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ACTION NEA-07

INFO OCT-01 ADS-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-06 H-02 INR-10  
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-02 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-15  
SPH-01 /069 W  
-----109880 091126Z /21

P 091059Z DEC 79  
FM AMEMBASSY JIDDA  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8229  
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN PRIORITY  
AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI PRIORITY  
AMEMBASSY DOHA PRIORITY  
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY  
AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY  
AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY  
AMEMBASSY MANAMA PRIORITY  
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT PRIORITY  
AMEMBASSY MUSCAT PRIORITY  
AMEMBASSY SANA PRIORITY  
AMCONSUL DHAHRAN PRIORITY  
USINT BAGHDAD PRIORITY  
USLO RIYADH PRIORITY

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EO 12065: N/A  
TAGS: PINT, PINS, SA  
SUBJECT: MECCA UP-DATE: PRAYERS RESOUND AT THE HOLY  
KA'ABA

REF: JIDDA 8429 AND PREVIOUS

1. SUMMARY: LED BY THE KING, A THANKFUL SAUDI NATION  
OFFERED PRAYERS TO GOD ON DECEMBER 6 AND 7 FOR THE  
DELIVERANCE OF THE HOLY KA'ABA FROM GUNMEN AS THE GRAND  
MOSQUE IN MECCA WAS AT LAST OPENED FOR PUBLIC WORSHIP.  
MEANWHILE, SAUDI MEDIA CONTINUED TO FOCUS THEIR ATTENTION  
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ON THE EVENTS OF THE PAST TWO WEEKS. SAUDI INTERIOR  
MINISTER INDICATED THAT HIS MINISTRY WAS CONSIDERING  
ISSUING A LAW PROHIBITING THE CARRYING OF FIREARMS WITHOUT  
A LICENSE. LAW WOULD NOT APPLY TO TRIBESMEN. INTERIOR

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MINISTER ALSO STATED THERE WAS NO RELATION BETWEEN GRAND MOSQUE INCIDENT AND RUMORS OF TROUBLE IN EASTERN PROVINCE. IN LATTER EPISODES, POLICE HAD BEEN ABLE TO DISPERSE GROUPS OF MARCHERS AT THE BEGINNING OF THEIR DEMONSTRATIONS AND "THERE WAS NOTHING ELSE TO BE MENTIONED ON THIS SUBJECT." END SUMMARY.

2. LAST THURSDAY AND FRIDAY (DEC. 6 AND 7) SAUDI ARABIA WITNESSED AN ALMOST UNPRECEDENTED DISPLAY OF RELIGIOUS DEVOTIONFERVOR IN CELEBRATION OF THE REOPENING OF THE GRAND MOSQUE IN MECCA TO PUBLIC WORSHIP. ON THURSDAY, DEC. 6, PRINCE NAYIF FORMALLY DECLARED THE MOSQUE REOPENED FOLLOWING A MASSIVE CLEAN-UP OPERATION WHICH BEGAN NOV. 25. IN AN EVENT TELEVISED LIVE BY SAUDI TELEVISION AND REPEATED FREQUENTLY THROUGHOUT THE THURSDAY/FRIDAY WEEKEND, KING KHALID LED MOST MEMBERS OF THE ROYAL COURT, CABINET, AND IMPORTANT RELIGIOUS NOTABLES IN THE EVENING PRAYERS AT THE HOLY KA'ABA ON DECEMBER 6. WHILE THESE BROADCASTS WERE, FOR THE LARGE PART, WITHOUT SOUND, THE GREAT EMOTION EXPRESSED IN THE FACES OF THE WORSHIPPERS NEEDED NO ADDITIONAL VERBAL EXPRESSION TO ATTEST TO THE GREAT SOLEMNITY OF THE OCCASION.

3. ON FRIDAY, DECEMBER 7, WHILE THE KING AND HIS ENTOURAGE PROCEEDED TO JIDDA, OVER 150,000 PEOPLE ATTENDED FRIDAY PRAYERS AT THE GRAND MOSQUE. SHAYKH ABDALLAH AL-KHATIB, THE CHIEF IMAM AND SPEAKER OF THE GRAND MOSQUE, DELIVERED THE TRADITIONAL FRIDAY SERMON. NOT SURPRISINGLY, SHAYKH AL-KHATIB'S SERMON DEALT WITH THE NOV. 20-DEC. 4 EVENTS  
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IN MECCA. AL-KHATIB THANKED THE GOVERNMENT FOR PURGING THE MOSQUE AND DENOUNCED WHAT HE CALLED "THE MISLED GROUP". HE CALLED ON MUSLIMS TO ADHERE TO THE TEACHINGS OF ISLAM AND PRAYED TO ALMIGHTY GOD TO SPARE MUSLIMS THE EVIL OF SEDITION. IN ALL, IT WAS ESTIMATED THAT ONE MILLION MUSLIMS PERFORMED FRIDAY PRAYERS IN AND AROUND THE GRAND MOSQUE IN MECCA.

