No. 21,476

SUBJECT: Reporting Further Conversation with the Minister of Foreign Relations, Dr. Padilla, on the Argentine Situation.

The Honorable Secretary of State, Washington, D.C.

Sir:

I have the honor to refer to recent exchanges with the Department on the Argentine situation and particularly to the Department’s telegram No. 2024 of November 16, 2 p.m. and to my conversation with Mr. Armour and Mr. Spaeth on the telephone this morning, after the receipt of the above-mentioned telegram. There is transmitted herewith (enclosure No. 1) a memorandum covering the conversation with Mr. Armour and Mr. Spaeth.

The Department’s telegram No. 2024 of November 16, 2 p.m. and the information given me by Mr. Armour and Mr. Spaeth were most helpful to me, particularly in preparation for the conversation which I had with the Minister later today. I have forwarded a telegram to the Department covering the substance of the conversation with Dr. Padilla today but for the possible assistance of the Department I will go into a little further detail.

I have just had a long conversation with Dr. Padilla on the basis of the Department’s telegram of yesterday and the conversation with Mr. Armour and Mr. Spaeth this morning. In order that there may be no misunderstanding on the part of Dr. Padilla, I read to him the Department’s telegram No. 2024. I made it clear that our position remained that it was preferable to discuss postwar problems at a meeting of Foreign Ministers without the presence of the Argentine, as long as the present people remained in control of the Government of the Argentine as we both agreed that no real dependence could be placed in these people. I thought it advisable not to say to him, as Mr. Armour and Mr. Spaeth had informed me over the telephone, that we were not refusing to sit in such a meeting if the other American Republics would insist upon it. I thought it better not to make any mention
mention of this for the present. I wished to reinforce as much as possible our attitude that we believe that a meeting can be held under the most favorable and successful circumstances if the Argentine is not there as long as the present Government is in power.

I did make it clear to the Minister that we were of the opinion that the steps which Dr. Padilla was taking were helpful and constructive and that we appreciated them. I said that there was no thought on our part that he should not continue with the consultations with the other American Republics along the lines of the two memoranda he had already delivered. We were somewhat doubtful, perhaps a good deal skeptical, as to whether the consultations and the pressures resulting therefrom would bring about the adequate changes in the Argentine in time to permit her to sit in a meeting but that this did not mean that we were in any way opposed to his continuing such consultation or saw any inconvenience therein.

Dr. Padilla informed me that in his opinion the most negative result we can have out of the recent situation with respect to the Argentine and in the Inter-American picture, and of the steps which we and he have taken, is confusion and he emphasized that in his opinion inaction will lead to confusion. He emphasized again his very strong fears of this confusion among the other American Republics.

I asked him whether he had had any replies to his memoranda and he stated that the only reply so far received is that from Venezuela, which was delivered this morning to him by the Venezuelan Ambassador. He said that the Venezuelan memorandum was quite direct to the effect that Venezuela favored a conference to discuss the Argentine situation and postwar problems. I will get further information as to the substance of the Venezuelan memorandum but I gather that the Venezuelan memorandum put the two points in the order above stated, that is, a meeting to discuss the Argentine situation and afterwards postwar problems.

The Minister said that the Chilean Ambassador had just called him to be received during the day and that he was receiving him late this evening. The Minister assumed that the Ambassador was bringing the preliminary reply of Chile, the nature of which he could not accurately surmise but he could not be too optimistic for obvious reasons as to the character of the reply.

