

Lincoln

In this chapter of "Lincoln, The Demon of Unrest," events unfold around the tense situation at Fort Sumter in Charleston, raising concerns for President Abraham Lincoln. General Scott's initial suggestion that Sumter be surrendered unsettles Lincoln, prompting him to seek more detailed assessments regarding Major Anderson's capacity to hold the fort given its dwindling supplies. In his letter dated March 9, Lincoln presented three probing questions to Scott, focusing on the duration Anderson could maintain his position without reinforcements and the feasibility of supplying the fort within the remaining time.

Scott's response revealed that Anderson had provisions for approximately twenty-six days and salt meat for about forty-eight days. The general conveyed that effectively reinforcing Sumter would necessitate significant military resources, including a fleet of war vessels and around 25,000 troops; however, gathering such forces would take months, and the opportunity to support Sumter had nearly passed.

Despite the urgency of the situation, Lincoln remained entangled in office politics, as applicants for government positions surged at the White House, complicating his decision-making process. At Postmaster General Montgomery Blair's insistence, Lincoln met Gustavus Vasa Fox, a former U.S. Navy lieutenant and aspiring leader of a rescue mission for Anderson. Though Fox had little military experience, his ambition and close ties to Blair compelled Lincoln to consider his revised rescue plan seriously.

As discussions unfolded within Lincoln's cabinet regarding this plan, opinions varied greatly. Secretary of State Seward and others expressed concerns that an attempt to relieve Sumter could ignite civil war and alienate border states. Meanwhile, Blair argued for a decisive action to reinforce the fort, insisting that secessionists already perceived weakness in the North.

In the end, the cabinet's decisions leaned towards caution, with several opposing the reinforcement on various grounds. Yet Lincoln, driven by instinct and the desire to uphold the Union, felt that surrendering Sumter would be catastrophic. Despite the differing opinions, he remained intrigued by Fox's proposal, seeking more precise intelligence concerning the conditions at Fort Sumter. Lincoln directed War Secretary Cameron to gather essential information to inform his decision, resulting in the selection of Fox—who was perhaps the least objective choice—to undertake this critical task .