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PAGE 01 JIDDA 08041 211527Z
ACTION SS-30

INFO OCT-01 ADS-00 SSO-00 ANAE-00 /031 W
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O 211345Z NOV 79D
FM AMEMBASSY JIDDA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 8030
AMEMBASSY AMMAN IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI IMMEDIATE
USINT BAGHDAD IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY MUSCAT IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY DOHA IMMEDIATE
AMCONSUL DHAHRAN NIACT IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT IMMEDIATE
USLO RIYADH NIACT IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY MANAMA IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY SANA IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE
AMEASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T JIDDA 8041

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EO 12065: RDS-1 11/21/99 (WEST, JOHN C) OR-M
TAGS: PINS, ASEC, SA
SUBJ: (U) OCCUPATION OF GRAND MOSQUE, MECCA

REF: JIDDA 8039

1. SECRET ENTIRE TEXT.
2. SUMMARY: THE GRAND MOSQUE IN MECCA WAS SEIZED BY A SAUDI RELIGIOUS FANATIC, MUHAMMAD ABDALLAH, 26 YEARS OLD, A MEMBER OF THE UTAYBA TRIBE. HE HAS APPROX 300 WELL-ARMED PERSONS WITH HIM, 13 OF WHICH HAVE BEEN CAPTURED BY SAUDI

SECRET

PAGE 02 JIDDA 08041 211527Z

AUTHORITIES.

THE CAPTURED GROUP INCLUDED AT LEAST ONE PAKISTANI. THERE IS NO RPT NO DIRECT RELATIONSHIP WITH IRAN AND MUHAMMAD AND HIS FOLLOWERS DENY ANY KHOMEINI INFLUENCE IN

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
REVIEW AUTHORITY: SHARON E AHMAD
DATE/CASE ID: 06 JUL 2006 200600046

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THEIR ACTIONS. THERE ARE SEVERAL THOUSAND PILGRIMS STILL IN MOSQUE DESPITE FACT THAT MUHAMMAD'S FORCES ALLOWED APPROX 5,000 TO LEAVE LAST EVENING (NOV 20). IN ADDITION, SEVERAL ESCAPED. SAUDI AUTHORITIES AT THIS TIME DO NOT CONSIDER THIS SEIZURE TO BE OF MAJOR POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE ALTHOUGH THEY ARE REACTING STRONGLY SO AS TO BE PREPARED FOR ANY EVENTUALITY. THE FIGHTING BETWEEN THE SECURITY FORCES SURROUNDING THE MOSQUE AND THOSE INSIDE WAS PARTICULARLY FIERCE LAST NIGHT BUT TODAY SEEMS TO HAVE CALMED SOMEWHAT AS OF ONE O'CLOCK LOCAL TIME. END SUMMARY.

3. I WAS ABLE TO GET FROM A KNOWLEDGEABLE CABINET MINISTER A COMPLETE UP-TO-DATE STORY ON THE EVENTS SURROUNDING THE SEIZURE OF THE GRAND MOSQUE AT MECCA. THE MINISTER SAID THAT JUST AFTER MORNING PRAYERS, A YOUNG MAN NAMED MUHAMMAD ABDALLAH ALONG WITH SOME FOLLOWERS VARIOUSLY ESTIMATED TO NUMBER FROM A MINIMUM OF 200 TO A MAXIMUM OF 500 SEIZED THE HOLY MOSQUE.

4. ACCORDING TO MINISTER, THERE IS A SPECIAL RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE ATTACHED TO THE SEIZURE AT THIS TIME. AS HE EXPLAINED IT TO ME, MUSLIMS GENERALLY BELIEVE THAT THERE WILL BE A SECOND COMING OF JESUS AND SOME BELIEVE THAT THERE WILL BE A FALSE JESUS PRECEDING THE REAL JESUS. STILL OTHERS BELIEVE THAT A MAHDI WILL APPEAR AS A FORERUNNER TO BOTH OF THESE EVENTS. ALTHOUGH NOT SPECIFICALLY SET FORTH IN THE QUR'AN, THE TRADITIONAL BELIEF IS THAT A MAHDI WILL APPEAR ON THE FIRST DAY OF A NEW CENTURY IN MECCA AND THAT HE WILL REMAIN IN MECCA FOR A TIME AND THEN DISAPPEAR LATER TO

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PAGE 03 JIDDA 08041 211527Z

REAPPEAR IN MEDINA.

5. MUHAMMAD ABDALLAH IS WELL KNOWN TO THE SAUDI AUTHORITIES. HE IS REPORTED TO BE 26 YEARS OF AGE AND OF IMPOSING APPEARANCE AND PERSONALITY. HE ATTENDED SHARIA SCHOOL IN RIYADH FOR APPROX THREE YEARS BUT DID NOT FINISH. HE WAS IMPRISONED FOR APPROX FOUR MONTHS BECAUSE OF ACTIVITIES INIMICAL TO GOVT. WHEN RELEASED, HE RETURNED SOUTH TO HIS HOME TRIBE.

