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Machiavelli, Lincoln, and the Art of Princely Procrastination

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MACHIAVELLI, LINCOLN, AND THE ART OF PRINCELY PROCRASTINATION

A Thesis

by

ANDREW LAWSON CARRANCO

Submitted to Texas A&M International University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

August 2021

Major Subject: History & Political Thought

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ABSTRACT

Machiavelli, Lincoln, and the Art of Princely Procrastination
(August 2021)

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This paper examines the phenomenon of procrastination in decision making. In certain circumstances, procrastinating a decision can yield better results in the long term. This paper looks at procrastination and decision making from the point of view of Von Clausewitz and Machiavelli and uses Abraham Lincoln as an example of efficient use of procrastination in decision making. Von Clausewitz looks to find action at the strongest point. The strongest point may not come for some time in the future and thus encourages procrastination. Machiavelli uses procrastination as an offensive capability in decision-making. Through prudence, *virtù*, and fortune, a prince can use procrastination efficiently and with power. Lincoln procrastinates often in making his decisions. He prefers to have the world move around him rather than to influence events at the earliest opportunity. In this capacity, he operates on a plane higher than his adversaries. Lincoln makes decisions at the time he sees fit. This paper reviews three instances of Lincoln's successful use of procrastinated decision making in his presidential administration in three scenarios: 1) the sacking of Secretary of War Simon Cameron, 2) the dismissal of General John C. Frémont for insubordination, 3) the manner in which Lincoln handled the Cabinet Crisis of 1862.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
CHAPTER	
I INTRODUCTION	1
II VON CLAUSEWITZ	6
BIOGRAPHY	6
ON WAR CRUCIAL POINTS	8
TWO TYPES OF TIME	9
LINCOLN AND HIS TIMING.....	11
VON CLAUSEWITZ AND TIMING	12
LINCOLN'S USE OF TIME	13
CONCLUSION.....	15
III MACHIAVELLI'S PRINCELY PROCRASTINATION	16
VIRTÙ	17
PRUDENCE AND VIRTÙ.....	18
TIMING	21
FORTUNE	23
DECISION-MAKING AND TIMING	25
THE LANDSCAPE OF DECISION-MAKING.....	28
PROCRASTINATING DECISION-MAKING	30
PRINCELY PROCRASTINATION.....	34
CONCLUSION.....	39
IV LINCOLN AND SIMON CAMERON	41
V LINCOLN AND JOHN C. FRÉMONT	52
VI LINCOLN AND SALMON P. CHASE.....	62
VII CONCLUSION	74
REFERENCES	76
VITA.....	79

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

A joy of youth is to procrastinate. The word is from the Latin prefix *pro* meaning forward and word *cras* meaning tomorrow. That is to say that procrastinate literally means “for tomorrow.” For example, work can always be done tomorrow along with homework and errands: This is an attitude commonly found among the young. Procrastination is usually not met with ready approbation; it rightfully draws scorn from parents and educators alike. This paper concerns the merits of procrastination, but not in the sense that youth would wish. This manner of procrastination is in regard to decision making at an executive level. Educators and parents are not alone in their rebukes of procrastination. Leadership and self-help books also decry procrastination and continually remind their readers that fast action makes for good leadership. Why would any leader procrastinate? The answer varies. Some leaders who come into their positions by fortune, as Machiavelli would say, are just bad leaders and get nothing done. But procrastination is also used by the best leaders as a mode for eschewing responsibility for a decision or to place themselves in a more powerful position when a decision finally has to be made.

I use the word procrastination in a somewhat unusual sense in this thesis. Traditionally, the word carries with it a wholly negative value judgement, the more so because the word itself implies morally culpability: It is a vice. One can explain away a “delay.” One can be delayed, but one cannot be procrastinated: The verb can only be used in the active sense; it is something one does, but should not generally do. To procrastinate, therefore, implies choice and deliberate awareness, which are causes of action—or inaction, in this case—that somehow lie within the one who waits. As a word, procrastination also implies a certain nonchalant-ness, if I may call it,

which mere delay or tardiness does not. I believe the evidence will show that Lincoln and Machiavelli both are far from feeling nonchalant when procrastinating their decisions, but to all appearances, nonchalant accurately describes their self-presentation. Machiavelli exhorts his prince to maintain a princely façade, and Lincoln’s friends and enemies remarked throughout his political career the seemingly calm nature he exuded in the midst of chaos. As I use it, then, procrastination involves choice and self-awareness; and in this sense, it is or can be a virtue, rising to the level of what one might even call a strategy. I deprive the word of its entirely negative value judgment. I redeem it, as it were, as my word of choice to point to waiting purposefully and longer than may seem advisable—seem, that is, to one who is not a prince.

The theory for procrastination in decision-making is not advanced thematically by many writers, but it is developed in works by Carl Von Clausewitz and Niccolò Machiavelli. Von Clausewitz authored the famous text *On War*, a book that concerns the theory of warfare at its most basic level. While there are chapters that concern warfare itself, there are many chapters concerning decision-making and timing. The latter is crucial in warfare and can cause routs or retreats depending on how well timing is applied. The focus of the chapter on Von Clausewitz centers on a concept he calls “being strong at the crucial moment.” The defining of “crucial moment” varies by event. In some cases, this means a later time or event. To take action immediately is always tempting, but it is not always right.

To understand Machiavelli’s view of the usefulness of procrastination, we have to understand three fundamental concepts, each of which forms an important part of Machiavelli’s political thought: prudence, *virtù*, and fortune. Both prudence and fortune, I postulate, revolve around *virtù*, and *virtù* is the axis on which timing turns. We encounter the primary tool for procrastinated decision-making in a prince’s *virtù*. The chapter on Machiavelli shows how *virtù*,

prudence, and fortune interact in procrastinated decision-making. In many situations, it is possible for a prince to strengthen his position through procrastination.

The final three chapters focus on three examples of successful procrastinated decision making as performed by Abraham Lincoln during the early period of the American Civil War. These chapters review how Lincoln used procrastinated decision making to fire the Secretary of War, fire an insubordinate but popular general, and save his cabinet from a serious constitutional and administrative crisis.

There is a wealth of examples concerning Lincoln's procrastinated decision making. Perhaps most well-known is his procrastination in declaring emancipation for the slaves. The reality of such procrastinated decision making is that there is already a popular knowledge of his reasoning behind such actions. He had to take into account several factors: The situation of the border states; Seward's assertion that the Emancipation be issued as a result of victory; and not least of all, popular resentment against Emancipation. Much has been written about this scenario, and its gravity shows that it was not an ordinary decision in any case. It is an extreme example, and I judged it better for the sake of this thesis not to take my bearings from an extreme example.

I have chosen three scenarios that illustrate decisions that are not necessarily grave, but certainly important. I hope to show the routine nature of Lincoln's procrastinated decision making through these decisions. This is not to say that Lincoln procrastinated all of his decisions. Often, action is needed immediately. In the span of a few weeks at the beginning of Lincoln's term, he was quick to realize the gravity of the situation and acted accordingly, i.e., speedily. When Lincoln realized that *habeas corpus* could affect the ability of the government to arrest and subdue potential threats to the Union, he abandoned *habeas corpus* using war powers that were not yet clear. At the same time, he began a naval embargo of the southern ports in an act

that would normally be reserved for use against foreign adversaries. Lincoln never acknowledged the legitimacy of the claims of the Confederacy, and thereby could not legally embargo the southern ports based on the rules of war. In these situations, Lincoln acted quickly without knowing the full repercussions of his actions. Procrastinating was not his only form of decision making; he was fully capable of making decisions quickly. These decisions show, therefore, that when Lincoln waits, he waits on purpose. They invite consideration of the reason behind Lincoln's waiting when he did choose to do so. At any rate, they show that there is a reason, that his waiting is not mere reliance on chance, fate, or God.

Prompt action is not always the solution. The firing of both Secretary of War Simon Cameron and General John C. Frémont required slow, deliberate nonaction. Lincoln chose to survey the landscapes over the course of months to allow Cameron and Frémont time to make mistakes while giving Lincoln a better understanding of the situation. Similarly, during the Cabinet Crisis of 1862, he needed to allow the passage of hours to understand from whence the attack came. Studying the situation also had the effect of placing pressure on his attacker, who probably would have acted immediately under similar circumstances.

The unsuccessful use of procrastination in life is readily apparent both through experience and in historical fact. Lincoln was not immune to the difficulties. One such example is his use of procrastination in the firing of McClelland: Lincoln had to be content with popular sentiment; he did not want to interfere with the operations of his military; and Lincoln wanted to believe in his general's military prowess. Though the extenuating circumstances were somewhat similar, Lincoln's procrastination was not exercised appropriately. There are a multitude of factors that could be examined in this case, but in themselves they could fill a volume. In this thesis, I confine myself to the examples where Lincoln exercised procrastination successfully.

Throughout the course of his career Lincoln used procrastinated decision making to avoid the inevitable criticism associated with making important decisions, especially when the situation was urgent. He used it also to survey the political landscape when he was unsure of his information. Perhaps more so than either of these, however, he used procrastinated decision-making to allow others to make bad decisions. The perception that he was doing nothing often made his political opponents overconfident or forced them into dire timidity. As I will show, Lincoln's deliberate procrastination often served him well.

Procrastination is generally perceived negatively. In politics however, perception is only part of the reality. Procrastinating decisions to one's advantage in a place of leadership requires cunning, deception, and audacity. While this thesis does not attempt to supplant the current negative opinion of procrastination entirely, I hope it invites the reader to reconsider its use in leadership generally and especially for those in positions of authority and command. Indeed, in some cases procrastination is a virtue.

CHAPTER II

CARL VON CLAUSEWITZ

Carl Von Clausewitz was a Prussian military officer in the early 19th Century. He is known primary for his magnum opus *On War*. In his book, he postulates that politics is the most important offensive and defensive weapon in war. Therefore, in Von Clausewitz's estimation, beyond all privates, sergeants, majors, and generals, it is the politician who wields the greatest power on the battlefield. In politics as in war, timing plays an important role in the decisions of a commander. The consequences battlefield decisions have serious life threatening implications which are difficult to overstate. If the implications are life threatening, then why would a commander on the battlefield procrastinate a decision? In politics, why would a politician sacrifice power-grabbing in the short term? The subject of this chapter is to investigate the value Von Clausewitz places on procrastinated decision-making in *On War*. Particular attention will be given to his chapter concerning "Concentration of Forces in Space." The chapter will also indicate how Lincoln acted much in the methods described by Von Clausewitz for battlefield use, but on the political field.

BIOGRAPHY

Von Clausewitz was born in Prussia in 1780 to a family with noble aspirations, but not yet noble. His father was a lieutenant in the army of the Frederick the Great and his grandfather a professor of theology. Von Clausewitz entered the military at the age of 12 in 1792 as a lance-corporal and served in several battles before he entered the *Kriegsakademie* (Prussian Military Academy) as an officer candidate in 1801. In the school, he excelled in his studies and graduated first in his class. His academic prowess was impressive enough to catch the eye of General

Gerhard von Scharnhorst who would be a powerful player in the Prussian Army and the reforms the army would undergo through the early parts of the 19th century.

He fought in dozens of battles from Moscow to Flanders during his career. The vast majority of these battles were against Napoleon. He, like many of his contemporaries, had a desire for glory. It was only on the field of battle that he could achieve the glory necessary for promotion. But being caught as a prisoner of war in his first campaign effectively precluded his ability to procure glory in his first years out of the academy. Though he served in other battles, he was relegated to mediocre positions, always missing the most important large actions.

Von Clausewitz saw plenty of action and understood life on the campaign. Von Clausewitz's thoughts on war are not from the point of view of a disengaged bureaucrat but from an active soldier. Von Clausewitz loved reading and was habitually fascinated with clear definition. "My original intention was to set down my conclusion on the principal elements of this topic in precise, compact statements without concern for system or formal connection . . . I had an intelligent reader in mind who was already familiar with the subject."¹ Von Clausewitz wanted to create a text that would be a military scientist's text that also would be useful for princes.

Von Clausewitz was never satisfied with his text. The vast majority of *On War* remained incomplete in his eyes. After nine years of work, he wrote "I regard the first six books, which are already in clean copy, merely as a rather formless mass that must be thoroughly reworked once more."² Though there are some parts of *On War* that are outdated, such as those that concern

¹ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. By Michael Howard, Peter Paret, and Bernard Brodie, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), 63.

² *Ibid.*, Clausewitz, *On War*, 69. "Two Notes by the Author on His Plans for Revising *On War*—July 1827".

horse led cavalry charges, the much of the text remains timeless because of its focus on the theory and elements of war, and war seems always to be with us.

ON WAR CRUCIAL POINTS

Von Clausewitz's definition of war can be found in Chapter 1: War is an "act of force to compel our enemy to do our will."³ Von Clausewitz goes on to propose that war is "a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means."⁴ Von Clausewitz uses the words "means" to suggest modes. To this point, Von Clausewitz suggests that there really are two modes of war: absolute war and limited war.⁵ Von Clausewitz theorized that a nation could mobilize entirely for war. Subsequent wars approached the complete mobilization that Von Clausewitz proposed. While Generals Ulysses S. Grant and William Tecumseh Sherman in the American Civil War were the first modern generals to involve the civilian population of the United States in the Civil War, it was not until the nuclear age that the full definition of absolute war could be completely understood. The definition of limited war was a reality for military commanders in both the US and Soviet spheres. From Angola to Vietnam, the "limited war" would become the principal mode of modern military engagement. Von Clausewitz defined these two modes in the 1820s. The former of the two modes, absolute war, was the mode in which Lincoln fought the Civil War. He knew by war's end, along with Sherman, that the war would have to reign down upon the South in a mode that was unparalleled in the country's history.

There are several ways to know your enemy. One manner is by means of military or political intelligence. Von Clausewitz does not take kindly to military intelligence. "Many

³ Clausewitz, *On War*, 75.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁵ See Book Eight, "War Plans", Chapter ii, "Absolute War and Real War" for his full interpretation.

intelligence reports in war are contradictory; even more are false, and most are uncertain. What one can reasonably ask of an officer is that he should possess a standard of judgement, which he can gain only from knowledge of men and affairs and from common sense. He should be guided by the laws of probability.”⁶ Throughout *On War*, Von Clausewitz does not put much credence in military intelligence. Von Clausewitz would rather that an officer put “trust his judgement and stand like a rock.”⁷ Knowing the enemy is greater than intelligence. It is understanding the enemy through careful study of his of tactics and culture. This is a talent Lincoln understood better than many of his contemporaries in Washington in the opening days of the Civil War. He was by birth a Southerner; he understood Southern culture and the particular attention to time embedded in it.

TWO TYPES OF TIME

Part of understanding the enemy is understanding time. History, like hindsight, creates a linear sense to events that at the time of their happening may not have had a logical line of succession. War is linear in its design, but its course is nonlinear. Clausewitz writes:

War is a pulsation of violence, variable in strength and therefore variable in the speed with which it explodes and discharges its energy. War moves on its goal with varying speeds; but it always lasts long enough for the influence to be exerted on the goal and for its own course to be changed in one way or another.⁸

War is interactive and lives a life of its own. Von Clausewitz describes war as a *zweikampf* (“dual”/ “two-struggle”).⁹ In any struggle there is call and response. Feedback from the call is pivotal in the nonlinearity of war. Without feedback, armies struggle in vain to achieve a goal that may have evolved to nonexistence by the time the “goal” has been achieved. Battles,

⁶ Clausewitz, *On War*, 117.

