

This week in history: September 10-16

10 September 2012

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

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“immediately withdraw its request for the \$270 million for the mercenary contras if it is serious about helping to find peace ... and does not want to keep staining itself with the blood of Central America.” Ortega’s government appealed to the US in other ways, including by releasing right-wing terrorists from prison and returning property holdings to the rich landholders who were forced into exile in 1979.

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25 years ago: Reagan increases aid to Contras

On September 10, 1987 the Reagan administration requested a further \$270 million from Congress to fund the Contra dirty war against the Sandinista government in Nicaragua. The proposal aimed to sink a recently concluded Central American “peace plan.”

On August 7, the presidents of five Central American governments—Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala and Costa Rica—had signed the plan drafted by Costa Rican president Oscar Arias. The plan opposed “foreign insurgents,” lumping the US-backed Contra terrorists in Nicaragua with the popularly supported liberation movement in El Salvador, the Faribundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN). The pact was engineered by the four US-supported Central American regimes as a way to pressure the Sandinista government in Nicaragua to the right.

Two days after the request for money for the contras, on September 12, Reagan made an about-face from his original praise for the peace plan and announced that the US would not accept any proposal which stood in the way of its declared goal of overthrowing the Sandinista government. Reagan declared the Sandinistas to be a “totalitarian Marxist-Leninist dictatorship” and a “Soviet beachhead on this continent, only 2,000 miles from the Texas border.” US imperialism never forgave the Sandinistas for their 1979 overthrow of the 45-year Somoza dictatorship, which was loyal to the US.

Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega called Reagan a “dangerous fool” and demanded the administration

50 years ago: US-Soviet tensions mount over Cuba

On September 15, 1962, the Soviet Union made operational fifteen medium-range nuclear missiles it had deployed to Cuba, following recent similar moves by the US in Turkey and Italy.

Knowledge of the deployment had not yet become public. Nonetheless, tensions between the US and the Soviet Union had reached a new low, with each side making public accusations over its rival’s intentions in Cuba. The US had sought to topple the nationalist Castro regime since it came to power in 1959. Fidel Castro in turn sought support from the Soviet Union, belatedly declaring himself and his government to be “socialist.”

The US Senate had on September 10 unanimously granted Kennedy authority to call up 150,000 reservists. A chorus of prominent Republican senators—including Goldwater of Arizona, Prescott Bush of Connecticut, Dirksen of Illinois, Tower of Texas and Keating of New York—were attacking Kennedy for not imposing a blockade on Cuba, even if that meant war.

On September 11, the Soviet Foreign Office warned the US that any attack on Cuba would result in a nuclear war. “If such an attack is made, this will be the beginning of unleashing war,” the statement read, “which might plunge the world into the disaster of a universal world war with the use of thermonuclear weapons.” The US State Department

called the Soviet statement “obvious propaganda.”

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75 years ago: Hitler speech to Nuremberg rally

German Chancellor Adolf Hitler closed the 1937 Nazi party Nuremberg rally on September 13 with strident threats against what he called “Jewish Bolshevism.” According to Hitler, European Jewry was the force behind Bolshevism and its “general attack on the present day social order” prepared by an “international guild of criminals ... from Moscow.”

By this time Hitler was rapidly losing faith in any military alliance between Germany and Great Britain coming to fruition. In his speech he chastised the British and French political leaders over the menace of Bolshevism. But in a nod to the blossoming relationship with Mussolini’s Italian fascist regime, the German chancellor declared himself still prepared to cooperate with countries who shared the same values and understood the value of an ordered and disciplined state like that of Nazi Germany.

Referring to the Spanish revolution and civil war, Hitler stated that Spain had gone “Bolshevik” not through a revolution but via bourgeois democracy. For Germany, he said, the real and permanent Spain was represented by General Franco’s forces. The city of Valencia was being held by the “hirelings of Moscow” who Hitler warned might use it as a base from which to unleash an assault upon other European countries.

Earlier that same day the Nazi leadership and military leaders watched a parade by the Luftwaffe and Wehrmacht. The London *Times* reported that a section of the military parade was the “1st S.S. Death Head Unit, Upper Bavaria”. The newspaper’s correspondent reported that according to the official Nazi statement these troops were responsible for “the special task of guarding the sub-humanity in the concentration camps of Germany.”

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100 years ago: Franco-Russian convention ratified

On September 12, 1912, the Franco-Russian convention was ratified. Under the convention, which was signed by French Prime Minister Raymond Poincaré, France and Russia agreed to immediately mobilize their troops in the case of a German mobilization. The agreement was an expression of growing tensions between the major powers in the lead-up to World War I.

The signing of the agreement followed a meeting of the French and Russian general staffs that took place in Paris in July 1912, resulting in tentative agreement for joint action in the event of war. In August, Poincaré conducted a state visit to Russia, meeting Tsar Nicholas II and Russia’s foreign minister Sergei Sazonov.

Poincaré discussed strategic railroads that would aid a Russian mobilization against Germany, advised the Russians not to immediately intervene in the political instability in the Balkans, and advised Sazonov that the Franco-Russian military alliance did not extend to support for Russia in the event of a war with Austria-Hungary, a conflict in which French interests would not be directly affected. He also disclosed the Anglo-Franco Naval Convention, which implied British support for France in the event of war with Germany.

Growing Franco-Russian military ties developed in the context of the decline and decay of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires on the eve of the First Balkan War, which began in early October. The Russian Tsarist autocracy was anxious to assert its interests and seize control of regions previously controlled by both Empires.

France was anxious to maintain close ties with Russia in order to improve its relative position in relation to the other major powers in Europe, particularly Germany, which had undergone a major industrial development, and was increasingly asserting its imperial interests internationally. However, French politicians were also concerned that Russia’s designs on Ottoman territory threatened French capital’s substantial investments in the Ottoman Empire.

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