

The significance of the Tet Offensive as part of North Vietnam's strategy in achieving victory in the Vietnam War is best examined in terms of its effects on the US, both militarily and domestically, as well as its effects on North Vietnam itself.

Tactically, the Tet Offensive was a failure. It did not lead to the capture of Saigon or heavy losses on the US' part. However, it was of great strategic value. The North showed that it was capable of striking anywhere, and had the numerical strength to do so. Ultimately it put pressure on the US home front. In the November elections of 1968, Lyndon B Johnson lost office in favour of Richard Nixon, who advocated a withdrawal of troops from Vietnam while still saving face on the international

stage. In this regard, the Tet Offensive succeeded in demoralising the US home front and provoking a gradual withdrawal. An American television show host remarked in shock, 'I thought we were winning the war?' With the realisation that Johnson had not been as successful as the media had claimed, and with growing anti-war sentiment, continuing US involvement was no longer an acceptable option. It was the turning point of the war.

However, it was not a sudden victory for the DRV. While Nixon promised to withdraw troops, he was still concerned about the postulated Domino Effect theory, as well as the effects that withdrawal from Indochina would have on American prestige. To save face, he opted for a

policy of Vietnamisation - continuing US involvement only as far as supporting the RVN's own efforts to win against the North.

Vietnamisation spelled great suffering for the people of the DRV. The great bombing campaigns - Linebackers 1 and 2, Rolling Thunder, among others - laid waste to vast tracts of land, while Operation Menu forced the Ho Chi Minh trail to move further into hostile Cambodian territory. However, like the Nazi bombing campaigns against Britain in World War 2, this only served to strengthen the people's resolve. Many in the South were suffering as a result as well - to root out the Viet Cong, the US was clearing jungles and displacing populations as well as destroying agriculture. As a result, the Viet Cong



garnered more support from sympathetic villagers. Vietnamisation also failed to bolster the ARVN's strength, as corruption and poor organisation compromised the troops' morale.

Tet also provoked ~~the~~ Nixon's adoption of a policy of Triangulation, in order to isolate the DRV from its Chinese and Soviet support. However, this policy failed, but not as a result of any North Vietnamese action. Rather, it was the RVN's president Nguyen Van Thieu who 'refused to deal with the communists'.

It would not be fair, however, to say that the failure of Vietnamisation and Triangulation to defeat the DRV was part of the North's strategy to win the war, much less that they were directly

caused by Tet. It must be remembered that Tet was a failure, with consequences which, while beneficial to the DRV, were not directly influenced or even intended. The failure of the Americans to capitalise on the situation was solely their own: the bombing campaigns did not take into account the human situation in the DRV and RVN, nor the North's determination; and Trien, who prompted the failure of Triangulation, was installed by the US in lieu of Ngoh Dinh Diem, to fix its own previous mistakes. In effect, the eventual victory of the DRV was not caused by some predetermined sequence of events with Tet as the catalyst, but rather by lucky coincidence and the US's series of monumental failures.

Thus, it can be argued that while

Tet provided the premise for US withdrawal, it was a failure in and of itself, and only indirectly influenced the successive failed attempts by the US to bring the war to a favourable end. Such events were certainly not integral parts of the North Vietnamese strategy, but rather fortunate additions.