LINCOLN'S AMERICAN DREAM

Clashing Political Perspectives

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Abraham Lincoln and His Cabinet

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"To those who knew Abraham Lincoln, or who were at all intimate with his Administration, the representation that he was subordinate to any member of his Cabinet, or that he was deficient in executive or administrative ability, is absurd."
Gideon Welles, 1874

Abraham Lincoln's use of the cabinet as an advisory body says much about his political skill and executive style. In the modern sense, Lincoln was not a disciplined administrator or highly organized executive. His administrative predilections would have been more in keeping with the freewheeling approach to governance of Franklin Roosevelt or John F. Kennedy, than with the highly systematic and formalistic style of Dwight Eisenhower or Richard Nixon. As John Hay noted in a letter to William Herndon, Lincoln "was extremely unmethodical: it was a four years' struggle on Nicolay's part and mine to get him to adopt some systematic rules. He would break through every regulation as fast as it was made."[1]

Like Roosevelt during his crises-dominated presidency, Lincoln operated largely on the basis of astute political instinct in managing the affairs of state. It followed that Lincoln's use of the cabinet was more ad hoc than systematic. Yet, Lincoln accorded his cabinet an important role in his administration, not just as an administrative arm of the executive, but as a useful sounding board for important policies. Though Lincoln was confident enough in his own judgment to ignore his cabinet's advice altogether in some instances, on more than one occasion, his cabinet secretaries served as an effective forum for helping the president to formulate, revise, or moderate his policy decisions. Individually, particularly in Secretary of State William Seward's case, or collectively as a formal advisory and administrative arm of the presidency, Lincoln utilized his cabinet with great skill and acumen.

Assembling the Cabinet

Lincoln's cabinet was composed of seven individuals who represented virtually every faction within the Republican party of 1860. The president-elect sought leaders of stature to serve as his top advisors. William H. Seward and Salmon P. Chase were not only distinguished United States Senators, but leaders in the antislavery movement. Edward Bates and Simon Cameron also possessed reputations within the

Republican party that made them seem more likely to win the Republican nomination for president in 1860 than Lincoln. Yet, it was Lincoln who reigned victorious at the Republican National Convention in Chicago in May of 1860. Of the seven men named by Lincoln to serve in the cabinet, "there was probably not one who did not regard himself, in experience, intellect, and capacity to lead, superior to the nominal chieftain."[2] Lincoln's appointment of individuals who considered themselves better suited for the presidency indicates that the president-elect was not only self-confident but that he possessed "a conscious sense of leadership."[3] As Burton Hendrick writes: "He deliberately sought the most commanding associates he could find, not at all fearful that they would gain the upper hand, entirely confident of his own ability to control and direct and to retain complete authority in his own hands."[4]

Lincoln admired Seward and Chase. Their opposition to slavery and their two term governorships in New York and Ohio, respectively, made them distinguished figures in the Republican party. "What's the use of talking of me for President," Lincoln told Jesse W. Fell, "when we have such men as Seward, Chase, and others, who are so much better known and whose names are so intimately associated with the principles of the Republican party?"[5] Yet, Lincoln was supremely confident in his own ability to lead his distinguished assemblage of experienced statesmen. A brief sketch of the appointees named to the four principal departments represented in Lincoln's cabinet indicates the breadth of experience represented:

William Seward (Secretary of State 1861–1869) was unquestionably the most impressive of Lincoln's associates in the cabinet. Seward was a highly personable and ambitious individual. Like Lincoln, he was a skilled storyteller, which made him sympathetic to Lincoln's yarns, though some members of the cabinet found them "undignified."[6] A New Yorker, educated at Union College, Seward was a student of Burke, Bacon, Bolingbroke, and Cicero. His circle of friends and acquaintances was impressive ranging from Charles Sumner, who enjoyed conversing with Seward, to Jefferson Davis, who remained one of his closest friends up to the time he became President of the Confederate States.

Seward played an active role in New York state politics, becoming aligned with Thurlow Weed, a major political operative in the state. Seward was the frontrunner for the nomination in 1860, but his reputation as an antislavery advocate made him appear radical to the West. Seward pondered Lincoln's offer of the secretary of state position for more than two weeks, sending Thurlow Weed to Springfield to discuss Seward's "unsettled views" before finally accepting the appointment. Seward's towering ambition and his reputation led him to erroneously conclude that Lincoln would defer to him in the selection of the cabinet and in its operation. Many observers "took it for granted that Seward would be the brains and engine" of the Lincoln administration.[7] Lincoln had no such illusion. "The election of 1860, he believed, had marked a turning point in American history. A national crisis had called into existence a new party, made him its head, and elected him President; he intended

to accept the mandate and the responsibility thus conferred."[8] Lincoln, in a conversation with Gideon Wells, said that it was fitting to name Seward secretary of state "in view of his admitted talents and great public services." But, he "did not think it came within the scope of his duty or courtesy" to turn over to Seward "the selection of the men with whom he was to be associated as advisers."[9] In summarizing Lincoln's views, historian Burton Hendrick writes:

> He had no intention of abdicating the Presidency and transferring it to a political clique dominated by Seward and Thurlow Weed. He sincerely desired to give Seward first place in the Cabinet; that formed an indispensable part of his plan of a composite administration. . . . But Lincoln intended to have Seward on his own terms, not on Seward's.[10]

Salmon P. Chase, Secretary of the Treasury (1861–1864) was born in a "particularly puritanical" section of New Hampshire in 1808. Even as a boy, Chase was noted for his "good behavior, scholarly tastes, and sobriety in conduct and religious observation."[11] Upon his father's untimely death he was raised by his uncle, Philander Chase, a distinguished Bishop in the Episcopal Church in Worthington, Ohio. A devout Episcopalian and graduate of Dartmouth College, Chase moved to Cincinnati to practice law in 1830. Chase became active in the antislavery movement and argued that the Framers of the Constitution had intended to abolish slavery soon after the Constitution was ratified.[12]

Chase was elected Governor of Ohio in 1857 as a Republican after serving one term as a Democrat. Lincoln wrote Chase that the Ohio Republican party's plank urging repeal of the Fugitive Slave Law was "damaging" the Republican party in Illinois and could "explode" the national party if introduced for discussion in 1860. Chase held firm, saying that a declaration in favor of the repeal of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 was indispensable. Nonetheless, Lincoln was grateful for Chase's support in the 1858 Senate race. Though a leading candidate for the Republican presidential nomination in 1860, Chase was "too austere and too humorless . . . too theological and too ostentatiously moral," to become a commanding leader.[13] After a dismal showing on the first ballot, Chase switched his forty-five delegates to Lincoln.

Chase was an influential member of Lincoln's cabinet, but was not as close to the president as Secretary Seward. Chase did not get along well with Seward and in 1862 launched a behind-the-scenes campaign to weaken Seward's influence. In 1863 Chase improved the national banking system in order to increase the sale of government bonds and solidify the national currency. Chase used his organizational ability and financial sophistication to enable the Treasury Department to meet the pressing financing needs of war. After a series of disagreements with the president over appointment and policy issues, Lincoln accepted Chase's resignation from the cabinet in June 1864. Earlier that year, Chase allowed his supporters to begin efforts to oppose Lincoln for the Republican presidential nomination in 1864. Despite their

differences, Lincoln appointed Chase as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court in December of 1864, realizing that his first choice, Montgomery Blair, would never be confirmed by the Senate. The last time that the two men met face to face was on March 4, 1865, on the porch of the Capitol, where Chief Justice Chase administered the oath of office to Lincoln on his inauguration to a second term.[14]

Edward Bates, Attorney General (1861–1864), was born in Virginia in 1793, and despite Quaker roots, fought in the War of 1812. After the war, he moved to St. Louis where he became a lawyer and took part in framing the Missouri constitution. By 1820, Bates and Thomas Hart Benton had become Missouri's two most famous politicians. Bates, a Hamiltonian in philosophy, had broken away from the Democratic Party to join the Whig Party in the late 1820s. President Fillmore offered Bates appointment as secretary of war in 1850 but Bates declined. Lincoln was favorably impressed with Bates when he heard him deliver a highly regarded speech in Chicago in 1844 in his capacity as president of the Rivers and Harbors Convention.

Bates supported repeal of the Missouri Compromise in 1854, but unlike Seward and Chase, he was not a passionate follower of the antislavery movement. At the Republican convention of 1860, Bates had the support of Horace Greely, Montgomery Blair, and Schuyler Colfax as an alternative to the presumed frontrunner, William Seward. Bates assumed that most of the anti-Seward delegates would support him, but like Chase, he underestimated Lincoln's organization and strength at the 1860 convention.

As attorney general, Bates defended Lincoln's suspension of habeas corpus and the Emancipation Proclamation. Although Bates was a loyal supporter of the president, he thought that Lincoln's "amiable weakness" led to vacillation and indecisiveness on such matters as whether to dismiss General George McClellan as general-in-chief of the army. On December 31, 1861, Bates wrote: "The President is an excellent man, and in the main wise, but he lacks *will* and *purpose*."[15] Bates was unaware of the fact that Seward had made similar aspersions concerning Lincoln's ability to decide policy earlier that year, and that the president had made abundantly clear that he was fully in charge of his administration.