⁷ Ibid., 117.

⁸ Ibid., 86.

⁹ Alan Beyerchen, “Clausewitz, Nonlinearity, and the Unpredictability of War,” in *International Security* 17, no. 3 (1992): 67, accessed Sept. 3, 2020, muse.jhu.edu/article/447033.

leadership, and luck all play an important role in the pattern that comes from the *zweikampf*. Feedback from the environment of war creates the full battle plan that can and does change the role of decision making in battle and in war. If war is not linear, how should we interpret decision making in regard to time? Linearity creates certainty; nonlinearity does not. The answer is in how we experience time.

Time is often experienced as a linear phenomenon, but not always. As measured in units of seconds, minutes, and hours, it would seem to be the same for all, but varieties of human experience uniquely set time apart. It is the human experience that varies the manner in which we experience time. “A watched pot never boils,” serves as an example of this human experience. Depending on the temperature and amount of the water, the certainty of water boiling within a set time over the stove can be scientifically expected. Our experience manipulates this scientific fact. Distracting yourself with other chores, we perceive the water to boil faster—even though the water does not boil at a faster rate. Our experience of time often governs the manner in which we decide. By busying ourselves, we decide to turn the heat off the boiling water at a time perceived to be sooner than usual even though the water has boiled in the same amount of time it always takes. It is the same phenomenon that makes children experience the dog days of summer as an eternity, whereas adults might experience the same days as a whirlwind. Time, though constant, is perceived differently, both by individuals and by cultures.

The perception of time can be divided into two categories: polychronic and monochronic.¹⁰ These definitions are applicable to different cultures, but in different ways. Time is a concept that is universally applicable, but how it is experienced is relative because the experience of time is culturally conditioned. The evolution of time has created two distinct and

¹⁰ Edward Hall, *The Dance of Life: The Other Dimensions of Time* (New York: Anchor Press, 1984), 45-52.

separate systems of spatiotemporal interpretation. Polychronic time “stresses involvement of people and completion of transactions rather than adherence to preset schedules.”¹¹

Monochronic time is associated with “tasks, schedules, and procedures” that are “without reference to either logic or human needs.”¹²

In the West, monochronic spatiotemporal perspective has created a culture that is driven by linearity in time and decisions that create definable progress over the course of a set time. In war, this means battles are fought one by one and wars are fought in a linear format. Polychronic spatiotemporal perspective is much more nuanced in its understanding of time. Time is not as much a commodity but rather an experience. Issues are addressed simultaneously or when needed. In war, this could mean that battles are not necessarily won or lost but rather played and checked when the moment seems opportune. Both modes of timing have their distinct advantages, but their disadvantages are equally visible upon closer inspection. Monochromatism dehumanizes decisions. It ignores the environment and adheres to the rigid constructs of time and scheduling. Polychromatism does not invite conflict resolution in a “timely” sense, and resolution can often appear aggressive and passionate when decisions are taken rigidly.

LINCOLN AND HIS TIMING

The timing of decision making needs to account for the enemy’s interpretation of timing. This can be both a cultural phenomenon and a personal attribute to either side. Lincoln had an uncanny ability to read his enemies. I postulate that this is due to his ability to understand spatiotemporal perspective in both a polychronic and monochronic way. Lincoln’s Yankee colleagues tended to have a monochronic interpretation of time whereas his Southern associates were arguably more polychronic in their spatiotemporal perspectives. The ability to understand

¹¹ Ibid., 49.

¹² Ibid., 52.

their prejudices and temporal interpretations are directly related to his decisions. In the north, Yankees in their highly industrial nature would have been hyper-sensitized to their perception of time. Factories running on daily quotas and trains running on a daily schedule would have lent a sense of urgency to the efficient use of time to the Yankee. Southern culture being more aristocratic, time would have been seen less as an impersonal, rigorous master and more as a seasonal object, as something that moved more slowly and was to a greater degree possessed and controlled by human beings.

Lincoln, being from the prairie frontier and born a Southerner who lived in the north, would have seen time as a function of both perspectives. Whereas farming and seasonal polychronic understanding took precedent in the frontier and fields, the daily workings of a frontier state capital would have demanded a more thorough observation of time in a monochromatic system. Because of this unique background, Lincoln understood that delaying the decision could often prove a more discretionary course while still generally operating in the overwhelming monochromatic system of Washington during the Civil War. Lincoln would tell long anecdotes to defuse situations or sometimes just to illustrate a point. He played with time based on the needs of the moment, but it was always with an eye to maintaining a position of strength.

VON CLAUSEWITZ AND TIMING

Von Clausewitz writes that “The best strategy is always *to be very strong*; first in general, and then at the decisive point.”¹³ What is the decisive point? The decisive point is directly incumbent on strength. The decisive point must be driven to and understood when reached. In

¹³ Clausewitz, *On War*, 204.

war or politics, that point may come earlier rather than later or vice versa. The decisive point is reached based on experience and character.

Character plays a role in spatiotemporal decision making. Von Clausewitz suggests that boldness plays a role in the manner in which men act in times of battle. “Indeed, what field of human activity is boldness more at home than in war?”¹⁴ Boldness is a double-edged sword, however. While being a “genuinely creative force,” it can also lead to foolhardiness. As a whole however, Von Clausewitz believes that boldness is “not to be despised.” Lincoln was considered by his contemporaries both bold and foolhardy, but in Von Clausewitz’s view, Lincoln would have been considered bold.

The majority of Von Clausewitz’s thoughts on boldness stem from quick and necessarily bold action. “When Frederick the Great perceived in 1756 that war was unavoidable and that he was lost unless he could forestall his enemies, it became a necessity for him to initiate hostilities; but at the same time it was an act of boldness, because few men in his position would have dared to act in this way.”¹⁵ Frederick the Great took the initiative when he was in a place of weakness. Though he was not “strong at the decisive moment”, he became strong by being compelling his enemy to be weak.

LINCOLN’S USE OF TIME

Lincoln takes a similar approach. By biding his time to make a decision, Lincoln turned an adversary’s haste, caution, or anxiety into an advantage. “Boldness will be at a disadvantage only in an encounter with deliberate caution, which may be considered bold in its own right, and is certainly just as powerful and effective; but such cases are rare. Timidity is the root of

¹⁴ Ibid., 190.

¹⁵ Ibid., 191.

prudence in the majority of men.”¹⁶ Though Lincoln may have been wary of situations, he was seldom scared in his life, even when he was President. As for the rarity of boldness through caution, Lincoln’s ability to tardy his decisions certainly pass muster. Lincoln had the talent to observe situations, allow certain amounts of time and events to pass, and then make his informed decision at the “decisive moment.”

In the usual western version of observing time, Lincoln’s use of polychronic time would have been considered unusual and even foolhardy. For many of his advisors, Lincoln’s tardy decisions would have seemed careless and apathetic. There are countless journal entries of his contemporaries complaining of his lack of risk taking and bold action when indeed he was taking bold and risky action by not acting! Lincoln, aside from caring little what his associates thought of him, made his choices at the time he thought appropriate and preferred to have decisions made by others rather than act himself.¹⁷ Developing a viewpoint of time in a polychronic manner would have eased any pressures that may have weighed on him during tense times.

Lincoln’s use of tardiness in his decisions was tantamount to the use of surprise in battle. His understanding of a situation and his decisions affecting those situations would move a situation in a direction that may have not been previously thought of or postulated by his adversaries. Von Clausewitz argues in Book 3, Chapter 9 that surprise “is highly attractive in theory, but in practice it is often held up by the friction of the whole machine.” Lincoln’s early administration was a large, unwieldy machine, but with experience it steadily became more efficient. Lincoln relied on his own cunning rather than that of his machine to use procrastination as a political weapon, especially at the beginning of his administration. Often, Lincoln fought more with opposing politicians in Washington than with Confederates in the field. In politics, surprise in the form of

¹⁶ Ibid., 190.

¹⁷ David Herbert Donald, *Lincoln* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1995), 286.

late political play can often wreak havoc on pre-planned situations such as the ones that were planned by John C. Frémont and Salmon P. Chase. In these cases, surprise is appropriate for it requires only “secrecy and speed.” Lincoln, being operator of political decisions could readily be in possession of both. He answered to nobody, and his choices could either drag or be immediate. Lincoln happened to enjoy watching others make decisions at their pace. Lincoln made his at his own speed.

CONCLUSION

Von Clausewitz is helpful in understanding decision making at a tactical level. Though Von Clausewitz is a military scientist, his magnum opus is a treatise that can apply to most any battlefield, whether it is the West Wing or the west flank. Lincoln’s decisions regarding his generals and his cabinet exemplify the same methods of deliberation that a general’s general makes on the battlefield. In its three separate chapters on surprise, boldness, and concentration of forces in space, *On War* applies directly to Lincoln’s battlefield at the White House. In decision making, the decisive moment is a moment that must take into account a fair and responsible account of the real situation while taking advantage of the opponent’s indecisive moment. Lincoln harnessed his unique understanding of “the decisive moment” through both his polychronic and monochronic interpretation of time, which came naturally to him. He achieved victory by a strategic use of boldness and limited use of surprise at decisive moments.

CHAPTER III MACHIAVELLI'S PRINCELY PROCRASTINATION

INTRODUCTION

Procrastinating decisions is either the foolhardiest or the most cunning action a prince can take—foolhardy because lack of action leaves a vacuum for others to seize it. The cunning prince, however, procrastinates decisions for good cause and allows the players in his world leeway to seize. Procrastination in this regard puts the prince in a plane high above those acting in the world below him. Continuous calculations must be taking place. The act of procrastination was made when the prince hypothesized the result of his lack of action. The whole of Machiavelli's *The Prince* puts the reader in a position where they must choose. It is the prince who makes choices to move his dominion in one direction or another. How does Machiavelli describe to the reader how not to make a choice? The prince must deceive. The prince must be secure in their place. The prince must have absolute control. Watching others act while remaining seemingly complacent requires prudence, *virtù*, and an almost absolute control of fortune.

In this chapter, I will review procrastinated decision making in its Machiavellian mode. This requires an understanding of prudence, *virtù*, fortune, and how they relate to each other. From this analysis of these elements, I will explain how and why the prince would procrastinate a decision. What becomes clearer as the chapter proceeds is the extreme amount of confidence in his power the prince must have to allow for an important situation to transpire. Procrastination may be the brilliance of fools: It can also be the tool of geniuses.

VIRTÙ

Virtù is an important part of the prince's ability to choose at his own leisure. It is through the prince's independent *virtù* that he can rule with absolute supremacy. What is *virtù* though? How does it factor into decision making? Like some other scholars, I will use the word *virtù* in its untranslated form.¹⁸ The translation is such that the word in itself demands use in our own vernacular. Should a translation be helpful to the reader, my suggestion is simply to read *virtù* as virtue and disassociate the English word with its corresponding definitions. This definition of virtue should take into account what Aristotle questions in his discussion of virtue in his *Politics*, namely "whether the excellence of a good man and that of a good citizen are identical or different."¹⁹ Aristotle says that it is possible to be a truly good man only in the best regime, and only when the good man is ruling, not when he's being ruled. In other words, the best kind of virtue, for Aristotle, is not political virtue but intellectual virtue. It should also take into account the Christian ideal of humility. While Machiavelli's ideal of *virtù* does not overtly require or demand the forfeiture of our soul to the devil, it does demand a certain acquiescence to the realities of temporal realm, which is certainly contrary to the views of virtue held by Aristotle, his intellectual successors, and Christian tradition. Put plainly, *virtù*, for Machiavelli, is not limited to what Aristotle or the Christians say it is.

¹⁸ Harvey Mansfield translates *virtù* as "virtue" because "the literal translation helps to preserve our sense of shock that someone might use that word to describe the misdeed of Agathocles." Harvey Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 8. Mansfield indicts us moderns for being "too cool" for this sort of moral outrage. Upon reading his considerable works along with those of Leo Strauss, it is easy for one's mind to be moved to rightful outrage and reflection. This work will hopefully move the reader to mere consideration of the potential for moral outrage.

¹⁹ Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Ernest Barker, 1276^b16.

Virtù adapts itself to the necessities of the moment and the situation. Flexibility is at the heart of much of what *virtù* describes in *The Prince*. As the definition is fluid, so are the actions that are derived from *virtù*. The flexibility of *virtù* gives the word the ability to fit in the lofty virtues of justice to the lowly virtues of vice and malice.

The use and understanding of *virtù* is central to the idea of Machiavelli and his prince's form and substance. Where the prince makes his decisions based on his knowledge, he also bases it on what *virtù* requires in the moment. That is to say that *virtù* has different definitions when combined with the different subjects that Machiavelli includes throughout his texts. When combined with art, goodness, arms, prudence, and fortune, *virtù*'s meaning changes. In decision making, princes utilize their prudence and gamble on their fortune. *Virtù*'s definition and relation to prudence and fortune help calculate whether a prince should take action or not.

PRUDENCE AND VIRTÙ

To be prudent in decision making is a necessary quality of princeliness. Prudence is born from the wisdom that comes naturally through age. As Mansfield demonstrates, the use of *virtù* in prudence is not Aristotle's *Ethics* VI. 12—the prudence that may lead to the discovery of the Truth.²⁰ Machiavelli's prudence in *virtù* is a wholly new subversion of the prudence known or calculated by Aristotle. Practical wisdom “is not supreme over philosophic wisdom, i.e., over the superior part of us, any more than the art of medicine is over health; for it does not use it but provides for its coming into being it issues orders then for its sake, but not to it.”²¹ This simply is not the case for Machiavelli. He intends to subvert Aristotle's subservient ideals of practical wisdom and prudence to Machiavelli's necessary ideals of *virtù*. Machiavelli “suggests very strongly in the *Prince* that the one thing needful is good arms; he speaks less loudly of the need

²⁰ Harvey C. Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 39.

²¹ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. by Sir David Ross (London: Oxford UP, 1954), 1144^b29-1145^a11.

for prudence.”²² That is to say, eschew the ideals and stick to the reality. By subverting Aristotle, Machiavelli builds his case for the necessity of prudence in *virtù* and *virtù* in prudence. Whereas Aristotle places prudence at the service of the Good (i.e., the supreme good), Machiavelli puts prudence at the forefront along with *virtù* so that in fact and practice, any aspects of goodness disappear in practical exercise. Machiavelli is not entirely losing site of the good; he reminds the prince to “not depart from good, when possible.”²³ The reader can determine what “when possible” means, especially in relation to what is most practical.

The word prudence should also be considered in relation to the examples of the Italian word *animo*. Leo Strauss reminded his readers of the difference between *animo* and *anima*. The latter, *anima*, means soul and is tellingly not recorded in any Machiavellian text.²⁴ The former, *animo*, is in both *The Prince* and *Discourses on Livy*. *Animo* carries with it a similar definition to *thymos*. *Thymos* is the ancient word that designates bootstrapping strength to the point of imprudence such as risking your life to save a friend. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli tells of the *virtù di animo e di corpo* of Agathocles.²⁵ Here we have a historical figure whose raw talent, prudence, and virtue overcame fortune to establish a principedom. Even though Agathocles was very cruel--indeed, he was a criminal—he still became a prince. *Animo* is an important part of Machiavelli’s prudence, which in turn plays a part in *virtù*.

