

## Chapter Twenty-three

### “I Intend to Give Blows”:

#### The Hundred Days (April-July 1861)

“I have desired as sincerely as any man – I sometimes think more than any other man – that our present difficulties might be settled without the shedding of blood,” Lincoln remarked to a group of ersatz soldiers in late April. The “last hope of peace may not have passed away. But if I have to choose between the maintenance of the union of these states, and of the liberties of this nation, on the one hand, and the shedding of fraternal blood on the other, you need not be at a loss which course I shall take.”<sup>1</sup> Little did he and most of his contemporaries realize how much fraternal blood would flow in order to save that Union and preserve those liberties; 620,000 soldiers and sailors (360,000 Union, 260,000 Confederate), including some of Lincoln’s closest friends, would die over the next four years. The total equaled the number of deaths in all other American wars combined, from the Revolution through the Korean War.

One of those who failed to realize how bloody the war would become was Edwin M. Stanton, who on April 8 told John A. Dix: “I do not think peaceful relations will

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<sup>1</sup> This is a conflation of two versions of these remarks, one from the Perryville correspondence, 28 April, New York World, 29 April 1861, and the other from the New York Tribune, 1 May 1861, reproduced in Roy P. Basler et al., eds., The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln (8 vols. plus index; New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953-55), 4:345.

continue much longer. Nor indeed do I think hostilities will be so great an evil as many apprehend. A round or two often serves to restore harmony.”<sup>2</sup>

In the fourteen weeks after the bombardment of Sumter, Lincoln acted decisively to meet the emergency. As he himself put it, the war “began on very unequal terms between the parties. The insurgents had been preparing for it more than thirty years, while the government had taken no steps to resist them. The former had carefully considered all the means which could be turned to their account. It undoubtedly was a well pondered reliance with them that in their own unrestricted effort to destroy Union, constitution, and law, all together, the government would, in great degree, be restrained by the same constitution and law, from arresting their progress. Their sympathizers pervaded all departments of the government, and nearly all communities of the people.”<sup>3</sup>

In that hectic time, Lincoln followed the advice he had offered twelve years earlier when he suggested that the newly-installed president, Zachary Taylor, should announce: “by the Eternal, I take the responsibility.”<sup>4</sup> Lincoln took decisive hold of the government. Among other things, he raised and supplied an army, sent it into battle, held the Border States in the Union, thwarted Confederate attempts to win European diplomatic recognition, declared a blockade, asserted leadership over his cabinet, dealt effectively with Congress, averted a potential crisis with Great Britain, and eloquently articulated the nature and purpose of the war.<sup>5</sup> While pursuing these objectives, he demonstrated that the “indomitable will” he ascribed to Henry Clay was a quality that he

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<sup>2</sup> Stanton to John A. Dix, Washington, 8 April 1861, Dix Papers, Columbia University.

<sup>3</sup> Lincoln to Erastus Corning and others, Washington, 12 June 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:263.

<sup>4</sup> Lincoln to John M. Clayton, Springfield, 28 July 1849, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:60.

<sup>5</sup> Don E. Fehrenbacher, “Lincoln’s Wartime Leadership: The First Hundred Days,” Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association 9 (1987): 1-18.

too possessed. But as he also pointed out in his eulogy on the Great Compromiser, “this quality often secures to its owner nothing better than a character for useless obstinacy.”<sup>6</sup> Lincoln, however, proved forceful without being obstinate or autocratic, and in doing so, started to infuse his own iron will into the North as it struggled to preserve what he was to call “the last, best hope of earth.”<sup>7</sup>

#### CALLING UP THE MILITIA, SUMMONING CONGRESS

On the evening of Friday, April 12, word of the attack on Sumter reached Washington, where Lincoln “received it with his usual composure, simply remarking that ‘he did not expect it so soon,’” for he was surprised that the secessionists bombarded the fort before Fox’s fleet arrived.<sup>8</sup> When a congressional delegation asked his reaction to the news, he replied laconically: “I do not like it.”<sup>9</sup> That day Lincoln met twice with Benjamin Brown French, who told his son that the president “is as firm as a rock, & means to show the world that there is a United States of America left yet.”<sup>10</sup>

The following day, he remained “calm and composed,” saying “but little beyond making inquiries about the current reports and criticizing the probability or accuracy of their details, and went on as usual receiving visitors, listening to suggestions, and signing routine papers throughout the day.”<sup>11</sup> When suspicion was voiced that Anderson had

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<sup>6</sup> Eulogy on Henry Clay, 6 July 1852, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:124.

<sup>7</sup> Annual message to Congress, 1 December 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:537.

<sup>8</sup> Washington correspondence, 12 April, New York World, 13 April 1861; Washington correspondence, 12 April, Cincinnati Gazette, n.d, copied in the Illinois State Register (Springfield), 16 April 1861.

<sup>9</sup> Washington correspondence, 12 April, New York World, 13 April 1861.

<sup>10</sup> Benjamin Brown French to his son Frank, Washington, 14 April 1861, French Family Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>11</sup> Washington correspondence, 14 April, New York Herald, 15 April 1861; John G. Nicolay and John Hay, Abraham Lincoln: A History (10 vols.; New York, Century, 1890), 3:71. On April 15, it was reported that Lincoln “remains calm under the excitement of the hour, and his friends are agreeably surprised to find that

behaved traitorously, Lincoln denied it, insisting that the major “acted in accordance with instructions” and that the “supply vessels could not reach him, and he did right.” The president was “very much gratified” that no one was killed, though he was “at a loss to understand the entire failure of the fleet to act.”<sup>12</sup> Looking to the future, he asked a western senator, “Will your State support me with military power?”<sup>13</sup>

More callers than usual visited the White House that Saturday, including a delegation from the Virginia convention who wished to learn about his southern policy. One of them recalled having “a long & earnest conversation with Mr. Lincoln, in which I showed him how war might, honorably, be avoided, by evacuating Fort Sumpter, & withdrawing the mails, & closing the custom-houses, in South Carolina, taking care to blockade the ports. S. C. would thus have nobody to fight, & being deprived of her commerce, & mail facilities, would soon seek to return to the Union.”<sup>14</sup> In reply, Lincoln read the delegation a formal paper: “In case it proves true, that Fort-Sumpter has been assaulted, as is reported, I shall perhaps, cause the United States mails to be withdrawn from all the States which claim to have seceded – believing that the commencement of actual war against the Government, justifies and possibly demands this. I scarcely need to say that I consider the Military posts and property situated within the states, which claim to have seceded, as yet belonging to the Government of the United States, as much as they did before the supposed secession. Whatever else I may do for the purpose, I shall

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his health is gradually improving in the midst of the weighty causes which press upon him.” Washington correspondence, 15 April, New York Evening Post, 16 April 1861.

<sup>12</sup> Washington correspondence, 14 April, Cincinnati Commercial, n.d., copied in the Illinois State Register (Springfield), 17 April 1861; Washington correspondence, 14 April, New York Tribune, 15 April 1861.

<sup>13</sup> Washington correspondence, 13 April, New York Herald, 14 April 1861.

<sup>14</sup> A. H. H. Stuart to F. S. Wood, Staunton, Va., 22 June 1875, photocopy, Stuart Papers, Virginia State Library, Richmond.

not attempt to collect the duties, and imposts, by any armed invasion of any part of the country – not meaning by this, however, that I may not land a force, deemed necessary, to relieve a fort upon a border of the country.”<sup>15</sup>

On April 14, upon receiving word of Sumter’s surrender, the president met with Scott, Pennsylvania Governor Andrew G. Curtin, and Alexander K. McClure, chairman of the military committee of the Pennsylvania state senate.<sup>16</sup> When Scott insisted that Washington could not be captured by the Confederate army, then in South Carolina, Lincoln observed: “It does seem to me, general, that if I were Beauregard I would take Washington.”

“Mr. President,” said Scott, “the capital can’t be taken, sir; it can’t be taken.”<sup>17</sup>

Scott’s insistence that this was ordained from on high reminded Lincoln of an old trapper in the West who was hired by some city dwellers as a guide. They assured him that everyone’s death was foreordained, and even if he encountered 1,000 hostile Indians he would survive if his death had not been ordained for that day. Skeptically the trapper replied that he wished to take no risks. “I always have my gun with me, so that if I come across some reds I can feel sure that I won’t cross the Jordan, ’thout taking some of ’em with me. Now, for instance, if I met an Indian in the woods, he drew a bead on me – sayin’, too, that he wasn’t more’n ten feet away – an’ I didn’t have nothing to protect myself; say it was as bad as that, the redskin bein’ dead ready to kill me; now, even if it had been ordained that the indian (sayin’ he was a good shot) was to die that very minute, an’ I want’t, what would I do ’thout my gun?” Just so, remarked Lincoln, “even if it has

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<sup>15</sup> Reply to a Virginia delegation, 13 April 1861, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:331.

<sup>16</sup> McClure to Lincoln, Washington, 15 April 1861, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>17</sup> Alexander K. McClure, Abraham Lincoln and Men of War-Times (Philadelphia: Times, 1892), 68-69.

been ordained that the city of Washington will never be taken by the Southerners, what would we do, in case they made an attack upon the place, without men and heavy guns?"<sup>18</sup>

When Lincoln asked how Pennsylvania would respond to a proclamation calling up the militia, Curtin pledged to send 100,000 troops within a week. Lincoln said: "Give me your hand, Andy. Thank God for that reply." The governor promptly telegraphed word of the forthcoming proclamation to agents in the Keystone State, which on April 18 sent the first troops to arrive at the capital.<sup>19</sup>

Later that day, the president was told by his friend Zenos Robbins, the attorney who in 1849 had obtained the patent for Lincoln's invention to lift stranded boats, that "all your friends hope that there will be no more blank cartridges, but a square, direct, and powerful exhibition of the strength of the Government."

"Are those your opinions?" asked the president.

"Yes, sir!"

"Then I suppose that you will be interested in the newspapers to-morrow!" The press on Monday would carry a proclamation summoning militia to put down the rebellion.<sup>20</sup>

Drafting the proclamation consumed much of Lincoln's time that Sunday. As he and the cabinet worked on it, they faced a dilemma: prompt action must be taken, but could the army and navy be expanded, unappropriated money be spent, Southern ports be blockaded, and the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus be suspended, all without

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<sup>18</sup> Alexander K. McClure, "Abe" Lincoln's Yarns and Stories (Chicago?: n.p., 1904), 72-73.

<sup>19</sup> Philadelphia Press, n.d., New York Evening Post, 18 August 1863.

<sup>20</sup> George Alfred Townsend, Washington Outside and Inside (Hartford: Betts, 1874), 714-15.

Congressional approval? Would it be wise to call Congress into session immediately? Would Washington, nestled between Virginia and Maryland – two slave states which might well secede – be a safe place for senators and representatives to gather? In late March, one observer in the District of Columbia predicted “that the chances are that Virginia will go out and take the capital with her; – that as matters stand the chances are that the next Congress of the U. S. will not meet in Washington.”<sup>21</sup>

Lincoln had resisted appeals by businessmen and New York newspapers to call a special session of Congress. They argued that legislation was needed authorizing the president to collect revenues offshore in the South and that the Morrill Tariff Act must be modified to help fill depleted Federal coffers.<sup>22</sup> Lincoln hesitated in part because elections for U.S. Representatives had not yet taken place in several states, including Kentucky, Tennessee, and North Carolina, all of which were scheduled to choose congressmen in August; Virginia was to do so in May. (In that era, not all states held congressional elections in November of even-numbered years.) Some argued that a special session could not be held before those August elections. Eighty-one members of the House had not been chosen yet, including twenty-six from seceded states and forty-one from the Upper South and Border States (Virginia, Tennessee, Kentucky, and North Carolina.)<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Albert G. Brown, Jr., to John A. Andrew, Washington, [28 March 1861], Andrew Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

<sup>22</sup> Washington correspondence, 18 March, Baltimore Sun, 19 March 1861; “Shall We Have an Extra Session of Congress?” and “Necessity of an Extra Session of Congress,” New York World, 13 March, 5 April 1861. On the attitude of the business community regarding tariffs, see Philip S. Foner, Business and Slavery: The New York Merchants and the Irrepressible Conflict (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1941), 275-84.

<sup>23</sup> New York Daily News, 29 March 1861.

Like some others, the president also feared that a reconvened Congress might again try to pass compromise measures permitting slavery to expand.<sup>24</sup> As the House was about to adjourn at the end of March, a few members called to ask about his plans for dealing with the South. He said that the administration had not yet settled on a course of action. “On the whole question of the collection of the revenues in the seceded ports, he admitted, to use his exact language, ‘that he was green as a gourd,’ and had turned it over to his attorney, Seward.” He did, however, assure them that he would not abandon the principle involved – that the laws must be obeyed – only that he might have to acknowledge practical problems in enforcing those laws. He did not discuss with this group the possibility of calling an extra session of Congress to pass legislation enabling him to collect revenues in seceded ports, but he said after the interview “that Congress would be called together, if he felt certain it would grant the legislation needed, and would not set about other business which might embarrass the administration.” It was “supposed by this he meant to deprecate any further attempts to compromise with the South. What if the new Congress, called together to give the president full power to collect the revenues in the seceded states, were to omit that work, and take up the old compromise patch-work?”<sup>25</sup>

The Republican majority in the House would be small, and if some of its members joined the Democrats to insist on compromising basic party principles, the result might be unfortunate. From the White House, William O. Stoddard reported that

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<sup>24</sup> Samuel F. Du Pont to William Whetter Louviers, 23 June 1861, John D. Hayes, ed., Samuel Francis Du Pont: A Selection from His Civil War Letters (3 vols.; Ithaca, N.Y.: Published for the Eleutherian Mills Historical Library by the Cornell University Press, 1969), 1:81; Washington correspondence, 3 April, New York Herald, 4 April 1861; William P. Mellen to Salmon P. Chase, Cincinnati, 29 June 1861, Chase Papers Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

<sup>25</sup> Washington correspondence, 3 April, Springfield (Massachusetts) Republican, 6 April 1861.



the prospect of a special session created fears “that some false prophet of peace, with a craven heart and a slippery tongue, will bring in specious proposals of some sort to distract our National Council, and impair the unity and energy of its actions.”<sup>26</sup> (Four years later, when the Confederacy surrendered, Lincoln rejoiced that Congress was out of session and thus could not immediately meddle with the delicate work of Reconstruction.)<sup>27</sup>

In addition, congressmen themselves opposed an extra session, for, as a journalist observed, “though they get their mileage they get no extra compensation, and if called together at all, doubtless they would remain here for two months, and the mileage would not pay for such an expenditure of time. Besides, every rational human being dislikes living in Washington in the hot months.”<sup>28</sup> Rumor also had it that Jefferson Davis “has given the admin[istration] to understand that he w[oul]d consider the calling of it [i.e., Congress] a casus belli, and in pursuance of the compromising policy no such casus will be willingly afforded by the admin[istration].”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Washington correspondence, 24 June, New York Examiner, 27 June 1861, in Michael Burlingame, ed., Dispatches from Lincoln's White House: The Anonymous Civil War Journalism of Presidential Secretary William O. Stoddard (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 12.

<sup>27</sup> Howard K. Beale and Alan W. Brownsword, eds., Diary of Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy under Lincoln and Johnson (3 vols.; New York: W.W. Norton, 1960), 2:281 (entry for 14 April 1865).

<sup>28</sup> Washington correspondence, 3 April, Springfield (Massachusetts) Republican, 6 April 1861. Similar points were made in the Washington correspondence, 6 April, Boston Journal, 6 April 1861, and by John Hay in his Washington dispatch of 9 July, New York World, 11 July 1861, in Michael Burlingame, ed., Lincoln's Journalist: John Hay's Anonymous Writings for the Press, 1860-1864 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998), 71-72. Another journalist reported that Lincoln favored passage of a bill like the one John Cochrane had introduced in the last Congress giving the executive branch power to declare Southern cities and towns no longer ports of entry. That would solve revenue problem in short order. Foreign governments would be notified and revenue cutters would enforce the new law. Washington correspondence, 12 March, New York Tribune, 14 March 1861.

<sup>29</sup> Albert G. Brown, Jr., to John A. Andrew, Washington, [28 March 1861], Andrew Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

Lincoln and his cabinet also favored delaying the special session of Congress lest a deliberative body prove unable to act decisively. According to Seward's son, they believed that "to wait for 'many men of many minds' to shape a war policy would be to invite disaster."<sup>30</sup> In addition, Seward opposed a special session because he feared Congress might pass unfortunate amendments to the Morrill tariff.<sup>31</sup> Lincoln may well have suspected that Congress might make some blunder that would drive loyal Slave States like Kentucky into the arms of the Confederacy. One observer likened the House of Representatives to a "disorderly body of schoolboys."<sup>32</sup> The president reportedly suspected that Congress would "undertake to investigate some unknown mystery."<sup>33</sup> So it was decided that the special session of Congress would be postponed until July 4, allowing enough time to determine if Washington would be a safe place to convene. It also meant that some emergency measures would have to be taken without prior congressional approval, measures which might be of questionable constitutionality.<sup>34</sup> Lincoln's failure to summon Congress immediately has been criticized, but it is difficult to fault his decision, given the uncertainty that prevailed immediately after the bombardment of Fort Sumter.<sup>35</sup> (On June 18, he asked the leaders of the finance

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<sup>30</sup> Frederick William Seward, Reminiscences of a War-Time Statesman and Diplomat, 1830-1915 (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1916), 152.

<sup>31</sup> Washington correspondence, 1 April, Philadelphia Inquirer, 2 April 1861.

<sup>32</sup> Mrs. Samuel Sinclair to Schuyler Colfax, n.p., April 1863 [no day of the month indicated], in O. J. Hollister, Life of Schuyler Colfax (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1886), 209-10n.

<sup>33</sup> Washington correspondence, 3 April, New York Herald, 4 April 1861.

<sup>34</sup> James G. Randall, Constitutional Problems under Lincoln (rev. ed.; Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1951), 51-59. In the Prize Cases, the Supreme Court in 1863 upheld by a 5-4 margin the constitutionality of Lincoln's acts taken between April and July 1861.

<sup>35</sup> For criticism of Lincoln's decision, see Fred A. Shannon, The Organization and Administration of the Union Army, 1861-1865 (2 vols.; Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark, 1928), 1:30-32. For a rebuttal of that argument, see Kenneth P. Williams,

committees to spend two weeks in Washington in advance of the opening of Congress in order to consult on measures to fund the war.)<sup>36</sup>

The cabinet also considered how large a militia force to call up. Some favored 50,000; Seward and others recommended double that number.<sup>37</sup> Lincoln split the difference and decided to ask the states to provide 75,000 men for three months' service, which the Militia Act of 1795 authorized. Once that was determined, action was swift: the president drafted a proclamation, Cameron calculated the quotas for each state, Nicolay had the document copied, and Seward readied it to distribute to the press in time for Monday's papers. That afternoon, Lincoln went for a carriage ride with his sons and Nicolay.<sup>38</sup>

In discussions of the proclamation, some advisors suggested that the North had far more resolve and enterprise than the South. Lincoln cautioned them, saying: "We must not forget that the people of the seceded States, like those of the loyal ones, are American citizens, with essentially the same characteristics and powers. Exceptional advantages on one side are counterbalanced by exceptional advantages on the other. We must make up our minds that man for man the soldier from the South will be a match for the soldier from the North and vice versa."<sup>39</sup>

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Lincoln Finds a General: A Military Study of the Civil War (5 vols.; New York: Macmillan, 1949-59), 2:797; Nevins, War for the Union, 1:91.

<sup>36</sup> Chase to Fessenden, Washington, 18 June 1861, Fessenden Papers, Bowdoin College; Chase to Justin Morrill, Washington, 22 June 1861, Morrill Papers Library of Congress.

<sup>37</sup> Gideon Welles, "Recollections in regard to the Formation of Mr Lincoln's Cabinet," undated manuscript, Abraham Lincoln Collection, Beinecke Library, Yale University. Cameron later alleged that he suggested 500,000 men be called up, but that seems unlikely. A. Howard Meneely, The War Department, 1861: A Study in Mobilization and Administration (New York: Columbia University Press, 1928), 101.

<sup>38</sup> Seward, Reminiscences, 152; Nicolay to Theresia Bates, Washington, 14 April 1861, Michael Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House: Letters, Memoranda, and Other Writings of John G. Nicolay, 1860-1865 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 33-34.

<sup>39</sup> Nicolay and Hay, Lincoln, 4:7.

Indeed, the North's obvious advantages in economic strength and manpower (the free states had 3,778,000 white males between the ages of eighteen and forty-five while the slave states had only 1,116,000) were so largely offset by the South's advantages that the North could well be considered the underdog at the outset of the war. The Confederates did not have to conquer the North to win; they merely had to fend it off. The military technology of the day favored the defense, not the offense. (With its grooved barrel, the rifle, which became the primary infantry and cavalry weapon on both sides, had much greater range and accuracy than the smoothbore musket, giving soldiers on the defensive a great advantage over their attackers.) The South's morale was exceptionally high, for it felt as if it were fighting for the principles of the Revolution of 1776. Moreover, Confederates sought to repel what they understandably considered an invasion. Because most of the battles would take place on Southern soil, the Confederates would know the terrain better and have superior sources of intelligence. European nations seemed likely to support the South. The South's military leaders, at least in the eastern theater, were superior to their Northern counterparts. In general, Southern enlisted men were more familiar with firearms, more accustomed to hard riding, and more used to outdoor life than Yankees. The North lacked a sophisticated governmental apparatus for conducting such a huge enterprise as the Civil War; mobilizing its vast resources would pose a grave challenge to the small, creaky, antiquated bureaucratic structures then available. A similar lack of organizational sophistication marked the civilian sector.<sup>40</sup> A greater challenge still was maintaining Northern unity. How could Kentucky slaveholders be kept in harness with Northern abolitionists? Prohibitionists in Maine with beer-loving

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<sup>40</sup> William Hanchett, Out of the Wilderness: The Life of Abraham Lincoln (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 60-63; Nevins, War for the Union, 1:241-65; James M. McPherson, Ordeal by Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.; New York: McGraw-Hill, 2001), 201-26.

Germans in the mid-west? Racial egalitarians in New England with racists in most other states? Free traders with protectionists? Former Whigs with former Democrats? If those elements did not all coalesce, the South could have prevailed despite its inferior numbers and economic muscle.

The militia proclamation reflected Lincoln's anger at leading secessionists, whom he regarded as a small handful who had dragooned their neighbors into disunion. In a preliminary draft of the proclamation he spoke of their "[in]sults, and injuries already too long endured." (In the final version he referred more temperately to "wrongs" rather than "insults and injuries.") Justifying the resort to arms, he emphasized a theme he would reiterate again and again, most memorably at Gettysburg in 1863: "I appeal to all loyal citizens to favor, facilitate, and aid this effort to maintain the honor, the integrity, and the existence of our National Union and the perpetuity of popular government." This was to be a war fought to vindicate democracy as well as to preserve the Union. The mission of the troops, he explained, would "probably be to repossess the forts, places and property, which have been seized from the Union; and, in every event, the utmost care will be observed, consistently with the objects aforesaid, to avoid any devastation; any destruction of, or interference with, property, or any disturbance of peaceful citizens, in any part of the country."

In thus describing the likely tasks that the troops would probably perform, Lincoln showed questionable judgment, for it confronted the Upper South and Border States with a dilemma: either they would have to make war against fellow Southerners or join them in secession. In Baltimore, John Pendleton Kennedy accurately predicted that

the proclamation “will fire up the whole South, as it implies invasion and coercion.”<sup>41</sup> By indicating that the militia would be used not simply to defend Washington but also to retake the forts, the president committed a “wicked blunder,” Kennedy protested. Half of the adult males in Maryland, he said, would have gladly rallied to protect the capital, but they would not consent to invade the South. “We are driven into extremities by a series of the most extraordinary blunders at Washington, which I think must convince everybody that there is no ability in the Administration to meet the crisis. They have literally forced the Border States out of the Union, and really seem to be utterly unconscious of the follies they have perpetrated.”<sup>42</sup>

In Kentucky, some Unionists were “struck with mingled amazement and indignation” at a proclamation which they said “deserves the unqualified condemnation of every American citizen.”<sup>43</sup> Kentuckians bristled at the word “repossess,” but the Bluegrass State remained loyal.<sup>44</sup> In North Carolina, Virginia, Arkansas, and Tennessee, however, the Unionist sentiment which had been waxing abruptly waned. Those states withdrew from the Union after their governors indignantly refused to provide any militia.<sup>45</sup> (Lincoln chastised the governor of Tennessee, Isham Harris, for his “disrespectful and malicious language.” When informed that Harris complained about the

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<sup>41</sup> John Pendleton Kennedy, journal, 15 April 1861, Kennedy Papers, Enoch Pratt Free Library, Baltimore.

<sup>42</sup> John Pendleton Kennedy to Robert C. Winthrop, Baltimore, 25 April 1861, Winthrop Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

<sup>43</sup> Louisville Journal, n.d., copied in the New York Times, 18 April 1861.

<sup>44</sup> John J. Speed to Henry S. Lane, Louisville, 29 April 1861, typed copy, Lane Papers, Indiana University.

<sup>45</sup> Daniel W. Crofts, Reluctant Confederates: Upper South Unionists in the Secession Crisis (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 340-52; Official Records of the War of the Rebellion (hereafter cited as O.R.) III, 1:98-106; Nevins, War for the Union, 1:102-7.

seizure of a boatload of weapons, Lincoln said quietly: “He be d—d.”<sup>46</sup> Those states might have resisted secession, at least temporarily, if Lincoln had announced that the troops would be used solely to protect Washington.<sup>47</sup> As it was, North Carolina Unionists felt betrayed. William Holden lamented that if the president “had only insisted on holding the federal property, and had called in good faith for troops to defend Washington City, the Union men of the border states could have sustained him. But he ‘crossed the Rubicon’ when he called for troops to subdue the Confederate States. This was a proclamation of war, and as such will be resisted.”<sup>48</sup> Jonathan Worth wondered how Lincoln failed to anticipate “that he was letting loose on us a torrent to which we could oppose no resistance. It may be said, theoretically, that this should not have been the effect. Statesmen should have common sense. All sensible men knew it would be the effect. . . . He could have adopted no policy so effectual to destroy the Union.”<sup>49</sup> A prominent newspaper in the Tarheel State declared that the “mask has fallen and the Black Republican administration stands forth in all its hideous deformity. . . . A free people unwilling to submit to wrong and oppression and fighting for their rights are to be butchered by the power of this great government.”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Lincoln to Harris, Washington, [1?] May 1861, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:351; Harris to Lincoln, Nashville, 29 April 1861, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; Lincoln to Harris, draft, [1? May 1861] ibid.; Michael Burlingame and John R. Turner Ettliger, eds., Inside Lincoln's White House: The Complete Civil War Diary of John Hay (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1997), 17 (entry for 3 May 1861).

<sup>47</sup> John Pendleton Kennedy to Chase, Baltimore, 24 April 1861, Chase Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; Richard N. Current, Lincoln and the First Shot (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1963), 207.

<sup>48</sup> North Carolina Semi-Weekly Standard, 20 April 1861, quoted in Crofts, Reluctant Confederates, 335.

<sup>49</sup> Worth to C. W. Woolen, Asheboro, 17 May 1861, in J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, ed., The Correspondence of Jonathan Worth (2 vols.; Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton, 1909), 1:147.

<sup>50</sup> Unidentified newspaper quoted in Donald E. Reynolds, Editors Make War: Southern Newspapers in the Secession Crisis (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1970), 208.

In neighboring Virginia, Unionist leader John Minor Botts called the proclamation “the most unfortunate state paper that ever issued from any Executive since the establishment of the government.”<sup>51</sup> William C. Rives blamed “Mr. Lincoln’s unlucky & ill-conceived proclamation” for causing Virginia’s catastrophic decision to secede. “Before that, all the proceedings of the Convention indicated an earnest desire to maintain the Union,” Rives asserted.<sup>52</sup> That proclamation transformed the sectional conflict in Tennessee from “the negro question” to “a question of resistance to tyranny,” according to Senator A. O. P. Nicholson.<sup>53</sup>

Lincoln soon regretted that he had not justified the militia call as a defensive measure to protect Washington. He exclaimed to the mayor of Baltimore on April 21: “I am not a learned man!” and insisted “that his proclamation had not been correctly understood; that he had no intention of bringing on war, but that his purpose was to defend the capital, which was in danger of being bombarded from the heights across the Potomac.”<sup>54</sup> Repeatedly he “protested, on his honor, in the most solemn way, that the troops were meant exclusively to protect the Capital.”<sup>55</sup> When a leading Maryland Unionist, Reverdy Johnson, warned that the people of his state and Virginia feared that troops headed for Washington would invade the South, Lincoln denied any such intent.

On April 24, he assured Johnson that “the sole purpose of bringing troops here is to

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<sup>51</sup> John Minor Botts, The Great Rebellion: Its Secret History, Rise, Progress, and Disastrous Failure (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1866), 205.

<sup>52</sup> Rives to Robert C. Winthrop, Castle Hill, 19 April 1861, Winthrop Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

<sup>53</sup> Nicholson to “Dear Green,” 5 May 1861, in Crofts, Reluctant Confederates, 351.

<sup>54</sup> George W. Brown, Baltimore and the Nineteenth of April 1861: A Study of the War (Baltimore: N. Murray, 1887), 74. Cf. statement by Cassius M. Clay, Washington, 20 April 1861, given to the editor of the Nashville Democrat, New York Times, 4 May 1861.

<sup>55</sup> S. Teackle Wallis to James Alfred Pearce, Baltimore, 18 July 1861, in Bernard C. Steiner, “James Alfred Pearce,” Maryland Historical Magazine 19 (1924): 26.



defend this capital. . . . I have no purpose to invade Virginia, with them or any other troops, as I understand the word invasion.” But Lincoln insisted that he must strike back if Virginia attacked Washington or allowed other Rebels to pass through her territory to do so. “Suppose Virginia erects, or permits to be erected, batteries on the opposite shore, to bombard the city, are we to stand still and see it done? In a word, if Virginia strikes us, are we not to strike back, and as effectively as we can. Again, are we not to hold Fort Monroe (for instance) if we can? I have no objection to declare a thousand times that I have no purpose to invade Virginia or any other State, but I do not mean to let them invade us without striking back.”<sup>56</sup>

The proclamation’s call for a mere 75,000 militia for three months’ service was also criticized.<sup>57</sup> Before issuing that document, Lincoln consulted Stephen A. Douglas, who recommended that the number be increased to 200,000. The president had asked George Ashmun to arrange an interview with the Little Giant. When the former Massachusetts congressman called on the senator, Douglas initially balked at the suggestion, protesting that “Mr. Lincoln has dealt hardly with me, in removing some of my friends from office, and I don’t know as he wants my advice or aid.” But persistent cajoling by Ashmun and an appeal from Mrs. Douglas persuaded the Little Giant to capitulate; accompanied by Ashmun, he met with Lincoln for two hours. After the president read a draft of the proclamation, Douglas urged the reinforcement of Cairo, Fort Monroe, Harper’s Ferry, and Washington itself, and also warned about the danger of having troops pass through Maryland. He suggested that soldiers be routed via Perryville and Annapolis to avoid clashes in Baltimore, and that Forts Monroe in Virginia and Old

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<sup>56</sup> Lincoln to Johnson, Washington, 24 April 1861, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:342-43.

<sup>57</sup> “Are 75,000 Men Sufficient?” New York World, 16 April 1861; Nevins, War for the Union, 1:90-91.

Point Comfort in Maryland be secured. During the discussion there prevailed a “cordial feeling of a united, friendly, and patriotic purpose.” Douglas informed the press that while he “was unalterably opposed to the Administration on all its political issues, he was prepared to sustain the President in the exercise of all his constitutional functions to preserve the Union, and maintain the Government, and defend the Federal Capital.” The two men spoke “of the present and future without reference to the past.” Lincoln was “very much gratified with the interview.”<sup>58</sup>

Shortly thereafter Douglas told a friend, “If I were president, I’d convert or hang them all within forty-eight hours. . . . I’ve known Mr. Lincoln a longer time than you have, or than the country has; he will come out all right, and we will all stand by him.”<sup>59</sup> On the floor of the senate he defended the proclamation, and, acting the part of a true statesman as he had done in the final stages of the 1860 campaign, took to the stump, denouncing secession and urging his followers to rally in support of the Union. Lincoln had urged him “to arouse the Egyptians [i.e., residents of southern Illinois].”<sup>60</sup> The Little Giant proceeded to Springfield, where on April 25 he delivered an electrifying address to the General Assembly.<sup>61</sup> Douglas’s prestige among Northern Democrats helped cement their loyalty to the Union cause. His lamentably premature death two months later

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<sup>58</sup> George Ashmun to Isaac N. Arnold, Springfield, Massachusetts, 15 October 1864, Springfield, Massachusetts, Republican, 26 October 1864; Washington correspondence, 14 April, 15 May, New York Tribune, 15 April, 16 May 1861; Simon P. Hanscom in the Washington National Republican, 16 September 1866; Nicolay and Hay, Lincoln, 4:80; J. G. Holland, Life of Abraham Lincoln (Springfield, Massachusetts: G. Bill, 1866), 300-3; F. Lauriston Bullard, “Abraham Lincoln and George Ashmun,” New England Quarterly 19 (1946): 198-200; Robert W. Johannsen, Stephen A. Douglas (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 859-60; Robert W. Johannsen, “The Douglas Democracy and the Crisis of Disunion,” Civil War History 9 (1963): 229-30, 243.

<sup>59</sup> Johannsen, Douglas, 860.

