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ACTION INR-00

INFO LOG-00 AMAD-00 INL-00 PDI-00 EUR-00 UTED-00 VCI-00  
 TEDE-00 IO-00 VCIE-00 NEA-00 OIC-00 PA-00 GIWI-00  
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O 121432Z JUN 06  
 FM AMEMBASSY RIYADH  
 TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8469  
 INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY  
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 AMEMBASSY AMMAN  
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 AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD  
 AMEMBASSY PARIS  
 AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV  
 AMCONSUL JERUSALEM  
 USMISSION USUN NEW YORK  
 HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL  
 WHITE HOUSE WASHINGTON DC

RELEASED IN FULL

UNCLAS RIYADH 004643

DEPT FOR INR/R/MR, NEA/ARPI, NEA/P, NEA/PPD, S/ES, PA  
 WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE  
 CINCCENT FOR CCPA  
 LONDON FOR TSOU  
 PARIS FOR ZEYA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: OPRC, KMDR, KPAO, SA

SUBJECT: GUANTANAMO MEDIA REACTION: Riyadh 06/12/2006

1. Summary. Coverage of the three suicides at Guantanamo in the Saudi print media began slowly on June 11 but picked up considerably on June 12. The tone of both coverage and editorial opinion was unfavorable toward the United States. End Summary.

2. On June 11 four Saudi papers carried the story. Influential Riyadh-based Al-Riyadh challenged the U.S. military's account of the incident describing it as "inaccurate." The paper cited the Vice President of the Saudi National Society for Human Rights, Muflah Al-Qhatani. Al-Qhatani suggested that those who died might have been tortured to death. Another member of the committee held the U.S. government responsible for the deaths and urged the

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Saudi government to establish a "neutral committee," from the UN and international organizations, to investigate the incident. Jeddah-based Al-Madina reported that detainee lawyer Katib Al-Shamari said that he felt the deaths could not be described as suicide. Al-Madina also noted that President Bush had expressed his deep concern over their death. Abha-based Okaz and Mecca-based Nedwa also carried the story.

3. On June 12, coverage picked up significantly. Headlines in all Saudi papers cast doubt that the deaths were suicides. Influential pan-Arab Al Hayat reported that Brigadier General Mansour Al-Turki, spokesman for the Ministry of Interior, said that his country is committed to bringing back all of its nationals who are detained at Guantanamo, and added that procedures are being implemented to claim the bodies of the two suicides. Jeddah-based Okaz, on its front page, quoted Minister of Interior Prince Naif, "We will know from the American officials the reasons for the death of A-Zahrani and Al-Otaibi." Many papers reported on the response of Shoura council members who condemned the mistreatment of prisoners, and said that President Bush's concern is not enough. They called for closure of the prison and the return of the detainees to their home countries. Bandar Al-Hajjar, Chief of the National Society for Human Rights said that the Americans are responsible for what happened. Abha-based moderate Al-Watan reported that the dead men's brothers claimed they had been killed, and said that they will sue the American Administration. Kateb Al Shammari, a lawyer appointed by the families of detainees, spoke to many newspapers and appeared on Al Arabiyah, and Al-Akhabariah TV, questioning the credibility of the American story.

4. English language daily Arab News ran a front page story under the headline "US Version of Gitmo Deaths Questioned" that reported the Ministry of Interior's announcement concerning the deaths. The article also reported that Muflah Al-Qhatani of the Human Rights society had demanded a neutral investigation and said: "The men could have been murdered or put under intense pressure forcing them to commit suicide." The report also mentioned detainee lawyer Kateb Fahad Al Shammari's statements holding the USG responsible for the deaths. English language daily Saudi Gazette carried a similar story on page 6 with an insert predicting the return of more detainees to the Kingdom. The Saudi Gazette also carried a wire service story calling the suicides "inevitable." Arab News carried, on page 10, an AP report entitled "Bodies at Gitmo Must be Treated Humanely: Bush."

