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Demands of Vietnam Hobble Our Steps to Outer World

"NO NEW STARTS!" was the central message of the 1968 budget, and for many long-range progressions of the Nation's ideals, may be the most optimistic hope for 1969. It has become wearisome and exasperating to talk, think or write about the drain of America's resources in the Asian war. But there it is, and it is pointless to comment on expectations for science and education without paying homage to the tyranny of military "solutions" to world problems.

"No new starts!" was applied with particular force to NASA's programs for the exploration of space. Many other agencies were subjected to the attrition implied by a fixed dollar ceiling; NASA was cut back from a 1967 expenditure level of nearly \$5 billion to \$4.6 billion in fiscal 1968. This appropriation ran a half-billion lower than President Johnson's budget request. This year he has asked for \$4.37 billion; some critics of any-space-at-all have set their sights on reducing this to an even \$4 billion.

THE APOLLO project has still been left virtually intact at about \$2.5 billion and the brunt of these cutbacks is taken by space science, planetary exploration and other advanced missions. This is paradoxical, insofar as the loss of the three astronauts in the Apollo fire last year has played a large part in public disenchantment with space efforts.

However, NASA Administrator James E. Webb has made a convincing case that we might still manage a lunar manned landing by 1970, that we can hardly abandon the program at this stage, and that a reprogramming to a stretched-out schedule would eventually cost more than continuing with established plans. He has also stressed the importance of unmanned planetary exploration as a basic program for the next decade.

THE MOMENTUM of this effort still leaves the possibility of continuing a significant program after 1970, provided we make a continued investment in advance planning and design and make special efforts to maintain the integrity and morale of the teams of experts who have committed their careers to space.

In this light, the deferral for another year or two of large-scale operational spending for planetary mis-

sions need not be a major tragedy for the overall chronicle of this frontier. There are, in fact, potential advantages to mounting a broader, more carefully planned campaign. An essential element of this strategy is to leave enough time between successive missions to each target for the data from one to be digested and to have a significant impact on planning the next. This might impose a four-year rather than the minimal two-year cycle of visits to Mars, unless the Mars missions can be programmed to have far more flexibility in the revision of details than is now provided. Against this philosophy of planning is the pressure of technological obsolescence, and the competition with the Soviet program.

The mapping and eventual surface analysis of Mars remain the most plausible and rewarding next steps in the mastery of the outer world.

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