

# This week in history: January 25-31

25 January 2016

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## 25 years ago: Mass protests against Iraq war erupt as US experiences first casualties

On January 26, 1991, nine days after the launching of an aerial assault on Iraq, more than 150,000 people marched in Washington, DC in opposition to the US war in the Persian Gulf. The mass demonstration was virtually ignored by the capitalist media, which had been engaged in a nonstop effort to promote the conflict over the previous months.

A simultaneous demonstration in San Francisco brought out 120,000 anti-war demonstrators.

On January 31, the first major ground battle of the US war against Iraq punctured the pretense of imperialist invincibility spread by the Bush administration and the Pentagon. A few hours of fighting at Khafji and other locations on the Saudi-Kuwaiti border resulted in 12 dead Marines and an unreported number of Saudi and Qatari casualties, after an Iraqi attack that caught the US-led coalition forces by surprise.

For months, the American people were bombarded with lies from the Bush administration, the Pentagon and the media, aimed at concealing the war aims of US imperialism and the horrendous cost of the impending war, both in lives and in attacks at home on jobs, living standards and democratic rights.

The real goals of the massive US military intervention in the Persian Gulf—seizing the oil fields, conquering Iraq and reasserting the dominant world position of American imperialism—were concealed behind the rhetoric about restoring the independence of “tiny Kuwait.”

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## 50 years ago: Johnson resumes “Rolling Thunder” bombing of North Vietnam

On January 31, 1966, President Lyndon Johnson ordered the resumption of the bombing of North Vietnam following a 37-day pause. The move followed by three days the January 28

launch of Operation Masher, the largest “search and destroy” campaign of the Vietnam War—which was carried out in South Vietnam’s Binh Dinh province—and Operation Double Eagle, the war’s largest amphibious landing, which took place in neighboring Quang Ngai province.

The bombing halt had begun on December 24 and was accompanied by a worldwide diplomatic offensive to bring the US allies behind plans for a larger American troop buildup in Vietnam.

The new round of lethal bombing was endorsed by the most Democrats in both houses of Congress, including leading liberals such as Sen. Mike Mansfield (Montana), who offered Johnson full support for the “difficult decision.” Differences within the ruling class were reflected in the decision of a group of Democrats in the Senate to oppose an immediate resumption of bombing. Several senators expressed fear that the air attacks would not defeat the Vietnamese national liberation forces and would force Johnson into an all-out land war that would prove disastrous for the administration.

Meanwhile, Sen. J. William Fulbright, Democrat from Arkansas and chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, announced that he favored hearings on US policy in Vietnam. A former supporter of the war, Fulbright had been a sponsor of the Gulf of Tonkin resolution, which paved the way for American military aggression.

In a further diplomatic move aimed at defusing opposition to US intervention, Johnson instructed United Nations Ambassador Arthur J. Goldberg to call on the Security Council to help bring about a meeting with the leaders of North Vietnam. Unlike during the Korean War, the United States had to this point avoided seeking the cover of the imperialist-controlled UN for its aggression in Vietnam.

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## 75 years ago: Romanian fascist revolt dissolves

On January 25, 1941 the London *Times* reported that the Romanian military under the leadership of right-wing dictator General Ion Antonescu had wrested back control of Bucharest from the fascist Iron Guard (also known as the Legionnaires, or Greenshirts). The latter carried out a savage pogrom against

Bucharest's Jewish population between January 21 and January 23, 1941.

Throughout the pogrom and revolt, both Antonescu and the Iron Guard strenuously claimed to be upholding the alliance with Nazi Germany. Having reasserted himself in power, Antonescu reaffirmed Romania's loyalty to Hitler. Romania will continue to march side by side, the General stated, the "great Fuhrer and Duce [Benito Mussolini]." Antonescu pressed home his advantage by issuing a decree that all firearms and ammunition had to be surrendered, and by banning all political meetings involving three or more people.

The Iron Guard rebelled against the government, of which they had been an integral part, because Antonescu had rolled back the organization's privileges, and because of differences over the ongoing expropriation of the country's Jewish population. Antonescu was not opposed to the Romanian Jews' complete ruination, or even expunging Romania's entire Jewish population—as his complicity with Nazi Germany in the Romanian Holocaust would later make clear—but he differed with the Iron Guard over how such operations should be conducted.

In the weeks leading up to the January 21 rebellion the Iron Guard created a poisonous anti-Semitic atmosphere in Romania, and hatched a plot to remove Antonescu from power. They published propaganda that highlighted the Jewish status of Antonescu's ex mother-in-law. On the eve of the pogrom and revolt, the Iron Guard called upon the Romanian people to rise up against the Freemasons and Jews.

What became known as the Bucharest Pogrom signaled the beginning of the revolt. During a barbarous rampage, unopposed by government forces, synagogues and Jewish-owned businesses, workshops and homes were burnt to the ground. Some Jews were taken to the Bucharest abattoir, hung from meat hooks, mutilated and labeled with signs reading "kosher." A total of 125 Jews were killed during the pogrom, with a further 200 seriously injured.

As the revolt was put down, Iron Guard leader Horia Sima was arrested and awaited court martial. Other conspirators, including Prince Ghica and former government minister Constantin Petrovicescu, were also picked up and held by security forces. Sima was allowed to leave for Germany, while Petrovicescu was placed under house arrest.

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## 100 years ago: Zeppelin raids in Britain

On January 31, 1916, six German dirigibles attacked East Anglia and the Midlands in Britain, killing 70 people and injuring a further 113. Dirigibles, also known as Zeppelins, were used by the German army and navy during the First World

War for both reconnaissance and strategic bombing.

A dirigible is a cigar-shaped airship, with gas balloons held within a rigid frame. Powered by multiple engines, unlike a balloon, the vessels could be flown in specified directions. Germany had two manufacturers of dirigibles, Luftschiffbau Schütte-Lanz and the better known firm headed by Ferdinand von Zeppelin. The airships designed by Zeppelin had proven capable of flying to Britain and back even before the war started.

At the beginning of the conflict, the German forces had seven dirigibles, and they were used experimentally to bomb Liège and Antwerp in Belgium in 1914, using artillery shells that were not designed for an aerial attack. During 1915, the airships were used in strategic bombing, although due to the difficulties in navigation at night and targeting, many of the raids did no damage to their intended targets.

The main target of these attacks was Britain. Cities in France, including Paris, were also bombed by dirigibles, but since this involved flying longer distances over enemy territory, it was therefore considered more dangerous. Several dirigibles were also used in bombing attacks on the Eastern Front, including in Salonika in Greece and Bucharest in Romania in 1916.

During the early part of the war, many dirigibles were brought down by anti-aircraft fire, leading to the development of larger dirigibles that were capable of flying higher than both the reach of ground based anti-aircraft fire and the altitude ceiling of smaller airplanes.

Although the attacks by dirigibles in Britain had almost no military impact, the psychological impact on the population was significant, as there were numbers of civilian deaths from the raids. The British government used the air raids by the dirigibles, dubbed "baby killers," extensively in propaganda and its recruiting material.

Later in 1916 anti-aircraft defenses in Britain became more successful with the development of explosive and incendiary ammunition that exploited the dirigibles' vulnerabilities. A total of 84 dirigibles were built by Germany during the course of the war and over 60 were lost, about half of the losses due to accidents and the rest through enemy action.

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