This week in history: October 8-14

8 October 2018

25 years ago: Clinton announces stepped-up intervention in Somalia

US President Bill Clinton, in a nationally televised address October 7, 1993, announced that he was sending a total of 2,350 more American soldiers to Somalia, as well as an aircraft carrier task force with 3,600 naval personnel, including Marines who could be deployed onshore. The fresh infusion of troops doubled the number of American soldiers in the occupied east African country, in a military operation that had already killed thousands of Somalis and reduced much of the capital city, Mogadishu, to rubble.

Within hours of the order for military escalation, press reports began to surface that American troops were ordering Somalis in the southern part of Mogadishu to evacuate their homes. All those who remained in the area would be assumed to be supporters of General Mohammed Farah Aidid, branded by the Clinton administration and the servile American media as a "warlord," and dealt with accordingly.

The character of the military hardware being shipped, even more than the size of the troop deployment, demonstrated that the purpose of the intervention was to wage war on the Somali people, not carry out a "humanitarian" mission, as Clinton claimed. The US was to send another 104 armored vehicles, including M-1 tanks, as well as new Blackhawk helicopters and two more AC-130 Specter gunships, armed with 105mm computer-guided howitzers capable of firing shells with overwhelming speed.

The Clinton order also gave soldiers on the streets far more leeway in determining whether and when to shoot than American troops had ever been granted outside of combat zones. The brutality and oppressiveness of the US intervention had provoked unceasing protests among the Somali people, leading to a series of incidents in which US and allied troops carried out bloodbaths, gunning down youth and entire families chanting "US out of Somalia!"

Throughout this period, Clinton had dispatched Army Rangers and Delta Force commandos on several raids seeking to capture or kill Aidid. The intervention begun at the end of the George H. W. Bush administration in the guise of providing relief for starving people had revealed its real purpose: exterminating all opposition to the US establishment of a puppet regime in a country in a key strategic position on the Horn of Africa, dominating the shipment of oil from the Persian Gulf through the Red Sea and the Suez Canal to Europe.

President Clinton claimed in his televised speech that the additional US troops would help impose a political settlement and create the conditions for a full US withdrawal. Nothing could more embody the hypocrisy of American imperialism than such a blatant lie, similar to those given by Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon during the American war of aggression in Vietnam, but this time delivered by the former antiwar protester, Bill Clinton.

50 years ago: Military officers overthrow Panamanian president

Just 11 days after being inaugurated, on October 11, 1968, Panamanian President Arnulfo Arias was overthrown by the military. The junta installed former National Guard commander Colonel Jose Pinilla as the new chief of state. It was the second coup in Latin America in the space of nine days. On October 3, President Fernando Belaunde Terry of Peru was deposed in a military revolt led by the army chief of staff.

In Peru the Belaunde government was in the midst of implementing unpopular austerity policies dictated by the International Monetary Fund, including the imposition of a gasoline tax. The military used as the pretext for the coup the government's alleged mishandling of negotiations for the nationalization of oil fields belonging to Standard Oil of New Jersey.

But in Panama, a group of younger military officers led by Colonel Omar Torrijos and Major Boris Martinez organized the coup. The military acted after Arias attempted to retire Colonel Pinilla, the deputy chief of the National Guard and a longtime opponent of the president.

The junta declared a state of emergency, took control of the press and radio and dissolved the National Assembly. Troops positioned machine guns in the main intersections of the capital. There were scattered instances of firing against government troops as Arias fled to the American-controlled Panama Canal Zone, where he issued an appeal for resistance to the coup but found less sympathy than he hoped for.

It was the third time in three decades that Arias had been

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removed from office by the Panamanian military. The latest coup came in the midst of a severe financial crisis. As one of his first actions on taking office, Arias was forced to negotiate an emergency loan from Chase Manhattan Bank to meet the state payroll.

The United States expressed its concern over the Panamanian military's action but disassociated itself from Arias's appeal for a popular uprising. Being indifferent to Democratic issues of an elected leader overthrown in a coup, US representatives stated their main priority was for tranquility in the strategically important region. In other words, as long as the United States was permitted to control the massively lucrative Panama Canal then it cares not who governs Panama. The Johnson administration soon resumed normal diplomatic relations with the new Panamanian regime.

75 years ago: Italy declares war against Nazi Germany

On October 13, 1943, the Italian government, led by King Victor Emmanuel and Premier Pietro Badoglio, declared war against its former ally, Nazi Germany, just three months after the fall of Mussolini and Italy's surrender to the Allies. The United States, Great Britain and the Soviet Union promptly recognized Italy as a co-belligerent state.

From the military point of view, Italy's entry into the war against Germany was of little importance to the Allies. The main aim of Churchill and Roosevelt was to use the state of war as an excuse for cracking down on the revolutionary movement of the Italian workers and maintaining Italian capitalism.

Badoglio, himself a marshal under fascist dictator Benito Mussolini, admitted as much in an interview: "After every war there is the danger of communism. If conditions are too bad and they are without hope, they turn to other presumed cures. The Allies must help us, in the press and in propaganda, so that communism does not stand a chance."

On September 29, Badoglio had met with Allied Commander Dwight Eisenhower and signed secret armistice terms under which Italy virtually lost its sovereignty. Under the new war measures, antifascists were forbidden to demonstrate, organize political parties or express their views in the media. Newspapers and radio stations were only placed in the hands of those who supported the US and British-backed regime. When antifascists attempted to organize and publish illegally, as they had done under the Mussolini regime, they were arrested.

The Allied determination to avert revolution went to the point of hiring fascists. Neither the OSS (CIA forerunner) nor army counterintelligence had a spy apparatus in Italy, so they hired the SIM-CS, Italy's counterintelligence operation, whose agents over the previous 20 years arrested and murdered antifascists.

100 years ago: British troops capture Beirut in Lebanon

The 7th Division of the British Egyptian Expeditionary Force (EEF) occupied Beirut, the capital city in what is now Lebanon, on October 8, 1918, to secure roads toward Homs in Syria, The British encountered little resistance from the Turkish military in their occupation of the city.

The region was a part of the Turkish Ottoman Empire, Germany's ally in the first imperialist war, and had been the theater of several significant military conflicts between the Allies and Turkish and German forces since 1914.

By the autumn of 1918, the EEF had degraded Turkish control in the Levant with the help of Arab allies, who were seeking freedom from Ottoman rule. The British had captured Palestine in the Battle of Megiddo on September 25, but the Turkish Yildirim Army Group, which was under German command, had retreated toward northern Lebanon and Syria. The British followed in what has come to be known as the Pursuit to Haritan, and by October 1, had occupied Damascus. The British were preparing to take Homs and Aleppo when the Armistice of Mudros on October 30 ended Turkey's participation in the war.

British and Turkish troops were both stricken by the worldwide influenza epidemic and by malaria, losing more men to the illnesses than to battle casualties. Turkish prisoners were often treated brutally by the Arab fighters allied with the British.

The British and French had planned to carve up the region between themselves in the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916. The Tsarist regime in Russia had been a minor partner in this secret imperialist plan, which the Bolsheviks made public after the 1917 October Revolution. Also included in the colonial machinations of the British was the Balfour Declaration of 1917, which sanctioned European Jewish immigration to Palestine and led ultimately to the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948.

Overall, the military successes of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force in 1918 were critical in drawing the borders of the nation-state system of the Middle East which has lasted to the present day. The Arab bourgeois regimes that were formed under British and French tutelage after World War I adhered to the national borders carved out by the colonial powers under Sykes-Picot.

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