

# Change of Heart

Change of heart occurred for President Lincoln on March 28, just before his first state dinner, when General Winfield Scott's memo landed on his desk. The memo painted a grim picture of Fort Sumter's situation, noting that Anderson's position was becoming increasingly untenable due to Beauregard's artillery installations. Scott predicted that any effort to relieve the fort would take at least ten months to organize, during which Union forces would likely be defeated. This grim assessment suggested that the fort's evacuation should be expedited as a peace-promoting gesture, which was a difficult conclusion for Lincoln to accept. Scott's evaluation, marked by its military and political implications, left Lincoln deeply unsettled, as it forced him to reconsider his strategy regarding the looming conflict.

However, Scott's recommendation didn't stop at merely advocating for the evacuation of Fort Sumter; he argued that such a move alone would not be enough to preserve the Union. He insisted that both Fort Sumter and Fort Pickens needed to be evacuated to maintain support from the border states and the upper South. Scott's suggestion sent shockwaves through Lincoln's mind, as it intertwined military strategy with delicate political concerns, further complicating the already tenuous situation. Lincoln was startled by the suggestion, as it seemed to position the fate of the Union's cohesion and survival on a risky, potentially catastrophic move. His distress mounted as he prepared for the state dinner, feeling the weight of Scott's words pressing down on him. The enormity of the decision that was now on the table, involving not just military strategy but political allegiance, left Lincoln in turmoil.

The state dinner, a lively and social occasion, provided a temporary escape for Lincoln, yet his mind remained occupied with the troubling content of Scott's memo. Despite the festivities, Lincoln's preoccupation with the situation at Fort Sumter was apparent, particularly to the guests in attendance. Among them was William Russell, who

observed Lincoln's storytelling, which appeared to be a technique for diffusing tension and navigating difficult situations. Russell, keen to understand Lincoln's strategy concerning the secession crisis, hoped to glean some insight into the president's thoughts during the dinner. However, despite his close attention, Russell left the evening with no clearer understanding of Lincoln's intentions. The political complexity surrounding Fort Sumter remained a tightly held secret, and Lincoln's ability to maintain composure during the dinner revealed his strategic focus, even in moments of deep personal distress.

After the dinner, Lincoln convened his cabinet privately to discuss Scott's message and its implications. The room was filled with tension, and the silence that followed highlighted the gravity of the situation. Postmaster General Blair broke the silence, strongly criticizing Scott for blending military recommendations with political considerations. Blair argued that Scott's shift from a strictly military perspective to a political one was not only misguided but dangerous for the Union's survival. Lincoln, who had been mulling over Scott's proposal, listened carefully and then called for a formal cabinet meeting the following day to revisit the resupply mission to Fort Sumter. The political and military stakes were so high that every word and decision could shape the future of the Union, leaving Lincoln with little room for error.

The following day, as new information emerged regarding pro-Union sentiment in South Carolina, Lincoln's cabinet revisited the decision about the resupply mission. After considering this new intelligence, most of the cabinet members changed their position, now favoring the resupply of Fort Sumter. Blair, pushing for swift action to avoid escalating conflict, urged Lincoln to move forward with the expeditions without delay. Lincoln, facing mounting pressure from both within his cabinet and the country, reluctantly agreed to authorize two expeditions, one for Fort Sumter and another for Fort Pickens. However, Lincoln's decision was fraught with risk, as both missions relied on the same warship, the side-wheel steam frigate *Powhatan*. This logistical conflict created a significant challenge for the administration, as it left the Union vulnerable to unforeseen complications. The potential for disaster was high, and the risk of failure

loomed large as Lincoln navigated the increasingly complex situation.

The cabinet's decision to move forward with the resupply missions demonstrated the internal divisions and urgent pressure that Lincoln faced. His approval of both expeditions was a calculated move aimed at preventing further conflict, but it was also laden with the uncertainty of potential failure. The reliance on the *Powhatan* for both missions highlighted the logistical challenges that the Union would soon face, further complicating Lincoln's strategy. The stakes of this decision could not have been higher, as the outcome would determine not just the fate of Fort Sumter but the very future of the Union. Lincoln's leadership was now being tested, and the choices he made in the coming days would have a lasting impact on the course of the Civil War.