As *virtù* constantly adapts itself into what is necessary for and in the moment, it is apropos that Machiavelli offers extremes as hypothetical allegories. For example, in Chapter XVIII of *The Prince*, Machiavelli teaches that princes should be either a fox or a lion. They can

²² Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1959), 82.

²³ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. by Harvey C. Mansfield (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 70.

²⁴ Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 200.

²⁵ Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il Principe de Niccolò Machiavelli*, ed. by Giuseppe Lisio (Florence, Italy: G.C. Sansoni, 1899), 40, accessed on March 2, 2021, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/coo.31924114884913>.

either be clever like the fox or brutish like the lion. “Deception is necessary for the productive good of maintaining the state and this project becomes the prince’s compass.”²⁶ Machiavelli then suggests not making a choice at all between the lion or fox. When possible, the prince should be both. And more often than not, the prince must be both simultaneously and he must be infinitely versed in these abilities to the *n*th degree always. The idea is not unlike the medieval sense of chivalry which C. S. Lewis describes: The knight “is not a compromise or happy mean between ferocity and meekness; he is fierce to the *n*th and meek to the *n*th.”²⁷ In this case, as Machiavelli so often does, he seizes the old virtues and manipulates them into his *virtùs*. He rewrites the medieval definition of chivalry into one whose ends are more practical by removing meekness altogether, unless necessary for the present situation, and substitutes more appropriate words for most occasions such as audacity or boldness.

In the maxim of the fox and the lion, *virtù* is both at the same time. As the fox and the lion have no understanding of morality, they have no moral compass. Machiavelli doubly exhorts his princes to relieve themselves of the burden of morality like both the fox and lion, and account only for *verità effettuale* (the effectual truth). Seldom does it profit to bite from the hand that feeds you, but “seldom” takes into account that sometimes there is a benefit in doing just that. *Virtù* is important to the prince in decision making because by means of his own *virtù* and with his audacity to use his *virtù* readily, the prince can control situations thereby lessening the general risk associated with decision making. *Virtù* gives the prince flexibility to do as he pleases at his own leisure.

²⁶ Mark Menaldo, “Leadership and the virtue of deception in Machiavelli,” in *Leadership and the Unmasking of Authenticity: The Philosophy of Self-Knowledge and Deception*, ed. by Brent A. Crusher and Mark A. Menaldo (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2018), 109.

²⁷ C. S. Lewis, *Present Concerns*, “The Necessity of Chivalry” (Time and Tide, Aug. 1940).

TIMING

It is difficult to make sense of decision-making without engaging the sense of time in relation to the choices that are made. The prince does not make decisions in a vacuum, and as such, the prince must take into account how time plays into all the decisions he must make. Throughout *The Prince*, Machiavelli makes careful note of how the prince should use time to his advantage when making decisions.

Some timing decisions are straightforward. Take for example Chapter X where Machiavelli speaks about the well-fortified nature of the typical German town. Machiavelli explains how these cities create a secure environment for a prince against the invading forces of other princes. However, should one of these defended cities be attacked, the immediate concern of the prince should be to defend his principality and to counterattack “when men’s spirits are still hot and willing for defense.”²⁸ There is no time to dilly dally when “the enemy reasonably would burn and ruin the countryside on his arrival . . . the prince should hesitate so much the less.”²⁹ Time is important to the prince because it sometimes assuages the passions that light the furies of men’s passion for justice, revenge, and even hate, qualities that Machiavelli says play a positive role in the preservation of political freedom. It is this cool down effect that Machiavelli is using in this particular example.

In this example, Machiavelli speaks of a prince who does have the ability to defend readily his citizens and their lives. Should this be the case, then the citizens would observe how an enemy army would confiscate and burn the property and lands around the principality. At the very moment that a man sees his possessions burnt and confiscated is when the passions run at

²⁸ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 44.

²⁹ Ibid.

their highest. As passions run high, so the prince would be prudent in using these passions to his own ends to defend his principality. If the prince would seek peace or capitulation, it would be prudent to wait for such a time that the populace's sentiments also reflect, or at least can be brought more easily in accord with, the prince's desires.

The example of citizens defending their property in the moment is connected also to what Machiavelli emphasizes in Chapter XVII, where he claims that "men forget the death of a father more quickly than the loss of a patrimony."³⁰ The loss of property and possession always stings whether by divorce or force, but it begs the question; Is it really worse than the loss of a father? In the 1980 Australian film *Breaker Morant*, the three protagonists, having been sentenced to death, drink together one final time. Having realized that their deaths represent convenient scapegoats for the British Empire, Breaker Morant consoles the youngest of the three convicts by saying, "Some people spend their whole lives wondering when and how they're going to die. We are lucky enough to know both."³¹ Death is an eventuality that even Machiavelli could not escape. In general, there is no choice whether or not to die eventually. There is almost always a choice, however, in defending personal possessions. After the loss of those possessions there is a lifetime to ponder what choices could have been made differently to avoid such a calamity. Choices that affect the acquisition of a lifetime negatively will remain in the consciousness for a lifetime. It seems plausible, then, psychologically speaking, that what Machiavelli says is true in Chapter 17: "Men forget the death of a father more quickly than the loss of a patrimony."

³⁰ Ibid., 67.

³¹ *Breaker Morant*, directed by Bruce Beresford (1980; Adelaide, Australia: South Australian Film Corporation, 2011) DVD.

FORTUNE

Fortune plays the second part in the definition of *virtù*. Fortune works both for and against *virtù*. Fortune is fickle, and under the right circumstances, can be overcome by power and with some seduction. Machiavelli in Chapter XXV describes fortune to be like a woman who can be seduced. Looking past the chauvinist tendencies of this comment, Machiavelli is describing fortune as fair but not just. Fortune is an arbiter, and as Star Fleet Captain Jean-Luc Picard would say, “It is possible to commit no mistakes and still lose. That is not a weakness. That is life.”³² You can lose because fortune was against you, but Machiavelli will not allow fortune to wreak the havoc that Captain Picard so readily accepts. Machiavelli believes that *virtù* can overcome fortune by means of strength.

AUDENTIS FORTUNA IUVAT would hold true for Machiavelli, but Machiavelli would take it further than that.³³ If the personification of fortune is that of a goddess, this goddess ought not be worshiped but rather subdued and beaten into submission. “Fortuna favors virtue and prudence in the sense that she has a healthy respect for them.”³⁴ Machiavelli makes no such suggestion for his prince. Horace writes in his “Roman Odes” about the necessary steadfast resolve required of men in battle and government. IUSTUM ET TENACEM PROPOSITI VIRUM, NON CIVIUM ARDOR PRAVA IUBENTIUM, NON VULTUS INSTANTIS TYRANNI MENTE QUATIT SOLIDA NEQUE AUSTER.³⁵ The Romans allow neither fortune nor gods to interfere with their task. They do this by means of their own *virtù*. This is diametrically opposite to the writings of the Greek historian Herodotus who, quoting Solon, said, “πάν ἐστὶ ἄνθρωπος συμφορῆ”³⁶ Fortune (or chance, as

³² *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. “Peak Performance.” Directed by Robert Scheerer, Written by Gene Roddenberry, (Paramount, July 8, 1989).

³³ Aeneid 10.284 “Fortune favors the bold.”

³⁴ Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 221.

³⁵ Horace, Odes, III. 3, “The man of integrity who is steadfast to his will is not shaken from his tenacious resolve by impetuous citizens urging him to do wrongly nor by the frowning countenance of a tyrant, nor by the South Wind.” (Author’s Translation)

³⁶ Herodotus, *Histories*, I.32. “All man is chance.”

Solon calls it) cannot be allowed to dominate the decision-making processes. Allowing fortune, the pleasure of moving her *virtù* over the prince's *virtù* is completely unacceptable in Machiavelli's worldview. Ruling over fortune is a Roman quality. Whereas allowing submission to chance is a Greek quality. Machiavelli cites the Romans and not the Greeks because of the perceived inability of the Greeks to deal with fortune.³⁷

The Romans are an ideal historical civilization for Machiavelli to use for his example. They are a historical civilization known for their power, military, and a shallow concern for the intellectual type of human being. That is to say, they paid lip service to the intellectual concerns of the Greeks but had very little interest in the things that did not consolidate power or expand the empire. *The Prince*, being a treatise that examines the political, pays almost no concern to the Greeks who are traditionally the ancient civilization that is consulted in such political discourses. Machiavelli is concerned solely for the utilitarian in this case. This is probably why he chose to include such a wealth of current events for his princes to study alongside the ancient ones.

Pope Julius II had luck as Machiavelli describes in Chapter XXV. Though lacking in the prudence to understand the fortunate circumstances around him, he ignored fortune altogether and benefited more from fortune than his enemies. Not seeing that fortune could be turned against him, he did not avail himself to make any moves against her. If fortune had turned against Pope Julius II, he might have been more inclined to incorporate her in his decision-making. Machiavelli speaks out of both sides of his mouth in this story, and it shows to the flexibility and invariable nature of fortune but also of *virtù*. *Virtù*, like fortune, is what you make of it. When it is bad, you force it to be good. When fortune is good, you allow it to be good. The use of *virtù* means to allow or disallow fortune to run its natural course.

³⁷ See Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue*, pp. 11-13 for further discussion.

At the beginning of Chapter XXV, Machiavelli describes fortune as “violent rivers which when they become enraged flood the plains, ruin the trees and the buildings, lift earth from this part, drop in another”³⁸ A similar analogy may be applied to timing decisions. Timing can be like a violent river. The decision-making processes and the timing that plays into this process is difficult to control. If left in their natural circumstances, timing can have the ability to lay waste and force the prince to make a necessary choice. Fortunately for the prince, they do have the ability to control timing. Machiavelli speaks to this point when he claims that fortune can be controlled in a calm manner.

And although they are like this, it is not as if men, when times are quiet, could not provide for them with dikes and dams so that when they rise later, either they go by a canal or their impetus is neither so wanton nor so damaging. It happens similarly with fortune, which shows her power where virtue has not been put in order to resist her and therefore turns her impetus where she knows that dams and dikes have not been made to contain her.³⁹

The volatility of fortune is directly related to the volatility of time; fortune is incumbent on our own strength to manage her. It is important for the prince’s *virtù* to manipulate fortune so that a decision might be made at the best time. Using *virtù*, the prince can “hold her [fortune] down, to beat her and strike her down.”⁴⁰ Manipulating fortune means creating an environment that works in the prince’s favor.

DECISION-MAKING AND TIMING

Decision making can be broken down into two parts, an affirmative and a negative. Binary computer language uses this principal. There are only two choices: 1 or 0. The input of either of these numbers constitutes a decision in the affirmative or the negative. There is no

³⁸ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 98.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 101.

account for timing in this sort of response. The prince, however, is really offered three choices in any scenario: affirm, negate, or do not respond. It is the “no response” choice that exemplifies procrastinated decision making and interests us here.

To delay a response allows for a variety of extenuating factors to interfere with a choice that could have been made at the moment a decision might have been made. The prince by doing nothing is in effect doing something, but it is a dimension of thought, not action.⁴¹ Events constantly happen around the prince and by setting in motion events that he does not condone, a prince releases responsibility from his shoulders but also increases his risk. Naturally, Machiavelli neither likes for his prince to relinquish responsibility nor power. He praises impetuosity over caution. Pope Julius II who “proceeded impetuously in all his affairs,”⁴² succeeded because of this natural inclination. “I judge this indeed, that it is better to be impetuous than cautious.”⁴³ From such a quote, the reader may think of *Macbeth* Act 1, Scene 7: “If it were done, when ‘tis done, then ‘twere well it were done quickly.” How can this be though? The prince cannot and should not make choices at certain times. “The office of prudence is not merely to consider present circumstances but to anticipate the future by being acquainted with necessities to come.”⁴⁴ It is in accordance with an understanding of the necessities to come that Machiavelli advocates the use of delaying decisions.

Take for example the execution of Messer Remirro de Orco in Chapter VII. A particularly cruel man, he was placed as the *patron* for Romagna by Alexander VI. Remirro’s job was to subjugate the whole of the Romagna by means of fear and terror, and Machiavelli says

⁴¹ Peg Thomas, David B. Greenberger, “The Relationship between Leadership and Time Orientation,” *Journal of Management Inquiry* (Sept. 1995): 278.

⁴² Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 100.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁴⁴ Mansfield, *Machiavelli’s Virtue*, 39.

Remirro excelled at his job. Once the state had lost its *animo*, however, Remirro was executed by Alexander VI, the same man who assigned Remirro his ignoble job. Talk about using people! Undoubtedly, Alexander VI received many demands for the removal of Remirro well before he chose the appropriate time to remove his agent. The spirit of the people having been purged, Alexander decided it was now time for Remirro's removal. This removal could have been done at any time previously, and in fact, he already knew that Remirro had to be removed even before Remirro was informed of his task. So cruel a man could coerce a province into order but not into loyalty. It would be useless to place any other man in the position if they were to act any less cruelly. The choice of Remirro was premediated with the intent to conspire against him once his services had been used. Alexander used his *virtù* to subdue Romagna by means of Remirro, and only at his leisure decided when Remirro had to be removed. This was at the moment when the cruelty had surpassed its usefulness and the people were able to be "satisfied and stupified," as Machiavelli writes, at the prince's mercy. That timing could only be assured by observing the situation and allowing the situation to transpire at its own rate.

The nature of this timing presented in the example above is Machiavellian in its most classic form. Christians, for their part, are called to choose. The Christian who does not choose spends eternity just past the gates of Dante's hell. "Those who lived without infamy or praise . . . Of Angels, who have not rebellious been, nor faithful were to God, but were for self."⁴⁵ Not choosing is not Christian. By contrast, Pontius Pilate, who could have released Christ from the Cross, absconded his responsibility by neither condemning nor relieving, and thus allowed the crowds their way in crucifying Christ while freeing Barabbas. Pilate washed his hands of all responsibility. By not taking an active side in the decision to crucify Christ, he ennobled the

⁴⁵ Dante Alighieri, *The Inferno*, trans. by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (Barnes & Noble Classics: New York, 2003), 15.

stronger of the two factions—the Jews, who were threatening to riot—to respect the rule of the Romans more than they already did. As the timing was neither right for reprieve nor condemnation, Pilate took no part seeing there was no gain to be had.

Machiavelli would have seen this action by Pilate as both good and bad. “Nor should any state ever believe that it can always adopt safe courses; on the contrary, it should think it has to take them all as doubtful.”⁴⁶ Machiavelli’s cautionary comments in Chapter XXI tell the prince exactly what to expect any decision. Any outcome from being forced to make any decision should be thought of as bad. There are no truly safe courses in making any decision, but this is no excuse to refrain from decision making. The Angels condemned to chase the blank standard in Dante’s *Inferno* themselves chose to abscond their responsibilities to choose. They did not delay their choice; they simply did not make a choice. Pilate’s refraining from making a choice in the small provincial manner of the crucifixion of Christ was not of any great importance in the real world of Roman state affairs at that time. But this refraining from decision making as a whole could not serve Pilate well in that realm of public affairs. “And irresolute princes, in order to escape present dangers, follow that neutral way most times, and most times come to ruin.”⁴⁷ Comparing the two maxims, Machiavelli speaks out of both sides of his mouth. No good thing can come from a decision, but conversely, the prince must make a decision because the ambivalent or neutral prince can only come to ruin.

