

## Tet Offensive (January 1968)

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Description On 30 January 1968, the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and the National Liberation Front (NLF, also known as the Vietcong) took advantage of the Vietnamese New Year celebrations known as Tet to launch uprisings in dozens of cities across South Vietnam. The attack surprised the South Vietnamese government and their American allies, as many soldiers from the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) had gone home to celebrate the Tet holidays. Although the rebels initially appeared to be gaining the upper hand (even the United States embassy in Saigon was temporarily penetrated), US and ARVN forces eventually rolled back the offensive, and the NLF suffered very high losses from which it never fully recovered.

US General William Westmoreland insisted that the Tet Offensive had failed, but the symbolic value of the attack far outweighed the tactical defeat because the offensive shattered the myth propagated by US leaders that victory was just around the corner. In the wake of the Tet Offensive, President Lyndon B. Johnson reduced the aerial bombardment of North Vietnam and began withdrawing US troops from Vietnam. Tet showed other struggling revolutionary movements in the Third World that a small, cash-strapped communist country could build a popular-based militia to fight American imperialism. The Tet Offensive can also be linked to the series of popular uprisings that rippled across the globe in 1968, such as worker and student revolts in France, the United States, and Mexico.

Suggested Reading: **Long, Ngo Vinh.** 1993. The Tet Offensive and its aftermath. In *The American war in Vietnam*. ed. J. Werner and D. Hunt, 23-45. Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program.

**Spector, Ronald H.** 1992. *After Tet: The bloodiest year in Vietnam*. New York: Free Press.

**Wirtz, James J.** 1991. *The Tet Offensive: Intelligence failure in war*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.