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ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 ADS-00 SY-05 SYE-00 SES-01 AID-05 A-02
CIAE-00 NSAE-00 NSCE-00 SSO-00 ICAE-00 INRE-00
PM-06 H-01 INR-10 L-03 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 HA-05
OC-06 CCO-00 MCT-02 SSN-02 /078 W
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O 241830Z NOV 79
FM AMEMBASSY JIDDA
TO USLO RIYADH NIACT IMMEDIATE
INFO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8054
AMCONSUL DHAHRAN IMMEDIATE
CHUSMTM DHAHRAN IMMEDIATE
DIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY AMMAN AIMMEDIATE
USINT BAGHDAD IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY DAMASDUS IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY DOHA IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY MANAM A IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASS MUSCAT IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY SANA IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T JIDDA 8095

USLO FOR AMBASSADOR

DPET PASS TO A/SY/CC/TAGS

E.O. 12065: GDS 11/24/85 (PLACKE JAMES A) OR-M
TAGS: PINS ASEC SA
SUBJ : (S) OCCUPATION OF GRAND MOSQUE, MECCA:
THE DRAMA APPARENTLY ENDS

REF: JIDDA 8094 DTG 240830Z (NOTAL)

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1. S - ENTIRE TEXT.
2. THE DRAMA AT MECCA IS APPARENTLY ALMOST, IF NOT COMPLETELY OVER AND THE ENDING APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN DRAMATIC AND VIOLENT.

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AMERICAN PILOTS (STRICTLY PROTECT) FLYING SAUDI CIVIL DEFENSE HELICOPTERS ON CONTRACT TOLD POLOFF THAT THEY HAD HOVERED OVER THE GRAND MOSQUE AND VICINITY BETWEEN 1335 AND 1500 HOURS GMT NOV 24 AND OBSERVED WHAT THEY BELIEVE WAS MOPPING UP STAGE OF THE FINAL ASSAULT ON THE MOSQUE. HELICOPTERS WERE BEING USED BY SAUDIS FOR RECONNAISSANCE PURPOSES.

3. PILOTS STATE THAT WHEN THEY CAME ON STATION AT 1335 HOURS GMT, THEY OBSERVED TWO APC'S DRIVING AROUND THE INTERIOR COURTYARD OF THE MOSQUE AND RAPIDLY FIRING THEIR WEAPONS INTO THE SURROUNDING RAMPARTS. PILOTS COULD NOT DETERMINE WHETHER APC'S WERE FIRING AT THE FIRST OR SECOND STORIES. THEY OBSERVED BLACK SMOKE RISING FROM A PORTION OF THE EASTERN SIDE OF THE BUILDING AS THE RESULT OF ONE OF THESE FUSILLADES, AND LATER OBSERVED ANOTHER LARGE QUANTITY OF SMOKE RISING FROM THE NORTHWESTERN PART OF THE BUILDING. GREATEST DAMAGE APPEARED TO BE ON THE NORTHERN SIDE OF THE MOSQUE, THE SIDE WHICH HAS A LONG GALLERY EXTENDING AT RIGHT ANGLES FROM THE MAIN BUILDING. HERE, A VERY LARGE FIRE WAS BLAZING FROM THE GROUND TO THE SECOND STORY IN THE AREA BETWEEN THE TWIN MINARETS. FIRE ENGINES OUTSIDE THE MOSQUE WERE TRYING TO CONTAIN THE FIRE. PILOTS STATED THAT SOME OF THE SEVEN MINARETS OF THE MOSQUE HAD BEEN BADLY RIDDLED BY THE APC FIRE. ON THE LONG EXTENDED GALLERY ITSELF, PILOTS STATED THAT THEY SAW 40-50 SAUDI SOLDIERS (PROBABLY NATIONAL GUARDSMEN) STANDING ON THE ROOF. THEY APPEARED TO BE STANDING IDLY AND NOT MAINTAINING ANY PARTICULAR MILITARY POSITION. EIGHT ADDITIONAL APC'S WERE IN THE STREET SURROUNDING THE MOSQUE, BUT THEY WERE NOT FIRING THEIR WEAPONS.

4. PILOTS SAID THAT SAUDI OFFICER ACCOMPANYING THEM HAS TOLD THEM
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ASSAULT HAD BEGUN IN THE EARLY AFTERNOON AND WAS LED BY QTE A GENERAL UNQTE. THERE WAS NO ESTIMATE AS TO CASUALTIES, AND PILOTS STATE THEY SAW NO DEAD OR WOUNDED, ALTHOUGH PRESUMABLY NUMBER WAS CONSIDERABLE. AS ONE INDICATION, EMBASSY LEARNED EARLIER TODAY THAT AT 1100 GMT NOV 24, ALL MUSLIM DOCTORS AND STAFF AT THE JIDDA MILITARY HOSPITAL (ABOUT 20-25 PERSONS) WERE INSTRUCTED TO PROCEED TO MECCA AND TO BRING ALONG AN OVERNIGHT BAG.

5. PILOTS SAID THAT JUST PRIOR TO RETURNING TO JIDDA BASE, THEY WERE INSTRUCTED TO FLY LOW OVER THE RIDGES NEAR THE MOSQUE. ACCOMPANYING SAUDI OFFICER TOLD THEM THAT UNKNOWN NUMBER OF ISLAMIC DISSIDENTS HAD MANAGED TO ESCAPE THE GRAND MOSQUE AND WERE BELIEVED TO BE HIDING IN THE VICINITY OF MECCA. PILOTS SAID THEY SAW NO SUSPICIOUS PERSONS, ALTHOUGH SAUDI SOLDIERS APPEARED TO BE ALMOST EVERYWHERE.

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6. COMMENT: PRIOR TO TODAY'S ASSAULT, SAUDI STRATEGY HAD BEEN VERY MUCH ONE OF "STARVING OUT" THE ISLAMIC DISSIDENTS OCCUPYING THE MOSQUE. THE FACT THAT THIS POLICY FAILED AND THAT DRACONIAN MEASURES HAD TO BE USED TO FINALLY SECURE THIS MOST HOLY AND SANCTIFIED SHRINE IS PROBABLY A REFLECTION OF BOTH THE DEGREE TO WHICH THE DISSIDENTS WERE ARMED AND THE FACT THAT THE SAUDI CASUALTY RATED HAD REACHED AN INTOLERABLE LEVEL. SAUDIS MAY ALSO HAVE BEEN A VICTIM OF THEIR OWN PUBLICITY. WHILE NOT QUITE CLAIMING TOTAL VICTORY, OFFICIAL SAUDI COMMENT HAS REPEATEDLY STATED OVER PAST TWO DAYS THAT MOSQUE COMPLETELY IN CONTROL OF SAUDI FORCES AND THAT OPERATION NOW IN ITS LAST STAGES (SEE FBIS LONDON LD240628 FOR EXAMPLE). THIS WAS CLEARLY NOT THE CASE, AND WITH NEWSPAPERS LIKE THE NOV 24 ARAB NEWS PROUDLY ANNOUNCING THAT QTE THE HOLY KA'ABA IS SAVED UNQTE, SAG PROBABLY FELT IT HAD MORE TO LOSE THAN TO GAIN BY NOT TAKING THE ACTION NECESSARY TO BRING THE GRAND MOSQUE BACK INTO ITS CONTROL QUICKLY. WEST

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