
Realpolitik and the Triumph of Nationalism

Cavour and the Unification of Italy

After the collapse of the revolution of 1848, the leadership of Italian nationalism passed to King Victor Emmanuel II of Piedmont-Sardinia: his prime minister, Count Camillo de Cavour; and the often-exiled *Carbonaro* soldier. Giuseppe Garibaldi, whose ties to Piedmont were erratic. They replaced Giuseppe Mazzini of the Young Italy society; the former Sardinian king, Charles Albert; the once liberal Pius IX; and the neo-Guelf movement, which had looked to the papacy to unify Italy. The new leaders did not entertain romantic illusions about the process of transforming Sardinia into an Italian kingdom: they were practitioners of the politics of realism, *realpolitik*.

Cavour (1810-1861) was a Sardinian who served as editor of *Il Risorgimento*, a newspaper that argued that Piedmont should organize the new Italy. Between 1852 and 1861, Cavour served as Victor Emmanuel II's prime minister. In that capacity, Cavour transformed Sardinian society through the implementation of a series of liberal reforms designed to modernize the Sardinian state and attract the support of liberal states such as Great Britain and France. Among Cavour's reforms were (1) the Law on Convents and the Siccardi Law, which were directed at curtailing the influence of the Roman Catholic Church; (2) reform of the judicial system; (3) the implementation of the *Statuto*, the Sardinian constitution modeled on the liberal French constitution of 1830; and (4) support for economic development projects, such as port, rail, and highway construction.

In 1855, under Cavour's direction, Sardinia joined Britain and France in the Crimean War against Russia. At the Paris Peace Conference (1856), Cavour addressed the delegates on the need to eliminate the foreign (Austrian) presence in the Italian peninsula and attracted the attention and sympathy of the French emperor, Napoleon III.

Cavour and Napoleon III met at Plombières (July 20, 1859). The Plombières Agreement stated that, in the event that Sardinia went to war with Austria – presumably after being attacked or provoked – France would provide military assistance, and with victory Sardinia would annex Lombardy, Venetia, Parma, Modena, and a part of the Papal States. In addition, the remainder of Italy would be organized into an Italian confederation under the

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direction of the pope. France would receive Nice and Savoy, and the alliance would be finalized by a marriage between the two royal families. The Plombières Agreement was designed to bring about a war with Austria and to assist Sardinia in developing an expanded northern Italian kingdom. The concept of an Italian confederation under the papacy was contributed by Napoleon III and demonstrates his lack of understanding of Italian political ambitions and values during this period.

After being provoked, the Austrians declared war on Sardinia in 1859. French forces intervened and the Austrians were defeated in the battles of Magenta (June 4) and Solferino (June 24), one of the bloodiest battles of European history to that point. Napoleon III's support wavered for four reasons: (1) Prussia's mobilization and its expressed sympathy for Austria; (2) the outbreak of uncontrolled revolts in some north Italian states; (3) the forcefulness of the new Austrian military efforts; and (4) the lack of public support in France for his involvement, with mounting criticism from the French Catholic Church, which opposed the war against Catholic Austria.

Napoleon III, without consulting Cavour, signed a secret peace with the Austrian emperor Franz Josef (the Truce of Villafranca) on July II, 1859. Sardinia received Lombardy but not Venetia; other terms indicated that Sardinian influence would be restricted and Austria would remain a power in Italian politics. The terms of Villafranca were clarified and finalized with the Treaty of Zürich (1859).

In 1860, after popular referenda in Parma, Modena, Romagna, and Tuscany in favor of Piedmont-Sardinia, Cavour arranged their annexation. The actions of these duchies were recognized by the Treaty of Turin between Napoleon III and Victor Emmanuel II: Nice and Savoy were transferred to France. With these acquisitions, Cavour anticipated the need for a period of tranquility to incorporate these territories into Piedmont-Sardinia.

Giuseppe Garibaldi and his followers, the Red Shirts, landed in Sicily (May 1860) and extended the nationalist activity to the south. Within three months, they had taken Sicily, and by September 7, Garibaldi was in Naples, and the kingdom of the Two Sicilies had fallen under Sardinian influence. Cavour distrusted Garibaldi, but Victor Emmanuel II encouraged him. Garibaldi favored a republican form of government for Italy, but he was persuaded that only the king of Piedmont-Sardinia could unify the peninsula, so he greeted Victor Emmanuel as king at a famous meeting, then retired to the island of Caprera, refusing all attempts of the new Italy to honor him.

In February 1861, in Turin, Victor Emmanuel was declared king of Italy and presided over an Italian parliament that represented the entire Italian peninsula with the exception of Venetia and the Patrimony of Saint Peter (Rome). Cavour died in June 1861.

Venetia was incorporated into the Italian kingdom in 1866 as a result of an alliance between Otto von Bismarck's Prussia and the kingdom of Italy that preceded the German Civil War between Austria and Prussia. In return for opening a southern front against Austria, Prussia, upon its victory, arranged for Venetia to be transferred to Italy.

Bismarck was indirectly helpful in the acquisition of Rome by Italy in 1870, when the Franco-Prussian War broke out and the French garrison, which had been in Rome providing protection for the pope, was withdrawn to serve on the front against Prussia. Italian troops seized Rome, and in 1871, as a result of a plebiscite, Rome became the capital of the kingdom of Italy, and the pope made himself "prisoner of the Vatican."

