

This week in history: January 11-17

11 January 2016

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

25 years ago: US begins carpet-bombing of Iraq

On January 17, 1991, one day after a UN-imposed deadline for Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait and five days after the Democratic-controlled US Congress rubber-stamped President Bush's war plan, "Operation Desert Storm," an all-out air war against Iraqi forces began.

After nearly six months of military buildup in the Persian Gulf by the Pentagon, the US had deployed 415,000 troops, 1,800 aircraft and a fleet of more than 100 ships including six aircraft carriers into the war zone. Including forces from a coalition of more than 30 other countries, the airstrike force was 2,250 of the most advanced combat aircraft against Iraq's force of about 500 Soviet-built MIGs and French-made Mirage F1 fighters.

The high-technology weaponry utilized by US forces made the fighting extremely lopsided. To establish air superiority from the start, Tomahawk cruise missiles were launched from the fleet in the Persian Gulf, sorties were flown by F-117A Nighthawk stealth bombers armed with laser-guided smart bombs and F-4G Wild Weasel aircraft used HARM anti-radar missiles to knock out Iraq's air defenses.

These attacks were followed with raids by F-14, F-15, F-16 and F/A-18 fighter bombers which continued to drop TV and laser-guided bombs. By the completion of the air campaign, US and allied forces would fly more than 100,000 sorties dropping 88,500 tons of bombs.

To prepare the advance of US ground troops, A-10 Thunderbolt aircraft, with Gatling guns and heat-seeking or optically guided Maverick missiles, annihilated Iraqi armored forces. AH-64 Apache and AH-1 Cobra attack helicopters fired laser-guided Hellfire missiles and TOW missiles to destroy Iraqi tanks. In addition, a fleet of B-52 bombers using the E-3A Airborne Warning and Control Systems conducted bombing runs.

In the first days of Desert Storm, frightened refugees brought news of the incineration of large sections of Baghdad and other Iraqi cities, with more than 100,000 casualties, including 30,000 civilians, in the first four days of war. "Children were crushed, adults were maimed and everyone was paralyzed with fear," according to one account. "This is not a war. This is the annihilation of a Moslem people," said an Egyptian worker. "I took some wounded and dead people to Fallujah General Hospital. There were many children—some five and six years old. The claim that they are not hitting civilian targets is propaganda. It is wrong. The skies are red above us."

Planning for war in the Persian Gulf began as far back as 1975, after the oil crisis in America. The US ruling elite realized then that it would have to seize control of the valuable oil resources of the region.

An article appeared in March 1975 in a policy magazine called *Commentary*, outlining a military plan for the first time for the conquest of the oil fields from Dubai and Qatar all the way up to Kuwait.

There is irrefutable evidence that the US deliberately provoked and encouraged the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait on August 2, to provide a pretext for long-prepared plans for US intervention.

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50 years ago: US B-52 crash drops four hydrogen bombs on Spain

On January 17, 1966, four hydrogen bombs fell on Spain without igniting, when a US Air Force B-52G bomber crashed above the fishing village of Palmores, on the country's southeastern Mediterranean coast.

The crash took place at an altitude of 31,000 feet, when the Strategic Air Command nuclear bomber collided with the KC-135 tanker that was sent to refuel it. The four-member crew of the KC-135 was killed when its fuel tank ignited, while three of the seven members of the B-52 died in the crash.

The plane carried four hydrogen bombs. The conventional explosives in two of the bombs detonated upon impact, contaminating two square kilometers with plutonium, including residential areas and farmland, but avoided either a nuclear or thermonuclear explosion because the bombs were not armed. A third hit the ground but did not explode. A fourth was found offshore in the Mediterranean after 80 days of intensive searching that involved 33 ships and diving crews.

Media representatives who arrived at the scene were confronted by angry local demonstrations, and several weeks later, on February 4, 600 demonstrators defied the Franco regime's ban on demonstrations and carried out a protest in front of the US embassy in Madrid. On January 29, the Spanish government banned NATO flights from carrying nuclear bombs over Spain.

The B-52 was part of a Cold War operation called Chrome Dome that took it on a flight from North Carolina, at the Seymour Johnson Air Force Base, to the borders of the Warsaw Pact Soviet defense area and back. This required mid-air refueling in Spain two times. Similar flights of nuclear bomb-equipped planes went on for decades during the Cold War, part of the US effort to maintain "first-strike capability" against the Soviet Union—that is, to maintain the capacity to unilaterally launch a nuclear war. During this time, a number of "broken arrow" incidents occurred—moments when a plane crashed or otherwise lost its nuclear bombs. When these accidents occurred in the US, they were hidden from the public.