Simon Cameron of Pennsylvania served as Secretary of War (1861–1862). Cameron was a native of Pennsylvania and had been a newspaper editor before amassing a fortune as an entrepreneur in the construction of canals and railroads. He served in the United States Senate from 1845 until his appointment in the cabinet. Cameron was a highly influential figure in Pennsylvania politics, first as a Whig, then in the Know-Nothing party, and finally as a Republican. He came in third behind Seward and Lincoln in the first round of balloting for the Republican presidential nomination in 1860. Cameron campaigned vigorously for Lincoln in 1860 and in 1864.

Lincoln received numerous endorsements for placing Cameron in the cabinet, but he also received many letters against his appointment, some of them charged Cameron with corruption. Lincoln hesitated, and even attempted to rescind his offer

of appointment to Cameron until he was convinced that there was no conclusive evidence of corruption, even if there may have been some ethical lapses.

Cameron presciently advised Lincoln to call up more than the initial seventy-five thousand men that had been requested after the fall of Fort Sumter.[16] He was released from the cabinet when he leaked a report calling for freeing and arming slaves as soldiers. Lincoln ordered the report's distribution halted and its contents altered, but the story made its way into the newspapers.[17]

Charges of corruption in the administration of contracts were leveled at Cameron, but his chief fault may have been more squarely that he was not a skilled administrator in the department of government that most needed effective administration. When Congress tried to censure Cameron, however, Lincoln defended him saying that the War Department's careless practices resulted from the dire emergency that the nation faced, and that the president and the other department heads "were at least equally responsible . . . for whatever error, wrong, or fault was committed."[18]

Edwin M. Stanton replaced Cameron as Secretary of War in 1862 and served as head of the department until 1868. Stanton, like Chase was raised in Ohio, but moved to Pittsburgh to practice law. He was one of the top lawyers in America and practiced frequently before the United States Supreme Court.[19] Stanton was critical of the new president in 1861, finding "no token of any intelligent understanding by Lincoln, or the crew that govern him."[20]

Stanton served as a legal advisor to Secretary of War Cameron at the time Lincoln removed Cameron from the cabinet. Ironically, Lincoln asked Stanton to take Cameron's place, even though Stanton had supported Cameron's controversial report calling for the freeing and arming of slaves. Secretary of State Seward and Treasury Secretary Chase both urged Lincoln to appoint Stanton to head the War Department. Stanton was much more proficient organizationally than Cameron had been. He soon turned the War Department into an efficient organization while doubling its size. He regularized the procedures for administration of contracts and ridded the department of the stigma of shoddiness and corruption that had surrounded it under Cameron's lax management.[21]

Stanton refused to alter state quotas for conscription or delay the draft, as some members of Congress had requested. He "was stern and pragmatic in all things having to do with achieving Union victory."[22] Stanton was an early fan of the talents of Ulysses S. Grant, and shared with Lincoln a desire to promote generals who were decisive and victorious. Stanton was one of only two members of the cabinet to urge Lincoln to issue his proclamation of emancipation when the president first presented the idea to the cabinet on July 22, 1862.

Beyond the four principal departments of the federal government, Lincoln named Gideon Welles of Connecticut as his secretary of the navy, Caleb B. Smith of Indiana as his secretary of the interior, and Montgomery Blair of Maryland as his postmaster-general.

In composing the cabinet, Lincoln had many purposes in mind. The result was

an adept blending and balancing of geography, political background, experience, and talent. As Lincoln's trusted White House aides, John Nicolay and John Hay would later write:

> He needed advisers, helpers, executive eyes and hands, not alone in department routine, but in the higher qualities of leadership and influence; above all, his principal motive seems to have been representative character. . . . He wished to combine the experience of Seward, the integrity of Chase, the popularity of Cameron; to hold the West with Bates, attract New England with Welles; please the Whigs through Smith, and convince the Democrats through Blair.[23]

In assembling his cabinet, Lincoln displayed the qualities that were to distinguish his administration: "Independence of opinion, absolute reliance on his own judgment," a willingness to listen to the advice of others, even when that advice ran against his own position, "a readiness to compromise, so long as the main object was achieved, and a logically thought out scheme of action."[24]

William Seward as First Secretary of the Cabinet

Lincoln first met William Seward while campaigning for Zachary Taylor in Boston in 1848. Lincoln had been impressed with a speech given by Seward in which he emphasized the need to contain slavery. The two me did not meet again until 1860 when they both sought the Republican presidential nomination. Seward was the clear front-runner for the nomination and Lincoln was a dark horse candidate. Lincoln's ultimate victory in securing the nomination stunned and "mortified" Seward.[25] Seward had a sense of entitlement concerning the nomination which made his defeat by Lincoln all the more humiliating. Even after his appointment as secretary of state, Seward referred to Lincoln disparagingly as the "little Illinois lawyer," who had handed him an unexpected defeat.[26]

