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BOUNDARY DISPUTE CLOUDS RIO CONFERENCE

The resurgence of the long standing boundary dispute between Ecuador and Peru could prove to be disruptive to the Second Special Inter-American Conference scheduled to open in Rio de Janeiro on May 20. In late February Ecuador announced its intention of bringing the boundary dispute before the conference and Peru shortly afterwards announced its intention of taking any steps necessary, including withdrawal from the conference, to avoid discussion of the issue.

History of Dispute - Ecuador and Peru have long held conflicting claims to a large, sparsely populated area of Amazon headwaters territory. The dispute flared into open warfare in 1941 and led to the occupation of Ecuador's southern provinces by Peruvian troops before the Rio Protocol of 1942 brought an end to the fighting. Under the Protocol, which the U.S., Argentina, Brazil and Chile signed as guarantors, Peru gained most of the disputed territory. Since then, Ecuador has consistently sought revision of the Protocol on the grounds that it was forced upon her "at the point of a bayonet," while Peru has insisted that the Protocol is an "untouchable" and valid international instrument which cannot be revised or unilaterally nullified.

The dispute has been a major cause of the repeated postponements of the still to be held 11th Inter-American Conference, originally scheduled to meet in Quito in 1960. Ecuadorean discontent with the settlement reached a dangerous peak in 1960-61 following President Velasco's announcement of Ecuador's "unilateral denunciation" of the Rio Protocol. The January 29 anniversary of the Protocol is observed annually, and Ecuadoreans deploring their lost territory often adopt an anti-US tone in view of the US role as a guarantor power.

Recent Developments - The Military Junta now ruling Ecuador has appeared genuinely desirous of avoiding any intensification of the dispute. However, Ecuador's political parties, ever alert to opportunities to embarrass the Junta, have demanded that the Junta raise the nullity of the Protocol at the forthcoming Conference. The emotional reaction of most Ecuadoreans to this issue is so intense that no Ecuadorean government can afford to ignore it. Accordingly, on February 24, the Junta issued a statement condemning the Rio Protocol and expressing a determination to seek its revision. Apparently in reference to the rigidity of the OAS agenda, approved February 26, the Junta asked the Consultative Board for Foreign Relations, an advisory group made up of distinguished citizens, to find a way to bring the matter before the Conference.

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The reaction of Peru was predictable. By February 25, the Chamber of Deputies and Senate had unanimously passed motions rejecting any Ecuadorian effort to revise or nullify the Rio Protocol. Press coverage in Lima and Quito was extremely heavy and public pressure on both governments increased. By March 3, the Peruvian Foreign Minister told our Embassy that the legislature had authorized him to take such steps as he deemed to be in the national interest, including Peru's withdrawal from the Rio Conference, should Ecuador succeed in bringing the matter before that body. On March 5 in Quito, the Ecuadorean Foreign Minister presented to the chiefs of missions of OAS nations represented in Quito (Peru excepted) a memorandum stating his country's position on the Rio Protocol. The memorandum declared the government's resolve to bring the boundary dispute before the Rio Conference and reiterated Ecuador's assertion that the 1942 Protocol is null. The memorandum also outlined the Ecuadorian argument that the Rio Protocol was signed under duress and is, hence, not binding.

Outlook - Both parties are soliciting support among OAS nations. It is unlikely that popular opinion will allow either government to grant concessions on the dispute. Indeed, Peru could react with less restraint than it has to date and demand full implementation of the Protocol, including the long delayed placement of boundary markers along the fifty miles of frontier that remain unmarked.

It is doubted that Ecuador can succeed in placing this issue on the agenda, since such a revision would require 14 affirmative votes. The best hope for minimizing the possible repercussions lies in permitting both governments to dissipate domestic pressures by appropriate public statements of their respective positions on the Protocol.

The United States, faced with the possible alienation of one or both of the parties involved and the possibility of a damaging blow to OAS parliamentary machinery, has to date avoided any statement on the dispute. The extent to which the OAS can remain apart from this highly charged issue during the next few months may well determine the success or failure of the Rio Conference.

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ARA NOTES

Chilean Congressional Elections

President Frei's Christian Democratic Party (PDC) scored an unprecedented victory in the March 7 Congressional elections. By increasing its representation in the 147 seat Chamber of Deputies from 28 to 82, the PDC is assured an absolute majority, an advantage

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