4. MEANWHILE, SAUDI MEDIA CONTINUED TO FOCUS THEIR ATTENTION ONBOTH THE EVENTS OF THE PAST TWO WEEKS AS WELL AS ON THE THURSDAY/FRIDAY RELIGIOUS CELEBRATIDNS. IN AN UNUSUAL GESTURE, THE ARABIC-LANGUAGE NEWSPAPER "AL-MADINA" PUBLISHED A SPECIAL FRIDAY EDITION, MOST OF WHOSE FRONT PAGE WAS DEVOTED TO A LARGE PHOTOGRAPH OF KING KHALID KISSING THE BLACK STONE AT THE HOLY KA'ABA. RADIO RIYADH,

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MEANWHILE, BROADCAST ON DEC. 6 WHAT WAS AN APPARENTLY TITLED RECORDING OF THE FIRS' AND THE SPEECH MADE BY THE SO-CALLED MILITARY LEADER OF THE ATTACK, JUHAYMAN BIN SAYF AL-UTAYBI. (FYI: THE LOUDSPEAKERS OF THE MOSQUE HAD NOT BEEN TURNED OFF AND, ACCORDINGLY, PEOPLE IN THE VICINITY OF THE MOSQUE COULD EASILY HEAR -- AND RECORD -- THE STATEMENTS OF THE GUNMEN AS THEY WERE AMPLIFIED OVER LOUDSPEAKERS ON THE SEVEN MINARETS. IT IS OUR UNDERSTANDING THAT TAPES RECORDING THE DRAMATIC EVENTS ARE NOW CIRCULATING IN RIYADH AND OTHER CITIES. END FYI)

5. ON BOTH DECEMBER 6 AND 7 SAUDI TELEVISION AIRED A SPECIAL HOUR-LONG PROGRAM WHICH SHOWED, FIRST, ALL OF THE EFFORTS SAG HAS UNDERTAKEN TO EXPAND THE GRAND MOSQUE SINCE THE 1950S TO MAKE IT ACCESSIBLE TO MORE OF THE MUSLIM FAITHFUL AND, SECOND, A FASCINATING PHOTOGRAPHIC

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ACCOUNT OF BOTH THE SEIZURE OF THE MOSQUE ON NOV. 20 (INCLUDING EXTRACTS FROM THE LIVE RECORDING OF THE EVENT) AND SUBSEQUENT SAUDI EFFORTS TO RETAKE THE BUILDING OVER THE NEXT TWO WEEKS. THE SCENES FROM THE MAIN ASSAULT ON THE MOSQUE ON NOV. 24 WERE PARTICULARLY GRAPHIC.

6. AS HAS BEEN TRUE EVERY NIGHT SINCE DEC. 4, THERE WAS FILM FOOTAGE AS WELL OF THE HAGGARD-LOOKING REMNANTS OF THE GROUP WHO WERE CAPTURED BY SAG FORCES. CORPSE PURPORTEDLY OF THE ALLEGED MAHDI (APPARENTLY MUHAMMAD ABDALLAH AL-QAHTANI) WAS ALSO SHOWN. WHEN THE CAMERA AT ONE POINT FOCUSED ON THE BEARDED JUHAYMAN BIN SAYF AL-

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UTAYBI, ONE OF THE RINGLEADERS OF THE GROUP AND VARIOUSLY DESCRIBED BY EMBASSY PERSONNEL AS RESEMBLING RASPUTIN, CHARLES MANSON, OR JOHN BROWN, THE TELEVISION ANNOUNCER STATED: "AND THIS IS JUHAYMAN AL-UTAYBI, SULLEN AND FILTHY AND CONTEMPLATING THE FATE WHICH WILL TAKE HIM TO HELL." INTERIOR MINISTER PRINCE NAYIF ANNOUNCED ON DEC. 8 THAT CHILDREN ACCOMPANYING THE GUNMEN IN THE MOSQUE WILL NOT BE PUNISHED. HOWEVER, ALL ADULTS, INCLUDING WOMEN, WILL BEAR FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR CRIMES.

7. IN ANOTHER DEVELOPMENT, ENGLISH LANGUAGE "SAUDI GAZETTE" STATED ON DEC. 8 THAT INTERIOR MINISTER PRINCE NAYIF HAD DISCLOSED THAT A STUDY WAS NOW BEING MADE BY HIS MINISTRY ON ISSUING A LAW TO PROHIBIT THE CARRYING OF ARMS WITHOUT A LICENSE. AT THE SAME TIME, THE "GAZETTE" QUOTES NAYIF AS SAYING THAT THERE WAS NOTHING UNUSUAL ABOUT THE KIND OF ARMAMENTS USED BY THE MECCA GUNMEN AND THAT THEY MIGHT HAVE BELONGED TO ANY CITIZEN IN THE COUNTRY. NAYIF REPORTEDLY ADDED THAT THERE WOULD BE NO ATTEMPT TO WITHDRAW WEAPONS FROM TRIBESMEN AS MANY CONSIDER THE CARRYING OF WEAPONS SYMBOL OF THEIR MANHOOD. NAYIF ADMITTED THAT LIGHT WEAPONS WERE SOMETIMES SMUGGLED ACROSS THE KINGDOM'S BORDERS BECAUSE THEY ARE SO LONG.

8. THE "GAZETTE" ALSO REPORTS THAT NAYIF WAS ASKED ABOUT RUMORS OF TROUBLE IN THE EASTERN PROVINCE AND ITS RELATION TO THE GRAND MOSQUE INCIDENT. NAYIF RESPONDED THAT THERE WAS NO RELATION BETWEEN THE TWO. A GROUP OF PEOPLE HAD DEMONSTRATED IN THE EAST AND HELD MARCHES. THE POLICE HAD BEEN ABLE TO DISPERSE THEM AT THE VERY BEGINNING AND

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"THERE WAS NOTHING ELSE TO BE MENTIONED ON THIS SUBJECT."  
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