David Donald describes Seward's endorsement of Lincoln as "patently insincere." Nonetheless, Lincoln felt obligated to offer the popular Republican the top post in the cabinet—secretary of state. The perception of Seward's stature as an eminence grise in the Lincoln administration was widely held. Even the commissioners sent to Washington by the newly formed Confederate States of America to negotiate the surrender of Fort Sumter turned to Seward as the presumptive spokesman for the incoming administration.[27] As Donald notes: "Nearly everybody assumed that Seward would become the 'premier' of the new administration, really running the government while Lincoln simply followed his advice."[28] Seward did nothing to quell such notions, writing to his wife some six months into Lincoln's presidency: "I look back, and see that there has not been a day since last January, that I could, safely for the Government, have been absent."[29]

Lincoln was well aware of Seward's huge ego and his pretentious behavior. But

it still must have come as a shock to the new president when a month into the administration Seward wrote a terse, egotistical, and remarkably candid memorandum to Lincoln in which he critiqued the president's performance during his first month in office. Seward criticized Lincoln for spending too much time on minor patronage matters and for not taking direct "energetic" action in some instances, including removal of federal troops from Fort Sumter. Seward kept his memo strictly confidential and Lincoln showed remarkable restraint in the face of Seward's "impertinence" and near insubordination.[30] Lincoln wrote a response to Seward which apparently was never sent, but which likely was conveyed in the form of a private face-to-face rebuke. Lincoln undoubtedly made it clear to Seward that he intended to run his own administration and that he intended to have no trumped-up wars with European nations of the type that Seward had advocated to "unify" the nation.[31]

Lincoln was particularly disturbed to find that Seward had been engaged in discussions with Southerners close to Jefferson Davis, providing assurances that Fort Sumter in South Carolina would not be reinforced, on the presumption that Lincoln would submit to Seward's wisdom.[32] The cabinet had been sharply divided on the issue with some urging reinforcement and others, especially Seward, urging abandonment of the fort as a means of averting war. On March 29, 1861, Lincoln informed his cabinet of his decision to send a resupply party (but no troop reinforcements) to Fort Sumter, thus making it crystal clear who was in charge, and leaving it to the South to decide on whether they wished to commence a civil war.[33]

Lincoln viewed Seward as an indispensable member of his cabinet notwithstanding Seward's bouts with megalomania. As David Donald notes:

> Lincoln knew that he needed Seward and began a systematic campaign to win his loyalty and even his affection. When Lincoln tried to be charming, he was irresistible, and he knew how to court Seward. Aware of the Secretary's self-importance and vanity, he encouraged Seward to drop in at the White House nearly every day. . . .[34]

Though Seward was given broad latitude by Lincoln, the president had the final say on all administration policy. When the secretary of state drafted a strong admonition to the British government against extending diplomatic recognition to the Confederacy, Lincoln took steps to ensure that a more tactful approach was utilized. Seward's draft communique, Despatch No. 10, posed a stern warning to the British that recognition of the Confederacy would have grave consequences: "We from that hour shall cease to be friends and become once more, as we have twice before been forced to be, enemies of Great Britain."[35] Lincoln circled the strident passage in Seward's despatch and marked it: "Leave Out."[36] Lincoln was also troubled by Secretary Seward's instruction to the American Minister to Great Britain, Charles Francis Adams, to take the message to the Foreign Office and read it directly to Lord John. Lincoln believed that such directness was dangerously provocative.[37] Lincoln

excised this directive and instructed Adams merely to summarize the Despatch. More important, Lincoln made specific changes in the wording of the document so as to tone down Seward's more strident language.

Whereas Seward had written that intercourse of any kind with the Confederate mission in London would be "wrongful," Lincoln deleted this word and substituted "hurtful."[38] And while Seward's draft threatened reprisals if Southern cruisers found refuge in British harbors, Lincoln instructed Seward to delete any mention of this. In so doing, Lincoln "adroitly changed Despatch No. 10 from what was virtually a threat," to a secret, and considerably less confrontational paper to guide Adams in his sensitive discussions with the British.[39] Historian Burton Hendrick suggests that "Lincoln's shrewd modification of Despatch No. 10, and the determination he had displayed," gave Secretary of State Seward "a new conception of his chief." Seward now understood "that Lincoln was indeed President, and intended to remain President."[40] Indeed, on June 5, Seward wrote his wife in terms very different from his earlier, more disparaging letters. "Executive skill and vigor," he wrote, "are rare qualities. The President is the best of us, but he needs constant and assiduous cooperation."[41]