<sup>60</sup> “Lincoln and Douglas: Their Last Interview,” undated memorandum written by Philip B. Fouke for Ward Hill Lamon, Jeremiah S. Black Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>61</sup> Allan Nevins, “Stephen A. Douglas: His Weaknesses and His Greatness,” Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 42 (1949): 407.

deprived Lincoln of an invaluable ally and left him to deal with obstructionist Democrats like Clement L. Vallandigham of Ohio and Horatio Seymour of New York, who were to cause him innumerable headaches. Their motto became “the Union as it was,” the “Constitution as it is,” and the “Negro in his place.”<sup>62</sup>

Some agreed with Douglas’s suggestion that 200,000 troops was a more reasonable number than 75,000.<sup>63</sup> Others recommended 300,000, and Horace Greeley even urged that 500,000 men be enlisted.<sup>64</sup> In explaining why the president did not ask for such a large number, his secretaries pointed out that a force of 75,000 “was nearly five times the [size of the] existing regular army; that only very limited quantities of arms, equipments, and supplies were in the Northern arsenals; that the treasury was bankrupt; and that an insignificant eight million loan had not two weeks before been discounted nearly six per cent. by the New York bankers.”<sup>65</sup> In addition, the 1795 statute authorizing the president to call out the militia specified that it could serve only “until the expiration of thirty days after the commencement of the then next session of Congress.”

But in general, Lincoln’s proclamation was enthusiastically received at the North, where the bombardment of Sumter triggered a passionate uprising. As he put it later, “the response of the country was most gratifying to the administration, surpassing, in

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<sup>62</sup> John Thomas Hubbell, “The Northern Democracy and the Crisis of Disunion, 1860-1861” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois, 1969), 272.

<sup>63</sup> C. G. Cotting to Elihu B. Washburne, Richmond, Illinois, 18 April 1861, Washburne Papers, Library of Congress; Robert C. Winthrop, diary entry for 19 April 1861, Winthrop Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

<sup>64</sup> E. B. Harwood to Salmon P. Chase, Lockport, New York, 24 April 1861, Chase Papers, Library of Congress; John M. Read to Lincoln, Philadelphia, 20 April 1861, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; “Will the Government Stand by the People?” New York Tribune, 22 April 1861. Francis P. Blair Sr. wrote that some unspecified people who wished to intimidate the rebels called for 300,000 troops. Undated historical essay by F. P. Blair, box 2, Blair and Lee Family Papers, Princeton University.

<sup>65</sup> Nicolay and Hay, Lincoln, 4:77-78.

unanimity and spirit, the most sanguine expectation.”<sup>66</sup> Rage at the secessionists swept through the Free States like a tornado. For too long had Southerners played the bully; now Northerners would stand up for themselves and their rights. The South must confront the pent-up anger of patient men. People in Vermont, wrote a Brattleboro resident, “have felt for the last three months mortified, indignant, ‘mad clear through’ at the disgrace & shame inflicted on us & we now rejoice & are glad that the insults heaped on us are to be avenged, & our wounded honor vindicated.”<sup>67</sup> From Wisconsin, Senator James R.

Doolittle reported that if “an Angel from Heaven had issued a proclamation it could hardly have received a heartier response than the proclamation of the President.”<sup>68</sup> On April 16, John Hay noted that there “is something splendid, yet terrible, about this roused anger of the North. It is stern, quiet, implacable, irresistible. On whomever it falls it will grind them to powder.”<sup>69</sup> Mass meetings throughout the North testified to the deep devotion felt for the Union. Thousands flocked to join the army. Seward’s fear of divisiveness within the North proved illusory. Like the U.S. after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, the Free States rallied around the flag with virtual unanimity.

Some Democrats objected that Congress would not convene until July 4. The President “has two months of absolute despotic control” protested the Washington States and Union.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Lincoln, message to Congress, 4 July 1861, early draft in Lincoln’s hand, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>67</sup> Edward Kirkwood to Gideon Welles, Brattleboro, Vermont, 16 April 1861, Welles Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>68</sup> James R. Doolittle to Lyman Trumbull, Racine, 24 April 1861, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>69</sup> Washington correspondence by John Hay, 16 April, Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 23 April 1861, in Burlingame, ed., Lincoln’s Journalist, 57-58.

<sup>70</sup> Washington States and Union, 15 April 1861.

## ANXIETY: AWAITING THE ARRIVAL OF TROOPS

Immediately after the fall of Fort Sumter, Northern anxiety mounted steadily as disaster followed disaster. On April 17, Virginia seceded; on the 18<sup>th</sup>, federal troops abandoned Harper's Ferry at the northern entrance to the vital Shenandoah Valley, torching the armory as they left; on the 20<sup>th</sup>, Union forces set afire the Gosport Navy Yard in Norfolk before evacuating it. Rumors circulated that 1500 Confederates in Alexandria were poised to attack the capital, a scant seven miles to the north.<sup>71</sup>

Lincoln found it hard to credit reports that Virginia had left the Union so precipitously. On April 17, when he learned of the Old Dominion's secession, he "said he was not yet prepared to believe that one of the founders of the Union, and the mother of so many of its rulers, was yet ready to break down her own work and blast her own glorious history by this act of treason."<sup>72</sup> That night it was feared that Confederates would attack the city.<sup>73</sup>

Washington was in fact quite vulnerable to Confederate attack; it seemed that Virginia secessionists could seize the lightly-defended capital with a determined thrust. Rumors abounded that the fierce Texas Ranger Ben McCulloch would lead such an assault (although he was then in Arkansas and would never come east of the Mississippi River before his death in battle the following year.)<sup>74</sup> The loyalty of the District's thirty

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<sup>71</sup> Nicolay to Therenia Bates, Washington, 19 April 1861, Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House, 35.

<sup>72</sup> Washington correspondence, 17 April, New York Times, 18 April 1861.

<sup>73</sup> Francis Sidney Low to his son, Washington, 18 April 1861, Francis Sidney Low Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>74</sup> John Pendleton Kennedy journal, 16 April 1861, Kennedy Papers, Enoch Pratt Free Library, Baltimore; Margaret Leech, Reveille in Washington, 1860-1865 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1941), 53; Charles Winslow Elliott, Winfield Scott: The Soldier and the Man (New York: Macmillan, 1937), 710.

companies of raw militia was suspect.<sup>75</sup> Anxiously Lincoln and other Washingtonians awaited the arrival of troops from the North. “Never was a capital left in such a defenceless [sic] condition,” complained one member of the Frontier Guards, an informal military force hastily thrown together to protect Washington.<sup>76</sup> On April 20, another Frontier Guardsman confided to his diary: “A universal gloom and anxiety sits upon every countenance.” The city was “rife with treason, and the street full of traitors.” Nervously he asked: “when will re-inforcements come? Will it be too late?”<sup>77</sup>

Henry Villard recalled the “impatience, gloom, and depression” that enveloped the capital as day after day the reinforcements failed to materialize. “No one felt it more than the President,” according to Villard. “I saw him repeatedly, and he fairly groaned at the inexplicable delay in the advent of help from the loyal States.”<sup>78</sup> Illinois Congressman Phillip B. Fouke, who visited the White House on the night of April 22, reported that Lincoln “appeared to be especially exercised at the critical condition of the federal capital.”<sup>79</sup> The next day Lincoln exclaimed in anguish while gazing at the Potomac: “Why don’t they come! Why don’t they come!”<sup>80</sup> On April 25, Lincoln “slowly and with great emphasis” asked a visitor from Connecticut who thought he looked “depressed beyond measure”: “What is the North about? Do they know our condition?”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> John G. Nicolay to Ozias M. Hatch, Washington, 26 April 1861, Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House, 38-39.

<sup>76</sup> James H. Campbell to his wife, Juliet Lewis Campbell, Washington, 24 April 1861, Campbell Papers, Schoff Civil War Collection, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>77</sup> Diary of Clifford Arrick, 20 April 1861, Frontier Guard Records, Library of Congress.

<sup>78</sup> Henry Villard, Memoirs of Henry Villard, Journalist and Financier: 1838-1900 (2 vols.; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1904), 1:169-70.

<sup>79</sup> Philadelphia correspondence, 23 April, New York Herald, 24 April 1861.

<sup>80</sup> Nicolay and Hay, Lincoln, 4:152.

<sup>81</sup> Harriet Beecher Stowe, Men of Our Times; or, Leading Patriots of the Day (Hartford: Hartford Publishing Co., 1868), 473.

Compounding Lincoln's woes were the resignations of approximately one third of the officers in the army and navy.<sup>82</sup> Especially disconcerting was the case of Colonel John B. Magruder, commander of the Washington garrison, who on April 18 had told Lincoln: "Sir, I was brought up and educated under the glorious old flag. I have lived under it and have fought under it, and, sir, with the help of God, I shall fight under it again and, if need be, shall die under it." The president replied: "you are an officer of the army and a Southern gentleman, and incapable of any but honorable conduct." Lincoln added that "independently of all other reasons he felt it to be a constitutional obligation binding upon his conscience to put down secession" even though "he bore testimony to the honor, good faith, and high character of the Southern people, whom he 'knew well.'" Three days thereafter the colonel announced his intention of quitting the service to join the Confederacy. Later Lincoln said that he could not remember "any single event of my administration that gave me so much pain or wounded me so deeply as the singular behavior of Colonel Magruder." To the president "it seemed the more wanton and cruel in him because he knew that I had implicit confidence in his integrity. The fact is, when I learned that he had gone over to the enemy and I had been so completely deceived in him, my confidence was shaken in everybody, and I hardly knew who to trust anymore."<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Nevins, War for the Union, 1:107-11; Meneely, War Department, 106.

<sup>83</sup> Magruder's reminiscences, taken from an unpublished memoir, edited by his brother, Allan B. Magruder, Philadelphia Weekly Times, 28 December 1878; Samuel D. Sturgis to the editor of the Philadelphia Evening Telegraph, 12 June 1870, Sturgis Papers, in Recollected Words of Abraham Lincoln, compiled and edited by Don E. Fehrenbacher and Virginia Fehrenbacher (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 431-32; Burlingame and Ettliger, eds., Hay Diary, 5 (entry for 21 April 1861); Magruder to an unidentified resident of Philadelphia, Galveston, 8 May 1870, Philadelphia Evening Telegraph, n.d., copied in the New York Times, 23 May 1870. In his 1870 letter, Magruder remembered events quite differently, claiming that he had told the president he intended to join the Confederacy and that Lincoln had expressed his understanding.

More significantly, Colonel Robert E. Lee spurned an offer from Lincoln (unofficially conveyed through Francis P. Blair Sr.) to command the Union army. “Mr Blair,” said the army’s most capable officer, “I look upon secession as anarchy – if I owned the four millions of slaves in the South I would sacrifice them all to the Union – but how can I draw my sword upon Virginia, my native State?”<sup>84</sup> (Years later, James B. Swain, a Washington correspondent of the New York Times in 1861, asked John Hay if he remembered “the séance which you arranged between the late Anne S. Stephens and Mrs. Lincoln, at which Mrs. Robert E. Lee, and her daughter were unanticipated participants, and which was the very evening of Lee’s flight from Arlington [on the morning of April 22, Lee left Alexandria for Richmond], and to cover which flight, evidently was the purpose of the visit of Mrs. Lee and her daughter to Mrs. Lincoln. That episode fixed in my mind the impression that Lee’s treachery was premeditated, not impulsive as history seems to be shaping it, and that the visit of his wife and daughter to the White House was a subterfuge to deceive.”)<sup>85</sup> On April 23, Lee accepted command of the military forces of the Old Dominion. If he had remained loyal to the Union, the war might have been much shorter and less bloody. (Generals Winfield Scott, George H. Thomas, Philip St. George Cooke, John W. Davidson, L. P. Graham, William Hays, and John Newton – Virginians all – did not follow Lee’s example.)

In July, Lincoln told Congress that it was “worthy of note, that while in this, the government’s hour of trial, large numbers of those in the Army and Navy, who have been

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<sup>84</sup> Francis P. Blair Sr. to William Cullen Bryant, 5 August 1866, draft, Blair Family Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>85</sup> James B. Swain to John Hay, Sing Sing, New York, 21 February 1888, Nicolay-Hay Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. Hay’s diary contains no mention of such a séance, though he did meet with Ann Stephens on April 18.



avored with the offices, have resigned, and proved false to the hand which had pampered them, not one common soldier, or common sailor is known to have deserted his flag. Great honor is due to those officers who remain true, despite the example of their treacherous associates; but the greatest honor, and most important fact of all is, the unanimous firmness of the common soldiers and common sailors. To the last man, so far as known, they have successfully resisted the traitorous efforts of those, whose commands, but an hour before, they obeyed as absolute law. This is the patriotic instinct of the plain people. They understand, without an argument, that destroying the government, which was made by Washington, means no good to them.”<sup>86</sup> (Actually, twenty-six enlisted men resigned to join the Confederacy.)<sup>87</sup>

In the midst of all the uncertainty, General Scott drew up emergency plans in case the capital were to be attacked in force. He designated the massive Treasury Building as a refuge for the president and his cabinet, who would take shelter in the basement while troops assembled at Lafayette Square.<sup>88</sup> In the meantime, Old Fuss and Fathers assigned Major David Hunter to protect the White House. Hunter called on two Republican leaders, Cassius M. Clay of Kentucky and Jim Lane of Kansas, to organize informal units.<sup>89</sup> Clay, who had arrived in Washington on April 15, was preparing to leave for Russia to take up his duties as America’s minister to the czar’s government. Hastily he assembled the “Clay Battalion,” a rag-tag company of a few dozen senators,

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<sup>86</sup> Lincoln, 4 July 1861 message to Congress, first draft, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>87</sup> Meneely, War Department, 106.

<sup>88</sup> Nevins, War for the Union, 1:79.

<sup>89</sup> Edward A. Miller, Lincoln's Abolitionist General: The Biography of David Hunter (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1997), 54-57.

congressmen, clerks, mechanics, and salesmen.<sup>90</sup> The vain, melodramatic Clay appeared at the Executive Mansion “with a sublimely unconscious air, three pistols and an Arkansas toothpick [Bowie knife] and looked like an admirable vignette to 25-cents-worth of yellow-covered romance,” according to John Hay.<sup>91</sup>

Supplementing these men were the “Frontier Guards,” hurriedly organized at Hunter’s request by the cunning, ambitious, violence-prone Jim Lane, senator-elect from Kansas.<sup>92</sup> Consisting of about fifty men, the Guards on April 18 took up residence in the White House, where Nicolay and Hay observed them as they “filed into the famous East Room, clad in citizens’ dress, but carrying very new, untarnished muskets, and following Lane, brandishing a sword of irreproachable brightness. Here ammunition-boxes were opened and cartridges dealt out; and after spending the evening in an exceedingly rudimentary squad drill, under the light of the gorgeous gas chandeliers, they disposed themselves in picturesque bivouac on the brilliant-patterned velvet carpet – perhaps the most luxurious cantonment which American soldiers have ever enjoyed.”<sup>93</sup> A member of the Guard wrote home describing how he and his colleagues “slept sweetly on the President’s rich Brussels [carpet], with their arms stacked in martial line down the center of the hall, while two long rows of Kansas ex-Governors, Senators, Judges, Editors, Generals and Jayhawkers were dozing upon each side, and the sentinels made regular beats around them.” Those guardians were instructed to admit no one to the East Room

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<sup>90</sup> David L. Smiley, Lion of White Hall: The Life of Cassius M. Clay (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1962), 175-76; Francis Sidney Low to his son, Washington, 18 April 1861, Francis Sidney Low Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>91</sup> Burlingame and Ettliger, eds., Hay Diary, 8 (entry for 22 April 1861).

<sup>92</sup> Charles F. Cooney, “The Frontier Guard Revisited,” Civil War Times, February 1974, 23-25; Miller, Hunter, 55-57.

<sup>93</sup> Nicolay and Hay, Lincoln, 4:106-7.

who failed to give the password. “Even the President,” a newspaper reported, “when he attempted to enter the hall, accompanied by his lady and some members of the Cabinet, was pricked with the sharp steel of the sentinel, and told, – perhaps jocosely – that he could not possibly come in!”<sup>94</sup> Lincoln “was forced to beat a retreat, to the no small amusement of the company.”<sup>95</sup> When the unit was disbanded after a few days, Lincoln said in thanking them that “language was incapable of expressing how great an obligation he and the people all over this country are under to this little patriotic band of men, for their timely services in preventing, as they undoubtedly did prevent, this capital from falling into the hands of the enemy.”<sup>96</sup>

Relieving tension slightly was the arrival five unarmed companies of Pennsylvania militiamen on April 18.<sup>97</sup> Accompanied by Cameron and Seward, Lincoln visited them at the Capitol to express hearty thanks for their promptitude as well as “his great relief and satisfaction at their presence.”<sup>98</sup> One soldier recalled that when the president entered, “[p]rofound silence for a moment resulted, broken by the hand clapping and cheers of the tired volunteers. . . . I remember how I was impressed by the kindness of his face and awkward hanging of his arms and legs, his apparent bashfulness in the presence of these first soldiers of the Republic, and with it all a grave, rather mournful bearing in his attitude.” After observing the men, some of whom had

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<sup>94</sup> Kansas State Journal (Lawrence), 9 May 1861.

<sup>95</sup> Washington Evening Star, 19 April 1861.

<sup>96</sup> Ward Hill Lamon, Washington Evening Star, 24 May 1890.

<sup>97</sup> Washington Evening Star, 19 April 1861; Benjamin Franklin Cooling, Symbol, Sword, and Shield: Defending Washington during the Civil War (2nd rev. ed.; Shippensburg, Pa.: White Mane, 1991), 22-24.

<sup>98</sup> Willis R. Copeland, The Logan Guards of Lewistown, Pennsylvania: Our First Defenders of 1861 (Lewistown: Mifflin County Historical Society, 1962), 23; Oliver Christian Bosbyshell, “When and Where I Saw Lincoln,” in John P. Nicholson, ed., Abraham Lincoln (Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States, Commandery of the State of Pennsylvania, Memorial Meeting, 13 February 1907), 17-18.

been wounded while passing through Baltimore, he said: “I did not come here to make a speech. The time for speech-making has gone by, and the time for action is at hand. I have come here to give the Washington Artillerists from the State of Pennsylvania a warm welcome to the city of Washington and to shake every officer and soldier by the hand, providing you will give me that privilege.” As he shook their hands, a “kind of awe seemed to come over the boys.”<sup>99</sup>

That same day, Lincoln met with the celebrated author Bayard Taylor, who found him “calm and collected” as “he spoke of the present crisis with that solemn, earnest composure, which is a sign of a soul not easily perturbed.”<sup>100</sup> In the evening, when informed that some daredevil Virginia guerillas planned to swoop into the city and either capture or assassinate him, the president merely grinned. Mary Lincoln, however, was not so nonchalant, and John Hay had to do “some very dexterous lying” to calm her fears.<sup>101</sup>

On April 19, the anniversary of the 1775 Battle of Lexington where Massachusetts men were the first to be killed in the Revolutionary War, members of the Sixth Massachusetts regiment were the first to die in the Civil War when a mob attacked them as they passed through Baltimore.<sup>102</sup> (In February, a leading politician in that city had warned that if the Lincoln administration “shall dare to bring its Black Republican cohorts to the banks of the Susquehanna” in order to defend Washington, “that river shall

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<sup>99</sup> Bosbyshell, “When and Where I Saw Lincoln,” 17-18; Heber Thompson, The First Defenders (n.p., 1910), 151.

<sup>100</sup> Washington correspondence by Bayard Taylor, 19 April, New York Tribune, 23 April 1861.

<sup>101</sup> Burlingame and Ettlinger, eds., Hay Diary, 2-3 (entry for 19 April 1861).

<sup>102</sup> The first troops wounded in the war were Pennsylvania militiamen attacked on April 18 by a mob in Baltimore. Cooling, Symbol, Sword, and Shield, 23.

run red with blood before the first man of them should cross it.”)<sup>103</sup> Shots were exchanged, killing four soldiers and wounding thirty-six of their comrades; in addition, twelve civilians were slain and scores wounded.<sup>104</sup> The North howled in outrage, causing residents of the Monumental City to become “greatly depressed by forebodings of the terrible retribution in store for them.”<sup>105</sup> When two leading citizens of the city expressed fear that indignant Northerners might swarm into the Free State, Lincoln offered them reassurance: “Our people are easily influenced by reason. They have determined to prosecute this matter with energy but with the most temperate spirit. You are entirely safe from lawless invasion.”<sup>106</sup>

When informed of the attack on the Massachusetts Sixth, Lincoln “was very much astonished” and said that Maryland Governor Thomas H. Hicks “had assured him, the day before, that the troops would have no trouble in passing through Baltimore, and that if they wanted any troops from Washington he (Gov. Hicks) would telegraph.” When Hicks wired saying “Send no more troops,” the president assumed that the governor wanted no help from the administration “and that he would take care and see that the

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<sup>103</sup> Robert M. McLane, speech to a secessionist meeting in Baltimore, 1 February 1861, quoted in a letter to the editor of the Baltimore Clipper by C. N., Fort Warren, 3 February 1862, copy, John Sherman Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>104</sup> Robert J. Brugger, with the assistance of Cynthia Horsburgh Requardt, Robert I. Cottom, Jr., and Mary Ellen Hayward, Maryland: A Middle Temperament, 1634-1980 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press in association with the Maryland Historical Society, 1988), 7; Charles Branch Clark, “Baltimore and the Attack on the Sixth Massachusetts Regiment, April 19, 1861,” Maryland Historical Magazine 56 (1961): 39-71; Frank Towers, “‘A Vociferous Army of Howling Wolves’: Baltimore’s Civil War Riot of April 19, 1861,” Maryland Historical Magazine 23 (1992): 1-27.

<sup>105</sup> New York Times, 25 April 1861; Scott S. Sheads and Daniel C. Toomey, Baltimore during the Civil War (Linthicum, Maryland: Toomey Press, 1997), 153-54.

<sup>106</sup> Burlingame and Ettliger, eds., Hay Diary, 3 (entry for 19 April 1861).

troops passed safely.”<sup>107</sup> (In fact, on April 18 Maryland Hicks and Baltimore Mayor George W. Brown telegraphed Lincoln ambiguously: “send no troops here.” They repeated that message the following day.<sup>108</sup> They meant to say “send no more troops through here.”)

Upon the arrival of the Massachusetts Sixth in Washington, Lincoln shook hands with every member of the regiment and greeted its commander, Colonel Edward F. Jones warmly: “Thank God, you have come; for if you had not Washington would have been in the hands of the rebels before morning. Your brave boys have saved the capital. God bless them.”<sup>109</sup> Observing their shabby uniforms, the president directed that the troops be given regular army shirts and trousers.

After midnight, when a delegation from Baltimore arrived at the White House to make an appeal like Hicks’s, Nicolay refused to wake the president but called on the secretary of war, who indicated no interest in complying with their request. The next morning Lincoln encountered the Baltimoreans as he descended the White House stairs to confer with General Scott, who urged that reinforcements be sent around rather than through Baltimore. The president, “always inclined to give all men credit for fairness and

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<sup>107</sup> Thomas B. Lowry of Philadelphia was the first to tell Lincoln of the attack on the Massachusetts troops. Lowry described the president’s reaction to the Philadelphia Press. Philadelphia Press, 22 April, copied in the New York Times, 23 April 1861.

<sup>108</sup> Telegrams from George W. Brown and Thomas H. Hicks to Lincoln, 18, 19 April 1861, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress. It is easy to see how Lincoln might have misinterpreted this language in the telegram of the 18<sup>th</sup>: “A collision between the citizens & the Northern troops has taken place in Baltimore and the excitement is fearful. Send no ~~more~~ troops here. We will endeavor to prevent all bloodshed. A public meeting of citizens has been called and the troops of the State in the City have been called out to preserve the peace. They will be enough.”

<sup>109</sup> Speech by B. F. Watson, who was the major of the regiment, given in Lowell, Massachusetts, 19 April 1886, quoted in an article by John Towle, Boston Evening Journal, 16 April 1911; Thomas E. Ballard to Truman H. Bartlett, Boston, 1 August 1907, Bartlett Papers, Boston University; Edward F. Jones to Daniel Butterfield, Binghamton, New York, 19 April 1901, in Julia Lorrillard Butterfield, A Biographical Memorial of General Daniel Butterfield (New York: Grafton, 1904), 29. Cf. Benjamin F. Butler, Autobiography and Personal Reminiscences of Major-General Benj. F. Butler: Butler’s Book (Boston: A. M. Thayer, 1892), 180.

sincerity,” agreed to this compromise solution, thus satisfying the committee. Half in jest, he told them that “if I grant you this, you will come to-morrow demanding that no troops shall pass around.”<sup>110</sup>

At the urging of Henry Winter Davis, Lincoln then wired Hicks and Brown, summoning them to Washington for a consultation.<sup>111</sup> Around midnight a telegram arrived from Brown stating that Hicks was unavailable and asking if he should come alone. At 1 a.m., Nicolay woke Lincoln, who had his secretary reply to the mayor: “Come.”<sup>112</sup>

On April 20, Lincoln also met with two Maryland congressmen, Anthony Kennedy and J. Morrison Harris, who repeated the message of the previous Baltimore callers. Impatiently, Lincoln declared: “My God, Mr. Harris, I don’t know what to make of your people. You have sent me one committee already, and they seemed to be perfectly satisfied with what I said to them.” When Harris insisted that no more troops pass through his state, the president answered: “My God, Sir, what am I to do? I had better go out and hang myself on the first tree I come to, than to give up the power of the Federal Government in this way. I don’t want to go through your town, or near it, if I can help it; but we must have the troops here to relieve ourselves, or we shall die like rats in a heap.” Lincoln then chided Harris for abandoning his Republican principles.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Lincoln to Hicks and Brown, Washington, 20 April 1861, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:340; Nicolay, memorandum of events, 19 April 1861, in Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House, 34-35; Burlingame and Ettliger, eds., Hay Diary, 5 (entry for 21 April 1861).

<sup>111</sup> Henry Winter Davis to Samuel Francis Du Pont, Baltimore, 29 April 1861, transcript, S. F. Du Pont Papers, Hagley Museum, Wilmington, Delaware.

<sup>112</sup> Nicolay, memorandum of events, 20, 21 April 1861, in Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House, 36, 37.

<sup>113</sup> Baltimore Exchange, n.d., copied in the Cincinnati Commercial, 30 April 1861.

Sunday, April 21, was a “dreary and anxious” day at the White House.<sup>114</sup> That morning, Mayor Brown and several of his fellow townsmen fulfilled Lincoln’s prediction by demanding “in the most earnest manner” that no troops pass through their state at all! The president at first balked, asserting “with great earnestness” that the protection of Washington “was the sole object of concentrating troops there, and he protested that none of the troops brought through Maryland were intended for any purposes hostile to the State, or aggressive as against Southern States.” The delegation left, reassured of the president’s desire to avoid further bloodshed in the Free State. But upon reaching the depot to return home, they received word that Pennsylvania reinforcements had recently arrived in Cockeysville, fourteen miles north of Baltimore, throwing that city into a panic. Indignantly the delegation returned to the White House to insist that these troops be sent back to the Keystone State. Fearing that renewed hostilities between troops and civilians might play into the hands of Maryland’s secessionists and that a pitched battle in the City of Monuments would delay the arrival of troops, he “at once, in the most decided way, urged the recall of the troops, saying he had no idea they would be there today, and, lest there should be the slightest suspicion of bad faith on his part in summoning the Mayor to Washington and allowing troops to march on the city during his absence, he desired that the troops should, if it were practicable, be sent back at once.”<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Nicolay, memorandum of events, 19-30 April 1861, in Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House, 38.

<sup>115</sup> Washington correspondence by [George W.] S[imonton], 1 May, New York Times, 4 May 1861; Brown, Baltimore and 19<sup>th</sup> of April, 71-74; George M. Brown’s statement, dated Baltimore, 7:30 p.m., 21 April, Washington National Intelligencer, 22 April 1861; Nicolay, memorandum of events, 21 April 1861, Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House, 37; George T. M. Davis to Prosper M. Wetmore, New York, 1 May 1861, in John Austin Stevens, The Union Defence Committee of the City of New York: Minutes, Reports, and Correspondence (New York: Union Defence Committee, 1885), 153-56. Brown’s version of Lincoln’s remarks was deemed inaccurate by a correspondent for the New York Times, who reported that the Baltimoreans “strangely misunderstood or grossly perverted his language.” Washington correspondence, 28 April, New York Times, 1 May 1861.



Many Unionists were “not only wounded but sickened” by this order, including some cabinet members.<sup>116</sup> Gideon Welles, at a meeting soon after the Baltimoreans finally departed, “jumped up, swung his hat under his arm and hastily walked out, telling them if that was their policy he would have no responsibility in the matter.”<sup>117</sup> With characteristic belligerence, Seward “said the treason of Hicks would not surprise him – that the Seventh [New York regiment] could cut their way through three thousand rioters – that Baltimore delenda est [must be destroyed].”<sup>118</sup> Former Kansas Governor Andrew Reeder observed that in Pennsylvania the “report made by the Mayor of Balt. of his interview with the Presdt I am sorry to say has excited a good deal of indignation and if he tells the truth, the bearing of the Presidt. was too weak and lowly for the commander in chief to use to the representative of rebels.”<sup>119</sup> Americans overseas felt embarrassed for their country upon reading accounts of the president’s interview with the Baltimoreans.<sup>120</sup> The New York Tribune scornfully called Lincoln’s decision to have troops avoid Baltimore “the height of Quixotic scrupulosity,” and the rival New York Times went so far as to suggest that the president be impeached.<sup>121</sup> Henry Villard told his editors that the beleaguered chief executive “shrinks from the responsibility of striking blows & is

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<sup>116</sup> Mark Howard to Gideon Welles, Hartford, 25 April 1861, Welles Papers, Library of Congress. Cf. E. Seeley to Gideon Welles, New York, 25 April 1861, ibid.; Washington correspondence by Ben: Perley Poore, 26 April, Boston Evening Journal, 2 May 1861; Philadelphia correspondence, 23 April, New York Tribune, 24 April 1861.

<sup>117</sup> William Faxon to Mark Howard, Washington, 12 May [1862], Mark Howard Papers, Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford.

<sup>118</sup> Burlingame and Ettlinger, eds., Hay Diary, 8 (entry for 23 April 1861).

<sup>119</sup> Andrew H. Reeder to Simon Cameron, Philadelphia, 24 April 1861, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>120</sup> W. B. Smith to Chase, [Geneva, Switzerland], 20 May 1861, Chase Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>121</sup> “The Administration’s View of the War,” New York Tribune, 25 April 1861; “A Startling Report,” “Clear the Track!” and “The Government and the People,” New York Times, 24, 26, 27 April 1861; “To Be Impeached,” New York Daily News, 25 April 1861; “The New York Times and the Administration,” New York World, 10 May 1861.

altogether of too lenient a disposition towards the rebels. I know this from my own conversations with him.”<sup>122</sup>

Lincoln’s failure to assert himself forcefully disturbed prominent Republicans, including John Bigelow of the New York Evening Post, which denounced the administration’s “fatal blunders” in failing to protect the capital and the Norfolk navy yard.<sup>123</sup> Before leaving for Paris to assume his duties as American consul, Bigelow called at the White House and detected in the president “a certain lack of sovereignty.” To Bigelow, Lincoln seemed “utterly unconscious of the space which the President of the United States occupied that day in the history of the human race, and of the vast power for the exercise of which he had become personally responsible.” Strengthening that impression was the president’s “modest habit of disclaiming knowledge of affairs and familiarity with duties, and frequent avowals of ignorance.”<sup>124</sup> On May 8, New York Senator Preston King told Bigelow that Lincoln was “weak and unequal not only to the present crisis but to the position he holds at anytime.”<sup>125</sup> In Washington, the eminent ethnologist George Gibbs deemed the lack of confidence in the administration a “great calamity.” The president “seems to be signally unfit for such an emergency, wanting both in foresight, and in decision, and meddling in details which don[’]t belong to him.”<sup>126</sup>

Supporters of the administration “find themselves unable to justify its moderation,”

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<sup>122</sup> Villard to Joseph Medill and Charles Henry Ray, Havre-de-Grace, Maryland, 29 April 1861, Ray Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California. The protests that arrived from New York on the morning of April 26, Villard said, “opened his eyes. At least he showed much more firmness at the interview I had with him in the evening.”

<sup>123</sup> New York Evening Post, n.d., copied in the Ohio State Journal (Columbus), 27 April 1861.

<sup>124</sup> John Bigelow, Retrospections of an Active Life (5 vols.; New York: Baker & Taylor, 1909-13), 1:367.

<sup>125</sup> Bigelow diary, New York Public Library (entry for 8 May 1861).

<sup>126</sup> George Gibbs to John Austin Stevens, Washington, 26 April 1861, Stevens Papers, New-York Historical Society.

Hiram Barney lamented. “The instant reopening of the usual lines of communication between Philadelphia & Washington at whatever cost, would be hailed with great satisfaction” he predicted, while warning that “unless that is done the administration will be severely censured and its moral hold on the community will be lost.”<sup>127</sup>

On April 24, Barney and other leading New York Republicans (among them George Opdyke, David Dudley Field, and Henry W. Bellows) dined with Vice-President Hamlin; they agreed “that Lincoln & his cabinet need more energy & resolution – that their brains are not yet evacuated of the idea that something is to be done by compromise & waiting – that it is almost impossible in that atmosphere (Southern & sectional) to get a clear impression of the strength of the Northern feeling – & that unless they act with more promptness & vigor, they will be compelled to give way to some semi-revolutionary outbreak of Northern pluck & determination – perhaps a military head.”<sup>128</sup> Lincoln “is yielding & pliable – with hardly back-bone enough for the emergency” and “dreads expense & all that,” complained Manton Marble of the New York World.<sup>129</sup>

Others also accused the administration of pinch-penny timidity. A Cincinnati Republican exclaimed “there is nothing for which the Administration has been so much censured here from the beginning as an apparent reluctance to prosecute the war with vigor because of considerations of finance!”<sup>130</sup>

Lincoln dismissed press critics, saying “we can afford to pass them by with the dying words of the Massachusetts statesman [Daniel Webster], ‘we still live.’ I am sure

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<sup>127</sup> Barney to Chase, New York, 23 April 1861, Chase Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

<sup>128</sup> Henry W. Bellows to his son, New York, 25 April 1861, Henry W. Bellows Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

<sup>129</sup> Manton Marble to Martin Anderson, New York, 11 June 1861, Anderson Papers, University of Rochester.

