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Title: Letter from Edwin Stanton to James Buchanan (Copy)

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1861

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W. Buchanan

March 10.

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Washington, Sunday
March 10th 1861.

My dear Sir,

The dangerous illness of my youngest child for the last three days, must be my apology for not writing you until today. I shall now endeavor to give you as full information as I possess of the state of public affairs at Washington. At the depot on the afternoon of your departure, I parted with Mr Holt and Mr Toucey & have not seen them since then. The Cabinet were as you know, nominated and confirmed that day.

The next morning Mr Seward took possession of the State Department, and Mr Bates was shortly afterwards qualified and commissioned as Attorney General. Before this was done, Mr Seward sent for me and requested me to draw up a nomination of Mr Crittenden for Judge of the United States Court. I did so, and gave it to him. My understanding was that the nomination would be immediately sent in. But it has not been sent and the general understanding is that it will not be.

The rumor is that the Red blacks oppose it and also many of the Democrats, and that Mr Holt will be nominated. He appears now to be the chief favorite of the Republicans.

At the time that Mr Seward sent for me, he also gave me some comments of Gen. Scott's on the Report made by Mr Holt in relation to Major Anderson and Fort Sumpter. The remarkable character of these comments induced me to ask permission (which was granted) to show them to Gen. Dix, and I designed also to procure a copy of them for you, if possible, but I have not been able to see Mr Seward since he sent for the paper.

These comments stated that they were written at night, at the General's quarters, and in the absence of his papers.

This may account for what I suppose to be errors in respect to material facts.

These errors relate —

1st To the sending of the Star of the West. This is attributed to Mr Toucey, being unwilling to furnish the Brooklyn for that expedition. My understanding was that Mr Toucey wanted to send the Brooklyn and that Gen. Scott and Mr Holt preferred the other mode and overruled Mr Toucey.

2nd. The second point was, that on subsequent consultations Gen Scott urged the sending of a military and naval force to relieve Major Anderson, but that Mr Toucey made such difficulty about furnishing the ships that it was abandoned. My understanding was, that ^{general} Scott never urged the sending of any force to Sumter but only to be ready to do so if required: and that he agreed with you in opinion that the state of political affairs in the border states, and the reports of Major Anderson made it expedient not to send any force unless Sumter was attacked.

A third point relates to what Gen. Scott calls an informal truce entered into by you with certain persons from seceding states under which the reinforcement of Sumter and Fort Pickens was suspended. My recollection in respect to that transaction is, that Mr Holt and Gen Scott concurred with you in that arrangement, which when proposed in Cabinet was opposed by Judge Black and myself. In his conversation with me Mr Seward mentioned that Mr Lincoln and his Cabinet, when this subject came up would desire me to be present and also Mr Holt.

I told him that if all of the late Cabinet were requested to be present I could have no objection but I did not think it proper unless all were present. He said that of course the invitation would be extended to all. As I never heard anything more on the subject I suppose that they have found it only necessary to consult Mr Holt, who continues acting as Sec. of War. Mr Seward has been sick for several days, but the first time that I see him, my intention is to ask for a copy of Gen. Scott's comments for you.

I am perfectly satisfied that Major Anderson will be withdrawn. Scott agrees with Anderson as to the force required to relieve Sumter, and evidently favors withdrawal of the troops. The same thing will no doubt be done in respect to Fort Pickens. The Montgomery Commissioners have not yet applied for an audience. Various conjectures are made in respect to whether they will be received. I am also convinced by the general tone prevailing here, that there is not the least design to attempt any coercive measure.

^{contingency}
 A ~~combination~~ of your policy to avoid collision, will be the course of the present administration. Gen. Dix gave up the Treasury Department Thursday and went home Friday morning. He on all occasions speaks of you with kindness and regard. Mr Holt is the only one of your Cabinet yet in office. The probability is, that he will receive the nomination of Supreme Judge as a reward for what he terms his efforts to arrest the downward course of public affairs at the time he became Sec. of War.

The resignations of Gen. Cooper and Colonels Lay and Withers, show that the feeling of secession in Virginia is growing stronger. Judge Campbell has his resignation prepared and will send it in on the 15th of this month. This will be the most serious resignation that has yet occurred, not only on account of his high character and eminent qualities but, also, because it affects a branch of the Government hitherto untouched by the contagion of secession. Judge Black left town with his family yesterday. He is to return on Monday. The scramble for office is terrific.

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It is said that Lincoln takes the precaution of seeing no strangers alone. The reception on Friday is reported to have been an immense mob. I beg you to present my compliments to Miss Lane, and shall ever remain with sincere regard yours truly

Edwin M. Stanton.