Prior to the finalizing of Despatch No. 10, Seward may have been impervious to the degree to which Lincoln was really in control of his own administration. For as David Donald suggests, Lincoln's delegation of authority to Seward was so masterful, that Seward himself may not have realized the fine line at which his authority blended with that of the president. As Donald puts it:

> In routine diplomatic affairs, Lincoln was usually willing to follow Seward's advice, but on important foreign policy questions, the President made the decisions. In so doing, he handled the Secretary with great finesse, allowing Seward to appear to shape policy—and perhaps to believe that he did so.[42]

According to Donald, Lincoln's ability to maneuver Seward in the direction that he favored is perhaps best illustrated in the *Trent* affair of 1861. The affair began on November 8 when the USS *San Jacinto* boarded the *Trent*, a British mail-packet and captured two Confederate envoys, James Mason and John Slidell. The envoys were headed to England in an attempt to secure formal diplomatic recognition of the South. The capture of Mason and Slidell "outraged British public opinion," and, in the view of the British government was a clear violation of international law.[43] The British government "demanded that the envoys be surrendered," and backed their demand with preparations for war. When the British issued an ultimatum demanding an answer by December 30, 1861, Lincoln convened the cabinet to discuss the matter. Fully aware of the gravity of the situation, Lincoln warned of the danger of having two wars at one time. At the meeting, Seward conceded that the government might be obligated under international law to release the envoys. With the cabinet divided on the issue, Lincoln adjourned the meeting until the next day. The presi-

dent then asked Seward to stay after the meeting when he said: "Governor Seward, you will go on . . . preparing your answer, which . . . will state the reasons why they [the Confederate envoys] ought to be given up. Now I have a mind to try my hand at stating the reasons why they ought not to be given up. We will compare the points on each side."[44]

When the cabinet reconvened the next day Seward, Donald notes, had "studied up all the works ever written on international law, and came . . . loaded to the muzzle with the subject."[45] He then proceeded to make a strong argument for release of the envoys. Seward noted that by siding with Britain in this affair, he was actually defending traditional American doctrines of the freedom of the seas that had been set forth in protest against British violations of neutrality at sea during Madison's administration. Although Secretary Chase and other members of the cabinet were unhappy with the prospect of heeding Seward's advice to release the envoys, they conceded that Seward had made such a powerful argument in favor of such action that they were in agreement that it should be carried out.

David Donald, drawing on Seward's *Reminiscences*, notes that after the meeting, the secretary of state asked Lincoln about his comment the day before that he would frame an argument for the other side. Seward recalled that Lincoln smiled and shook his head, saying: "I found I could not make an argument that would satisfy my own mind, . . . and that proved to me that your ground was the right one."[46] Donald speculates that Lincoln was "unwilling to reveal that he had maneuvered the Secretary of State into adopting the position that he had favored all along."[47]

As the *Trent* affair makes clear, while Lincoln was clearly in charge of his cabinet, he was willing, indeed eager, to draw upon the talents and good ideas of those who served in the cabinet, often refining and improving upon their contributions. There is no question that Lincoln profited from the counsel of Secretary Seward and other members of his cabinet. John Nicolay and John Hay, in their meticulous documentation of the crafting of Lincoln's First Inaugural Address of March 4, 1861, reveal the important role that Seward played in developing this landmark speech. One of the most profound changes suggested by Seward called for the addition of a paragraph at the end of the Inaugural speech. Lincoln's original draft closed with the following sentence: "In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow-countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of civil war. The Government will not assail you, *unless you first assail it . . . You can forbear the assault upon it, I cannot shrink from the defense of it. With you, and not with me, is the solemn question of "Shall it be peace or a sword?"*"[48]

Nicolay and Hay note that "Mr. Seward did not like this termination." Seward suggested in his letter to Lincoln that "something besides or in addition to argument is needful—to meet and remove prejudice and passion in the South, and despondency and fear in the East. Some words of affection—some of calm and cheerful confidence."[49] Seward then volunteered two separate drafts for a closing paragraph to substitute for the "Shall it be peace or a sword?" closing in Lincoln's draft. Seward's second draft appealed to Lincoln. In it, Seward wrote:

> I close. We are not, we must not be, aliens or enemies, but fellow-countrymen and brethren. Although passion has strained our bonds of affection too hardly, they must not, I am sure they will not, be broken. The mystic chords which, proceeding from so many battlefields and so many patriot graves, pass through all the hearts and all hearths in this broad continent of ours, will yet again harmonize in their ancient music when breathed upon by the guardian angel of the nation.[50]

Praising Seward's draft for "containing the germ of a fine poetic thought," Nicolay and Hay record that "Mr. Lincoln took, and, in a new development and perfect form, gave it the life and spirit and beauty which have made it celebrated in the text."[51] In one of the most eloquent and memorable passages in American history, Lincoln thus transformed Seward's idea into the following words:

> I am loth to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield, and patriot grave, to every living heart and hearthstone, all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angles of our nature.[52]

Cabinet Deliberations

Although Secretary Seward dominated discussion in some of the meetings of the cabinet, Lincoln was attentive to the arguments and comments of all members of the cabinet. At the end of cabinet discussions, Lincoln would often sum up the pros and cons of the policies under consideration and announce his decisions. According to Gideon Wells, who served as secretary of the navy throughout Lincoln's presidency, the president's positions frequently ran counter to those of Seward.[53] Yet, despite Lincoln's ability to take stands quite different from Seward's, some members of the cabinet were resentful of the special role that Lincoln had accorded to Seward as an advisor and confidant.

Lincoln was conversant in the activities of all of the departments in the federal government and discussed them freely and frequently with Seward. Other members of the cabinet, particularly Treasury Secretary Salmon P. Chase, were concerned that they were not privy to the affairs of the State Department, much less what was going on in the rest of the government. Chase and others were not happy with the appearance that Seward exercised disproportionate influence. In frustration, Chase argued in favor of more frequent and regularized meetings of the cabinet. Citing custom, Chase suggested that the cabinet meet on a routine schedule with its members acting as a general council to address affairs of state. Not surprisingly, all of Chase's colleagues supported the proposal except Seward, who could see no value in periodical gatherings. Despite Chase's objections, Lincoln "approved the suggestion and directed that the time-honored 'cabinet days' be restored."[54] The regular schedule

of meetings, however, did not persist, in part because of Seward's continued opposition. Routine was replaced by the earlier "easygoing" state of affairs.

Seward's persistent meddling in the affairs of the other departments aggravated others besides Chase. Attorney General Bates, "not easily moved to anger, was outraged when he learned that Seward was sending instructions—without the attorney general's knowledge—to district attorneys' and marshals' offices which were exclusively under the jurisdiction of the Department of Justice."[55] Seward's intrusion into Justice Department activities rekindled the demand for regular meetings of the full cabinet as a council to the president. Now it was Bates, not Chase, who "brought up the whole question of 'cabinet unity' and a more regular procedure in full cabinet meetings."[56] Bates protested to the president against the lack of methodical and dignified arrangements in the conduct of public business by the cabinet. Again, all members of the cabinet, except Seward, supported Bates's demand. And once again, Lincoln overruled the secretary of state and ordered that regular meetings of the cabinet be held on Tuesdays and Fridays. According to Burton Hendricks, the secretary of navy intimated that Lincoln himself probably instigated Bates in bringing the matter before the whole cabinet.[57] This time, the new routine was adhered to, and Tuesdays and Fridays, for the rest of the administrations were regular "cabinet days."

The internal rivalry with Seward, however, persisted, and would ultimately precipitate the Cabinet Crisis of 1862. Part of the problem stemmed from the cabinet overestimating Seward's overall influence with the president. As great as Seward's influence over Lincoln was, Hendricks writes, he in no way exercised the type of control that his colleagues suspected.

> In the great early issues of the conflict, it was the will of Lincoln, not that of Seward, which prevailed. He had utterly disregarded Seward's policy of avoiding conflict by compromising with the South. The decision to preserve the Union, even at the cost of civil war, was Lincoln's not Seward's. He overruled Seward's policy on the relief of Sumter.[58]

The loss of the Battle of Fredericksburg on December 13, 1862 and the political loss of Republican majorities in New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, and Indiana in the midterm elections of November 1862 combined to precipitate what is known as the "Cabinet Crisis of 1862." Many disgruntled Republicans in Congress argued for a change in the cabinet to facilitate more vigorous prosecution of the war.[59] Treasury Secretary Chase had indiscreetly remarked to members of Congress that the cabinet in general, and Secretary Seward in particular, had been indecisive in the war effort. Congress drafted a protest that suggested a reorganization of the cabinet and denounced Seward by name. Upon hearing of the backlash in the Republican ranks, Seward submitted his resignation to the President. Lincoln was not inclined to accept Seward's resignation. Instead, he adroitly invited a committee of disgrun-

tled senators to the White House to present their grievances and to make their case against Seward.