<sup>130</sup> George Hoadly to Chase, Cincinnati, 19 September 1861, Chase Papers, Library of Congress.

they don't worry me any, and I reckon they don't benefit the parties who write them."<sup>131</sup>

Privately he was less stoical, calling hostile articles "villainous" and intimating to Seward that the editor of the New York Times, Henry J. Raymond, should receive no government office. (Seward had been hoping to appoint Raymond consul at Paris, for the editor had grown weary of journalistic drudgery and was eager to serve overseas.)<sup>132</sup> Months later, when asked if he had read an editorial in a certain New York newspaper – probably the Morning Express – he allegedly replied: "No, I dare not open that paper. I'd like now and then to see its editorials, for the fun of the thing, but if I do I'm sure to get seduced into reading its Washington dispatches – and then my sleep is gone for one night at least."<sup>133</sup>

To those protesting his decision, Lincoln explained that he had gone out of his way, "as an exhaustion of the means of conciliation & kindness," to accommodate the Baltimore authorities who assured him that they had insufficient power to assure the safety of Union troops passing through their city but could guarantee undisturbed passage elsewhere in Maryland. He added that "that this was the last time he was going to interfere in matters of strictly military concernment" and that "he would leave them hereafter wholly to military men."<sup>134</sup> (Eventually he would change his mind about relying entirely on such men.) He also argued that it had been imperative to maintain the good

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<sup>131</sup> Washington correspondence, 1 May, New York Tribune, 2 May 1861.

<sup>132</sup> Lincoln's endorsement on New York Times articles, 25 April 1861, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; John Bigelow diary, New York Public Library (entry for 3 July 1861); Charles G. Halpine to Thurlow Weed, New York, 28 March 1861, Weed Papers, University of Rochester.

<sup>133</sup> Washington correspondence by Van [D. W. Bartlett], 18 September, Springfield (Massachusetts) Republican, 21 September 1861.

<sup>134</sup> Burlingame and Ettliger, eds., Hay Diary, 5, 6 (entries for 21, 22 April 1861).

will of the Maryland authorities lest they hinder troop movements via the alternate route through Perryville and Annapolis.<sup>135</sup>

On April 22, when yet another group from Baltimore called to demand that troops be forbidden to pass through the Free State and that the Confederacy be recognized, the president lost his customary patience. With some asperity he scolded them: “You, gentlemen, come here to me and ask for peace on any terms, and yet have no word of condemnation for those who are making war on us. You express great horror of bloodshed, and yet would not lay a straw in the way of those who are organizing in Virginia and elsewhere to capture this city. The rebels attack Fort Sumter, and your citizens attack troops sent to the defense of the Government, and the lives and property in Washington, and yet you would have me break my oath and surrender the Government without a blow. There is no Washington in that – no Jackson in that – no manhood nor honor in that.” Lincoln insisted that he had “no desire to invade the South; but I must have the troops, and mathematically the necessity exists that they should come through Maryland. They can’t crawl under the earth, and they can’t fly over it. Why, sir, those Carolinians are now crossing Virginia to come here to hang me, and what can I do?” He added that “he must run the machine as he found it.” There would be no need for a clash as Union soldiers crossed Maryland: “Now, sir, if you won’t hit me, I won’t hit you!”

But if those troops were forcibly resisted, “I will lay Baltimore in ashes.” When told that 75,000 Marylanders would resist the passage of Union troops, he promptly and decidedly “replied that he presumed there was room enough on her soil to bury 75,000 men.” As the delegation left, Lincoln said to one young member of it: “You have heard of

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<sup>135</sup> George T. M. Davis to Prosper M. Wetmore, New York, 1 May 1861, in Stevens, Union Defence Committee, 153-56.

the Irishman who, when a fellow was cutting his throat with a blunt razor, complained that he haggled it. Now, if I can't have troops directly through Maryland, and must have them all the way round by water, or marched across out-of-the-way territory, I shall be haggled.”<sup>136</sup>

Lincoln's “familiarity and want of dignity” disgusted some Baltimoreans.<sup>137</sup> The head of one delegation, the Rev. Dr. Richard Fuller, who was both a large-scale slave owner and a prominent Baptist leader, snorted that “nothing is to be hoped” from Lincoln because he “is wholly inaccessible to Christian appeals – & his egotism will forever prevent his comprehending what patriotism means.”<sup>138</sup>

Lincoln's anger at Baltimoreans persisted. In September, when Mayor Brown was arrested for aiding the Rebels, a delegation from the Monumental City pleaded for his release. The president replied: “I believe, gentlemen, if we arrested Jeff. Davis, committees would wait upon me and represent him to be a Union man.” He recounted a conversation he had had with Brown in the spring during which that official had shown sympathy for the Confederacy. “I have not heard of any act of mayor Brown since, which would lead to the belief that he was in favor of supporting the Government to put down this rebellion.”<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> This is a conflation of the following sources: Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:341-42, which reproduces what Nicolay and Hay give in their biography of Lincoln; an account in the Baltimore Sun, 23 April 1861, evidently based on what Fuller told someone; Washington correspondence, 24 April, New York Times, 27 April 1861; and William Cullen Bryant's dispatch dated New York, 24 April, New York Evening Post, 24 April 1861. “Haggle” in this case means to cut clumsily or to hack.

<sup>137</sup> New York Times, 25 April 1861.

<sup>138</sup> Fuller to Chase, Baltimore, 23 April 1861, Chase Papers, Library of Congress; Fuller owned a large plantation in South Carolina.

<sup>139</sup> Washington correspondence, n.d., Philadelphia Gazette, n.d., copied in the Chicago Tribune, 28 September 1861. This took place on a Saturday, presumably in late September.

Two years later, when he hesitated to pardon a young William B. Compton who had been condemned to death, he was asked if he “would receive a delegation of the most influential citizens of Baltimore, with the Hon. Reverdy Johnson at their head, if they will come in person and present a petition on behalf of Mr. Compton?” With “the fire of utmost indignation,” the president replied: “No! I will not receive a delegation from Baltimore for any purpose. I have received many delegations from Baltimore, since I came into office, composed of its most prominent citizens. They have always come to gain some advantage for themselves, or for their city. They have always had some end of their own to reach, without regard to the interests of the government. But no delegation has ever come to me to express sympathy or to give me any aid in upholding the government and putting down the rebellion. No! I will receive no delegation from Baltimore.”<sup>140</sup>

When Governor Hicks of Maryland suggested that Lord Lyons, the minister of Great Britain to the U.S., be asked to mediate the dispute between North and South, Seward replied, explaining that the troops would be used merely to defend Washington and added that he “cannot but remember that there has been a time in the history of our country when a general of the American Union, with forces designed for the defense of its capital, was not unwelcome anywhere in the State of Maryland, and certainly not at Annapolis.” Firmly he insisted that “no domestic contention whatever that might arise among the parties of this republic ought in any case to be referred to any foreign arbitrament, least of all to the arbitrament of a European monarchy.”<sup>141</sup> Many

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<sup>140</sup> Robert Livingston Stanton, “Reminiscences of President Lincoln,” c. 1883, Robert Brewster Stanton Papers, New York Public Library.

<sup>141</sup> Hicks to Lincoln, Annapolis, 22 April 1861, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; Seward to Hicks, Washington, 22 April 1861, ed. John G. Nicolay and John Hay, eds., Complete Works of Abraham

Northerners found this response “too timid” and insisted that Marylanders “must be told that submission or extermination are its only alternatives.”<sup>142</sup> A Hartford banker wanted to inform Seward that the letter “raised here one universal shout of execration.” Such “damned . . . wishy washy stuff does not ‘go down’ with us, not by a great deal. Why didn’t he say, ‘We propose to go through Baltimore & will lay your infernal city in ashes if a gun is fired.’ That’s the kind of talk the people want & they will back it up.”<sup>143</sup> In New York the letter was received “not only . . . with some regrets, but with indignation.”<sup>144</sup> A Manhattan resident said it “absolutely disgusts everybody; it is begging, mean, and truckling, instead of being as it should have been, firm, decisive and imperative.”<sup>145</sup>

The reigning literary lion in the City of Monuments, John Pendleton Kennedy, accurately predicted that “this refusal of a right of transit will arouse the whole North.”<sup>146</sup> Throughout the Free States, people declared that if troops could not pass through Baltimore, the “city and its name should be swept from the face of the earth.”<sup>147</sup> In Ohio,

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Lincoln (12 vols.; New York: F. D. Tandy, 1905), 6:252-54. The inclusion of this letter in Nicolay and Hay’s edition of Lincoln’s writings suggests that Lincoln may have drafted this letter for Seward’s signature. Henry Winter Davis claimed that he persuaded Seward to include the passage about troops being used for defensive purposes only and that a route for the troops had been chosen in consultation with Maryland authorities. Henry Winter Davis to Samuel Francis Du Pont, Baltimore, 29 April 1861, transcript, S. F. Du Pont Papers, Hagley Museum, Wilmington, Delaware.

<sup>142</sup> Simeon Nash to Chase, Gallipolis, Ohio, 3 May 1861, Chase Papers, Library of Congress; “Seward to Hicks,” New York Tribune, 25 April 1861.

<sup>143</sup> George P. Bissell to Gideon Welles, Hartford, 24 April 1861, Welles Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

<sup>144</sup> Charles R. Miller to Salmon P. Chase, New York, 24 April 1861, Chase Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>145</sup> E. Seeley to Gideon Welles, New York, 25 April 1861, Welles Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>146</sup> John Pendleton Kennedy journal, 21 April 1861, Kennedy Papers, Enoch Pratt Free Library, Baltimore.

<sup>147</sup> Washington correspondence by G. W. A., 29 April, Cincinnati Gazette, 3 May 1861. Similar sentiments were expressed by many of Salmon P. Chase’s correspondents. See, for example, Erastus Hopkins to Chase, Northampton, Mass., 25 April 1861; Milton Sutliff to Chase, Cincinnati, 28 April 1861; S. Lester



a leading Methodist clergyman insisted that “Maryland must be kept open” even it meant that “we make it a graveyard.”<sup>148</sup> Former Kansas governor Andrew Reeder told Simon Cameron: “If Baltimore was laid in ashes the North would rejoice over it and laud the Spirit that dictated the act.”<sup>149</sup> A correspondent for the New York Tribune asked, apropos of Lincoln’s order sending the Pennsylvania troops home: “Is not this enough to make one’s blood boil? We are not allowed to defend our Capital, or our wives and children.”<sup>150</sup> The journalist Albert D. Richardson said of Baltimore, “That city has stood long enough.” It “should be razed to the earth, and not one stone left upon another.”<sup>151</sup> Richardson’s boss, Horace Greeley, argued that if “the passage of our armies be disputed over our own highways, and if Senators of the United States have to steal away privily to escape being torn to pieces by the inhabitants of Baltimore,” then “the sooner that city be burned with fire and leveled to the earth, and made an abode for owls and satyrs, and a place for fishermen to dry their nets, the better.”<sup>152</sup> Chase urged the president to deal firmly with Maryland in order to avoid any “new humiliation” such as the possible seizure of Fort McHenry.<sup>153</sup> “If any Governor or Mayor stands in the way,” thundered the Indianapolis Journal, “let him be extinguished. If any city or State offers to thwart or oppose the military operations of the Federal Government, let every gutter run with blood, and every foot of ground within the State be furrowed by cannon, if necessary to

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Taylor to Chase, Covington, Kentucky, 30 April 1861; Roswell Marsh to Chase, Steubenville, 4 May 1861, Chase Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>148</sup> Granville Moody to Chase, Cincinnati, 30 April 1861, Chase Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>149</sup> Andrew H. Reeder to Simon Cameron, Philadelphia, 24 April 1861, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>150</sup> Washington correspondence, 22 April, New York Tribune, 26 April 1861.

<sup>151</sup> New York correspondence by A[bert] D. R[ichardson], 24 April, New York Tribune, 25 April 1861.

<sup>152</sup> New York Tribune, 2 May 1861.

<sup>153</sup> Chase to Lincoln, Washington, 25 April 1861, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

vindicate the supremacy of the constitution.”<sup>154</sup> (On April 27, Lincoln explained that “he could have easily have destroyed Baltimore, but that it would have been visiting vengeance upon a large body of loyal citizens, who were the property-holders, for the sake of punishing the mob who had committed the outrage upon the Massachusetts troops, but which mob, as to property, had little or nothing to lose.”)<sup>155</sup>

Meanwhile, Washington had become isolated from the North. On April 20, Maryland officials ordered the destruction of railroad bridges on lines connecting the capital with Baltimore. Telegraph wires were cut, and mail service to the District ceased. Troops heading there, among them the Seventh New York and the First Rhode Island regiments, were held up for several days as they sought alternate routes. Later the president remarked, “He who strangles himself, for whatever motive, is not more unreasonable than were those citizens of Baltimore who, in a single night, destroyed the Baltimore and Ohio railroad, the Northern Central railroad, and the railroad from Baltimore to Philadelphia.”<sup>156</sup>

One day, while nervously awaiting the arrival of reinforcements, Lincoln thought he heard a cannon boom in the distance, signaling what he feared was a Confederate attack. Nonplussed by his aides’ insistence that they had heard no artillery fire, the president walked over to the Arsenal, which he found unguarded, much to his surprise and dismay. All was quite still both there and along his route back to the White House.

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<sup>154</sup> Indianapolis Journal, 1 May 1861.

<sup>155</sup> George T. M. Davis to Prosper M. Wetmore, New York, 1 May 1861, in Stevens, Union Defence Committee, 154.

<sup>156</sup> Reply to a delegation of Baltimore citizens, 15 November 1861, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:24.

<sup>156</sup> Lincoln told this to Carl Schurz. Schurz, Reminiscences, (3 vols.; New York: McClure, 1907-08),

As he returned, he asked passers-by if they had heard cannonading earlier. When they said that they had had not, he assumed his imagination was playing tricks on him.<sup>157</sup>

In Washington, April 24 was “a day of gloom and doubt” when everyone seemed “filled with a vague distrust and recklessness.” In despair, Lincoln told some of the Massachusetts soldiers who had survived the attack in Baltimore: “I don’t believe there is any North. The Seventh [New York] Regiment is a myth. R[hode] Island is not known in our geography any longer. You are the only Northern realities.”<sup>158</sup> Seward anticipated that “All Virginia, and all Maryland are to be upon us in mass.”<sup>159</sup> Washingtonians feared not only a Confederate attack but also worried that “the suspense and uncertainty” among the population had grown “to such a pitch that a very small untoward circumstance or accident” might touch off rioting or panic. The 2000 troops in Washington afforded some comfort, but it was thought that the 3000-man District Militia might prove disloyal, and then, Nicolay speculated, “we would have to look down the muzzles of our own guns.”<sup>160</sup> Hence, despite criticism, Lincoln refused to call up the local militia. Hotels emptied as people fled to safety outside Washington, while those who remained began girding for a siege.<sup>161</sup> The threat of famine arose as flour supplies dwindled.<sup>162</sup> Luckily the moon

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<sup>157</sup> Lincoln told this to Carl Schurz. Schurz, The Reminiscences of Carl Schurz (3 vols.; New York: McClure, 1907-08), 227-28.

<sup>158</sup> Burlingame and Ettlinger, eds., Hay Diary, 11 (entry for 24 April 1861).

<sup>159</sup> Seward to Weed, Washington, 26 April 1861, Weed Papers, University of Rochester.

<sup>160</sup> Nicolay to Theresa Bates, Washington, 26 April 1861, in Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House, 39.

<sup>161</sup> Philadelphia correspondence, 23 April, New York Tribune, 24 April 1861; Washington correspondence by “Occasional” (John W. Forney), 21 April, Philadelphia Press, 24 April 1861; Washington correspondence by Ben: Perley Poore, 21 April, Boston Evening Journal, 25 April 1861.

<sup>162</sup> Burlingame and Ettlinger, eds., Hay Diary, 8 (entry for 22 April 1861); Washington correspondence, 22 April, Baltimore Sun, 23 April 1861.

shone brightly night after night, discouraging local secessionists who otherwise might have risen up against the city's few defenders.<sup>163</sup>

On April 25, the thick gloom that had blanketed the capital for more than a week suddenly lifted as the crack New York Seventh arrived to thunderous cheers.<sup>164</sup> “If they had been delayed two days longer revolution would have broken out in our midst,” a relieved Frontier Guardsman told his wife.<sup>165</sup> Lincoln and Seward greeted them at the Navy Yard, shaking hands all around. One soldier recalled that the president showed a “serious and almost fatherly demeanor” as “he bent slightly in taking our hands . . . . Indeed one hand was not enough to express his feeling, and with his left he took each of us by the elbow and gave a hearty pressure.” As the troops marched past the White House, Lincoln, who was described as “the happiest-looking man in town,” reportedly “smiled all over” and complimented the soldiers with great enthusiasm. During the following weeks he regularly visited their camp, along with those of other troops.<sup>166</sup>

Even more encouraging was word that several more regiments were on their way from Annapolis, having skirted Baltimore by a water route from Perryville on the Susquehanna River to the Maryland capital.<sup>167</sup> Those units came pouring into

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<sup>163</sup> James H. Campbell to his wife, Juliet Lewis Campbell, Washington, 29 April 1861, Campbell Papers, Schoff Civil War Collection, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>164</sup> William Joseph Roehrenbeck, The Regiment that Saved the Capital (New York: T. Yoseloff, 1961), 123-41; Nicolay and Hay, Lincoln, 4:156-57.

<sup>165</sup> James H. Campbell to Juliet Lewis Campbell, Washington, 27 April 1861, Campbell Papers, Schoff Civil War Collection, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>166</sup> Washington correspondence, 28 April, New York Times, 1 May 1861; reminiscences of E. A. Spring, unidentified clipping with date “1898” penciled in, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana; Washington correspondence, 25 April, New York Tribune, 26 April 1861; Washington correspondence, 25 April, New York World, 30 April 1861; Washington correspondence, 1 May, Cincinnati Commercial, 2 May 1861; Washington correspondence, 15 May, Springfield (Massachusetts) Republican, 17 May 1861.

<sup>167</sup> Nicolay to Ozias M. Hatch, Washington, 26 April 1861, in Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House, 39.

Washington during the last week of April, ensuring the safety of the city.<sup>168</sup> Lincoln's decision to have those reinforcements avoid the City of Monuments, despite severe criticism from many Republicans, helped prevent Maryland from seceding.<sup>169</sup> As an abolitionist journal pointed out, if he had “done anything to arouse yet more the passions and to unite the energies of the Marylanders, such as the assertion of the perfect right of a free passage for troops through Baltimore and his determination to enforce it, Washington might have been taken and he made prisoner by a coup de main before help could arrive.”<sup>170</sup>

Fearing that Maryland might secede, Massachusetts General Benjamin F. Butler urged Lincoln “to bag the whole nest of traitorous Maryland Legislators and bring them in triumph” to Washington. On April 25, the president, who desired “to observe every comity even with a recusant state,” told Winfield Scott: “The Maryland Legislature assembles to-morrow at An[n]apolis; and, not improbably, will take action to arm the people of that State against the United States. The question has been submitted to, and considered by me, whether it would not be justifiable, upon the ground of necessary defence, for you, as commander in Chief of the United States Army, to arrest, or disperse the members of that body. I think it would not be justifiable; nor, efficient for the desired object. First, they have a clearly legal right to assemble; and, we can not know in advance, that their action will not be lawful, and peaceful. And if we wait until they shall have acted, their arrest, or dispersion, will not lessen the effect of their action. Secondly,

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<sup>168</sup> Nevins, War for the Union, 1:86-87.

<sup>169</sup> William J. Evitts, A Matter of Allegiances: Maryland from 1850 to 1861 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 183; Charles W. Mitchell, “‘The Whirlwind Now Gathering’: Baltimore’s Pratt Street Riot and the End of Maryland Secession,” Maryland Magazine of History 97 (2002): 202-32.

<sup>170</sup> National Anti-Slavery Standard, 4 May 1861.

we can not permanently prevent their action. If we arrest them, we can not long hold them as prisoners; and when liberated, they will immediately re-assemble, and take their action. And, precisely the same if we simply disperse them. They will immediately re-assemble in some other place. I therefore conclude that it is only left to the commanding General to watch, and await their action, which, if it shall be to arm their people against the United States, he is to adopt the most prompt, and efficient means to counteract, even, if necessary, to the bombardment of their cities – and in the extremest necessity, the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus.”<sup>171</sup>

At the last minute, the Maryland legislature decided to convene in Frederick, a Unionist stronghold, instead of Annapolis. The secessionist tide, which had flowed so strongly in eastern Maryland, was now ebbing. Federal soldiers occupied strong positions near Baltimore and the state capital. On May 9, troops once again began passing through the City of Monuments en route to Washington. Rather than calling for a secession convention, the General Assembly sent a deputation to Lincoln to learn what military action he planned in their state and to protest various measures taken by the administration. On May 4, he “plainly” told them “that while the Government had no intention to retaliate for Baltimore outrages by force of arms, it had determined upon measures to secure the unobstructed passage of troops through their State, and would carry them out at all hazards.” He also assured them that “the public interest and not any spirit of revenge should actuate his measures.”<sup>172</sup> Nine days later, General Butler

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<sup>171</sup> Burlingame and Ettliger, eds., Hay Diary, 12 (entry for 24 April 1861); Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:344.

<sup>172</sup> Washington correspondence, 5 May, Chicago Tribune, 7 May 1861; report of the commissioners (Otho Scott, Robert McLane, and William J. Ross), contained in the Baltimore correspondence, 6 May, New York Tribune, 8 May 1861; Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:356; Burlingame and Ettliger, eds., Hay Diary, 17-18 (entry for 4 May 1861).

marched a thousand troops by night into Baltimore and occupied Federal Hill, thus making sure the city would remain pacified. After the legislature adjourned on May 14, Governor Hicks complied with Lincoln's proclamation by issuing a call for four militia regiments. In mid-June, Unionist candidates won elections in sixteen of the state's twenty-one counties, signifying that less than two months after the Baltimore riots, Maryland had recovered its loyalty to the Union.<sup>173</sup>

As Lincoln struggled to nurture Unionism in Maryland, he was assisted by Governor Hicks, who during the secession winter had supported the formation of a border state nation as a buffer between North and South. Bucking strong pressure, Hicks refused to call a secession convention.

In September, however, the administration feared that the Maryland legislature, scheduled to meet at Frederick on September 17, might yet adopt an ordinance of secession. It was rumored that disunionists planned a coup de main, joining forces with Virginia rebels. To counter that possibility, Lincoln and Seward arranged with Generals George B. McClellan, John A. Dix, and Nathaniel P. Banks to have pro-secession legislators detained before they could reach Frederick. This decision, carried out primarily by Allan Pinkerton, led to the arrest of fourteen legislators and guaranteed that the state would remain in the Union.<sup>174</sup> In November, the election of a pro-Union

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<sup>173</sup> Evitts, A Matter of Allegiances, 186-91; Brugger, Maryland, 277-79.

<sup>174</sup> Seward, Reminiscences, 175-78; Banks to Seward, camp near Darnstown, 15 September 1861 [misdated 1862] and 20 September 1861, Seward Papers; S. Teackle Wallis, Correspondence between S. Teackle Wallis, Esq. (Baltimore, 1863); John A. Dix to Simon Cameron, Baltimore, 13 September 1861, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; Gustavus V. Fox to his wife Virginia, Washington, 15 September 1861, Fox Papers, New-York Historical Society. All the detained men were released by late November.

governor, Augustus Bradford, along with a lopsided Unionist majority in the legislature, sealed the state's loyalty.<sup>175</sup>

Civil libertarians objected that the arrest of the Maryland legislators occurred "before they had time to meet, without any form of law or prospect of trial, merely because President Lincoln conceived they might, in their legislative capacity, do acts at variance with the American Constitution."<sup>176</sup> In reply, Lincoln argued that the "public safety renders it necessary that the grounds of these arrests should at present be withheld, but at the proper time they will be made public. Of one thing the people of Maryland may rest assured, that no arrest has been made, or will be made, not based on substantial and unmistakable complicity with those in armed rebellion against the Government of the United States. In no case has an arrest been made on mere suspicion, or through personal or partisan animosities; but in all cases the Government is in possession of tangible and unmistakable evidence, which will, when made public, be satisfactory to every loyal citizen."<sup>177</sup>

Privately, General Dix acknowledged that in arresting the legislators, breaking up the Baltimore police department, and taking similar steps he had acted "on the 'plea of necessity' alone." To a New York Democratic leader he confided in November that "I have not had the time to look into the Constitution since I came. – 'Inter arma silent leges!' Alas that it should be so!" He had received no specific instructions from the administration, and if his actions were to be judged "by the Constitution or the laws, I am afraid you will make me out to be a very poor democrat. But two assurances I can give –

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<sup>175</sup> Charles Branch Clark, Politics in Maryland during the Civil War (Chestertown: n.p., 1952), 61-83.

<sup>176</sup> London Saturday Review, 19 October 1861.

<sup>177</sup> Statement regarding suspension of habeas corpus in Maryland, [ca. 15 September 1861], Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:523.



that Maryland shall not go out of the Union, and that I have done & shall do nothing tyrannically, wantonly or unnecessary to the fixed purpose I have had in view.”<sup>178</sup>

McClellan, who had authorized Dix to make arrests “even where there is want of positive proof of their guilt,” lauded his action in dealing with the legislators.<sup>179</sup> Dix said he was “not sure as to the President, though I think he regards my policy as the true remedy for the special phase of the malady of secessionism, which existed on the Eastern shore of Virginia. Whether he will regard it as the proper treatment for other phases of the disease I do not know.”<sup>180</sup>

#### STRETCHING THE CONSTITUTION: EMERGENCY MEASURES

In the immediate aftermath of Sumter’s fall, Lincoln took a few relatively small steps without congressional approval: a convoy was dispatched to escort ships bearing gold from California; over a dozen merchant vessels were bought or rented to protect the coast and enforce a blockade; three prominent New Yorkers were given \$2,000,000 to spend as they saw fit for national defense; other leading private citizens of the Empire State received authorization to raise troops and provide supplies; two naval officers were empowered to arm civilian vessels and use them to patrol the Potomac River and Chesapeake Bay. In explaining these measures a year later, the president said that there “was no adequate and effective organization for the public defence. Congress had indefinitely adjourned. There was no time to convene them. It became necessary for me to choose whether, using only the existing means, agencies, and processes which

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<sup>178</sup> Dix to Silas M. Stillwell, Baltimore, 6 November 1861, draft, Dix Papers, Columbia University.

<sup>179</sup> McClellan to Dix, 20 August 1861, O.R., II, 1:589; Randolph B Marcy to Dix, 11 October 1861, and A. V. Colburn to Dix, 18 September 1861, Dix Papers, in Lichterman, “Dix,” 458.

<sup>180</sup> Dix to Samuel J. Tilden, Baltimore, 3 December 1861, Tilden Papers, New York Public Library.

Congress had provided, I should let the government fall at once into ruin, or whether, availing myself of the broader powers conferred by the Constitution in cases of insurrection, I would make an effort to save it with all its blessings for the present age and for posterity. . . . The several departments of the government at that time contained so large a number of disloyal persons that it would have been impossible to provide safely, through official agents only, for the performance of the duties thus confided to citizens favorably known for their ability, loyalty, and patriotism. . . . I believe that by these and other similar measures taken in that crisis, some of which were without any authority of law, the government was saved from overthrow.”<sup>181</sup>

While these actions may have bent the Constitution slightly, more serious extra-constitutional steps were also taken in the ten weeks between the bombardment of Sumter and the convening of Congress in July. Lincoln acted unilaterally in the belief that his emergency measures would be endorsed retrospectively by the House and Senate and thus made constitutional. On April 19, he declared his intention to blockade ports in the seven seceded states; a week later he extended it to cover Virginia and North Carolina. This he justified as a response to the Confederacy’s announcement on April 17 that it would issue letters of marque, authorizing privateers to seize Union shipping. In the momentous cabinet session of April 14, a majority agreed with Gideon Welles, who maintained that a blockade was more appropriate for a war between two nations rather than for a rebellion. Better to simply close the ports in the seceded states, argued the navy secretary, who understandably feared that the Union fleet was too small and antiquated to enforce a blockade. Bates believed that a blockade was “an act of war, which a nation

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<sup>181</sup> Message to Congress, 26 May 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:241-42.

cannot wage against itself” but that closing ports was “altogether different.” Seward, however, countered that closing Southern ports might provoke foreign nations to declare war. Lincoln at first sided with Welles, but Seward took him “off to ride, explained his own view,” and the president gave in. The following day he told the cabinet and “that we could not afford to have two wars on our hands at once” and therefore he would declare a blockade.<sup>182</sup>

Seward was right, for the British government had warned that closing the ports where the administration had no control would be tantamount to an illegal paper blockade, which would not be honored by British ships.<sup>183</sup> In July, when Congress did authorize the president to close Confederate ports, Lincoln hesitated to do so. In response to Orville H. Browning’s question, “if we were in any danger of becoming involved in difficulties with foreign powers,” the president, who “seemed very melancholy,” acknowledged “that there was,” for Britain and France “were determined to have the cotton crop as soon as it matured.” The South’s coastline “was so extensive that we could not make the blockade of all the Ports effectual,” and the British government “was now assuming the ground that a nation had no right, whilst a portion of its citizens were in revolt to close its ports or any of them against foreign Nations.” Congress “had passed a law at this session of Congress, authorizing him, in his discretion, to close our ports, but

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<sup>182</sup> Gideon Welles, Lincoln and Seward (New York: Sheldon, 1874), 122-24; Howard K. Beale ed., Welles Diary, 1:174 (entry for 15 October 1862), 414 (22 August 1863); Seward in conversation with Henry W. Bellows, 22 April 1863, described in Bellows to his wife, Washington, 23 April 1863, Bellows Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society; Bates to Francis Lieber, Washington, 12 November 1862, Lincoln Cabinet Collection, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne. Welles’ arguments are spelled out fully in Welles to Lincoln, Washington, 5 August 1861, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>183</sup> Ephraim Douglass Adams, Great Britain and the American Civil War (2 vols.; New York: Longmans, Green, 1925), 1:245-50; Stuart Anderson, “1861: Blockade vs. Closing the Confederate Ports,” Military Affairs 41 (1977): 190-94.

if he asserted the right of closing such as we could not blockade, he had no doubt it would result in foreign war, and that under the circumstances we had better increase the navy as fast as we could and blockade such ports as our force would enable us to, and say nothing about the rest.”<sup>184</sup> In February 1862, the British did officially recognize the Union blockade, despite Confederate protestations that it was ineffective and hence illegal.<sup>185</sup>

Recognizing that the 75,000 militia called up on April 15 would be insufficient, Lincoln two weeks later ordered the expansion of the armed forces far beyond what Congress had authorized.<sup>186</sup> On May 3, an official proclamation specified that 42,034 volunteers would be called up to serve three years; in addition 22,714 soldiers were to be added to the regular army and 18,000 sailors to the navy.<sup>187</sup> Here Lincoln violated the explicit provision of the Constitution empowering Congress to raise armies. (On July 1, Lincoln explained to Lyman Trumbull “that he did not know of any law to authorize some things which he had done; but he thought there was a necessity for them, & that to save the constitution & the laws generally, it might be better to do some illegal acts, rather than suffer all to be overthrown.” The president “seemed to think there was just as

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<sup>184</sup> Theodore Calvin Pease and James G. Randall, eds., The Diary of Orville Hickman Browning (2 vols.; Springfield: Illinois State Historical Library, 1925-33), 1:489 (entry for 28 July 1861).

<sup>185</sup> Adams, Great Britain and the American Civil War, 1:258-63.

<sup>186</sup> On the morning of April 29, Lincoln directed the enrollment of 40,000 volunteers for three years service, and a further enrollment of 25,000 regular troops for five years. He also directed the enrollment of 18,000 sailors for five years. “This is publicly and officially announced, and orders have already been sent to distant recruiting stations.” Washington correspondence, 29 April, New York World, 30 April 1861.

<sup>187</sup> Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:353-54.

much law for [increasing?] the regular army & the Navy as for calling out the three years' men.")<sup>188</sup>

Such boldness helped reassure some Northern doubters. On May 2, Henry W. Bellows, a prominent New York divine, noted that the "Cabinet is gaining confidence in the country & from the country every day" and predicted that "much hasty criticism" would soon be withdrawn. The president's stock was rising, for though "not great" he was nevertheless "very honest & resolute." (Soon thereafter, Bellows spoke with the president and was less complimentary, finding him "a good, sensible, honest man," but "utterly devoid of dignity" and "without that presence that assures confidence in his adequacy to his trying position." He had a "sweet smile" and a "patient, slow, firm mind," though Bellows had doubts about its "comprehensiveness.")<sup>189</sup>

Lincoln's most controversial act was authorizing General Scott to suspend the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus, thus allowing the military to arrest and detain persons without charges. At first, when Seward recommended suspending habeas corpus, Lincoln at first demurred, but when the secretary of state argued that "perdition was the sure penalty for further hesitation," the president capitulated.<sup>190</sup> The initial suspension, limited to military lines between Washington and Philadelphia, was authorized on April 27. Two weeks later Lincoln issued a public proclamation suspending the writ in

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<sup>188</sup> Lyman Trumbull to his wife Julia, Washington, 2 July 1861, Trumbull Family Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

<sup>189</sup> Henry W. Bellows to his son, New York, 2 May 1861, and to his wife, Washington, 20 May 1861, Henry W. Bellows Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

<sup>190</sup> Philadelphia correspondence, 23 April, New York Tribune, 24 April 1861; Francis B. Carpenter, "A Day with Governor Seward at Auburn," July 1870, Seward Papers, University of Rochester.

