

This week in history: August 15–21

14 August 2022

25 years ago: Leaked Pentagon report exposes US role in Zaire invasion

On August 16, 1997, the *Washington Post* published a leaked account of an eight-page internal Pentagon report which exposed the fact that American military personnel had been working in Rwanda for the previous three years to train the forces used in the successful invasion of Zaire, leading to the overthrow of the Mobutu regime.

Beginning in January 1995, hundreds of Rwandan soldiers were trained in combat tactics, military management, disaster relief, team operations, landmine removal and military and civilian policing by American advisers wearing military fatigues. In July and August 1996, US Green Berets conducted two months of counterinsurgency training for selected Rwandan troops.

Two months later, the Rwandan military began cross-border operations against Rwandan Hutu guerrillas based in the refugee camps in Zaire. The routing of Hutu-led militias set the stage for the full-scale invasion of Zaire by Zairean exiles and Tutsi soldiers under the nominal leadership of Laurent Kabila, which culminated in the overthrow of the Mobutu regime.

In June, Vice Premier Paul Kagame, the military strongman of the Rwandan regime, admitted that his forces had played the main role in organizing and mobilizing Kabila's rebel army, with the Rwandan Army supplying virtually all of Kabila's officers. The *Post* report confirmed that the US government sponsored the overthrow of Mobutu, whose regime had become a liability to imperialist interests, by training the Rwandan soldiers who then trained and even commanded Kabila's forces.

Kagame himself received US military training at Fort Leavenworth before the 1994 Rwanda genocide, which ended when Kagame's largely Tutsi military force invaded Rwanda from bases in Uganda—a model for the subsequent invasion of Zaire from bases in Rwanda.

The US government intervened in central Africa, taking advantage of the ethnic conflicts produced by a century of colonial and postcolonial oppression and exploitation. One official told the *Post* that the Clinton administration was supplying arms and training to Rwanda as part of the creation of a “zone of influence,” which included Uganda, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Angola, all of which provided support to the Zairean “rebellion.” Rwanda was a “target of opportunity,” he said.

Kabila's assumption of power and the ouster of Mobutu were hailed by a number of middle class radical and Stalinist tendencies as a triumph of “armed struggle” and even as a popular revolution. But the *Post* report demonstrated that Kabila was little more than a

stooge for American imperialism.

50 years ago: King of Morocco narrowly avoids coup attempt

On August 16, 1972, King Hassan II of Morocco was nearly assassinated during a coup attempt from within the military. This was the second attempt by members of the Moroccan military to depose the autocratic ruler, with the first attempt taking place when armed opponents stormed his birthday party in July 1971.

The second attempt occurred as Hassan was traveling back to Morocco from France where he had been meeting with President Georges Pompidou. As the King crossed over into Moroccan air space his plane was fired on by Moroccan Air Force planes.

The rebel fighters significantly damaged the King's plane, forcing it to land. According to reports of the incident, after several people on board the plane had been injured, the pilot radioed to the rebels declaring, “The tyrant has been killed!” and pleading for them to cease fire.

While Hassan in actuality remained uninjured, the rebel pilots were fooled by the radio calls and broke off their attack. The king's plane was then able to land at the Rabat airport when loyal forces brought the king under their protection.

The Kenitra Air Base, where the coup had been launched from, was surrounded by loyalist forces shortly after news of the assassination attempt reached other bases. Hundreds of soldiers at Kenitra would be arrested but in the following days many would be acquitted of being involved in the coup.

The coup was led by General Mohamed Oufkir, the Moroccan Minister of Defense. Initially, it came as a surprise that Oufkir was behind the plot as he had played a key role in putting down the prior coup in 1971 and defending Hassan.

In the years prior, opposition to Hassan swelled among military officers and other high ranking officials in the Moroccan government. In 1965 Hassan had disbanded the country's parliament, at that time only three years old, and granted himself full dictatorial powers.

Following the Air Force coup, Hassan began a purge of disloyal officers. Out of 32 members of the Air Force who were found guilty of participating in the coup, 11 would be executed. Among them was a colonel, Mohamed Amekrane, who attempted to flee to Gibraltar but was turned back by the British authorities.

Oufkir was never tried, but was found dead days after the coup from multiple gunshot wounds. The Moroccan government officially reported his death a suicide. Members of his family

would be imprisoned arbitrarily and were not released until 1991.