Lincoln convened his cabinet the next morning, (December 19, 1862) to say that he was surprised to hear that members of the senate were under the impression that the cabinet was divided. He invited the entire cabinet, except Seward, to meet with the senate delegation that very evening to register their concerns. Secretary Chase was now placed in the position of either repeating his accusations about the cabinet in front of its members or withholding his criticism. Chase chose the latter course, but ended up offering his own resignation to the president the following day. "Lincoln refused both resignations and the crisis was over."[60]

David Donald suggests that the friction between members of the cabinet was based on conflicts of personality more than of ideology. For that reason, the rifts were not as pronounced, in Lincoln's view, as they may have seemed on the surface. As Donald puts it:

> Welles and Chase distrusted Seward because they suspected his bland amiability and his perpetual optimism and believed that he failed to understand the seriousness of the nation's crisis. Stanton's irascible, secretive manner prevented other cabinet members from becoming his friends, though he generally managed to work amicably with Chase. . . .
>
> . . . Lincoln was not only aware of this dissonance; he was prepared to tolerate, and perhaps even to encourage, creative friction among his advisers. He understood that the conflicts among his cabinet members were not so fundamental as they seemed. The irritable clashes among the cabinet officers reflected differences in personality, not ideology; unconsciously they were rivals for the esteem and affection of the President. It was a problem that Lincoln, like other men of enormous personal magnetism, had to live with throughout his life; and he understood that the rivalry between Seward and Chase, or between Stanton and Welles, was much like that between Herndon and Mary Lincoln back in Springfield, or between Mrs. Lincoln and Nicolay and Hay during the White House years.[61]

To the extent that Lincoln tolerated this creative tension among his cabinet officers, his style of leadership had many of the ingredients that political scientists have come to associate with the successful leadership of a distant successor: Franklin Roosevelt. Stephen Hess describes Roosevelt's "cold blooded practice" of managing the cabinet as "management by combat."[62] FDR's approach to management, tolerated, indeed encouraged a degree of competition among cabinet members and agency directors for the president's ear, and approval. This competitive style sometimes resulted in bruised egos and threats of resignation from various members of the cabinet. In a memorandum to Sam Rosenman, Roosevelt wrote: "Get [Budget Director] Harold Smith, usually known as 'Battling Smith,' into a room with the Secretary of the Treasury, usually known as 'Sailor Morgenthau,' lock them in and let the survivor out."[63] In a revealing comment to Frances Perkins, Roosevelt once said: "A little rivalry is stimulating you know. It keeps everybody going to prove he is a better fellow than the next man."[64]

Lincoln, like Roosevelt in a later crisis-dominated era, apparently realized that the tension of competition for the boss's approval helped stimulate creative thinking and good performance. And, just as Lincoln turned frequently to subordinates outside the cabinet for information, Roosevelt was fond of digging deep into the bureaucracy for information. He had mid-level informants in several of the key departments of government as well as in the army and navy to keep him apprised of situations independent of departmental bias.

The Cabinet as a Moderating Influence

Initially, at least, Lincoln attempted to micromanage many of the details of the executive branch, particularly military operations. As Donald notes, "he thought he could issue orders directly to officers in the navy, without even informing Secretary Welles, and he attempted, without congressional authorization, to create a new Bureau of Militia in the War Department."[65] But Lincoln, even in his capacity as commander in chief, was not a one-man show. His confidence allowed him to listen carefully to the advice of his cabinet officers and to heed their advice when it seemed prudent to do so. Early in his administration, as Fort Sumter became the focus of attention, Lincoln asked each member of his cabinet to respond in writing to the question: "Assuming it to be possible to now provision Fort Sumter, under all the circumstances, is it wise to attempt it?"[66] Though the entire cabinet except for Secretary Chase opposed resupplying Sumter, Lincoln followed his own instinct on the matter. By engaging in open discussion of the issue, however, the president had given the cabinet a stake in the deliberations and decisions of the administration.

On other occasions the cabinet's influence was more decisive. In September 1863, for example, the cabinet played an important role in cooling the passions of the president regarding a developing judicial crisis in Pennsylvania. On September 14, the president informed his cabinet "that military officers in Pennsylvania were complaining that judges were issuing writs of habeas corpus to free recruits and draftees. The officers were compelled to appear in court to explain why certain men were held in the army."[67] The practice had become so widespread that it threatened mobilization of the army in Pennsylvania. Lincoln's proposed response to the crisis was to instruct officers to respond to writs of habeas corpus with force, if necessary, indicating to judges that the prisoners were being held by presidential authority. The president was prepared to instruct officers in the army that "if said court or judge [shall attempt] to take such officer, or to arrest such officer, he resist such attempt, calling to his aid any force that may be necessary to make such resistance effectual."[68] In discussion, the cabinet convinced Lincoln to tone-down his toughly worded order.