Dr. Padilla then went on to say that in his opinion it was necessary for us to continue to emphasize certain principles and to hammer these home with the other American Republics and that we should concentrate on two points: first, the fulfillment by the Argentine of the commitments of Rio not yet complied with and two, the calling of elections. He then went on at considerable length to give the basis of his opinion that if we hammer on these two points there is really nothing which will weaken more the present Argentine regime. He said that if through consultation we can get common acceptance by the other American Republics of the above two points and then acceptance by the Argentine regime of them, then the actual presence
of the Argentine at a meeting to discuss postwar problems can be a question of further discussion among the other American Republics. He says it is important to get these two points clearly accepted by all of the twenty American Republics and hammered in upon the Argentine regime. He went on to say that if we get full compliance by the Argentine regime of the above points, the presence of the Argentine in a meeting of Foreign Ministers to discuss postwar problems would depend on the way that the Argentine is carrying through the above points. He said, for example, that if the Argentine regime would fix elections for some distant date and not for a very near date, it would be a further indication of the bad faith of these people and every one in the other American Republics would realize this and it would be one of the bases of agreement that the Argentine could not be at a meeting.

Dr. Padilla emphasized to me very strongly the necessity for the United States and Mexico getting before the other American Republics several points of principle on which there could be complete agreement and to confront the Argentine regime with these. He said that he thought specific action was necessary in order to prevent confusion of thinking and the wrong kind of replies from some of the American Republics.

For this reason he asked me to say to the Department that he believes that it would now be most helpful for the Department to send to our Chiefs of Mission in the other American Republics a telegram to the effect that we accept the central points of the Mexican memorandum, which are set forth above in this despatch as points one and two, and instruct our Chiefs of Mission to so inform the respective Foreign Offices. He believes that if we do this it will stop confusion which may develop and will solidify the thinking in some of the Chanceries and prevent any replies coming in to us or to the Mexican Government in a sense that we do not wish them. Dr. Padilla emphasized that if all the American Governments will agree to accept these two central points in the Mexican proposal, then consultation on further steps can go on from there. He was very insistent on this point and believed that at this time we should take this action. He believes that these two points of the Mexican proposal, if solidified and emphasized by our approval expressed to the other Governments through our Chiefs of Mission, it will prevent confusion and keep the consultation in constructive lines.

I recommended in my telegram going forward today that we send such a telegram without delay. I believe that so far as these procedures are concerned, Dr. Padilla has them well thought out and that circumstances which have already developed have justified the soundness of the procedure he is advocating.

The Minister said that there was already some confusion and misunderstanding regarding the Mexican attitude and he referred specifically to press statements made yesterday which did not accurately present the Mexican proposal. I asked
asked him if he had in mind Leon Pearson's article which appeared in the Mexico City papers this morning and he said that it was one. I told him that undoubtedly Pearson had secured the information he used as the basis for his article through a leak from one of the Latin American Missions in Washington. The Minister said that he might have to make some statement to the press during the next two or three days to clarify the Mexican position. I did not encourage him in this and I am hopeful that we may await hearing that we send out this telegram to our Chiefs of Mission before making any statement.

Dr. Padilla went on to say that our action and his memoranda have already had a very real effect as is obvious from the steps which have been taken in the Argentine, in the last few days. He says that these steps by the Argentine regime are an indication of the pressures which it is feeling. I referred to this point specifically in the despatch from Buenos Aires from one of the news agencies there and to the effect that three civilians had been asked to enter the Cabinet but that all three for one reason or other had indicated that they were not prepared to enter the Government until they knew more specifically the attitudes of the Government. I referred particularly to the alleged statement by Escobar to the effect that he could not accept the position of Foreign Minister until he knew what attitude the Argentine would take in a meeting of Foreign Ministers. The Minister commented by saying that all this was the result of the steps which we and the Mexican Government had taken so far and emphasized the importance of our maintaining a very firm position with regard to the two points mentioned in this despatch. The regime was constantly growing weaker and the real will of the Argentine people was already finding more expression. If we hewed close to the line and did not lose any time there was even the strong possibility that the regime would be completely changed shortly and the necessary steps taken towards elections of an adequate character so that the Argentine could even sit in a meeting before the elections were actually held.