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5. Editorial comment also increased on June 12. Moderate Al-Watan editorialized that the suicides would create a crack "not only in relations between the Democratic and Republican parties but also among parts of the Republican Party itself." It went on adding that "the storm [of angry reactions] will continue because of increasing violations of human rights by the American administration, especially by the Pentagon." An op-ed commentary entitled "Guantanamo another Face of Brutality" in conservative Al-Nadwa held that the bad reputation of the camp in Guantanamo had overtaken the reputation of the Nazi concentration camps. The columnist also said: "It was no surprise at all that

detainees attempted suicide. There were more than 40 suicide attempts." English language daily Arab News editorialized under the headline "Indictment" that the Bush administration should have yielded to world pressure on Guantanamo and needs to admit that the suicides were driven by desperation. The paper and its Arab language sister ASharq Al-Awsat featured a political cartoon depicting Uncle Sam with a bouquet of flowers attempting to walk in the direction of a sign labeled "Improving American Image in the Middle East" but being held back by a chain linking him to a uniformed figure labeled "Prisoners of Guantanamo." The Saudi Gazette's editorial took the same tone and closed with the comment that closing the prison and transferring the detainees to proper US legal jurisdiction could mitigate the negative perception the prison has created but such a step might be "already too late."

### Block Quotes

--Makkah's conservative Al-Nadwa carried an op-ed commentary by Al-Shami Al-Hebir (06/12):

#### Guantanamo another Face of Brutality

The name of the Guantanamo detention camp suggests nothing so much as its bad reputation because of the repeated brutal abuses and many immoral and inhuman practices all under the sponsorship of the one who claims to protect and guard noble values. Under these circumstances it was not strange at all that detainees would attempt suicide. There have been more than 40 suicide attempts [intended] to draw the attention of the world to what is going on inside the detention center... President Bush's concern is not sufficient; there must be practical steps to expedite the closure of the camp, whose reputation has overtaken the reputation of the Nazi

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concentration camps during the Second World War. Calls for closure of the detention center have not come only from the enemies of the U.S. but also from its friends, the American people and the world humanitarian organizations. President Bush instructed that the bodies be treated humanely. We wish he could also extend this gesture and show respect for human dignity of those who are alive.

--Abha's moderate Al-Watan editorialized (06/12):

American Administration, Prisoner of Guantanamo

The suicides of two Saudis and a Yemeni in Guantanamo create a fissure not only in relations between the Democratic and Republican parties but also among parts of the Republican Party itself... The bad reputation of Guantanamo has stained the face of America through practices that deviate from human rights and international agreements... The latest suicides were not the only ones but they were the only ones that succeeded. The detention center has seen tens of attempts in less than four year. This confirms that the methods of torture there exceed the limits that can be borne by any human being... The storm of angry reactions will continue because of the increased violation of human rights by the American administration especially by the Pentagon, under its current leadership...

--Jeddah English language daily Arab News editorialized (06/12):

Indictment

News of the first detainees to commit suicide in Guantanamo Bay -two men from Saudi Arabia and one from Yemen- has brought further condemnation of this isolated detention center... It is unfortunate and in this particular case too late that the Bush administration has not been listening, or if it has, then ...has been unwilling to bend... These deaths reflect desperation for a basic human need -- a need for justice, a need to have someone hear what these incarcerated people have to say, then be duly punished if a crime has been committed or be set free.

--Jeddah English Language daily Saudi Gazette editorialized (06/12):

Gitmo Suicides

That the three suicides were a final act of desperation by men held without charge or trial for years does not appear to have crossed Admiral Harris's mind. Guantanamo represents a challenge to the vision the United States wants to present of itself to the rest of the world and one which the

prison's closure and the transfer of detainees to proper US legal jurisdiction might go some way to mitigate if it is not already too late. UNCLASSIFIED

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