THE LANDSCAPE OF DECISION-MAKING

What Machiavelli does make clear in Chapter XXI is how these decisions can evolve and how they may not evolve. The chapter slowly changes its attitude on the idea of neutrality. We first encounter his maxim on choosing a side at the beginning of the chapter. Toward the end, we

⁴⁶ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 91.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 90.

see his maxim take into consideration decision-making as opposed to side taking. The considerations on decision making are incumbent on the various situations that the prince finds himself in, but any decision should always lead the prince to a more powerful position. Sacrificing anything for the sake of goodness will only erode at the already tenuous pedestal on which all princes stand. By assuming that the outcomes of all decisions will affect the prince negatively, Machiavelli compels his student either to find a response that will leave the prince more powerful or delay the decision to a more opportunistic point where the prince has a better survey of the situation, or where he may not be obligated to make a decision at all. It is the outcome of the decision that should concern the prince.

The outcome of a decision is part of the ability for a prince to think in spatiotemporal timing. The time duration of a decision is not so much an immediate impact as much as the impact on a decision that will be forced in the future. Therefore, when the prince is coerced to make a decision, he is really impacting the scenario in which the next decision is to be made. Delaying decision making allows fortune to run its course, and the prudent prince, being the master of fortune, would not fear fortune as an arbiter. When fortune fails to meet the expectations of the prince, there should always be arms on which to fall back. Fortune is only part of the spatiotemporal aspect of princely decision making. The prince should know fortune well, but the prince should also be a prudent person. As Machiavelli implores us to follow the great men of history so that we may have the odor of greatness, Machiavelli turns to the Romans and their *virtù*.

The Romans, being wise, did always concern themselves with the events that would come to pass as Machiavelli articulates. "For the Romans did in these cases what all wise princes

should do: they not only have regard for present troubles but also for future ones.”⁴⁸ He finds their ability to read the future fascinating and compares their abilities to that of a savvy physician. “In the beginning of the illness it is easy to cure and difficult to recognize, but in the progress of time, when it has not been recognized and treated in the beginning, it becomes easy to recognize and difficult to cure.”⁴⁹ The Romans had the princely talent for intelligent cruelty. War itself is a kind of cruelty, and the Romans had a knack for war and for making it at the right time; most of the time, that meant preventative war. Machiavelli lauds this. “The Romans, seeing inconveniences from afar, always found remedies for them and never allowed them to continue so as to escape a war.”⁵⁰ Not fearing war nor attempting to flee a situation where war was needed, the Romans often played the war card. They made a decision not in a vacuum but in the reality of both an existing present and a possible future. In order to put themselves in a place where they would not be forced to choose between bad outcomes, they elected to make a decision earlier than later. If war was to be the course anyways, the Romans would fight that war sooner than later. It would cure the issue as a physician would cure a minor case, and making war sooner rather than later meant it stayed a minor case

PROCRASTINATING DECISION-MAKING

Machiavelli’s formula for making decisions is this: First, do not make decisions unless necessary. Second, if a decision is to be made, make it in light of future circumstances and with a view to maintaining princely power. Lastly, make the decision quickly. With this formula for decision making established, where is the case for delaying a decision? Under what circumstances would it be prudent for a prince to delay a decision? I postulate three reasons for

⁴⁸ Ibid., 12.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

procrastinating a decision: the absence of necessity; the lack of information supplies or alliances; and finally, the need for a more prudent spatiotemporal understanding.

First, the prince wisely procrastinates on a decision if there is an absence of necessity. He is, after all, the prince. Being involved in any decision making exposes the prince to challenges that he may not have perceived. In making any choice, he has to rely on his own prudence to choose the lesser of two evils. Even when being asked for a decision, lack of action is in itself an action, and though much can be construed, the prince cannot be directly implicated. In Chapter XIX, Machiavelli lauds the courts of France. In their system, the king can readily assign culpability for unpopular decisions to others. “This order could not be better, or more prudent, or a greater cause of the security of the king and the kingdom. From this one can infer another notable thing: that princes should have anything blamable administered by others, favors by themselves.”⁵¹ By compelling others to make the decision—in this case it was law courts meeting out punishments and for crimes—the French monarch remains above the fray of politics and thus inculpable. These passages on the courts of France can cause one to reflect on what is perhaps an unspoken purpose of “the judicial system.” While enforcing the law is nominally an executive branch responsibility, courts often do “the dirty work.”

Here is an example. In the play *A Man for All Seasons*, Sir Thomas More is accused of sedition and treason against Henry VIII since he does not take the new oath declaring Henry VIII as the head of the Church of England. In court, More says to the jury “The maxim is ‘Qui tecat consentere.’ The maxim of the law is ‘Silence gives consent.’ If you wish to construe what my silence betokened you must construe that I consented, not that I denied.”. The prosecution interrupts him: “Is that what the world construes from it? Do you pretend that is what you wish

⁵¹ Ibid., 75.

the world to construe from it?” To which More retorts, “The world must construe according to its wits. This court must construe according to the law.”⁵² The prince has much to back his silence. “There is the majesty of the principality, the laws, the protection of friends and of the state which defend him.”⁵³ *A Man for All Seasons* would lead the audience to believe More is technically correct. Sir More tries to use the prince’s own law to protect his silence. Machiavelli and history show that More was dead wrong, and Henry VIII remained the unquestioned monarch of his kingdom. Between Sir Thomas More’s betokened silence and King Henry VIII’s royal silence, the majesty of the king won, and handedly. In this case, King Henry’s “dirty work” was performed by a law court, which served him as Remirro de Orco had so usefully served Pope Alexander VI.

The second reason a prince would procrastinate a decision is that the information, supplies, alliances needed to make a decision are not available. He may have an inclination, but he needs more ground on which to stand. In the 1969 movie *Patton*, the title character laments having his gasoline supply cut. “Right now, the whole Nazi Reich is mine for the taking . . . and now I have precisely the right instrument at precisely the right moment in history, at exactly the right place..... Such a moment won’t come again for a thousand years. And all I need is a few miserable gallons of gasoline.”⁵⁴ Patton thought he had the right time and the right place, but he lacked the right infrastructure and political alliances to achieve his goal. A more powerful prince (in Patton’s case, General Eisenhower) thought these assets were put to better use supporting other allies. “He should do as prudent archers do when the place they plan to hit appears too distant and knowing how far the strength of their bow carries, they set their aim much higher

⁵² Robert Balt, *A Man for All Seasons* (Bloomsbury Publishing: New York, 1960), 132.

⁵³ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 73.

⁵⁴ *Patton*, directed by Franklin Schaffner (1970; Los Angeles, CA: 20th Century Fox, 2010), DVD.

than the place intended . . . with the aid of so high an aim to achieve their design.”⁵⁵ The prudent archer knows his craft and knows both the strength and weakness of his tools. Archers studied and honed their craft over years of practice and trials. The archer must learn how to factor the particular parts of his tool, such as the strength of his draw string, the construction of the shaft, the shape of the arrowhead, and then also include the extenuating circumstances of nature in order to hone his craft well.

The prince must achieve the same sense of unity in his offices before committing to a decision. As an archer may pull his string slowly so as not to damage the frame or string; the prince may commit to an action in a similar manner as to better understand the circumstances. Machiavelli is keen on his prince’s ability to know everything in the kingdom whenever possible. This includes language, customs, and orders. “Here one needs to have great fortune and great industry to hold them [new conquests of different cultures]; and one of the quickest remedies would be for whoever acquires it to go there to live in person.”⁵⁶ Having the right information and almost all of it is important to execute a desire properly.

The third reason for procrastinating a decision is due to the lack of understanding of the spatiotemporal landscape. The perceived need may be immediate, but the environment may not be amenable to action. To have the right timing is to take consideration of fortune through prudence and *virtù*. It is prudent to invade in summer when the ground is dry and the weather salubrious as opposed to the winter when the ground is wet and the weather inhospitable. Machiavelli exhorts in his last chapter to Lorenzo to “Seize Italy and to Free Her from the Barbarians,”; he writes, “I do not know what time has ever been more apt for it.”⁵⁷ Timing is

⁵⁵ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 22.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 101.

truly the central theme in many of the cases calling for the prince to procrastinate a decision. Why is now the time apt for conquest as opposed to before now or later? It is particulars such as this that Machiavelli shies away from, and prudently so, for all situations are characterized by unique circumstances not capable of formulation in advance. When the time is right though, a prudent prince should instinctively know it. Pope Julius II was audacious and moved too quickly. While this was indeed successful for him in his life, over the course of a longer life, Machiavelli effectively cedes that it would have failed inevitably.

Ultimately the prince must “adapt the proceedings to the qualities of the times; and similarly, he is unprosperous whose procedure is in disaccord with the times.”⁵⁸ In short, the prince needs to know where he stands spatiotemporally. The failure to take action in the future because of a present decision is directly attributable to the prince who chooses not to take into account the times. He should be like the Roman who looks to the future in making his decisions, but he should also take into account Julius II who had the audacity to act. The prince must be like the fox and the lion. Both creatures are quick to act but bide their time to stalk prey before making their kill.

PRINCELY PROCRASTINATION

Waiting is the most dangerous of games, but it can reap the most benefit when done properly. The risk must be worth the reward. But delaying is not merely a waiting game. Certain measures must be in place to ensure the prince will even have the ability to make a choice should he so desire to do so. The prince needs to have the right information, and he needs to master things so that at time of execution of a decision, there needs not to be a serious reassessment of the situation. The prince needs *virtù* and fortune.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 101.

Delaying a decision is a power move that requires cunning and skill. To rely solely on fortune is a dangerous decision. For if fortune smiles on the prince's lack of movement, then the prince is praised and if not, he is blamed. It is like bluffing in Texas Hold'em until the river card, the last card put down by the dealer. When or if you show your cards and the river proves in your favor, the players at the table will respect your bluff and hold. If fortune does not smile, then these same players will mock you for your incredulity. Success rides on your ability to have cunning and skill in a fortuitous manner.

Returning to the historical character of Patton again, he relied on much skill at the Battle of the Bulge when turning his army north 90 degrees and marching them one hundred miles in the snow to Bastogne. His pivot and march in itself was stunning in that he had trained his army mercilessly for months for such a move. No army in American history to that point had ever moved farther and faster. Patton however lacked a key factor that he could not control—the weather. On Christmas Eve, he ordered his chaplain to write a prayer for seasonable weather and relief from the snowstorm that prevented air cover for his army during the coming attack of Bastogne. Patton invoked God, by means of prayer, to aid him in his time of need. The weather cleared, and fortune was in his favor. If the weather had not been in Patton's favor, how would the world have responded to his move to Bastogne? Would it be perhaps a military oddity understood by few and ridiculed by many? Patton had a character that would have powered through the weather even if fortune had not been favorable, but at what cost would that move come? Most likely, it would have come at the cost of thousands of allied and axis lives and the forfeit of the glory that came with his attack.⁵⁹ Fortune is fickle at best and is therefore unreliable to the prince that has true aspirations to the power and glory that belongs to the best of princes.

⁵⁹ See Hubert Essame's *Patton: A Study in Command* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974) and George S. Patton's *War as I Knew It* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1947) for an examination of the Third Army's 90-degree

Fortune is nothing more to Machiavelli than the whims of a God who gives arbitrarily. Fortune of course plays a tremendous role in the life of Pope Julius II whose impetuosity was loved by fortune, and as such saw all his endeavors succeed. “I judge this indeed, that it is better to be impetuous than cautious, because fortune is a woman; and it is necessary, if one wants to hold her down, to beat her and strike her down.”⁶⁰ Fortune’s impetuosity does not need to translate exactly to a prince’s success in delaying his decision. This is the second and more important of the two necessities to allow for delayed decision making— *virtù*.

Virtù is what truly allows for a prince to delay a decision. It is by sheer force that the prince is allowed the space to delay a decision. By sheer force, it is meant that the prince would ideally have absolute control over the circumstances in his world. He is in effect, a God, commanding all the nuances of all the characters and their decisions. If you continually force fortune to yield to your will, you will always have control of the field. In order to allow for procrastinated decisions, you not only have to know how the world around you works, but how the events will transpire. You force not only your own fortune but effectively control the fortune of others. Doing this means you can let whatever event happens because you allow it to happen, not anybody else. Machiavelli is all about the acquisition of power. He is nuanced about the modes of getting power, but he is clear on the goal of the acquisition and retention of power.

Napoleon at the Battle of Austerlitz needed a couple of days for his army in Vienna to arrive to the field of battle. While he had enough men to feign dominance, he needed the remaining army in Vienna to bring any battle to a draw—much less a victory. In normal circumstances, upon the arrival of an enemy army, a battle would have taken place within the

pivot north and the Battle of the Bulge. Patton’s belief in his own fortune is an interesting study in itself and mimics the attitude of Pope Julius II.

⁶⁰ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 101.

course of a day, perhaps two. Napoleon needed time. So, he made it. He pretended to enter into peace negotiations with the Austrian Army. The Austrians took Napoleon in good faith since no gentleman would pretend one thing in order to gain another. Such a guise would be unchristian. Napoleon, and not the Pope, had already crowned himself emperor. When the additional army had arrived from Vienna, the ruse was up. Napoleon attacked, and the field was taken by his armies in a battle that is also studied by modern tacticians. Napoleon did not follow Christian principals; he lied blatantly in order to find more time. Fortune did not work in his favor. Thus, he made his own. He forced the Austrian Coalition to delay their decision by delaying his own decision to fight. What if he lied about the negotiations? He used his *virtù* to win the battle and became an even more powerful prince.⁶¹

Virtù drives the prince toward comfort by making the most efficient use of his time. Why work when you can have greater forces working in your favor? That is to say do not abscond your responsibility to declare war. Declare it if you have to, but if you don't have to and other things can let you avoid war, then avoid it. That is the advantage of not making your decisions too quickly. *Virtù* allows the princes absolute power to do and *not do* as they please. Napoleon relied too much on fortune in his invasion of Russia. He did not think that the Russians would burn their own cities, and he did not account for an unbelievably cold winter. He thought his own *virtù* would see him through the battles and occupation of enemy cities. His *virtù* got him to Moscow, but his planning and expectations of his enemy caused him to lose the war. *Virtù* is not

⁶¹ David Bell's *Napoleon: A Concise Biography* (New York: Oxford UP, 2015) is an excellent introduction to Napoleon. It is short enough to gather the distinct impression that the biography is not nearly long enough. His chapter on Austerlitz shows the cunning and the daring of Napoleon in power. Felix Markham's *Napoleon* (New York: Signet Classics, 2010) is longer but address Austerlitz more in depth. Lastly, Philip Dwyer's *Napoleon: The Path to Power* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009) is a lengthy examination of Napoleon's early career. It is the first of two parts. He pays special attention to Machiavelli's influence on young Napoleon.

fickle, but it needs finesse and a certain sense of humility to use properly. As Napoleon and Patton both saw, *virtù* got them to the battle but it was their skill that allowed their *virtù* to shine.

A prince who knows and uses *virtù* prudently and has seduced fortune is an unstoppable force. There are two factors in using this force: audacity and intelligence. Lawrence of Arabia had audacity. In the David Lean film *Lawrence of Arabia*, the Bedouin remark repeatedly at seemingly impossible things that “It is written [that this should not happen].”⁶² In doing the impossible (such as crossing deserts and pushing back the Turks), Lawrence has the audacity to prove them wrong and uses his *virtù* to make it happen. He in effect conquers fortune—or as the Arabs might ponder, he changes the will of Allah. Further, Lawrence had the academic background to engage in a fuller manner than his military counterparts, the Arab culture. By changing his uniform and playing both the role of the good Englishman and the good Arab, he had the good sense to deceive both his own army and the Bedouin armies of his intentions. There is little doubt that he truly wished to see the Arab peoples free of colonial domination, but equally, during his time in Arabia he must have known of the existence of the Sykes–Picot Agreement which would divide the Arab world between the French and British “spheres of influence.” By not publicly disclosing his knowledge of the agreement (which he was probably asked about by many in the Bedouin armies), his deception enabled Great Britain to manage Arabia for a generation.