In the cleanup, 1,400 tons of radioactive soil were excavated and sent to the US. Eventually, the US gave settlements to some 500

Spanish citizens who experienced health troubles as a result of the detonations. Elevated levels of radioactivity were found in the soil around Palmares as late as 2008, requiring a new round of cleanup jointly conducted and paid for by the US and Spain. On October 19, 2015, US Secretary of State John Kerry and Spanish Foreign Minister José García-Margallo y Marfil signed a statement of intent to establish new negotiations for the removal of contaminated soil to the US.

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75 years ago: Defense strikes in Michigan, Ohio and Illinois

On January 13, 1941, in Saginaw, Michigan, hundreds of striking members of the United Auto Workers clashed with police and shut down production at an Eaton Manufacturing plant, which was being operated by scabs represented by the rival United Auto Workers-AFL. Police hurled tear gas canisters at the workers. A parts manufacturer, Eaton was handling a large share of military orders, as the US prepared to enter the Second World War.

On January 14, federal labor mediator James F. Dewey issued an ultimatum on behalf of the National Defense Commission to Eaton and to the UAW. Eaton was ordered to rehire striking UAW members who had been fired, and the UAW was ordered to call off the strike, which had shut down five Eaton plants in Michigan and Ohio.

On January 17, International Harvester in East Moline, Illinois, was shut down after members of the CIO's Farm Equipment Workers were locked out after a separate independent union had the previous day conducted a one-day sitdown strike.

Also on January 17, 1941, a crowd of women strikers estimated at 200 fought with Detroit city police who were escorting strikebreakers into the American Lady Corset Company in downtown Detroit. "Swinging purses and using hatpins," according to one account, the women, represented by the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, damaged the uniforms and injured several policemen and detectives.

On January 12, a "reorganization of the entire labor defense set-up" began under Sidney Hillman, one of the top bureaucrats from the CIO and president of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (ACW), who had been tapped to be the labor head of the newly created corporatist Office for Production Management. The express intent of the OPM was to "mediate and adjust disputes that might lead to strikes before they develop into actual stoppages," the *New York Times* reported.

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100 years ago: Karl Liebknecht expelled from German SPD

On January 13, 1916, Karl Liebknecht, the well-known revolutionary leader and internationalist opponent of World War I, was expelled from the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) and its parliamentary group on the grounds of "continuous gross infractions of party discipline." The expulsion came just two days after Liebknecht had asked another set of damaging questions in the German Reichstag.

Liebknecht used his position as a member of the Reichstag to pose questions exposing the predatory character of the German war effort.

In "Either Or," an exposure of the pro-war and nationalist character of the SPD published in April 1916, Liebknecht's revolutionary colleague Rosa Luxemburg wrote: "In the system of so-called 'questions in the House,' the Reichstag deputies have been handed an invaluable weapon which enables them to offer constant resistance to the government and the bourgeois majority in this lamentable assembly of yes-men and obedient Mamelukes of the military dictatorship, to harass the imperialist phalanx, to arouse constantly the masses of the people. In the hands of twenty resolute representatives of the people, the system of questions in the House could become a real rhino-whip with which to flay unmercifully the backs of the imperialist rabble." But Liebknecht was alone in using the parliament to oppose the war effort.

In a biographical sketch of Luxemburg and Liebknecht written after their murders in 1919, Leon Trotsky wrote of Liebknecht, "Finally he discovered his full measure when he raised his voice against the serried warmongering bourgeoisie and the treacherous social-democracy in the German Reichstag where the whole atmosphere was saturated with miasmas of chauvinism."

In both December 1915 and early January 1916 Liebknecht had used the floor of the Reichstag to put forth questions regarding the conditions facing the working class both in Germany and in the territories they occupied, the role of secret diplomacy and the censorship of individuals opposed to the war. In addition he exposed the complicity of German imperialism in the Armenian genocide that had begun in Turkey in 1915. These questions exposed the role of the leadership of the SPD parliamentary group and leadership, which had betrayed socialist internationalism with the outbreak of world war in August 1914, and supported the war efforts of the German ruling class.

Liebknecht had been drafted into the army with the complicity of the SPD leadership in early 1915, while Luxemburg was sentenced to a lengthy term of imprisonment. The expulsion of Liebknecht was another attempt to silence him and suppress the growing opposition to war within the German working class.

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