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PAGE 01 JIDDA 08079 221828Z
ACTION SS-30

INFO OCT-01 ADS-00 SSO-00 /031 W
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O 221745Z NOV 79
FM AMEMBASSY JIDDA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 8047
DIW WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE
CHUSMTM DHAHRAN NIACT IMMEDIATE
USLO RIYADH NIACT IMMEDIATE
AMCONSUL DHAHRAN NIACT IMMEDIATE
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN IMMEDIATE
USINT BAGHDAD IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY MANAMA IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY SANA IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T JIDDA 8079 DECAPTIONED

EXDIS-MILITARY ADDEES HANDLE AS SPECAT EXCLUSIVE

DEPT ALSO PASS NIACT 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 - NEITIRE 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 ARMORED PERSONNEL CARRIERS.
END SUMMARY.

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

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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 REPORTSD EMBASSY HAS RECEIVED (SEE REFTTEL) 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 AIRFILED 3-5 MILIES 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 ALITUDE 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 LIGHTSUNDER 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 INA 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 OVE MOSQUE. NE PORTICO STILL LIT, AND THERE WAS A SMALL BONFIRE IN THE

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CENTROL 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 MOSUQE 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 FACTD OCCUPIERS OF MOSQUE IN POSSESSION OF SOME HEAVY WEAPONS. PILOTS DID NOT RETURN TO GRAND MOSQUE AREA UNTIL 1530 JRS. NOV 22. DURING THS 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,

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PILOTS STATED THEY SAW NO EVIDENCE OF APC'S OR ANY OTHER ARMoured VEHICLES IN VICINITY OF MOSQUE. IN PARTICULAR, THEY STATED THEY NOTED NO TRACKS ON THE DIRT-COVERED CENTRAL COURTYARD WHICH SURROUNDS THE HOLY KA'ABA.

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 APPEAREDSTO 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 SLODIERS. SAUDI

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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 THATSHIS MEN HAD ENTERED THE MOSQUE THROUGH THE EXTENSIVE NETWORK OF TUNNELS WHICH APPARENTLY EXISTS UNDERNEATH IT.

8. COMMENT: WE HAVE NO EXPLANATION FOR THE INCON-SISTENCY BETWEEN THESE OBSERVATIONS AND THE VARIOUS REPORTS WE HAVE RECEIVED REGARDING THE ALLEGED SLOW

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BUT METHCDICAL 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
AHVE 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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