

This week in history: August 17-23

17 August 2015

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25 years ago: Bush puts 150,000 reservists on call-up for action in Iraq

US President George H.W. Bush signed an executive order on August 22, 1990, in response to the Pentagon request to send 100,000 additional National Guard and reserve troops to Saudi Arabia. The existing troop deployment on August 7 of 50,000 marked the beginning of the so-called Operation Desert Shield. The additional deployment of reservists was, according to the executive order, to “augment the active armed forces for the effective conduct of operational missions in and around the Arabian Peninsula.”

The mobilization of reservists had been already set in motion, according to a Pentagon spokesman: “That process has been going on for some time. It didn’t start with today’s announcement.” However once the executive order was in place, guardsmen all across the country would have had as little as 24 hours to leave their civilian jobs and present themselves for active duty. This initial deployment of reservists was estimated at 40,000.

The US Navy had already deployed two naval battle groups, including the aircraft carriers USS Dwight D. Eisenhower and USS Independence, to the Persian Gulf. On August 18, the USS Eisenhower fired warning shots across the bows of two Iraqi oil tankers. The US battleships USS Missouri and USS Wisconsin had also been deployed to the Gulf along with support fleets.

Some 48 F-15s were sent from Langley Air Force Base in Virginia and began running around-the-clock patrols of the Saudi-Kuwait-Iraq borders. Another 36 F-15-A-Ds were sent from the Bitburg air base in Germany. Two US Air National Guard units from South Carolina and Syracuse, New York sent four dozen F-16 fighter jets.

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50 years ago: India and Pakistan at war

On August 17, 1965, India and Pakistan stepped up an

undeclared war over the disputed territory of Kashmir. The mountainous province in the northern tip of the Indian subcontinent had been contested by the two countries since the bloody partition imposed by imperialism in 1947 which divided the former British colony along religious lines.

Border clashes began earlier in 1965 over the Rann of Kutch area, on the Arabian Sea, where the Pakistani province of Sind adjoins the Indian province of Gujarat. In June both governments verbally accepted a ceasefire proposed by British Prime Minister Harold Wilson. In reality the conflict moved north, to the disputed Kashmir region, a majority-Muslim area held by India, where a nationalist uprising was being led by forces loyal to Sheikh Abdullah.

On August 5, Pakistan sent thousands of soldiers across the “Line of Control” border, disguised as Kashmiri rebels, in a campaign called Operation Gibraltar. India responded with a massive attack against West Pakistan, and on August 17 the Pakistani military set into motion a long-planned attack on Kashmir and Jammu known as Operation Grand Slam.

The war represented a continuation of the reactionary communal politics of the Hindu and Muslim ruling classes of India and Pakistan. New Delhi welcomed the war as a means of distracting the working class and oppressed peasantry away from the problems of landlessness, indebtedness, hunger and exploitation. In Bihar huge demonstrations of hungry workers, peasants and students were fired on, resulting in many deaths. Food shortages and a foreign exchange crisis brought the Indian economy to a virtual halt.

While the Pakistani bourgeoisie demagogically claimed to support the Kashmir rebels, peasants in the Pakistan-occupied portion of Kashmir complained of forced conscription and food shortages.

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75 years ago: Tensions increase in the Balkans

On August 17, 1940, Romania agreed to return all of

southern Dobruja to Bulgaria at the conclusion of negotiations between the two countries. Southern Dobruja, inhabited by a majority of Bulgarian peasants, had become part of Romania in 1913 after the second Balkan War.

Bulgaria had troops massed on the frontier between the two countries, as well as administrators waiting to take over the territory as negotiations concluded. The carving up of Romania began in June, when Stalin launched a lightning strike against the country and annexed Bessarabia and Bukovina. After Bulgaria's takeover of southern Dobruja, Hungary demanded that Romania cede northern Transylvania.

Unable to come to terms, Italy and Germany intervened a week later to impose the settlement on Romania. In two months Romania lost more than a third of its territory and about a third of its population. Throughout the opening period of World War II, the Balkan countries had remained relatively peaceful—much to the liking of Hitler because its oil and grain resources were required for the German war machine. While Stalin's annexations were provided for in a secret protocol to the Stalin-Hitler pact, rivalry over Balkan territories led to the first clashes between Germany and the Soviet Union since the pact was signed the previous year.

The seizures of Romanian territory set into motion demands against other Balkan countries. Italian imperialism made territorial demands on Yugoslavia and Greece, which led ultimately to military intervention by Mussolini's fascist regime and the spread of the European war to the whole Balkan region.

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100 years ago: Liebknecht votes against war credits in German Reichstag

On August 20, 1915, the German Reichstag, or parliament, voted for new war credits to fund military operations in the First World War, which had broken out a year before. Only one vote was cast against the credits, that of Karl Liebknecht, the SPD leader who adhered to the revolutionary wing of the German social democratic party led by Rosa Luxemburg.

On August 4, 1914, the SPD had betrayed the program of socialist internationalism, for which it had previously fought, supporting the imperialist war efforts of its "own" government with the outbreak of the global conflagration.

In the SPD caucus in August 1915, held before the Reichstag vote, 36 deputies voted to oppose the war budget. When the vote in the chamber of the Reichstag

came, three of them voted with the majority, while 32 left the chamber, with Liebknecht alone registering a "no" vote, publicly defying party discipline and the war policies of the autocratic ruler of Germany, Kaiser Wilhelm II.

Under the pressure of a mounting social polarization and growing opposition to the war in the working class, the SPD was increasingly divided into three factions: the right-wing majority led by Scheidemann, Heine, and Sudekum, which supported the suppression of the class struggle during the war, and uncritically adhered to the government line; the center, led by Haasse, Kautsky, and Bernstein, which criticized the war in a pacifist and centrist fashion, but opposed any revolutionary struggle against it; and the revolutionary left led by Luxemburg, Liebknecht, and Franz Mehring.

Eduard David, the official spokesman of the SPD majority, delivered a speech to the Reichstag outlining complete support for a German victory over its "enemies", and an ensuing piece dictated by the Kaiser. *Vorwärts*, the publication of the centrists led by Kautsky, noted that David's speech was "in no way distinguishable from those of the capitalist orators."

In the debate, Liebknecht demanded that government representatives detail their attitude to the call for immediate peace, without annexations. Secretary of State V. Jagow replied, "I believe I shall meet the wishes of the great majority of the House if I decline to answer the question of the member, Dr. Liebknecht, at the present time as inopportune."

Liebknecht responded, "That is concealing the capitalistic policy of conquest. The answer of the Secretary of State is a confession of a policy of annexation. The people want peace."

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