ITALIAN UNIFICATION, 1815-1871

Section 1: Italian Affairs 1815-48

1. Political Composition in 1815.

After the collapse of the Napoleonic Empire, the great powers considered that Italy was not sufficiently strong or self-supporting to stand alone. The various units in Italy were as follows.

(a) Lombardy and Venetia. Both were placed under direct Austrian rule.

(b) The Kingdom of Naples and Sicily (the Two Sicilies). Austrian arms were responsible for restoring the tyrant Bourbon ruler King Ferdinand. He immediately concluded an offensive and defensive treaty with Austria.

(c) The Papal States.

(d) The duchies of Parma, Modena and Tuscany. Austrian princes or persons friendly to Austria or related to the House of Hapsburg were made rulers.

(c) Piedmont. This included Savoy, Nice, Genoa and the island of Sardinia. This was the only Italian state under Italian rule.

2. Barriers to Italian unity.

No great demand existed among Italians for unity after 1815.

(a) Tradition of localism and separatism.

(i) Numerous sovereign states: there had been little co-operation between Italian states in the past.

(ii) Geography: though Italy formed a unity on the map. There were many natural barriers, particularly mountain ranges, and too few roads.

(iii) Administration: There was no uniformity in the currencies, weights and measures.
(b) Autocratic rule.

Italy was a backward area, especially in the Papal States and the Two Sicilies. Local rulers, with the exception of those of Piedmont, opposed any plans for unity since they were likely to result in the loss of their powers and privileges.

(c) The Roman Question.

The Pope had temporal power over central Italy. He was supported not only by loyal Catholics in Italy but by France and Austria. He opposed any movement in Italy likely to threaten his authority in the Papal States, and his territory constituted a wedge between the northern and southern parts of Italy.

(d) Presence of Austria.

Austria was an important conservative Catholic power. This state had considerable influence in Italy after 1815, except in Piedmont, and was the chief barrier to the aspirations of Italian nationalists.

3. Early Italian revolts.

The revolts in the following states were easily suppressed by Austrian forces.

(a) Naples. In July 1820 General Pepe marched on the capital and forced a democratic constitution on the King. This was based on the Spanish constitution of 1812. Eventually the King was able to gain the support of Austria whose army marched on Naples and punished the rebels.

(b) Piedmont. In March 1821 a mutiny occurred in the Piedmontese army, with demands for a constitution. Victor Emmanuel abdicated in favour of his brother Charles Felix. The young Charles Albert, known for his liberal sympathies, became regent. Felix appealed to Austria, and Austrian troops put down the rising at Novara.

(c) Papal States. At the end of 1830 disorders spread throughout central Italy in a chain reaction from Modena to Parma and from there to the Papal States. Provisional governments were formed. In 1831 rebels in the Papal States demanded civilian government, but Pope Gregory XVI appealed to Austria, and the rebellion was crushed.

4. Factors promoting unity.

Despite the causes of disunity, Italy constituted an entity from the racial, linguistic and cultural standpoints. Factors making for eventual political unity were as follows.
(a) **Growth of national feeling.**

Among the intelligentsia and the progressive middle classes there was a growing interest in the prospects of unity after 1815. It was inspired by hatred of Austria and memories of French liberalism.

(b) **Economic progress.**

The Italian economy was slowly beginning to modernise and catch up with the rest of Europe.

(c) **Cultural and literary works.**

Certain men helped to inspire the people to resist the tyranny of foreign rule. Notable contributors were the following.

(i) Vittorio Alfieri (1749-1803)

(ii) Giacomo Leopardi (1798-1837)

(iii) Alessandro Manzoni (1785-1873)

(d) **Activities of secret societies.**

(i) The Carbonari: this was the so-called Society of Charcoal-burners which originated in Naples. It aimed to expel the Austrians from Italy and played an active part in the revolutions of 1820-1 and 1831.

(ii) The Federati: this was an aristocratic society in Piedmont. It supported the 1821 rebellion.

5. **Work of Mazzini.**

Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-72), the son of a Genoese doctor, was the soul of Italian unification.

(a) **His ideas.**

Apart from being a patriot, he was a gifted speaker and writer. He believed that a nation had a moral purpose and that unity, achieved through war, would be a stage towards a free confederation of all Europe influenced by a spirit of Christian brotherhood. He was described by Metternich as the most dangerous man in Europe.

