

This week in history: May 9-15

9 May 2016

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

25 years ago: Baker follows up US war against Iraq with Mideast tour

This week in May 1991, US Secretary of State James Baker conducted a six-day round of imperialist diplomacy in the Middle East with an itinerary that included secret talks in Riyadh, Damascus, Amman, Cairo and Jerusalem.

While the capitalist press speculated on the reported obstacles to Washington's proposal for a Mideast "peace conference," Baker continued the diplomatic maneuvers as the necessary preparation for new wars, seizures of territory and other forms of deepening imperialist intervention in the region.

Behind the reported procedural wrangling on the role of the United Nations in a Mideast conference, all the bourgeois regimes in the region accepted that US imperialism, with the assistance of its Stalinist accomplices in Moscow, would decide the future of the peoples of the Middle East.

Baker's latest trip, his fourth to the area within two months, began with a meeting with the Saudis as well as the representatives of five other gulf states, who announced that they were prepared for the first time to sit down at a conference with the Zionist regime. Following a six-hour meeting with Hafez al-Assad of Syria, Baker went on to Cairo for a meeting with US stooge Hosni Mubarak.

Particularly noteworthy about the latest Baker trip were his discussions with Soviet Foreign Minister Alexander Bessmertnykh on the US proposal for a UN force to replace allied troops in northern Iraq, and the truce between the government and the imperialist-backed rebels in Angola, in addition to the latest diplomatic round in the Arab-Israeli "peace process."

Moscow was reported to be reluctant to endorse a larger UN role in northern Iraq because of the precedent this would set for appeals to the UN by national minorities in the USSR, such as the Baltic peoples, Armenians and others. There is a "thin line that separates the necessity for humanitarian support and the concerns for the sovereignty of a country," Bessmertnykh said at a joint news conference with Baker.

This concern, of course, did not stop the Stalinists from endorsing the US assault on Iraq and the continued US occupation of large sections of the country.

[top]

50 years ago: Ky crushes dissidents in South Vietnam

On May 15, 1966, tank units loyal to South Vietnamese dictator Nguyen Cao Ky crushed rebel units based in the city of Danang after a brief but bitter battle. At the same time, the government began a roundup of left-wing political opponents. Ky's troops had been blocked for two months from entering Danang by units loyal to the pro-Buddhist "Struggle" movement.

The crackdown came after weeks of mounting political crisis. The US-backed puppet government had seen a steady wave of strikes which were crippling the war against the National Liberation Front. Threatening to extend the strike against the beating of two female mill workers who were taking part in a sit-down strike, union leaders in Saigon called for a cutoff of all power and water to the city. Work stoppages had already closed down the docks, blocking the delivery of war materials for the imperialist and ARVN armies.

While officially silent, the Johnson administration backed Ky's military measures as necessary to stabilize the puppet regime. Ky's repression came only weeks after he entered into an agreement with leaders of the bourgeois Buddhist opposition for the holding of elections before

the end of the year.

In the United States, students at the University of Chicago ended a three-day occupation of the school's administrative office building to protest university cooperation with the Selective Service System. The occupation was staged on the eve of the nationwide draft deferment examination. This test served as the basis for local draft boards to determine eligibility for draft deferments. It served as the focus for a series of anti-war protest demonstrations.

[top]

75 years ago: Vichy French regime bows to Nazi SS

On May 14, 1941 French head of state Henri Petain announced to the nation that France would subordinate itself to Hitler's new world order in Europe in order to "surmount her defeat and preserve in the world her rank as a European and colonial power."

The previous day Nazi German SS units arrested 5,000 Jews between the ages of 18-40 in the Occupied Zone of France during the early morning hours. The SS units received the help of Paris police who supplied the names of 3,649 naturalized Polish Jews. The Jews were then placed aboard trains and shipped to concentration camps near Orleans where they were to provide labor for the occupation authorities.

In the Vichy Zone, that area not occupied by German troops, French authorities had collaborated with the Nazis in the internment of some 20,000 Jews since the armistice in the summer of 1940 that ended fighting between Germany and France.

Behind the Vichy collaboration with Nazi Germany on the arrest and eventual extermination of Jews was the French bourgeoisie's attempt to maneuver between the Axis and Allied camps. There was a threat French colonies in Africa from Great Britain and the United States if France moved towards a military alliance with Hitler's Germany, and the threat that Germany would subjugate France to direct Nazi rule, as had been done to Poland.

Most immediately, Germany sought access to French colonies in Africa in order to supply Rommel's forces and establish air bases in Syria to aid Iraq's military rebellion against Great Britain. US President Franklin Roosevelt reacted to France's move towards Germany by

seizing 10 French ships in American ports and threatening to occupy France's colonies in the western hemisphere.

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100 years ago: US Marines occupy the Dominican Republic

On May 15, 1916, US marines who had been landed on the soil of the Dominican Republic entered the capital city of Santo Domingo and took possession of the center of the city. The entry of US forces was unopposed.

The immediate cause of the imperialist intervention was the outbreak of fighting on May 5, during an attempt to overthrow the regime of General Juan I. Jimenez. Several people were killed or wounded in the clashes. As soon as the rebels, led by General Arias, the minister of war, took Santo Domingo, American Ambassador to the Dominican Republic, W.W. Russell issued a warning that armed US intervention would result unless the hostilities ceased within 72 hours.

General Arias initially agreed to surrender, on the condition that the president resign. The threat of a US invasion caused the rebels to evacuate Santo Domingo, stripping the fort there of guns and war materials. The US dispatched seven navy destroyers on May 6 and 7, bound for the Dominican Republic. On May 9, Santo Domingo was reported quiet as the Australian cruiser, Melbourne and the US collier, Hector arrived.

Five hundred marines took part in the invasion. The Wilson administration made it known through officers of the municipal government that the object of the occupation was to guarantee the "free election" by congress of a provisional president to succeed General Jimenez. US imperialism firmly controlled the political and economic life of the Dominican Republic. In 1905, for instance, the US had assumed control of collecting Dominican customs duties. The occupation did not end until 1924.

[top]



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