The Minister expressed the thought that it would be "smart" for the State Department to be enthusiastic in what it said about that part of the Mexican proposals on the consulting of the Argentine people by the regime through the calling of elections. The Minister said that he thought it would be a smart move for us to do this, even to the extent of some one committing an indiscretion at home through making a statement supporting the Mexican proposal in its memorandum on the matter of the Argentine regime consulting the Argentine people. The Minister expressed the opinion, for which I believe there is a good deal of basis, that such an indiscretion on our part would recuperate for us some, if not a good deal, of the position we had lost among the good Argentine people and therefore, of course, correspondingly weaken the regime and strengthen the prospects for the calling and carrying through of proper elections. The Department will recall that in reporting on this subject by the Minister in my telegram, I stated that I had no recommendation to make at the time with respect
respect to such an indiscretion. I did, however, indicate to the Department the possible inadvisability of our making any mention of the Argentine elections as such if such an indiscretion is committed, until such time as some of the American countries have expressed themselves on this point. I do wish to repeat, however, that I believe we could and should specifically refer to elections in the telegram to Chiefs of Missions which Dr. Padilla has suggested it would be so helpful for us to send out.

It is obvious that what we have already done recently and what the Mexican Government has done through the memoranda of Dr. Padilla has had a very real effect already in building opinion in some of the American countries. It is obvious also that the specific reactions in the Argentine in the last few days have been the result of these initiatives by us and Mexico. I strongly concur, therefore, with the suggestion by Dr. Padilla that it would be advisable and helpful for a telegram be sent to our Chiefs of Mission in the sense he has suggested and hope that this has already been done. I think it is most important that we emphasize to our Chiefs of Mission and to the other American Republics at this time that we agree with Padilla on these two points. This will leave the way open for further consultation and discussion but will prevent in the meantime confusion and the pressure on the Argentine regime will continue, I believe, to have increasing effect - as we have seen recently. The fact that Mexico is making these suggestions and having a very real effect and if we can now get the other American Republics to go along on these two points now, the effect on the Argentine regime will be cumulative. It has already shown its weakness by the prompt response to the steps already taken even though the steps so far taken do not go far but they do indicate weakness. The reactions in the Argentine are, I think, the best proof that we can have that Padilla is thoroughly and rightly judging the Latin American mentality, including that of the Argentine.

It is, therefore, my very real hope that the telegram which Dr. Padilla has suggested has already gone forward to our Chiefs of Mission.

Dr. Padilla is leaving for Monterrey and cities of northern Mexico on official business on Saturday evening, November 18, and will be away from Mexico City for perhaps eight days. I have arranged, however, to remain in constant touch with him and his absence from Mexico City should not interfere with active prosecution of the Mexican proposals and consultation.

I emphasized in my telegram going forward today that if the Department is agreeable to sending a telegram to our Chiefs of Mission, as Dr. Padilla has suggested, covering the two points, he is very anxious to know this before he leaves Mexico City on Saturday evening so that he can send a telegram to the Chiefs of Mission of Mexico in the Latin American Republics.

It is, I am sure, not necessary for me to say that we must
must expect leaks of anything which we do or which the Mexican Government does to the Argentine. There is no doubt that some of the Chiefs of Mission in Washington will pass on to the Argentine Embassy in Washington whatever they get from us. In the same way there are certain Chiefs of Mission here in Mexico City who will pass on whatever they get from the Foreign Office here to the Argentine Chargé d’Affaires. Similarly in the other American capitals it can be taken for granted that whatever we say or whatever Mexico may say will get to the Argentine. That this is so is obvious from the prompt reaction which has taken place in the Argentine to the recent steps by ourselves and Mexico. These indiscretions and leaks are unavoidable and must be reckoned with and there is nothing that could be done to stop them. On the other hand, I see a distinct advantage in them because it is to our advantage for the Argentine regime to know just what we are doing. For this reason it is well for them to know that Mexico is supporting us and that we are supporting certain Mexican proposals.

I will keep the Department informed promptly of any information which the Foreign Office here gives me with respect to the replies received from the other American Republics to the two Mexican memoranda.

Respectfully yours,

G. S. MESSERSMITH

Enclosure:
1. Copy of Memorandum

To Department in quintuplicate
File No. 800 Argentina
GSM:NA