(b) **His activities.**

In 1827 he joined the Carbonari. In 1830 he was arrested, imprisoned and then exiled. Charles Albert, who became King of Sardinia in 1831, ignored Mazzini's appeal to assume the leadership of the movement for Italian freedom.
In 1831 he formed at Marseilles the society of "Young Italy". It was designed to be a national rather than a regional movement and soon had a large membership throughout Italy.

(c) *His contribution.*

He was invaluable in encouraging many Italians in the cause of unity and in showing them a way to achieve it. He was the first Italian to promote nationalism and to work actively towards a united Italy through political action. He spread ideas for:

(i) the overthrow of native and foreign tyrants in Italy;

(ii) the unification of Italy on republican and democratic lines;

(iii) the need for Italians to achieve their goal through good organisation and their own united efforts.

6. **Reforms of the new Pope.**

In June 1846 Giovanni Mastai Ferretti (1792-1878) was elected Pope Pius IX. In the first few months of Pius's reign the following developments occurred.

(a) An amnesty was given to exiles and political prisoners, limited freedom of speech was granted and the press censorship was modified.

(b) In June 1847 the Pope agreed to the appointment of a Council of Ministers to help in the governing of the Papal States.

**Section 2: REVOLUTIONS OF 1848-9**

7. **Outbreak of revolution.**

In 1848 a series of events led to either the expulsion of Austrian troops or the granting of political concessions in the following states.

(a) **Lombardy.** In January the citizens of Milan abandoned smoking to annoy the Austrians, who monopolised the tobacco trade. Later, on 18th March, a desperate five-day battle resulted in the expulsion of the Austrian troops.
(b) **Sicily.** On 12th January rebels in Palermo defeated Ferdinand II's troops. The King was forced to accept the 1812 constitution and to extend it to Naples and grant an amnesty to political prisoners.

(c) **Tuscany.** On 11th February the Grand Duke agreed to allow representative government and the grant of a constitution.

(d) **Piedmont.** On 4th March Charles Albert, anxious to have the support of the liberals for any war with Austria, granted a constitution.

(e) **The Papal States.** On 15th March the Pope reluctantly accepted a new constitution.

(f) **Venetia.** On 22nd March Venice rose and expelled Austrian troops. Under Manin an independent republic was proclaimed.

8. **Start of Austro-Piedmontese war.**

Charles Albert became interested in the possibilities of taking Lombardy from Austria. He was influenced by Cavour, who wanted to unite the northern states in one economic unit. On 23rd March he issued a proclamation declaring that his people sympathised with the heroic struggles of Lombardy and Venice. His troops then attacked Austrian forces in Lombardy.

9. **The Pope and the war.**

When the war in Lombardy began, Papal troops were sent to the north, presumably to cooperate with the Piedmontese army. However, on 29th April the Pope announced that he opposed offensive war against Austria and refused to permit his troops to fight against fellow Catholics. Therefore, in his desire for peace and legitimacy, the Pope had abandoned the national cause.

The results of the Pope's actions were as follows.

(a) **The Pope lost the opportunity to pose as Italian leader.** Liberals lost faith in the Pope as a potential political leader. Thus Gioberti's solution had little chance of being accepted. People were now keener to turn to Piedmont for a leader in establishing unity.

(b) **The Italian revolt was seriously weakened.** Popular enthusiasm for the national cause weakened, since the Pope no longer gave it his moral support.
10. The revolt weakened by disunity.

Mutual suspicions and jealousies prevented effective co-ordination between the Italian states.

(a) Lombardy and Venetia. Friction existed between Venice and Milan. When the two states had asserted their independence from Austria they were reluctant at first to surrender it to a new North Italian kingdom based on Turin in Piedmont.

(b) Southern Italy. Before they were actually withdrawn from the north, the Neapolitan and Papal troops had been instructed not to cross the Po into Austrian territory. In the south there was rivalry between Messina and Palermo.

(c) Tuscany. Leopold, the Grand Duke, approved of the idea of calling an Italian Constituent Assembly for settling the conditions of union among the states. The scheme failed owing to the opposition of Piedmont and the Pope. Leopold thereupon abandoned the national cause.


Despite the lack of support from other Italian states, it seemed at first that Piedmont might succeed against Austria, who had serious domestic troubles at home. However Austria defeated Piedmont decisively on the following two occasions.

