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Outbreak of Hostilities. - Compromise Settlement after Mediation by Organization of American States.

What was described in the Press as the "football war" broke out in the first week of July between the Central American republics of El Salvador and Honduras. Escalating rapidly to the dimensions of an undeclared war between the two countries, the hostilities were characterized by bitter fighting and a deathroll which, according to press reports, had risen to about 2,000 by July 18. Thousands of people were made homeless as a result of the fighting, which, however, had virtually ended by July 18, after which date there were only sporadic outbreaks. By the end of July both El Salvador and Honduras had accepted the principles of a settlement negotiated, after many difficulties, by the Organization of American States (O.A.S.).

The immediate cause of the hostilities was ill-feeling generated during the eliminating rounds of the 1970 World Cup association football competition. Salvadorean supporters complained of ill-treatment in Tegucigalpa, the Honduran capital, on June 8 when their national team lost 1-0 in the first leg. In revenge, Hondurans visiting San Salvador (the capital of El Salvador) the following Sunday, when the Honduran team lost 3-0 in the second leg, were also subjected to insults and indignities. Reports over the Honduran radio of these incidents, including allegations that women had been raped and the Honduran flag desecrated, provoked attacks on Salvadoreans and their property in many parts of Honduras. Large numbers of Salvadoreans resident in Honduras fled the country, arriving at the frontier with only the clothes they were wearing and complaining that all their possessions had been taken from them.

A state of emergency was proclaimed in El Salvador, reservists were ordered to report to their barracks on June 24, and the Salvadorean Foreign Minister, Senor Francisco Jose Guerrero, declared over the radio that nearly 12,000 Salvadoreans had been expelled from Honduras. He requested an immediate investigation by the Organization of American States, charging Honduras with the murder, rape, plunder, oppression, and mass expulsion of Salvadoreans living in that country. El Salvador broke off diplomatic relations with Honduras on June 26, the Honduran Government taking reciprocal action against El Salvador on June 27. On the latter date the World Cup play-off between the two countries took place in Mexico City, where in a heavily-guarded stadium El Salvador won 3-2.

Incidents on the Honduran-Salvadorean frontier had meanwhile been reported in several areas, and on July 3, the Salvadorean Foreign Minister informed the O.A.S. that a Honduran plane had machine-gunned Salvadorean frontier guards in the region of El Poy and that Honduran troops had crossed the border and entered the village of Cueva del Ermitano; these allegations were denied by Honduras, which counter-charged that the Salvadoreans had fired on a civilian plane taking off from an airport near Nueva Ocotepeque, eight miles inside the Honduran frontier.

During the next 10 days the scale of fighting increased in intensity, and there were frequent press reports of machine-gun and mortar fire in the border regions. On July 14 the Salvadorean forces penetrated some distance into Honduras, mainly in the region of Amarillo in the south and El Poy in the west, and had occupied the Honduran frontier town of Nueva Ocotepeque; about 100 Honduran troops were reported to have counter-attacked across the Salvadorean border. At the same time that ground operations were in progress, the small Honduran and Salvadorean air forces, neither numbering more than a dozen planes, had

also gone into action—Salvadorean *Mustangs* making bombing attacks on a number of Honduran army and air force installations and on the international airport of Tocontin, near Tegucigalpa, and Honduran *Corsairs* bombing petrol tanks and other installations at San Salvador, forcing the Ilopongo international airport to close for a time, and attacking Acajutla, La Union, and other towns.

Reports on July 18 from both O.A.S. sources and press correspondents said that there had been about 2,000 dead in the fighting, the majority of the casualties being Honduran; the loss of 700 Salvadorean troops was admitted in San Salvador. Serious refugee problems were also reported to have arisen in El Salvador, due to the flight or expulsion of large numbers of Salvadoreans previously living in Honduras, and in Guatemala, where many Honduran refugees were reported to have crossed the frontier in face of the Salvadorean advance. Although the Salvadorean forces were reported to be better equipped—press reports said that El Salvador had used light tanks, mortars, and bazookas in the fighting for Nueva Ocotepeque—they were reported to have met fierce resistance from machete-wielding Hondurans who constantly attacked their extended lines of communication. As stated above, however, hostilities virtually ceased after July 18, apart from sporadic exchanges of fire, and by the end of the month they had entirely ceased as El Salvador and Honduras accepted a compromise settlement drawn up by the O.A.S.

In an attempt to settle the dispute, three Central American Foreign Ministers—Senor Alberto Fuentes Moher (Guatemala), Senor Fernando Lara (Costa Rica), and Senor Lorenzo Guerrero (Nicaragua)—arrived in Tegucigalpa on June 27 and were told by President Osvaldo Lopez Arellano that Honduras would do nothing to aggravate the situation provided El Salvador also exercised restraint. At the same time Senor Galo Plaza, the Secretary-General of the O.A.S., sent members of the O.A.S. Human Rights Commission to both countries; in San Salvador they were presented with numerous statements by refugees detailing their alleged ill-treatment in Honduras. The Permanent Council of the O.A.S. met in emergency session on July 4 to consider the conflicting charges, but on the advice of the Nicaraguan member, Dr. Guillermo Sevilla-Sacasa, decided to adjourn to enable the three Central American Foreign Ministers to continue their attempts at mediation, which, however, proved abortive.

The O.A.S. Permanent Council met in emergency session in Washington on July 14 at the request of Honduras, which demanded that the hemispheric collective security pact should be invoked against Salvadorean aggression, asked for arms and aircraft for defence, and gave an assurance that the Honduran Government would accept an indefinite cease-fire provided El Salvador did likewise. The O.A.S. Council issued another appeal to both sides to stop the fighting, and on the same day (July 14) sent a seven-man “peace team” to Central America headed by Dr. Sevilla-Sacasa (Nicaragua) and with Argentinian, Costa Rican, Dominican, Ecuadorean, Guatemalan, and U.S. members. The U.N. Secretary-General, U Thant, sent cables on July 15 to the Honduran and Salvadorean Foreign Ministers urging them to “desist at once from the use of force” and to “direct their efforts towards the use of peaceful means for settling their differences,” while the Vatican announced that the Pope was in touch with both sides.

