

Where We Are

By ANTHONY LEWIS

ABROAD AT HOME

By the end of this week President Nixon will have presided over the Vietnam war for longer than it took the United States to fight and win World War II. From Pearl Harbor to Japan's surrender it was three years, eight months and one week.

This is, therefore, an appropriate time to look at the record. What have been the costs and the achievements of the Nixon policy in Vietnam over the last three years, eight months and one week?

The direct cost in American lives is 15,243 men killed in action and 5,164 "nonhostile deaths," as the Pentagon calls them—Americans killed in Indochina by such things as aircraft failure, not enemy action. Another 53,375 men have been wounded seriously enough to be hospitalized.

Asian military casualties are less certain. South Vietnam has listed more than 80,000 of its own soldiers killed during the Nixon years, and 240,000 wounded; it claims more than 400,000 Communist troops killed and 600,000 wounded.

Civilian victims are much more numerous, although again precision is not possible. A Senate subcommittee has made these estimates for the last three and one-half years: 165,000 South Vietnamese civilians killed, 400,000 wounded and 1,850,000 made refugees; 2,000,000 Cambodians made refugees. There are no reliable figures for North Vietnamese civilian victims.

From President Nixon's Inaugural through the month of August 1972, American planes dropped about 3,750,000 tons of bombs on North and South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. The figure is currently running close to 100,000 tons a month.

According to cautious estimates by Profs. Arthur H. Westing and E. W. Pfeiffer, the bombs dropped during the Nixon Administration have left approximately 7,500,000 craters in Indochina. They have displaced 750 million cubic yards of earth.

Budget figures put the cost of the Vietnam war to the United States since January 1969 at \$60 billion. But that does not include much of the cost of outside bases serving the war, or of aid to South Vietnam and Cambodia. The true cost of carrying on the war has probably exceeded \$100 billion.

enth Fleet off Vietnam and at the bomber bases in Thailand. Today the official figure is 84,000. The number serving the war at the B-52 base in Guam and in other places is not disclosed, but it would bring the total of Americans involved in the war in September 1972 to over 100,000.

The United States is now using 200 B-52s in Vietnam, North and South—almost double the number deployed in January 1969. There are 800 smaller U.S. planes, fighter-bombers, compared with 1,000 to 1,200 in 1969. Four aircraft carriers are operating off Vietnam, twice as many as in January 1969.

With the high level of American air activity, substantial losses continue. Since the U.S. resumed heavy bombing of the North last April, the Saigon command has reported the loss of 101 planes. Reports from Vietnam put the number of American airmen missing or captured in that time at 106.

What have we achieved in those three years, eight months and one week, in the war that still goes on?

In the official Washington view the significant accomplishment is that the Saigon Government has survived. Despite the massive American ground withdrawal, General Thieu is still in office.

On the other hand, the greatest use of explosive power by any country in any war in the history of the world has not crushed the other side, politically or militarily. The Communists have substantial control or influence in many parts of South Vietnam—probably as much there as in 1969, and certainly more in the other countries of Indochina. The Times correspondent in Saigon wrote this month that the Communists' "military position in the South is vastly better than it was a year ago and is virtually unchallenged in Laos and Cambodia."

In short, three years, eight months and one week of American fighting in Indochina have not achieved stability on our terms. The reason is no secret: "We are trying to impose an alien system on a people with a long history of resistance to alien intrusion, against a political force that is the legitimate representative of Vietnamese nationalism. Until we stop that attempt, there can be no stability and no peace."

The other day an American officer in Danang said: "We are really giving it to them with B-52 strikes. Out in the hills around Quangtri, wherever there are reports of two or three people gathered together, they are being hit with B-52s." In terms of military effectiveness, politics and morals, that is where we are in Vietnam.

All this has been spent—lives and money and nature—to carry out a stated policy of American withdrawal from Vietnam.

U.S. ground forces have largely been withdrawn. There were 542,000 American soldiers in Vietnam in January 1969. Today there are 36,000. But in other respects the trend is different.

In January 1969, there were 72,000 Navy and Air Force men of the Sev-