Treasury Secretary Chase told the president that he feared that the potential defiance of judicial authority implicit in the commander in chief's explicit order might

bring about civil war in the free Northern states. Chase and others believed that Lincoln's strongly worded order would challenge established precedent in the United States that civilian authority reigned supreme over the military.[69] Lincoln stated his strong objection to the practice used by some judges in Pennsylvania to employ writs of habeas corpus "to frustrate the conscription system enacted by Congress in 1863."[70] Lincoln was angered that judges would work to obstruct a federal law to raise an army "in a case when the power is given by the Constitution in express terms."[71] After hearing the arguments of his cabinet, however, Lincoln accepted their advice to issue a less confrontational proclamation suspending the writ of habeas corpus in which he merely admonished judges not to follow the obstructionist tactics of the judges in Pennsylvania. As Mark E. Neely, Jr. notes, Lincoln issued his more drastic enforcement orders discreetly, behind the scenes, rather than issuing an edict that appeared to confront judicial authority. "By preparing public opinion first, the policy worked."[72]

The cabinet had moderated the president's impulses on other occasions, most notably when he read his early draft of the Emancipation Proclamation to the entire cabinet on July 22, 1862. The proposed proclamation seemed to catch the cabinet off-guard. As Donald notes: "The curious structure and awkward framing of the document showed that Lincoln was still trying to blend his earlier policy of gradual, compensated emancipation with his new program of immediate abolition."[73] Lincoln told his cabinet from the outset that he had "resolved upon this step, and had not called them together to ask their advice, but to lay out the subject-matter of a proclamation before them."[74] Whereas Stanton and Bates urged "immediate promulgation" of the proclamation, Chase, Seward, Welles, and Postmaster General Blair expressed reservations. Blair was concerned that the proclamation would have adverse impact on the fall elections. Seward argued that the timing was poor. Issuing the proclamation after a series of serious military reverses by the Union army would "be viewed as the last measure of an exhausted government, a cry for help."[75] Seward suggested, according to Lincoln's own recollection, that the proclamation "would be considered our last shriek, on the retreat."[76] As eager as Lincoln had been to issue the proclamation, the cabinet debate forced him to consider the possibility that the order for emancipation would be viewed as a desperate act unless it was accompanied by a major Union victory. Lincoln waited three months, until McClellan's victory at Antietam, to issue the proclamation. The timing would never be ideal for such a profound edict, but now the president could act from a position of strength rather than weakness.

Conclusion

In the *Trent* affair of 1861, as in the timing of the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation, and in the crisis over habeas corpus in 1863, Lincoln allowed the col-

lective wisdom of his cabinet to help refine and modify his decisions. From his early days as a lawyer Lincoln had developed good listening skills which paid off in his ability to discern the merits of arguments made by the members of the cabinet. Lincoln's folksy and unassuming style of leadership appears to have led even members of his own cabinet to underestimate his ability and accomplishments. The president's untimely death and the successful end of the war for Union would make many who had served Lincoln realize more fully the extent of his greatness. Seward's close confidant, Thurlow Weed, in compiling his autobiography twenty-five years after the fact, would write of his first meeting with Lincoln with the advantage of hindsight. Recalling his first impression of Lincoln when the two met in Springfield to discuss the formation of the cabinet Weed wrote: "I found Mr. Lincoln sagacious and practical. He displayed throughout the conversation so much good sense, such intuitive knowledge of human nature, and such familiarity with the virtues and infirmities of politicians that I became impressed very favorably with his fitness for the duties which he was not unlikely to be called upon to perform."[77] Even allowing that Weed's recollection may have been influenced by the course of events after his meeting with the president-elect in Springfield, there is no doubt that his words accurately capture the true essence of Lincoln's leadership.

Notes to Chapter 5

Lincoln and the Constitution

From time to time, *Congress and the Presidency* will publish articles of interest to its readers, which have been published in formats with limited distribution and unlikely to be reported in reference works. This address, the seventh annual R. Gerald McMurtry Lecture, sponsored by the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum, received such limited publication in 1984. It is with the permission of the Lincoln Library and Museum that it is republished here (copyright 1984, Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum).

1. The same point was made by Sydney George Fisher in "The Suspension of Habeas Corpus During the War of the Rebellion" (1988). Fisher, thoroughly approving of Lincoln's actions, did not describe them as in any way dictatorial.

2. In 1923 John W. Burgess wrote a bitter lamentation condemning the growth of democratic Caesarism and the demise of limited government. Not surprisingly, considering his Unionist background, yet perhaps significantly, he attributed none of this development to Lincoln, but rather saw Theodore Roosevelt as its source. See Burgess, 1923.

3. Reflecting the anti-Radical outlook of most historians at this time, Stephenson believes that the Radical Republicans in Congress presented a far more serious threat of dictatorship than Lincoln. See Stephenson, 1922.

4. Edgar Lee Masters attacked Lincoln as a tyrant in *Lincoln the Man* (1931), but while his work was not in the neo-Confederate tradition, neither ought it to be regarded as a serious scholarly contribution.

5. A little-noticed irony occurred in 1981 when Bradford, author of notorious anti-Lincoln