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Cardinal

Sumner Welles

Mexico, D. F., June 3, 1942

Dear Sumner:

I received, in due course, your confidential telegram No. 758 of 8 p.m., to me, with regard to the sinkings of merchant vessels in the Yucatan Channel and asking me to take up immediately with the Mexican Government the securing of its permission for us to use existing airfields in Yucatan for the purpose of certain specified operations to eliminate this submarine menace. Immediately on the receipt of this telegram I took this up with Padilla without a moment's delay, and left with him an Aide-Memoire, giving the substance of the telegram. Padilla assured me he would take up the matter immediately and that he understood the urgency of the matter and its importance.

Last night he called me to the Foreign Office, and thereupon sent a strictly confidential message for the Secretary and yourself, which you must have received the first thing this morning. I think you may be somewhat disappointed over the answer, but will understand the situation. I am fearful that our Army and Navy people may not be so understanding. I think Padilla had this very much in mind, but he asked me to be sure to convey certain messages to you.

Padilla started out our conversation by referring to our conversation on this matter and our desires. He then said: "Mexico desires, so far as it is possible, to defend her own territory." I could tell that he was repeating something which the President had said to him.

He then continued that he had just come from the President and had his instructions. It developed during the conversation that General Sanchez, the Chief of the

Staff

The Honorable
Sumner Welles
Undersecretary of State
Washington, D. C.

Staff, had been present during the conversation between the President and Padilla. He said that it was his opinion, and that of the Mexican Government, that Mexico should make every effort to protect and defend her own territory. He felt that this was absolutely essential in order to awake the proper and adequate interest of the Mexican people in the war in which they were now engaged. He asked me to say to you that you would keep in mind the conversation which he had had with you on this subject, and that he would also recall that he had mentioned this point to me on several occasions. It was his opinion, which he had expressed to you, that not only Mexico, but the other American States would, so far as it was possible, have to defend their own territory. For us to defend the territory of the far flung American states without full effort on the part of these States, was an almost impossible, or at least, an incredibly great task for even so great a country as ours. His whole conception of this Inter-American solidarity involved each State making a full effort on its own part. He enlarged on this theme with obvious sincerity and conviction, and as he says that he has talked with you about this, I will not go into his full argument here, as I am pressed to get this letter into the air mail this morning.

He then went on to say that nevertheless, the Mexican Government, in view of the urgency of the situation in the Gulf and the Yucatan Channel, was prepared to permit the operation by our forces in Yucatan in the manner indicated in the telegram for a period of one month. The Mexican Government had entered into an agreement with us, "signed and sealed", for the delivery of certain aircraft and military equipment. The Mexican Government had available a minimum of three hundred trained aviators, who with very little additional training in the planes themselves, would be able to carry on such an operation. All they needed was the equipment, for which arrangements had already been "signed and sealed". If such equipment was delivered, Mexico could carry on this effort. He did not need to expand on the importance of the operation being continued by Mexican forces. It was the confident hope of the Mexican Government that during the course of the month under which we could carry on this operation, material would be delivered so that at the end of the month, Mexican forces could carry on such an operation and similar ones.

So far as the planes are concerned, General Sanchez had informed him and the President that the types of planes

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which the Mexican Government had asked for were the very types which were used in such operations as we would engage in over the Yucatan Channel. General Sanchez had every confidence that the Mexican pilots would be able to handle the planes with very little additional training.

I think that with the main point which the President and Padilla have in mind we can take no issues, but that they want to defend their own territory and make a full effort themselves is in their interest and ours. I am sure that Padilla and the President know, as well as we, that they need our help, but I think we should, on the whole, be more pleased than otherwise that it is their desire to make every effort on their own. The President and Padilla know how necessary this is for Mexican public opinion, et cetera.

Although the Mexican Congress in both houses, voted the declaration of war unanimously, Padilla referred confidentially to me last evening, to the difficulties which the Government had experienced. There are a lot of people here who would have preferred not to have this full step taken now. There is no doubt that it was the determined action of the President and Padilla that carried it through, and I think we must bear in mind that Padilla alone could not have done it without the President, who is a calm and serene man, and once he has made up his mind - carries through to the limit. He had made up his mind, and this is what carried the day, but I am conscious of the pressures which are brought, and which were brought, on the President. He has been as steadfast as Gibraltar, and I am sure, will remain so, but we must be conscious of the difficulties which he and Padilla have to deal with.

Padilla said last night that he was sure that these resistances in the Government would now disappear, but they have to count on them. The Mexican people are not yet prepared for our armed forces acting on Mexican territory. This is not only a question of General Cardenas, as our Army people may think, but in this he has a very considerable opinion here with him. The President and Padilla realize that they have to get into this by steps, and we will not gain anything by pressing them too hard.

Under the circumstances, it is my considered opinion that they have gone very far in permitting this operation in Yucatan in the form we desire for a period of a month. I think we should immediately take up the matter of the

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delivery of planes through the Joint Military Commission, as Padilla indicated to me should be done. I think that at the out-set, if our people will take one or two Mexican aviators with them on these operations, it will mean a tremendous lot. I think our people who carry on this operation in Yucatan should cooperate most fully with the Mexicans who may be, and I think should, be given the delivery of some planes and help to train Mexican aviators. It cannot be a joint operation from the out-set, but we should begin to make it such as rapidly as possible, and I am confident that, if we do so, at the end of the month it can be a joint operation which we will practically run. For Mexican public opinion and the Mexican military to feel that Mexico is actually in the war and engaged in some real military operation, how much this is to the Mexican and our advantage I need not tell you. I cannot go into this further as I wish to get this letter in the air mail this morning. I am confident that you will be able to explain this situation to our Army and Navy people at the top so they will give the necessary instructions so essential to carrying through this operation in the right way, and to prepare the way for the most full cooperation, which I am confident we can get if we keep in mind the fact that the Mexican Government wants to go the limit, but that we must keep in mind that it has to go by degrees.

With every good wish,

Faithfully yours,

G. S. Messersmith

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