1860-11-26

Letter (copy): William Henry Trescot to William H. Gist, November 26, 1860

Trescot, William Henry

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Washington, Nov 26, 1861

Strictly Confidential

Dear Sir,

I am aware (and I do not deem it necessary to specify my source of information) that apprehensions exist in the mind of the President that before the State acts in Convention some attempt will be made to take the forts in Charleston Harbor. Feeling that his personal honor would be involved in such an attempt, he may make his apprehensions the pretext or ground on which to order an increased force to these posts. This order will be resisted to the very last and at any cost by the southern members of the Cabinet, but they would be inestimably strengthened in their position if you were at liberty to say directly to the President that you could answer on your responsibility that so long as no change was made in these garrisons, so long as no additional force was sent there, and the State remained in the union, no attempt would be made and that any increase of force would be made in the face of the notice would lead to instant collision, and that for every drop of blood shed under such circumstances he alone would be responsible.

I wish you distinctly to understand that there is no possibility of such an order being issued, without the desolation of the Cabinet, and your receiving ample notice.

While I answer for this, I write with the
confidence that such an assurance will prevent any hasty and indiscreet movement on the part of the state. Believing that you agree fully with me, that for the sake of the state and the South our more towards secession ought to be regular and orderly, and that all collisions should be avoided, and feeling that the Southern members of the cabinet are entitled to the support of the state, I write to you to indicate how you can support them to that point alone this letter is addressed. If it becomes necessary for the state to look to itself, you shall know promptly & certainly. If therefore you can write such a letter as I indicate, the Southern members of the cabinet can rest upon it tranquilly, no such order will be issued on the face of it and if it is, you will be free to act, and have ample information as to the necessity of action and the whole responsibility of what comes will be not on the head of S, C but of the rest of the U. S.

If so, your letter must be here by return mail directed under cover to me. Telegraph me also when this is received and if you intend to answer yes or no to my proposition.

Details I cannot give you but trust that my signature will command your confidence

Cordially yours,

Montgomery Trescot

To Gov. Gov. Dix