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ACTION SS-30

INFO OCT-01  ADS-00  SSO-00  /031 W

O 221745Z NOV 79
FM AMEMBASSY JIDDA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACIT IMMEDIATE 8047
DIW WASHDC NIACIT IMMEDIATE
CHUSMTM DHAHRAN NIACIT IMMEDIATE
USLO RIYADH NIACIT IMMEDIATE
AMCONSUL DHAHRAN NIACIT IMMEDIATE
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN NIACIT IMMEDIATE
USINT BAGHDAD IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY MANAMA IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY SANA IMMEDIATE

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DECAPTIONED

EXDIS-MILITARY ADDRESSES HANDLE AS SPECAT EXCLUSIVE
DEPT ALSO PASS NIACIT IMMEDIATE TO A/SY/CC/TAGS

E.O. 12065: GDS 11/22/85 (PLACKE, JAMES A.) OR-M
TAGS: PINS, ASEC, SA
SUBJECT: (S) OCCUPATION OF GRAND MOSQUE, MECCA

REF: JIDDA 8073 DTG 221111 NOV 79 (NOTAL)

1. (S - NEITHER TEXT).

2. SUMMARY. EMBASSY OFFICERS DEBIEFED U.S. PILOTS FLYING
SAUDI CIVIL DEFENSE HELICOPTERS OVER MECCA NOV 21-22.
THEIR OBSERVATIONS APPEAR IN CONSIDERABLE CONTRADICTION
WITH OTHER REPORTS EMBASSY HAS RECEIVED FROM OFFICIAL
SAUDI AND OTHER SOURCES WHICH INDICATE THAT SAUDIS
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HAVE RETAKEN AT LEAST PORTION OF FIRST FLOOR OF
MOSQUE WITH ASSISTANCE FROM ARMOURED PERSONNEL CARRIERS.
END SUMMARY.

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
REVIEW AUTHORITY: SHARON E AHMAD
DATE/CASE ID: 06 JUL 2006  200606046
3. POLOFF AND AIR ATTACHE DEBRIEFED U.S. CIVILIAN PILOTS (PLS PROTECT) CONTRACTED TO FLY SAUDI CIVIL DEFENSE HELICOPTERS FOLLOWING THEIR RETURN TO JIDDA AT 1600 HOURS LOCAL NOV 22. THEIR OBSERVATIONS APPEAR IN CONSIDERABLE CONTRADICTION WITH OTHER REPORTS. EMBASSY HAS RECEIVED (SEE REFTEL) WHICH INDICATED THAT SAUDIS HAVE RETAKEN AT LEAST PORTION OF FIRST FLOOR OF MOSQUE WITH ASSISTANCE FROM ARMORED PERSONNEL CARRIERS. WHILE WE CANNOT CONFIRM OR DENY VALIDITY OF THEIR OBSERVATIONS, THEY ARE BEING REPORTED FOR WHAT THEY ARE, A VALUABLE FIRST-HAND AERIAL VIEW OF THE SITUATION IN MECCA.

4. IN LATER VISITS TO MECCA, PILOTS DEPARTED JIDDA FOR SMALL MUNA AIRFIELD 3-5 MILES FOR MECCA AN 1400 HOURS NOV 21. AIRFIELD IS REPORTED TO BE UNDER VERY HEAVY GUARD. AT 1900 HOURS PILOTS FLEW OVER GRAND MOSQUE AT ALTITUDE OF ABOUT 3500 FT. AS WAS CASE PREVIOUS NIGHT, ALL LIGHTS ON THE USUALLY BRILLIANTLY LIT MOSQUE WERE COMPLETELY DOUSED. AT 2000 HOURS, WHAT APPEARED TO BE THE LIGHTS UNDER THE NE PORTICO SUDDENLY CAME ON AND REMAINED LIT THROUGHOUT THE NIGHT. AT 2015 HRS, HELICOPTER WAS SHOT AT BY A TRACER ROUND FROM THE MOSQUE. ROUND MISSED ITS TARGET BUT CONTINUED IN A FLAT TRAJECTORY TO ALTITUDE OF 7-8000 FT, WHERE IT BURNED OUT. ROUND APPEARED TO BE FROM HEAVY CALIBER WEAPON. AT 2300 HOURS, PILOTS AGAIN PASSED OVER MOSQUE. NE PORTICO STILL LIT, AND THERE WAS A SMALL BONFIRE IN THE CENTRAL COURTYARD. PILOTS SURMISED THIS WAS FOR COOKING PURPOSES.

