

This week in history: April 14-20

13 April 2025

25 years ago: The New York Times publishes new revelations about the CIA's role in the 1953 Iranian coup

On April 16, 2000, the *New York Times* published new material about the CIA's pivotal role in the 1953 overthrow of the Iranian bourgeois nationalist regime of Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh. Although it was widespread knowledge that American and British intelligence agencies bore political responsibility for the 1953 events, the new revelations detailed the inner mechanisms of the coup and the strong support given by the CIA to the revived monarchy under Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi.

While the document had been leaked to the press, the Clinton administration tacitly approved of its publication for contemporary political reasons: the need to air the history of US-Iranian relations. The author of the April 16 *Times* article remarked that the violent removal of Mossadegh "was a turning point in modern Iranian history and remains a persistent irritant in Tehran-Washington relations." On April 18, an editorial repeated the theme: "If the United States and Iran are ever to restore good relations, both nations must understand the events that helped drive them apart."

Washington's false show of contrition over its past crimes in Iran and the Middle East had an insidious motive. The leaked history proclaimed it would be an instrument to further undermine the present Iranian regime and manipulate factional conflicts within it. As the *Times* article noted, the document raised "tantalizing questions" such as the importance of CIA-employed religious militants in 1953 and their subsequent role in the Islamic Revolution of 1979, and the urge to quickly declassify many of the surviving CIA reports on Iran.

The revelations came during a softening in the tumultuous relationship between the American and Iranian governments. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright had declared a month prior that Washington desired a "new relationship" with Iran. The first act announced was rescinding a ban on the importation of Iranian luxury items. She then conceded the fact that the US-sponsored coup of 1953 had handicapped "Iran's political development," adding that "it is easy to see why many Iranians continue to resent this intervention by America in their internal affairs."

The Foreign Minister of Iran, Kamal Kharazi, embraced Albright's remarks, saying if "the United States is really for an

improvement of ties with Iran, it should take practical steps in this regard and show that it has abandoned its hostile policy." The Iranian bourgeois-clerical regime responded to these overtures of American imperialism by signaling that it was ready to be deputized in the Middle East. Kharazi ordered the Iranian navy to police the waters of the Persian Gulf and seized several ships transporting oil in violation of Washington's barbaric embargo against neighboring Iraq, against which Tehran fought a bloody war from 1980 to 1988.

50 years ago: Khmer Rouge capture Phnom Penh

On April 17, 1975, the U.S.-backed dictatorship of General Lon Nol collapsed as Khmer Rouge forces seized Cambodia's capital, Phnom Penh. The event marked the end of the regime installed by a CIA-orchestrated coup in 1970 and the culmination of an anti-imperialist struggle by masses of Cambodian workers and peasants.

By the time the siege of Phnom Penh began, the Khmer Rouge forces had already consolidated control over virtually all of Cambodia. The last significant defense of the Lon Nol government was smashed on April 15 when Khmer troops captured Pochentong Airport. Lon Nol himself had already fled into exile in the United States on April 1, the same day the US officially cut off funding to his military.

In the days prior to the capture of the city, Lon Nol's inner circle set about looting what remained of the state. In its final act, the regime ordered a \$1 million transfer to Lon Nol's personal account.

The Lon Nol regime owed its existence entirely to its backers in Washington which sought to transform Cambodia into a garrison to support the war in Vietnam. Over \$1.7 billion was poured directly into Lon Nol's military. At the same time the US government conducted one of history's most devastating bombing campaigns. From 1969 to 1973, US planes dropped 532,000 tons of bombs on rural Cambodia, more than the Allies dropped on Japan during all of World War II. Over 600,000 civilians were killed in these bombings and as many as 2 million were displaced from their homes.

This massive scale of the violence radicalized the peasantry against the US-backed government. Thousands flocked to join

the resistance forces to oust Lon Nol and US imperialism from the country. By 1973, even CIA reports acknowledged that the bombing had become the Khmer Rouge's "best recruiter."

The capture of Phnom Penh was celebrated by Cambodian workers and peasants as a great triumph over US imperialism. However, almost immediately the consequences of the Khmer Rouge's particularly deranged variant of Stalinist ideology would become apparent.

Not long after the victory, the Khmer Rouge leadership would set in motion viciously anti-worker measures. Thousands living in the cities would be forcibly relocated to the countryside. Factories, schools and hospitals were shuttered. Currency was abolished in an absurd attempt to build a purely agrarian society.

The capture of Phnom Penh marked the final end of the brutal US-backed regime sustained only by the mass bombing of the population. While indisputably a significant defeat for American imperialism, it led to mass murder of the Cambodian people by the Khmer Rouge, only halted when the new period of crisis led eventually to war with Vietnam and the ouster of the regime in 1979.

75 years ago: Maoist forces begin conquest of Hainan Island

On April 16, 1950, the People's Republic of China (PRC) launched an amphibious assault on Hainan Island—then controlled by the Republic of China (ROC)—during the final stages of the Chinese Civil War.

The conquest of Hainan was the last major military engagement of the Chinese Revolution, which had seen the nationalist Kuomintang (KMT) regime under Chiang Kai-shek defeated by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in October 1949. Following the loss of the mainland, Chiang's forces retreated to Taiwan along with an estimated 2 million people, including the KMT's military forces, loyalists and poor farmers under the control of the bourgeois movement.

Hainan is China's second-largest island, only slightly smaller than Taiwan, but much more accessible to the mainland, separated by only 30 km of shallow water, rather than the 180 km of the Taiwan Strait, whose depths reach over 2 km. The island off the southern coast of the mainland was among the last significant territories still held by the capitalist ROC outside Taiwan. Mao Zedong, leader of the CCP, approved the invasion while visiting Stalin in the Soviet Union in January 1950.

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) faced around 120,000 ROC troops under the command of General Xue Yue, who had fortified the island in preparation for the impending invasion. Despite suffering heavy casualties in the initial phases of the

assault, the PLA successfully established beachheads and advanced inland. Though outnumbering the PLA forces nearly 2-1, the KMT's army was set back by uncoordinated communication and leadership, as well as a shortage of supplies.

The Battle of Hainan lasted two weeks, concluding on May 1, when the CCP announced the island's capture. The ROC's remaining territory was cut nearly in half, confining its authority primarily to Taiwan, where it would continue to rely heavily on US military and political support to maintain its position.

100 years ago: Communist Party of Korea founded

On April 17, 1925, the Communist Party of Korea was founded at a secret meeting in Keijō (now Seoul) in Japanese-occupied Korea. The founding of the party as well as its initial activities were clandestine because the puppet government of Japanese imperialism had outlawed all socialist and left-wing parties. The party was founded by leaders of various left-wing groups, primarily composed of students and intellectuals, that were inspired by the Russian Revolution and had contact with the Soviet Union, notably the Tuesday Society and the North Wind Society.

Since 1921, the Communist International had been producing large amounts of literature in Korean and distributing it to Korean communists based in Shanghai, China. A bureau to set up a Korean Communist Party had been organized in Vladivostok in the far east of the USSR in 1923, although most of its members were arrested by the Japanese on their return to Korea.

The founding congress, which gathered in a Chinese restaurant, had 15 delegates who elected a Central Committee and a Central Inspection Commission. The next day, the party created a Communist Youth League. The party was officially recognized as a section by the Communist International in May 1926. Among its prominent leaders were Pak Hon-yong, Kim Chan, and Kim Chae-bong.

However, after a raid in November 1925 at a wedding, Japanese authorities arrested several of the founding leaders and were able to find documents that led them to arrest about 100 Communists, 83 of whom were convicted of crimes against the state and imprisoned.



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