Florida.<sup>191</sup> In early, July he authorized Scott to suspend the writ along the military lines between Washington and New York.<sup>192</sup> In response to several arrests in Washington, he counseled restraint in using the power thus granted: “Unless the necessity for . . . arbitrary arrests is manifest, and urgent, I prefer that they should cease.”<sup>193</sup>

Henry Winter Davis lamented that the proclamation suspending habeas corpus “is illegal in every line” and feared “there is an utter oblivion of constitutional restraints at Washington. Lincoln is open to good advice; it must be that he cannot get it. He actually did not know till I shewed him the law, that he was not obliged to call for troops through the Governors, but could send his order to any officer of the militia!!”<sup>194</sup>

In May, one John Merryman, a wealthy lieutenant in a pro-secession cavalry troop that had helped cut telegraph wires and burn bridges, was arrested for preparing Marylanders to serve in the Confederate army. He sued for his freedom, arguing that the suspension of the writ was illegal. Roger B. Taney, the octogenarian chief justice of the supreme court, heard the case in his role as a circuit court of appeals judge. (In that era, supreme court justices served both on the high court and on the appeals bench.) Taney ruled that Lincoln had acted unconstitutionally, for only Congress, not the president, was authorized to suspend the writ of habeas corpus. In a judicial stump speech, the Maryland slave owner declared that if Lincoln were permitted to usurp that congressional power,

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<sup>191</sup> Lincoln to Scott, 27 April 1861, O.R., II, 2:19; Basler gives the draft, not the final order as issued, which was more comprehensive. Mark E. Neely, Fate of Liberty: Abraham Lincoln and Civil Liberties (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 8; Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln 4:347.

<sup>192</sup> Lincoln to Scott, Washington, 2 July 1861, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:419.

<sup>193</sup> Memorandum, [ca. 17 May 1861], Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:372.

<sup>194</sup> Henry Winter Davis to Sophie Du Pont, Baltimore, 5 May 1861, transcript, S. F. Du Pont Papers, Hagley Museum, Wilmington, Delaware.

“the people of the United States are no longer living under a government of law; but every citizen holds life, liberty and property at the will and pleasure of the army officer in whose military district he may happen to be found.” Referring to the president, he added that it was “up to that high officer, in fulfillment of his constitutional obligation to ‘take care that the laws be faithfully executed,’ to determine what measures he will take to cause the civil process of the United States to be respected and enforced.”<sup>195</sup> Lincoln ignored the order, and Merryman remained in prison for a few weeks.

In his July 4 message to Congress, Lincoln responded to Taney’s arguments. In a draft of that important document, far more personal than the final version, he stated clearly what he had done and why: “Soon after the first call for militia, I felt it my duty to authorize the Commanding General, in proper cases, according to his discretion, to suspend the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus – or, in other words, to arrest, and detain, without resort to the ordinary processes and forms of law, such individuals as he might deem dangerous to the public safety. At my verbal request, as well as by the Generals own inclination, this authority has been exercised but very sparingly– Nevertheless, the legality and propriety of what has been done under it, are questioned; and I have been reminded from a high quarter that one who is sworn to ‘take care that the laws be faithfully executed’ should not himself be one to violate them– Of course I gave some consideration to the questions of power, and propriety, before I acted in this matter– The whole of the laws which I was sworn to take care that they be faithfully executed, were being resisted, and failing to be executed, in nearly one third of the states. Must I have allowed them to finally fail of execution, even had it been perfectly clear that by the

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<sup>195</sup> Randall, Constitutional Problems under Lincoln, 121.

use of the means necessary to their execution, some single law, made in such extreme tenderness of the citizens liberty, that practically, it relieves more of the guilty, than the innocent, should, to a very limited extent, be violated? To state the question more directly, are all the laws, but one, to go unexecuted, and the government itself go to pieces, lest that one be violated? Even in such a case I should consider my official oath broken if I should allow the government to be overthrown, when I might think that disregarding the single law would tend to preserve it— But, in this case I was not, in my own judgment, driven to this ground— In my opinion I violated no law— The provision of the Constitution that ‘The privilege of the writ of habeas corpus, shall not be suspended unless when, in cases of rebellion or invasion, the public safety may require it’ is equivalent to a provision – is a provision – that such privilege may be suspended when, in cases of rebellion, or invasion, the public safety does require it. I decided that we have a case of rebellion, and that the public safety does require the qualified suspension of the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus, which I authorized to be made. Now it is insisted that Congress, and not the executive, is vested with this power— But the Constitution itself, is silent as to which, or who, is to exercise the power; and as the provision plainly was made for a dangerous emergency, I can not bring myself to believe that the framers of that instrument intended that in every case the danger should run its course until Congress could be called together, the very assembling of which might be prevented, as was intended in this case, by the rebellion.”<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Abraham Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress on-line edition, Douglas Wilson’s version of the second printed draft with Lincoln’s emendations.



Lincoln had a good argument, for Congress was often out of session, and an invasion or rebellion might well take place during one of its long recesses, just as had occurred in April. Clearly, in the case of Maryland that spring, emergency conditions prevailed. Joel Parker, professor of constitutional law at Harvard, observed a few months later that if Taney's interpretation of the Constitution were adopted, "the judicial power may be quite as effectual to overthrow the government in time of war as the suspension of the habeas corpus, by order of the President, in time of peace, could be to overthrow the liberties of the people, – somewhat more so, indeed, as the effect of the latter could be more readily and securely avoided."<sup>197</sup> The eminent Philadelphia attorney Horace Binney issued a pamphlet criticizing Taney's opinion for "a tone, not to say a ring, of disaffection to the President, and to the Northern and Western side of his house, which is not comfortable to suppose in the person who fills the central seat of impersonal justice." He argued that Congress could not on its own suspend the privilege of the writ but could only authorize its suspension by the executive branch.<sup>198</sup> In another widely-circulated pamphlet, former U.S. Attorney General Reverdy Johnson refuted the arguments of his fellow Marylander Taney.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Joel Parker, "Habeas Corpus and Martial Law," North American Review 93 (October 1861): 498.

<sup>198</sup> Binney, The Privilege of the Writ of Habeas Corpus under the Constitution (Philadelphia: C. Sherman & Sons, 1862), in Frank Freidel, ed., Union Pamphlets of the Civil War (2 vols.; Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967), 1:200-52. Binney's pamphlet elicited a strong response from the polemicist-lawyer Sidney George Fisher, whose 1862 volume The Trial of the Constitution argued for congressional supremacy over the executive branch. William H. Riker, "Sidney George Fisher and the Separation of Powers during the Civil War," Journal of the History of Ideas 15 (1954): 397-412. Edward Ingersoll published a similar rejoinder, Personal Liberty and Martial Law: A Review of Some Pamphlets of the Day (Philadelphia, 1862), in Freidel, ed., Union Pamphlets, 1:253-94.

<sup>199</sup> Reverdy Johnson, The Power of the President to Suspend the Habeas Corpus Writ (New York, 1861).

Taney’s reasoning was flawed. He argued that since the provision regarding habeas corpus appears in the first article of the Constitution, an article dealing primarily with the powers of Congress, that the legislative branch, not the executive, had the power to suspend the privilege of the writ. But the judge failed to note that the original draft of that article stated that the “privileges and benefit of the Writ of Habeas Corpus shall be enjoyed in this Government in the most expeditious and ample manner; and shall not be suspended by the Legislature except upon the most urgent and pressing occasions, and for a limited time not exceeding \_\_\_\_\_ months.” Later it was revised by Gouverneur Morris to read as it did in the ratified version of the Constitution. By replacing the original language with Morris’s substitute, the framers implicitly rejected the notion that Congress alone was empowered to suspend the privilege.<sup>200</sup>

In his July 4 message, Lincoln did not explore the subject further but promised to submit a lengthy opinion by the attorney general. The next day Bates provided him such a document, which was forwarded to Congress the following week. It argued that “if we are at liberty to understand the phrase “the suspension of the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus” to mean that in case of a great and dangerous rebellion like the present the public safety requires the arrest and confinement of persons implicated in that rebellion, I . . . declare the opinion that the President has lawful power to suspend the privilege of person arrested under such circumstances; for he is especially charged by the Constitution

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<sup>200</sup> Wilbourn E. Benton, ed., 1787: Drafting the U.S. Constitution (2 vols.; College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1986), 1:976, 991.

with the ‘public safety,’ and he is the sole judge of the emergency which requires his prompt action.”<sup>201</sup>

In 1862, the federal circuit court in ex parte Field ruled that the Militia Act of 1795 (authorizing the president to summon troops to suppress rebellion) implicitly empowered him to suspend habeas corpus. Half a century later, the supreme court in Moyer v. Peabody indirectly upheld the circuit court’s reasoning in the Field case. Thus Lincoln acted constitutionally in suspending habeas corpus where insurrection was actually taking place and in the absence of congressional action forbidding him to do so.<sup>202</sup>

In August, Congress by a near-unanimous vote approved a resolution stating that “all the acts, proclamations and orders of the President . . . [after 4 March 1861] respecting the army and navy of the United States, and calling out or relating to the militia or volunteers from the States, are hereby approved in all respects legalized and made valid . . . as if they had been issued and done under the previous express authority and direction of the Congress of the United States.”<sup>203</sup> Two years later, the supreme court upheld this unorthodox procedure in the Prize Cases, involving a plaintiff who argued that the blockade was illegal from the time Lincoln announced it until war was in effect declared by Congress in July. Upholding the blockade and all other emergency measures taken by Lincoln in the first weeks of the war, a bare five-man majority of the court ruled that a “civil war is never solemnly declared; it becomes such by its accidents – the

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<sup>201</sup> Bates to Lincoln, Washington, 5 July 1861, O.R., II, 2:28.

<sup>202</sup> Daniel Farber, Lincoln’s Constitution (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 157-62, 169, 188-92.

<sup>203</sup> U.S. Statutes at Large, 12:326.

number, power, and organization of the persons who originate and carry it on. When the party in rebellion occupy and hold in a hostile manner a certain portion of territory; have declared their independence; have cast off their allegiance; have organized armies; have commenced hostilities against their former sovereign, the world acknowledges them as belligerents and the contest is war. They claim to be in arms to establish their liberty and independence in order to become a sovereign state, while the sovereign party treats them as insurgents and rebels who owe allegiance and should be punished with death for their treason. . . . As a civil war is never publicly proclaimed eo nomine against the insurgents, its actual existence is a fact in our domestic history which the court is bound to notice and to know.”<sup>204</sup>

Despite his early foray into extra-constitutionality, Lincoln for the rest of the war generally respected constitutional restraints.<sup>205</sup> Political opponents were allowed free rein to criticize the administration; the press was rarely censored, even when papers urged the president’s assassination; elections were conducted freely and fairly, with some bending of the rules in Border States; courts remained open; with one exception, legislatures met unimpeded.<sup>206</sup> When urged to confiscate Southern property in the North, he replied: “No, gentleman, never.” To their rejoinder that the Confederates seize Northern property, he said: “They can afford to do a wrong – I cannot.”<sup>207</sup> Democrats, however, railed against

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<sup>204</sup> Randall, Constitutional Problems, 53.

<sup>205</sup> Allen Guelzo, “Apple of Gold in a Picture of Silver: The Constitution and Liberty,” in Gabor Boritt, ed., The Lincoln Enigma: The Changing Faces of an American Icon (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 104-7.

<sup>206</sup> Neely, Fate of Liberty; Randall, Constitutional Problems under Lincoln; Farber, Lincoln’s Constitution, 144-75.

<sup>207</sup> Washington correspondence 16 May, New York Tribune, 17 May 1861.

what they called the “irresponsible despotism of Abraham Lincoln!”<sup>208</sup> It was to become a standard shibboleth in future political campaigns.

## KEEPING KENTUCKY IN THE UNION

Lincoln worried a great deal about Kentucky.<sup>209</sup> During the first year and a half of the war, his most important policies were largely shaped to keep her loyal. “I think to lose Kentucky, is nearly the same as to lose the whole game,” he told his good friend Orville H. Browning. “Kentucky gone, we can not hold Missouri, nor as I think, Maryland. These all against us, and the job on our hands is too large for us. We would as well consent to separation at once, including the surrender of the capital.”<sup>210</sup> He allegedly said that to win the war he “wanted God on his side, but he must have Kentucky.”<sup>211</sup> His concern was understandable, for the Bluegrass State ranked ninth in the nation in terms of population, seventh in terms of farm value, and fifth in terms of livestock value. Her men, horses, mules, grain, fruit, hay, hemp, and flax would all be valuable assets to whichever side Kentucky favored.<sup>212</sup> Geographically she occupied a crucial location; Northern armies would have to pass through her to get at Tennessee, Mississippi, and Alabama. From Kentucky, Southern troops could establish a formidable defensive barrier along the Ohio and even penetrate the Midwest.

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<sup>208</sup> George Lunt to Caleb Cushing, Newburyport, Massachusetts, 11 July 1861, Caleb Cushing Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>209</sup> See Lowell H. Harrison, Lincoln of Kentucky (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000); E. Merton Coulter, The Civil War and Readjustment in Kentucky (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1926), 18-110.

<sup>210</sup> Lincoln to Browning, Washington, 22 September 1861, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:532.

<sup>211</sup> Dr. Henry Howard Furness, paraphrasing Lincoln, in Henry C. Whitney, Life on the Circuit with Lincoln, ed. Paul M. Angle (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton, 1940), 332.

<sup>212</sup> Harrison, Lincoln of Kentucky, 135.

Lincoln's fear was justified, as even the abolitionist National Anti-Slavery Standard acknowledged. If he were prematurely to announce his intention to free the slaves, "nearly one-half of the people of the loyal States would utterly refuse to aid in carrying on such a war, and at least one-third of the army would lay down its arms." The paper's Washington correspondent warned that a "premature movement of this kind might simply pave the way for the rule of Jeff. Davis over the whole land."<sup>213</sup>

To retain his native state in the Union, Lincoln exercised preternatural tact, especially in dealing with slavery.<sup>214</sup> Soon after the firing on Fort Sumter, Kentucky's legislature and governor, the pro-secession Beriah Magoffin, expressed a wish to have their state remain neutral, in effect becoming an American Switzerland. Lincoln recommended to a group of Southern Unionists that young men in that state must be organized to resist the governor, whose views were unrepresentative of most Kentuckians.<sup>215</sup>

In late April, the president assured Kentucky Senator Garrett Davis, a strong Unionist, that the administration's intentions were not aggressive. He said he had "determined, that, until the meeting of Congress, he would make no attempt to retake the forts, &c." but "would leave the then existing state of things to be considered and acted upon by Congress, unless he should be constrained to depart from that purpose by the

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<sup>213</sup> Washington correspondence, 8 September, National Anti-Slavery Standard (New York), 14 September 1861.

<sup>214</sup> Gary L. Williams, "Lincoln's Neutral Allies: The Case of the Kentucky Unionists," South Atlantic Quarterly 73 (1974): 70-84; Wilson Porter Shortridge, "Kentucky Neutrality in 1861," Mississippi Valley Historical Review 9 (1923): 283-301.

<sup>215</sup> Reminiscences of A. H. Markland in Allen Thorndike Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln, by Distinguished Men of His Time (New York: North American, 1886), 318-24.

continued military operations of the seceded States.” Alluding to slavery, he added that he “intended to make no attack, direct or indirect, upon the institutions or property of any State; but, on the contrary, would defend them to the full extent with which the Constitution and laws of Congress have vested in the President with the power. And that he did not intend to invade with an armed force, or make any military or naval movement against any State, unless she or her people should make it necessary by a formidable resistance of the authority and laws of the United States. That if Kentucky or her citizens should seize the post of Newport, it would become his duty and he might attempt to retake it; but he contemplated no military operations that would make it necessary to move any troops over her territories – though he had the unquestioned right at all times to march the U.S. troops into and over any and every State. That if Kentucky made no demonstration of force against the United States he would not molest her.” Lincoln voiced regret that the Bluegrass State had spurned the call for troops and had “not acted up to the principle of her great statesmen” like Henry Clay and the platform “for which she cast her vote in the late Presidential election, ‘the Union, the Constitution, and the Enforcement of the Laws.’”<sup>216</sup> (The Constitutional Union party had carried the state in 1860.)<sup>217</sup> Similarly, the president told former Congressman Warner L. Underwood of Kentucky that he hoped the state “would stand by the Government in the present

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<sup>216</sup> Garrett Davis to George D. Prentice, Baltimore, 28 April 1861, Louisville Journal, 2 May, copied in the New York Tribune, 5 May 1861.

<sup>217</sup> John Bell won 65,710 votes, beating Breckinridge (53,143), Douglas (25,341), and Lincoln (1,364).

difficulties, but if she would not do that, let her stand still and take no hostile part against it, and that no hostile step should tread her soil.”<sup>218</sup>

When urged to send troops into Kentucky to defend persecuted Unionists, he replied: “I am exceedingly anxious to protect the Union men, and have taken all proper measures to do so, as well in Kentucky as in Tennessee, but I am the head of a great nation, and must be governed by wide forethought, as far as possible. I will illustrate my position by the fable of the farmer who returned home and found that, while his two little children were asleep, a number of snakes has taken part possession of the bed. He could not strike the snakes without endangering his offspring, and, therefore, he had to stay his hand.”<sup>219</sup>

Sometimes he used humor to deflate Kentuckians pleading for neutrality. In July, he told George Robertson and another Kentucky Commissioner “that neutrality did not become any of the friends of the government, – that while the citizen enjoyed his rights and the protection of the laws, he must also recognize his obligations and his duties.” He then had a friend relate a joke about a British minister to Prussia who tried to enlist the Germans to support Great Britain in its wars. Frederick the Great politely refused. Later, the monarch at a state dinner offered the diplomat some capon. “No, sir,” came the reply, “I decline having anything to do with neutral animals!”<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> W. L. Underwood to an unidentified correspondent in St. Louis, n.p., n.d., New York Times, 11 May 1861.

<sup>219</sup> Washington correspondence by John W. Forney, 11 September, Philadelphia Press, 12 September 1861.

<sup>220</sup> John W. Forney, Anecdotes of Public Men (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1873), 264-65.



Occasionally Lincoln would be less gentle with Kentuckians. When a state senator protested against Union troops occupying Cairo, Illinois (across the Ohio River from the Blue Grass State), Lincoln had John Hay pen a sarcastic response: “The President directs me to say that the views so ably stated by you shall have due consideration: and to assure you that he would certainly never have ordered the movement of troops, complained of, had he known that Cairo was in your Senatorial district.”<sup>221</sup>

To placate Kentuckians, Lincoln allowed them to trade with the Confederacy until mid-August, by which time the state’s Unionists had gained the upper hand.<sup>222</sup> He honored Kentucky’s neutrality, though he regarded it as unrealistic. On July 4, he stated in his message to Congress that within the Border States “there are those who favor a policy which they call ‘armed neutrality:’ that is, an arming of those States to prevent the Union forces passing one way, or the disunion the other, over their soil. This would be disunion completed. Figuratively speaking, it would be the building of an impassable wall along the line of separation – and yet, not quite an impassable one; for, under the guise of neutrality, it would tie the hands of the Union men, and freely pass supplies from among them to the insurrectionists, which it could not do as an open enemy. At a stroke, it would take all the trouble off the hands of secession, except only what proceeds from the external blockade. It would do for the disunionists that which, of all things, they most desire – feed them well, and give them disunion without a struggle of their own. It recognizes no fidelity to the Constitution, no obligation to maintain the Union; and while

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<sup>221</sup> John M. Johnson to Lincoln, Paducah, Kentucky, 26 April 1861, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; Burlingame and Ettlinger, eds., Hay Diary, 19 (entry for 6 May 1861).

<sup>222</sup> Harrison, Lincoln of Kentucky, 136-37.

very many who have favored it are, doubtless, loyal citizens, it is, nevertheless, treason in effect.”<sup>223</sup> Kentucky Unionists protested mildly that Lincoln misunderstood the reasons why their state adopted a neutrality policy.<sup>224</sup>

Nevertheless, Lincoln continued to humor Kentucky. A week after he expressed his misgivings about “armed neutrality,” he was visited by Simon Bolivar Buckner, head of the pro-Confederate Kentucky State Guard militia, who said in the course of “a very friendly interview” that his state was justified because Lincoln had “confessedly violated the constitution, and, therefore, had no right to call upon Kentucky to aid him in this violation; and that, even if his acts were justified, as he claimed, by necessity, the same cause, when it was a question of internal peace in Kentucky, would justify the attitude she had assumed.”<sup>225</sup> The president replied that while he considered it his duty to suppress the insurrection, he wished to do so “with the least possible disturbance, or annoyance to well disposed people anywhere. So far I have not sent an armed force into Kentucky; nor have I any present purpose to do so. I sincerely desire that no necessity for it may be presented; but I mean to say nothing which shall hereafter embarrass me in the performance of what may seem to be my duty.”<sup>226</sup> Buckner reported that Lincoln “succeeded in impressing upon me the belief, that, ‘as long as there are roads around Kentucky,’ to reach the rebellion, it was his purpose to leave her unmolested, not yielding

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<sup>223</sup> Message to Congress, 4 July 1861, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:428.

<sup>224</sup> Louisville Democrat, n.d., copied in the New York Times, 11 July 1861.

<sup>225</sup> Buckner, public letter dated 12 September 1861, in Clarksville Jeffersonian, 13 September 1861, quoted in Robert McNutt McElroy, Kentucky in the Nation’s History (New York: Moffat, Yard, 1909), 536.

<sup>226</sup> Lincoln to Buckner, Washington, 10 July 1861, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln 4:444.

her right to the position she occupied, but observing it as a matter of policy.”<sup>227</sup> A few weeks after their meeting, Lincoln offered Buckner a generalship, which the West Pointer declined; soon thereafter he assumed that rank in the Confederate army.<sup>228</sup> (A journalist charged that Buckner called at the White House and “under a deceitful profession of friendship, obtained from President Lincoln his plans, then returned to Kentucky and organized rebellion.”)<sup>229</sup>

Though he refrained from sending troops into the Bluegrass State, Lincoln did establish a military presence at Newport, Kentucky, under the command of Robert Anderson, who was empowered to recruit volunteer regiments from Kentucky and western Virginia.<sup>230</sup> That appointment was shrewd, for as Joshua Speed told Lincoln, Anderson’s “name & lineage will give us great strength.”<sup>231</sup> (An ardent Unionist, Speed proved invaluable in keeping his state loyal. To Joseph Holt he expressed the keen desire “that my most intimate friend Mr Lincoln, who I shall ever regard as one of the best & purest men I have ever known, should be the instrument in the hands of God for the reconstruction of this great republic.”)<sup>232</sup> In July, the president authorized Navy Lieutenant William “Bull” Nelson, then on loan to the army, to enlist Kentuckians. Lincoln also arranged with Speed to smuggle weapons into the state, including 20,000

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<sup>227</sup> Buckner, public letter dated 12 September 1861, in the Clarksville Jeffersonian, 13 September 1861, quoted in McElroy, Kentucky in the Nation’s History, 536.

<sup>228</sup> Arndt M. Stickles, Simon Bolivar Buckner: Borderland Knight (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1940), 86-94.

<sup>229</sup> Washington correspondence, 24 February, Philadelphia Inquirer, 25 February 1862.

<sup>230</sup> Order to Robert Anderson, 7 May 1861, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:359.

<sup>231</sup> Joshua F. Speed to Lincoln, Louisville, 2 June 1861, Robert Anderson Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>232</sup> Speed to Holt, Louisville, 7 September 1861, Holt Papers, Library of Congress.

rifles which became known as “Lincoln guns.”<sup>233</sup> General George B. McClellan, in charge of the Department of the Ohio, told the president that, according to leading Kentucky Unionists, “the effect [of distributing arms] has been extremely beneficial, not only in giving strength to the Union party & discouraging the secessionists, but that it has proved to the minds of all reasonable men that the Genl. Govt has confidence in their loyalty & entertains no intention of subjugating them.”<sup>234</sup>

Lincoln also shipped able officers to Kentucky to lead the state’s Unionist military forces. One was Captain Richard W. Johnson, a West Point graduate and native of the Blue Grass State. When Johnson applied for a leave from the regular army to join the Kentucky Volunteers, he was denied, for the war department felt acutely the need for professional officers. Lincoln called on Adjutant General Lorenzo Thomas and said: “I would like to have a leave of absence granted to my Confederate friend, Captain Johnson, to enable him to accept the position of lieutenant-colonel of a Kentucky cavalry regiment.”

“It cannot be done,” replied Thomas.

“But,” rejoined Lincoln, straightening up until he seemed twice his normal height, “I have not come over to discuss this question with you, General Thomas, but to order you to give the necessary instructions.”

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<sup>233</sup> Speed to Robert Anderson, Washington, 24 September 1861, Anderson Papers, Library of Congress; Lincoln to Robert Anderson, Washington, 14 May 1861, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:368-69; Charles A. Wickliffe et al. to Lincoln, Frankfort, 28 May 1861, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; Joshua F. Speed to Lincoln, Louisville 29 May 1861, ibid.; Joshua F. Speed to Lincoln, Louisville, 2 June 1861, Robert Anderson Papers, Library of Congress; Williams, “Lincoln’s Neutral Allies,” 76-79; Robert V. Bruce, Lincoln and the Tools of War (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956), 43-47.

<sup>234</sup> McClellan to Lincoln, Cincinnati, 30 May 1861, Stephen W. Sears, ed., The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1989), 28-29.

Captain Johnson obtained his leave then and there.<sup>235</sup>

On June 20, Lincoln's delicate cultivation of Kentucky paid off when Unionist candidates captured nine of the state's ten Congressional seats. The loyal candidates received a total of 92,460 votes and their opponents 37,700. Seven weeks later Unionists enjoyed another triumph, winning 103 of the 138 seats in the General Assembly. On the heels of that August 5 Unionist triumph, Lt. Nelson established Camp Dick Robinson between Louisville and Danville, a move which prompted Governor Magoffin to protest that the state's neutrality had been violated.<sup>236</sup>

In response, the president explained: "I may not possess full and precisely accurate knowledge upon this subject; but I believe it is true that there is a military force in camp within Kentucky, acting by authority of the United States, which force is not very large, and is not now being augmented. I also believe that some arms have been furnished to this force by the United States. I also believe this force consists exclusively of Kentuckians, having their camp in the immediate vicinity of their own homes, and not assailing, or menacing, any of the good people of Kentucky. In all I have done in the premises, I have acted upon the urgent solicitation of many Kentuckians, and in accordance with what I believed, and still believe, to be the wish of a majority of all the Union-loving people of Kentucky. While I have conversed on this subject with many eminent men of Kentucky, including a large majority of her Members of Congress, I do not remember that any one of them, or any other person, except your Excellency and the

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<sup>235</sup> Richard W. Johnson, A Soldier's Reminiscences in Peace and War (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1886), 172-73.

<sup>236</sup> Beriah Magoffin to Lincoln, Frankfort, 19 August 1861; George T. M. Davis to Lincoln, New York, 27 August 1861, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

bearers of your Excellency's letter, has urged me to remove the military force from Kentucky, or to disband it. One other very worthy citizen of Kentucky did solicit me to have the augmenting of the force suspended for a time. Taking all the means within my reach to form a judgment, I do not believe it is the popular wish of Kentucky that this force shall be removed beyond her limits; and, with this impression, I must respectfully decline to so remove it.” In closing, Lincoln gently but firmly chided the governor: “I most cordially sympathize with your Excellency, in the wish to preserve the peace of my own native State, Kentucky; but it is with regret I search, and can not find, in your not very short letter, any declaration, or intimation, that you entertain any desire for the preservation of the Federal Union.”<sup>237</sup>

Kentucky’s neutrality abruptly ended on September 3, when the willful Confederate General Leonidas Polk, spurred on by his subordinate Gideon J. Pillow, rashly ordered his troops to occupy Columbus on the Mississippi River, prompting Union troops under U. S. Grant to seize Paducah. Polk’s action resembled the blunder that the Confederates had made by attacking Fort Sumter; just as that bombardment had solidified the North and reduced the chances that the Border States would secede, the Confederate invasion of Kentucky helped secure that state to the Union. The General Assembly demanded the withdrawal of Polk’s troops but not Grant’s.<sup>238</sup>

## RETAINING MISSOURI IN THE UNION

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<sup>237</sup> Lincoln to Magoffin, Washington, 24 August 1861, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln 4:497.

<sup>238</sup> John Y. Simon, “Lincoln, Grant, and Kentucky in 1861,” in Kent Masterson Brown, ed., The Civil War in Kentucky: Battle for the Bluegrass State (Mason City, Iowa: Savas, 2000), 10-20.

In his efforts to keep Missouri from seceding, Lincoln faced severe obstacles.<sup>239</sup> With a population of approximately 1,200,000, it was the largest state in the Trans-Mississippi West. Its proximity to Kansas, Kentucky, and southern Illinois made it strategically important, if not as vital as Maryland and the Blue Grass State. Governor Claiborne F. Jackson, a secessionist who had denounced the president's troop requisition as "illegal, unconstitutional, and revolutionary," plotted to seize the St. Louis arsenal and distribute its muskets, powder, and cartridges to Confederate volunteers.<sup>240</sup> Opposing him were two impetuous Unionists, Congressman Frank Blair and Captain Nathaniel Lyon, who needed help. At the end of April, the president authorized Lyon to enroll 10,000 Missourians into the army and to declare martial law in St. Louis. This was highly irregular, but Scott endorsed it because the times were "revolutionary."<sup>241</sup> On May 10, the willful Lyon, acting without authorization from Washington, thwarted Jackson's plans by capturing the governor's pro-secessionist militia before it could aid the Confederacy.<sup>242</sup>

This rash act did not sit well with Lincoln, who wished to tread cautiously in Missouri. In early May, he told Charles Gibson, a judge of the Court of Claims and a political ally of Attorney General Bates, that "if he was compelled to send men from one side of Missouri to the other which he did not anticipate he would rather send them around than through the State in order to avoid any trouble. No troops will be sent to

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<sup>239</sup> On Missouri in the early stages of the war, see William E. Parrish, Turbulent Partnership: Missouri and the Union, 1861-1865 (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1963), 1-100; Louis S. Gertis, Civil War St. Louis (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 92-161; Christopher Phillips, Damned Yankee: The Life of General Nathaniel Lyon (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1990), 129-256.

<sup>240</sup> Jackson to Simon Cameron, Jefferson City, Missouri, 17 April 1861, O.R., III, 1:82-83; Nevins, War for the Union, 1:122.

<sup>241</sup> Phillips, Lyon, 201-3; Cameron to Lyon, 30 April 1861, O.R., I, 1:675

<sup>242</sup> Phillips, Lyon, 175-192.

Missouri from other States. In short everything tending to arouse the jealousy of the people will be avoided.”<sup>243</sup>

The president’s desire to maintain calm was not shared by the young duo of Lyon and Blair, who claimed that they were hampered by the older, more lethargic and complacent General William S. Harney, commander of the Department of the West.<sup>244</sup> On May 21, Harney concluded an agreement with Confederate General Sterling Price, in effect committing the Lincoln administration to treat Missouri as a neutral. This act alarmed St. Louis Unionists, who feared that it would only postpone a day of reckoning and thus allow the secessionists to gird for the coming fray.<sup>245</sup>

But this did not stop the informal warfare waged by pro-Confederate forces. Indignant at the continuing violence against Missouri Unionists, Lincoln heatedly instructed Harney to end it. “The professions of loyalty to the Union by the State authorities of Missouri are not to be relied upon,” he had Adjutant General Lorenzo B. Thomas inform Harney. “They have already falsified their professions too often, and are too far committed to secession to be entitled to your confidence, and you can only be sure of their desisting from their wicked purposes when it is out of their power to prosecute them. You will therefore be unceasingly watchful of their movements, and not permit the clamors of their partizans and opponents of the wise measures already taken to prevent

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<sup>243</sup> Charles Gibson to “My dear Sir,” Washington, 13 May 1861, Gibson Papers, Missouri Historical Society.

<sup>244</sup> Phillips, Lyon, 199; William E. Parrish, Frank Blair: Lincoln's Conservative (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1998), 94-97; Montgomery Blair, “Missouri’s Union Record,” Philadelphia Weekly Times, 28 June, 11 October, 29 November 1879.

<sup>245</sup> Samuel T. Glover to Lincoln, St. Louis, 24 May 1861, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; Gustave Koerner to Lyman Trumbull, Belleville, Illinois, 31 May 1861, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress; Parrish Turbulent Partnership, 29-30.



you from checking every movement against the government, however disguised under the pretended State authority. The authority of the United States is paramount, and whenever it is apparent that a movement, whether by color of State authority or not, is hostile, you will not hesitate to put it down.”<sup>246</sup>

When Blair recommended that Harney be transferred, Lincoln authorized him to do so only if it seemed absolutely necessary. “We have a good deal of anxiety here about St. Louis,” he told the congressman on May 18. While it was important to protect friends of the government, removing Harney precipitously would cause harm, especially since he had already been relieved of command in April and reinstated shortly thereafter. “We better have him a friend than an enemy. It will dissatisfy a good many who otherwise would be quiet. More than all, we first relieved him, then restored him, & now if we relieve him again, the public will ask, ‘why all this vacillation.’”<sup>247</sup> Despite this counsel, on May 30 Blair used his authority to replace Harney with Lyon.

That headstrong captain led his troops westward toward Jefferson City, where Governor Jackson and General Sterling Price had assembled a pro-Confederate militia. As Lyon approached, Jackson and Price retreated, leaving the state’s capital in Union hands. In July, a new provisional government was formed, with the conservative Unionist Hamilton R. Gamble as its governor. He proclaimed Missouri loyal to the Union and won the acquiescence of much of the state as well as official recognition from the Lincoln administration. In August, regular Confederate forces won the battle of Wilson’s Creek,

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<sup>246</sup> Lorenzo Thomas to Harney, Washington, 27 May 1861, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:387. This letter was in all likelihood drafted by Lincoln for Harney’s signature.

