

Q16

- b) The 1968 Tet Offensive was a significant part of North Vietnam's strategy in achieving ~~the~~ victory in the Second Indochina War, but it was by no means the only factor which rendered the NLF (National Liberation Front) and Viet Cong stronger and more enduring than their South Vietnamese and US counterparts. The Tet<sup>Offensive</sup> has often been labelled the 'turning point' of the Vietnam War (the Second Indochina War), but in reality it was just one specific campaign which had particularly broad ramifications - it was a fact within a wider North Vietnamese strategy, further supplemented by the heavy-handedness of US intervention and the unrelenting incompetence of ~~the~~ a succession of South Vietnamese governments.

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The Tet Offensive took place in January - February 1968, beginning on January 30th. 70,000 - 80,000 Viet Cong soldiers invaded ~~the~~ nine cities and ~~the~~ thirty provincial capitals within South Vietnam.

On January 31st, several cadres blew a hole in the concrete wall of the US embassy in Saigon, succeeding in an ~~an~~ internationally televised takeover.

However, by ~~the~~ February 10, the popular support anticipated by the North Vietnamese forces had failed to materialise, and they were ~~at~~ forced out of Saigon.

The most significant battle was the Battle for Hue, which lasted until the 25th of February. 12,000 Viet Cong soldiers took particularly aggressive tactics to an extreme, strangling, beating and



Shooting more than 3,000 citizens.

However, the Viet Cong were eventually driven back from Hue. Thus, simply in terms of taking territory, the Tet offensive could hardly be termed a success.

~~The~~ The implications of the offensive, rather than the offensive ~~it~~ itself, had the most significant impact in assisting eventual North Vietnamese victory. The invasion of the US embassy was televised worldwide, and a wave of shock spread throughout the public - especially, of course, in America. The US government had long been informing citizens of the American successes in Vietnam (measured in terms of body counts and bombs dropped), but this occurrence appeared to be evidence of the reverse. In November 1969,

250,000 anti-war protesters marched in Washington, as well as in other cities around the US. The tide of public opinion was turning against US involvement in Indochina - a development which could only prove positive for North Vietnamese forces. At the end of 1969, President Nixon was elected on the issue of 'peace with honour.' He began to extricate US forces from Vietnam, removing 150,000 <sup>soldiers</sup> in 1970 and aiming for the eventual 'Vietnamisation' of the war. It was this endeavour - handing the war over to the incompetent ARVN - which vastly increased the prospect of North Vietnamese victory. However, it was not the Tet Offensive alone which led to US withdrawal from Vietnam and eventual North Vietnamese success.



When asked about North Vietnamese Strategy, General Vo Nguyen Giap (leader of the guerilla forces) explained that: "We were never strong enough to drive out half a million Americans - it was not our aim. Our intention was to destroy the will of the American government to continue the war." The Tet Offensive certainly contributed to this objective, but was supplemented by other measures as Giap himself noted: "We do not have one strategy, but an intertwined political, military and diplomatic strategy...". In fact, it was this overarching strategy - centred on nationalism and unrelenting guerilla warfare - which secured North Vietnamese victory. The Tet Offensive was a significant component, but by no means the only one.

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Firstly, <sup>many of</sup> the North Vietnamese Viet Cong had ~~infiltrated~~ infiltrated South Vietnam in 1954, following the division of Vietnam at the seventeenth parallel under the Geneva Convention. By 1964, 40 percent of rural Vietnam was controlled by the Viet Cong (a CIA estimate). For years, strategies of literacy, education, propaganda and clandestine ~~to~~ tax collection had been employed by the ~~peasant~~ Viet Cong in order to secure peasant support in South Vietnam. As Viet Minh secretary Truong Chinh emphasised: "The people are the eyes and ears of the army." Meanwhile, the US and South Vietnamese tactics with regard to the peasantry ~~was~~ were forceful and ineffective. The 'Strategic Hamlets Programme' (1962) ~~intended~~ aimed to create 12,000



hamlets, but in reality only created around 8000, the majority of which had been infiltrated by or were controlled by the Viet Cong.

Similarly, the US' methods ~~to~~ involved the ~~bombing~~ 'search and destroy' missions targeted at Viet Cong infiltrators within South Vietnam, but in reality indiscriminately massacred the population (such as at My Lai in 1968). ~~These~~ Such tactics turned the rural populace against the US, and contributed to North Vietnamese victory considerably - alongside such endeavours as the Tet offensive.

Similarly, US bombing of Laos and Cambodia (allowing the Khmer Rouge to eventually take power in the case of the

latter and the Pathet Lao in the case of the former) earned the US domestic opponents and ~~later~~ further hostility from the NLF and Viet Cong. The US never succeeded in destroying the Ho Chi Minh trail, a main path via which ~~the~~ Viet Cong <sup>soldiers</sup> infiltrated South Vietnam. Yet the harsh measures wrought destruction - millions of tonnes of bombs and thousands of gallons of defoliant ~~was~~ (especially Agent ~~Orange~~ <sup>Orange</sup> ~~which~~ ~~destroyed~~ ~~the~~ ~~environment~~ ~~and~~ ~~destroyed~~ killed many citizens and destroyed the environment throughout the US' entire Campaign.

Further, North Vietnamese victory was ~~also~~ aided by the ~~their~~ overarching strategy of guerilla warfare, and the <sup>strong</sup> desire for nationalism after ~~years~~

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~~For decades~~ decades of subjugation at the hands of colonial powers. The North Vietnamese determination to eventually prevail within the Second Indochina War was virtually limitless.

This can be contrasted with the incompetence of the series of puppet regimes in South Vietnam - ~~Born~~ from Diem to Ky to Thieu and Minh - all of which were propped up by US financial and military support. ~~But~~ Social repression and political corruption were rife. ~~It~~ Whilst the US used 'Search and destroy' tactics, ~~the ARVN~~ they ~~was~~ deemed to be ARVN's tactics 'Search and Avoid.' Such incompetence ~~contributed~~ paved the way for North Vietnam's eventual takeover of the South in April 1975,

after the departure of the US. The peace agreement itself (signed in Paris in 1973) was no ~~barrier~~ barrier to ~~North Vietnam's~~ North Vietnam's long-held aspirations of national unification. As with all peace attempts thus far in Indochina, it was fragile and tenuous.

As a result, a vast variety of factors - not merely the Tet Offensive - proved significant in facilitating North Vietnam's 1975 victory in the Second Indochina War. Certainly, the occurrence itself had considerable impact on domestic opinion in the US and on the confidence of US and ARVN ~~and~~ (South Vietnamese army) forces. However, the Tet Offensive can be clearly identified as a single tactical manifestation of the



broader strategy of North Vietnam - national unification at any price, underpinned by guerrilla warfare. This ~~strategy~~ strategy, along with the Viet Cong's infiltration of South Vietnam, the US' unpopular and destructive methods of warfare, and overall South Vietnamese weakness, supplemented the Tet offensive in leading ~~the~~ ~~North~~ Vietnam to victory in the Second Indochina War.