The Tet Offensive, 1968

The Vietnam War’s Turning Point?
The Tet Offensive: The Eddie Adams Picture
1.) North Korean seizure of the USS Pueblo – concern about another front in Asia – (North Koreans had attempted assassination of South Korean leader the previous day) – crew released in December, only Navy ship still held

2.) Siege at Khe Sanh – begins January 21 (will last until April 8) – fears of another Dien Binh Phu
Beginning of the Offensive

1.) Struck 36 of 44 provincial capitals, five of six major cities, 64 district capitals, and 50 hamlets

2.) Raid on the US Embassy – got into the compound – lasted about six hours - all 19 killed or severely wounded

3.) Also hit Saigon’s airport, presidential palace, and military headquarters

4.) Most successful attack in Hue – held the city for a month
Footage from Tet Offensive – CBS News

- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tm3WimttZjc&feature=related
Military Assessment of Tet – a defeat for the Communists

1.) No collapse of Saigon – South Vietnamese did not welcome them as liberators

2.) Losses – may have been as high as 40,000 – the Viet Cong took the brunt of the losses – Hanoi expected to do better
For the U.S. – A “Costly Victory”

1.) US losses more than 1100, ARVN 2300
2.) More than 12, 500 civilians killed
3.) Devastating Effect on American public opinion – 78 percent of Americans said no progress was being made; 26 percent approved Johnson’s handling of the war
4.) Increase in the credibility gap – Tet seemed to show LBJ’s progress offensive was an exaggeration, to some a lie – Kennedy speech
Tet’s Impact on Washington

1.) Shock at the White House – divided the staff, Rostow still hawkish, McPherson and others more dovish

2.) Military – wanted Johnson to take important decisions – perception of being stretched thin – wanted a reserve call-up

3.) Westmoreland – wanted to expand the war into Laos and Cambodia, southern North Vietnam
Vietnam
Impact of Tet

4.) Military Request for 206,000 more men – half to Vietnam, half to reserve – effort to persuade the president but was more pessimistic in order to persuade

5.) Defense Secretary Clark Clifford – ordered a full scale review – influenced by civilian strategists in the Pentagon – pushed for a change in strategy, de-escalation, getting Saigon to do more
Consideration of a bombing halt

1.) Secretary of State Dean Rusk – now pushed for a bombing halt – thought Hanoi damaged by Tet – chance for peace talks

2.) Johnson – thought US might now be able to act from strength

3.) Uncertainty at the White House reflected in the public mood
“Atmosphere of Gloom”

1.) Robert Kennedy’s speech
2.) Media reporting on the war – image of chaos and defeat
3.) Walter Cronkite - [YouTube - Walter Cronkite Remembers His Tet Offensive Editorial](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QoqBZxXkZ8Q)
4.) NYTimes story – March 10, 1968 – Westmoreland’s request for 206,000 – produced an uproar
Antiwar momentum

1.) Congress – 139 House members call for a review of policy
2.) March 12, 1968 - New Hampshire primary – McCarthy almost upsets Johnson
3.) March 16, 1968 – Robert Kennedy enters the race YouTube - Robert Kennedy for President
4.) “Gold Crisis” intensifies fears of escalation
5.) Johnson meets with the Wise Men – they urge de-escalation
Johnson’s withdrawal

- Johnson proposes a bombing halt north of the 20th parallel
- YouTube - Lyndon Johnson - Remarks on Decision to not seek Reelection
- YouTube - Lyndon B. Johnson I Will Not Run Address
- North Vietnam agrees to Peace talks in Paris – immediate problem, Saigon and the NLF
1968 – after Tet in Vietnam

1.) Military action in Vietnam remains stepped up – offensives in May and August

2.) US accelerates Pacification Program and Chieu Hoi program – amnesty to Viet Cong

3.) Phoenix Program developed by CIA

4.) Expansion in size of South Vietnamese Army
1968 – Violence in America

1.) Assassination of Martin Luther King in Memphis, April 1968

2.) Assassination of Robert Kennedy in June

3.) Chicago Democratic convention – riots and protests
Humphrey vs. Nixon vs. Wallace

The Bombing Halt

- 1.) Prague Spring – Soviets Invade Czechoslovakia – Cancellation of Summit – the Cold War is still there
- 2.) Johnson Halts the Bombing of North Vietnam before the election,
- 3.) Nixon – secret contacts with Thieu – warns him about the negotiations
- 4.) Saigon won’t negotiate yet
- 5.) Nixon wins
- 6.) Stalemated War, Stalemated Peace Talks
Nixon “Bring us together”