

SIEGE OF MECCA

1 x 60 HD



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The year 1979 began with Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's return to Iran and the Islamic revolution, and ended with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. In between, Egypt signed a peace treaty with Israel to the outrage of the Arab countries, Saddam Hussein took power in Iraq and Pakistan's former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was hanged by Mohammed Zia ul-Haq who began the nuclear proliferation with India. This film lifts the veil on one of the best-hidden secrets of modern history: the 1979 Siege of the Grand Mosque in Mecca.

On November 20, 1979, at the peak of the annual Hajj pilgrimage, heavily armed Saudi fundamentalists stormed the Grand Mosque of Mecca, Islam's holiest shrine. 100,000 pilgrims were taken hostage and the Mosque was rigged with explosives. Led by Saudi preacher Juhayman al-Utaiby, the group made their demands: the immediate abdication of the Saudi royal family, the expulsion of all non-Muslims from the country and the return of uncompromising Islam and sharia law.

The world's attention was focused on the Iranian hostage crisis on the other side of the Persian Gulf. For three long weeks, the Siege of Mecca put Saudi Arabia on the verge of yet another Islamic revolution. A French Special Forces team finally resolved the crisis in a brutally efficient manner using a ton of tear gas. The manner in which the situation was handled outraged many Saudis, leaving a lasting impression on a 20-year-old Osama bin Laden who was among them.

Before 1979, the world had known Arab terrorism: but Carlos the Jackal and the groups responsible for Munich in 1972, the OPEC attack and many others were secular, their motivations highly political. Experts and secret service agencies acknowledge the Siege of Mecca as the beginning of religiously motivated, fundamentalist terrorism that almost brought down Saudi Arabia and ultimately marked the beginning of international religious terrorism as we know it today.

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CREDITS

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