**TET Offensive**

The **Tet Offensive** ([January 30](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/January_30), [1968](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1968) - [June 8](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/June_8), [1968](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1968)) was a series of [operational](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operational_warfare) offensives by the [Viet Cong](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viet_Cong) and the [North Vietnamese Army](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnam_People%27s_Army) during the [Vietnam War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnam_War). The operations are called the Tet Offensive as they were timed to begin on the night of January 30–31, 1968, [*Tết Nguyên Đán*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/T%E1%BA%BFt) (the [lunar new year](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lunar_new_year) day). The offensive began spectacularly during celebrations of the Lunar New Year and lasted about two months, although some sporadic operations associated with the offensive continued into 1969. The Tet offensive was a tactical defeat for the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces, but it inflicted severe damage on American civilian morale and contributed to the withdrawal of American forces from the country.

**Strategic context**

Until 1968 the strategy of North Vietnam and the Viet Cong in South Vietnam had been predicated on developing a [social revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_revolution) which would begin in the countryside and end in a nationalist urban uprising. This strategy had informed an operational doctrine of gradual intensification of ground warfare, and the development of the Viet Cong's capacity for operational warfare. With the local RVN-aligned village elite as their primary enemy in a fundamentally social war, early efforts in the south were aimed at villages and large farms. The intent of this strategy was to swing the rural population to supporting the National Front for Liberation, thereby socially isolating the urban elite, and winning the allegiance of urban leftists and discontents. This form of war produced what amounted to a bloody stalemate where neither side was able to gain any real advantage over the other. The reaction of the rural population was often to flee the countryside for the cities as refugees.

The involvement of U.S. ground forces greatly changed the strategy of North Vietnam. Rather than any kind of revolutionary conflict or irregular war, the conflict turned into small-unit battles between regular army units on both sides. Starting in the 1950s, North Vietnam began sending units of its army south. On [March 8](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/March_8), [1965](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1965), 3,500 [United States Marines](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Marines) became the first American combat troops to land in South Vietnam, adding to the 25,000 U.S. military advisers already in place, and four days later President Johnson announced the number of U.S. troops in Vietnam would be increased from 75,000 to 125,000. The combined forces of U.S. infantry, artillery and air-power inflicted steady losses on the Viet Cong, but as these losses were consistently made up with replacements from North Vietnam, nothing really changed.

From the American perspective, the first several years of the war involved an ever greater commitment of forces in the name of stabilizing the situation in Vietnam. The US Military and Defense Department told the public that the war was a matter of destroying the insurgency in the countryside. The military focused on "body counts" as a metric for progress in the destruction of the insurgency. US strategy for dealing with North Vietnam was to use bombing to pressure the country out of the conflict and to draw the North Vietnamese into unequal conventional battles such as the [Battle of Khe Sanh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Khe_Sanh).

The high level commanders were convinced of their success, and were all too happy to share the opinion with reporters. Throughout 1967 the attitude was one of "containment"; the war would never be ended due to direct military action, but it would be reduced to such a low level that the ARVN could deal with any remaining problems.

By late 1967 the momentum seemed to be with the U.S. Unbeknownst to the leaders in the south, there was a growing body of politicians in the north that shared these views and called for dialogue to end the war. This resulted in a massive purge, leading to the arrest and imprisonment of over 200 North Vietnamese officials. The US bombing campaign over North Vietnam had allowed the more extreme elements of the government to both whip up patriotic feeling and to crush any dissent within the ruling party.

**The plan**

The plan for the Tet Offensive originated in 1967, following the death of North Vietnamese General [Nguyen Chi Thanh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nguyen_Chi_Thanh). The primary strategist was Thanh's successor, General [Vo Nguyen Giap](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vo_Nguyen_Giap), although Giap claimed afterward to have been against the idea, planning it "reluctantly under duress from the [Le Duan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Le_Duan) dominated Politburo." Giap had long advocated primarily using guerrilla tactics against the U.S. and South Vietnam, whereas Thanh had supported general main force action. Overriding Giap, the North Vietnamese leadership decided that the time was ripe for a major conventional offensive. They believed that the South Vietnamese government and the U.S. presence were so unpopular in the South that a broad-based attack would spark a spontaneous uprising of the South Vietnamese population, which would enable the North to sweep to a quick, decisive victory.

