

Analyse the political factors involved in the unification of Italy up to 1861 - e...



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Italian Unification or Italian Risorgimento is known as the chain of political and military events that produced a united Italian peninsula under the Kingdom of Italy in 1861. These events can be broken down in four stages: Revolutionary, Cavour's Policy and the Role of Piedmont, Garibaldi's Campaign, and the creation of the Italian Kingdom. The unification of Italy up to 1861 is due to two main political factors. The first factor would be nationalism and the other would be the two main individuals who contributed to the Kingdom of Italy, Garibaldi and Cavour. After Napoleon had thoroughly ravaged Europe and had finally been exiled the second time in 1815, nationalism became a wonderfully dangerous thing. Nationalism is pride in one's country, but in the 19th century Italy, it was regionalism that was dominant as the people of Italy showed loyalty to their states and not Italy. By 1848 the entirety of Europe suffered a few massive revolts in which monarchies were toppled left and right. In Italy, there was almost no respect for the existing governments by the population and a great desire for a unified Italy grew. The movement was divided into two groups, one radical and one moderate. The moderate faction was lead by Josef Mazzini, whose writings became the basis of the moral cause for unification. The radical faction was greatly divided, but the main figure head was Giuseppe Garibaldi. Both figures were very prominent with Italian secret societies like Young Italy. Garibaldi first became involved in Italian Unification when he joined Young Italy in 1831 and became a passionate supporter of Mazzini's proposed Italian Republic. Although Garibaldi's political affiliation later changed to royalism, his commitment to Italian unification never faltered; at no point, however, did Garibaldi possess a design by which he planned to

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achieve his goal. A military figure with no particular political skills, as shown by his brief governance of Sicily, Garibaldi's success in Sicily would have been predicted by very few. Additionally, it is likely that had Garibaldi succeeded in his attack on Rome then he would have inspired foreign intervention on the part of reactionary countries such as Austria and set back the cause of Italian unification by many years. Thus while Garibaldi was an extraordinarily successful soldier and general, his achievements were governed more by opportunism and chance than an overarching plan. In the same way as Garibaldi, Mazzini was a passionate supporter of Italian unification, although he was not prepared to compromise his principles and remained deeply hurt by Garibaldi's abandonment of republicanism. However, although Mazzini can be credited with almost single-handedly creating at least a partial Italian consciousness and while he possessed a huge influence in the Milanese and Roman Republics his practical contribution to Italian unification was minimal. For much of the period between 1848 and 1870 within which Italian unification came about, Mazzini was in exile in London. Additionally, his political writings were unfathomable even to the educated minority and comprehensively failed to encourage popular revolutions after 1848. Thus while Mazzini had a definite political agenda which he succeeded in imposing on the Roman Republic, for most of the period in question he was powerless in political terms. The second most important factor towards the unification of Italy would be the Nation of Piedmont and the brilliance of Cavour. After 1848, the Kingdom of Sardinia, or Piedmont, as it is better known, arose as a constitutional monarchy with the one and only Italian monarch in Italy, King Victor Emmanuel of the House of Savoy. The king was just a figurehead however, for there was a great

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power behind the throne of the small nation. This power was Camillo di Cavour, and he easily rivals Bismarck as the greatest politician of all time. Taking over as prime minister in 1852, Cavour quickly improved the nation, bringing railroads, better farming methods, and opened trade with other nations. Cavour practiced Bismarck's idea of "politik," which was basically an "end justifies the means" way of thinking in the political arena. To achieve Italian unity, Cavour knew he would never be able to rely on a revolt from the people nor the secret societies that were very popular. Italian Unification would have to be achieved through fierce political combat to drive the Austrian Empire out, and then brutal war on the smaller powers of the Italian peninsula. To gain a foothold in the grand political arena of Europe, Cavour sent troops to Russia to participate in the Crimean War in 1854. His hope by doing this was to present the Italian Question to the higher powers of Europe in a hope that they will disagree and erupt in war over the issue. Cavour did just that. At the time, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte was the ruler of France. Napoleon III was very supportive of Cavour's cause. Napoleon himself participated in underground organisations and even helped in a revolt in 1831 before he became the second French emperor. Napoleon was trying to spread French influence throughout Europe, so when Cavour tricked Austria to declare war on Piedmont, it was not long before the French declared war on the Hapsburgs. It was a short war; two battles over two months. Both won by the Franco-Piedmontese forces. The war started in April, but by July, France was pressured into making peace with the Austrians because Prussian forces were gathering on the Rhine. The peace agreement was not made with Cavour's presence and as a result the peace treaty was not as much to his liking as it could have