Bismarck and the Unification of Germany

After 1815, Prussia emerged as an alternative to a Habsburg-based Germany. Germany was politically decentralized into thirty-eight to thirty-nine independent states. This situation had been sanctioned by the Peace of Westphalia in 1648.

Prussia had absorbed some smaller states during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and controlled indirectly such enclaves as the Anhalt duchies, surrounded by Prussian territory.

Otto von Bismarck (1815-1898) entered the diplomatic service of William I as the revolutions of 1848 were being suppressed. In 1862, Bismarck emerged as principal adviser and minister to the king, who sought to form a Prussian-based (Hohenzollern) Germany. In the 1860s, Bismarck supported a series of military reforms to improve the Prussian army, but he was thwarted by liberals in the Prussian parliament. At one juncture, he announced, intending to humiliate them, that Germany would not be made great by speeches and such – the fault of (their) revolutions of 1848 – but rather through "blood and iron" (meaning, wars and industry). When the parliament continued to refuse to grant him a new budget to modernize the army, he boldly defied them, ruling with the old budget through a "hole in the constitution."

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In 1863, the Schleswig-Holstein crisis broke. Holstein was part of the German Confederation, but both provinces, occupied by Germans, were also under the personal rule of Christian IX of Denmark. The Danish government advanced a new constitution specifying that Schleswig and Holstein must be annexed by Denmark. German reaction was predictable, and Bismarck arranged for a joint Austro-Prussian military action. Denmark was defeated and agreed (Treaty of Vienna, 1864) to give up the provinces. Schleswig and Holstein were to be jointly administered by Austria and Prussia.

Questions of jurisdiction provided the rationale for estranged relations between Austria and Prussia. In 1865, the two reached a temporary settlement in the Gastein Convention, which stated that Prussia would administer Schleswig, and Austria manage Holstein. In 1865 to 1866, Bismarck made diplomatic preparations for the impending struggle with Austria. Italy, France, and Russia did not interfere, and Britain was not expected to involve itself in a central European war. Key states in the Confederation allied with Austria, fearing Prussian preponderance in any new Germany. These included the kingdoms of Saxony, Bavaria, Württemberg, and Hanover; the grand duchies of Baden and Darmstadt; the principality of Hesse-Kassel and Nassau; and the free city of Frankfurt. Only a few minor northern states joined with Prussia: the grand duchies of Oldenburg and Mecklenburg-Schwerin, and the duchies of Strelitz and Brunswick, among others. Anyone not looking too closely at military technicalities might have bet on the Austrian side, but the Prussian army, brilliantly reorganized and modernized by its chief of staff, Helmuth von Moltke, had the advantage in rail lines, the newest rifles, and more.

The German Civil War (also known as the Seven Weeks' War) was devastating to Austria and her allies. The humiliating defeat at Koniggratz (July 4, 1866) showed the ineptitude of Austrian forces when confronted by the Prussian army led by Moltke. Within two months, Austria had to agree to the peace terms, which were drawn up at Nikolsburg and finalized by the Peace of Prague (August 1866).

The peace treaty stipulated three major terms: Austria was excluded from all German affairs – the *kleindeutsch* plan had prevailed over the *grossdeutsch* plan (which would have included Austria); Venetia was ceded to Italy; and Austria had to pay an indemnity to Prussia. Some of Austria's allies suffered far more: Hanover, part of Darmstadt, Kassel, Nassau, and Frankfurt were simply annexed by the victors. Blind king George of Hanover had to stumble

his way to exile in Austria, defiant to the end as Bismarck used his sequestered wealth for Prussian political purposes.

In the next year, 1867, the North German Confederation was established by Bismarck. It was designed to facilitate the movement toward a unified German state and included most German states, except for the south German powers, Baden, Württemberg, and Bavaria, which soon signed military alliances with Prussia, in anticipation of difficulties with France: the king of Prussia served as president of the Confederation.

In 1870, the deteriorating relations between France and Germany became critical over the Ems Dispatch. William I, while vacationing at Ems, was approached by the French diplomat Count Benedetti, who demanded a Prussian pledge not to interfere on the issue of the vacant Spanish throne. William I refused to give such a pledge and informed Bismarck of these developments through a telegram from Ems. Bismarck doctored this telegram and leaked it to the friendly press, which reacted as he had wished, with anti-French sentiment, since the telegram seemed to show that the French had insulted the king of Prussia. Bismarck also leaked proof that Benedetti had been part of a French plan to annex Belgium and Luxemburg (part of the latter had belonged to the German Confederation until an 1867 crisis).

Bismarck exploited the situation by initiating a propaganda campaign against the French. Subsequently, France declared war and the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871) commenced. Prussian victories at Sedan and Metz proved decisive: Napoleon III and his leading general, Marshal MacMahon, were captured. Paris continued to resist, under the tragic and anarchist government of its Commune, but fell to the Prussians in January 1871. The Treaty of Frankfurt (May 1871) ended the war and resulted in France ceding Alsace-Lorraine to Germany and a German occupation until an indemnity was paid.

The German Empire was proclaimed on January 18, 1871, with William I elected as emperor of Germany by all the princes. Bismarck became imperial chancellor. Bavaria, Baden, and Württemberg were incorporated into the new Germany.