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Copy

Washington Nov 26 1860

Strictly Confidential

Dear Sir. I am aware (and I do not deem it necessary to specify my source of information) that apprehensions exists 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 apprehension 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 incalculably 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^d and that any increase of force would be made in the face of this notice would lead to instant collision, and that for every drop of blood shed under such circumstances, he & he alone would be responsible.

I wish you distinctly to understand that there is no possibility of such an order being issued, without the dissolution 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 move towards secession ought to be regular
 and orderly, and that all collision 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 triumphantly,
 no such order will be issued on the face of it
 and if it is, you will be free to act, will 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 Pres
 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.
 Consult Chesnut
 & Shaw him this
 to Gov Gist

I am yours Resp
 Wm Henry Prescott