6. FOLLOWING MORNING PRAYERS ON NOV 20, HE APPEARED AT THE GRAND MOSQUE AND TOLD THE IMAM THAT HE WAS THE MAHDI. HIS FOLLOWERS THEN SEIZED CONTROL PUTTING TWO GUARDS AT EACH OF THE 26 DOORS INTO THE MOSQUE. PREVIOUSLY, THEY HAD BEEN ABLE TO BRING IN TRUCKS LOADED WITH ARMS AND DATES FOR FOOD. IN

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THIS SEIZURE, ARMED SENTRIES WERE SENT TO THE ROOF OF THE MOSQUE AND INTO THE MINARETS. THE MINISTER EXPLAINED THAT THE MUSLIM CUSTOM ON NEW YEAR'S DAY WAS TO GO TO EARLY MORNING PRAYERS, THEN VISIT THE ELDERLY MEMBERS OF FAMILY IN THE SURROUNDING AREA. THUS THERE WERE SEVERAL THOUSAND (ESTIMATED BY THE MINISTER TO BE AS MANY AS 40,000-50,000) PEOPLE IN THE MOSQUE AT THAT TIME. AFTER THE SEIZURE SOME OF THE WORSHIPPERS ENGAGED MUHAMMAD AND HIS FOLLOWERS IN CONVERSATION. ONE ASKED IF THIS ACTION WERE INSPIRED BY THE IRANIANS. MUHAMMAD SCORNFULLY AND EMPHATICALLY SAID, "NO." ONE OF HIS FOLLOWERS

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ADDED THAT THE IANIANS WERE NOT TRUE MUSLIMS AND HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH THIS ACTION. IT IS THE MINISTER'S OPINION THAT THESE ANSWERS WERE SINCERE AND THAT THE INDIVIDUALS IN QUESTION LACKED THE CAPACITY TO MISLEAD.

7. THE MINISTER HAS A PERSONAL INTEREST IN THE INCIDENT, SINCE SOME 45 MEMBERS OF HIS FAMILY ARE AMONG THOSE BEING HELD IN THE MOSQUE. HE SAID THAT HE HAS BEEN RECEIVING TELEPHONE CALLS EVERY 15 MINUTES FROM PEOPLE STATIONED IN HOUSES AROUND THE MOSQUE. HE ADDED THAT HE WAS BEEN ABLE

SECRET

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PAGE 04 JIDDA 08041 211527Z

TO HEAR THE SOUND OF FIRING WHILE TALKING ON TELEPHONE AND THE FIRING REACHED A CRESCENDO LAST EVENING BUT IS MUCH QUIETER NOW. TWO OF THE PEOPLE WHO ESCAPED FROM MOSQUE HAVE COME TO MINISTER'S HOUSE. ONE WAS THERE DURING MEETING, ALTHOUGH I DID NOT ENGAGE HIM IN CONVERSATION. THE MINISTER ADDED THAT THOSE BEING HELD WERE NOT BEING THREATENED OR MISTREATED BUT THE BIGGEST PROBLEM IS A LACK OF SANITARY FACILITIES WHICH HE SAYS ARE NON-EXISTENT IN THE MOSQUE.

8. THE MINISTER SAID THAT LAST EVENING 13 OF THE INTRUDERS WERE CAPTURED, ONE OF WHOM WAS A PAKISTANI. THE REST WERE PROBABLY MEMBERS OF THE UTAYBA TRIBE. ACCORDING TO THE PEOPLE WHO WERE THERE, THERE WERE A FEW NON-SAUDIS INVOLVED BUT THE GREAT MAJORITY WERE FROM THE UTAYBA TRIBE PLUS SOME FROM THE WADI AL-DAWASIR.

9. THE MINISTER DID NOT THINK THAT THE ACTION HAD A GREAT DEAL OF POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE, ALTHOUGH HE SAID HE HAD NOT HAD A CHANCE TO ASSESS THE FULL IMPLICATIONS. HE STATED THAT THE MEMBERS OF THE UTAYBA TRIBE WERE VERY STRONG FUNDAMENTALIST MUSLIMS WHO LACKED SOPHISTICATED LEADERSHIP SUFFICIENT TO TRANSLATE THEIR RELIGIOUS

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PRINCIPLES INTO OVERTHROW OF A CIVIL GOVERNMENT.

10. THE MINISTER HAD HEARD REPORTS OF DISTURBANCES AT MEDINA BUT STATED THAT HE HAD CALLED SEVERAL PEOPLED WHO HAD PRAYED IN THE MOSQUE THROUGHOUT THE DAY ON NOV 20 AND HAD SEEN NO DISRUPTIONS OR UNDUE INCIDENTS. HE SAID THAT IF THERE WERE ANY DISTRUBANCES, THE POLICE HAD EVIDENTLY STOPPED THE TROUBLEMAKERS BEFORE THEY WERE ABLE TO ENTER THE MOSQUE. (SEPARATELY, WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN SEVERAL, SEEMINGLY CORROBRATORY, REPORTS OF SOME MINOR DIS-

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PAGE 05 JIDDA 08041 211527Z

TURBANCES IN MEDINA ON NOV 20.)

11. I ASKED THE MINISTER WHAT HE THOUGH THE RESULTS OF THE TAKEOVER WOULD BE, AND HE REPLIED RATHER CALMLY: "SOONER OR LATER THEY WILL BE CAPTURED AND BEHEADED." WEST

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1. SECRET ENTIRE TEXT.
2. SOURCE OF INFORMATION FOR REFTEL WAS MINISTER OF PETROLEUM AHMED ZAKI YAMANI. WESTD

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