To this end, a multiphase plan was developed: in the first phase, the PAVN would launch attacks on the border regions of [South Vietnam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Vietnam) to close those regions to American observation. Following this, a second phase of widely dispersed attacks by the Viet Cong directly into the major centers of the country would cause the collapse of the government and would prod the civilians into full-fledged revolt, and with the government overthrown, the Americans and other allied forces would have no choice but to evacuate, leading to phase three attacks by the Viet Cong and PAVN against elements of the isolated foreign forces.

The offensive involved simultaneous military action in most of the larger cities in South Vietnam and attacks on major U.S. bases, with particular efforts focused on the cities of Saigon and Hue. Concurrently, a substantial assault was launched against the U.S. firebase at [Khe Sanh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khe_Sanh). The Khe Sanh assault drew North Vietnamese forces away from the offensive into the cities, but North Vietnam considered the attack necessary to protect their supply lines to the south.

**ARVN and U.S. readiness**

In the days immediately preceding the Offensive, the preparedness of both the ARVN and the U.S. military were relatively relaxed. North Vietnam had announced in October that it would observe a seven-day truce from January 27 to February 3, 1968, in honor of the Tet holiday, and the South Vietnamese army made plans to allow recreational leave for a large part of its force.

U.S. and ARVN military intelligence observed signs of a major military buildup in the months before the Offensive. In addition to captured intelligence, observations of [logistics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Logistics) operations were also quite clear: In October the number of trucks observed heading south on the [Hồ Chí Minh Trail](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ho_Chi_Minh_trail) jumped from the previous monthly average of 480 to 1,116. In November this number was 3,823 and in December, 6,315.

U.S. attention was firmly focused on the ongoing battle at Khe Sanh, and concluded it was the target of this buildup. U.S. intelligence identified at least 15,000 PAVN troops in the vicinity, and [Military Assistance Command Vietnam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_Assistance_Command_Vietnam) (MACV) staff was certain that a decisive clash was imminent, but thought it would be directed solely against Khe Sanh.

General Westmoreland warned President Johnson of the possibility of a major offensive, probably against Khe Sanh, and considered analogous to the famed Vietnamese attacks at [Điện Biên Phủ](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dien_Bien_Phu) in the 1950s, which had preceded scheduled negotiations as a means of improving the Communist bargaining position. While military intelligence saw that offensive operations were being planned, it did not detect that the offensive would be national in scale and aimed at cities.

**Specific operations**

Map of South Vietnam showing some of the major targets of the Tet Offensive. Also shown is Khe Sanh, where the attack predated Tet.

The Tet Offensive was coordinated between [battalion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battalion) strength elements of the [National Liberation Front's](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Front_for_the_Liberation_of_Vietnam) People's Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF or [Viet Cong](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viet_Cong)) and [divisional](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Division_%28military%29) strength elements of [North Vietnam's](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Vietnam) [People's Army of Vietnam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People%27s_Army_of_Vietnam) (PAVN), against [South Vietnam's](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Vietnam) [Army of the Republic of Vietnam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Army_of_the_Republic_of_Vietnam) (ARVN), and [United States military](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_military) and other ARVN-allied forces. Fighting began to the south on January 29 as a number of Viet Cong units attacked prematurely in four provincial towns. The rest of the NLF/PAVN attacks began on the night of January 30. All but eight provincial capitals, five of the six autonomous cities, and 58 other major towns were attacked, with major attacks aimed at [Ban Me Thuot](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ban_Me_Thuot), [Quảng Nam province](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quang_Nam), [Đà Lạt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dalat), [Mỹ Tho](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/My_Tho), [Cần Thơ](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Can_Tho), [Bến Tre province](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ben_Tre_Province), [Nha Trang](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nha_Trang), and [Kontum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kontum). It was in [Huế](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hu%E1%BA%BF), the ancient capital, and [Saigon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saigon) that the Communist forces had significant success.