<sup>247</sup> Lincoln to Blair, Washington, 18 May 1861, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln 4:372.

where Lyon was killed. (Indianans thought “Lyon was sacrificed through the imbecility of the government, and the people will soon make Mr Lincoln understand it.”)<sup>248</sup> But in March 1862, at the battle of Pea Ridge, Arkansas, the Rebels were defeated; thereafter armed resistance to federal authority in Missouri took the form of guerilla warfare and savage bushwhacking. The state remained in the Union throughout the war.<sup>249</sup>

## PROTECTING UNIONISTS IN WESTERN VIRGINIA

When Unionists in western Virginia, a region culturally and economically distinct from the eastern portion of the state, appealed to Lincoln for help, he complied promptly.<sup>250</sup> Federal control of that area was important, for through it passed the main rail link (the Baltimore and Ohio) connecting the eastern seaboard with the Midwest. In addition, it shielded eastern Ohio, western Pennsylvania, and eastern Kentucky. The Unionists planned to move the seat of government from Richmond west of the Alleghenies, or else cut themselves off from the eastern portion of the state and become a separate entity.<sup>251</sup> On May 1, at Lincoln’s invitation, a committee from Butler County called at the White House and asked for \$100,000 and 5,000 rifles. Influential Republicans, including William E. Dodge, urged the president to honor the request.<sup>252</sup> Edwin M. Stanton wrote a legal brief justifying the transfer federal arms to private parties

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<sup>248</sup> John P. Usher to Samuel J. Tilden, Terre Haute, 17 August 1861, Tilden Papers, New York Public Library.

<sup>249</sup> Michael Fellman, Inside War: The Guerrilla Conflict in Missouri during the American Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Parrish Turbulent Partnership; William E. Parrish, ed., A History of Missouri (6 vols.; Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1971-2004), 3:30-115.

<sup>250</sup> George W. Caldwell to Lincoln, Wellsburg, Brooke Co., Virginia, 25 April 1861, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>251</sup> George W. Caldwell to Lincoln, Wellsburg, Virginia, 25 May 1861, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; Nicolay to Caldwell, Washington, 1 May 1861, in Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House, 41.

<sup>252</sup> Washington correspondence, 2, 3 May, New York Tribune, 3, 4 May 1861.

in Virginia, then pledged all his personal assets as bond to guarantee that the weapons would be used properly. Cameron saw to it that they were dispatched to the trans-Appalachian Virginia Unionists.<sup>253</sup> (In his effort to avert war, Seward without Lincoln's knowledge had worked to keep guns from being distributed to Unionists in the Border States. As soon as Lincoln was inaugurated, Maryland Unionists appealed for weapons but Seward thwarted them. Missouri Unionists encountered the same problem, but they managed to procure arms from Illinois. Similarly, when Seward frustrated the Unionists in western Virginia, Massachusetts Governor John A. Andrew provided weaponry from his state's arsenal.)<sup>254</sup>

After Virginia voters ratified the ordinance of secession on May 23, more forceful measures were called for. The following day, when Congressman John S. Carlisle of Clarksburg demanded that troops be sent into the Kanawha and Monongahela Valleys, Lincoln replied: "we will help you."<sup>255</sup> Indeed, Ohio and Indiana troops promptly crossed the Ohio River and marched toward Wheeling. In June, Unionists held a convention and formed "the Reorganized Government of Virginia," purporting to represent the entire Old Dominion, with Francis Pierpont as its governor. On June 25, Lincoln through Cameron said he that he "never supposed that a brave and free people, though surprised and unarmed, could long be subjugated by a class of political adventurers always adverse to them, and the fact that they have already rallied, reorganized their government, and

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<sup>253</sup> George Plumer Smith to Edwin M. Stanton, n.p., 14 October 1865, Stanton Papers, Library of Congress; Thomas and Hyman, Stanton, 127; Lincoln to Cameron, Washington, 29 July 1861, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:464.

<sup>254</sup> Montgomery Blair to Gideon Welles, Washington, 22 January 1874, Lincoln Collection, Yale University.

<sup>255</sup> Various reminiscences of Francis Pierpont, typescripts, Pierpont Papers, West Virginia University.

checked the march of these invaders demonstrates how justly he appreciated them.”<sup>256</sup>

The following month, Lincoln recognized the new government’s legitimacy; he had worked behind the scenes to come up with this plan instead of acceding to the Unionists’ wish to establish a new state, a move which he considered premature.<sup>257</sup> Eighteen months later he did approve their proposal.

#### DISCOURAGING EUROPEAN RECOGNITION OF THE CONFEDERACY

While laboring to retain the Border States, Lincoln did not lose sight of another danger: the possible intervention of European nations, especially Great Britain, on behalf of the Confederacy. Even before Fort Sumter fell, the British and French governments warned that if the administration cut off trade with the South, their major supplier of cotton, they might well recognize the Confederacy.<sup>258</sup> Such recognition would enable the South to negotiate military and commercial treaties, to gain access to European ports, and thus to win the war. The matter came up almost immediately with the commencement of hostilities. In response to Lincoln’s April 19 and 27 proclamations of intent to blockade Southern ports, Queen Victoria on May 13 issued a Proclamation of Neutrality, granting the Confederacy belligerent status (but not official recognition), entitling her to employ privateers and take prizes to British ports, to borrow money from Great Britain, to obtain weapons there, and to have commerce raiders built in British shipyards. This was a premature act, for British shipping was in no immediate danger; the North could not

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<sup>256</sup> O.R., I, 2, 1:723. Though signed by Cameron, this was probably written by Lincoln.

<sup>257</sup> Nevins, War for the Union, 1:139-44; William C. Harris, With Charity for All: Lincoln and the Restoration of the Union (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 20-23.

<sup>258</sup> Lord Lyons to Lord John Russell, 26 March 1861, Lord Newton, Lord Lyons: A Record of British Diplomacy (2 vols.; New York: Longmans, Green, 1913), 1:31; Adams, Great Britain and the American Civil War, 1:66-67.

begin to enforce a blockade for many months, and few Southern ships could be effective privateers.<sup>259</sup> Moreover, Lincoln had not proclaimed a blockade but merely announced his intention to establish one eventually.<sup>260</sup> Still, the president's blockade declarations, indicating that a real war was underway between two belligerents, necessitated some response from maritime powers like Great Britain. Prime Minister Palmerston, eager to avoid entanglement in the American Civil War, reminded his cabinet that "They who in quarrels interpose, will often get a bloody nose" and that "If you would keep out of strife, step not 'twixt man and wife."<sup>261</sup> The way to "keep out of strife," it seemed to Palmerston, was to declare neutrality. The U.S. minister to Britain, Charles Francis Adams, arrived in London the very day that the Queen's proclamation appeared in the press. He objected that the document was hasty and that it indicated partiality toward the Confederates, giving them hope that they might well be recognized as an independent nation. The outraged North shared his inaccurate if understandable interpretation of the neutrality proclamation.<sup>262</sup> The misunderstanding helped poison diplomatic relations between the two countries.

Seward indignantly remonstrated with Lord Lyons not only about the proclamation but also the willingness of Foreign Secretary John Russell to meet informally with Confederate commissioners. To Senator Charles Sumner, the secretary of state berated the British ministry: "God damn them, I'll give them hell. I'm no more

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<sup>259</sup> Norman B. Ferris, Desperate Diplomacy: William H. Seward's Foreign Policy, 1861 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1976), 32, 203-4.

<sup>260</sup> Howard Jones, Union in Peril: The Crisis over British Intervention in the Civil War (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 27-28, 47-48.

<sup>261</sup> Ferris, Desperate Diplomacy, 36.

<sup>262</sup> Jones, Union in Peril, 43-44.

afraid of them, than I am of Robert Toombs.”<sup>263</sup> (This reaction seemed excessive, coming from a man who had met informally with Confederate commissioners two months earlier.) With equal truculence, Seward on May 21 penned a dispatch to Charles Francis Adams that was so bellicose that Lincoln felt compelled to moderate it lest the secretary of state provoke a war.<sup>264</sup> (According to the Russian minister to the U.S., Seward continued to believe that “the Unionist party in the South is quite strong and awaits only the presence of federal troops to declare itself” and that a foreign war would induce the seceded states to return to the fold.)<sup>265</sup>

Upon receiving Seward’s bellicose draft, the president consulted with the chairman of the senate foreign relations committee, Charles Sumner, who was shocked at the secretary’s recklessness. The senator urged Lincoln to “watch him and overrule him” and encouraged him to moderate the secretary’s language.<sup>266</sup> Just as Seward had toned down Lincoln’s inaugural, so Lincoln did the same for Seward’s instructions. The president also condensed the document, for he “thought Mr. Seward's style too verbose—too much like ‘machine writing.’”<sup>267</sup> When Seward wrote the dispatch, he had not yet learned of the queen’s proclamation, but he did know about Russell’s willingness to meet

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<sup>263</sup> Sumner quoting Seward, Edward Everett journal, 23 August 1861, Everett Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

<sup>264</sup> See Ferris, Desperate Diplomacy, 21-23; Alexander Thorndike Rice, “A Famous Diplomatic Dispatch,” North American Review 142 (1886): 402-10, for a facsimile copy of the document with Lincoln’s suggested changes. On Lincoln’s revisions, see Ferris, Desperate Diplomacy, 217n21.

<sup>265</sup> Edouard de Stoeckl to Alexander Gortchakov, Washington, 6 May 1861, dispatch 30, photocopy, Principal Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Russian Reproductions, Papers of the Foreign Copying Project, Library of Congress; Albert A. Woldman, Lincoln and the Russians (Cleveland: World, 1952), 62.

<sup>266</sup> David Donald, Charles Sumner and the Rights of Man (New York: Knopf, 1970), 21.

<sup>267</sup> John D. Defrees to Josiah G. Holland, Washington, 8 August 1865, in Allen C. Guelzo, ed., “Holland’s Informants: The Construction of Josiah Holland’s ‘Life of Abraham Lincoln,’” Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association 23 (2002): 46.

with Confederate envoys and that the British and French had agreed to act in concert in dealing with the American Civil War.

Lincoln softened Seward's belligerent language with several changes, among them the following:

- "The Presidents regrets" instead of "The President is surprised and grieved"
- "Such intercourse would be none the less hurtful to us" instead of "Such intercourse would be none the less wrongful to us"
- "No one of these proceedings will pass unnoticed by the United States" instead of "No one of these proceedings will be borne by the United States"
- Most importantly, Lincoln recommended that the dispatch contain the following sentence: "This paper is for your own guidance only, and not be read, or shown to any one" instead of these sentences: "We are not insensible of the grave importance of this occasion. We see how, upon the result of the debate in which we are engaged, a war may ensue, between the United States, and one, two, or even more European nations. War in any case is as exceptionable from the habits as it is revolting to from the sentiments of the American people. But if it come it will be fully seen that it results from the action of Great Britain, not our own, that Great Britain will have decided to fraternize with our domestic enemy either without waiting to hear from you our remonstrances and our warnings or after having heard them. War in defence of national life is not immoral, and war in defence of independence is an inevitable part of the discipline of nations. The dispute will be between the European and the American branches of the British race. All

who belong to that race will especially deprecate it, as they ought. It may well be believed that men of every race and kindred will deplore it. A war not unlike it between the same parties occurred at the close of the last century. Europe atoned by forty years of suffering for the ~~crime~~ error that Great Britain committed in provoking that contest. If that nation ~~will~~ shall now repeat the same great ~~crime~~ error the social ~~calamities~~ convulsions which will follow may not be so long but they will be more general. When they shall have ceased, it will, we think, be seen, whatever may have been the fortunes of other nations that it ~~will not be~~ is not the United States that will have come out of them with its precious Constitution altered or its honestly obtained dominion in any degree abridged. Great Britain has but to wait a few months and all her present inconveniences will cease with all our own troubles. If she take a different course she will calculate for herself the ultimate as well as the immediate consequences, and will consider what position she will hold when she shall have forever lost the sympathies and the affections of the only nation on whose sympathies and affections she has a natural claim. In making that calculation she will do well to remember that in the controversy she proposes to open we shall be actuated by neither pride, nor passion, nor cupidity, nor ambition; but we shall stand simply on the principle of self-preservation, and that our cause will involve the independence of nations and the rights of human nature. This Government considers that ~~matters have reached such a~~ our relations in Europe have reached ~~such a~~ a crisis in which it is necessary for it to take a decided stand ~~from which~~ on which ~~its~~ not only ~~but, its fre~~ its immediate measures but its ultimate and ~~enduring~~ permanent policy can be determined and defined. At the same time, it neither means to menace ~~nor to~~ Great Britain nor to wound the susceptibilities of this or any other European nation That policy



is defined and is ~~illegible~~ developed in this paper– It ~~illegible~~ for your own ~~illegible~~.”<sup>268</sup>

Seward took many (but not all) of Lincoln’s suggestions, effectively defanging and declawing the original ultimatum. (Seward intended to have Adams submit the remonstrance to John Russell and then suspend diplomatic relations until the ministry ended contact of any kind with the Southern commissioners.)<sup>269</sup> Even in its toned-down version, the document astounded Adams, who confided to his diary that the Lincoln administration appeared “almost ready to declare war with all the powers of Europe. . . . I scarcely know how to understand Mr Seward.” It appeared to him “like throwing the game into the hands of the enemy.”<sup>270</sup> If he had delivered the document to Russell, it would, he thought, have ended his mission.<sup>271</sup> Henry Adams, the minister’s son and secretary, thought the document “so arrogant in tone and so extraordinary and unparalleled in its demands that it leaves no doubt in my mind that our Government wishes to face a war with all Europe. That is the inevitable result of any attempt to carry out the spirit or the letter of these directions, and such a war is regarded in the dispatch itself as the probable result.” Seward’s policy was “shallow madness.” Young Adams was “shocked and horrified by supposing Seward, a man I’ve admired and respected

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<sup>268</sup> Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress. See Alexander Thorndike Rice, “A Famous Diplomatic Dispatch,” North American Review 142 (1886): 402-10, for a facsimile copy of the document with Lincoln’s suggested changes.

<sup>269</sup> Frederic Bancroft, The Life of William H. Seward (2 vols.; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1900), 2:172.

<sup>270</sup> Charles Francis Adams diary, 10 June 1861, Massachusetts Historical Society.

<sup>271</sup> Martin B. Duberman, Charles Francis Adams (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961), 269.

beyond most men, guilty of what seems to me so wicked and criminal a course as this.”<sup>272</sup>  
He would have been even more horrified if he had read Seward’s original draft.

Minister Adams tactfully summarized the document to Lord Russell, who explained that he had seen the Confederate emissaries only twice and had no intention of holding a third interview. Thus did Lincoln, with the assistance of Sumner and Adams, help defuse what could have been a diplomatic crisis leading to war with Great Britain. In late June, Sumner rejoiced that Seward “has changed immensely during the last month, & is now mild & gentle.” Following this episode, Lincoln came to rely more and more on Sumner for advice regarding foreign affairs.<sup>273</sup> The relationship between the senator and the president was a curious one, for initially the latter impressed the former as undignified, socially inept, and uncultured. When they first met, Lincoln suggested that he and the tall senator “measure backs,” but the pompous Sumner declined, stating that it was time “for uniting our fronts against the enemy and not our backs.” Lincoln allegedly remarked later, “I have never had much to do with bishops where I live, but, do you know, Sumner is my idea of a bishop.” Sumner told Carl Schurz that he found Lincoln a puzzle. According to Schurz, the senator “could hardly understand this western product of American democracy.” Sumner could detect “flashes of thought and bursts of illuminating expression” in Lincoln’s conversation, but because the senator lacked a sense of humor, “he often lost Lincoln’s keenest points” and had difficulty shaking the belief that such a “seemingly untutored child of nature” could meet the challenges he

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<sup>272</sup> Henry Adams to Charles Francis Adams Jr., London, 11 June 1861, in J.C. Levenson, ed., The Letters of Henry Adams (6 vols.; Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982-1988), 1:239.

<sup>273</sup> Sumner to Richard Henry Dana, Washington, 30 June, 18 July 1861, Dana Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society; Donald, Sumner and the Rights of Man, 20-25.

faced. But because the president seemed to him a deeply committed opponent of slavery, and since slavery was Sumner's main concern, he overcame his misgivings. Despite the widespread belief that two such different men would be unable to cooperate, but they generally did because they respected one another's sincerity.<sup>274</sup>

#### PREPARING THE ARMY TO FIGHT

Thanks to the rage provoked by the bombardment of Fort Sumter and to the energetic leadership of some Northern governors, raising an army proved easy; training, equipping, arming, feeding, and supplying it, however, did not. For decades Congress and state governments had neglected the military so badly that the North had great difficulty mobilizing its vast resources swiftly.<sup>275</sup> Compounding the problem was the general lack of lack of organizational sophistication throughout the economy and society. The U.S., still an immature country in many ways, had few men and institutions experienced in organizing large-scale enterprises of any kind.

Nowhere was such backwardness more evident than in the War Department, with its aged and small staff, antiquated rules, and stifling bureaucracy. As men eagerly enlisted, their requests for weapons, uniforms, and equipment overwhelmed Cameron and his bureau chiefs.<sup>276</sup> They responded to urgent appeals so slowly that some energetic governors (notably John A. Andrew of Massachusetts, Andrew G. Curtin of

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<sup>274</sup> David Donald, Charles Sumner and the Coming of the Civil War (New York: Knopf, 1960), 383; Ben: Perley Poore in Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln, 223; Carl Schurz, Reminiscences of Carl Schurz (3 vols.; New York: McClure, 1907-08), 2:240-1.

<sup>275</sup> Meneely, War Department, 13-64.

<sup>276</sup> Marvin A. Kreidberg and Merton G. Henry, History of Military Mobilization in the United States Army, 1755-1945 (Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1955), 90-100.

Pennsylvania, Edwin D. Morgan of New York, and Oliver P. Morton of Indiana) took matters into their own hands, purchasing necessary paraphernalia at home and abroad.<sup>277</sup>

Governor Morton repeatedly clamored for weapons, warned of a possible invasion of Kentucky from Tennessee, requested heavy ordnance to guard Indiana along the Ohio, and predicted an attack on Louisville.<sup>278</sup> In September, Lincoln told the telegraph operators at the war department: “we will have a little talk with Governor Morton, at Indianapolis. I want to give him a lesson in geography. Bowling Green affair I set him all right upon; now I will tell him something about Mulgraugh Hill. Morton is a good fellow, but at times he is the skeerdest man I know of.”<sup>279</sup> (Morton mistakenly thought railroads converged at Muldraugh Hill.)<sup>280</sup> And so Lincoln wrote the governor explaining the delay in supplying weapons: “I wish you to believe of us (as we certainly believe of you) that we are doing the very best we can. You do not receive arms from us as fast as you need them; but it is because we have not near enough to meet all the pressing demands; and we are obliged to share around what we have, sending the larger share to the points which appear to need them most. We have great hope that our own supply will be ample before long, so that you and all others can have as many as you need. I see an article in an Indianapolis newspaper denouncing me for not answering your letter sent by a special messenger two or three weeks ago. I did make what I thought the best answer I could to that letter. As I remember, it asked for ten heavy guns to be

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<sup>277</sup> William B. Hesseltine, Lincoln and the War Governors (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1948), 166-80.

<sup>278</sup> Morton to Lincoln, 10, 20, 22, 25, 26 September 10, 1861, Morton to Thomas A. Scott, 25 September 1861, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>279</sup> William B. Wilson, A Few Acts and Actors in the Tragedy of the Civil War in the United States (Philadelphia: by the author, 1892), 111.

<sup>280</sup> Morton to Lincoln, 26 September 1861, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

distributed, with some troops, at Lawrenceburgh, Madison, New-Albany and Evansville; and I ordered the guns, and directed you to send the troops if you had them. As to Kentucky, you do not estimate that state as more important than I do; but I am compelled to watch all points. While I write this I am, if not in range, at least in hearing of cannon-shot, from an army of enemies more than a hundred thousand strong. I do not expect them to capture this city; but I know they would, if I were to send the men and arms from here, to defend Louisville, of which there is not a single hostile armed soldier within forty miles, nor any force known to be moving upon it from any distance.”<sup>281</sup>

Cameron authorized his henchman, Alexander Cummings, a journalist and political operator, to buy war material in New York. Unlike the governors, Cummings spent money foolishly, paying far too much for horses, pistols, muskets, and rifles; he also purchased uniforms and blankets made of shoddy, “a villainous compound, the refuse stuff and sweepings of the shop, pounded, rolled, glued, and smoothed to the external form and gloss of cloth, but no more like the genuine article than the shadow is to the substance.”<sup>282</sup> Such material dissolved in the rain and came apart in high winds. Shoes and boots wore out after moderate use. Fraud marred Cummings’ dealings, prompting Congress to investigate and denounce him.<sup>283</sup>

Corrupt quartermasters also cheated the government. One of the more flagrant examples was Reuben B. Hatch, brother of Lincoln’s close friend Ozias M. Hatch.

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<sup>281</sup> Lincoln to Oliver P. Morton Washington, 29 September 1861, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:541.

<sup>282</sup> Robert Tomes, “The Fortunes of War,” Harpers New Monthly Magazine, June 1864, 227-28.

<sup>283</sup> Erna Risch, Quartermaster Support of the Army: A History of the Corps, 1775-1939 (Washington: Quartermaster Historian’s Office, Office of the Quartermaster General, 1962), 341-42; Meneely, War Department, 119-20.

Operating out of Cairo, Illinois, as an assistant quartermaster on U. S. Grant's staff, Hatch bought coal and lumber and then submitted inflated bills for the purchase, pocketing the difference between what he actually paid and what he received from the government. He also sold to the government horses and mules that had been seized from the enemy.<sup>284</sup> General Justus McKinstry, Frémont's willful quartermaster in St. Louis, was court-martialed and cashiered for defrauding the government of hundreds of thousands of dollars.<sup>285</sup>

In addition to energetic governors, other civilians did yeoman work in helping to compensate for the war department's inadequacy. Among them were William M. Evarts, Richard Blatchford, and Moses Grinnell of New York, who received \$2,000,000 in federal dollars to buy military supplies. From one area of American life with significant organizational savvy – railroad corporations – came Thomas A. Scott to help the beleaguered war department. Assuming the post of assistant secretary of war, this vice-president of the Pennsylvania Railroad efficiently reformed procedures, got rid of dead wood, and dramatically improved the functioning of department, especially its handling of railroads.<sup>286</sup> Lincoln was highly complimentary of Scott's work.<sup>287</sup> Aiding him was Edward S. Sanford, president of the American Telegraph Company, who performed

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<sup>284</sup> Russell Frank Weigley, Quartermaster General of the Union Army: A Biography of M. C. Meigs (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 185-86; David W. Miller, Second Only to Grant: Quartermaster General Montgomery C. Meigs, A Biography (Shippensburg, Pennsylvania: White Mane Books, 2000), 105; Jackson Grimshaw to Ozias M. Hatch, Cairo, 11, 13, 18, 20 July 1862, Hatch Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield; undated report on Reuben Hatch prepared by the staff of the Abraham Lincoln Association, ibid.

<sup>285</sup> Risch, Quartermaster Support of the Army, 343-44; Weigley, Meigs, 187-99; Edward G. Longacre, "A Profile of General Justus McKinstry," Civil War Times Illustrated 17 (1978): 15-21.

<sup>286</sup> Samuel Richey Kamm, The Civil War Career of Thomas A. Scott (Philadelphia: by the author, 1940), 46-82.

<sup>287</sup> Washington correspondence, 15 April, Philadelphia Press, 16 April 1862.

similarly well after taking charge of military telegraphs. In New York, leading citizens established the Union Defence Committee, which significantly helped to raise men and money for the war effort. Dorothea Dix, renowned as a champion of reform in the treatment of the insane, organized a capable nursing corps. Aiding her was the Sanitary Commission, established to protect and promote the health of the army.<sup>288</sup>

Some military men stepped forward to fill the vacuum created by the war department's ineptitude. A conspicuous example was the elderly General John E. Wool, who seized the initiative without waiting for department approval. His meritorious efforts in procuring arms and ammunition came to a halt when Cameron, allegedly at the behest of corrupt contractors, ordered him back to his routine duties.<sup>289</sup> Equally efficient was Montgomery C. Meigs, who became quartermaster general in mid-June over the objections of Cameron.<sup>290</sup> Francis Preston Blair described Meigs as a West Pointer with "energy, industry, knowledge of the wants of an army" as well as "zeal in the course an army is about to vindicate" and "probity, punctuality & strong common sense in dealing with men."<sup>291</sup> In urging his appointment, Lincoln told Scott: "I have come to know Col. Meigs quite well for a short acquaintance, and, so far as I am capable of judging I do not know one who combines the qualities of masculine intellect, learning and experience of

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<sup>288</sup> William Q. Maxwell, Lincoln's Fifth Wheel: The Political History of the U.S. Sanitary Commission (New York: Longmans, Green, 1956).

<sup>289</sup> Meneely, War Department, 122-25; Wool to Benson J. Lossing, n.p., June 1861 [no day of the month indicated], Lossing Papers, Syracuse University.

<sup>290</sup> Weigley, Meigs, 156-214; Miller, Second Only to Grant, 94-95; Sherrod E. East, "Montgomery C. Meigs and the Quartermaster Department," Military Affairs 25 (1961-62) 183-96.

<sup>291</sup> Blair to Cameron, 2 June 1861, in Miller, Meigs, 95.

the right sort, and physical power of labor and endurance so well as he.”<sup>292</sup> Scott agreed, praising Meigs for his “high genius, science, vigor & administrative capacities.”<sup>293</sup>

Cameron was clearly not up to his job.<sup>294</sup> A political wheeler-dealer, he reveled in distributing patronage and awarding contracts to allies; he devoted more attention to those congenial chores than readying the nation to fight. Meigs found him “weak and infirm of purpose.”<sup>295</sup> In August, the ethnologist George Gibbs charged the war secretary failed to obtain vital information about troop strength and distribution; ignored credible warnings about treasonous officers; provided inadequate support for the troops who poured into Washington in the early weeks of the war; recruited and mustered in three-years men lackadaisically; unreasonably delayed supplying transportation, animals, weapons, medicine, and artillery to the troops; awarded contracts to inept family members and political cronies; ordered inadequate inspection of food and clothing; issued and then countermanded orders carelessly; and generally mismanaged his department. In short, Gibbs concluded, Cameron had “shown neither foresight nor energy. He has had no comprehensive plan, if he has any plan at all. He has not devoted himself to military duties, but to contracts which belonged properly to the regular departments. Neither in capacity nor in character is he fitted for his place.”<sup>296</sup>

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<sup>292</sup> Lincoln to Scott, Washington, 5 June 1861, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:394.

<sup>293</sup> Scott to Lincoln, Washington, 5 June 1861, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>294</sup> Nevins, War for the Union, 1:227, 396-97, 410.

<sup>295</sup> Meigs diary, 29 July 1861, copy, Nicolay Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>296</sup> Gibbs to John Austin Stevens, Washington, 25, 29 July [1861], and “Memoranda,” [August 1861], John Austin Stevens Papers, New-York Historical Society. Cf. George Gibbs to McClellan, 19 June 1861, in Meneely, War Department, 168n.



By late summer, public opinion had soured on Cameron more because of his unsuitable appointments than his questionable contracts.<sup>297</sup> Well before the spring of 1862, when the House of Representatives officially condemned Cameron, Lincoln too had grown disenchanted with his secretary of war. But in 1862, when Congress censured Cameron, the president with characteristic magnanimity told the lawmakers that he himself, and not the secretary of war, was responsible for mistakes made in letting contracts.<sup>298</sup>

In fact, Lincoln did make some blunders as the mobilization effort got under way. He was partly distracted by ongoing patronage squabbles, with Seward and Cameron leading the way as they lobbied on behalf of friends.<sup>299</sup> On April 13, when the slate of Philadelphia appointments was announced, the president told a Pennsylvania congressman that he was “greatly relieved” to have that source of worry “off his mind.” He “hoped now to be able to devote his attention exclusively to the condition of the country.”<sup>300</sup> But contentious New Yorkers gave him little rest. A month after the bombardment of Fort Sumter, he felt “as though several thousand pounds weight” had been removed by the appointment of a slate for the Empire State.<sup>301</sup>

But no sooner had civilian patronage been distributed than a great clamor arose for military positions. Especially coveted were paymasterships, with the rank of major,

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<sup>297</sup> Washington correspondence by Carleton [C. C. Coffin], 26 August, Boston Journal, 28 August 1861.

<sup>298</sup> A congressional committee under the leadership of Charles H. Van Wyck issued a report highly critical of Cameron. “Government Contracts,” House Report no. 2, 37<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> session, s.n. 1142, 1143.

<sup>299</sup> “The Government and the People,” New York Evening Post, 22 April 1861.

<sup>300</sup> Washington correspondence, 18 April, Philadelphia Inquirer, 19 April 1861. On the night of April 16, Lincoln had met with Governor Curtin and the congressional delegation from Pennsylvania. After conferring with them as a group, he had private conferences with each, taking notes on their recommendations. Washington correspondence, 16 April, Philadelphia Inquirer, 17 April 1861.

<sup>301</sup> Washington correspondence, 13 May, New York Tribune 14 May 1861.

good pay, and little danger of being killed. Once again Illinoisans descended in shoals. In early 1862, Lincoln told Orville H. Browning that their state “has already had more than her share,” that “complaints are made about it,” and “that he cannot appoint any more Pay Masters there.” Browning advised one importunate constituent: “I do not know of any thing in the way of an office to dispose of and there are certainly fifty applicants for every one at the disposal of the Government. There are a good many applicants here from Illinois, who have been pressing their claims all winter, without success. I know of no more unpromising business at present than the pursuit of office.”<sup>302</sup>

Lincoln exasperated governors by allowing ambitious politicians to raise regiments independently and have them accepted into the army while Cameron was turning away units recruited in accordance with state regulations.<sup>303</sup> A case in point was Daniel Sickles, the wealthy New York ex-congressman who had achieved notoriety just before the war by murdering his wife’s lover (the son of Francis Scott Key) and then escaping punishment on a plea of temporary insanity.<sup>304</sup> After Sickles claimed that he had raised enough men to constitute a brigade, Governor Edwin D. Morgan of New York refused to make such a controversial figure a brigadier general.<sup>305</sup> When Sickles asked the president if he would tolerate efforts to thwart his recruiting efforts, Lincoln replied: “I like that idea of United States Volunteers” rather than state militia. “But you see where it leads to. What will the governors say if I raise regiments without their having a hand in it?”

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<sup>302</sup> Browning to John C. Bagby, Washington, 26 February 1862, Bagby Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

<sup>303</sup> Meneely, War Department, 165-68; Kreidberg and Henry, History of Military Mobilization, 99.

<sup>304</sup> W. A. Swanberg, Sickles the Incredible (New York: Scribner, 1956); Thomas Keneally, American Scoundrel: The Life of the Notorious Civil War General Dan Sickles (New York: Doubleday, 2002).

<sup>305</sup> James A. Rawley, Edwin D. Morgan, Merchant in Politics (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), 149-51. On the opposition to Sickles, see Weed to Lincoln, New York, 23 May 1861, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

Cameron endorsed Sickles' plan, and Lincoln went along, saying to the acquitted killer on May 16: "whatever are the obstacles thrown in your way, come to me, and I will remove them promptly. Should you stand in need of my assistance to hasten the organization of your brigade come to me again, and I will give or do whatever is required. I want your men, General, and you are the man to lead them. Go to the Secretary of War and get your instructions immediately."<sup>306</sup> At Lincoln's insistence, Sickles received a general's commission.<sup>307</sup> To one of Sickles' subordinates, Col. John S. Austin, who proposed to raise a "British Legion" with the motto "We come to Redeem our Forefathers," Lincoln said: "This Legion has a political significance which we cannot overlook. It and its motto will be received with cordiality by this nation. Go ahead, Colonel, and recruit."<sup>308</sup>

At that same time, Governor Morgan was indignant at Cameron's reluctance to accept many regiments already mustered in.<sup>309</sup> When the governor complained about the war department's confusion, Lincoln replied: "The enthusiastic uprising of the people in our cause, is our great reliance; and we can not safely give it any check, even though it overflows, and runs in channels not laid down in any chart."<sup>310</sup> The president settled the

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<sup>306</sup> "The Sickles Brigade and the President," Washington correspondence, 16 May, New York Herald, 17 May 1861; "Straight to the Work," New York Tribune, 16 May 1861; Washington correspondence, 15, 17 May, New York Times 16, 18 May 1861.

<sup>307</sup> Washington correspondence by the Associated Press, 27 August, New York Times, 28 August 1861. Lincoln nominated Sickles for a generalship on September 3, but the Senate rejected the nomination in March 1862. When later renominated, he was confirmed.

<sup>308</sup> Washington correspondence, 17 May, New York Tribune, 18 May 1861.

<sup>309</sup> James A. Rawley, "Lincoln and Governor Morgan," Abraham Lincoln Quarterly 6 (1950-51): 284-87; James A. Rawley, Edwin D. Morgan, Merchant in Politics (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), 142-48. Chase supported Cameron, but Lincoln Seward, and the other cabinet members did not. Seward to Weed, Washington, 17 May 1861, Weed Papers, University of Rochester.

<sup>310</sup> Lincoln to E. D. Morgan, Washington, 20 May 1861, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:375.

matter by appointing Morgan a major general of volunteers and placing him in command of the Department of New York. In November, when Colonel William H. Allen of the First New York Volunteers, who had been dismissed for insubordination, asked Lincoln to reinstate him, the president replied: “I cannot afford to enter into a controversy with the Governor of a State that I rely upon more than any other to assist in putting down this terrible rebellion, and you must say as much to General Wool, and tell him that I say he must fix it up with Governor Morgan.”<sup>311</sup>

In matters military, Lincoln said he relied on General Scott, but the poor health and advanced years of that septuagenarian hero unfitted him to meet the challenge posed by a conflict far vaster than what he had known during the War of 1812 or the Mexican War.<sup>312</sup> So gradually, Lincoln began to depend more on his own judgment. In August 1861, to facilitate the enlistment of volunteers, he issued an order eliminating much red tape. Commenting on this step, a journalist remarked that the president “is daily growing up to the altitude of his position, and with every hour learns more and more to comprehend his duties and his responsibilities.”<sup>313</sup>

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<sup>311</sup> Rush Hawkins’ reminiscences, Margaret B. Stillwell, ed., “Hawkins of the Hawkins Zouaves,” in Deoch Fulton, ed., Bookmen’s Holiday, Notes and Studies Written in Tribute to Harry Miller Lydenberg (New York: New York Public Library, 1943), 96. In October, Lincoln said that he wished Wool would reinstate Allen if the general thought it in the best interest of the service. A. J. Bergen to Wool, Washington, 22 October 1862, and Ward B. Burnett to Wool, Washington, 23 October 1861, Wool Papers, New York State Library, Albany. Morgan adamantly refused to approve such a move. William H. Allen to Lincoln, New York, 25 April 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress. See also Wool to Lincoln, Fort Monroe, 9 December 1861, ibid.

