

separate peace with the Austrians, he regained the initiative early the next year. After his reappointment as prime minister in January 1860, he engineered plebiscites in Tuscany and Emilia that legitimized the annexation of much of central Italy to Turin and the House of Savoy. To win the support of Napoleon III, he ceded the historic territories of Savoy and Nice to France, a move that alarmed the British and antagonized important segments of Piedmontese public opinion. Even with this sacrifice, the people of Turin could be justifiably proud of what their native son had achieved by the end of March 1860. In a period of less than two years, their city had become the capital of a greatly enlarged state that now included Lombardy, Emilia, and Tuscany – the most modern and prosperous regions on the Italian peninsula.

The Piedmontese prime minister had little time to rest on his laurels, however, as unexpected events in southern Italy quickly confronted him with new challenges. After revolts erupted in Sicily in April 1860, Giuseppe Garibaldi led an expeditionary force, the legendary one thousand “Red Shirts”, to support the uprisings and liberate the island. After their arrival in Sicily the next month, Garibaldi’s forces won a series of remarkable military victories. Buoyed by their successes, the Red Shirts launched an invasion of the mainland in August. These developments represented a threat to the moderate leadership and the monarchy in Turin on a number of fronts. Not only did they introduce the possibility of constituent assemblies and a democratic republic in the south, but they also raised the prospect of eventual attacks on Rome and Venice that risked provoking war with both France and Austria.

In anticipation of Garibaldi’s defeat of the Bourbon army and his impending occupation of Naples in early September 1860, Cavour prepared a bold, but risky plan to recapture the initiative from the left and forestall any hostile foreign intervention. Days after Garibaldi entered Naples, he launched an unprovoked invasion of the Papal States by the Piedmontese army that succeed in occupying two-thirds of the pope’s territories by the end of September. Cavour justified this direct challenge to the diplomatic status quo as the only way to prevent revolution and block an advance on Rome by Garibaldi. At the same time, he arranged for Victor Emanuel II to head the invading army in order to exploit the king’s influence over Garibaldi.

Cavour’s daring gamble paid off as events in the fall of 1860 quickly demonstrated. His decision to have the king lead the army proved especially astute, when a devoted Garibaldi handed over all the territories he had conquered to Victor Emanuel in late October. Cavour moved swiftly to consolidate these gains and avoid any constituent assemblies