

# This week in history: September 19-25

19 September 2011

*This Week in History* provides brief synopses of important historical events whose anniversaries fall this week.

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secretly supplying Iran with missiles via Israel and using the money to fund Contra death squads in their efforts to topple the Sandinista government of Nicaragua.

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## 25 years ago: Iraq-Iran War enters sixth year

On September 22, 1986 the Iraq-Iran War entered its sixth year with no end in sight. The two armies were hunkered down along a front that more or less corresponded to the 733-mile border that existed in 1980, when Iraq under Saddam Hussein, urged on by the US and Saudi Arabia, launched the war against Iran. This followed the Iranian Revolution of 1979, which overthrew the US puppet regime of Shah Pahlavi and replaced it with a Shiite theocracy.

By 1986, estimates suggested that at least 200,000 Iranians and over 100,000 Iraqis had been killed. The economic cost of the war was equally catastrophic, further impoverishing both societies and creating acute shortages in all manner of consumer goods.

Iraq enjoyed overwhelming air superiority, which by 1986 it used to place its army in a largely defensive position while targeting Iran's oil industry in bombing campaigns. Iran, with more than twice the population of Iraq, continued to carry out costly offensive assaults on Iraq's positions, realizing only limited gains.

By 1986, demoralization had reportedly taken hold among conscripts in the Iraqi army, and leaders of Jordan, Egypt and the Gulf States were expressing fears that a promised "final offensive" from the Ayatollah Khomeini would see Iraqi forces defeated. On September 25, Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz appealed to the United Nations to help negotiate a cease-fire.

Iraq received military and logistical support from France, the US, the Soviet Union and Arab states that viewed it as "the last line of defense" against Iran. Iran was thought to be largely cut off from aid outside of sporadic arms sales from Libya, China, North Korea and some Soviet satellites in Eastern Europe. But in contravention of US law, the Reagan administration was

## 50 years ago: French military stages provocations

During this week in 1961, the cabal of French right-wing army officers calling itself the *Organisation armée secrete* (OAS) stepped up its provocations aimed at toppling President Charles de Gaulle and accelerating the effort to crush resistance to French rule in France's most important remaining colony, Algeria.

On September 21, forces loyal to the fugitive general Raoul Salan, who had led an abortive April uprising in Algeria against the French government and its moves toward reconciliation with the Algerian independence movement, the FLN, took over the airwaves of an Algiers television station after bombing it. Salan then broadcast a message calling on European Algerians to stage protests in the coming days. The "Flag Day" demonstrations that followed were small even in Algiers, an illustration of the relative isolation of the right-wing forces.

The OAS carried out dozens of terrorist bombings in both France and Algeria during the week. On September 23, it bombed the Paris home of General Charles Ailleret, who headed the French military operations in Algeria. On September 24, another French officer, René Derret, was killed in an OAS bombing in Algeria. Earlier in the month de Gaulle himself had narrowly escaped assassination in a bomb attack on his limousine in France.

The OAS had significant support in French ruling circles—the same military, colonial and corporate groupings that had brought de Gaulle to power in 1958 in what amounted to a coup d'état. During the week, establishment figure Marshal Alphonse-Pierre Juin *Die Welt* gave interviews to German newspapers in which he accused de Gaulle of handing Algeria over to "communists."

On September 25, two officers who had participated in the

April uprising (Roland Vaudrey and Phillipe de Saint Rémy) were allowed to “escape” military custody in Paris. Salan himself was living in Algiers with impunity. *Le Monde* editor Hubert Beuve-Méry even allowed Salan to publish a September 19 column spelling out his position that Algeria must remain forever a French possession.

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## 75 years ago: Nazi military buildup advances

On September 20, 1936, the Nazi regime began Germany’s biggest troop maneuvers since just prior to the outbreak of World War I. The simulated war operations lasted for five days, with various sections of the Wehrmacht playing different roles.

Outside Bad Nauheim in Upper Hesse, Hitler inspected the initial troop maneuvers with General von Leeb, who was in control of the operation. Others in attendance were SS head Heinrich Himmler, Police Commander Viktor Lutze and attachés from European countries, including Britain.

The show of force was bolstered by large increases in German troop numbers as a result of conscription, reintroduced the previous year for the first time since the Kaiser.

The Nazis were simultaneously pursuing closer diplomatic relations with Mussolini’s fascist regime. Their mutual anti-Bolshevism and the support both provided to the fascist forces in Spain drew Berlin and Rome closer together. The July Agreement between Germany and Austria, whereby Hitler ostensibly recognized Austrian sovereignty, had removed the remaining impediment to their rapprochement.

On September 23, the German minister for justice, Hans Frank, met Mussolini in Rome in the Palazzo Venezia. Frank brought an invitation to Mussolini to visit Germany, but more crucially, he told the Italian leader that Germany had no Mediterranean ambitions.

Germany, Frank was keen to express, was assisting the Spanish fascists out of ideological solidarity and not because of German territorial aims or interests. The historian Alan Bullock writes that Frank told Mussolini and his foreign minister, Ciano, that Hitler regarded the Mediterranean “as a purely Italian sea” and that German territorial ambitions turned towards the Baltic.

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Spanish Prime Minister Jose Canalejas announced the suspension of constitutional guarantees throughout the country on September 19, 1911 in order to suppress a national general strike that had been called for the following day. The premier stated that the grave measure was imperative to defend not only “public institutions, but society itself” against a strike movement that was “unmistakably revolutionary and anarchist in character.”

Canalejas headed a Liberal government that had won office after the previous Conservative administration of Prime Minister Antonio Maura used troops to suppress an uprising in Barcelona in 1909. The week-long confrontation between workers and troops came to be known as the “Tragic Week.” The crushing of the rebellion led to the formation of the anarcho-syndicalist Confederacion Nacional de Trabajo (CNT) in 1910.

The 1911 strike wave began in Bilbao among carters and spread to the dock workers and metal workers, paralyzing the city. It widened throughout the province of Vizcaya and received the reluctant backing of the Union General de Trabajadores (UGT), which was linked to the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE).

The strikes were given a major impetus by the first CNT conference on September 8-10, which called for a general strike against the government, including against its war in Morocco, precipitating strikes in Saragossa, Cadiz, Huelva, Sevilla, Cordoba, Gijon and Valencia.

Terrified at the potentially revolutionary movement, Canalejas used his declaration of martial law to dispatch troops to a number of cities, where they fired on workers. At least 300 people were arrested and imprisoned in Madrid, among them UGT Vice President Largo Caballero. In Barcelona, there were 168 arrests.

On September 23, the Socialist Party criticised the government, but disclaimed any responsibility for the strikes. The CNT was outlawed and remained dissolved for several years.

Canalejas was killed by an anarchist assassin in November 1912.

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## 100 years ago: Spanish government suppresses strike wave