<sup>312</sup> “The President,” Chicago Tribune, 8 August 1861.

<sup>313</sup> Washington correspondence by “Leo,” 19 August, New York Times, 21 August 1861.

That summer, the president confessed to Carl Schurz that his administration had “stumbled along” but thought that on the whole it had done so “in the right direction.”<sup>314</sup>

#### ANNUAL MESSAGE: DEFINING WAR AIMS, EXPLAINING ACTIONS

As July 4 approached, Lincoln put the finishing touches on his message to Congress, one of his most significant and eloquent state papers.<sup>315</sup> For weeks he had been considering carefully what he wanted to say. On May 7, John Hay noted that his boss “is engaged in constant thought upon his Message: It will be an exhaustive review of the questions of the hour & of the future.”<sup>316</sup> And so it was. Later that month he said that he was so frequently interrupted by visitors from morning till night that “he shall be fortunate if he gets time to finish the message before the 4<sup>th</sup> of July.”<sup>317</sup> From mid-June until Congress assembled, he was “engaged almost constantly in writing his message” and “refused to receive any calls whatever, either of friendship or business, except from members of the Cabinet, or high officials.”<sup>318</sup> He revised his first draft extensively, incorporating many suggestions offered by Seward. When, however, the public printer suggested that “sugar-coated” was too undignified a term for such a formal address, Lincoln replied: “No, let it stand; it is a word the people use; they will know what it

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<sup>314</sup> Schurz, Reminiscences, 2:242.

<sup>315</sup> Pease and Randall, eds., Browning Diary, 1:475-76 (entry for 3 July 1861). Lincoln was just finishing his message when Browning called. After the president completed his revisions, he read the document to Browning. Changes were made as late as two hours before it was delivered. Washington correspondence, 30 November, New York Times, 1 December 1861.

<sup>316</sup> Burlingame and Ettliger, eds., Hay Diary, 20 (entry for 7 May 1861).

<sup>317</sup> Washington correspondence, 30 May, New York Tribune, 31 May 1861.

<sup>318</sup> Nicolay to Theresia Bates, Washington, 3 July 1861, Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House, 46; Washington correspondence, 19 June, New York World, New York Times, New York Tribune, 20 June 1861. The New York Times reported that on June 20 Lincoln “kept out of sight” in order to work on his message. “This is the first day that he has devoted to that undertaking.”

means.”<sup>319</sup> As he considered how much money and how many men to request, he consulted members of Congress and corresponded with the governors of the loyal states.<sup>320</sup> Before submitting the message, he went over it in detail with the cabinet and read it to Charles Sumner.<sup>321</sup>

While solicitous of congressional opinion, Lincoln did not adhere to the Whig notion that the executive branch must defer to the legislature and merely carry out its wishes. Though he occasionally paid lip service to that doctrine, his actions belied his words. He was an assertive, if tactful, president, unafraid to use the powers of his office to achieve victory in the war and unwilling to be cowed by governors, generals, cabinet members, newspaper editors, congressmen, senators, or anyone else.<sup>322</sup>

On Independence Day, Lincoln reviewed a military parade and introduced various cabinet members and generals, who briefly addressed a huge crowd gathered before the White House. When asked to speak himself, he modestly declined, saying: “I appear at your call, not to make a speech. I have made a great many dry and dull ones. Now I must fall back and say that the dignity of my position does not permit me to expose myself any

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<sup>319</sup> Washington correspondence by “Indiana” [John D. Defrees], 9 July, Cincinnati Commercial, 12 July 1861; Defrees in Francis B. Carpenter, The Inner Life of Abraham Lincoln: Six Months at the White House (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1867), 126-27.

<sup>320</sup> Washington correspondence, 9 July, Cincinnati Commercial, n.d., reprinted in the Chicago Tribune, 15 July 1861; Washington correspondence, 16 June, New York Times 17 June 1861. All the governors but two supported his plan to call for 500,000 men and \$200,000,000. Among the members of Congress whom he consulted was Henry Wilson of Massachusetts, chairman of the senate military affairs committee.

<sup>321</sup> Seward, Seward at Washington, 2:592; Sumner to Richard Henry Dana, Washington, 30 June 1861, Dana Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

<sup>322</sup> Allan G. Bogue, The Congressman’s Civil War (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 44-59; Geoffrey Perret, Lincoln’s War: The Untold Story of America’s Greatest President as Commander in Chief (New York: Random House, 2004), 334-43.

more. I can now take shelter and listen to others.”<sup>323</sup> (Another journalist reported a slightly different version of these remarks: “I have made a great many poor speeches, and now feel relieved that my dignity does not permit me to be a public speaker.”)<sup>324</sup>

Lincoln’s unassuming modesty pleased the public. A Missourian who observed the president receive callers detected in him “no airs of assumed or hereditary dignity, nor stiffness, nor carrying the importance of the Presidential office into every day acts. His reception of men is cordial and unaffected, and his manner devoid of any personal claim for respect from the office he holds.” Even his appearance on the streets of Washington endeared Lincoln to the public. The “half jaunty air . . . of his hat, as he rides in his barouche, beside Mrs. Lincoln, of an evening, is consoling to the spectator, who instinctively feels that even if he can write State papers with original and trenchant ability, yet a man of easy manners and kind good nature is Mr. President.”<sup>325</sup>

On July 5, Lincoln’s message was read to Congress, as was the custom for such documents. (The same was true of his annual December messages, forerunners of what later became known as state of the union addresses.) His principal goal was to define the stakes of the war, a subject he had discussed with his personal secretaries. On May 7, when John Hay told him that many correspondents wished him to abolish slavery, he replied: “For my own part, I consider the central idea pervading this struggle is the necessity that is upon us, of proving that popular government is not an absurdity. We must settle this question now, whether in a free government the minority have the right to

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<sup>323</sup> Washington correspondence, 4 July, Philadelphia Press, 5 July 1861.

<sup>324</sup> Washington correspondence, 6 July, Ohio State Journal (Columbus), 10 July 1861.

<sup>325</sup> Washington correspondence by “Au Revoir,” 20 July, Missouri Democrat (St. Louis) 25 July 1861.

break up the government whenever they choose. If we fail it will go far to prove the incapability of the people to govern themselves.” Alluding to slavery, he added: “There may be one consideration used in stay of such final judgment, but that is not for us to use in advance. That is, that there exists in our case, an instance of a vast and far reaching disturbing element, which the history of no other free nation will probably ever present. That however is not for us to say at present. Taking the government as we found it we will see if the majority can preserve it.”<sup>326</sup>

That same day, Lincoln addressed a letter to the Regent Captains of the tiny principality of San Marino, Italy, in which he said that the war “involves the question whether a Representative republic, extended and aggrandized so much as to be safe against foreign enemies can save itself from the dangers of domestic faction.”<sup>327</sup> To Nicolay, the president gave a similar analysis.<sup>328</sup>

Lincoln elaborated on this theme in his message to Congress. “Our popular government,” he wrote, “has often been called an experiment. Two points in it our people have already settled – the successful establishing and the successful administering of it. One still remains – it's successful maintenance against a formidable attempt to overthrow it. It is now for them to demonstrate to the world, that those who can fairly carry an election, can also suppress a rebellion; that ballots are the rightful, and peaceful, successors of bullets; and that when ballots have fairly, and constitutionally decided, there can be no successful appeal back to bullets; that there can be no successful appeal,

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<sup>326</sup> Burlingame and Ettlinger, eds., Hay Diary, 19-20 (entry for 7 May 1861).

<sup>327</sup> Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:360.

<sup>328</sup> Nicolay memorandum, 7 May 1861, Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House, 41.



except to ballots themselves, at succeeding elections. Such will be a great lesson of peace; teaching men that what they cannot take by an election, neither can they take it by a war; teaching all, the folly of being the beginners of a war.”

Later in the message he foreshadowed the celebrated speech he would give at Gettysburg more than two years later: “And this issue embraces more than the fate of these United States. It presents to the whole family of man the question, whether a Constitutional republic, or a democracy – a government of the people, by the same people – can, or cannot, maintain its territorial integrity against its own domestic foes. It presents the question, whether discontented individuals, too few in numbers to control administration, according to organic law, in any case, can always, upon the pretences made in this case, or on any other pretences, or arbitrarily, without any pretence, break up their government, and thus practically put an end to free government upon the earth. It forces us to ask: ‘Is there, in all republics, this inherent and fatal weakness?’ ‘Must a government, of necessity, be too strong for the liberties of its own people, or too weak to maintain its own existence?’”

In the most eloquent passage of the address, Lincoln called the war “essentially a People's contest.” For Unionists, “it is a struggle for maintaining in the world, that form and substance of government, whose leading object is, to elevate the condition of men – to lift artificial weights from all shoulders; to clear the paths of laudable pursuit for all; to afford all, an unfettered start, and a fair chance, in the race of life. Yielding to partial and temporary departures, from necessity, this is the leading object of the government for

whose existence we contend.” These words had a special resonance coming from a man who had made his way up from grinding frontier poverty.

The president’s democratic faith in the people shone through his description of the army. There were, he said, “many single regiments whose members, one and another, possess full practical knowledge of all the arts, sciences, professions, and whatever else, whether useful or elegant, is known in the world; and there is scarcely one, from which there could not be selected, a President, a Cabinet, a Congress, and perhaps a Court, abundantly competent to administer the government itself.”

Lincoln recounted the events leading to war, explaining why he had decided to relieve Fort Sumter. Some have regarded his version of events skeptically, but there is good reason to believe that he accurately reported his thoughts and actions during the administration’s first six weeks.

In one regard, the message was an extension of Lincoln’s inaugural, for it refuted at great length the secessionists’ “ingenious sophism” that “any State of the Union may, consistently with the national Constitution, and therefore lawfully, and peacefully, withdraw from the Union, without the consent of the Union, or of any other State. The little disguise that the supposed right is to be exercised only for just cause, themselves to be the sole judge of its justice, is too thin to merit any notice. With rebellion thus sugar-coated, they have been drugging the public mind of their section for more than thirty years; and, until at length, they have brought many good men to a willingness to take up arms against the government the day after some assemblage of men have enacted the farcical pretence of taking their State out of the Union, who could have been brought to

no such thing the day before.” A dangerous precedent would be set if we were to accept secession in 1861: “by allowing the seceders to go in peace, it is difficult to see what we can do, if others choose to go, or to extort terms upon which they will promise to remain.” He pointed out that the Confederates recently adopted a constitution that failed to include the right of secession. “The principle itself,” he wryly observed, “is one of disintegration, and upon which no government can possibly endure.” Ingeniously he showed how the doctrine of secession could be used to justify expelling a state from the union against its will, clearly a flagrant violation of states rights: “If all the States, save one, should assert the power to drive that one out of the Union, it is presumed the whole class of seceder politicians would at once deny the power, and denounce the act as the greatest outrage upon State rights. But suppose that precisely the same act, instead of being called ‘driving the one out,’ should be called ‘the seceding of the others from that one,’ it would be exactly what the seceders claim to do; unless, indeed, they make the point, that the one, because it is a minority, may rightfully do what the others, because they are a majority, may not rightfully do.” He denied that a majority of voters in any Confederate state, except perhaps South Carolina, truly favored secession. Caustically he alluded to the conduct of the authorities in Virginia: “The course taken in Virginia was the most remarkable – perhaps the most important. A convention, elected by the people of that State, to consider this very question of disrupting the Federal Union, was in session at the capital of Virginia when Fort Sumter fell. To this body the people had chosen a large majority of professed Union men. Almost immediately after the fall of Sumter, many members of that majority went over to the original disunion minority, and, with them, adopted an ordinance for withdrawing the State from the Union. Whether this

change was wrought by their great approval of the assault upon Sumter, or their great resentment at the government's resistance to that assault, is not definitely known.

Although they submitted the ordinance, for ratification, to vote of the people, to be taken on a day then somewhat more than a month distant, the convention, and the Legislature, (which was also in session at the same time and place) with leading men of the State, not members of either, immediately commenced acting, as if the State were already out of the Union. They pushed military preparations vigorously forward all over the state.”

Apologetically Lincoln asked Congress to endorse retrospectively the emergency measures he had taken since the bombardment of Fort Sumter. “It was with the deepest regret that the Executive found the duty of employing the war-power, in defence of the government, forced upon him. He could but perform this duty, or surrender the existence of the government. No compromise, by public servants, could, in this case, be a cure; not that compromises are not often proper, but that no popular government can long survive a marked precedent, that those who carry an election, can only save the government from immediate destruction, by giving up the main point, upon which the people gave the election. The people themselves, and not their servants, can safely reverse their own deliberate decisions. As a private citizen, the Executive could not have consented that these institutions shall perish; much less could he, in betrayal of so vast, and so sacred a trust, as these free people had confided to him. He felt that he had no moral right to shrink; nor even to count the chances of his own life, in what might follow. In full view of his great responsibility, he has, so far, done what he has deemed his duty. You will now, according to your own judgment, perform yours.”

To supplement what he had already done, Lincoln urged Congress to authorize the creation of a huge army and to appropriate enormous sums of money. He had concluded in the two months since his call for 42,000 volunteers that Confederate resistance would be more formidable than earlier anticipated. “It is now recommended that you give the legal means for making this contest a short, and a decisive one; that you place at the control of the government, for the work, at least four hundred thousand men, and four hundred millions of dollars. That number of men is about one tenth of those of proper ages within the regions where, apparently, all are willing to engage; and the sum is less than a twentythird part of the money value owned by the men who seem ready to devote the whole. A debt of six hundred millions of dollars now, is a less sum per head, than was the debt of our revolution, when we came out of that struggle; and the money value in the country now, bears even a greater proportion to what it was then, than does the population. Surely each man has as strong a motive now, to preserve our liberties, as each had then, to establish them. A right result, at this time, will be worth more to the world, than ten times the men, and ten times the money. The evidence reaching us from the country, leaves no doubt, that the material for the work is abundant; and that it needs only the hand of legislation to give it legal sanction, and the hand of the Executive to give it practical shape and efficiency. One of the greatest perplexities of the government, is to avoid receiving troops faster than it can provide for them. In a word, the people will save their government, if the government itself, will do its part, only indifferently well.”

As the message was read in the House, its members paid profound attention and frequently expressed their approval, especially at the call for 400,000 troops, which elicited loud, irrepressible, unrestrained applause from the congressmen as well as

spectators in the galleries.<sup>329</sup> “Hurrah for Uncle Abe!” shouted one soldier, to which another spectator burst out, “Bully for him!”<sup>330</sup> The speaker of the House shrilly called for order, but in vain.<sup>331</sup> Another passage received an especially favorable reception: “A right result, at this time, will be worth more to the world, than ten times the men, and ten times the money.”<sup>332</sup> The audience also liked the mention of the loyalty of enlisted men as opposed to officers.<sup>333</sup> The president’s analysis of the doctrine of secession, according to one report, “was so direct and ingenious and so saturated with traces of the President’s peculiar quaintness of humor, as to provoke more than once a general buzz of satisfied approval.”<sup>334</sup>

Most congressmen took a favorable view of the message, calling “very Lincolnish” with its “new ways of putting old questions,” “full of strong sense and irony,” “admirable for the times[,] the people & the occasion,” and predicting that it would be “very popular.”<sup>335</sup> In the upper chamber, the message was listened to in silence as a clerk read it in a low monotone. Occasionally one senator would whisper to another, “It’s too long,” or “What’s the point of going into that?” The consensus among them was

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<sup>329</sup> Washington correspondence, 5 July, New York Tribune, 6 July 1861; Washington correspondence, 5 July, New York Times, 6, 7 July 1861; Washington correspondence, 5 July, Cincinnati Commercial, 6 July 1861; Washington correspondence, 5 July, New York World, 6, 8 July 1861. The senate was more subdued in its response.

<sup>330</sup> Washington correspondence, 10 July, Chicago Evening Journal, 13 July 1861.

<sup>331</sup> James H. Campbell to his wife, Juliet Lewis Campbell, Washington, 5 July 1861, Campbell Papers, Schoff Civil War Collection, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>332</sup> Washington correspondence, 5 July, New York World, 8 July 1861.

<sup>333</sup> Washington correspondence, 5 July, Cincinnati Gazette, 6 July 1861.

<sup>334</sup> Washington correspondence by Sigma, 6 July, Cincinnati Commercial, 11 July 1861.

<sup>335</sup> Henry Winter Davis to Samuel Francis Du Pont, [Washington], [ca. 5 July 1861], transcript, S. F. Du Pont Papers, Hagley Museum, Wilmington, Delaware; James H. Campbell to his wife, Washington, 5 and 6 July 1861, Campbell Papers, Schoff Civil War Collection, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

“that the argumentative and historical parts of the message were unnecessary, but, as a Senator observed, the people had a right to know the facts of the case as they appeared to the mind of the Executive in making such propositions, and that nothing should be taken for granted or supposed to be known to those who were so materially interested in the result.”<sup>336</sup> At the mention of \$400,000,000 and 400,000 troops, pro-southern senators, like John C. Breckinridge of Kentucky and Trusten Polk of Missouri, “exchanged ominous glances” and shifted nervously in their seats.<sup>337</sup>

The document won widespread approval.<sup>338</sup> Henry Villard reported that among “the throng that daily now frequent the hotels and capitol, none is found (save the secession spies who abound here) who does not heartily endorse the patriotic message of the President.”<sup>339</sup> The New York Tribune praised its brevity and directness: “It gushes out from the earnest heart of the author, and goes straight to the hearts of the patriotic millions. Utterly devoid of rhetorical embellishment and official reserve, its positions will be comprehended and its arguments appreciated by every rational mind.”<sup>340</sup> The Providence Journal liked “its perfect plainness, its downright honesty, its unmistakable sincerity” and its “manly and straight-forward words.”<sup>341</sup> Benjamin Brown French pronounced it “the best, considering all things, that was ever sent to Congress. It goes as

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<sup>336</sup> Washington correspondence, 12 July, London Times, 29 July 1861.

<sup>337</sup> Washington correspondence, 8 July, National Antislavery Standard (New York), 13 July 1861.

<sup>338</sup> Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper, 13 July 1861; Washington correspondence by S., Ohio State Journal, 12 July 1861. A good example of favorable commentary is “The President’s Message in Philadelphia,” Philadelphia Press, 6 July 1861.

<sup>339</sup> Washington correspondence, 9 July, Cincinnati Commercial, n.d., copied in the Chicago Tribune, 15 July 1861.

<sup>340</sup> New York Tribune, 6 July.

<sup>341</sup> Providence Journal, 6 July 1861.

straight as a rifle ball to the mark, & without the least flourish, tells whole story of our troubles so that every man woman & child who can read it can understand.”<sup>342</sup>

Men of letters heaped praise on Lincoln’s message. George William Curtis, editor of Harper’s Weekly, called it “the most truly American message ever delivered. Think upon what a millennial year we have fallen when the President of the United States declares officially that this government is founded upon the rights of man! Wonderfully acute, simple, sagacious, and of antique honesty! I can forgive the jokes and the big hands, and the inability to make bows. Some of us who doubted were wrong.”<sup>343</sup> In Harper’s Weekly, Curtis was more formal but no less laudatory in his assessment: “While many Presidents of many parties would have endeavored to save the Government by force of arms, not all Presidents would so clearly comprehend or so simply state what the Government was that they were saving. This Government was founded upon the rights of man; and for the first time in long years the President recognizes that fact. Presidents’ messages for many years have been labored defenses of an oligarchical and aristocratic administration of the Government. At length there is a people’s President, in no mean sense; and the Government of the United States is restored to its original principles. It is not a matter of party, but of patriotic congratulation.”<sup>344</sup>

The Philadelphia author Sidney George Fisher called the message “simple, clear, positive,” “marked throughout by evident sincerity & truth,” “wholly free from egotism or desire to produce an effect,” “earnest & candid.” It demonstrated “remarkable power

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<sup>342</sup> Benjamin Brown French to Henry Flag French, Washington, 5 July 1861, French Family Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>343</sup> Curtis to John J. Pinkerton, North Shore, N.Y., 9 July 1861, in Edward Cary, George William Curtis (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1894), 147.

<sup>344</sup> Harper’s Weekly, 20 July 1861.



of thought & argument. The reflections are eminently just and the right of secession is treated in a manner at once clear, comprehensive and original.” Fisher thought Lincoln’s “style is not polished or graceful, but nervous, compact & clear, the utterance of strong convictions seeking expression. The whole production is pervaded by good feeling and loyal catholic spirit. In this hour of its trial, the country seems to have found in Mr. Lincoln a great man. I should judge that he has a clear head, a good heart, a strong will and high moral sentiment. Should he prove equal to the promise given by his [inaugural] speech, his message [to Congress] and his conduct thus far, he will be an unspeakable blessing to the nation.” Lincoln, thought Fisher, was “the best man we have had for President since Jno. Q. Adams, he is the man for this crisis, worth, in the strength of his mind and character & purity of purpose all the rest of the cabinet put together.”<sup>345</sup>

In late June, after Lincoln read the address to John Lothrop Motley, that eminent historian told his wife that “it impressed me very favourably. With the exception of a few expressions, it was not only highly commendable in spirit, but written with considerable untaught grace and power.”<sup>346</sup> (Motley found the president to be “a man of the most extraordinary conscientiousness. He seemed to have a window in his breast. There was something almost childlike in his absence of guile and affectation of any kind.”)<sup>347</sup>

Also laudatory was the New York World, which praised the message’s “homely and honest simplicity.” That style appealed to the public’s preference for “vigorous,

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<sup>345</sup> Nicholas B. Wainwright, ed., A Philadelphia Perspective: The Diary of Sidney George Fisher Covering the Years, 1834-1871 (Philadelphia: Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1967), 1:396, 410-11 (entries for 6 July, 5 December 1861).

<sup>346</sup> Motley to his wife, Woodland Hill, 23 June 1861, George William Curtis, ed., The Correspondence of John Lothrop Motley (2 vols.; New York: Harper & Brothers, 1889), 1:395.

<sup>347</sup> Motley to the duchess of Argyll, Vienna, Austria, 27 May 1865, Curtis, ed., Motley Correspondence, 2:203.

everyday common sense, quaint expression and shrewd mother wit” instead of “the pomp of artificial rhetoric.” The editors predicted that the message would “strengthen that confidence in Mr. Lincoln’s honesty and robust common sense, which causes the sturdy masses to feel that he is a man to lean against in a great emergency.”<sup>348</sup> The Ohio State Journal liked the message’s “blunt directness – its clearness of statement, and unaffected every-day diction, which is familiar without being undignified.”<sup>349</sup> Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper found it “remarkable for its directness and simplicity, for its grasp of the whole subject which now agitates the country, and for its ability in meeting the various subterfuges upon which the Secession leaders have based their action.”<sup>350</sup>

Not every reader regarded Lincoln’s style favorably. London papers declared that the president “writes like a half-educated lawyer, and thinks like a European sovereign,” and that his style was “[h]omely in language and somewhat apologetic in tone.”<sup>351</sup> Massachusetts Congressman Henry L. Dawes called the message “a queer document.” Though he admired its “excellent tone” as well as its “strong and pointed and pat argument,” nevertheless he found it disappointing as a “state paper to be read by the world as the authoritative statement at the Bar of History of the causes and consequences of the foulest and blackest and at the same time the most wide spread conspiracy to overthrow the greatest and best government in the world. It nowhere rises to the dignity and grandeur or sublimity of the theme.”<sup>352</sup> Some friendly newspapers objected that

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<sup>348</sup> New York World, 6 July 1861.

<sup>349</sup> Ohio State Journal (Columbus), 6 July 1861.

<sup>350</sup> Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper, 13 July 1861.

<sup>351</sup> London Spectator, 20 July 1861, copied in The Living Age (Boston), 24 August 1861; London Times, n.d., copied in the Boston Journal, 2 August 1861

<sup>352</sup> Dawes to his wife, Washington, 7 July 1861, Dawes Papers, Library of Congress.

“there is too much of the lawyer about it, and that it is too much marked by its special pleadings” and that excessive attention was devoted to Virginia’s actions and to the settled question of the constitutionality of secession.<sup>353</sup>

While the Illinois State Journal rejoiced to find “no ‘niggerism’” in the message (that is, no mention of slavery), Frederick Douglass regretted that omission. “Any one reading that document, with no previous knowledge of the United States, would never dream from any thing there written that we have a slaveholders war waged upon the Government,” Douglass complained.<sup>354</sup> At the other end of the political spectrum, some Democrats objected that the “necessity of circumstances placed in extenuation of the President’s guilt, is precisely the same plea put in by tyrants, despots, and usurpers of every age of the world.”<sup>355</sup> Kentucky Senator Lazarus Powell denied that there was any necessity for extra-constitutional action, arguing that there “never was a king, potentate or sovereign, when he was assuming powers that did not belong to him for the purpose of crushing the liberties of his people, who did not do it under the plea of ‘necessity.’”<sup>356</sup> Echoing this charge, an Ohio Democrat maintained that Lincoln “makes himself a perfect monarch. I would see him d[amne]d before I would by my official vote legalize his unconstitutional acts.”<sup>357</sup> Other Democrats protested against Lincoln’s statement that government should lift “artificial weights” from the shoulders of all men, for that implied

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<sup>353</sup> Philadelphia Daily News, New York Times, 6 July 1861.

<sup>354</sup> Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 9 July 1861; Douglass’ Monthly 4 (August 1861): 497.

<sup>355</sup> Dubuque, Iowa, Herald, 10 July 1861, quoted in Hubbell, “Northern Democracy and the Crisis of Disunion,” 242. The Cincinnati Enquirer and the Albany Atlas and Argus made similar criticisms. Ibid., 242-44.

<sup>356</sup> Congressional Globe, 37<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> session, 68 (11 July 1861).

<sup>357</sup> William Parr to S. S. Cox, Linville, Ohio, 9 July 1861, Cox Papers, Brown University.

that the shackles of slaves ought to be struck off.<sup>358</sup> The Southern press condemned the message as the work of an “old perjurer,” a “Usurper,” and a “vulgar savage who seems to be making desperate efforts to imitate the Neros and Caligulas of old.”<sup>359</sup>

#### CONGRESS IN SESSION: DEALING WITH THE CRISIS

Missing from the new Congress that assembled on July 4 were members from the seceded states, with the notable exception of Tennessee Senator Andrew Johnson. Thus the Republicans were able to dominate both houses by substantial majorities (106-42 in the House, 31-14 in the Senate).<sup>360</sup> Their party was divided into radicals, moderates, and conservatives, who in time would clash, but not at this special session.<sup>361</sup>

Congress agreed to deal with only military, financial, judicial, and naval matters and to postpone all other business till the regular session in December.<sup>362</sup> As Wisconsin Senator Timothy O. Howe put it, the “resolution seems to be universal to do nothing more than the special occasion demands & to do that speedily – to use few words & no palaver – to clothe the President with the utmost potentiality of this great people, and

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<sup>358</sup> Chicago Times, n.d., copied in the Illinois State Register (Springfield), 9 July 1861.

<sup>359</sup> New Orleans Bulletin, 8 July 1861, copied in the Providence Journal, 17 July 1861.

<sup>360</sup> Bogue, Congressman’s Civil War, xiv; Allan G. Bogue, The Earnest Men: Republicans of the Civil War Senate (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981); Leonard P. Curry, Blueprint for Modern America: Non-military Legislation of the First Civil War Congress (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1968), 10-17. In the House were also twenty-eight self-styled Unionists, mostly from the Border States.

<sup>361</sup> Bogue, Congressman’s Civil War, 132-41.

<sup>362</sup> William S. Holman’s resolution to this effect was adopted on July 8. Curry, Blueprint for Modern America, 36-37n.

command him to see that the ‘Republic receives no detriment.’”<sup>363</sup> Lyman Trumbull accurately predicted that “[m]en & money will be voted without stint.”<sup>364</sup>

Also missing was Stephen A. Douglas, who on June 3 died at the age of forty-eight after heroically exerting himself to rally Northern Democrats in support of the war effort. The pro-Union speeches he gave in Illinois and elsewhere taxed his waning strength and helped bring on his premature demise, which created a vacuum in the leadership ranks of the Northern Democracy. That gap would eventually be filled by less enthusiastic supporters of the Union cause like New York Governor Horatio Seymour, Senators James A. Bayard of Delaware and Jesse D. Bright of Indiana, former governor Thomas H. Seymour of Connecticut, and three Ohio congressmen: Clement L. Vallandigham, Alexander Long, and Samuel S. (“Sunset”) Cox. They and their allies made Lincoln’s job far more difficult than it would have been had Douglas lived.<sup>365</sup> In the emergency summer session, however, Democrats agreed to support the war effort and not to obstruct the work of the session.<sup>366</sup>

Congress obliged Lincoln by retroactively approving all his emergency measures except the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus. (The House and the senate waited until March 1863 to ratify that controversial step. Some Republicans hesitated to vote for

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<sup>363</sup> Howe to Horace Rublee, Washington, 3 July 1861, Howe Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society. William P. Fessenden made a similar prediction. Fessenden to his father, Washington, 26 June 1861, Fessenden Papers, Bowdoin College.

<sup>364</sup> Lyman Trumbull to his wife Julia, Washington, 14 July 1861, Trumbull Family Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

<sup>365</sup> Richard Curry, “Congressional Democrats – 1861-1863” Civil War History 12 (1966): 213-29; Joanna D. Cowden, “Heaven Will Frown on Such a Cause as This”: Six Democrats who Opposed Lincoln’s War (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2001); Jennifer L. Weber, Copperheads: The Rise and Fall of Lincoln’s Opponents in the North (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>366</sup> Bogue, Congressman’s Civil War, 122.

such a bill lest by so doing they might imply that the president had no power to suspend habeas corpus without congressional approval.)<sup>367</sup> Among the seventy-six statutes the lawmakers passed before adjournment on August 6 were acts authorizing the enlistment of 500,000 volunteers for three years as well as the expansion of both the regular army and the navy; providing military leaders with larger staffs; enlarging the war department; and empowering the treasury department to borrow \$250,000,000, which would supplement the money raised by increased import duties and taxes (\$20,000,000 of direct levies on the states and territories and an income tax).<sup>368</sup>

Some members shared the uneasiness that Iowa Senator James W. Grimes expressed before Congress met. He told a fellow senator that “we are about to encourage precedents that will be very dangerous to the rights of the States & to the liberties of the people.” Grimes called Lincoln’s decision to expand the regular army by ten regiments “the most extraordinary assumption of power than any President has attempted to exercise.” With trepidation he asked: “Where is this thing to stop?”<sup>369</sup>

In late July, Congress overwhelmingly approved John J. Crittenden’s resolution stating that the war which “has been forced upon the country by the disunionists of the southern States” is not being waged “in any spirit of oppression, or for any purpose of conquest or subjugation, or purpose of overthrowing or interfering with the rights or

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<sup>367</sup> Randall, Constitutional Problems, 128-31; Senator James W. Grimes of Iowa to an unidentified correspondent, copied in the New York Evening Post, n.d., clipping enclosed in O. J. Victor to John Sherman, Burlington, Iowa, 16 September 1861, Sherman Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>368</sup> Heather Cox Richardson, The Greatest Nation of the Earth: Republican Economic Policies during the Civil War (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 103-15.

<sup>369</sup> James W. Grimes to William P. Fessenden, Washington, [day not indicated] May 1861, copy, Fessenden Papers, Bowdoin College.

established institutions of those States.” The aim of the war was “to defend and maintain the supremacy of the Constitution, and to preserve the Union with all the dignity, equality, and rights of the several States unimpaired.” Although some interpreted the resolution as a declaration that slavery would not be affected by the war, in fact the peculiar institution was not mentioned in the text and no promise was made to safeguard all “established institutions.” Slavery might be abolished as a byproduct of hostilities even if abolition was not a war aim.<sup>370</sup> On August 4, in the presence of Crittenden, Lincoln assured Kentucky Congressman Robert Mallory that “this war, so far as I have anything to do with it, is carried on on the idea that there is a Union sentiment in those States, which, set free from the control now held over it by the presence of the Confederate or rebel power, will be sufficient to replace those States in the Union.”<sup>371</sup>

By a much narrower margin, Congress also passed a confiscation act, seizing property (including the labor of slaves) employed by Confederates in direct support of military operations. It did not fully liberate bondsmen, but represented a step on the path to emancipation.<sup>372</sup> Despite its limited nature, the law cheered some Radicals, including Thomas Wentworth Higginson, who said he was “satisfied that we are gravitating towards a bolder anti-slavery policy. The desideratum is to approach a policy of

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<sup>370</sup> Herman Belz, Reconstructing the Union: Theory and Policy during the Civil War (Ithaca, N.Y.: published for the American Historical Association by the Cornell University Press, 1969), 24-28.

<sup>371</sup> New York Daily News, 12 July 1864.