(a) Custozza (25th July 1848). While attacking one wing of the Quadrilateral, Piedmontese forces were defeated by a counter-attack of Radetzky's forces. In August Piedmont withdrew from the struggle.

(b) Novara (23rd March 1849). Following a renewed outbreak of violence in Vienna in March 1849, Charles Albert again marched his troops into Lombardy. The King was heartbroken when his troops were defeated again and abdicated in favour of his son Victor Emmanuel II.

12. Events in Rome.

For a time there was hope that something fruitful could still come from the Papacy. Events then took the following course.

(a) Flight of the Pope. Pius IX fled to Naples on 24th November, disguised as a simple priest.

(b) Declaration of a republic. A provisional government administered the city until a Constituent Assembly could be elected. In February 1849 this latter body proclaimed Rome a republic. Mazzini became the head of government and carried out a series of reforms.
(c) Papal authority restored. The Pope appealed to European powers and France intervened first, the new leader Louis Napoleon seeing an opportunity to win glory. A French army under General Oudinot landed in April but was repulsed at first by Garibaldi when it advanced on Rome. Oudinot waited for reinforcements and then on authority from Napoleon began a full-scale military operation. The Neapolitans gave some assistance and Rome surrendered to the French on 30th June.

13. Reasons for the failure of the uprisings.

(a) Austrian military power.

(b) Lack of international help.

(c) Lack of unity and organisation

(d) Lack of outstanding statesmen or generals

(e) Opposition of the Pope

(f) Intervention of the French in Rome

Section 3: CAVOUR AND PIEDMONT

14. Factors helping Italian unification after 1848

After the setbacks received during 1848-9, the following factors contributed to the creation of the Italian nation during the period 1849-71.

(a) Diplomatic skill of Cavour.

(b) Fighting qualities of Garibaldi. Early in life Garibaldi was a faithful follower of Mazzini and joined the "Young Italy" movement. He entered the Piedmontese navy to induce it to mutiny in favour of Mazzini's plot of 1833. He escaped, was condemned to death in his absence and disappeared to South America. He played an important role from 1848 onwards, for example, as regards the following.

(c) Agitative activities of Mazzini. Mazzini disliked the diplomatic methods used by Cavour to secure the south in 1860-1. However, his continued efforts kept alive the spark of resistance in Italy, as outlined in 5(c) above.
(d) **Use of foreign aid.** France helped gain Lombardy in 1859 and Parma, Modena, Tuscany and Romagna for the new Italian state in 1860. Britain lent moral support. Prussia helped gain Venetia in 1866.

15. **Piedmontese leadership.**

After 1848 Piedmont was recognised as the hope of liberal Italy, for the following reasons.

(a) It alone possessed an army capable of fighting Austria.

(b) It had a constitution and a liberal government.

(c) In contrast to the other states it alone had taken the lead in 1848 in the cause of national unity.

(d) In Victor Emmanuel II it possessed a ruler determined to continue the struggle against Austria.

16. **Rise to power of Cavour.**

Camillo di Cavour (1810-61), a Piedmontese aristocrat, had travelled widely and had studied the political life in Britain and France. In 1847 he founded the liberal newspaper *Il Risorgimento*. In 1848 he was elected to the first Piedmontese Parliament. He played an important role in planning and retaining the *statuto* (constitution) of 1848 with its bicameral legislature and responsible cabinet. In 1850 he became Minister of Agriculture and Commerce, and in 1852 he succeeded Massimo d'Azeglio as Prime Minister.

17. **Cavour's domestic measures.**

Cavour aimed to make Piedmont economically progressive, politically liberal and financially stable. In this way he hoped that Piedmont would be strong enough to assume the leadership of Italy in the event of another war with Austria.

18. **French aid sought.**

The Italian failures of 1848-9 convinced Cavour that Italy could not achieve unity without foreign help. Cavour wanted to prevent any chance of Austria consolidating her power in Italian affairs. Napoleon III, the champion of nationality, seemed a likely ally to help Piedmont overturn the *status quo.*
19. Reasons for Napoleon's interest.

For different reasons Napoleon was interested in the affairs of northern, central and southern Italy.

Napoleon's family origins had been Italian and he was a former member of the Carbonari. Napoleon hoped that French influence would replace that of Austria in northern Italy, and also that France's Alpine frontier might be restored by the acquisition of Nice and Savoy.