If deception is the prince’s compass by means of intelligence, audacity, and *virtù*, then delaying decisions will fit most comfortably in the prince’s wheelhouse. The prince should be perfectly comfortable not addressing issues and declining decisions. The combination of these elements and the smart enactment of them gives the prince the power to do as they please in their

⁶² *Lawrence of Arabia*, directed by David Lean (1962; Las Angeles, CA: Columbia Pictures Corporation, 2008), DVD.

princedom. In delaying a decision, the prince has little concern over the major or minor changes that happen around him. The world of the prince revolves around him and not him around the events of the world. The systematic unpredictability of fortune having been abated by dikes and canals now allows the prince to execute his will. It may be that the floods are happening now, but with the proper infrastructure in place, there is no need to make anything happen unless the will of the prince is willing.

As Machiavelli concludes *The Prince*, he makes an exhortation to reconquer the Italian peninsula. “And everything follows from the weakness at the head, because those who know are not obeyed, and each thinks he knows since up to now none has been able to raise himself, both by virtue and by fortune, to a point where the others will yield to him.”⁶³ He looks toward Lorenzo de’ Medici to begin the reconquest. He implies that not only does Lorenzo have the *virtù* to commit to such a conquest, but he also knows how to seduce fortune through his *virtù* to achieve this end. Machiavelli spurs his princes to seize the moment in a world that revolves around them. They can make the unification happen now. If the unification can happen now, then an obvious factor in their rule is that the minor decisions that they make in between the great decision to conquer Italy can be made at their will as others wait.

CONCLUSION

Procrastination is not for weak princes. It is for the prince who has absolute control over his dominion and can exercise that control at will. The prince with prudence, *virtù*, and fortune could engage in procrastinated decision making, but only if their *virtù* was strong enough to endure the ebbs and flows of fortune and if their prudence extended to the reading of allies and enemies at will. Lincoln would procrastinate his decisions because he understood the nature of

⁶³ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 104.

the people with whom he was working. He could usually compel those he needed to compel, but when compulsion did not work, he would silently use others to engage in the action for him. This would keep him out of the decision making. The following chapters will show three examples of Lincoln's use of procrastinated decision making and the steps he took in order to achieve his goal. Through procrastinated decision making, Lincoln was able to not only maintain his power, but he was also able to grow it.

CHAPTER IV LINCOLN AND SIMON CAMERON

Abraham Lincoln was a quiet and melancholy man who became the President of the United States in the most precarious of times. Arguably, he is the only reason why our nation still exists today as a union. He formed a more perfect Union by using his office to pursue a singular goal: to unify a nation. There were many other important struggles that demanded his attention. There were many egos to satisfy. There were many silent masses who demanded results. In order to placate all these demands, Lincoln inevitably had to rank and order the importance of the demands placed upon his office. Many of the demands were menial but required by law, such as the appointment of minor government offices. Some of these demands were never examined or thought of by law to begin with, such as suspending *habeas corpus*. Some of these demands were just not important for the executive to review. Some of these demands needed more information or time to pass before a decision could be made.

In these chapters, I will examine the nature of Lincoln's successful use of procrastinated decision-making in three scenarios. First, I will examine the successful use of procrastinated timing in the firing of Simon Cameron. The decision to dismiss and exile the Secretary of War Simon Cameron is a classic example of procrastinating decisions. Lincoln waited a month after Cameron made poorly thought-out political move before he took action against Cameron and his new "allies." Second, I will compare this procrastinated timing in his sacking of the arrogant and insubordinate General John Frémont. Lincoln took time to weigh every option in dealing with the general's gross insubordination. Through waiting to make his decision, he allowed Frémont more time to dig his own grave. This cheapened the political cost of making the more appropriate decision. Lastly, I will examine Lincoln's best use of procrastinated decision-making

in his handling of the Cabinet Crisis of 1862. Here especially, Lincoln utilizes the qualities of *virtù* in a manner that Machiavelli would appreciate. Through cunning, intelligence, audacity, and a bit of fortune, Lincoln called the bluff of another cabinet member and saved his most important cabinet ally.

The firing of both Cameron and Frémont show how in daily life Lincoln often waited before acting. There are two different types of waiting demonstrated in these decisions. The decision to dismiss Cameron was arguably made the moment Cameron overextended his reach. Lincoln simply waited for the right time to act on his decision. The decision to dismiss Frémont, however, was a product of deductive analysis and generous opportunities for mercy. Lincoln preferred others to act so that he could decide in relation to their actions.

In the lobby of Willard's Hotel in Washington D.C., a Vermont jobber supposedly boasted, "You can sell anything to the government at almost any price you've got the guts to ask."⁶⁴ While talk such as this echoed through boarding houses, hotels, and brothels across town, Secretary of War Simon Cameron gave a report on December 1, 1861 to Congress, in which he wrote that "While an increase of cavalry was undoubtedly necessary, it has reached a numerical strength more than adequate to the wants of service. As it can only be maintained at great costs, measures will be taken for its gradual reduction."⁶⁵ This report was in response to grave accusations lobbied against him that corruption permeated the halls of the War Department. Defective, overpriced firearms were certainly not Cameron's fault: "Combinations among manufacturers, importers, and agents, for the sale of arms, have, in many cases caused an undue increase in prices."⁶⁶ Throughout Cameron's administration, a cloud of corruption hung over the

⁶⁴ Shelby Foote, *The Civil War: A Narrative, Fort Sumter to Kernstown—First Blood—the Thing Gets Under Way* (New York: Random House Press, 1958), 242.

⁶⁵ Carl Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years—I*, Vol. III (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947), 429.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

halls of the War Department. Shelby Foote claims that “there was no evidence that the Secretary had profited personally except in the use of his office to pay off his political debts and strengthen his political position.”⁶⁷ David Herbert Donald similarly claims that “Simon Cameron believed to be personally venal, but he was the head of a corrupt department and was responsible for its actions.”⁶⁸ Simon Cameron was responsible for the extensive corruption that prevailed across the War Department.

Cameron was a savvy politician. He could read political winds well, and the winds from the Executive Mansion were not favorable. The public was losing confidence in Cameron’s abilities to run the war department. Lincoln by the end of 1861 had steadily been receiving a long series of letters and notes from the public loudly informing their executive that Cameron was not the right man for the job. “It is universally believed that Cameron is a thief,” wrote an exasperated John Cranford to Lincoln in Aug of 1861.⁶⁹

Lincoln had his doubts of Cameron early in his administration and had even considered replacing him initially. He desired to have Joseph Holt as his Secretary of War, and he informed Cameron of his thoughts by dropping hints. As Lincoln was hinting though, very real repercussions were affecting the war effort. Financing the war, which was a difficult problem in the early days of the conflict, was becoming increasingly difficult not for lack of leadership from Lincoln but because of some of his members in the Cabinet. Cameron was at the heart of the difficulty in the financing situation for he lacked the capabilities necessary to conduct the business side of a war administration.⁷⁰ A letter from George T. M. Davis, a New York City

⁶⁷ Foote, *Fort Sumter to Kernstown*, 242.

⁶⁸ David Herbert Donald, *Lincoln* (New York, Simon & Schuster, 1995), 325.

⁶⁹ As cited in Donald, *Lincoln*, 325.

⁷⁰ Godfrey Rathbone Benson Charnwood, *Abraham Lincoln* (Lanham, MD: Madison Books, 1996), 234.

attorney and friend of financiers, illustrated to Lincoln the grave distrust of Cameron's administration.

The Banks in their efforts to replace the loan among their correspondents throughout the Country, found the disaffection and distrust towards the War Department much greater than they had any idea of. And that the general want of confidence in the Country in the Department that was to disburse the major part of the Loan the Banks had agreed to make, would operate disastrously to their expectations in carrying the whole plan successfully through.⁷¹

The answer to this was all too clear to Davis: "I inquired again, whether nothing short of a change in the Secretary of War would remedy the objections and dispel the prejudice of the public against that high officer of the Government, and was answered most emphatically in the negative."⁷² Lincoln had no other option than to replace Cameron.

In this precarious position, Cameron realized that it was necessary to establish new allies. Therefore, with no consultation or warning, in an address to Congress in December 1861, Cameron became an abolitionist, and thus positioned himself to make policy for Lincoln's administration without the President's consultation. In his annual report to Congress on the status of the War Department, a long exhortation in the middle of this report was made to free the slaves. In this incitement, Cameron spoke of traitors who had already forfeited their property. This property naturally included human beings. Abolition at this stage of the Civil War was practically impossible. The word alone incited protests in both the North and South. Cameron's position was an untenable position in Lincoln's administration in December 1861.

Lincoln, unaware of these statements made in the report, learned of this along with the report at the same time as the rest of the world from the public telegraph office. Portrait painter

⁷¹ Lincoln, Abraham. *Abraham Lincoln Papers: Series 2. General Correspondence. 1858 to 1864: George T. M. Davis to Abraham Lincoln, Tuesday, Financial and Political Affairs*. 1861. Manuscript/Mixed Material, accessed April 24, 2021, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mal4209900/>.

⁷² Ibid.

Frank B. Carpenter, who was with Lincoln at the time, heard Lincoln speak, “this will never do! Secretary Cameron must take no such responsibility. That is a question which belongs exclusively to me!”⁷³ And so, Lincoln recalled the published pamphlet with the abolitionist text and had another copy without the questionable text reprinted quietly. Nevertheless, the text had already been widely circulated. Once reprinted, Lincoln took no further stance other than to publicly restate the administration’s official position on abolition.

Reports were made by papers across the divided states both praising and blaming Secretary Cameron and fellow political abolitionist John Frémont. Of course, in the center of this melee of editorials, front page news clips, and bar talk was Lincoln: What was Lincoln going to do? Would he sack the Secretary? Would he adopt the new measures? Would he repeal what was said and forgive the Secretary? Would he punish the Secretary?

Lincoln did nothing for a crucial month. He avoided the question of Cameron’s transgression.

Having corrected his minister’s haste and imprudence, the President indulged in no further comment, and Cameron, yielding to superior authority, received the implied rebuke with becoming grace. From the confidential talks with his intimates it was clear enough that he expected a dismissal. But Lincoln never acted in a harsh or arbitrary mood. For the time being the personal relations between the President and his Secretary of War remained unchanged.⁷⁴

Without comment, Cameron must have feared every note to have enclosed a rebuke or a dismissal from his office. For as cunning as Cameron was, he made a crucial mistake. He, like Frémont, underestimated Lincoln. To sack a man like Cameron who was on the front page of many a publication across the US would have been politically disadvantageous. John Bigelow, of

⁷³ Sandburg, *The War Years—I, Vol. III*, 436.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 436.

the French consulate, wrote home, “Are Cameron and Frémont to be canonized as martyrs?”⁷⁵ As the papers were singing the praises of Cameron, the Abolitionist faction which he courted also took him to heart. They charged Lincoln with “dictatorship” and “timidity.”⁷⁶ The abolitionist would protect “Simon pure”⁷⁷ Cameron from the tyrannical Lincoln. With the overt support from abolitionist over his “great document,”⁷⁸ Cameron was lulled into a false security.

A full month passed before Lincoln took any action against Cameron. By January, the events of December had long passed. Lincoln saw the opportunity to make his move. 40 days after Cameron’s address in December, on January 11, 1862, Lincoln wrote a short note to Cameron.

“My dear Sir:

As you have more than once expressed a desire for a change of position, I can now gratify you consistently with my view of the public interest. I therefore propose nominating you to the Senate next Monday as minister to Russia.

Very sincerely, your
friend, A Lincoln.”⁷⁹

Cameron was politically and personally hurt. He was driven to tears when Salmon P. Chase, Secretary of the Treasury, delivered the letter.⁸⁰ Lincoln, too, was shocked at Cameron’s indiscretion. The secretarial reports were usually compiled under the careful eye of the executive and then transmitted through the President’s own annual address. Mercy was certainly the Presidential prerogative. To keep Cameron’s honor, dignity, and political friendship, Lincoln rescinded the letter and allowed Cameron to submit his own resignation.

⁷⁵ Ibid., and Foote, *Fort Sumter to Kernstown*, 243.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Sandburg, *The War Years—I, Vol I*, 437, and J.G. Randall, *Lincoln: The President Springfield to Gettysburg, Vol. II*. (New York: Da Capo Press, Inc: 1997), 57.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 57.

⁷⁹ Sandburg, *The War Years—I Volume*, 437.

⁸⁰ Randall, *Lincoln: Vol. 2*, 56.

Cameron was sent to Russia as a political banishment for having crossed Lincoln. Some abolitionists came to Cameron's aid, but it was too little too late.⁸¹ Lincoln had one very strong hand to play and that was against Cameron's incredibly corrupt Department of War which he let Congress prosecute shortly after Cameron's departure. Conversely, however, Lincoln characteristically came to Cameron's protection during a particularly strong censure from the House of Representatives. He could not "leave the censure . . . to rest . . . chiefly upon Mr. Cameron."⁸² Lincoln, too, would shoulder some of the blame. Regardless of Lincoln's good intentions, it was Cameron who suffered from the wrath of Congress, for shortly after the censure, he was on a ship sailing to his banishment.

Politically, the sin of Cameron was against Lincoln and no other person. Lincoln punished him accordingly: He banished him to Saint Petersburg while feigning support. The abolitionists, who had only three weeks prior elevated Cameron to the pantheon of great Americans and offered him unwavering support, now offered a lackluster and toothless defense of their new saint as he faced corruption charges and then boarded the vessel. Cameron went to St. Petersburg later in 1862 that year and served at the embassy post briefly. He returned a few months later to a president who constantly offered his support, and in return Cameron offered Lincoln his disinterested friendship and tacit political support.⁸³ Cameron was a seasoned politician, keenly aware of his political and social surroundings, and yet misread Lincoln. This was chiefly due to Lincoln's ability to remain quiet when tensions and emotions ran highest.

Lincoln had to worry about four sectors in this situation: the public, both North and South, the abolitionist and anti-abolitionist factions in Congress, the financiers, and his own

⁸¹ Ibid., 58.

⁸² As quoted in Randall, *Lincoln: Vol. 2*, 59

⁸³ Sandburg, *The War Years—I, Vol. III*, 439.

cabinet. The last of these, the cabinet, he could worry the least about. There were competing factions in the cabinet, but none so strong as to offer their political careers for the increasingly unpopular Cameron. Besides, Lincoln had little love for Cameron in his Cabinet to begin with. The financiers simply did not trust Cameron. Immediately after his proclamation the increasingly strong abolitionist lent their political weight to Cameron. The public was either largely apathetic to Cameron or voiced their opposition to his corrupt department. Thus, the public would generally support Lincoln in any move against Cameron.

