

Lincoln

Lincoln found himself in a difficult position on March 9, 1861, as the situation at Fort Sumter grew increasingly tense. General Winfield Scott, who had initially suggested that the fort be surrendered, left Lincoln unsettled. With growing concerns about the fort's dwindling supplies and the feasibility of maintaining its defense, Lincoln sought more specific answers regarding Major Anderson's ability to hold the position. In his letter to Scott, Lincoln asked three crucial questions: How long could Anderson sustain his position without reinforcements? Could the fort be resupplied in time? And, ultimately, how feasible was it to maintain the fort's defense? Scott's response indicated that Anderson could hold out for around twenty-six days with provisions, but without reinforcements, the fort's position would become increasingly precarious. Reinforcing Sumter would require a substantial military effort, including a fleet of warships and around 25,000 troops—resources that would take months to amass, leaving little time to act decisively.

While the situation at Fort Sumter continued to deteriorate, Lincoln remained embroiled in the complexities of office politics. The White House was inundated with applications for government positions, further complicating Lincoln's ability to make timely decisions regarding the fort's fate. Amid this chaos, Postmaster General Montgomery Blair urged Lincoln to meet with Gustavus Vasa Fox, a former U.S. Navy lieutenant who had proposed a daring rescue mission to relieve Anderson. Despite Fox's limited military experience, his ambitious plan, combined with his close connections to Blair, convinced Lincoln to consider the proposal seriously. Fox's idea was bold: to organize a military mission to resupply Fort Sumter, which Lincoln saw as a potential solution to the growing crisis. However, the plan lacked clear military backing, and Lincoln was uncertain about its feasibility, which only added to his growing concerns about the fragile state of the Union.

As the cabinet deliberated on Fox's proposal, opinions were deeply divided. Secretary of State Seward and others feared that any attempt to relieve Sumter could escalate tensions and potentially ignite civil war. They also voiced concerns that such an action could alienate the border states, who might perceive it as a provocation. On the other hand, Montgomery Blair strongly advocated for immediate action, arguing that the secessionists already viewed the North as weak. He believed that reinforcing Sumter was vital to maintaining the Union's honor and credibility. Despite these differing viewpoints, the cabinet's overall stance was one of caution, with many opposing the reinforcement of Fort Sumter. They argued that the risks of provoking a broader conflict were too high and that the best course of action was to avoid further escalation.

Amid this internal discord, Lincoln remained focused on one goal: preserving the Union. Although the cabinet was hesitant to take decisive action, Lincoln was convinced that surrendering Fort Sumter would be a disastrous outcome. He felt that any concession would be seen as a sign of weakness, emboldening the secessionists and weakening the Union's resolve. However, Lincoln was intrigued by Fox's plan and determined to gather more precise information about the situation at Fort Sumter. Despite the differing opinions within his cabinet, Lincoln instructed War Secretary Simon Cameron to gather the necessary intelligence to assess whether Fox's plan was viable. Ultimately, Lincoln's decision to send Fox on this critical mission demonstrated his commitment to saving Fort Sumter and the Union. Even though Fox was perhaps the least objective choice, Lincoln trusted him to carry out the task with urgency, which would ultimately shape the trajectory of the nation's future.

In the midst of political turmoil, Lincoln's leadership remained steadfast, driven by the desire to hold the Union together. The conflicting opinions within his cabinet reflected the gravity of the situation, as each member had a different perspective on how best to navigate the crisis. Yet, Lincoln's determination to act swiftly and decisively, despite the challenges he faced, would be tested in the days to come. The selection of Gustavus Vasa Fox to carry out the mission to resupply Fort Sumter marked a pivotal moment in the early days of the Civil War, setting the stage for the events that would

soon unfold.