

SECRET

RELEASED IN FULL

PAGE 01 JIDDA 08039 211408Z
ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ADS-00 CIAE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 PM-06
SP-02 SS-15 NSCE-00 SSO-00 INRE-00 DODE-00 SY-05
SYE-00 MCT-02 SES-01 SSN-02 L-03 USSS-00 OC-06
CCO-00 OCS-06 CA-01 A-02 OPR-02 OMB-01 ACDA-12
ANAE-00 /100 W

-----104216 211432Z /65

O 211310Z NOV 79
FM AMEMBASSY JIDDA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 8029
INFO AMCONSUL DHAHRAN IMMEDIATE
USLO RIYADH IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY AMMAN IMMEDIATE
USINT BAGHDAD IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY MANAMA IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY SANA IMMEDIATE
USMTM DHAHRAN IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY MUSCAT IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY DOHYA IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T JIDDA 8039

DEPT ALSO PASS NIACT IMMEDIATE TO A/SY/CC/TAGS

EO 12065: GDS 11/21/79 (PLACKE, JAMES A) OR-M
TAGS: PINS, ASEC, AFSP, SA
SUBJ: (S) OCCUPATION OF GRAND MOSQUE IN MECCA

1. (S - ENTIRE TEXT)
2. SUMMARY: OCCUPATION OF GRAND MOSQUE IN MECCA APPEARS TO SECRET

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BE CONTINUING AS OF 1500 LOCAL TIME (1200Z), BUT THERE ARE SIGNS THAT SAUDI AUTHORITIES ARE PREPARING TO USE FORCE. SECURITY AROUND JIDDA HAS BEEN BEEFED UP AND CITY SEEMS PARTICULARLY QUIET. END SUMMARY.

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3. EARLY MORNING NOV 21 SAUDI INTERIOR MINISTRY ISSUED STATEMENT ON SEIZURE WHICH WAS BROADCAST ON RADIO AND PUBLISHED IN OKAZ (ARABIC). EMBASSY TRANSLATION FOLLOWS: BEGIN TEXT: A GROUP OF RENEGADES AGAINST ISLAM CARRYING ARMS AND AMMUNITION INFILTRATED INTO THE HOLY MOSQUE IN MECCA AT DAWN PRAYER YESTERDAY. THEY PRESENTED ONE OF THEIR NUMBER TO THE WORSHIPERS CLAIMING HE IS THE EXPECTED MAHDI AND CALLED ON THEM, AT GUNPOINT, TO RECOGNIZE HIM AS SUCH. THE SAUDI AUTHORITIES HAVE ASKED THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS FOR THEIR OPINION ABOUT MEASURES TO BE TAKEN TO PROTECT MUSLIMS IN THE MOSQUE. ANOTHER STATEMENT WILL BE ISSUED LATER EXPLAINING WHAT NEW DEVELOPMENTS OCCUR IN THIS INCIDENT.

END TEXT.

4. SOURCES IN OPERATIONS SECTION AT JIDDA AIRPORT REPORTED THIS MORNING (NOV 21) THAT ALL COMMERCIAL FIGHTS WERE CONTINUING AS SCHEDULED, BUT SECURITY HAS BEEN BEEFED UP. HOWEVER, MOST CORPORATE AIRCRAFT IN JIDDA ARE EFFECTIVELY GROUNDED BY CLOSURE OF SERVICE AREA.

5. HOSPITALS IN AREA ARE STILL UNDER MEDICAL ALERT. MILITARY HOSPITAL IN JIDDA HAS BEEN TOLD BY ITS CHIEF SURGEON TO EXPECT NUMEROUS CASUALTIES THIS AFTERNOON OR EARLY THIS EVENING. ALL NON-CRITICAL PATIENTS HAVE BEEN REMOVED FROM HOSPITAL. SENIOR MILITARY COMMANDER CLOSELY CONNECTED WITH EFFORT TO RETAKE MOSQUE HAS

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INFORMED EMBASSY THAT INCIDENT WILL BE OVER BY SUNSET.