After further negotiations at the O.A.S. both Honduras and El Salvador accepted a cease-fire to take effect from 10 p.m. on July 18. Adopted by a unanimous vote of 19 to nil (Honduras and El Salvador being barred from voting), with Barbados absent, the resolution to this effect called for the withdrawal of troops in stages from occupied territories within 96 hours of the cease-fire; guarantees for the safety of nationals of both countries living in the territory of the other; and the posting of observers from the O.A.S. in both countries. A resolution was also adopted calling on Honduras and El Salvador to cease inflammatory press, radio, and television attacks against each other.

Despite the cease-fire, El Salvador refused to evacuate her forces from occupied territory in Honduras unless adequate guarantees were given for the safety of Salvadoreans living in that country; while Honduras, on her

side, insisted on the complete withdrawal of all Salvadorean forces from her territory. On July 21 the President of El Salvador, Colonel Fidel Sanchez Hernandez, said in a radio broadcast that Salvadorean troops would not be withdrawn from Honduras unless the O.A.S. furnished proof that it could protect Salvadoreans living in that country from “genocide.” The O.A.S. Council thereupon met in emergency session on July 22 and called upon El Salvador to withdraw its troops from Honduras by midnight of the following day; the Salvadorean Government, however, insisted as conditions for withdrawal on an immediate investigation into alleged Honduran “crimes” against Salvadoreans living in Honduras, the punishment of those found guilty, and compensation for losses suffered.

In face of El Salvador's continued refusal to withdraw from occupied areas of Honduras, the O.A.S. Council met once more on July 23, adopted a resolution naming El Salvador for non-compliance with the resolution of July 18, and convoked an emergency meeting of Foreign Ministers of the O.A.S. for July 26. Diplomatic and economic sanctions against El Salvador were tacitly threatened if the situation had not changed by the time of the Foreign Ministers' meeting. [Under the Charter of the O.A.S. and the Rio de Janeiro Treaty of 1947 —see 8881 A—a nation branded as an “aggressor” can be subjected to sanctions by a two-thirds vote of the O.A.S. Council; these sanctions include the severance of diplomatic and economic relations, or even the use of armed force by the other member-States.]

Shortly before midnight on July 28 the Salvadorean Foreign Minister handed the chairman of the O.A.S. Foreign Ministers (Senor Alfonso Lopez Michelsen, of Colombia) a message saying that his Government refused to withdraw and asking for sanctions against Honduras because that country had violated human rights in the measures taken against Salvadoreans. The 17 Foreign Ministers, however, who had just received a report from the O.A.S. investigating committee which alleged grave excesses committed by Salvadorean troops in Honduras, rejected the Salvadorean request and threatened to pass resolutions naming El Salvador an aggressor and imposing sanctions which would end Salvadorean inter-American trade in oil, machinery, cotton, coffee, and sugar.

Eventually, after further meetings of the O.A.S. Foreign Ministers both informally and in plenary session, the Salvadorean and Honduran Governments accepted on July 29 a compromise settlement, negotiated by the O.A.S. Secretary-General, which was approved by all the O.A.S. Foreign Ministers and came into effect on July 30. The settlement provided for:

- (1) The immediate withdrawal of Salvadorean forces from Honduran territory, and the withdrawal of the troops of both countries behind their existing frontiers.
- (2) Guarantees for the safety of Hondurans and Salvadoreans living in the territory of the other country, such guarantees to be supervised by the O.A.S.
- (3) the setting-up of an O.A.S. commission to ensure that the settlement was carried out and to mediate on any differences which might arise between the two countries.

Despite its brief duration, the “football war” proved costly to both countries both in military and economic terms. Both El Salvador and Honduras had lost, or virtually lost, their small air forces; Honduras was forced to issue 10-year national defence bonds to pay for the cost of the war; whilst El Salvador was left with a large refugee problem—the number of Salvadorean refugees from Honduras having risen by the end of July to 25,000, of whom about 15,000 were children. the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) announced on Aug. 4 that it was providing over 1,000 tons of food supplies for the Salvadorean refugees from Honduras, including maize, wheat flour, dried skim milk, butter, vegetable oil, and stockfish.

It was reported on Aug. 14 that, under an exchange arranged by the International Red Cross, El Salvador had repatriated 58 Honduran prisoners captured during the hostilities in exchange for 27 Salvadoreans captured by the Hondurans.

Although the football riots provided the immediate cause of the Honduran-Salvadorean hostilities, their underlying causes were to be found in tension between the two countries arising from economic and demographic factors. On the one hand El Salvador, while the smallest country of Central America, has the greatest density of population (137 persons per square kilometre) and a population of 3,400,000, which is increasing rapidly. On the other hand Honduras, while five times the size of El Salvador, has a population of 2,360,000, a population density of only 20 persons per square kilometre, and vast tracts of unused land. In this situation large numbers of Salvadoreans—about 350,000 in all—have settled in Honduras, mainly on the land, and played an increasingly important part in the economy of that country, leading in turn to Honduran resentment at Salvadorean immigration (much of which was claimed to be illegal) and to the growth of a strong “Honduras for the Hondurans” movement. This resentment, it was alleged in El Salvador, had led to attacks on Salvadoreans and their property in Honduras and to discriminatory agrarian legislation aimed at dispossessing them.—(New York Times - Le Monde U.N. Information Centre, London - FAO, Rome)

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