<sup>372</sup> John Syrett, “The Confiscation Acts: Efforts at Reconstruction during the Civil War” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1971), 1-19; Silvana R. Siddali, From Property to Person: Slavery and the Confiscation Acts, 1861-1862 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 70-94; Richardson, Greatest Nation, 209-14; Curry, Blueprint, 75-78.

emancipation by stages so clear & irresistible as to retain for that end a united public sentiment.”<sup>373</sup>

Lincoln was less enthusiastic about the Confiscation Act. Believing that it might violate the Constitution’s Fifth Amendment provision that “no person shall be held to answer for a capital, or otherwise infamous crime, unless on a presentment or indictment of a grand jury, except in cases arising in the land or naval, forces, or in the militia, when in actual service in time of war or public danger” as well as Article 3, Section 3 (“no attainder of treason shall work corruption of blood, or forfeiture, except during the life of the person attainted”), he hesitated to approve the legislation. According to James G. Blaine, he believed it was too early for such a step and that the bill would be a mere empty threat which would alienate the Border States. He allegedly exclaimed that “it will lose us Kentucky!” Lincoln was reluctant, however, to veto the bill lest that action be understood to mean that the rebels might have “full benefit of the slave population as a military force.”<sup>374</sup> Finally, he signed the statute after prominent senators urgently lobbied him, but he did little to enforce it.<sup>375</sup> A Kansan expressed dismay at Lincoln’s reluctance to sign legislation confiscating “the horse and the sword of an officer taken prisoner and

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<sup>373</sup> Higginson to Louisa Higginson, 23 August 1861, Mary Thacher Higginson, ed., Letters and Journals of Thomas Wentworth Higginson, 1846-1906 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1921), 157-58.

<sup>374</sup> “Mr. Lincoln as a Politician,” Springfield (Massachusetts) Republican, 16 October 1861; James G. Blaine, Twenty Years of Congress: From Lincoln to Garfield (2 vols.; Norwich, Conn.: Henry Bill, 1884-86), 1:343.

<sup>375</sup> Syrett, “Confiscation Acts,” 93-98; Allen C. Guelzo, Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation: The End of Slavery in America (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 42; New York Times, 7 August 1861.



also his servant if found to have been engaged in the war. Other nations confiscate all the property of Rebels.”<sup>376</sup>

The lawmakers also established a pair of special investigating committees. One, under the chairmanship of Wisconsin Congressman John F. Potter, looked into disloyalty among government employees.<sup>377</sup> Many Southerners had been appointed to office during the previous two administrations, and legitimate concerns were raised about their devotion to the Union. Unfortunately, Potter’s committee pursued its mission clumsily, violating due process in denouncing men who were then fired. Charges were often falsely made by those who hungered for the jobs held by the accused.<sup>378</sup> When told that a prospective appointee sympathized with the Confederacy, Lincoln replied that if office seekers thought they could obtain the presidency itself, they would “before night prove [him] the vilest secessionist in the country.”<sup>379</sup> One night two callers warned him that a cabal of government employees planned to communicate with the nearby Confederate army. He asked what should be done. They replied that the suspects should be fired. “Ah, gentlemen,” he interrupted, “I see it is the same old, old coon; why could you not tell me at once you wanted an office, and save your own time as well as mine?”<sup>380</sup>

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<sup>376</sup> John B. Wood to Lyman Trumbull, Lawrence, Kansas, 26 August 1861, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>377</sup> On the Potter Committee, see Harold Hyman, Era of the Oath (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1954), 1-8.

<sup>378</sup> John Hay, perhaps reflecting Lincoln’s opinion, thought so. See Washington correspondence by Hay, 11 October, Missouri Republican (St. Louis), 15 October 1861, in Burlingame, ed., Lincoln’s Journalist, 107-8.

<sup>379</sup> Washington correspondence by Rolla, n.d., Cleveland Plain Dealer, 29 November 1861.

<sup>380</sup> Washington correspondence by Edward Dicey, n.d., London Spectator, n.d., quoted in Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper, 17 May 1862.

Another committee was set up under the leadership of Charles H. Van Wyck of New York to scrutinize government contracts. Though it did uncover fraud, the committee was highly controversial.<sup>381</sup> When it criticized Ward Hill Lamon, Simon Cameron, and Gideon Welles, among others, John Hay denounced it as “an absurd fiasco” employed “chiefly as an engine to ventilate personal animosities and prejudices existing in the minds of the incorruptible committeemen against better people.”<sup>382</sup> Lincoln complained that its most active member, Henry L. Dawes of Massachusetts, had “done more to break down the administration than any other man in the country.”<sup>383</sup> (In mid-January, Dawes publicly charged that “there had been more money stolen from the Treasury during the first year of Mr. Lincoln’s administration than it had cost to carry on the whole government during the entire term of Mr. Buchanan’s administration.” This utterance, Dawes told his wife, created “the awfulest hubbub you ever saw.” Even friends like Senator Henry Wilson were “down on it.”)<sup>384</sup> Leading Radicals in Congress, including Charles Sumner, Thaddeus Stevens, and Henry Wilson, shared the president’s dim view of Dawes and the Contracts Committee.<sup>385</sup>

That body may have embarrassed the administration, but it conscientiously investigated misfeasance and malfeasance in the daunting task of raising and equipping a

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<sup>381</sup> For an overview of the committee’s work, see in Fred Nicklason, “The Civil War Contracts Committee,” Civil War History 17 (1971): 232-44.

<sup>382</sup> Washington correspondence by Hay, 6 January, Missouri Republican (St. Louis), 10 January 1862, in Burlingame, ed., Lincoln’s Journalist, 188.

<sup>383</sup> Washington correspondence by Van [D. W. Bartlett], 5 February, Springfield (Massachusetts) Republican, 8 February 1862. The source for this was evidently Henry Wilson. That senator told someone called “Buffington” of Lincoln’s remarks, and Buffington told Dawes. Henry L. Dawes to his wife, Washington, 13 February 1862, Dawes Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>384</sup> Henry L. Dawes to his wife, Washington, 17 January 1862, Dawes Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>385</sup> Nicklason, “Civil War Contracts Committee,” 232-44.

500,000-man army and navy. Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles had unwisely authorized his brother-in-law, George D. Morgan, to purchase ships for the service on a commission basis rather than for a flat fee. While ship brokers claimed that they could have done the job for \$5000, Morgan's 1861 commissions totaled over \$70,000. Morgan committed no fraud, but it seemed obvious that the government had spent far too much for his services.<sup>386</sup> In Boston, John Murray Forbes did for free what Morgan did for a 2.5% commission. In addition to taking criticism for Morgan's contract, Welles was denounced as "a miracle of inefficiency" and blamed for the loss of important vessels when Confederates seized the Norfolk shipyard.<sup>387</sup>

While the House defeated a motion censuring Welles, the lawmakers did censure Simon Cameron, whose incapacity, carelessness, and inefficiency significantly harmed the war effort.<sup>388</sup> Cameron's assistant secretary of war, Alexander Cummings, and his personal secretary thought that their boss was a failure and that the war department was "in most hideous disorganization which it will take years to right."<sup>389</sup>

Lincoln was widely denounced for keeping Welles and Cameron on.<sup>390</sup> The country was "disgraced by the astounding frauds in the Army & Navy both" and "looks

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<sup>386</sup> Richard H. Sewell, John P. Hale and the Politics of Abolition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), 200-6.

<sup>387</sup> Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, 1 February 1862; Manton Marble to Martin B. Anderson, New York, 11 June 1861, Anderson Papers, University of Rochester.

<sup>388</sup> Nevins, War for the Union, 1:227.

<sup>389</sup> Manton Marble to Martin B. Anderson, New York, 1 August 1861, Anderson Papers, University of Rochester.

<sup>390</sup> Boston Transcript, 19 August, copied in the Cincinnati Commercial, 24 August 1861; Washington correspondence, 27 August, Chicago Tribune, 28 August 1861; Frankfort, Kentucky, Commonwealth, 26 August, copied in the Cincinnati Commercial, 28 August 1861; New York World and Herald, n.d., copied in the Illinois State Register (Springfield), 23 August 1861.

upon the authorities at Washington as corrupt as Buchanan’s administration,” according to Lincoln’s friend William M. Dickson.<sup>391</sup> A New Yorker complained that the president’s “retention and sanction of Cameron & Well[e]s & all their transactions already causes an apprehension that he is also corrupt or what is worse that he is weak & under the control of Jobbers & Contractors.” Nothing could save Lincoln “but the manifestation of a Jackson courage to extricate himself from the corrupt & selfish men by which he is surrounded.”<sup>392</sup> Another New Yorker informed Lincoln that “it is universally believed that Cameron is a thief– All men believe you, upright – but know you lack experience and fear you lack nerve.”<sup>393</sup> The National Anti-Slavery Standard lamented that the country had “a weak but honest President, and a Cabinet made up principally of fourth-rate men.”<sup>394</sup> In Boston and New York, influential Republicans launched a concerted effort to replace Caleb B. Smith, Cameron and Welles with Nathaniel P. Banks, John A. Dix, and Joseph Holt. Their efforts enjoyed the approval of Charles Eliot Norton, who thought that the “inefficiency of the President & the Cabinet are our greatest present danger.” Rhetorically Norton asked: “Must we be content with feebleness where strength is needed, with mean[n]ess for magnanimity, and cowardice for courage?”<sup>395</sup>

## WAR IN EARNEST: EARLY SKIRMISHES AND BULL RUN

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<sup>391</sup> William M. Dickson to Friedrich Hassaurek, Cincinnati, 25 December 1861, Hassaurek Papers, Ohio Historical Society.

<sup>392</sup> A. Mann Jr. to E. B. Washburne, New York, 1 May 1862, Washburne Papers, Library of Congress; A. Mann Jr. to Lyman Trumbull, New York, 18 January 1862, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>393</sup> John P. Crawford to Lincoln, New York, 10 August 1861, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>394</sup> Washington correspondence, 26 August, National Anti-Slavery Standard (New York), 31 August 1861.

<sup>395</sup> Charles Eliot Norton to Henry W. Bellows, Newport, 25 August 1861, Henry W. Bellows Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

As Congress debated, legislated, and investigated, the administration made and executed war plans. A week after Sumter fell, James A. Hamilton asked Lincoln if he proposed to launch an offensive soon. “I intend to give blows,” he replied. “The only question at present is, whether I should first retake Fort Sumter or Harpers Ferry.”<sup>396</sup> He authorized Hamilton to say publicly that the president “is determined to prosecute the war . . . with all the energy necessary to bring it to a successful termination. He will call for a large additional force, relying upon Providence and the loyalty of the people.”<sup>397</sup> Lincoln described his strategy more fully to John Hay on April 25: “I intend at present, always leaving an opportunity for change of mind, to fill Fortress Monroe with men and stores: blockade the ports effectually: provide for the entire safety of the Capitol: keep them quietly employed in this way, and then go down to Charleston and pay her the little debt we are owing.”<sup>398</sup> Fort Monroe, located at the mouth of the James River, was quickly reinforced with 15,000 men. But Lincoln withheld military action against Virginia until that state’s electorate officially ratified the ordinance of secession, which it did on May 23 by a three-to-one margin. Even before that vote was taken, Virginians had been openly aiding the rebellion. As the president noted in his July 4 message to Congress, they had “seized the United States Armory at Harper’s Ferry, and the Navy-yard at Gosport, near Norfolk. They received – perhaps invited – into their state, large bodies of troops, with their warlike appointments, from the so-called seceded States. They formally entered into a treaty of temporary alliance, and co-operation with the so-called ‘Confederate States,’ and sent members to their Congress at Montgomery. And, finally, they permitted the

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<sup>396</sup> James A. Hamilton, Reminiscences of James A. Hamilton; or, Men and Events, At Home and Abroad, during Three Quarters of a Century (New York: C. Scribner, 1869), 477.

<sup>397</sup> New York Evening Post, 29 April 1861.

<sup>398</sup> Burlingame and Ettlinger, eds., Hay Diary, 11 (entry for 25 April 1861).

insurrectionary government to be transferred to their capital at Richmond. The people of Virginia have thus allowed this giant insurrection to make its nest within her borders; and this government has no choice left but to deal with it, where it finds it.”<sup>399</sup>

Montgomery Blair urged an immediate attack on the Confederates, but General Scott and Montgomery Meigs argued against a precipitate offensive because the troops were woefully ill-prepared.<sup>400</sup> Lincoln accepted their advice, though he did authorize a mission to secure Alexandria.<sup>401</sup> When one of Lincoln’s favorite surrogate sons, Colonel Elmer E. Ellsworth, asked to serve in the vanguard of that expedition, the president “replied that the first movement on Southern soil was one of great delicacy. Much depended thereon. He desired to avoid all violence. The people of Virginia were not in a mass disloyal and he wanted nothing to occur that might incense them against the government, but rather wished to so conduct the movement that it would win them over.”<sup>402</sup> On May 24, federal troops crossed the Potomac and occupied Alexandria without opposition, though Ellsworth took umbrage at the Confederate flag flying atop a hotel. (Visible from the White House, that flag had been an irritant to Lincoln and his cabinet. Two weeks earlier Chase said “very emphatically” that “if I had my way yesterday that Flag wouldn’t be there this morning.”)<sup>403</sup> Impetuously the young officer dashed into the offending hostelry, clambered up the stairs to the roof, and hauled down the secessionist ensign. As he descended, Ellsworth encountered the hotel proprietor, who

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<sup>399</sup> Message to Congress, 4 July 1861, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:427.

<sup>400</sup> Montgomery Blair to Lincoln, Washington, 16 May 1861, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>401</sup> Meigs diary, 15 May 1861, copy, Nicolay Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>402</sup> Frank E. Brownell, “Ellsworth’s Career,” Philadelphia Weekly Times, 18 June 1881.

<sup>403</sup> W. W. Orme to David Davis, Washington, 11 May 1861, David Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

shot him dead. News of his murder shocked Northerners and devastated Lincoln, who “mourned him as a son.”<sup>404</sup> Upon learning of Ellsworth’s death, the president burst into tears, telling some White House callers: “Excuse me, but I cannot talk.” After regaining his composure, he said: “I will make no apology, gentlemen, for my weakness; but I knew poor Ellsworth well, and held him in great regard. Just as you entered the room, Captain Fox left me, after giving me the painful details of Ellsworth’s unfortunate death. The event was so unexpected, and the recital so touching, that it quite unmanned me. . . . Poor fellow! It was undoubtedly an act of rashness, but it only shows the heroic spirit that animates our soldiers, from high to low, in this righteous cause of ours. Yet who can restrain their grief to see them fall in such a way as this; not by the fortunes of war, but by the hand of an assassin.”<sup>405</sup> According to an account written many years later, the tearful president also said: “so this is the beginning – murder! Ah, my friends, what shall the end of all this be?”<sup>406</sup> In reply to a congressman who found consolation in the fact that the U.S. flag now waved over the Alexandria hotel, Lincoln exclaimed with tears in his eyes: “Yes, but it was at a terrible cost!”<sup>407</sup> Ellsworth’s body was taken to the Navy Yard, where the president and his wife “gazed long and tearfully on the still face which had so often brought sunshine with it, into the Executive Mansion.”<sup>408</sup> Finally, Lincoln

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<sup>404</sup> John Hay, “A Young Hero,” New York World, 16 February 1890.

<sup>405</sup> Washington correspondence, 24 May, New York Tribune and New York Herald, 25 May 1861.

<sup>406</sup> The source of this version was “a veteran Union officer, who knew Mr. Lincoln intimately, and whose position, at first in the War Department, and later in the field, was such that he often came into personal contact with the great President.” “Stories of Lincoln,” New York Mail and Express, 11 February 1899, p. 11.

<sup>407</sup> John A. Kasson in Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln, 36.

<sup>408</sup> Hay, obituary of Ellsworth, Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 3 June 1861, in Burlingame, ed., Lincoln's Journalist, 70.

exclaimed: “My boy! My boy! Was it necessary that this sacrifice should be made?”<sup>409</sup>

The body was removed to the White House, where the funeral service was held on the following day.

The president had an “almost fatherly affection” for Ellsworth and the relation between them was “like that of knight and squire of the age of chivalry.”<sup>410</sup> John Hay remarked that “Lincoln loved him like a younger brother.”<sup>411</sup> The president may have identified with Ellsworth, an ambitious, self-educated poor boy, too proud to accept favors, alienated from his father (who expected the son to support him financially), with a sensitive conscience, a paternal streak, and a wealth of compassion and generosity. In 1860, he had worked in the Lincoln-Herndon law office, ostensibly as a student, but he spent most of his time on the campaign trail stumping for the Republican ticket.<sup>412</sup>

To Ellsworth’s parents Lincoln extended heartfelt sympathy. “In the untimely loss of your noble son,” he wrote them the day after their son’s assassination, “our affliction here, is scarcely less than your own. So much of promised usefulness to one’s country, and of bright hopes for one’s self and friends, have rarely been so suddenly dashed, as in his fall. In size, in years, and in youthful appearance, a boy only, his power to command men, was surpassingly great. This power, combined with a fine intellect, an indomitable energy, and a taste altogether military, constituted in him, as seemed to me, the best natural talent, in that department, I ever knew. And yet he was singularly modest and

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<sup>409</sup> Frank Brownell, quoted in Frank G. Carpenter, “Col. Ellsworth,” Washington correspondence, 25 May, Los Angeles Times, 4 June 1887; St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 24 May 1901.

<sup>410</sup> Henry Clay Whitney, Life of Lincoln (2 vols.; New York: Baker & Taylor, 1908), 2:87-88.

<sup>411</sup> [Hay], “Ellsworth, Atlantic Monthly, July 1861, 124.

<sup>412</sup> Ruth Painter Randall, Colonel Elmer Ellsworth: A Biography of Lincoln’s Friend and First Hero of the Civil War (Boston: Little, Brown, 1960), passim.



deferential in social intercourse. My acquaintance with him began less than two years ago; yet through the latter half of the intervening period, it was as intimate as the disparity of our ages, and my engrossing engagements, would permit. To me, he appeared to have no indulgences or pastimes; and I never heard him utter a profane, or an intemperate word. What was conclusive of his good heart, he never forgot his parents. The honors he labored for so laudably, and, in the sad end, so gallantly gave his life, he meant for them, no less than for himself.”<sup>413</sup>

The widespread indignation at Ellsworth’s murder helped swell the enlistment rolls. Though Lincoln had called for only 42,000 volunteers, by July 1 over 200,000 had joined up.<sup>414</sup>

In addition to occupying Alexandria, federal troops seized Arlington Heights overlooking Washington, where Robert E. Lee’s mansion was located. Attention then shifted to Harper’s Ferry, where fewer than 10,000 Confederates under Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston had assembled. Sixty-nine-year-old General Robert Patterson, who had served as Winfield Scott’s second-in-command during the Mexican War, was selected to lead the expedition against them. With a force of 17,000, Patterson approached the town in mid-June, causing Johnston to retreat to Winchester. When urged to pursue the Confederates, the indecisive, fearful Patterson, whose troops called him “Granny,” balked.

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<sup>413</sup> Lincoln to Ephraim and Phoebe Ellsworth, Washington, 25 May 1861, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:385-86. The concluding lines of this letter seem to have been written by John Hay, who was extremely close to Ellsworth: “In the hope that it may be no intrusion upon the sacredness of your sorrow, I have ventured to address you this tribute to the memory of my young friend, and your brave and early fallen child. May God give you that consolation which is beyond all earthly power.”

<sup>414</sup> Williams, Lincoln Finds a General, 2:794.

Further west in Virginia, Union forces proved more aggressive. In early June, they routed Confederates at Phillipi in a minor skirmish that became known as “the Phillipi races.” A month thereafter at Rich Mountain and Corrick’s Ford, 12,000 troops under the leadership of George B. McClellan, Thomas A. Morris, and William S. Rosecrans defeated Confederate forces led by Robert S. Garnett, who on July 13 became the first general killed in the war. McClellan received most of the credit for these minor victories, though Rosecrans deserved much of it. Union successes boosted Northern morale and paved the way for western Virginia to break away from the Old Dominion and establish itself as a new state.

These small-scale engagements whetted the appetite of the Northern public, which desired its legions to attack the Confederate capital. Remarking on the overwhelmingly positive Northern response to the president’s April 15 proclamation, Harper’s Weekly declared that with “such support, and such resources, if this war is not brought to a speedy close, and the supremacy of the Government asserted throughout the country, it will be the fault of Abraham Lincoln.”<sup>415</sup> When the impatient New York Times suggested that the president be replaced, Lincoln “spoke amusedly” of the paper’s editorial “and said that the Government had three things to do: defend Washington: Blockade the Ports: and retake Government property. All possible dispatch was to be used in these matters & it w[oul]d be well if the people would cordially assist in this work, before clamoring for more.”<sup>416</sup> In early May, several Northern governors met at Cleveland and warned the administration that “there is a spirit evoked by this rebellion

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<sup>415</sup> Harper’s Weekly, 4 May 1861.

<sup>416</sup> “A Startling Report,” New York Times, 24 April 1861; Burlingame and Ettlinger, eds., Hay Diary, 16 (entry for 1 May 1861).

among the liberty loving people of the country, that is drawing them to action, and if the Government will not permit them to act for it, they will act for themselves.”<sup>417</sup> Cabinet members also chafed at the inaction. Montgomery Blair denounced “the dilatory policy of the Administration,” and Chase lamented that Lincoln had “merely the general notion of drift, the Micawber policy of waiting for something to turn up.”<sup>418</sup> One cabinet member (perhaps Chase) believed that General Scott did not have “any plan of advance” but rather assumed “that the rebel force would soon melt away of itself.”<sup>419</sup> Chase’s friend Murat Halstead of the Cincinnati Commercial groused to former Ohio Congressman Timothy C. Day that “there could not be a more inefficient man President of the United States than A. Lincoln. He is of no earthly or possible account.”<sup>420</sup> Day replied that “the generous uprising of our people in behalf of the Republic is being chilled by the fast spreading idea, that a good cause is in incompetent hands.”<sup>421</sup> Congress was “intensely wrought up to a vigorous prosecution of the war,” and members were growing “suspicious that rail-splitting is not the highest qualification for Chief Magistrate.”<sup>422</sup> Senator Henry Wilson called at the White House with a delegation of Radicals and told the president: “we saved you from an attack by the secessionists, but you are menaced by an even greater danger from the North. One retrograde step or even a moment’s

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<sup>417</sup> Alexander K. Randall to Lincoln, 6 May 1861, OR, III, 1:190; William B. Hesseltine and H. C. Wolf, “The Cleveland Conference of 1861,” Ohio Archaeological and Historical Quarterly 56 (1947): 258-65.

<sup>418</sup> Henry L. Dawes to his wife, Washington, 15 July 1861, Dawes Papers, Library of Congress; Chase to Alphonso Taft, Washington, 28 April 1861, John Niven, ed., The Salmon P. Chase Papers (5 vols.; Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1993-1998), 3:63.

<sup>419</sup> William P. Fessenden to his father, Washington, 26 June 1861, Fessenden Papers, Bowdoin College.

<sup>420</sup> Halstead to Timothy C. Day, Washington, 11 June 1861, in Sarah J. Day, The Man on a Hill Top (Philadelphia: Ware Brothers, 1931), 245.

<sup>421</sup> Timothy C. Day to Murat Halstead, Cincinnati, 13 June 1861, Halstead Papers, Cincinnati Historical Society.

<sup>422</sup> Henry L. Dawes to his wife, Washington, 15 July 1861, Dawes Papers, Library of Congress; William P. Fessenden to Elizabeth Warriner, Washington, 7 July 1861, Fessenden Papers, Bowdoin College.

hesitation and you will be lost.”<sup>423</sup> The Republican congressional caucus narrowly defeated Lyman Trumbull’s resolution demanding that the army seize Richmond before July 21.<sup>424</sup> At that meeting, Senator Wade “was loud, furious and impudent, denouncing everybody civil & military as incompetent or treacherous.”<sup>425</sup> The New York Times exclaimed “Action! Action! is the watchword.” An army of 25,000 should capture Richmond within sixty days!<sup>426</sup> “We want war,” cried the Indianapolis Journal, “swift and overwhelming. The more terrible the war is made, the shorter it will be, and the more humane the policy. Let not the President suppose that the loyal North desires the war cloud to be gently and gradually discharged of its electricity.”<sup>427</sup> “Forward to Richmond! Forward to Richmond!” trumpeted the influential New York Tribune, whose impetuous editor, Horace Greeley, “thought the world might be reformed in a day – in his day.” The Confederate Congress should be prevented from meeting in the Virginia capital on July 20 as planned, insisted the Tribune. “By that date the place must be held by the national army!”<sup>428</sup>

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<sup>423</sup> Edouard de Stoeckl to Alexander Gortchakov, Washington, 6 May 1861, dispatch 30, photocopy, Principal Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Russian Reproductions, Papers of the Foreign Copying Project, Library of Congress; Albert A. Woldman, Lincoln and the Russians (Cleveland: World, 1952), 61.

<sup>424</sup> Lyman Trumbull to his wife Julia, Washington, 16 July 1861, Trumbull Family Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. The caucus failed to adopt it “on the ground that such a resolutions was unnecessary as the army was about to advance, & because it would imply a censure on the commanding Gen.”

<sup>425</sup> William P. Fessenden to J. S. Pike, Portland, Maine, 8 September 1861, Pike Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>426</sup> New York Times, April 18, 20, 21, 22. See also “The Crisis and the Responsibility,” New York Times, 30 April 1861.

<sup>427</sup> Indianapolis Journal, 1 May 1861.

<sup>428</sup> “The Nation’s War Cry,” New York Tribune, 26 June 1861; Beman Brockway, Fifty Years in Journalism, Embracing Recollections and Personal Experiences with an Autobiography (2 vols.; Watertown, N.Y.: Daily Times, 1891), 1:152-53.

Vexed by Greeley's hectoring, Lincoln asked the Washington bureau chief of the Tribune: "What in the world is the matter with Uncle Horace? Why can't he restrain himself and wait a little?" When reminded that Greeley did not write every editorial, the president replied: "Well, I don't suppose I have any right to complain; uncle Horace agrees with me pretty often after all; I reckon he is with us at least four days out of seven."<sup>429</sup> On April 27, when his old friend George T. M. Davis, representing the New York Union Defence Committee, said that "a speedy termination should be made of the rebellion . . . by decisive and energetic action," the president calmly replied that the committee had been given all the information that it wanted, that Baltimore was under control, that Scott was capably supervising military affairs, and that the committee should be more patient and not agitate for "any excess of action." He assured the New Yorkers that the administration was "determined to act with all the dispatch and decision" within its power, yet it "would at the same time as strenuously avoid everything like a spirit of revenge toward the South."<sup>430</sup> Senator William P. Fessenden thought that Lincoln doubted the wisdom of Scott's plan "but shrinks from the responsibility of overruling him, on account of his great name, and his hold on the country."<sup>431</sup> (Fessenden believed that Scott was behind the times and should have seized Manassas when Alexandria was occupied in late May.)<sup>432</sup>

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<sup>429</sup> The journalist A. Homer Byington told this to W. A. Croffut. William A. Croffut, An American Procession, 1855-1914: A Personal Chronicle of Famous Men (Boston: Little, Brown, 1931), 123.

<sup>430</sup> George T. M. Davis to Prosper M. Wetmore, New York, 1 May 1861, in Stevens, Union Defence Committee, 153-55.

<sup>431</sup> William P. Fessenden to his father, Washington, 26 June 1861, Fessenden Papers, Bowdoin College.

<sup>432</sup> William P. Fessenden to J. S. Pike, Portland, Maine, 8 September 1861, Pike Papers, Library of Congress.

Meanwhile, the general-in-chief had been formulating strategy without consulting the president. “Scott will not let us outsiders know anything of his plans,” Lincoln observed on June 17.<sup>433</sup> But the previous month, Old Fuss and Feathers had outlined to McClellan a scheme which became known as the “Anaconda Plan.” The Confederacy, he recommended, should be encircled and crushed through the combined effects of a stringent blockade and a “powerful movement down the Mississippi” by an 80,000-man army, whose goal would be the capture of New Orleans; thus girdled, the rebellion could be squeezed to death. Before marching southward, troops should have at least four months’ training. This strategy, based on Scott’s experience in the Mexican War and on the writings of European military theorists, encountered what the general called “the impatience of our patriotic and loyal Union friends.” Since it contemplated no forward movement in Virginia and relied heavily on an upsurge of Southern Unionism, it was considered too passive and unrealistic.<sup>434</sup> Scott described this approach to several people, among them Schuyler Colfax, who thought it “grand, but too slow to suit our Western enthusiasm. He gets up the most magnificent plans of a campaign I have ever seen – but he ignores political necessities – such as the need of instant occupation of Memphis &c, though he said he would try to accelerate the movement thus far if possible. He needs some dashing Young American to be by his side constantly, & while Scott puts in the wise caution in his plans, the saving of life &c, to mix in that ‘forward march’ as much as

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<sup>433</sup> Motley to his wife, Washington, 20 June 1861, Curtis, ed., Motley Correspondence, 1:382.

<sup>434</sup> O.R., I, 51, part 1, 338, 339, 369, 370, 387; Timothy D. Johnson, Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 226-28; Elliott, Winfield Scott, 720-24; Nevins, War for the Union, 1:151-2. In April, Edward Bates had proposed a similar strategy. Howard K. Beale, ed., The Diary of Edward Bates, 1859-1866 (Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1930, vol. IV; Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1933), 182-85 (entry for 15 April 1861). For a novel interpretation of Scott’s thinking, see Perret, Lincoln’s War, 57-59.

possible, which Americans so love to hear.”<sup>435</sup> Many army officers doubted that Scott’s policy was “sufficiently energetic” and thought he was “wasting valuable time in making too much preparation.”<sup>436</sup> Eager to avoid bloodshed if possible, Scott said: “If the objective of the war is the reconstruction of the Union, if our enemies of today are to become our compatriots, it is impolitic to alienate them unduly.”<sup>437</sup>

Others, including Edward Bates and Montgomery Meigs, agreed with Scott’s cautious approach.<sup>438</sup> Meigs served informally as a military advisor to Seward. In May, when the secretary of state asked him how he would conduct the war, Meigs recommended “a policy defensive in the main, offensive only so far as to occupy the important positions in the border states.” He warned against a premature thrust into the South, with inadequately trained and supplied troops led by inexperienced officers. (His thinking may have been influenced by reverses in Virginia. On that state’s Peninsula, General Benjamin F. Butler dispatched seven regiments from Fortress Monroe to attack Confederate forces half as numerous at Big Bethel. On June 10, the outnumbered Rebels drove back the Federals, killing fifty-three and losing only one. A week later, at Vienna, Virginia, Rebels ambushed a train, capturing it and the Ohio troops aboard.) Meigs also thought that it might be necessary to foment a slave uprising.<sup>439</sup>

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<sup>435</sup> Colfax to Horace Greeley, South Bend, Indiana, [14?] June 1861, Greeley Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>436</sup> William P. Fessenden to his father, Washington, 26 June 1861, Fessenden Papers, Bowdoin College.

<sup>437</sup> Edouard de Stoeckl to Alexander Gortchakov, Washington, 3 July 1861, dispatch 46, photocopy, Principal Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Russian Reproductions, Papers of the Foreign Copying Project, Library of Congress.

<sup>438</sup> Edward Bates, memoranda for Lincoln, 15, 23 April 1861, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>439</sup> Miller, Second Only to Grant, 97-98.

Scott incurred ridicule for his prudent advice. Count Adam Gurowski sneered that the elderly, infirm Scott was “too inflated by conceit to give the glory of the active command to any other man” and that someone should create “a wheelbarrow in which Scott could take the field in person.” Others suggested that the general was under the influence of one of his daughters who was a “rabid secessionist.”<sup>440</sup>

Lincoln rejected Scott’s advice, for he was growing impatient. On June 20, he suggested to Cameron that Senator James H. Lane of Kansas be appointed a brigadier general and authorized to raise regiments: “Tell him when he starts to put it through. Not to be writing or telegraphing back here, but put it through.”<sup>441</sup>

Calculating that the 50,000 Union forces in Northern Virginia should be able to defeat the 30,000 Confederates there, Lincoln decided to launch an offensive. Since many Union soldiers were ninety-day militiamen whose enlistments would soon expire, the president understandably wished to give them “a chance to smell powder before discharging them from service.”<sup>442</sup> He may also have believed that to postpone an attack would dispirit the North and perhaps even lead to European recognition of the Confederacy.<sup>443</sup> He was therefore enthusiastic about a plan drawn up at Scott’s request by General Irvin McDowell, the abrasive, hypercritical, forty-two-year-old gourmand and West Pointer in charge of the Department of Northeastern Virginia. Montgomery Meigs called him a “good, brave, commonplace fat man.”<sup>444</sup> The general proposed an attack on

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<sup>440</sup> Adam Gurowski, Diary (3 vols.; Boston: n.p., 1862-1866), 1:47 (entry for May 1861).

<sup>441</sup> Lincoln to Cameron, Washington, 20 June 1861, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:414.

<sup>442</sup> Washington correspondence by Special, 31 May, Cincinnati Commercial, 1 June 1861.

<sup>443</sup> Fehrenbacher, “Lincoln’s Wartime Leadership,” 15.

<sup>444</sup> Miller, Second Only to Grant, 102.



Beauregard's forces concentrating near Manassas, an important rail junction some thirty miles southwest of Washington. When it was objected that the men needed more training, Lincoln replied that the enemy suffered from the same problem: "You are green, it is true; but they are green, also; you are all green alike."<sup>445</sup> Though that was an accurate statement, it was misleading, for the Union forces would have to maneuver in the presence of an entrenched enemy, a much more complicated challenge than the one the Confederates would face.

On June 25, Lincoln convened a council of war with Scott, Quartermaster General Montgomery Meigs, and the cabinet. There the president "expressed a great desire to bag [Confederate forces under Thomas J.] Jackson" at Harper's Ferry, but Scott thought it unfeasible. Four days later, at a second council of war, McDowell's fundamentally sound plan was discussed at length, with Meigs countering Scott's vigorous objections. As Meigs recorded in his diary, "I said that I did not think we would ever end this war without beating the rebels; that they had come near us. We were, according to Gen. Scott's information, given to us at the Council of the 25<sup>th</sup>, stronger than they, better prepared, our troops better contented, better clothed, better fed, better paid, better armed. That we had the most violent of the rebels near us; it was better to whip them here than to go far into an unhealthy country to fight them, and to fight far from our supplies, to spend our money among enemies instead of our friends. To make the fight in Virginia was cheaper and better as the case now stood. Let them come here to be beaten, and leave the Union men in time to be a majority at home."<sup>446</sup> It was agreed to endorse McDowell's

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<sup>445</sup> United States Congress, Report of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War (3 vols.; Washington, 1863), 2:38.