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been. With France no longer in the war, Piedmont could not hope to win against the Austrians alone and Piedmont left the war with what was given to them in the Franco-Austrian agreement; the city state of Lombardy, but left Venetia in the hands of the Hapsburgs. Even worse, was the Franco-Austrian settlement constructed a sort of federal union, the members of which were all the secular leaders of Italy, and was presided over by the Pope. In response to the Piedmontese war in April, and still raging after the peace settlements, Italian underground organisations staged revolts all over Italy. These revolts were successful in Tuscany, Modena, Parma, and Romagna; all of which were absorbed by Piedmont with treaties made by Cavour. The nation of Piedmont was now taking up half of the Northern portion of the boot, and about one third of the peninsula in all. To punish those that had revolted in Romagna, formerly a Papal State and the pope excommunicated all the organizers of the revolt, as well as the leaders of the enlarged Piedmont. Even though excommunication was a severe penalty in Catholic Italy, those involved remained true to their cause, and met for a parliamentary meeting. Despite the disapproval of the papacy, Britain and France both hailed the Piedmontese. Like the papacy disapproving something would have stopped Britain from doing it. There were now only four states in all of Italy, the nation of Piedmont, Venetia, the Papal States, and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. The kingdom of Two Sicilies was located in the southern half of Italy and guess where, Sicily. Two Sicilies was ruled by the Bourbons, but distant cousins of those of French fame. Just like those of French fame, however, these Bourbons were politically corrupt and faced a long history of political instability within the country. In 1860 this problem was solved by Giuseppe Garibaldi. A prominent

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member of Italian secret societies, he organized 1, 150 Red Shirts into what was called " Garibaldi's Thousand." He invaded Two Sicilies, and the government there collapsed around itself as thousands of citizens rallied behind Garibaldi. Garibaldi then turned north to Rome, but was stopped by an army from Piedmont. Not because Piedmont wished to fight Garibaldi, but because if Garibaldi invaded Rome, then the French soldiers stationed there would defend it, and the trained and hardened French forces would probably easily defeat Garibaldi. Afterwards, the French would probably be forced by international pressure to place the Bourbons back on the throne of Two Sicilies. Cavour convinced Garibaldi that a constitutional monarchy was best, and Two Sicilies was annexed to Piedmont. Soon after, the Papal States excluding Rome were added to Piedmont by way of universal manhood vote. In 1861, the nation of Piedmont changed its name to the Kingdom of Italy. The only parts of Italy not part of the kingdom were Venetia and Rome. The former was annexed in 1866 for aid to the Prussians in a war against Austria. The latter was annexed when the French troops withdrew to help their homeland in the Franco-Prussian War in 1870. The Pope was initially seen as a figurehead under whom Italy could achieve unification, and this was certainly Cavour's suggestion in 1848. However, Pius IX's Papal Allocution led pro-Papal figures such as Gioberti to change their allegiance, declaring Piedmont to be the only means by which Italian unification could be achieved. Thus although initially there was a certain level of support for a strong level of Papal influence in a united Italy, the actions of the Papacy made this position untenable. Napoleon III has a strong claim to being the most important figure in Italian Unification: it is certainly true that Austrian influence could not have been removed from northern Italy without <https://assignbuster.com/analyse-the-political-factors-involved-in-the-unification-of-italy-up-to-1861-essay/>

the enormous amount of military assistance provided by France. However, Napoleon himself had never planned that Italy should be united: he merely wanted a friendly Kingdom of Upper Italy as a counterweight to Austrian influence. Despite heading a Republic in 1849, Louis Napoleon nevertheless sent troops to defend Rome against the republican Garibaldi when none of the reactionary powers were prepared so to do. Indeed, it is arguable that in opposition to his principle of nationalities, Napoleon III only accepted the 1860 unification of Italy under British pressure. When the French garrison left Rome in 1870, it was not due to a desire on Napoleon's part to see Italian Unification completed but rather was an act which was forced upon him after the Austro-Prussian War. Thus, although Napoleon III did more to unify Italy than any other political or religious figure, it can hardly be said that this was in any way his original intention. Although a Kingdom of Italy had been formed by 1861, it did not include all of Italy. The missing parts were Rome and Venetia. Neither could be gained easily because Rome was under the protection of Napoleon III and French troops while Venetia was controlled by Austria and its troops. The unification was a long and arduous process. But all the problems that remained before the unification were not solved after the unification. As the last quarter of the century unfolded, this was evident. But, Italy stayed united and focused on solving its new problems. In the end, Cavour, Garibaldi, and Mazzini became the founding fathers of a nation and were immortalized. It can, therefore, be seen that while the unification of Italy owed more to political manoeuvring than to any great social, economic or demographic change there was no individual who intended that unification should be brought about in such a manner. Aside from idealists such as Mazzini and Garibaldi, few Italians in 1850 had any desire or

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comprehension that a united Italy might be brought about within twenty years. The unification of Italy came about more through accident and chance than through design, modern historical interpretations go as far as to assert that it was the disagreements rather than the agreements between the major players which brought about unification. Indeed, if there had been a design, especially a long drawn out plan than it seems likely that it would have been crushed, as were the 1848 Revolutions. The extreme rapidity with which Piedmont expanded its territory in 1860 makes it clear that this combination of circumstances was not one that could have been foreseen or directed in this light, the unification of Italy can be seen as unplanned and unintended.