**Saigon**

*Main article:* [*First Battle of Saigon*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Battle_of_Saigon)

Although Saigon was the focal point of the Tet Offensive, the Communists did not seek a total takeover of the city. Rather, they had six primary targets within the city: the headquarters of the ARVN, President Thieu's office, the American Embassy, the [Tan Son Nhut Air Base](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tan_Son_Nhut_Air_Base), the Long Binh Naval Headquarters, and the National Radio Station. A total of 35 battalions attacked these targets; many of these troops being undercover Viet Cong who lived and worked in the city.

The radio station was considered an important target by the Communists. They had brought a tape recording of Hồ Chí Minh announcing the liberation of Saigon and calling for a "General Uprising." The building was taken and held for six hours, but they were unable to broadcast as the power had been cut off as soon as the station was attacked.

By early February, the Communist high command realized that none of their military objectives were being met, and they halted any further attacks on fortified positions. Sporadic fighting continued in Saigon until March 7. Some sections of the city were left badly damaged by the combat, particularly by U.S. retaliatory air and artillery strikes. The Chinese district of Cholon suffered especially, with perhaps hundreds of civilians killed in American counterattacks.

**U.S. Embassy**

The attack against the [U.S. Embassy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diplomatic_mission) was especially significant in the public's perception of the U.S. military's control over the situation. At 2:45 AM on January 31, 19 Viet Cong commandos attacked the embassy. Although VC attacks had been taking place in Saigon for over an hour, the guards at the embassy had not been informed of this and had not been reinforced. The Viet Cong blew a hole in the embassy compound's wall, killed several [MPs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_police), and entered the grounds. The few remaining American guards withdrew into the embassy building and locked the doors. Although the Viet Cong had an ample supply of explosives, they did not press their attack. Both officers in charge of the Viet Cong squad had been killed in the initial assault and the remaining guerrillas milled aimlessly around the grounds. Eventually American reinforcements arrived, and in the morning, six hours after the attack began, MPs retook the embassy compound, killing all of the remaining Viet Cong.

With the bodies of the dead Viet Cong still scattered about the rubble of the badly damaged embassy, General Westmoreland gave a press conference inside the compound. According to American reporter Don North "At 9:20, General Westmoreland strode through the gate in his clean and carefully starched fatigues, flanked by grimy and bloody MPs and Marines who had been fighting since 3 a.m. Standing in the rubble, Westmoreland declared: "No enemy got in the embassy building. It's a relatively small incident. A group of sappers blew a hole in the wall and crawled in, and they were all killed. Nineteen bodies have been found on the premises -- enemy bodies. Don't be deceived by this incident." "I couldn't believe it. "Westy" was still saying everything was just fine. He said the Tet attacks throughout the country were 'very deceitfully' calculated to create maximum consternation in Vietnam and that they were 'diversionary' to the main enemy effort still to come at Khe Sanh."

**Adams photograph**

Saigon Police Chief General [Nguyen Ngoc Loan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nguyen_Ngoc_Loan) executing Viet Cong Captain [Nguyen Van Lem](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nguyen_Van_Lem): Eddie Adams' Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph

The fighting in Saigon also produced one of the Vietnam War's most famous images, photographer [Eddie Adams](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eddie_Adams_%28photographer%29)' [Pulitzer Prize](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pulitzer_Prize)-winning image of the summary execution of a Viet Cong prisoner on [February 1](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/February_1), [1968](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1968).

[Nguyen Van Lem](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nguyen_Van_Lem) was captured by South Vietnamese national police, who identified him as the captain of a Viet Cong assassination and revenge platoon, and accused him of murdering the families of police officers. He was brought before Brigadier General Nguyen Ngoc Loan, the chief of the national police, who briefly questioned him. General Nguyen then drew his sidearm and shot the prisoner. Nguyen's motives may have been personal; he had been told by a subordinate that the suspect had killed a police major who was one of Nguyen's closest friends, and the major's family as well.

Present at the shooting were Adams and an [NBC](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NBC) [television news](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Television_news) crew. The photograph appeared on front pages around the world, and won eight other awards in addition to the Pulitzer. The NBC film was played on the [Huntley-Brinkley Report](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Huntley-Brinkley_Report) and elsewhere, in some cases the silent film embellished with the sound effect of a gunshot. General Westmoreland would later write, "The photograph and film shocked the world, an isolated incident of cruelty in a broadly cruel war, but a psychological blow against the South Vietnamese nonetheless."

