

# This week in history: July 20-26

20 July 2015

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## 25 years ago: US sets trap for Iraqi president Saddam Hussein

On July 25, 1990, US Ambassador to Iraq April Glaspie met with Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and encouraged him to believe that Washington would not intervene if a military conflict broke out between Iraq and Kuwait. The meeting set the stage for Iraq's invasion of Kuwait a week later, which the Bush administration immediately portrayed as an unprecedented act of aggression requiring massive US military intervention in the Persian Gulf.

Transcripts from the meeting, supplied by the Iraqi foreign minister to ABC News and confirmed as authentic over 20 years later in a cable released by WikiLeaks, documented that Hussein was told that the US had "no opinion on the Arab-Arab conflicts, like your border disagreement with Kuwait." US intelligence agencies were well aware at the time of the meeting that Iraq had amassed 100,000 troops on the border with Kuwait and that Saddam Hussein was considering a military strike.

Tensions between Iraq and Kuwait and other OPEC members like the UAE had been increasing for months as the global price of oil was driven down by production increases above the agreed-upon quotas. The Iraqi president claimed that OPEC member states acting under US auspices were seeking to wreck the Iraqi economy. In particular, he charged that Kuwait had stolen \$2.4 billion worth of oil by using slant drilling to pump oil from the Rumaila oil field, which was in Iraqi territory. Hussein declared, "If words fail to protect Iraqis, something effective must be done to return things to their natural course." Iraq owed Kuwait some \$30 billion in debts incurred in financing the eight-year Iran-Iraq war.

British imperialism created Kuwait by carving out a portion of the province of Basra from the Ottoman Empire in 1899. The emirate of Kuwait was made formally independent in 1961, and the role of protector from Iraqi attempts at annexation passed to the Shah of Iran, a US henchman, and after his overthrow in 1979 to the US itself.

## 50 years ago: 10,000 battle riot police in Athens

On July 21, 1965, police in Athens attacked a crowd, estimated by western media at 10,000, demonstrating for the reinstatement of former Prime Minister Georgios Papandreou. King Constantine II removed Papandreou from office on July 15, 1965 claiming the Center Union Party premier had promoted leftism in the military. One man, Sotirias Petrouslas, 25, was killed and at least 130 were injured, along with dozens of tourists, in the police riot. About 100 were arrested.

The crowd of 10,000 had splintered off from a larger mass rally in favor of Papandreou's reinstatement and the ouster of replacement Prime Minister Athanasiadis-Novas, also a member of Papandreou's Center Union Party. Minister of Public Order Ioannis Toumbas claimed the demonstrators refused police orders to disperse, and then attacked police. He laid blame for the "disturbance" at the feet of Papandreou, whom he accused, in a nationally broadcast address, of "rabble-rousing." The demonstrations, which began immediately after Papandreou's ouster, continued. The General Confederation of Labor announced a 24-hour nationwide general strike for July 27, the following Tuesday.

The July 1965 events are known in Greece as the "the Royal Coup." Papandreou's Center Union Party was based on an uneasy combination of liberal and social democratic forces that balanced between the social aspirations of the Greek masses and the most reactionary elements of society grouped around the crown and the military. After winning the elections of 1963 and 1964—the latter by a wide margin—Papandreou sought to consolidate his own power and at the same time appease the right-wing by appointing monarchist officers to high military posts.

King Constantine responded by cultivating disaffected layers within the Center Union Party itself. Right-wing elements seized on allegations in early 1965 that Papandreou's son, Andreas Papandreou, was a member of a secretive anti-monarchical group of military officers, called ASPIDA. This scandal brought the resignation of Defense Minister Petros Garoufalias. When George Papandreou nominated himself for

defense minister, Constantine refused to accept it, forcing his resignation.

The sacking of Papandreou and the split within the Center Union Party resulted in a series of weak governments unable to deal with mounting social opposition, setting the stage for the coup d'état of April 21, 1967, and the "Regime of the Colonels."

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## 75 years ago: Battle for Britain begins

On July 24, 1940, the first major clashes over the skies of southern Britain took place between the British and German air forces. The German Luftwaffe would steadily escalate its campaign, targeting British airfields first, before launching, later in 1940, a terror bombing campaign of British cities that lasted until 1941. Over 43,000 British civilians were killed in the campaign.

After the surrender of France, Hitler had decided after consultations with military brass that an immediate invasion across the British Channel was unfeasible because of British naval supremacy. After the British government rejected Nazi overtures the previous week, Hitler acted upon plans to subjugate Britain by a concerted air offensive and submarine warfare, with a view to invade in September.

However, while the German Luftwaffe was suited to "Blitzkrieg" tactics, essentially utilizing tactical bombing to aid a rapidly moving ground force, it was less well equipped for an independent strategic offensive. German intelligence reports also underestimated the sophistication of British radar systems and its industrial productivity in manufacturing aircraft.

In the week's fighting, German Dornier and Heinkel bombers supported by Messerschmitt 109's attacked a British sea convoy in the Thames estuary and engaged British Spitfire and Hurricane fighter-planes that scrambled from southern airfields. During an aerial dogfight, witnesses described how the daytime sky was darkened by the large number of planes involved and smoke created by the intense ferocity of fighting.

The London *Times* reported that the RAF responded to the daytime attacks by the German Luftwaffe by bombing German targets at Gotha, Kasel and Gelsinkirchen that very night. Among the targets of British bombing were aircraft factories, dockyards, goods yards, anti-aircraft battery and aerodromes. The British newspaper reported that when Bomber Command attacked the aircraft factory at Gotha the barrack blocks housing factory workers was targeted.

As many as 600,000 German civilians, refugees, and foreign workers died in Allied bombing raids on Germany during WWII.

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## 100 years ago: British defeat Ottoman troops in Battle of Nasiriyah

On July 24, 1915, British troops defeated Ottoman forces in the battle of Nasiriyah, securing control of the strategically important city in modern-day Iraq. The battle was part of a broader push by Britain to seize the ailing Ottoman Empire's territories in the Arab-inhabited parts of the Middle East and establish dominance over the region's oil fields.

Following the outbreak of World War I in August 1914, Britain rapidly moved against the Ottomans, first dispatching an expeditionary force to Southern Mesopotamia in October. In November, Britain had seized control of Basra in modern-day Iraq, and easily drove Ottoman troops from a series of other towns in the area. Much of the fighting was conducted by the Indian British Army under the command of Lieutenant-General John Nixon.

Confident of the relative weakness of the Ottoman army, Nixon increasingly favored a bid to capture Baghdad. In order to take the city, British troops would need to advance up both the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, the central means of transport in the region. With British troops making gains along the Tigris, Nixon devised a campaign for Nasiriyah, which functioned as the main Ottoman supply depot on the Euphrates.

The British Indian advance, which began in late June, confronted widespread flooding in the region, extreme heat, and Turkish defenses that made use of dams and river marshes. After almost a month of fighting, British Indian forces broke through the last lines of Ottoman defense on July 24, prompting a disorganized retreat by the Turkish troops. The city was formally surrendered on July 25.

The ranks of both sides had already been ravaged by sickness, and the skirmishes throughout July had resulted in significant losses. British and Turkish casualties numbered over 500 each, while some 1,000 Turkish troops are thought to have been wounded. Another thousand Turkish troops were taken prisoner.

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