20. Piedmont in the Crimean War.

Cavour hoped European powers might be interested in Italian problems if Piedmont played an active role abroad. In December 1855 France and Britain invited Piedmont to join them in the Crimean War. The Piedmontese cabinet opposed the idea, but Cavour eventually brought Piedmont into the war.

In 1856 a Piedmontese force under La Marmora did well at the battle of the Tchernaya. This helped to extinguish the stigma of earlier defeats at the hands of Austria, and Piedmont staked a claim to Italian leadership.

At the Paris peace conference Italian affairs were debated and Napoleon continued to express interest. However, Cavour was unable to gain French support for any changes in Italy.

Section 4: FRENCH AID AND THE AUSTRIAN WAR OF 1859

21. Franco-Italian negotiations. The following steps were taken to form closer liaison between Piedmont and France.

(a) Plombières meeting. Napoleon invited Cavour to a meeting on 20th July 1858. He suggested that a northern Italian state under Victor Emmanuel and a central Italian federation under the presidency of the Pope should be formed.

Cavour was cautious and nothing definite was signed. The meeting was novel in that it was a deliberate attempt to manufacture a war.

(i) Napoleon agreed to help Piedmont if she were involved in war with Austria.

(ii) Nice and Savoy were to be ceded to France in return for her assistance.
(b) **Marriage arrangement.** It had been agreed at Plombieres, that a marriage would first be arranged between the daughter of King Victor Emmanuel, the fifteen-year-old Princess Clotilde, and Jerome, a cousin of Napoleon III. This took place in September 1858 and cleared the way for tightening the arrangements between the two countries.

(c) **Military alliance.** France and Piedmont signed a formal military alliance in January 1859. This time no mention was made of a federation or of any specific state boundaries. Napoleon hoped these would be based on his Plombieres proposals. The details were as follows.

**22. Formation of the National Society.** In 1857 Mazzini, working from England, organised insurrections in Genoa and Livorno. They failed and a similar fate befell a landing at Sapri on the Calabrian coast. Many Italian nationalists then realised the futility of isolated risings. A new organisation, the National Society, was formed which united many of the groups of the early *risorgimento*. Its leaders were Pallavicino, La Farina, Garibaldi and Daniele Manin. They believed that Cavour would be a valuable ally to co-ordinate the activities of the Italian national movement. The motto of the society became 'Independence, unity and constitutional liberty under the Savoy dynasty.'

**23. Austria provoked by Cavour.**

After the Plombieres meeting in mid 1858 Cavour planned to bring about war with Austria. He tried to avoid placing Piedmont and France too clearly in the wrong.

Austria disliked the following.

(a) **Piedmont's refusal to extradite draft evaders.**

(b) **Cavour's negotiations with the National Society.**

(c) A *provocative speech by Victor Emmanuel*. In January 1859, on a suggestion of Napoleon, the King spoke of the "cries of grief" that were reaching Piedmont from the rest of Italy.

(d) **Piedmont's efforts to raise war loans.**

**24. Intervention of other European powers.** Both Piedmont and Austria started to mobilise their forces. Cavour aimed at a defensive mobilisation to force Austria to issue an ultimatum.

Gorchakov, the Russian Foreign Minister, proposed a congress to solve the question. This was accepted by Britain and Napoleon, but Austria demanded Piedmont's exclusion from the congress and demanded the disarmament of Piedmont before the congress met. Napoleon,
pressed by the other European states, and disheartened by the lack of enthusiasm at home, forced Cavour to agree to the Austrian demand on 19th April.

**25. The Austrian ultimatum.** Because of the wish to protect her security, Austria had made the initial mistake of mobilising her large army too soon. To keep the Austrian army mobilised indefinitely was an expensive procedure if peace negotiations were prolonged.

Piedmont was on the point of disarming when Buol, on 19th April, sent a fatal ultimatum giving Cavour the alternative between unconditional demobilisation "within three days" or war. This was a blunder as it supplied Cavour with the provocation he needed. Piedmont refused, and Austria declared war, thereby appearing the aggressor.

**26. Defeat of Austria.**

In April 1859, war broke out between Piedmont and Austria. The joint armies of Piedmont and France won at Magenta and Solferino.

Prussia started to mobilize an army in Austria’s defence and more Italian provinces wanted to join Piedmont under one nation. Both of these events alarmed Napoleon III because Prussia was starting to have a strong presence in European affairs. He signed an armistice with Austria and ended the war without the agreement of Cavour.

