Memorandum

Updated: March 27, 2003

SUBJECT: Budgeting for wars in the past

FROM: Stephen Daggett
Specialist in National Defense
Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade Division

This is in response to congressional requests for a memo briefly reviewing how the United States has budgeted for wars in the past. Requesters have asked specifically whether, since World War II, the United States has ever provided funds for wars – or for some other recent military operations – before the operations have started.

Based on an examination of previous CRS reviews of funding for wars and for other major military operations, it appears, with one possible exception, that Presidents have not requested and Congress has not provided funding for wars in advance of the start of operations. Rather, Administrations have requested funding after operations have begun, and Congress has subsequently appropriated money to meet specific documented budget requirements.¹

One possible exception to this pattern occurred in 1965, when the Johnson Administration requested supplemental appropriations for military operations in Southeast Asia. According to the Congressional Quarterly Almanac, in May 1965, the Administration requested supplemental appropriations for FY1965 for operations in Southeast Asia in part as a means of affirming congressional support for the buildup of forces in Vietnam, even though sufficient funds appeared to be available through the end of the fiscal year. I have not, however, done sufficient research based on primary sources to be able to affirm this interpretation independently. All of this, of course, came after Congress approved the

¹ It is important to note, however, that Congress has provided the Executive Branch with considerable flexibility in financing military operations in advance of specific congressional action on appropriations. In regular defense appropriations bills, money for operation and maintenance, for example, is typically appropriated in very broad categories, which has allowed Administrations to deploy forces into regions of potential conflict without advance funding approval from the Congress. The “Feed and Forage Act” (41 U.S.C. 11) also allows the Defense Department to incur obligations for certain purposes in advance of appropriations, and a number of other provisions of law and Defense Department regulations allow additional funding flexibility.

What follows is a very brief overview of initial Administration and congressional action on funding for World War II, the Korean conflict, the Vietnam conflict, and the Persian Gulf War of 1991. It is followed by a brief discussion of funding for some recent military contingency operations.

- World War II: The United States declared war on Japan on December 8, 1941, and on Germany and Italy on December 11. Subsequently, on January 5, 1942, in its regular budget message for FY1943, the Administration requested what it described as an initial “war appropriation” of $13.6 billion for FY1943. On January 30, 1942, the President signed into law supplemental appropriations of $10.5 billion for the Army. And on February 7, the President signed the regular FY1943 appropriations for the Navy, which included supplemental appropriations for FY1942. In these and in other subsequent war-related funding measures, the Administration requested and Congress provided funds in the form it had followed in the past – i.e., as specific amounts for specific, traditional budget accounts. While funding specifically for the war followed the start of the conflict, it is worth noting that the Administration requested and Congress provided funding for a substantial buildup of U.S. military forces and armaments before the attack on Pearl Harbor, and that substantial unobligated funds were available when war was declared. The Administration’s FY1943 budget message notes that “The defense program ... was 29 billion dollars on January 3, 1941. During the past 12 months 45 billion dollars have been added to the program. Of this total of 75 billion dollars there remains 24 billion dollars for future obligation.”

- Korean War: North Korean forces invaded South Korea on June 25, 1950. President Truman subsequently ordered U.S. forces to defend South Korea and on July 19, in an address to Congress, estimated that $10 billion would be needed immediately to prosecute the war and build up U.S. forces. Subsequently, on August 28, Congress approved regular FY1951 defense appropriations as part of an omnibus appropriations measure (the fiscal year began on July 1). The bill provided $14.7 billion for defense, about the amount the Administration had requested in its regular defense budget request in January 1950 – it did not include additional funds for Korea. Meanwhile, the Administration requested an additional $11.6 billion in FY1951 supplemental appropriations for defense, plus $4 billion for military assistance. Congress approved a measure providing $11.7 billion for the Defense Department and $4 billion for military aid on September 22. These funds were for increasing U.S. military forces as well as for operations in

---

2 This discussion is drawn from Robert Keith, “Initial Federal Budget Response to the 1941 Attack on Pearl Harbor,” CRS Report RS21010, September 13, 2001.
Korea. On December 1, after Chinese forces intervened, the Administration requested an additional $16.8 billion in supplemental FY1951 appropriations for the Defense Department and $1 billion for the Atomic Energy Commission. On January 2, 1952, Congress approved $16.8 billion for the Defense Department, $1 billion for the AEC, and $1.8 billion for stockpiling.³

