

# This week in history: September 19-25

19 September 2016

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

## 25 years ago: US stages new provocation against Iraq

On September 24, 1991, the United States dispatched a Patriot missile team from Germany to Saudi Arabia in a new threat to Iraq. The force was comprised of some 24 launchers, 100 missiles and 1,300 soldiers to operate the systems.

Little more than six months after the United States ended its bombing of civilians and massacre of retreating Iraqi soldiers, the Bush administration stage-managed a provocation for the purpose of justifying a new war. A team of United Nations inspectors, armed with intelligence supplied by the United States and headed by a former State Department official, seized documents with the names and addresses of Iraqi government employees and nuclear scientists and refused to supply copies to the Iraqis, or even a list of what they had taken.

When the Iraqi authorities refused to allow them to leave without showing them what they had grabbed, the US provided the inspectors with a supply of food and satellite telephones so that they could broadcast to the media their accusations of hostage-taking and their claims that Saddam Hussein was building nuclear weapons.

This incident followed two months of provocations. At the end of August, Kuwait fabricated an alleged Iraqi incursion onto Bubiyan Island. The previous week, Bush and the UN Security Council threatened military action to enforce their demand for unrestricted helicopter flights over Iraqi territory. Finally, the Bush administration decided to stage the latest stunt and exploit the bogus issue of nuclear weapons to more effectively manipulate public opinion.

The *New York Times* on Thursday, September 26, virtually acknowledged the orchestrated character of the crisis. “Was the United States deliberately trying to increase tensions with Mr. Hussein as a way of provoking a military confrontation and giving it an excuse to resume the war, this time with more ambitious objectives?” the *Times* asked. It went on to cite an unnamed government official as saying, “Mr. Bush is driven by complex political pressures, including his desire to hold together the anti-Iraq coalition, to maintain the United States’ role as the enforcer of the peace in the Mideast as he seeks to

drag the region’s fractious people into a peace conference, and to maintain a strong American military presence as the agreement to keep a rapid-deployment force in southern Turkey nears its Sept. 30 expiration date.”

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## 50 year ago: North Vietnam rejects US surrender demand

On September 23, 1966, the government of North Vietnam rejected a US proposal for a halt to the American bombing campaign against North Vietnamese targets and a gradual troop withdrawal in exchange for an end to North Vietnamese support for the war of national liberation against the US puppet government in Saigon.

Speaking before the United Nations, US ambassador Arthur Goldberg called for the establishment of an international “peacekeeping” force to oversee a disengagement of forces. He denounced the Stalinist government of China for allegedly promoting “revolution and subversion throughout the world” and declared that the US would continue to oppose its seating in the UN. In a ranting anticommunist tirade, Goldberg called the Vietnamese liberation forces “subversives” and “terrorists” who were acting as pawns of North Vietnam and China.

North Vietnam denounced the US proposal as “hypocritical” and a cover for the continued expansion of imperialist intervention in the face of growing international opposition to the war.

An official statement declared that Goldberg’s speech was “slandorous” and “aimed at whitewashing U.S. aggression.” It demanded that Washington recognize the National Liberation Front “as the sole genuine representative of the South Vietnamese people.” The Soviet Union simultaneously rejected the US proposal as “false, demagogic and hypocritical.”

Both the Canadian and British governments applauded the shift by the United States to the use of the United Nations as a screen for imperialist intervention in Vietnam. In the initial phase of the troop build-up, President Johnson had decided against seeking a UN cover for the war. The increasingly frequent peace maneuvers by the Johnson administration reflected fear of the growing opposition to the war by the working class internationally and in the US.

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## 75 years ago: Nazi forces complete capture of Kiev

On September 19, 1941, the Soviet city of Kiev, capital of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, fell to German military forces. The Battle of Kiev was over by September 25 and the Soviet southwest front was totally destroyed. The Nazi victory paved the way for the occupation of Ukraine, much of the Crimea, and the Donets basin, with further enormous losses for the Red Army.

Kiev's defenses had fallen once the pincer movement at Lohvytsia by two Panzer groups had trapped hundreds of thousands of Red Army troops. Kiev's southwestern front collapsed when, fighting until the last man, General Kirponos along with 2,000 troops were destroyed by the Third Panzer Division. The German Sixth Army marched into the bombed-out remains of the city.

The Soviet civilians left behind in Kiev were left to starvation and the Jews of the city systematically killed by firing squads. The astonishing 665,000 Red Army soldiers caught in the Wehrmacht's encirclement of the Ukrainian city would mostly die of disease or starvation in Nazi prisoner camps. The captured military material included 884 tanks and over 3,000 artillery pieces.

Prescient warnings made by General Georgy Zhukov in late July, that Kiev risked encirclement by German advances and should be abandoned, were ignored by Stalin. Hitler, however, appreciated the crucial nature of the raw materials and agricultural base of the Ukraine and Black Sea region for war economy. Such a move would also serve to protect German oil supplies in Romania.

The Kiev *Kesselschlacht*, or battle of encirclement, was the largest in military history. Viewing newsreel footage of the Battle of Kiev, Hitler exclaimed, "I am immensely happy to have experienced the war in this way." Believing the Soviet Union virtually defeated on September 23, Hitler told Goebbels, "The spell is broken."

More sober analysts in the German high command, however, believed that the stubborn resistance of Soviet soldiers and the delay in launching Operation Typhoon, the conquest of Moscow, into the fall made the outcome of the war on the Eastern Front more and more problematic.

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## 100 years ago: German Social Democrats hold last united conference

On September 21, 1916, the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) held its last united national conference, amid irreconcilable divisions between different factions over Germany's role in World War I.

Dominant at the congress was the right-wing party leadership, which fully supported German war aims and had adopted a policy of suppressing class conflict during the war. Another tendency, led by Hugo Haase and Georg Ledebour, made some criticisms of the party leadership, but held the same nationalist and opportunist orientation.

The third tendency, the International Group (Spartacists), which defended the principles of socialist internationalism and opposed the imperialist world war, was led by Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. Both were in prison for their antiwar activities.

The SPD Executive Committee, which was to force through a split in early 1917, allowed all of the factions to address the conference, because the outcome of its proceedings was already rigged in favor of the right wing.

Kate Duncker spoke on behalf of the International Group. She stated that the Second International, in which the SPD had played a leading role, had "collapsed irretrievably" when its national sections supported the war aims of their "own governments," betraying previous commitments to oppose any imperialist conflict. "We are striving for an international that stands above national parties," she declared.

Duncker exposed the varying pretexts used to justify the war, stating, "Between the big imperialist states there are no longer any defensive wars. The claim that one goes to war to preserve borders and national sovereignty is today an outright swindle of the people. When one pirate ship attacks another to take away its loot, we do not talk about justified self-defense. The imperialist powers always aim for expansion and plunder and, from the outset, their wars are wars of conquest. It makes absolutely no difference on whose territory the war is fought."

She concluded by declaring, "We must openly renounce obedience to the policy of the party establishment. We must break with the politics of half-measures and abandon the illusion that the crisis begins and ends with the purely parliamentary question of granting or rejecting war credits. It means summoning the masses to a mighty struggle against imperialism and war."

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