Therefore, Lincoln had to deal with the abolitionist factions in Congress. Their support was strong, but the support was loose and unorganized. Lincoln, though personally holding opinions that leaned toward abolitionism, was a political moderate in regard to the slavery question in 1861. He never supported abolition openly; in fact, he often scoffed at the notion of abolitionism in his public statements. Privately and among members of his inner circle, he spoke of abolition in the most obtuse manners possible. In 1861, Lincoln could not have a particularly strong stance on the issue. He was, in fact, pushing the issue away from any point of decision. By not endorsing abolition publicly, the population of the South and of the border states may have retained a more open mind on endorsing the Union. The faction of abolitionist whom Lincoln upset could be assuaged by his own powerful abolitionist friends in the form of Republican Party members. Besides, as a Republican, Lincoln's party almost uniformly supported abolition. There was no need for him publicly to declare further what was already known widely as his party's platform.

The powerful abolitionist that Lincoln had alienated by his lack of a strong stance for abolition came to haunt him in the issue of Cameron. The abolitionists in Congress maintained strong pull among their constituents and could provide strong shields for anyone who joined their

ranks. One Illinois newspaper even wrote that Cameron “was very strong in Illinois.”⁸⁴

Cameron’s bet was not foolhardy, however; the support of abolitionists in Congress could have insulated him well. Their support was fiery and impulsive. They did not move, as Sam Houston said about those who lived in the Union, “with the steady momentum and perseverance of a mighty avalanche.” The cause as a whole over the course of decades may have reflected that steady momentum, but abolitionist politicians did not. Cameron mistook the politicians for the movement. Lincoln was smarter. He was fresh off the fiasco of the Frémont affair. He knew the abilities of the abolitionists and that translated to loud, passionate sentiments with wondering eyes.

Lincoln realized that the abolitionists quickly moved from one event to another. So that when one affair ended another one started. SIC GLORIA TRANSIT MUNDI. Indeed, Cameron’s glory with the abolitionist moved quickly. A month after a long list of abolitionist Congressmen and Senators lent their aid to the ailing Cameron political machine, their support quickly dwindled. This was not for lack of enthusiasm as much as for lack of engagement. Corruption did not help either.

Cameron could have retained their friendship by asserting a more dominant part in the situation. He allowed the abolitionist to move to new events without giving him due consideration. He would have been better should he had continued his engagement with the faction and entrenched himself in the middle of their politics. Instead, he relied purely on a long a week’s worth of scandalous writings in partisan newspapers and shallow speeches on the floor of Congress.

⁸⁴ Randall, *Lincoln: Vol. 2*, 57.

Machiavelli would have seen right through this ploy. Cameron believed he had come to the center of a well-fortified city such as those that Machiavelli speaks of in Germany in Chapter X of *The Prince*. For Cameron, the ramparts of these cities were not as strong as they seemed. The abolitionists seemed impregnable, but they only cursorily adopted the virtues necessary to maintain the illusion. To maintain illusions without force to back the inadequacies, the abolitionists could only afford so much time and political capital on a single political aim—to abolish slavery in the whole of the United States.

Cameron would have done well to have joined this group in a more politically earnest manner. Abolitionists were good at protecting those in their inner-most circles, but even this was only to a point. The Blair Family spent a considerable amount of political capital on the losing horse of Frémont, which goes to show how politically expensive the endeavor of abolition was. Lincoln saw through the lack of virtue of the abolitionists, and like the lion and fox, he stalked his prey for the right time to pounce. He waited for the right time to execute his plan of riding Cameron from the Cabinet.

In this case of procrastinated decision making, we see the formula of the decision-making process as follows: Cameron's actions demanded immediate retaliation. The decision to terminate him from his position was made privately almost immediately following his action, but Lincoln waited for the right moment to take action. This situation is not unlike Machiavelli's example in *The Prince* Chapter VIII where Liverotto da Fermo bid his time taking over the principedom of Fermo. Though he may have been able to commit his atrocities by poisoning dinner or assassinating the rulers of Fermo earlier in his visit. He had to execute his plan at precisely the right moment with precisely the right instruments. Liverotto da Fermo knew he wanted the power, but he had to go through the right motions to get it.

Lincoln knew exactly what time to enact his plan. By forcing the resignation when support from the abolitionist faction was fading and in the midst of a corruption investigation, there was very little on which Cameron could fall back. Cameron in effect overplayed his hand and Lincoln played his at the right moment. Further, Lincoln also used Clausewitz's notion of attacking at the weakest point. The weakest point was determined by time, not necessarily by political strength. By allowing the decay of political support and quietly allowing the charges of corruption to continue unchallenged, Lincoln moved Cameron to the periphery of political life.

Simon Cameron was a Washington insider whose approbation Lincoln neither needed nor sought. Being at the center of various scandals involving corruption, Cameron needed the support of powerful abolitionist friends. He got the support, but it was not strong enough to endure the onslaught of Lincoln's carefully planned dismissal. Cameron perhaps could have endured if he had allied himself more strongly with greater friends, but Lincoln knew to what extent Cameron could hold out. Lincoln knew how to bide his time appropriately. Cameron was like a fly in a covered glass vase—fair to see but bound to die. Lincoln had to move Cameron out covertly while making it seem that he, as the president, supported him. By allowing Cameron to move at his own pace, Lincoln allowed Cameron to operate in an environment that Lincoln effectively set up with the intent to force him to capitulate.

We see in this instance that procrastinating a decision or the enactment of a decision has its advantages. It allows the target to move at their pace while allowing the predator the ability to observe and even the hopes of not having to take an action. In the next example with General Frémont, Lincoln will show the merits of waiting to take action based on lack of information while allowing his target to contemplate change.

CHAPTER V LINCOLN AND JOHN C. FRÉMONT

John Frémont is had already achieved national fame and notoriety well before Lincoln made his Cooper Union Address in 1860. He was the Pathmarker of the West, and he and his wife Jessie had written and widely disseminated one of the first scientific studies of the Oregon Trail in 1844. When Lincoln had appointed him the commander of the Army of the West in July of 1861, few people questioned the appointment. The appointment was followed by one of the first extended crisis of the Lincoln Administration, and one of the first crises involving one of the many generals under Lincoln's command. Throughout the course of the crisis, Lincoln learned the various factions that he had to contend with and how to best assuage their demands. Between the Frémonts (both man and wife), abolitionists, and the border states, the balance of power lay in slow but deliberate action. Lincoln was universally criticized by all sides, but he was also praised by a few surprising allies.

The Frémont Imbroglio, as David Herbert Donald calls it, can be broken into three distinct parts: the order, the immediate response, and the "surging tide." The process in which the order was issued is important because it illustrates the gross hubris characteristic of Fremont's self-estimation. The immediate response showcases Lincoln's incredible ability to exercise patience and purposeful procrastination in the effort to assemble the necessary information to commit to a decision and the effort to allow his opponent to make more costly decisions. These first two parts took place over the course of 12 days. Lastly, the surging tide exemplifies Lincoln's ability to wait out opposition when just the smallest amount of smoke appears on the horizon. The smoke in this case was the egregious amount of mismanagement and graft being committed in Frémont's Army of the West. Three months transpired before Lincoln dismissed

Frémont, but by the end of three months, Lincoln had received far more support for Frémont's dismissal than he would have had three months earlier.

On August 30, 1861, 30 days after his arrival to command the Army of the West, Frémont issued an edict of martial law across the State of Missouri. The edict was a result of his fear that the situation in Missouri was growing too turbulent to control. Therefore, the order included an order for martial law, but also for a general emancipation as well as what amounted to summary executions of rebels caught under arms in an area north of a line drawn from Fort Leavenworth to Cape Girardeau. The question of emancipation of slaves was pressed upon him by radicals who surrounded him and his wife Jessie.⁸⁵ The excuse for the emancipation was military necessity. "The property, real and personal, of all persons in the State of Missouri who shall take up arms against the United States or who shall be directly proven to have taken an active part with their enemies in the field, is declared to be confiscated to the public use, and their slaves, if any they have, are hereby declared freemen."⁸⁶

The proclamation could not stand. Frémont's proclamation was everything the South feared. It was this proclamation the border states had feared. The border states were crucial early in the years of the war because they, too, could have succeeded from the Union. Further, the proclamation was unconstitutional and downright illegal in a multitude of ways. The coup de grâce in the proclamation was that Lincoln was not informed of the issuance of the decree beforehand. Lincoln learned about the decree in the same manner that Jefferson Davis did—through the newspaper!

Reactions to the proclamation came swiftly. Missouri brigadier M. Jeff Thompson made clear to his troops, "For every member of the Missouri State Guard, or soldier of our allies the

⁸⁵ Allan Nevins, *Fremont, Pathmarker of the West* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 499-500.

⁸⁶ Sandburg, *The War Years—I, Vol. III*, 342, and Foote, *Fort Sumter to Kernstown*, 94.

Confederate States, who shall be put to death in pursuance of said order of General Frémont, I will hang, draw and quarter a minion of said Abraham Lincoln so help me God!”⁸⁷ Abolitionists were elated. In Chicago’s *Tribune*, in Washington’s *National Intelligencer*, in Boston’s *Post*, and in New York’s *Tribune*, there was uniform approbation. “As one member of Congress from Indiana named George Julian wrote, “it stirred and united the people of the loyal States during the ten days of life allotted it by the Government far more than any other event of the war.”⁸⁸ The border states protested. Joshua F. Speed communicated to Lincoln serious concerns in Kentucky. To Joseph Holt, a Washington insider and eventual Judge Advocate General of the United States Army, Speed wrote,

We could stand several defeats like that at Bulls run, better than we can this proclamation if endorsed by the Administration . . . Do not allow us by the foolishact of a military [sic] popinjay to be driven from our present active loyalty . . . And Oh how I desire that my most intimate friend mar Lincoln . . . should be the instrument in the hands of God for the reconstruction of this great republic.⁸⁹

Lincoln constantly preached the necessity of the maintenance of the Union above emancipation. It was the essence of his Inaugural Address only six months prior. This was the first major challenge to the order of priority Lincoln placed on those two objectives. To uphold that priority, Lincoln wrote Frémont almost immediately, on September 2 and, as Foote notes, “in a spirit of caution, and not censure,”⁹⁰: “Should you shoot a man, according to the proclamation, the Confederates would very certainly shoot our best men in their hands in retaliation; and so, man for man, indefinitely.”⁹¹ Lincoln had all but commanded Frémont to

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 95-96.

⁸⁸ Nevins, *Fremont*, 504.

⁸⁹ J.G. Randall, *Lincoln: The President Springfield to Gettysburg*, Vol. 2 (New York: Da Capo Press, Inc: 1997), 87.

⁹⁰ Foote, *Fort Sumter to Kernstown*, 96.

⁹¹ Sandburg, *The War Years—I Volume Three*, 342.

rescind his proclamation. He sent the order with his own personal secretary, John Hay, to emphasize its importance.

Frémont waited to respond to the President's polite and simple, "no." On September 8th, Fremont responded to Lincoln's note. This response was penned a full 6 days later and then delivered by hand an additional two days to make a total of 8 days of delay before response. His response was audacious and impetuous: He invited Lincoln to revoke the order himself. Jessie Frémont, his wife, delivered personally her husband's response to Lincoln. Jessie, a woman of strong temperament and personality, most probably coerced her husband in allowing her to deliver the response.⁹² In allowing his wife, Frémont seemingly made a prudent choice. Jessie's family were political insiders, and she knew the Executive Mansion well.

She wrote later in life three separate accounts of Lincoln's receipt of her at the Executive Mansion. All accounts were cold. Lincoln received her at 9:00pm on September 11th. Both she and he had endured long days. Lincoln's curt responses to her and her husband's note effectively angered Lincoln. She explained to Lincoln why emancipation was morally right and how such a proclamation could bring Europe on the side of the Union. The accounts differ as to the tone, but Lincoln said to her, "You are quite the female politician."⁹³ "It was a war for a great national idea, the Union, and General Frémont should not have dragged the Negro into it."⁹⁴ Her anger at both comments brought the conversation to a boiling point. "Sir, the general will try titles with you! He is a man, and I am his wife."⁹⁵ Lincoln wrote Frémont back and sent the note

⁹² Candice Shy Hooper, *Lincoln's Generals' Wives: Four Women Who Influenced the Civil War—for Better and for Worse* (Kent, Ohio: the Kent State University Press, 2016), 53.

⁹³ Hooper, *Lincoln's Generals' Wives*, 55-56. Interestingly, Lincoln was more liberal than Jessie in his views on women's rights. By 1861, he had been a supporter of women's suffrage for over two decades. She actively opposed women's suffrage.

⁹⁴ Donald, *Lincoln*, 315.

⁹⁵ Foote, *Fort Sumter to Kernstown*, 96-97.

again by courier, “Your of the 8th, in answer to mine of the 2d inst., is just received.”⁹⁶ Lincoln cited “nonconformity” issues with the congressional act which Frémont used as his impetus for pursuing his order.⁹⁷ “Your answer, just received, expresses the preference on your part that I should make an open order for the modifications, which I very cheerfully do.”⁹⁸

Lincoln had to make a decision. He did so after all options had been exhausted. This decision drew considerable backlash. Abolitionist and Republicans felt betrayed. This was Lincoln’s first open break with the Republican party.⁹⁹ In the north as a whole, tension flared. “It would have been difficult to have devised a more effective plan to dispirit the People of this section than your order,” wrote Wisconsinite L.B. Moon to Lincoln.¹⁰⁰ “How many times are we to save Kentucky and lose our self-respect?” asked a James Russell Lowell.¹⁰¹ His friend and Illinois Senator Orville H. Browning wrote Lincoln expressing his concern over the retraction of the Frémont’s order, “Its revocation disheartens our friends, and represses their ardor.”¹⁰² Lincoln was now coping with the surging tide.

The retraction of the order worked both for and against him: Against him, in that it upset many of his allies.; for him in that it allowed Frémont to expose himself to more criticism.

Lincoln wrote back to Browning,

That you should object to my adhering to a law which you had assisted in making, and presenting to me less than a month before, is odd enough— But this is a very small part— Genl Fremont's proclamation, as to confiscation of property, and the liberation of slaves, is purely political, and not within the range of military law, or necessity. The proclamation, in the point in question, is simply dictatorship.¹⁰³

⁹⁶ Sandburg, *The War Years—I*, Vol. III, 345.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Foote, *Fort Sumter to Kernstown*, 97.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ As quoted in Donald, *Lincoln*, 316.

¹⁰¹ Nevins, *Fremont*, 507.

¹⁰² Abraham Lincoln, *Abraham Lincoln Papers: Series 1. General Correspondence. 1833 to 1916*: Abraham Lincoln to Orville H. Browning, Sunday, Fremont’s Proclamation. 1861, Manuscript/Mixed Material, accessed April 23, 2021, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mal1192600/>.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

Lincoln deflected from the issue of slavery, which he acknowledges is important, to the issue of law. Some newspapers, such as *The Springfield (Massachusetts) Republican* noted that “It is gratifying to know that we have a President who is loyal to law.”¹⁰⁴ This concentration on law runs parallel with his focus on the continuity of the Union. Kentucky, for example, would not openly declare itself for the Union as long as Frémont’s proclamation remained in place. A whole company of volunteers threw down their arms and disbanded on the news of Frémont’s proclamation.¹⁰⁵ When the proclamation was rescinded, Kentucky made overt promises to remain loyal to the Union through the course of the war.

