

This week in history: July 27-August 2

27 July 2015

25 Years Ago | 50 Years Ago | 75 Years Ago | 100 Years Ago

25 years ago: Iraq invades Kuwait

Iraq sent some 100,000 troops into Kuwait on August 2, 1990, after talks broke down between the two Mideast nations in Jidda, Saudi Arabia. The talks were a façade, as Kuwait had no intention of making concessions, since its overproduction of oil, which drove prices down and threatened to bankrupt Iraq, was orchestrated by Washington. Within 24 hours of their commencement, the talks broke down.

Before the invasion, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein had been purposely misled by the US embassy that Washington would be neutral in the event of any border conflict. His reckless action provided a pretext for US military intervention. The invasion of Kuwait generated fears in world financial markets, immediately driving oil prices up by 15 percent.

US President George H.W. Bush immediately condemned the attack as an act of "naked aggression," imposed severe economic sanctions against Iraq and called for an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council. The capitalist press immediately fell into line with Washington's hegemonic war drive with a campaign to demonize Saddam Hussein as a bloodthirsty butcher.

Bush immediately froze control of Iraqi assets in the US and cut off all commerce. He cynically announced, "We're not discussing intervention. .. I would not discuss it (publicly) if I were."

Meanwhile, the Pentagon ordered the aircraft carrier Independence and six warships to the area. The US had been conducting a "short-notice exercise" with forces of the United Arab Emirates for over a week, dispatching its fleet into the Persian Gulf from its base in Bahrain.

The same day, the US House of Representatives unanimously passed a bill endorsing Bush's sanctions and calling for a coordinated allied military response to the invasion. In discussion on the Senate floor, Alfonse

D'Amato said, "I hate to say, 'I told you so,' but for years people in the State Department have been acting like wimps toward (Hussein). They have been appeasing him. .. and appeasement has only served to whet his appetite."

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50 years ago: Johnson doubles draft quotas

On July 28, 1965, following an eight-day conference with his top military and diplomatic advisers, President Lyndon Johnson ordered the doubling of the monthly draft quota from 17,000 to 35,000. At the same time he announced the immediate dispatch of an additional 50,000 troops to South Vietnam with the promise that additional forces would be sent upon the request of the military command.

The decision to increase the draft was taken as an alternative measure to the demand by the Pentagon chiefs for calling up the reserves coupled with the mandatory extension of enlistments. From a purely military standpoint, the mobilization of the reserves would have the advantage of providing an immediate infusion of substantial numbers of trained forces into the rapidly deteriorating military situation in South Vietnam. Johnson, after much vacillation, rejected such a move, because he feared that sending older men, many with families, into combat would spark widespread opposition to the war.

Democrats in Congress, including Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield, praised Johnson's decision as "deliberately measured." Differences with the administration centered on the use of the United Nations as a screen for US aggression, as had been done in Korea. Liberal critics pointed to the fact that the United States had foregone the usual ritual of UN debates in carrying out its recent stepped-up intervention in Vietnam.

Symbolizing the "guns and butter" policy of his administration, two days after the draft announcement Johnson enacted the Medicare bill providing hospital and nursing home care for the elderly. The legislation was signed in an elaborate ceremony in Independence, Missouri, using

72 different pens, which were distributed as souvenirs to lobbyists, union bureaucrats and political cronies.

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75 years ago: Germany moves toward Soviet invasion

During the week beginning July 27, 1940, the fascist regime in Berlin deepened its preparations for an invasion of the Soviet Union. With the German air force engaged in the Battle of Britain for the dominance of British airspace over southern England, Hitler and the Nazi leadership turned their attention eastward to the Soviet Union. Since the early 1920s, Hitler had dreamed of a war of annihilation against the Soviet Union in order to simultaneously eradicate “Jewish Bolshevism” and create *Lebensraum*, for the expansion of German imperialism deep into Eurasia.

With the British government rejecting overtures of détente from Germany, Hitler decided that the best way to remove Britain from the equation was to open a second front in the east against the Soviet Union. Full of hubris, Hitler told Wehrmacht generals Jodl and Keitel that compared to France “a campaign against Russia would be child’s play.”

On July 29 Hitler asked the Chief of the Wehrmacht Directional Staff about the feasibility of attacking the Soviet Union that very autumn, but Jodl argued strongly that the army was not yet ready for such an undertaking. However, earlier that summer, operational plans called “Aufbau-Ost” (Build-up in the East) for just such an invasion, had already been drawn up by the military top brass in ready anticipation of Hitler’s future intentions.

Two days later, on July 31, Hitler met his military leadership at the Berghof above Berchtesgaden. The German navy told the Nazi leader that an invasion of Britain could not be considered before mid-September and might even have to be postponed until May the following year. In order to simultaneously squeeze Britain further, and fulfill his murderous designs upon the Soviet Union, Hitler reached the conclusion that Russia had to be destroyed.

Notes taken at the Berghof meeting outlined Hitler’s thinking: “With Russia smashed, Britain’s last hope would be shattered. Germany then will be master of Europe and the Balkans: Russia’s destruction must therefore be part of this struggle. Spring 1941. The sooner Russia is crushed the better.”

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100 years ago: United States invades Haiti

On the July 28, 1915, the United States invasion of Haiti began with the landing of 330 marines at Port au Prince, following the assassination of pro-US President Jean Vilbrun Guillaume Sam by his political rivals. The assassination of Sam was part of a protracted period of instability in Haitian politics, spurred by conflicts within the local ruling elite, and intensifying imperialist intervention. Sam was the country’s seventh president in four years.

The US invasion force, ordered to protect American and foreign interests, seized control of Haiti’s treasury and customs houses, and forced the installation of a pro-US president in the country’s legislature.

A former French colony, Haitian independence was won in 1804. France surrendered control over the country only after being defeated militarily by a slave revolt. Paris then financially blackmailed the fledgling black republic, imposing crushing indemnity payments. The French ruling class ensured that an independent Haiti was born in ruins, incapable of freeing itself from poverty and oppression.

The US considered Germany its main rival in the Caribbean. Haiti was strategically important in terms of manpower, material worth and port facilities. Whichever imperialist power had control over Haiti would have an advantage with regard to the rest of the region.

In the early part of the 20th century, German trade interests were large in Haiti, controlling about 80 percent of the country’s international commerce. In an attempt to limit German influence, in 1910-11 the US State Department backed a consortium of banks which acquired control of the National Bank of Haiti, the nation’s only commercial bank, and the government treasury.

The initial years of the US occupation saw a campaign to suppress opposition from the *cacos*, a peasant-based rebel movement. The movement gained broad support from Haiti’s most oppressed layers, in large measure due to the brutal methods used by the US occupiers, who seized peasants and forced them into chain-gang-style labor.

Under the control of the US, a select group of the Haitian upper class achieved a certain level of economic prosperity, and functioned as a servile comprador of Washington, while the vast majority of the population remained in abject poverty.



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