

AIR MAIL.

1514

Personal file

CONFIDENTIAL.

Mexico, June 17, 1942.

Dear Sumner:

I have to refer to my confidential despatch No. 1849 of June 5, 1942, transmitting a memorandum from the Mexican Government authorizing certain control operations over the Yucatan Channel from air fields in Yucatan for a limited period to eliminate the submarine menace from that area, and to my two confidential letters of June 3 on this same subject. You will recall that I was requested to take up this matter with Dr. Padilla in a very urgent manner in view of the necessity for eliminating the submarine menace in those areas. I took up the matter with Dr. Padilla on this emergency and immediate basis and you will recall that verbally, and later in writing, the operation was authorized for a limited period.

Since that time I have heard nothing further from the Department with regard to this matter and the other day the Under Secretary, Mr. Torres Bodet, indicated that he had no information that the operation had started. In a conversation with Philip Bonsal over the telephone a day or two ago I asked him whether he had any information that the operation had started and he told me that so far as he knew it had not started due to the difficulty there had been in getting together the necessary airplane equipment for the patrols and that it would probably start in the next few days. I, of course, have no information as to whether the submarine menace in the Yucatan Channel has abated to the degree that we have less interest in the patrol. In any event, if the operation has not yet started I am sure there must be some good reason. I hope in that case that the Mexican members of the Joint Military Mission have been informed and that they have conveyed the appropriate information down here, as otherwise it will create a rather bad impression. I took up this matter in such an emergency way and got such a good response from the President and from Dr. Padilla and the Military authorities that they will naturally be surprised if the operation

tion

The Honorable
Sumner Welles,
Under Secretary of State, Washington.

tion is not started without adequate explanation being given to them, which, of course, I am not able to give them here as I have no information.

In practically every conversation which I have had with Dr. Padilla and with Mr. Torres Bodet, and I see them almost every day, they raise the question of the Yucatan operation and emphasize the desirability and necessity of Mexico undertaking some operation her own. I think they may have gathered the impression, and this they must have got from conversations in Washington, that our military are not anxious to proceed with the operation because the Mexicans have indicated that they would later like to carry it on themselves. There was an indirect reference which Padilla or Torres Bodet made to a conversation which Castillo Nájera had with you in which, I gathered, you had indicated that our military would like to see the operation carried on indefinitely on a cooperative joint basis. This indirect reference to a conversation between you and Castillo Nájera I did not think it advisable to explore, as the reference was so indirect and vague.

I realize, of course, that our own military people would prefer to carry on this operation indefinitely on their own. While I have comprehension of this point of view, I believe that it would be too narrow a one and one which does not show a full knowledge of the situation here. The Mexican Government is in the war. The President and Dr. Padilla and the military want Mexico not to be a spectator, but to actually do something. The military are particularly eager to do something on their own. They believe this is essential for morale in Mexico, both military and civil, and in order to awaken full consciousness among the Mexican people of the war and the proper interest therein. There is no doubt that behind all that Padilla tells me there is this deep-seated belief of theirs that Mexico cannot be a spectator and must be an active participant.

The other day Padilla, in referring to the Yucatan operation, said that he hoped when I wrote you I would emphasize what he was going to say to me which represented the point of view of the Mexican Government. He spoke as follows:

1.- Mexico wants to undertake her own defense. That is her obligation as a belligerent and she wants to assume her obligations as a belligerent.

2.- While there are certain things Mexico cannot do in her own defense, for certain other things she needs

equipment.

equipment. That equipment she must have from us as the sole source. She has entered into arrangements with us for this equipment. Specifically, so far as the Yucatan operation is concerned, the Mexican Government realizes it cannot undertake it on its own for the moment. It does not have the planes but it has the pilots and the air fields. It has asked for these planes and asks that they be delivered during the period that we will conduct the operation alone. At the end of that period she wishes to, and is able to, undertake the operation on her own. That she should do this is absolutely essential for military and civilian morale, etc., in Mexico. This applies to similar operations which Mexico may have to undertake.