The surging tide against Frémont began to grow. When the winds of Lincoln’s response to Frémont began to die down by mid-September, rumors of graft and corruption in the Army of the West began to circulate in Washington. As early as September 9 (two days before receiving Jessie Frémont), Lincoln had written, “Frémont is losing the confidence of men near him, whose support any man in his position must have to be successful.”¹⁰⁶ This knowledge, coupled with the insistence of the powerful enemies of Frémont in Missouri—the Blair Family in particular—empowered Lincoln to wait out Frémont. Characteristically, Lincoln allowed events around him to form before he made any action. Slowly and surely the popular tides turned against Frémont. There was even serious talk about relieving Frémont as early as September 27th, but Lincoln

¹⁰⁴ Sandburg, *The War Years—I, Vol. III*, 351.

¹⁰⁵ Abraham Lincoln, *Abraham Lincoln Papers: Series 1. General Correspondence. 1833 to 1916*: Abraham Lincoln to Orville H. Browning, Sunday, Fremont’s Proclamation. 1861, Manuscript/Mixed Material, accessed April 23, 2021, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mal1192600/>. Lincoln’s note to Browning illustrates the exhaustive lengths the President went to illustrate the gravity of the situation to his abolitionist colleagues. “No doubt the thing was popular in some quarters, and would have been more so, if it had been a general declaration of emancipation— The Kentucky Legislature would not budge till that proclamation was modified; and Gen. Anderson telegraphed me, that on the news of Gen. Fremont having actually issued deeds of manumission, a whole company of our volunteers, threw down their arms and disbanded—I was so assured, as to think it probable, that the very arms we had furnished Kentucky, would be turned against us— I think to lose Kentucky, is nearly the same as to lose the whole game— Kentucky gone, we can not hold Missouri, nor as I think, Maryland—”

¹⁰⁶ Randall, *Lincoln: Vol. 2*, 20-24.

would not act unless there was another cause outside of Frémont's general insubordination.¹⁰⁷ Lincoln sent a reluctant Secretary of War Cameron and Adjutant General Lorenzo Thomas to investigate grave charges of corruption and press suppression. Cameron, who himself ran a corrupt Department of War, found copious amounts of graft and corruption and reported it back to Lincoln.¹⁰⁸ More reports began to flood the Executive Mansion, and two strong factions came to exist, one supporting and the other denouncing Frémont. The former kept Lincoln from acting against Frémont well into October at which point the criticism and echoes of insubordination could no longer be ignored. Lincoln wrote an order relieving Frémont of his command on October 24th, and it was delivered to Frémont on November 2nd.¹⁰⁹

Throughout the Frémont Imbroglio, Lincoln acted coolly. Some of Lincoln's allies would claim he acted too coolly; Fremont, among others, would argue Lincoln acted too rashly. Lincoln allowed an openly insubordinate field commander to remain at his post for 100 days. Was this procrastination sensible?

Lincoln had to satisfy three groups: the Frémonts (both man and wife), abolitionists, and the border states. No matter what move Lincoln made, he was going to upset a faction. Machiavelli reminds us that "hatred is acquired through good deeds as well as bad ones."¹¹⁰ Machiavelli used this idea of course to educate a prince on the virtues of learning how not to be good according to necessity, but Lincoln never was very good at doing bad things. "A man can't turn bad if it ain't in him to be bad. Even if you try to," closes the Audie Murphey film *Gun Runners*. While it wasn't in Lincoln to be bad, he did not have a hard time committing to his own actions once he made a choice. Politically he had to walk a thin line based on who he was going

¹⁰⁷ Nevins, *Fremont*, 530.

¹⁰⁸ Sandburg, *The War Years—I, Vol. III*, 348.

¹⁰⁹ Nevins, *Fremont*, 538.

¹¹⁰ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 77.

to upset. Again, Machiavelli: “Nonetheless, [a prince] should be slow to believe and to move, nor should he create fear for himself, and he should proceed in a temperate mode with prudence and humanity so that too much confidence does not make him incautious and too much diffidence does not render him intolerable.”¹¹¹ Machiavelli’s maxim illustrates what course Lincoln took during the Frémont Imbroglio.

There are two parts to decision making in this story. There is first an immediate action to abate the trouble Frémont caused. The second action is slower in its nature and required more calculation, and that was the eventual dismissal of Frémont. Lincoln had to reckon with the three groups that would be affected by these decisions. The Frémont’s would be unhappy no matter how Lincoln acted. This would have manifested itself the evening when Jessie Frémont came to the Executive Mansion almost ten days after issuing the order to amend the proclamation. The border states, particularly Kentucky, would remain unhappy as long as the proclamation was in place, while the abolitionists would become upset if the order was removed.

Lincoln was certainly in a bind. He had to act immediately at times and with caution at others, but at all times he had to be prudent. The opportunity in this case was not for general boldness but deliberate caution. What had to be done immediately, however, was the proclamation, and indeed Lincoln responded to the proclamation immediately. Though Lincoln was probably not expecting a serious retort from Frémont, by attacking the problem immediately, he could in the future claim that it was the fault of Frémont for not conforming to the administration’s orders. “For the Romans did in these cases what all wise princes should do: they not only have regard for present troubles but also for future ones.”¹¹² By attacking Frémont

¹¹¹ Ibid., 66.

¹¹² Ibid., 12.

at the first moment, he was able to abate qualms that may have arisen should the situation have grown great in scope.

Lincoln procrastinated in deciding what to do about Frémont. By attacking early in this case, Lincoln purchased time for himself to ponder the future of Frémont's command. "Boldness will be at a disadvantage only in an encounter with deliberate caution, which may be considered bold in its own right, and is certainly just as powerful and effective but such cases are rare. Timidity is the root of prudence in the majority of men."¹¹³ Frémont was continually bold with Lincoln and could not reconsider his positions nor his public image. Lincoln's ability to act early allowed him the luxury of procrastinated decision making without concern for repercussions. After submitting to Frémont his "cheerful" modification of the proclamation, Lincoln enjoyed almost 80 days to consider Frémont's fate.

Lincoln knew from the moment that Jessie Frémont left his office that General, and Mrs. Frémont would never be satisfied with whatever solution Lincoln could construct. Therefore, whatever Lincoln's decision was going to be, he did not need the Frémont's approbation. Lincoln's solution, however, did need the approval of either the border states, Kentucky in particular, or the abolitionist faction. Lincoln was convinced that Kentucky was the key state in the fabric of the Union. Kentucky's northern border, the Ohio River, was a key part in the strangling of the Confederacy. Kentucky also represented a fair number of volunteers. Not to mention that Mrs. Lincoln's family was of Kentucky stock. It would be an embarrassment to the administration personally to lose the home state of the First Lady to succession. Conversely, the abolitionist sentiment in the remaining states of the Union was particularly strong. They were

¹¹³ Von Clausewitz, *On War*, 190.

not, however, unified, and factions were common among them. The only group that was unified was the Republican Party; happily, Lincoln was its representative.

Moving slowly, Lincoln had to navigate which group he was going to offend if there was a need to offend. Frémont could very well throw himself on the mercy of the President, beg forgiveness for his transgressions, and continue on with the business of the war. It was clear very soon after the original order was released, however, that that this would not be the case. Thus Lincoln, in line with Clausewitz, was steady in his approach with Frémont. Though Frémont had often been thorough during his hundred days as Commander of the Army of the West, he acted brashly and imprudently in this case. Lincoln would read reports colored by Frémont's imprudence throughout the rest of Frémont's short tenure as Commander. Before making a decision on Frémont and his dismissal, Lincoln went through various reports. A quote that is often attributed to David Crockett is, "Be sure of what you are going to do, and then go ahead." Lincoln's deliberate caution served him well. Delaying a real decision on whether to retain or dismiss Frémont was beneficial to Lincoln in that it gave him a very real idea of the situation around him.

CHAPTER VI

LINCOLN AND SALMON P. CHASE

Fellow-citizens, we cannot escape history. We of this Congress and this administration, will be remembered in spite of ourselves. No personal significance, or insignificance, can spare one or another of us. The fiery trial through which we pass, will light us down, in honor or dishonor, to the latest generation. [...] We—even we here—hold the power and bear the responsibility.

Annual Message to Congress Concluding Remarks. December 1, 1862

Salmon P. Chase was not concerned about escaping the watchful eye of history. He was more concerned about the power he believed was stolen from him two years previously. Lincoln kept many friends close, but he also kept perceived and real enemies just as close. The Cabinet Lincoln assembled was filled with friends and enemies alike who had the same goal—to win the war. They all differed in their opinions about the manner in which the war could be won, but they generally operated as a cohesive unit. The Cabinet Crisis of 1862 solidified their loyalty to Lincoln and to each other. It also showed how Lincoln was willing to procrastinate to the last moment before acting. “It was his style to react to decisions made by others rather than to take the initiative himself.”¹¹⁴ Chase started a battle with Lincoln, and Lincoln forced Chase to finish it.

Throughout the months leading to December 1862, Chase had steadily been spreading rumors in the Senate and Congress that Secretary of State William Seward enjoyed a monopoly on forming the President’s opinion. “It was believed also, that the Secretary of State was not in accord with the majority of the Cabinet and exerted an injurious influence upon the conduct of

¹¹⁴ David Herbert Donald, *Lincoln* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1995), 286.

the war. Such was common rumor.”¹¹⁵ The propagation of the rumor produced positive results benefiting Chase. Armed with this false information, a group of Republican Senators unified and attempted to pass a vote of no confidence on Seward. This resolution was killed by Seward’s supporters, and the group of disaffected, radical, Jacobite senators assembled in the form of a Senate Committee. Over the course of two days, this committee assembled a list of grievances against a “certain Cabinet Member.” One of the leaders of this cabal was Senator William P. Fessenden of Maine. His account of the crisis showcases the long arc of justice in the face of rumor. “He, Mr. Fessenden, had been told by a member of the Cabinet that there was a back-stairs influence which often controlled the apparent conclusions of the Cabinet.”¹¹⁶ The member of Cabinet spreading the rumor was Chase. The back-stairs influence was Stanton. The Jacobites felt something had to be done for the good of the nation. On the evening of Wednesday, December 17th, the Senators in this Committee passed a resolution amongst themselves to encourage Lincoln in the strongest terms to reform his Presidential Cabinet. They asked him to reform the Cabinet and not replace the whole cabinet for the specific reason that many of them had placed a great amount of trust in Chase. It was at this moment the crisis began.

The crisis was two-fold. First, it was political—almost personal: The Senate was challenging Lincoln’s ability to govern the nation. The second was constitutional. In Great Britain, Parliament has the ability to directly interfere with the Prime Minister’s Cabinet and governance. The American Founders were very clear in their separation of powers. This Constitutional aspect became evident early on in this crisis for all who were involved. To the

¹¹⁵ James D. Fessenden, *Life and Public Services of William Pitt Fessenden* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1907), 241.

¹¹⁶ Fessenden, *Life of Fessenden*, 234.

Jacobites, this Constitutional crisis was less of a concern than the concern of the governance of the nation as a whole. To Lincoln, both challenges were equally fraught with concern.

Even before the final vote was cast on that cool December evening, one of the senators had defected. Senator Preston King of New York State raced across town to notify his friend and colleague Seward, who was also a very powerful New York politician, of the impending crisis. “Seeing how things were going, I did not stay for the last vote, but just slipped out to tell you for I thought you ought to know. They were pledging each other to keep the proceedings secret, but I told them I was not going to be bound.” Chewing on one of his cigars, Seward wrote out a resignation to be effective immediately. “They may do as they please about me, but they shall not put the President in a false position.”¹¹⁷ Within half an hour Lincoln received the resignation and was shocked. He walked across the street to Stanton’s home asking for an explanation. “Ah yes Governor, that will do very well for you, but I am like the starling in Sterne’s story, ‘I can’t get out.’”¹¹⁸ For the next 60 hours, Lincoln would face the greatest internal threat of his presidency.

From Lincoln’s perspective, he knew there was an attack coming from the very powerful radicals of his own party. He could not readily dismiss the voluntary resignation of his Secretary of State. These Jacobites would surely resent the President should he permit Seward to stay but Lincoln and his Cabinet would lose almost all autonomy (not to mention Lincoln’s closest advisor) if he allowed Seward to go. Lincoln did know, however, that there was a member of the Cabinet who was giving information to these Senators. It was not yet known to Lincoln who that member was. Whether the information had any credibility though was inconsequential. The

¹¹⁷ Carl Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years—I, Volume III* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1947), 640.

¹¹⁸ Shelby Foote, *The Civil War: A Narrative—Fredericksburg to Chancellorsville* (New York, Random House, 1963), 111.

target of this rouse Cabinet member, or members, was Seward, but Lincoln saw clearly the attack as a deeper attack on the ability of Lincoln himself. The President was cornered. Without any more information available to him, Lincoln did as General Allenby suggests after encountering the Arab National League flimsily attempting to run Damascus as an Arab Democracy in the film *Lawrence of Arabia*, “We can wait. It is usually what’s best.”

Waiting that long night must have been difficult for Lincoln. “The President, my informant stated, was much troubled about it,” Fessenden later noted.¹¹⁹ In the morning, Lincoln received a note that the committee had called for a meeting with him at 7:00PM that evening of Thursday, December 18th. Lincoln met with Senator Orville Browning of Illinois and complained at length. “Since I heard last night of the proceedings of the caucus, I have been more distressed than by any event of my life.”¹²⁰ Lincoln had to be concerned with Seward’s and his own position by an insubordinate member of his inner circle. “What do these men want? . . . They wish to get rid of me, and I am sometimes half disposed to gratify them.”¹²¹

By the meeting at 7:00PM however, he was better composed. Lincoln had probably figured out from where the attack was coming and more importantly how to solve the crisis at hand. The attack was probably coming from Chase, who was not a particularly strong Lincoln ally. Lincoln also understood that to solve the crisis, it had to be perceived that he was not making any decisions. Rather the decisions had to be made by someone else. To solve this crisis, he had to remain perfectly composed and casual. He had to be both the fox and the lion, scheming silently and plotting ferociously simultaneously. The scheming required placing a trap, and plotting required a trivial action to compel a victim.

¹¹⁹ Fessenden, *Life of Fessenden*, 243.

¹²⁰ Foote, *The Civil War—Fredericksburg to Chancellorsville*, 113.

¹²¹ Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln, The War Years—I*, 640.

At 7:00PM, the crisis had nearly entered its 24th hour. “He [Lincoln] received us [the Committee] with his usual urbanity,”¹²² wrote Fessenden. Lincoln was not going to expose any weakness on his part. He then endured a three-hour meeting with the Jacobite Senators. Throughout the course of this meeting, almost every member of the delegation gave a speech lecturing Lincoln on his shortcomings, and in particular pointing out to him the malignant nature of his Secretary of State. “It was believed also that the Secretary of State was not in accord with the majority of the Cabinet and exerted an injurious influence upon the conduct of the war.”¹²³ Throughout the meeting, Lincoln kept his temper and said little. From his days in court, he understood the importance of a well-timed digression as a method of defusing hostility. In the middle of one of Fessenden’s lectures to Lincoln concerning his failure to consult the Cabinet on important issues, “The President produced a large bundle of papers and read several letters to General McClellan, showing that he had been sustained by the government to the utmost of its power. Some half hour was thus spent.”¹²⁴ Fessenden did not continue his speech, and the hostility defused.¹²⁵ Lincoln, by meeting’s end, had almost become “cheerful” and promised to give careful consideration to the resolutions. The Senators and Lincoln agreed to meet the next evening at 7:30PM.