5. AT 0906 HRS NOV. 22, TWO F-5'S MADE LOW LEVEL PASSES OVER THE GRAND MOSQUE FOR A FIFTEEN MINUTE PERIOD AS THEY HAD DONE PREVIOUS DAY. IN CONTRAST TO SIMILAR F-5 PASSES NOV. 20, AIRCRAFT FLEW VERY FLAT FLIGHT PATTERN AS IF IN RECOGNITION OF FACTED OCCUPIERS OF MOSQUE IN POSSESSION OF SOME HEAVY WEAPONS. PILOTS DID NOT RETURN TO GRAND MOSQUE AREA UNTIL 1530 JRS. NOV 22. DURING THIS FINAL PASS-OVER, PILOTS STATED THEY COULD PICK UP NO ACTIVITY WHATSOEVER EITHER IN THE MOSQUE OR IN THE SURROUNDING AREA WHICH CONTINUES TO BE CORDONED OFF FOR A 3 TO 5 BLOCK AREA. IN RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS,
6. HELICOPTER RETURNED TO JIDDA AT APPROXIMATELY 1600 LOCAL ACRRYING 15 WOUNDED SAUDI SOLDIERS. SOLDIERS WERE DISEMBARKED AT JIDDA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT WHERE RSAF C-130'S CONVEYED THEM TO RIYADH. (FYI: NEW MILITARY HOSPITAL IN RIYADH HAS BEEN EVACUATED AS HAS MILITARY HOSPITAL IN JIDDA. END FYI.) PILOTS SAID ALL THE INJURED APPEARED TO HAVE BEEN WOUNDED BY SMALL CALIBER WEAPONS. INJURIES WERE NOT SERIOUS. NO FRAGMENTATION WOUNDS IN EVIDENCE. ALL OF THE SOLDIERS APPEARED TO BE FROM A SPECIAL FORCES UNIT FROM TABUK. WHEN QUESTIONED AS TO HOW THEY WERE WOUNDED, OFFICER AMONG THEM INDICATED THAT AT 1100 HRS LOCAL, THEY HAD PARTICIPATED IN AN ASSAULT IN THE MOSQUE BY 2000 SAUDI SOLDIERS. SAUDI D
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OFFICER IMPLIED THAT SAUDI TROOPS NOW OCCUPYING AT LEAST PART OF GROUND FOLLR, PILOTS STATED, HOWEVER, THEY THEY THOUGHT THIS ASSERTION WAS IMPLAUSIBLE, AND SAID THAT THEY COULD NOT SUBSTANTIATE ANY CLAIM FROM THEIR OBSERVATIONS OF THE GRAND MOSQUE AND SURROUNDING AREA. PILOTS ADDED THAT THEY NOTICED NO DAMAGE TO EITHER OF THE TWIN MINARETS DESPITE REPORTS WE HAVE RECEIVED THAT SAUDIS HAVE DIRECTED GRENADE OR LIGHT SHELL FIRE AT THE MINARETS TO DISLODGE SNIPERS.
7. PILOTS SAID THEY ASKED SAUDI OFFICER IF THERE WAS ANY EVIDENCE OF IRANIAN INVOLVEMENT IN THE MOSQUE TAKOVER. OFFICER REPLIED THAT HE THOUGHT ONLY SAUDIS WERE INVOLVED. ASKED HOW 2000 MEN COULD ASSAULT THE MOSQUE WITH SO LITTLE OUTWARD EVIDENCE, OFFICER REPORTEDLY REPLIED THAT HIS MEN HAD ENTERED THE MOSQUE THROUGH THE EXTENSIVE NETWORK OF TUNNELS WHICH APPARENTLY EXISTS UNDERNEATH IT.
8. COMMENT: WE HAVE NO EXPLANATION FOR THE INCONSISTENCY BETWEEN THESE OBSERVATIONS AND THE VARIOUS REPORTS WE HAVE RECEIVED REGARDING THE ALLEGED SLOW

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BUT METHODOLOGICAL RECAPTURE OF THE MOSQUE FROM THE ISLAMIC DISSIDENTS. AT SAME TIME, WE HAVE NO REASON TO DISMISS THE FOREGOING REPORT, WHICH HAS BEEN RELATED TO US BY PILOTS WELL-SEASONED IN COMBAT (ALL ARE RETIRED U.S. MILITARY). OBVIOUSLY THERE HAVE BEEN SUBSTANTIAL EXCHANGES OF FIRE, BUT AS ONE OF THE PILOTS COMMENTED, THE WOUNDED MAY BE CASUALTIES OF A SAUDI EFFORT TO INFILTRATE RATHER THAN ASSAULT THIS HOLIEST OF MUSLIM SHRINES.

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