

HEADQUARTERS ARMY OF NORTHERN VIRGINIA,
June 23, 1863.

His Excellency President DAVIS, Richmond:

Mr. PRESIDENT: The season is now so far advanced as to render it improbable that the enemy will undertake active operations on the Carolina and Georgia coast before the return of frost. This impression is confirmed by the statements contained in Northern papers, that part of General Hunter's force had gone to re-enforce General Banks, and that Admiral Foote, the successor of Admiral DuPont in the command of the South Atlantic fleet, lies dangerously ill, a circumstance that will tend further to embarrass any designs the enemy may entertain of operating against the cities of the seaboard. Federal papers of the 19th allude to the frequent arrival or departure of troops and munitions at Old Point, and those of the 20th announce the arrival of General Peck and staff in Washington, without indicating the object of his visit, further than it may be connected with the movements just referred to.

At this distance, I can see no benefit to be derived from maintaining a large force on the southern coast during the unhealthy months of the summer and autumn, and I think that a part, at least, of the troops in North Carolina, and of those under General Beauregard, can be employed at this time to great advantage in Virginia.

If an army could be organized under the command of General Beauregard, * and pushed forward to Culpeper Court-House, threatening Washington from that direction, it would not only effect a diversion most favorable for this army, but would, I think, relieve us of any apprehension of an attack upon Richmond during our absence. The well-known anxiety of the Northern Government for the safety of its capital would induce it to retain a large force for its defense, and thus sensibly relieve the opposition to our advance. Last summer, you will remember, that troops were recalled from Hilton Head, North Carolina, and Western Virginia for the protection of Washington, and there can be little doubt that if our present movements northward are accompanied by a demonstration on the south side of the Potomac, the coast would be again relieved, and the troops now on the Peninsula and south of the Potomac be with- drawn.

If success should attend the operations of this army, and what I now suggest would greatly increase the probability of that result, we might even hope to compel the recall of some of the enemy's troops from the west.

I think it most important that, whatever troops be used for the purpose I have named, General Beauregard be placed in command, and that his department be extended over North Carolina and Virginia. His presence would give magnitude to even a small demonstration, and tend greatly to perplex and confound the enemy. Of course, the larger the force that we can employ the better, but should you think it imprudent to withdraw a part of General Beauregard's army for the purpose indicated, I think good results would follow from sending forward, under General Beauregard, such of the troops about Richmond and in North Carolina as could be spared for a short time.

The good effects of beginning to assemble an army at Culpeper Court-House would, I think, soon become apparent, and the movement might be increased in importance as the result might appear to justify. Should you agree with me, I need not say that it is desirable that the execution of the plan proposed should immediately begin. The enemy will hear of it soon enough, and a proper reticence on the part of our papers will cause them to attribute greater importance to it. I need not mention the benefit that the troops themselves would derive from being transferred to a more healthy climate.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,
R.E. LEE,
General.