<sup>446</sup> Meigs diary, 29 June 1861, copy, Nicolay Papers, Library of Congress.

plan, which appeared likely to succeed if the Confederate forces under Johnston at Winchester were unable to join Beauregard. To prevent the two Rebel commands from uniting, Scott ordered Patterson to hold Johnston in check.<sup>447</sup> On July 3, when Lincoln received a dispatch from Patterson reporting that he had crossed the Potomac and caused the enemy to fall back, the president read it to callers who noted that he was “affable but evidently much preoccupied.”<sup>448</sup>

After many delays, McDowell lurched toward Manassas on July 16, eight days later than the date agreed upon at the council of war. In the oppressive mid-summer heat, the raw troops poked along, taking four days to reach their destination, marching poorly, as inadequately trained recruits are wont to do.<sup>449</sup>

As they proceeded, Lincoln understandably grew anxious. A caller on July 19 was struck by his “wearied and worried appearance.” During their conversation, the president’s “eye-lids dropped repeatedly and he seemed like a person who had been watching with a sick friend and deprived of his wonted sleep.”<sup>450</sup>

Beauregard, learning of McDowell’s glacial advance, appealed for help to Johnston, who easily slipped away from the cautious Patterson and hastened to reinforce his threatened colleague. Upon receiving word of this development, Lincoln asked Scott

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<sup>447</sup> Reminiscences of Schuyler Hamilton quoted in J. H. Stine, A History of the Army of the Potomac (Philadelphia: J. B. Rodgers, 1892), 7-10; Townsend, Anecdotes of the Civil War, 57; Elliott, Winfield Scott, 727-28; McDowell’s testimony, Report of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, 2:35-38; Gen. Charles W. Sanford’s testimony, ibid., 2:55, 62.

<sup>448</sup> John Bigelow diary, New York Public Library (entry for 3 July 1861).

<sup>449</sup> Colin R. Ballard, The Military Genius of Abraham Lincoln: An Essay (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), 56-59.

<sup>450</sup> Reminiscences of Gary W. Hazleton, Edward S. Bragg Papers, Palmer Collection, Western Reserve Historical Society, copy, Allan Nevins Papers, Columbia University.

if it might be advisable to postpone McDowell's attack until Patterson could join him; the general-in-chief thought that would not be necessary.<sup>451</sup>

On the morning of Sunday, July 21, McDowell's troops splashed across Bull Run and so successfully drove the Confederate left that victory seemed imminent. At noon, John G. Nicolay reported from the White House that "everybody is in great suspense. General Scott talked confidently this morning of success, and very calmly and quietly went to church." Every fifteen minutes or so, Lincoln received dispatches from a telegrapher near the battlefield – young Andrew Carnegie – describing what he was able to hear. Uneasy because those bulletins seemed to indicate that Union forces were retreating, the president shortly after lunch called at Scott's quarters, where the general was sleeping. (The 300-pound veteran suffered from gout and dropsy, among other ailments, and dozed off at inopportune times.) Lincoln wakened him and offered a pessimistic interpretation of the dispatches. Scott "told him these reports were worth nothing as indications either way – that the changes in the currents of wind – the echoes &c &c. made it impossible for a distant listener to determine the course of battle." The general "expressed his confidence in a successful result" and "composed himself for another nap when the President left." Back at the war department, Lincoln joined Seward, who puffed confidently on a cigar, and Cameron, who forcefully expressed optimism. The president, according to the telegraph operator, was "deeply impressed with the responsibilities of the occasion" and, exuding "quiet dignity," made only a few measured observations. Lincoln became more hopeful when dispatches arriving in mid-afternoon

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<sup>451</sup> Russell H. Beatie, The Army of the Potomac (2 vols.; Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2002), 1:326. Scott and Lincoln conferred at length on the morning of July 20. Washington correspondence, 20 July, New York Tribune, 21 July 1861.

suggested that the Confederates were falling back. One of Scott's aides "reported substantially, that the General was satisfied of the truth of this report and that McDowell would immediately attack and capture the Junction yet to-night but certainly by tomorrow noon."<sup>452</sup>

The president left to take his customary afternoon ride, visiting the Navy Yard, where he told its commander, John A. Dahlgren, that "that the armies were hotly engaged and the other side [was] getting the worst of it."<sup>453</sup>

At six o'clock, an excited, frightened-looking Seward rushed into the Executive Mansion and asked in a hoarse voice: "Where is the President?"

"Gone to ride."

"Have you any late news?"

Nicolay read a fresh dispatch by Lieutenant G. H. Mendell, forwarded by the journalist Simon P. Hanscom: "General McDowell wishes all the troops that can be sent from Washington to come here without delay. He has ordered the reserve now here under Colonel Miles to advance to the bridge over Bull Run, on the Warrenton road, having driven the enemy before him."<sup>454</sup>

"Tell no one," enjoined Seward. "That is not so. The battle is lost. The telegraph says that McDowell is in full retreat, and calls on General Scott to save the Capitol. Find

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<sup>452</sup> Nicolay to Theresia Bates, Washington, 21 July 1861, Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House, 51; Wilson, A Leaf from the History of the Rebellion, 7-8.

<sup>453</sup> Dahlgren diary, copy, Nicolay Papers, Library of Congress (entry for 21 July 1861).

<sup>454</sup> Mendell to Lorenzo Thomas, Centreville, 4 p.m., 21 July 1861, O.R., I, 2:747.

the President and tell him to come immediately to Gen. Scott[']s.”<sup>455</sup> (In fact, late that afternoon, the last of the Confederate reinforcements arrived from Winchester and helped turn the tide. In pell-mell fashion, McDowell’s men retreated ignominiously to Washington, causing one wag to write that the troops evidently thought “these are the times that try men soles.”)<sup>456</sup>

Thirty minutes later, Lincoln returned, received the bad news “without the slightest change of feature or expression,” and promptly went next door to the war department.<sup>457</sup> There he read a dispatch from a captain reporting that “General McDowell’s army in full retreat through Centreville. The day is lost. Save Washington and the remnants of this army. All available troops ought to be thrown forward in one body. General McDowell is doing all he can to cover the retreat. Colonel Miles is forming for that purpose. He was in reserve at Centreville. The routed troops will not reform.”<sup>458</sup>

Lincoln and his cabinet gathered in Scott’s office to follow the latest developments. The captain’s dismal report was soon confirmed by McDowell’s telegram stating that his men, “having thrown away their haversacks in the battle and left them behind,” were “without food” and “have eaten nothing since breakfast. We are without artillery ammunition. The larger part of the men are a confused mob, entirely

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<sup>455</sup> Nicolay to Theresia Bates, Washington, 21 July 1861, Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House, 51.

<sup>456</sup> Herman Hattaway and Archer Jones, How the North Won: A Military History of the Civil War (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 47. For a general account of the battle, see John Hennessy, The First Battle of Manassas: An End to Innocence, July 18-21, 1861 (Lynchburg: Howard, 1989).

<sup>457</sup> Nicolay to Theresia Bates, Washington, 21 July 1861, Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House, 51; Nicolay and Hay, Lincoln, 4:353.

<sup>458</sup> B. S. Alexander to ?, 21 July 1861, O.R., I, 2:747; Nicolay and Hay, Lincoln, 4:353-54.

demoralized. It was the opinion of all the commanders that no stand could be made this side of the Potomac. We will, however, make the attempt at Fairfax Court-House.”<sup>459</sup>

Scott was so dumbfounded by contradictory reports of success and failure that he scarcely credited the latter.<sup>460</sup> Immediately all available troops were sent to McDowell’s aid.

Lincoln remained at the war department until after 2 a.m. After returning to the White House, he stayed up throughout the moonlit night, listening to reports from noncombatant eyewitnesses.<sup>461</sup> There were many of them, for Washingtonians, including members of Congress, had flocked to Manassas to observe the fighting. Among the visitors was E. B. Washburne, fresh from the battlefield, who found the president huddled with his cabinet and Scott. To his wife the congressman reported that “a more sober set of men I never before met.”<sup>462</sup> Montgomery Meigs called at 3 a.m. and described at length what he had seen.<sup>463</sup> When Lincoln’s old friend and fellow member of the Illinois general Assembly’s Long Nine, Robert L. Wilson, asked what sort of news the president had from the front, he replied “in a sharp, shrill voice, ‘damned bad.’” (This was the only time Wilson ever heard Lincoln use profanity.)<sup>464</sup>

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<sup>459</sup> McDowell to Townsend, Fairfax Court House, 21 July 1861, O.R., I, 2:316.

<sup>460</sup> Nicolay and Hay, Lincoln, 4:354.

<sup>461</sup> Nicolay and Hay, Lincoln, 4:355.

<sup>462</sup> E. B. Washburne to his wife, Washington, 22 July 1861, Washburn Family Papers, Washburn Memorial Library, Norlands, Maine.

<sup>463</sup> Meigs diary, copy, Nicolay Papers, Library of Congress (entry for 21 July 1861).

<sup>464</sup> Robert L. Wilson to William H. Herndon, Sterling, Illinois, 10 February 1866, in Douglas L. Wilson and Rodney O. Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants: Letters, Interviews, and Statements about Abraham Lincoln (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 207.

On Monday morning, as a drizzling rain intensified the atmosphere of gloom pervading the capital, footsore, discouraged soldiers straggled into town “like lost sheep without a shepherd.” From the White House, John Hay reported that with “the ushering in of daylight there came pouring into the city crowds of soldiers, some with muskets, some without muskets, some with knapsacks, and some without knapsack, or canteen, or belt, or anything but their soiled and dirty uniform, burned faces and eyes, that looked as [if] they had seen no sleep for days, to indicate that they were soldiers.” Grimmer still were the “wagons filled with the dead and wounded. Most horrible were the sights presented to view, and never to be forgotten by those who witnessed them. The bodies of the dead were piled on top of one another; the pallid faces and blood-stained garments telling a fearfully mute but sad story of the horrors of war. And the appearance of the wounded, bereft of arms, of legs, eyes put out, flesh wounds in the face and body, and uniforms crimsoned with blood, proclaimed with equal force the savage horrors of human battling with weapons of war.”<sup>465</sup>

Luckily for the Union cause, the Confederates did not press their advantage and besiege Washington, which they could well have done.<sup>466</sup>

On July 22, Lincoln took umbrage at Scott’s suggestion that the battle had been forced on him. “Sir,” the general exclaimed to Lincoln, “I am the greatest coward in America. I will prove it. I have fought this battle, sir, against my judgment; I think the President of the United States ought to remove me to-day for doing it; as God is my

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<sup>465</sup> Washington correspondence by John Hay, 22 July, New York World, 24 July 1861, in Burlingame, ed., Lincoln’s Journalist, 78.

<sup>466</sup> Hattaway and Jones, How the North Won, 48-49; Benjamin Franklin Cooling, Symbol, Sword and Shield: Defending Washington during the Civil War (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon, 1975), 53; George Gibbs to John Austin Stevens, Washington, 25 July 1861, Stevens Papers, New-York Historical Society.

judge, after my superiors had determined to fight it, I did all in my power to make the Army efficient. I deserve removal because I did not stand up, when my army was not in a condition for fighting, and resist it to the last.” Lincoln replied: “Your conversation seems to imply that I forced you to fight this battle.” Scott denied any such implication, saying “I have never served a President who has been kinder to me than you have been.”<sup>467</sup> (In fact, Scott had been pressured to attack both by congressmen and senators who threatened to censure him and by cabinet members.)<sup>468</sup> Though Lincoln did acknowledge that if Scott had been allowed to conduct the campaign as he wished, the defeat “would not have happened,” he nevertheless took umbrage at the general’s suggestion that he had been coerced to take the offensive prematurely.<sup>469</sup>

In the wake of such a humiliating defeat, many condemned “the inexplicable folly of the Administration.” To all and sundry, Maryland Congressman Henry Winter Davis expatiated on the “unfitness for their high task” of the president and his cabinet.<sup>470</sup> An

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<sup>467</sup> This colloquy took place at the White House, where Illinois Congressmen Richardson, Logan, McClelland, and Washburne were present, along with Secretary of War Cameron. Richardson, remarks in the House of Representatives, 24 July and 1 August 1861, Congressional Globe, 37<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> session, 246, 387. Washburne told a similar story to his wife. Washburne to his wife, Washington, 22 July 1861, Washburn Family Papers, Washburn Memorial Library, Norlands, Maine. Another account had Scott saying, “The first thing that you must do is to accept my resignation because I have committed one of the gravest offences possible, that of yielding to the clamor of demagogues.” Edouard de Stoeckl to Alexander Gortchakov, Washington, 26 July 1861, dispatch 54, in Woldman, Lincoln and the Russians, 73-74. Scott told an Iowa congressman “that he was guilty of cowardice, and should be reproached for he yielded his better judgement to popular clammer and suffered men to go into battle before they were properly prepared.” Samuel R. Curtis to his wife, Washington, 26 July 1861, Kenneth E. Colton, ed., “With Fremont in Missouri in 1861: Letters of Samuel Ryan Curtis,” Annals of Iowa, 3<sup>rd</sup> series, 24 (1942): 115. On July 22, Samuel Du Pont reported to his wife that “General Scott told the President that he (General Scott) ought to be dismissed for cowardice, that he had allowed himself to be forced into giving battle and had been beaten.” Samuel Du Pont to his wife, Washington, 22 July 1861, Hayes, ed., Du Pont’s Civil War Letters, 1:107.

<sup>468</sup> Benjamin Brown French to Henry Flagg French, Washington, 22 July 1861, French Family Papers, Library of Congress; Washington correspondence, 24 July, New York Times, 27 July 1861.

<sup>469</sup> Pease and Randall, eds., Browning Diary, 1:485 (entry for 22 July 1861).

<sup>470</sup> Henry Winter Davis to Sophie Du Pont, Baltimore, 4 August 1861, and to S. D. Du Pont, Long Branch, N.J., 21 August 1861, transcripts, S. F. Du Pont Papers, Hagley Museum, Wilmington, Delaware.



editor of the New York World decried “the lack of all that splendid boldness which [Andrew] Jackson would have shown” and expressed doubt that the war could be waged successfully because of the “waning confidence of the people in the energy of Lincoln or the honesty of his cabinet or their ability to master the crisis & organize victory.”<sup>471</sup> The “whole responsibility, in the end, falls upon the President,” editorialized the New York Herald, and the Chicago Evening Journal expressed the hope that Lincoln “appreciates the grave fact that he alone is most responsible of all.”<sup>472</sup> In Washington it was widely believed “that Scott’s policy was interfered with by the President in obedience to what he calls the popular will.”<sup>473</sup> Edwin M. Stanton ascribed the “catastrophe” to the “imbecility of this Administration.” He charged that “irretrievable misfortune and national disgrace, never to be forgotten, are to be added to the ruin of all peaceful pursuits and national bankruptcy as the result of Lincoln’s ‘running the machine’ for five months.”<sup>474</sup> Even Lincoln’s good friend Leonard Swett complained that the government did not “seem to [be] conducted with ability, and I am afraid new disasters await us.”<sup>475</sup>

The cabinet came in for criticism from many sides. Lyman Trumbull regretted that it contained no businessmen. “Everything seems to be in confusion,” the senator thought, “& when this is so in the cabinet & at headquarters we must expect it also on the

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<sup>471</sup> Manton Marble to Martin B. Anderson, New York, 1 August 1861, Martin B. Anderson Papers, University of Rochester.

<sup>472</sup> New York Herald, 22 July 1861; Chicago Evening Journal, 20 August 1861.

<sup>473</sup> Worthington Chauncey Ford, ed., A Cycle of Adams Letters, 1861-1865 (2 vols.; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1920), 1:22.

<sup>474</sup> Stanton to Buchanan, 26 July 1861, in George C. Gorham, Life and Public Services of Edwin M. Stanton (2 vols.; Boston, New York, Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1899), 1:223.

<sup>475</sup> Leonard Swett to his wife Laura, Washington, 6 August 1861, David Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

field of battle.”<sup>476</sup> In the cabinet Frederick Law Olmsted detected “the greatest conceivable dearth of administrative talent” and grumbled that though Lincoln was “an amiable, honest, good fellow,” nevertheless he “has no element of dignity; no tact, not a spark of genius.”<sup>477</sup> Israel D. Andrews of Maine denounced all the cabinet members for lacking “administrative ability” and for failing to comprehend “the immensity of the crisis.” He also reported that a leading westerner told Lincoln: “Unless you soon change this Cabinet the people will change you and it.”<sup>478</sup>

Many others demanded a cabinet shake-up. At a series of Republican meetings in New York, bitter recriminations were voiced against the secretaries of state, war, and the navy as well as the attorney general. “Mr. Lincoln must be compelled to call about him men of middle age, enjoying the business confidence, the moral approval, [and] the patriotic reliance of the nation” and “throw overboard all mere politicians, office-seeker-&-holders, aspirants to his own chair,” wrote the Rev. Dr. Henry W. Bellows, chairman of the U.S. Sanitary Commission.<sup>479</sup> Echoing the views of many, Assistant Secretary of the Interior John Palmer Usher predicted that if Welles and Cameron were not swiftly replaced, the entire administration “will go together to perdition.”<sup>480</sup> Chase also was criticized for having championed McDowell and for allegedly threatening before the battle to quit if more regiments were received. Greeley did not demand a cabinet change

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<sup>476</sup> Lyman Trumbull to his wife Julia, Washington, 28 July 1861, Trumbull Family Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

<sup>477</sup> Charles Capen McLaughlin et al., eds., The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted (6 vols.; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977-92), 4:138.

<sup>478</sup> [Israel] D. Andrews to Samuel J. Tilden, Washington, 18 August 1861, Tilden Papers, New York Public Library.

<sup>479</sup> Bellows to Charles Eliot Norton, Walpole, New Hampshire, 21 August 1861, Charles Eliot Norton Papers, Harvard University.

<sup>480</sup> Usher to Samuel J. Tilden, Terre Haute, 17 August 1861, Tilden Papers, New York Public Library.

only because he feared it would be futile. “No President,” he wrote, “could afford to have it said that a newspaper had forced him to give battle, and then turned out his Cabinet because he lost that battle.”<sup>481</sup>

But Greeley’s New York Tribune nevertheless attributed the “shipwreck of our grand and heroic army” to the administration, which owed an apology “to the humiliated and astounded country.”<sup>482</sup> Greeley acknowledged that he “was all but insane” after the battle.<sup>483</sup> Charles A. Dana thought Greeley was “completely broken down and the next thing to being insane.”<sup>484</sup> For weeks after the battle, Greeley was unable to sleep more than one hour a night.<sup>485</sup> The distraught editor privately urged Lincoln to surrender to the Confederacy: “You are not considered a great man, and I am a hopelessly broken one,” the mercurial editor observed patronizingly in a letter to the president. If the Confederacy “cannot be beaten – if our recent disaster is fatal – do not fear to sacrifice yourself to your country. If the Rebels are not to be beaten – if that is your judgment in view of all the light you can get – then every drop of blood henceforth shed in this quarrel will be wantonly, wickedly shed, and the guilt will rest heavily on the soul of every promoter of the crime.”<sup>486</sup> (John Hay aptly called this missive a “most insane specimen of pusillanimity.”)<sup>487</sup>

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<sup>481</sup> Greeley to Moncure D. Conway, New York, 17 August 1861, Conway Papers, Columbia University.

<sup>482</sup> New York Tribune, 23 July 1861.

<sup>483</sup> Greeley to Moncure D. Conway, New York, 17 August 1861, Conway Papers, Columbia University.

<sup>484</sup> Francis P. Blair Jr. to Montgomery Blair, Southport, Connecticut, 8 August 1861, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>485</sup> Greeley to Beman Brockway, New York, 14 August 1861, Greeley Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>486</sup> Greeley to Lincoln, New York, 29 July 1861, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>487</sup> Burlingame and Ettlinger, eds., Hay Diary, 193 (entry for 30 April 1864).

Defenders of the administration protested that such criticism would undermine public confidence and prove “suicidal.”<sup>488</sup> When a New Yorker asked Lincoln about all this clamor, he replied: “Tell your friends to make war on the enemy, and not on each other.”<sup>489</sup> He advised a delegation urging the removal of Cameron and Welles that “while swimming the river it was no time to swap horses.”<sup>490</sup> Similarly, he informed a group of Philadelphia leaders that he “doubted, and the public probably doubted, his ability to meet the public expectations in carrying on the Government; but they need have no doubt of his intention.” His only complaint was against the press’s “spirit of fault-finding” as sometimes “manifested against the Government.” Instead of being impatient, “it was rather the duty of each in his own sphere well to do his duty, and have a reasonable confidence that every other department was doing theirs as well. We would thus be able to turn our guns upon a common enemy, instead of firing into each other.”<sup>491</sup> From a committee urging the removal of Cameron, Lincoln requested specific examples of his misconduct. When none was forthcoming, he concluded that “they each had a good-sized axe to grind.”<sup>492</sup>

Some critics tempered their strictures. George William Curtis, who thought the “administration has been inadequate,” acknowledged that the North had “undertaken to make war without in the least knowing how. . . . We have made a false start, and we

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<sup>488</sup> Providence Journal, 27 July 1861.

<sup>489</sup> Washington correspondence, 29 August, New York Tribune, 30 August 1861.

<sup>490</sup> Washington correspondence, n.d., Philadelphia Gazette, n.d., copied in the Chicago Tribune, 28 September 1861.

<sup>491</sup> Washington correspondence, 10 September, Philadelphia Press, 11 September 1861; Philadelphia Daily News, 13 September 1861.

<sup>492</sup> Washington correspondence, [28 August], New York Times, 29 August 1861.

have discovered it. It only remains to start afresh.”<sup>493</sup> Lincoln agreed with that sentiment. To be sure, the defeat profoundly affected him; with “intense feeling” he told John D. Defrees, “if Hell is [not] any worse than this, it has no terror for me.”<sup>494</sup> But he did not wallow in self-pity or pessimistic gloom. The morning after the battle, he said: “There is nothing in this except the lives lost and the lives which must be lost to make it good.”

Remarking on this statement, John Hay wrote that there “was probably no one who regretted bloodshed and disaster more than he, and no one who estimated the consequences of defeat more lightly. He was often for a moment impatient at the loss of time, and yet he was not always sure that this was not a part of the necessary scheme.”<sup>495</sup>

Lincoln assured House Speaker Galusha Grow: “My boys are green at the fighting business,” but “wait till they get licked enough to raise their dander! Then the cry will be, ‘On to Richmond’ and ‘no Stone-walls will stop them!’”<sup>496</sup> In early August he told a despondent friend: “We were all too confident – too sure of an easy victory. We now understand the difficulties in the way, and shall surmount them.”<sup>497</sup> To Richard W. Thompson, who had served with him in Congress, the president explained how the battle had come about. Thompson was struck by “the hopefulness of his nature and his

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<sup>493</sup> George William Curtis to Charles Eliot Norton, North Shore, New York, 29 July, 19 August 1861, Curtis Papers, Harvard University.

<sup>494</sup> George P. Goff to Nicolay, Washington, 9 February 1889, Nicolay Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>495</sup> John Hay, “The Heroic Age in Washington,” 1871 lecture, in Michael Burlingame, ed., At Lincoln’s Side: John Hay’s Civil War Correspondence and Selected Writings (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 126.

<sup>496</sup> James T. Du Bois and Gertrude S. Mathews, Galusha A. Grow, Father of the Homestead Law (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1917), 250.

<sup>497</sup> Washington correspondence, 5 August, National Antislavery Standard (New York), 10 August 1861.

confidence in the final result which he expressed with the fixed determination to omit nothing and not to slacken his exertions in the work of saving the nation's life."<sup>498</sup>

Years later, Walt Whitman paid tribute to Lincoln's resilience: "If there were nothing else of Abraham Lincoln for history to stamp him with, it is enough to send him with his wreath to the memory of all future time, that he endured that hour, that day, bitterer than gall – indeed a crucifixion day – that it did not conquer him – that he unflinchingly stemm'd it, and resolv'd to lift himself and the Union out of it."<sup>499</sup>

Two days after the battle, Lincoln visited some of "his boys" in the field, accompanied by Seward, who suggested the excursion.<sup>500</sup> En route they encountered Col. William T. Sherman, commander of a brigade which had taken 300 casualties in the battle. When the colonel asked if they intended to inspect his camps, Lincoln said: "Yes; we heard that you had got over the big scare, and we thought we would come over and see the 'boys.'" He invited Sherman to join them, and as they rode along, the colonel "discovered that Mr. Lincoln was full of feeling, and wanted to encourage our men." Sherman asked "if he intended to speak to them, and he said he would like to." The colonel requested that he "please discourage all cheering, noise, or any sort of confusion," for they had had "enough of it before Bull Run to ruin any set of men," and

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<sup>498</sup> Thompson "Abraham Lincoln," manuscript, Thompson Papers, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, in Charles Roll, Colonel Dick Thompson: The Persistent Whig (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau, 1948), 174.

<sup>499</sup> Walt Whitman, Specimen Days, in Whitman, Complete Prose Works (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1892), 24-25.

<sup>500</sup> Frederick Seward, Seward at Washington as Senator and Secretary of State: A Memoir of His Life, with Selections from His Letters, 1846-1861 (2 vols.; New York: Derby and Miller, 1891), 1:602.

that what they needed “were cool, thoughtful, hard-fighting soldiers—no more hurraing, no more humbug.” Lincoln good-naturedly took the suggestion.

Upon reaching one of the camps, Lincoln, according to Sherman, “made one of the neatest, best, and most feeling addresses I ever listened to, referring to our late disaster at Bull Run, the high duties that still devolved on us, and the brighter days yet to come. At one or two points the soldiers began to cheer, but he promptly checked them, saying: ‘Don't cheer, boys. I confess I rather like it myself, but Colonel Sherman here says it is not military; and I guess we had better defer to his opinion.’” In concluding, “he explained that, as President, he was commander-in-chief; that he was resolved that the soldiers should have every thing that the law allowed; and he called on one and all to appeal to him personally in case they were wronged. The effect of this speech was excellent.”

As they passed by more camps, the president complimented Sherman “for the order, cleanliness, and discipline, that he observed.” Seward and Lincoln remarked “that it was the first bright moment they had experienced since the battle.”

At Fort Corcoran, Lincoln repeated to the troops the same talk he had given earlier, including his suggestion that they complain to him if “they were wronged.” One officer took him up on that offer, saying: “Mr. President, I have a cause of grievance. This morning I went to speak to Colonel Sherman, and he threatened to shoot me.”

Lincoln replied, “Threatened to shoot you?”

“Yes, sir, he threatened to shoot me.”

The president fixed the complainant with his gaze “and stooping his tall, spare form toward the officer, said to him in a loud stage-whisper, easily heard for some yards around: ‘Well, if I were you, and he threatened to shoot, I would not trust him, for I believe he would do it.’ The officer turned about and disappeared, and the men laughed at him.” As they drove on, Sherman explained why he had threatened the officer. Lincoln remarked: "Of course I didn't know any thing about it, but I thought you knew your own business best." The colonel thanked him for that expression of confidence and observed that the president’s remarks would help maintain discipline in the regiment.<sup>501</sup>

At another camp, a soldier complained to the president that Sherman had treated the men badly, forcing them to vacate a cozy barn in the midst of a rainstorm. Lincoln replied: “Well, boys, I have a great deal of respect for Colonel Sherman, and if he turned you out of the barn I have no doubt it was for some good purpose; I presume he thought you would feel better if you went to work to forget your troubles.”<sup>502</sup>

That same day, Lincoln sketched a new military plan, calling for swift implementation of the blockade; further drilling and instruction of troops at Fort Monroe; holding onto Baltimore “with a gentle, but firm, and certain hand;” bolstering Patterson’s forces in the Shenandoah Valley; leaving the troops farther west in Virginia under the command of McClellan; making Missouri more of a priority and encouraging Frémont to be more active there; reorganizing the forces that had retreated from Manassas; discharging swiftly the ninety-day enlistees who were unwilling to serve longer; and

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<sup>501</sup> William T. Sherman, Memoirs of Gen. William T. Sherman (2 vols.; New York, D. Appleton, 1875), 1:293.

<sup>502</sup> William Todd, Seventy-Ninth Highlanders, New York Volunteers in the War of Rebellion, 1861-1865 (Albany: Brandow, Barton, 1886), 53-54.



bringing forward the new volunteer forces rapidly and stationing them along the Potomac. Once these goals were reached, Union forces should advance on three fronts: in Virginia, take Strasburg and Manassas Junction and keep open lines from Washington to Manassas and from Harper's Ferry to Strasburg, then launch simultaneous campaigns against Memphis and East Tennessee.<sup>503</sup>

When a delegation urged him to concentrate on attacking the Confederates further south, say at Mobile and New Orleans, Lincoln said he was reminded of an Illinois farming couple whose daughter “had been troubled all her life with a ringing sound in her head, and they had spent a good deal of money in their efforts to cure her, but without success. One day a stranger in that part of the country was passing, and the farmer’s wife rushed out of the house and asked him if he was a doctor. He said yes. Then she told him what was the matter with her daughter, and asked him if he could cure her. He replied that he could not get the disorder out of her system, but she might put a mustard plaster on her feet and draw the ringing from the top to the bottom.”<sup>504</sup>

To carry out this grand strategy, Lincoln summoned George B. McClellan from western Virginia, where his successes, though minor, had cheered the North. Ten days before the battle at Bull Run, the president anxiously awaited news from McClellan, who was closing in on Confederates at Rich Mountain. Throughout the night of July 11-12, Schuyler Hamilton, an aide of General Scott’s, called repeatedly at the White House with news of the battle. Finally, around 4 a.m., he brought a telegram announcing a Union

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<sup>503</sup> Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:457-58.

<sup>504</sup> John Littlefield, “Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln,” lecture delivered in Brooklyn on 2 December 1875, Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 3 December 1875, p. 4.

victory. Lincoln seemed vexed at being aroused, for he was wearing only a short red shirt which he felt compelled for modesty's sake to hold down with both hands. Since the president could not read the telegram without indecorously letting go of his shirt, Hamilton turned his back and handed the glad tidings over his shoulder to the embarrassed Lincoln. When Hamilton assured him that much evidence corroborated the good news from Rich Mountain, the president said "with a happy rhythm in his voice, a ripple of merriment and satisfaction, 'Colonel, if you will come to me every night and every hour of every night, with just such telegrams as that, I will come out not only in my red shirt, but without any shirt at all. Tell General Scott so.'"<sup>505</sup>

Two days later, similar good news came from a follow-up engagement at Corrick's Ford. In his western Virginia campaign, McClellan and his men had killed or captured 700 Confederates while suffering only two dozen casualties. No other Union commander had achieved anything like this success, small-scale though it was, so McClellan seemed a natural choice for the president as he sought a replacement for McDowell. Prominent military men, he later recalled, "assured him that McClellan possessed a very high order of military talent," and, he added, "he did not think they could all be mistaken."<sup>506</sup>

Lincoln went out of his way to console McDowell, whom he would later call "a good and loyal, though very unfortunate" officer who had to "drive the locomotive as he found it." He told the general: "I have not lost a particle of confidence in you," to which

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<sup>505</sup> Hamilton, "A True Story of President Lincoln," in Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House, 208n129.

<sup>506</sup> Pease and Randall, eds., Browning Diary, 1:537-38 (entry for 2 April 1862).

the unashamed McDowell replied: "I don't see why, Mr. President, you should." He was demoted to division commander, while Robert Patterson was replaced by Nathaniel P. Banks shortly after Bull Run.<sup>507</sup> When the aggrieved Patterson asked Lincoln for vindication, the president told him (in substance): "I have never found fault with or censured you; I have never been able to see that you could have done anything else than what you did do. Your hands were tied; you obeyed orders, and did your duty, and I am satisfied with your conduct." Patterson recalled that these words were "said with a manner so frank, so candid, and so manly, as to secure my respect, confidence, and good will. I expressed to the President my great gratification with, and tendered my sincere thanks for his fairness towards me, and his courtesy in hearing my case, and giving me some five hours of his time." When Patterson again asked for a court trial "in order to have a public approval of my conduct, and stop the abuse daily lavished upon me," Lincoln remarked that "he would cheerfully accede to any practicable measure to do me justice, but that I need not expect to escape abuse as long as I was of any importance or value to the community, adding that he received infinitely more abuse than I did, but he had ceased to regard it, and I must learn to do the same."<sup>508</sup> To placate the general, Lincoln promoted his son to brigadier over the strenuous objections of Cameron.<sup>509</sup>

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<sup>507</sup> James Taussig to members of a committee of Missouri Radicals, Missouri Democrat (St. Louis), 9 June 1863; William Howard Russell, My Diary North and South (Boston: T.O.H.P. Burnham, 1863), 247 (entry for 26 August 1861); William Howard Russell's dispatch, Washington, 5 August, London Times, 20 August 1861.

<sup>508</sup> Carpenter, Six Months at the White House, 137-38; Robert Patterson, A Narrative of the Campaign in the Valley of the Shenandoah in 1861 (Philadelphia: Sherman, 1865), 18-19; Patterson to John Sherman, Philadelphia, 24 October, 5 November, 2, 14, 16 December 1861, Sherman Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>509</sup> New York Tribune, n.d., copied in the New York Evening Express, 13 January 1862.

On July 27, McClellan officially took command of the Division of the Potomac, raising high the hopes of the North. His presence in Washington “seems to inspire all with new courage and energy,” reported William O. Stoddard from the White House.<sup>510</sup> The Young Napoleon, as the general was called, would redeem the shameful defeat at Bull Run, whip the demoralized army into shape, and soon bring the war to a victorious close. Or so it was thought.

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<sup>510</sup> Washington correspondence, 29 July, New York Examiner, 1 August 1861, Burlingame, ed., Dispatches from Lincoln's White House, 16.