required only minimal supplies and usually brought about minimal losses ^{with} ~~the~~ maximal gains. This allowed them to continue waging effective warfare despite heavy losses and ^{subsequent} decline in morale after Tet in 1968.

The Tet offensive of 1968 wounded both the attackers - North Vietnam and the Viet Cong, and the attacked - the US and South Vietnam. However, the damage to America's belief in her own superiority was far greater than any loss incurred by the forces from the north. As such, Tet achieved its aim of shocking both American troops and the American public to the point where their attitude to war was dramatically and irreversibly changed. This, in time, contributed greatly to the American withdrawal in 1973 and the subsequent victory of North Vietnam in the Second Indochina war.