- Vietnam War: There is no official date on which U.S. military involvement in Vietnam began. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial includes casualties from as early as 1959, but that date was established by a private organization. For certain official purposes, casualties from 1961 through 1975 are recognized as related to the conflicts in Southeast Asia. Congress approved the Tonkin Gulf Resolution in August 1964, but the large scale U.S. buildup of forces for ground combat began only in 1965. In any case, the first formal request for funds directly related to operations in Southeast Asia was a May 4, 1965, Administration request for $700 million in supplemental appropriations for FY1965. The House approved the measure on May 5, the Senate on May 6, and the President signed the measure into law on May 7. Later in 1965, as Congress was considering the FY1966 defense appropriations bill, the Administration requested an additional $1.7 billion for costs of the Vietnam buildup. Congress approved the additional funds in a conference agreement on the bill in September. In the following years, funding for operations in Southeast Asia was provided both in supplemental appropriations bills and in regular annual defense appropriations bills in FY1966-FY1969. From FY1970 on, funding was provided only in regular annual defense appropriations bills.⁴

- Persian Gulf War of 1991: In response to Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, the United States began a buildup of forces in Saudi Arabia and other nations in the region in August 1990. The buildup, Operation Desert Shield, continued through the beginning of the war, Operation Desert Storm, in January 1991. On September 30, 1990, in H.J. Res. 655, the first continuing resolution for FY1991, Congress provided $2 billion in supplemental appropriations for Desert Shield expenses in FY1990. The measure also authorized the Treasury Department to accept contributions from allies and established the Defense Cooperation Account as a depository for the funds from which money would later be transferred subject to appropriations. Later, the regular FY1991 defense appropriations bill, passed on October 27, provided an additional $1 billion for Operation Desert Shield expenses. On September 7, DOD provided a formal estimate of costs of the operation if


⁴ This discussion is drawn from a CRS memo of December 28, 1990, entitled “Congressional Funding for the Vietnam Conflict,” which was sent to you earlier.
the then-planned deployment of about 210,000 troops were continued through FY2001. DOD said it would cost about $15 billion to maintain forces in the region in the absence of combat. In November, the Administration announced an increase of about 200,000 in the number of troops to be deployed to the region, and in December, news media reported that DOD estimated it would cost about $30 billion to maintain a force of the increased size through the end of the fiscal year, also without hostilities. The Administration never provided an official estimate of costs, however, until after the conflict was over. On February 22, the Administration submitted a request for supplemental appropriations for costs of Operations Desert Shield/Desert Storm, although it did not specify an amount. Instead, the Administration estimated total costs, including combat, of $45-60 billion. Later, as the Administration provided more detailed cost estimates and budget justification material, Congress provided funds for specific costs of the operation in supplemental appropriations acts for FY1991 and FY1992.

Recent contingency operations: In recent years, Administrations have generally provided estimates of the costs of military contingency operations along with supplemental appropriations requests shortly after operations have begun. There are, however, some cases in which the Clinton Administration, in particular, provided estimates of costs, though not formal requests for funding, in advance of the deployment of U.S. forces. In Somalia, the Bush Administration deployed forces in December 1992 and subsequently submitted an estimate of costs and a request to reprogram funds to meet the costs in January 1993. Operations Northern Watch and Southern Watch were initially funded through supplemental appropriations. Later, however, at the insistence of the Appropriations Committees, the Administration requested funds as part of regular annual defense appropriations bills. The Clinton Administration did not provide an advance estimate of costs, or an advance request for funds, for Haiti, for the preemptive buildup of forces in Southwest Asia at the end of FY1994, for the bombing campaign in Bosnia in August and September 1995, or for operations in Kosovo. The Administration did, however, provide a rough estimate of costs of peacekeeping operations in Bosnia in November 1995, shortly before the Dayton Peace Accords were signed in December 1995 and before U.S. peacekeeping forces were deployed. Later, as troops were being deployed in January 1996, it provided a revised, more detailed projection of costs, along with a reprogramming request and a projection of subsequent supplemental appropriations requirements.

One final note. Administrations have occasionally requested that Congress provide either (1) unallocated contingency funds in advance of military operations or (2) general authority for the Defense Department to spend funds, beyond those permitted under the Feed and Forage Act, in advance of specific congressional appropriations. As part of the FY1997 defense budget request, for example, the Clinton Administration asked Congress to establish a “Readiness Preservation Authority” that would allow obligation of substantial funds in...
operation and maintenance accounts in advance of appropriations. And the current Bush Administration asked for $10 billion in unallocated contingency funds for the Global War Against Terrorism in its FY2003 budget request. Congress has not responded favorably to these requests.

If CRS can be of any further assistance, please call me at 707-7642.