**Huế**

*Main articles:* [*Battle of Hue*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Hue) *and* [*Massacre at Huế*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Massacre_at_Hu%E1%BA%BF)

The city of Huế was attacked by ten PAVN battalions and six Viet Cong battalions and almost completely overrun. Thousands of civilians believed to be potentially hostile to Communist control, including government officials, religious figures, and expatriate residents, were executed in what became known as the Massacre at Huế. The city was not recaptured by the U.S. and ARVN forces until the end of February. Due to the historical and cultural value of the city, the U.S. did not apply air and artillery strikes as widely as in other cities, at least initially. Instead, [U.S. Marines](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/U.S._Marines) of the [1st Marine Division](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1st_Marine_Division) and several Army units had to clear the city street by street and house by house; a deadly form of combat the U.S. military had hardly seen since WW II, and for which the soldiers were not trained. Over most of February, they gradually fought their way towards the Citadel, a fortified 3-square-mile section of the city, which was recaptured from PAVN troops after four days of struggle. The U.S. lost 216 men and the ARVN 384. The allies estimated the PAVN lost 8,000 in the city and in fighting in the surrounding area. Lasting 26 days, Huế was one of the longest and perhaps the bloodiest single battle of the Vietnam War. The extent of the massacre of civilians by the Communists was only realized over the following months and years, with the last mass graves being found in 1970. Approximately 2,800 bodies were found, and another 2,000 persons were missing. Some thousands of additional lives were lost from civilians being caught in the crossfire of the battle.

In the aftermath of Tet, the Communist command described the battle of Huế as "an overall success." Their unapologetic description of the massacre of civilians was "Huế was a place where reactionary [i.e., anti-communist] spirit had existed for over ten years. However, it took us only a short time to drain it to its root."

**Khe Sanh**

*Main article*: [Battle of Khe Sanh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Khe_Sanh)

Khe Sanh was an airstrip and U.S. Marine base just south of the [DMZ](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnamese_Demilitarized_Zone). According to North Vietnam leadership, the attack on Khe Sanh, which began on January 21, was intended to serve two purposes: As a diversionary tactic to draw American attention and forces away from the upcoming Tet attacks, and to prevent the forces at Khe Sanh from attacking supplies and troops moving south on the Hồ Chí Minh Trail. In turn, American military stated that the very purpose of the Khe Sanh base was to provoke the North Vietnamese into focused and prolonged battle, allowing American artillery and air strikes to inflict massive casualties.

Khe Sanh and its 6,000 men were surrounded by 3 PAVN divisions, totaling approximately 20,000 men. Throughout the battle, which lasted until April 8, the Marines were subjected to heavy artillery bombardment, combined with sporadic small-scale infantry attacks. There was never any major ground assault on the base, and the battle was largely a duel between American and PAVN gunners, combined with air strikes from the American side. American air support eventually included massive bombing by [B-52s](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/B-52_Stratofortress) to destroy PAVN trenches and bunkers. Ground supply to the base was cut off, and airborne resupply became difficult due to enemy fire. Thanks to innovative high-speed "supply assaults" using fighter-bombers in combination with helicopters, air supply was never halted.

American media covered the battle extensively, and often made pessimistic comparisons to the [Battle of Dien Bien Phu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Dien_Bien_Phu), where a French base had been besieged and ultimately defeated by the Vietnamese in the [1946-1954 Indochina War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indochina_Wars#The_First_Indochina_War).

In the end, the PAVN broke off their assault, and both sides would claim that the battle had served its intended purpose. The United States estimated 8,000 PAVN dead and considerably more wounded, against 730 American lives lost and another 2,642 wounded. As with the Vietnam War in general, the loss of American lives left a much greater impression upon the American public than did a military victory that could only be measured in terms of "kill ratio." The fact that the Khe Sanh base was abandoned on June 23 of 1968, having been deemed of no further military value, inevitably encouraged this sense of futility about the battle and the overall war.

**Aftermath**

A Viet Cong soldier awaits [interrogation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interrogation) following capture in the attacks on [Saigon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ho_Chi_Minh_City) during the Tet Offensive of 1968.

