

The Defense Department has based its requests for war appropriations not upon a forecast of what will actually happen in the Vietnam war, but upon what a Pentagon official calls "calculated requirements." In calculating the "requirement" for any procurement item, the department considered the lead time—how far ahead you have to order the item to have it when you need it. For complex or precisely tooled military hardware, lead times may run to a year or more, and for such items—particularly aircraft and aircraft spares—the department allowed fully for expected losses and use-up to the end of fiscal 1967. But for items with shorter lead times, requirements were calculated tightly, on the assumption that later on they could be revised and McNamara could ask for supplemental appropriations.

Supplemental appropriations have come to be viewed as natural in wartime. And McNamara's policy of asking for funds "at the last possible moment," as he puts it, has its merits. By following that policy he hopes to avoid "overbuying" and any pileup of surplus materiel at the end of the war. (When the Korean war ended, the Military Establishment had billions of dollars worth of excess goods in stock or on order.) But the policy implies that the Defense Department will have to ask for more funds before the end of fiscal 1967 unless there is some unexpected abatement in the war.

Of necessity, the 1967 defense budget was constructed upon working assumptions about how big the war will get and how long it will last, and given all the uncertainties, these cannot be expected to coincide with the realities. In estimating expenditures and appropriations for fiscal 1967, the Defense Department assumed that U.S. "combat operations" in Vietnam will not continue beyond June 30, 1967. In keeping with that assumption, the 1967 budget does not provide funds for orders of aircraft or other military goods to replace combat losses after that date. Here again the assumption implies that the Defense Department will need supplemental appropriations in fiscal 1967 if the war continues at even the present rate.

McNamara has not said in public what U.S. force level in South Vietnam is allowed for in the 1967 budget, and the explanations he has offered at congressional hearings have been deleted by Pentagon censors. But at a Senate hearing in January, Gen. John P. McConnell, the Air Force Chief of Staff, indicated that, for the Air Force at least, the appropriations requested so far allow for little or no expansion of the war beyond the 200,000-man level. Said McConnell in reply to a question concerning the adequacy of the funds requested: "We don't have any problem if the war continues at about the same rate as now, Mr. Chairman."

These budgeting assumptions expressed and implied by McNamara and other Pentagon witnesses lead to a strong inference: by next January, if the war continues unabated until then at even the present rate, the Defense Department will have to ask for supplemental appropriations for long-lead-time items required in fiscal 1968 and shorter leadtime items required in the last months of fiscal 1967. Some months before next January, indeed, perhaps this summer, the department will have to begin ordering very long leadtime items in anticipation of fiscal 1968 combat losses.