3.- It is quite obvious that certain circumstances may arise when Mexico could not altogether defend herself even with material which we may make available. That event does not seem to be in the immediate offing, but no one can tell when it may arise. When the occasion would arise that Mexico would need help in her defense, she would be the first to accept our help in the fullest degree and manner which the circumstances call for. Until that moment, however, so immediate and so definitely in the offing that steps would have to be taken, the Mexican Government wanted to act in its own defense and he was sure that we would have full comprehension and understanding and real appreciation of that point of view.

Padilla was speaking with a good deal of feeling and I know that he had just been with the President before he saw me and it is quite clear that he was expressing the President's point of view also. I do not see how our military can fail to have comprehension of this point of view. The fact that Mexico wants to do what she can in her own defense is the most natural thing in the world and that the military feel that they must do something should certainly be understandable to our own military people. No country likes to feel that it depends upon another completely for its defense. The fact that the Mexicans feel this way is only indicative of a sense of self-respect and dignity which we must admire. I think they are the first to recognize that under certain circumstances they need our active help and that troops, etc., may have to come into Mexico. It is equally clear, however, that they do not want them here until they feel that it is imperative for the defense of the country. That, I think, too, we can understand.

What concerns me is that I think these repeated references to this Yucatan matter which are being made to

me indicate that high Mexican officials, civil and military, feel that we may not have confidence in them and that we want to assume the role of the protector rather than the cooperator. I think the Mexican army is beginning to feel that we underestimate or deprecate the value of their cooperation. This would be a very unhealthy state of affairs and I think we must avoid this impression getting real ground at any costs. Even if the Yucatan operation may not be as immediately urgent as it was when we approached the Mexicans with it, we should take some steps in this connection.

I think we should make immediate plans to make further deliveries of planes to the Mexicans. I think we should immediately begin to use Mexican pilots in the patrols. I think we should envisage turning over a certain patrol to them, ~~perhaps~~ this Yucatan patrol, within the period set by the Mexicans. If they are not ready to do it at the end of the period and we have shown adequate cooperative measures, I do not believe there is any doubt that we can get a prolongation of our own operation. Perhaps it will eventually result in a joint operation rather than a purely Mexican operation. If we proceed in the right way I have every confidence that the development will be on the basis which will be satisfactory to us and to the Mexicans. The point is that we have got to give concrete evidence that we understand the Mexican point of view and are giving concrete measures of cooperation.

The other day in a conversation with Dr. Padilla and Mr. Torres Bodet they both raised a further question. They asked me whether consideration had been given to some joint measures by us, Mexico and Cuba; that Mexico and Cuba were both belligerents and it ought to be possible to work out some measures of joint cooperation in coastal patrols by the three countries. I think Dr. Padilla had in mind that there should be some approaches so that the three countries could talk about this and work out something in practice. He did not elaborate on the idea but he was obviously in earnest about it. I said that I would mention the matter to you and he repeated that he would like me to do so. I gathered the impression that this question might be raised by Castillo Nájera in Washington, but Dr. Padilla did not say so directly. If you wish me to I will explore the matter further with Dr. Padilla and perhaps with the President, also, when I see him. I think it grows out of their general conception of American solidarity on which, of course, they are basing Mexican policy. That they are really basing their policy on American solidarity there is no doubt.

In

1519

- 5 -

In this general connection I think I should mention a psychological factor which we have increasingly to keep in mind. The other day there was shown in the picture houses of Mexico City a newsreel or other picture showing our patrol operations based on Guatemala. The picture itself, I understand, was good, but the captions were something like this - America protects her weaker neighbors - and others along the same line. There was no emphasis on the Guatemalan cooperation with us, but the emphasis in the pictures and in the captions was entirely on how America is protecting her weaker neighbors. Americans and Mexicans spoke to me of the disastrous effect of this picture and particularly the captions. I need not elaborate to you as to how unfortunate this sort of thing is. Some of us are conscious that we are weaker than others and that we need the protection of others. We will never get, however, full cooperation, or in any degree adequate cooperation, if the thing is put on this basis. I merely mention this because it is this psychological factor, as well as the practical aspects, which are among the things which the Mexican Government, and particularly the President and Dr. Padilla, have in mind. You, who know the Latin temperament so well, realize the importance of these psychological factors.

With every good wish,

Cordially and faithfully yours,

GSM:HH