A little over 24 hours into the crisis, Lincoln had now generally formed a mental map of the situation. Chase was behind the crisis at hand and had been making false statements to the Senators indicating a lack of cohesion among Lincoln’s Cabinet. This would serve Chase by weakening the Cabinet members and his enemy Seward, but also it would severely damage Lincoln’s ability to govern. It may even give Chase a chance to run for President in the next

¹²² Fessenden, *Life of Fessenden*, 240.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 241.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 242.

¹²⁵ Donald, *Lincoln*, 403.

election. Lincoln now had a very good idea of the situation. “He did not come to conclusions quickly, and he was temperamentally averse to making bold moves.”¹²⁶ Lincoln took 24 hours to come to a conclusion. As Shelby Foote so vividly describes, “What he required just now was someone to draw their wrath, someone to serve him much as a billygoat serves the farmer who places him in a barnlot to draw fleas.”¹²⁷ Lincoln was not going to make a bold move. His plan was to place the billygoat into the center of the barnlot. He was going to let the billygoat do all the work. That billygoat was Chase. The barnlot was the 7:30PM meeting on Friday, December 19.

To set up the barnlot, and perhaps to confirm his conclusions, Lincoln called for an impromptu Cabinet meeting at 10:30AM on Friday morning. At this point, Lincoln had endured about 36 hours of serious political apprehension, but the political landscape was slowly becoming less fogged. All the Cabinet members but Seward were present at the meeting. Though there was a rumor circulating about Washington as early as Wednesday that Seward had resigned, Lincoln had not made any public notice of this resignation. He was to make the first presentation of this resignation to the Cabinet on this cold December morning. Lincoln specifically asked the information at the meeting be kept confidential, and the Cabinet began debating the Constitutional crisis at hand. “He [Lincoln] expressed a hope that there would be no combined movement on the part of other members of the cabinet to resist this assault whatever might be its termination.”¹²⁸ Lincoln then polled the members of the Cabinet about whether they would meet with the Senators. Attorney General Edward Bates and Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase did not like the idea of a meeting but eventually acquiesced. From this meeting,

¹²⁶ Donald, *Lincoln*, 285-286.

¹²⁷ Foote, *The Civil War—Fredericksburg to Chancellorsville*, 112.

¹²⁸ William E. Gienapp and Erica L. Gienapp, *The Civil War Diary of Gideon Welles, Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy: The Original Manuscript Edition* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 99.

Lincoln was able to confirm that Chase was indeed one of the conspirators. His insistence not to attend such a meeting would have been read as certainly suspicious.

At 7:30, Lincoln invited the Senators into the Executive Mansion. He had spent the last 48 hours attempting to map out the landscape behind this conspiracy, and it would be at this meeting where he would find success or failure in his conclusions. As the Senators arrived, Lincoln straightaway took control of the meeting by inviting, unannounced, the Cabinet. All the Cabinet members were there except of Seward, just as it was in the morning. Lincoln started out by saying that “He thought that most questions of importance had received a reasonable consideration – was not aware of any divisions or want of unity. Decisions had, so far as he knew, received general support after they were made.”¹²⁹ Then Lincoln confirmed the Committee’s earlier indictments. He had made many decisions, and some very serious choices, without consulting the Cabinet. Lincoln apparently acquitted himself well. “The President managed his own case,—speaking freely, and showed great tact and ability provided such a subject were a proper one for such a meeting and discussion.”¹³⁰

Chase was nervous as the President spoke, for as Lincoln finished, he said that “he should not have come here had he known that he was to be arraigned before a committee of the Senate.”¹³¹ The billygoat had begun to make its way to the center of the barnlot. “Already he [Chase] was squirming, as if the fleas had jumped at the sight of his large, handsome person: but worse was still to come.”¹³² The meeting took a decided turn as Chase began to make a fool of himself. He backpedaled. The Committee had been arranged under the auspices that an unnamed individual, who was now clearly Chase, had given information to the Committee separately as

¹²⁹ Fessenden, *Life of Fessenden*, 243.

¹³⁰ Gienapp, *Diary of Welles*, 101.

¹³¹ Fessenden, *Life of Fessenden*, 244.

¹³² Foote, *The Civil War—Fredericksburg to Chancellorsville*, 114.

individuals that Seward was running amuck, and the Cabinet was lacking any say in the administration. Now Lincoln steadily closed the gate to the barnlot asking the individual Cabinet members about Lincoln's consultation with them. As the other Cabinet members offered their favorable testimony for Lincoln, Chase's eyes must have darted to the door and window looking for any sign of relief.

Then the question came to Chase. As Fessenden notes, "He went on to say that questions of importance had generally been considered by the Cabinet, though perhaps not so fully as might have been desired, and that there had been no want of unity in the Cabinet, but a general *acquiescence* on public measures; no member had opposed a measure after it had once been decided on."¹³³ Lincoln was not yet finished. He then polled the Cabinet about Seward's record. Chase had no option but to relent. "Mr. Seward had suggested amendments which strengthened it, such as the pledge to *maintain* the freedom of those emancipated."¹³⁴ This was directly contradictory to what he had been telling the Senators when speaking to them individually away from Lincoln and his Cabinet colleagues. Finally, when Lincoln brought up the question of Seward's retention, Fessenden offered relief to Chase by suggesting the Cabinet should not be present when speaking of the Seward issue. Chase concurred directly, "I think the members of the Cabinet had better withdraw,"¹³⁵ and so they did.

It was after the Cabinet left that Lincoln announced Seward's resignation, which he had not mentioned the night before, perhaps on purpose or perhaps not. "I thought I told you last evening that Mr. Seward had tendered his resignation. I have it in my pocket but have not yet made it public or accepted it."¹³⁶ Fessenden and Lincoln had a frank dialogue about the

¹³³ Fessenden, *Life of Fessenden*, 244.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 246.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 247.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

resignation. Some of the Senators had changed their opinion of Seward. Others had not. Fessenden had not quite changed his mind yet and encouraged Lincoln to accept the resignation. The meeting ended around 1:00AM. “One of them [the Senators], Lyman Trumbell, turned before going out, walked rapidly back to the President, and told him rather hotly that the Secretary of the Treasury had talked in a different tone the last time they had spoken.”¹³⁷ This last comment before the end of Lincoln’s evening must have produced a sweet feeling in him. Lincoln had won a battle, but he had not yet won the war. He successfully outed Chase as the minion spreading the rumors and made the fleas jump on to his coat. Lincoln did not yet have a solution to the crisis yet. The ball was in Chase’s court, and all Lincoln could do was wait.

On the morning of the third day and almost 60th hour of the Crisis, Lincoln woke to another victory. When Gideon Welles came into the office soon after breakfast encouraging Lincoln to not accept Seward’s resignation, Lincoln knew that his Cabinet had unified against a common threat. This exhortation was no small victory either. Welles and Seward did not get along. Though veiled in language speaking of the rights of the separate branches, Welles allegiance to Seward as a fellow Cabinet member was not lost on Lincoln. Welles even went to Seward’s home that morning to check on him. When Welles came back to the White House, he found Chase and Stanton in the President’s office. Lincoln walked in and listened to Chase. “Chase said he had been painfully affected by the meeting last evening, which was a total surprise to him, and after some, not very explicit remarks as to how he was affected, informed the President he had prepared his resignation.”¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln, The War Years—I*, 646.

¹³⁸ Gienapp, *Diary of Welles*, 103.

Lincoln opened the note and read it. He pulled out Seward's letter from his other coat pocket. In a triumphant laugh, Lincoln said, "This cuts the Gordian knot!"¹³⁹ Confused, Stanton looked at the gleaming President while standing between his two stunned colleagues, and said solemnly, "I wish you sir to consider my resignation at this time in your possession." "I don't want yours," said Lincoln. "This [holding out Chase's letter] relieves me—my way is clear—the trouble is ended."¹⁴⁰ "Now I have a pumpkin in each end of my bag," said Lincoln according to Welles, and according to Fessenden he said, "Now I have the biggest half of the hog. I shall accept neither resignation."¹⁴¹ As Chase had submitted his resignation, he could mutually cancel the two resignations and retain both Cabinet members. He would satisfy his own sense of honor and the Jacobites sense of extremism. If Chase had not tendered his resignation, Lincoln would have had very little recourse but to decide to accept Seward's resignation. This would have been a massive victory for the Jacobites.¹⁴²

Lincoln fought a very difficult crisis that emanated from his own Cabinet. In the course of the 60 some hours he had to control his emotion and accept the difficult circumstances that required him to do nothing. Procrastinating a decision to act allowed the people around him to act. This lack of action increased the center of gravity around Lincoln and forced the real instigators of the action to deal with the increase of gravity against their original course.

In Chapter X of *The Prince*, Machiavelli speaks of the German princes who build their walls high and can withstand sieges of great length and strength. Princes must always have force of arms behind them, but in addition to that they must be able to withstand a siege over the

¹³⁹ Gienapp, *Diary of Welles*, 103.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 105.

¹⁴¹ Donald, *Lincoln*, 405, and Fessenden, *Life of Fessenden*, 251.

¹⁴² And it could have seriously affected the manner in which the US Government operates today. If the Cabinet Crisis had not been resolved in the manner Lincoln resolved it, the separation of powers doctrine could have been nullified. This would have created a weak executive branch subordinate to the Legislative Branch.

course of time. This fortitude is a crucial part of *virtù*. It is the ability for a Prince to withstand the onslaught. “I respond that a powerful and spirited prince will always overcome all these difficulties. . . by securing himself skillfully against those who appear too bold.”¹⁴³ Chase was very bold to strike at the President with such blatant lies. Having a military force to back these empty words would satisfy a literal sense of arms that Machiavelli speaks of in Chapter X, but he could have also had written evidence to substantiate the claims or at least other allies on the Cabinet who could have lent strength to the accusations. On the heels of the failure of the Battle of Fredericksburg, it would have taken little evidence to compel the Senators to remain on Chase’s side. Chase would also have done well by studying Chapter XIX on “Avoiding Contempt and Hatred.” “For whomever conspires cannot be alone,” and Chase, at the very core, was very much alone in his attempt to dethrone both Seward and Lincoln. Fortunately for Chase, Lincoln was not keen on dispatching his Secretary of the Treasury.

Procrastinating a decision is a dangerous game. Lincoln knew how much power he could use before acquiescing to the inevitable push for acceptance of Seward’s resignation. “I am assured on entirely reliable authority that the President had determined to accept Mr. Seward’s resignation and was about announcing it to his Cabinet Saturday morning, when Mr. Chase’s resignation was handed him.”¹⁴⁴ Procrastinating in this case made Lincoln an expert at brinksmanship. This is all fine until it does not work. Lincoln held on to the last possible moment before taking any step. This worked well for Lincoln in this case. It is both extremely cautious and reckless simultaneously. It is cautious as it allows others around Lincoln to make the mistakes, but reckless in that it allows the situation to manipulate Lincoln. If fortune was insubordinate, then Lincoln would have had to yield.

¹⁴³ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 44.

¹⁴⁴ Fessenden, *Life of Fessenden*, 251.

As Fessenden's statement shows, however, Lincoln knew the limits of his ability. Here again is Machiavelli: "For if one governs himself with caution and patience, and the times and affairs turn in such a way that his government is good, he comes out prosperous; but if the times and affairs change, he is ruined because he does not change his mode of proceeding."¹⁴⁵ Lincoln was not afraid to change his mode to achieve his end, but he preferred to govern himself with caution and patience. Lincoln was not obstinate in his role. Pope Julius II was impetuous in all his affairs, and though this worked for him, "the brevity of his life did not allow him to feel the contrary [misfortune], because if times had come when he had needed to proceed with caution, his ruin would have followed."¹⁴⁶ By procrastinating his decisions, Lincoln forced his opponent, Chase, to move pugnaciously. Like a fish on a hook, he thrashed and pulled. If he had changed his mode, Chase may have been able to effectively disarm the Senators and even the Cabinet. Chase did not, and in this he proved himself less than Machiavellian.

¹⁴⁵ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 100.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 101.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Procrastination is a powerful tool when used appropriately. It requires a number of elements such as prudence, *virtù*, and fortune, but it also requires the boldness to consider the wait. To this point, procrastinated decision-making in a leadership capacity is not merely an act which eschews responsibility and action. Rather, it absorbs greater responsibility by calculating the effects of inaction until such a point action may or may not be taken effectively. When action is taken, it should be taken at the strongest point as Von Clausewitz advised, and sometimes that means waiting for the right moment.

Procrastinating a decision also works extremely well in conditions where the prince maintains absolute control. By commanding control of the environment and maintaining a hold on fortune, procrastinating decision making becomes an invaluable tool in the prince's arsenal of weaponry. As Machiavelli shows, a prince who knows and uses *virtù* prudently and has seduced fortune is an unstoppable force. With these forces united, the prince can handle the world as he pleases. He observes from his perch above the world of the others and decides at his leisure and at nobody else's.

Lincoln utilized this force handedly three separate times. In sacking Cameron, he allowed simple time to pass before acting. He could have decided to fire Cameron the moment he made his pronouncement to congress, but Lincoln also knew that firing him immediately could incur the wrath of the abolitionists. By gauging the public sentiment and his enemies' political positioning, he deduced that he could safely fire Cameron once the hullabaloo subsided. Procrastinated decision making in this case allowed Lincoln to understand the world around him.

He also used procrastinated decision making effectively in the Frémont Imbroglia. By calmly waiting and observing Frémont's chaotic movements, Lincoln allowed Frémont time to

make mistakes but also allowed time to pass to make it appear that Lincoln was exercising extreme amounts of patience with a man who clearly disrespected the president's authority.

Lastly, Lincoln's effort in the 1862 Cabinet Crisis combined all the aspects of which both Von Clausewitz and Machiavelli speak. First, Lincoln maintained his composure and appeared to take the crisis in front of his enemies in stride. Second, Lincoln had the presence of mind not to attack a ghost but instead to carefully and quietly gather information while coming to his decisions. Third, knowing his enemies, he carefully avoided an overt decision by compelling his adversary to move at Lincoln's own will. Last, he acted at the strongest point of decision. Upon the resignation of Chase and Lincoln's decision to retain both Chase and Seward, Lincoln was as strong as he could have ever been politically in Washington. He made the move at the strongest point. In these respects, Lincoln is a perfect Machiavellian prince.

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Bates College, Lewiston, Maine—May 2014

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Double Major in Classical and Medieval Studies and Latin American History

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History Thesis: *All But Forgotten: A History of the Crystal City Internment Camp and the Peruvian Japanese*

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Work Experience

Laredo Lomas Properties, Ltd. *Project Manager*, January 2015—Present

- Design, supervise, and execute a potentially \$25M mixed use- commercial/residential project in Laredo, Texas
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Cielito Lindo, Ltd., *Commercial Real Estate Co-Manager*, June 2012—Present

- Handle all commercial real estate for 500+ acre development in Laredo, Texas
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- Attend conventions and continued long standing commercial relationships

Community Service Activities

Boys and Girls Club of Laredo, *Executive Board Chair*, 2015-Present

- Oversee operating budget of over a \$1.5M annually for one of the national organization's largest clubs numbering over 20,000 members
- Former Chair for the Boys and Girls Club Wine Tasting which raises over \$200k annually

Laredo Chamber of Commerce, *Board Member*, 2016-Present

- A principal coordinator of annual lobbying tripping in Washington, D.C. for the Chamber (2017-2020)
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