

# This week in history: October 5-11

5 October 2015

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**50 years ago: US moves deeper into Vietnam conflict**

## 25 years ago: Zionist paramilitary forces massacre Palestinians

Israeli security forces shot dead as many as 24 Palestinians and wounded another 150 in Jerusalem on October 8, 1990. This represented the largest single death toll in the three-year-old *Intifada*, the Palestinian uprising against Zionist rule.

Hundreds of Israeli paramilitary border police stormed into the Al Aqsa mosque compound where thousands of Palestinians had gathered to counter the threat by an extreme Zionist group to attack the Moslem holy place. The group, known as the Faithful of the Temple Mount, were demanding the destruction of the Al Aqsa mosque and the building of a Third Temple, replacing two Jewish temples destroyed in ancient times. An announced attempt by the group to march on the mosque followed a long string of incidents in which Zionist fanatics attempted to plant explosives under the mosque and staged provocative demonstrations there.

When the Palestinians responded to the warning that the group was approaching, the police began firing live ammunition into the crowd. Among those killed by Israeli bullets were men praying in the mosque itself. Others were shot dead as they attempted to close the doors to the mosque in order to keep out the rampaging Israeli police.

“We were inside the mosque and shouting Islamic and nationalist slogans ... and the police asked us to stop, but we didn’t,” one survivor of the massacre, a Palestinian from Gaza, told the *New York Times*. “They began to shoot randomly, and a lot of people were inside the mosque. Prayers hadn’t begun yet, and the soldiers were shooting; they didn’t differentiate between young and old people.”

Violence continued even at the hospital, where most of the wounded were brought for treatment. Israeli troops repeatedly fired tear gas into the building.

In the aftermath of the killing, the Israeli army imposed an intensified crackdown on the occupied territories, enforcing a curfew which kept all Palestinians locked in their homes. Scores of Palestinian leaders were arrested.

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This week in 1965 saw the United States fall deeper into the quagmire in Vietnam, with significant US casualties in many parts of South Vietnam, and the expansion of military operations against North Vietnam and neighboring Cambodia.

On October 5, US-supplied South Vietnamese Skyraiders bombed villages on the Cambodian side of the border, and US B-52 bombers were engaged in the border region dubbed “Zone C” in American military operations. Cambodia denied the claims that National Liberation Front forces were using Cambodian territory and condemned the violations of its sovereignty.

Also on October 5, Minoru Omori, foreign affairs editor for the major Japanese daily *Mainichi*, confirmed North Vietnamese allegations that the US Air Force had deliberately bombed a leprosarium. Omori was shown film of US planes in low formation bombing the hospital. “Patients on crutches are seen running helter-skelter, the nurses trying to take refuge in shelters carrying on their backs patients who are unable to walk ... and suddenly in their midst bombs and napalm explode, spreading death,” Omori said. “I have never seen such an appalling film.”

The bombing raids did not go unopposed by North Vietnam, which was receiving limited military support from the Soviet Union and China. On October 6, four US planes were shot down during raids. Three of these were attacking a bridge and a “military depot” northeast of Hanoi. Crews for all three were killed or captured. On October 8, a day in which the US military reported dropping 209 tons of bombs on North Vietnam, Hanoi reported that its forces had shot down two more US planes.

Ground combat also intensified, though casualties were obscured by the US media’s agreement not to report figures for American dead from specific engagements. On October 5, a patrol of one dozen US infantrymen was “virtually wiped out” fifteen miles northwest of Saigon. On October 8, an NLF ambush on a US convoy, also near Saigon, resulted in an unknown number of US casualties, and two days later a US paratrooper platoon was ambushed 25 miles northwest of the capital. October 11, once again near Saigon, a land mine detonated, “killing or wounding all of the handful of American paratroopers riding in a jeep.” These NLF attacks prompted

massive US artillery and aerial reprisals.

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## **75 years ago: German troops enter Romania**

On October 5, 1940 the first trainloads of German soldiers arrived in Romania to bring that Balkan country under the orbit of Nazi Germany. Fascist dictator Adolf Hitler dispatched one division, 15,000 troops, along with aircraft and artillery, under the guise of training the Romanian army. But the real intention was to take advantage of Romania's political crisis in order to secure control of the Romanian oil fields, which were essential to Hitler's war aims. Germany also relied on the import of grains, fats, and meats from the agricultural regions of the Balkan country.

The defeat of France by Hitler's armies in June had thrown Romania into a crisis, as French imperialism had previously guaranteed the territorial integrity of Romania. Now the Balkan state was on the verge of disintegration, as Bulgaria, Hungary and the USSR began to dismember it, reducing its territories by one-third. The Romanian bourgeoisie now turned to Germany for support in hopes of recovering its losses. King Carol II abdicated in early September and was replaced with a military-fascist government led by Ion Antonescu, general of the regular army, with Horia Sima, leader of the fascist Iron Guard, as vice premier.

The dictatorship suppressed the working class organizations and the social democratic and Communist parties, along with bourgeois politicians. On the same day that German troops entered Romania, a law was passed that called for the state to expropriate land owned by Jews. The Iron Guard launched several pogroms in the next period against Jews.

In late November, Romania would formally join the Axis. But even before that, military collaboration between Romania and Germany was integrated into Hitler's plans for a future invasion of the USSR.

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## **100 years ago: Serbian capital falls to Austria-Hungary**

On October 9, 1915, a combined force of Austro-Hungarian and German troops captured Belgrade, the capital of Serbia, after an assault that began October 7. The Balkans had been a focal point of the conflicts between the major imperialist powers since the outbreak of the First World War on August 4, 1914, precipitated by the assassination of the Austro-Hungarian Archduke Franz Ferdinand by a Serbian nationalist in Sarajevo

on June 28, 1914.

In preparation for the attack on Belgrade, the Austro-Hungarian army had positioned itself to the north and northwest of the city, and was reinforced by the German 11th army. They crossed the Sava and Drina rivers, along with the Danube, and moved on the capital. Though their entry was met by ferocious street fighting, by October 9 the capital was under the control of the Central Powers.

Belgrade had previously been occupied by Austro-Hungarian troops in December 1914, and had been the scene of intense fighting, with the invading force laying many sections of the city to waste before giving way by the end of the month to a Serbian counteroffensive.

In 1915 discussions had taken place between the German and Austro-Hungarian command about the importance of conquering Serbia, as it would enable the creation of a rail link through Austria-Hungary to Istanbul, allowing Germany to direct supplies to the Ottoman Empire.

The decision to launch the offensive in September followed the defeat of the Allied powers in the Battles of Gallipoli, and further setbacks for Russian troops. On October 4, Bulgaria formally entered the World War on the side of the Central Powers, having been promised concessions in the event of victory. Within days of the fall of Belgrade, the Bulgarian army launched a major offensive against Serbian troops.

Faced with the combined offensive, Serbian authorities organized a retreat of the entire Serbian army, the King, and tens of thousands of civilians through mountainous ranges, into Albania, to await Allied assistance. Thousands died of disease and starvation during the course of the trek.

Serbia would register the highest per capita casualties of any of the belligerent nations in World War One. According to some figures, by the end of the conflict, over 1.1 million inhabitants of Serbia, around 27 percent of its population, perished in the conflict, including 60 percent of its male population.

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