In total, the United States estimated that 45,000 Viet Cong and PAVN soldiers were killed, though the actual figure may have been significantly lower. The USA, ARVN, and allied Australian and South Korean forces suffered 4,324 killed, 16,063 wounded, and 598 missing. (other sources give a higher estimate of about 5,000 ARVN troops killed).

**Effect on the Viet Cong and North Vietnam**

The Tet Offensive can be considered a military defeat for the Communist forces, as neither the Viet Cong nor the North Vietnamese army achieved their tactical goals. Furthermore, the operational cost of the offensive was dangerously high, with the Viet Cong essentially crippled by the huge losses inflicted by South Vietnamese and other Allied forces. Nevertheless, the Offensive is widely considered a turning point of the war in Vietnam, with the NLF and PAVN winning an enormous psychological and [propaganda](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Propaganda) victory. The Viet Cong's operational forces were effectively crippled by the Offensive. Many Viet Cong who had been operating under cover in the cities of South Vietnam revealed themselves during the Offensive and were killed or captured. The organization was preserved for propaganda purposes, but in practical terms the Viet Cong were finished. Formations that were referred to as Viet Cong were in fact largely filled with North Vietnamese replacements. In reality, this change had little effect on the war, since North Vietnam had no difficulty making up the casualties inflicted by the war. The National Liberation Front (the political arm of the Viet Cong) reformed itself as the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam, and took part in future [peace negotiations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paris_Peace_Accords) under this name.

The Communist high command did not anticipate the psychological effect the Tet Offensive would have on America. For example, the attack on the U.S. Embassy was allocated only 19 Viet Cong soldiers, and even the expenditure of this force was considered by some VC officers to be misguided. Only after they saw how the U.S. was reacting to this attack did the Communists begin to propagandize it. The timing of the Offensive was determined by the hope that American and South Vietnamese forces would be less vigilant during the Tet holiday.

**Effect on South Vietnam**

The violence witnessed during the Tet Offensive had a deep psychological effect on the South Vietnamese civilians. Confidence in the government was greatly reduced, as the offensive seemed to show that even with massive American support, the government could not protect its citizens. The South Vietnamese army also suffered lowered morale, with the desertion rate increasing from 10.5 per thousand before Tet to 16.5 per thousand in July of 1968 The songwriter [Trịnh Công Sơn](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tr%E1%BB%8Bnh_C%C3%B4ng_S%C6%A1n) composed the songs *Bài ca dành cho những xác người* (*Song for the dead bodies*) and *Hát trên những xác người* (*Singing on dead bodies*) as a result of the offensive while the songwriter [Trầm Tử Thiêng](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Tr%E1%BA%A7m_T%E1%BB%AD_Thi%C3%AAng&action=edit) composed *Chuyện một chiếc cầu đã gãy* (*Story about a Broken Bridge*) about the collapse of the historic [Trang Tien Bridge](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Trang_Tien_Bridge&action=edit). These songs quickly became classics.

**Effect on the United States**

Although US public opinion polls continued to show a majority supporting involvement in the war, this support continued to deteriorate and the nation became increasingly polarized over the war. [President](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/President_of_the_United_States) [Lyndon Johnson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lyndon_Johnson) saw his popularity fall sharply after the Offensive, and he withdrew as a candidate for re-election in March of 1968. The Tet Offensive is frequently seen as an example of the value of [media](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mass_media) influence and popular opinion in the pursuit of military objectives. That the Communists were able to mount a major, country-wide assault at all was a blow to U.S. hopes of winning the war rapidly, and starkly called into question General Westmoreland's earlier public reports of progress in the War. Likewise, the optimistic assessments of the Johnson administration and [The Pentagon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Pentagon) came under heavy criticism and ridicule.

Seeing the complete collapse of the PAVN/Viet Cong offensive, the lopsided casualty ratio, the lack of a popular uprising in support of the attacks, and the failure of the attacking forces to gain and hold significant territorial assets, Westmoreland considered it an appropriate opportunity for a [counteroffensive](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Counteroffensive) action. He put together a request for 206,000 additional troops to prosecute the war in the wake of the Offensive, a move that would have required mobilization of the U.S. Reserves.

