

ferences among the Great Powers to advance his state's interests on the peninsula. At the same time, the war triggered a surge of pro-Piedmontese sentiment among both moderates and segments of the democratic left in other Italian states that led to the founding of the National Society, an organization launched in 1857 to promote Savoyard leadership of the independence cause. Together, these international and regional developments encouraged the prime minister to adopt a foreign policy designed initially to extend the boundaries of his regional state in the north and establish its influence over the rest of Italy. This shift represented a major change, for it marked the first time that a group actually in power had agreed to embrace the cause of Italian nationalism, a cause that now acquired a new respectability since it was no longer associated exclusively with the revolutionary left.

From his base in Turin, Cavour embarked in the years between 1856 and 1859 upon a daring, but ambiguous and opportunistic foreign policy whose principal objective was not so much national unification as the dislodging of Austria from Italy. On the one hand, his government broke diplomatic relations with Austria (1857) and sought to increase instability on the peninsula by encouraging discontents, exploiting insurrectionary movements, and rallying patriotic support for Piedmont in the other regional states. At the same time, he attempted to convince the Great Powers that Piedmont was the most secure bulwark against revolution and the most reliable guarantor of European diplomatic interests on the peninsula. These policies did not yet reflect a clear vision of the Italian question; rather they were designed to disrupt the status quo on the peninsula and to position Piedmont so that it could take advantage of any new opportunity that might arise.

Such an opportunity arose in the spring of 1858, when the French emperor, Napoleon III, reached an understanding with Cavour, in which he guaranteed his country's military cooperation with Piedmont if the latter found a diplomatic pretext for a war with Austria. The outbreak of hostilities between the two allies and Austria in the spring of 1859 initially produced results that seemed to exceed Turin's expectations. The defeat of the Austrian forces at the battles of Magenta and Solferino ensured the Franco-Piedmontese occupation of Lombardy. The withdrawal of Austrian troops, in the meantime, created a power vacuum in central Italy, where the flight of the old rulers from Tuscany, Parma, Modena, and the Papal Legations converted frightened local elites to the idea of union with Piedmont as the only alternative to democratic revolution. While Cavour suffered a major setback and temporarily resigned from office in the summer of 1859, when Napoleon III signed a