The military weakness of Austria was soon revealed. Important factors contributing to her defeat were as follows.

(a) *Poor commanders.*

(b) *Poor strategy.*

(c) *Insufficient forces.*

(d) *Poor morale.*

**27. The Peace of Villafranca.**

Preliminary peace terms were settled by Napoleon and Francis Joseph on 11th July at Villafranca near Verona. Cavour was not consulted.
**Peace conditions.**

(i) Lombardy, except for the fortresses of Mantua and Peschiera, was to be transferred to Piedmont. Napoleon was to be the intermediary in this arrangement. Parma was tacitly conceded as well.

(ii) All Italy was to be included in a new confederation. This was to be under the titular presidency of the Pope.

(iii) The hereditary rulers of Tuscany and Modena were to be restored.

(iv) Austria was to retain Venetia. This state was to form part of the new confederation.

(iii) Piedmont had gained only Lombardy. Cavour resigned in disgust.

**28. Failure of the settlement.**

Events in Italy took a surprising turn which was to help the Italian cause. The Villafranca terms were unenforceable, for the following reasons.

(a) *The duchies refused to accept the return of their rulers.*

(b) *The Pope refused to co-operate.*

(c) *Napoleon refused to allow force to be used to implement Villafranca.*

**29. Agreement between Cavour and Napoleon.**

Cavour agreed to cede Savoy and Nice. It was agreed in the Treaty of Turin of 24th March that plebiscites would be held in all the areas concerned. They resulted in an overwhelming majority in favour of annexation by Piedmont of the central Italian states, and for annexation of Nice and Savoy by France.
Section 5: UNIFICATION OF SOUTHERN ITALY WITH THE NORTH

30. Re-emergence of Garibaldi.

Only a little over half the peninsula had been won for the new Italy. Venetia, Rome and the Kingdom of Naples were not included.

In 1859 Garibaldi had returned from his borne on the island of Caprera to lead a guerrilla band for Piedmont in the Austrian War. He was infuriated at the cession of his native Nice to France and contemplated a raid on the ballot boxes to stop the plebiscite.

The success of national movements in central Italy encouraged similar movements in the south.

31. Expedition of the Thousand.

Garibaldi gathered a thousand picked volunteers at Genoa. Cavour refused to give public support, wanting to avoid a clash with Austria, and Garibaldi was prevented from getting recruits from the Piedmontese army or rifle supplies. The expedition, aboard two leaky steamers, made a successful landing at Marsala in Sicily on 11th May. Garibaldi's ill-equipped army defeated the Neapolitans at Calatafimi and he negotiated for their withdrawal to Naples.

32. Annexation of Naples and Sicily.

On 18th August Garibaldi crossed the Straits of Messina. His progress on the mainland was triumphant, and resistance to him was negligible. The future was uncertain and Cavour decided it was time for Piedmont to take an official part in the drama. Garibaldi handed over authority to King Victor Emmanuel and returned to Caprera.

33. Non-intervention of the powers.

The cause of Italian unity was helped by the rivalry of the powers:

(a) Anglo-French rivalry.

(b) Austro-Prussian rivalry.
Section 6: FINAL UNIFICATION, 1861-70

34. New Kingdom of Italy.

After Villafranca, Cavour had been determined to work for a united state. On 17th March 1861 the first Italian Parliament met in Turin and proclaimed Victor Emmanuel II King of Italy. The government was to be a limited constitutional monarchy based on the statuto of 1848 and a highly centralised one.

35. Death of Cavour.

In June 1861 Cavour died, exhausted by his exertions. His death was a great blow to the new Italy. No future politician seemed capable of devising suitable policies for the centre and south, and Cavour might have prevented much of the chaos which was to follow in subsequent years.

36. Annexation of Venetia.

In 1866 Italy allied with Prussia against Austria. Her army was defeated at Custozza and her navy at Lissa. However, Prussia was victorious, and Italy was rewarded for participating in the conflict by being granted Venetia.

37. Occupation of Rome.

Cavour's last political act had been the securing of a parliamentary declaration that Rome should be the capital of Italy. As a result most Italians regarded unification as incomplete as long as the city was not under their control. At the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War the French troops garrisoned in Rome left. Italian troops then occupied the city.