While this was being deliberated, the request was leaked to the press and published across three columns of the Sunday edition of [*The New York Times*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_New_York_Times) on [March 10](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/March_10), [1968](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1968). Then-[Lieutenant Colonel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lieutenant_Colonel) Dave Palmer later wrote in *Summons of the Trumpet*: "Looked upon erroneously but understandably by readers as a desperate move to avert defeat, news of the request for 206,000 men confirmed the suspicions of many that the result of the Tet Offensive had not been depicted accurately by the President or his spokesmen. If the Communists had suffered such a grievous setback, why would we need to increase our forces by 40 percent?"

**Media impact**

Many people, both at the time and in retrospect, have criticized the U.S media for the negative light in which it portrayed both the war in general and the Tet Offensive in particular. [Earle Wheeler](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Earle_Wheeler), then [Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chairman_of_the_Joint_Chiefs_of_Staff), complained of "all the doom and gloom we see in the U.S. press" after Tet. General Westmorland would later write: "The war still could have been brought to a favorable end following the defeat of the enemy’s Tet Offensive. But this was not to be. Press and television had created an aura, not of victory, but defeat."

Some conservative authors have accused the press of being responsible for losing the war. For example, in *Certain Victory: How Hanoi Won The War*, Dennis Warner writes "This is the only war lost in the columns of The New York Times. They created an image of South Vietnam that was as distant from the truth as not even to be a good caricature. There were those who invented, distorted, and lied."

One of the most commonly cited works on the media is *Big Story*, by Peter Braestrup, a former Marine infantry officer and reporter for The Washington Post during the Tet Offensive. Braestrup analyzed press coverage of the Tet offensive and concluded that the press misreported the offensive as a defeat for the U.S. and that the reporting amounted to a "portrait of defeat".

Probably the most well-known example of an anti-war statement in the press is [Walter Cronkite](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter_Cronkite)'s special report on the war of [February 27](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/February_27), [1968](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1968). After touring the ruined streets and battlefields of the Tet Offensive and interviewing discouraged soldiers and officers in the field, he directly criticized the military leadership and the Johnson administration: "We have been too often disappointed by the optimism of the American leaders, both in Vietnam and Washington, to have faith any longer in the silver linings they find in the darkest cloud." He concluded by saying that the U.S. was "mired in a stalemate" and called for a negotiated end to the conflict.

**Studies of media impact on public opinion**

Daniel Hallin and Clarence Wyatt also studied the effect of the media on public opinion. They found virtually no evidence to support any causal relationship between editorial tone and bias in the media with loss of public support for the war. Hallin maintains that there was in fact a shift in the tone of coverage during and after Tet, but this change was a reflection of the shift in the opinions of elite decisions makers in the United States.

Professor John Mueller also studied the effects of the media on public opinion during the Korean and Vietnam conflicts. He found no relationship between the media and popular support but linked support to casualty levels.

Army historian William Hammond, considered an authority on military and media relations concluded that there was little evidence showing a link between media coverage and popular support. Hammond wrote "that press reports were...more accurate than the public statements of the administration in portraying the situation in Vietnam." But by 1968, the charge that the press lost Vietnam had become an article of faith to many Vietnam veterans.

**Impact on domestic politics in the United States**

In November 1967, in response to mass protests at the Pentagon the month before, President Johnson started a public relations campaign to convince the public that the United States was winning the war. Johnson stated that the war would last "not many more nights. Westmorland told the National Press Club that the end had come into view. After Tet President Johnson continued to claim the war was going well for the United States. His credibility was undermined however by the leak of Westmoreland's request for 206,000 additional troops just two days before the [United States Democratic Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Democratic_Party) [New Hampshire Primary](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Hampshire_Primary) President Johnson suffered a unexpected setback in the primary, finishing barely ahead of [United States Senator](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Senator) [Eugene McCarthy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eugene_McCarthy). Soon after, Senator [Robert F. Kennedy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_F._Kennedy) announced he would join the contest for the Democratic nomination, further emphasizing the plummeting support for Johnson's Administration in the wake of Tet. On March 31, Johnson announced he would not seek reelection, and announced a halt to the bombing of North Vietnam.

Also in March of 1968, Johnson announced that General Westmoreland would be replacing General Harold K. Johnson as [Army Chief of Staff](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chief_of_Staff_of_the_United_States_Army). Although technically a promotion, few doubted that Westmoreland was being "kicked upstairs" in response to Tet.