6. ON MORNING OF NOV 21, POLOFF AND AIR ATTACHE AGAIN DEBRIEFED AMERICAN PILOTS FLYING RECONNAISSANCE SORTIES FOR SAG OVER GRAND MOSQUE IN MECCA. (SEE JIDDA 7993). PILOTS STATED THAT THEY MADE THREE EVENING SORTIES OVER MOSQUE EVENING OF NOV 20 AND ONE SORTIE MORNING OF NOV 21. THEY NOTED THAT THEIR HELICOPTER DREW HEAVY FIRE (INCLUDING TRACERS) FROM GUN POSITIONS ESTABLISHED IN TWIN MINARETS OF MOSQUE AND SAID IT APPEARED THE OCCUPIERS ALSO POSSESSED AT LEAST ONE .50 CALIBER MACHINE GUN. PILOTS SAID THE OCCUPIERS OF THE MOSQUE APPEARED VERY WELL ORGANIZED AND CONSTANTLY MOVED THEIR GUN POSITIONS -- EVEN IN THE MINARETS -- IN ORDER TO HINDER

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THE AIMING OF RETURN FIRE.

7. DURING EVENING OF NOV 20 MOSQUE WAS COMPLETELY DARKENED, SOMETHING WHICH PILOTS' SAUDI CONTACTS STATED HAD NEVER BEFORE HAPPENED. SNIPERS IN THE MINARETS WERE AGAIN PRESENT IN THE MINARETS AND OTHER POSITIONS AROUND THE PERIMETER OF THE MOSQUE DURING THEIR SORTIE OVER BUILDING AT 0700 LOCAL NOV 21. PILOTS STATED THAT THREE 8-10 STORY BUILDINGS ACROSS FROM MOSQUE WERE ON FIRE, ALTHOUGH IT WAS NOT CLEAR HOW FIRES STARTED. PILOTS ALSO STATED THAT FOR FIRST TIME SINCE MOSQUE SEIZED, TWO SAUDI F-5S MADE TOTAL OF SIX LOW PASSES OVER MOSQUE. NO SHOTS FIRED, ALTHOUGH PLANES ARMED WITH 20 MM CANNON.

8. REFERRING TO INFO GIVEN THEM BY SAUDI OFFICERS IN MECCA, PILOTS STATED THAT THESE OFFICERS CONFIRMED THE KILLING OF THE IMAM OF MOSQUE SHORTLY AFTER ITS SEIZURE FOLLOWING EARLY MORNING PRAYERS NOV 20. IN A SEPARATE INCIDENT, OFFICERS TOLD PILOTS THAT A SAUDI BRIGADIER GENERAL, A COLONEL, A MAJOR AND ANOTHER SECRET

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OFFICER WERE KILLED AT APPROX NOON NOV 20. ONE OF THE GATES OF MOSQUE WAS SUDDENLY AND BRIEFLY FLUNG OPEN AND THE OFFICERS, WHO WERE STANDING IMMEDIATELY OUTSIDE, WERE KILLED IN A HAIL OF BULLETS. STREETS AROUND MOSQUE WERE IMMEDIATELY CLEARED. BODIES OF THE DEAD OFFICERS HAVE APPARENTLY NOT BEEN RECOVERED.

9. IN CONFIRMATION OF OTHER REPORTS WE HAVE RECEIVED, OFFICERS ALSO TOLD PILOTS THAT WEAPONS HAD BEEN SMUGGLED INTO THE MOSQUE EVENING OF OV 19 ABOARD TWO TRUCKS DISGUISED AS SUPPLIES AND EQUIPMENT NEEDED BY A WORK CREW UNDERTAKING RENOVATIONS INSIDE.

10. SECURITY AT ALL SAG MINISTRIES HAS BEEN BEEFED UP. THERE ARE NO SIGNS OF DISTURBANCE IN JIDDA OR RIYADH. A SOURCE WITH CONTACTS HIGH IN ROYAL FAMILY HAS INFORMED EMBOFF THAT THERE WAS INCIDENT IN MEDINA SIMULTANEOUS WITH MOSQUE SEIZURE IN MECCA, BUT IT WAS QUICKLY SUPPRESSED AND SITUATION THERE IS NOW NORMAL. OTHER SOURCES ALSO REPORT THAT MEDINA IS CALM. WEST