75 years ago: Military accident sets off massive explosion in Cádiz, Spain

On August 18, 1947, a massive explosion at a military base near Cádiz, Spain, set off a chain of fires and further blasts that laid waste to the industrial port city, killing hundreds and affecting the working-class residents who survived for years.

A contemporaneous Spanish news agency report, cited in the American press, reported scenes of vast destruction and confusion. According to the American media, the Spanish agency “estimated today that more than 500 persons were killed and thousands injured in a night-long series of torpedo and submarine mine explosions which devastated entire sections of the port city of Cádiz.”

Firefighters battled 300 or more fires throughout the city, the report stated, as explosive material meant that blazes were continuously being reignited, even after they had initially been extinguished.

It rapidly emerged that the Base de Defensas Submarinas (Submarine Defence Base) of Cádiz was the site of an enormous munitions arsenal. This included an estimated 1,737 sea mines, torpedoes and depth charges (of a total of 2,228 distributed in two depots), containing 200 tons of TNT and amatol.

The fascistic military dictatorship of General Francisco Franco responded nervously to the disaster, accusing the British Broadcasting Corporation and other outlets of conducting a “campaign of defamation” with their coverage of the blast.

There was speculation that the explosion may have been connected to increased resistance and anti-fascist activities of partisan fighters. This was fueled by Franco, whose regime claimed that some of the munitions were of Russian, rather than Spanish origin. Recent scholarship, however, has indicated that the waters off Cádiz were laid extensively with mines during the Second World War, in anticipation of a potential Allied invasion, creating fertile conditions for such a disaster.

The official death toll was given as 150, with more than 5,000 injured, though both were likely a substantial underestimate. Explosions and fires battered an old people’s home, a children’s orphanage and multiple factories. The shipyards, the largest employer in the city, were destroyed. Economic activities in Cádiz would be impacted well into the 1950s.

The Franco regime’s response expressed a fear that the explosion could become a focal point for long-simmering opposition, amid a wave of working-class struggle across Europe and internationally in the years after World War II. It had only consolidated power during the Spanish Civil War, as a result of the betrayals of the working class by the Stalinist Communist Party.

On August 15, 1922, the German government of Joseph Wirth notified the Belgian, British, French and Italian governments that it could not make its installment of \$900,000 on the war reparations negotiated under the Versailles Treaty of 1919. As a reason, the German government cited the precipitous decline in the value of the mark, which had been falling since June 1921, after the country’s first payment to the Allied imperialist powers, which had to be made in hard currency. The failure to pay touched off an international crisis, with French imperialism threatening to seize German coal mines and forests as reparations payments.

But just as significantly, rising prices made life unbearable for the German working class and middle class. In August, the price of milk had risen 60 percent in three days and the government announced that freight rates would increase by 50 percent in October. The Berlin City Council was forced to issue an ordinance that fixed housing rents in the city at 450 percent of pre-war prices. German state employees had petitioned the Wirth government for, according to the *New York Times*, “the largest wage increase ever sought in Germany.” City employees in Berlin received a cost-of-living stipend of 1,000 marks for the month in addition to their regular salary.

The inflation marked the beginning of what would become a pre-revolutionary situation in Germany that would culminate with the failed revolution of August–October 1923, an event of world-historical significance.

The German Communist Party (KPD) in August 1922 saw the revolutionary potential in the inflation, which was set to increase by orders of magnitude in the coming months. The daily newspaper of the KPD *Die Rote Fahne* (*The Red Flag*) wrote:

“Wage struggles must be carried on energetically. The workingman must be supplied with food at reasonable prices. The export of foodstuffs and importation of articles of luxury must be stopped. The hoarding of foreign exchange by industrialists and the flight of capital from Germany must be stopped. The war burden must be taken from the shoulders of the workers and thrust on the capitalist class. The fight against the madness of the Versailles treaty must be begun ... control must be taken by the workers of the bourses, banks, import and export food traffic and food distribution, factories, and mines; seizure of materials and gold values; workers guard for beating down reaction; the closest alliance with Soviet Russia. Already acute hunger and sickness stalks the German proletariat.”



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100 years ago: Inflation and social crisis ravage Germany