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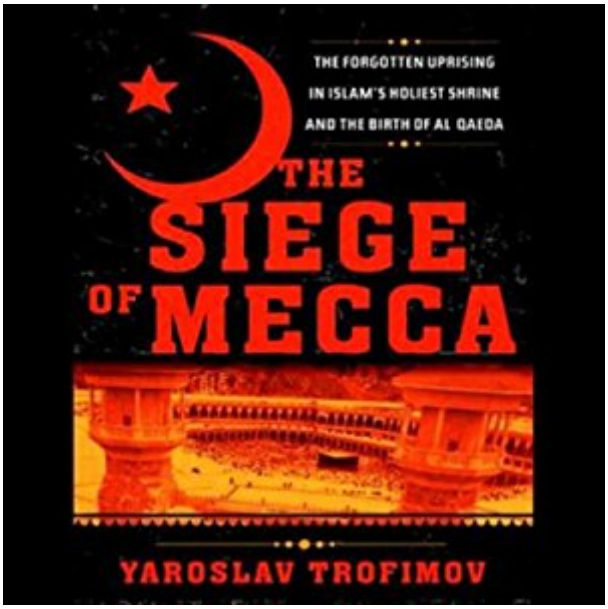
# The Siege Of Mecca: The Forgotten Uprising In Islam's Holiest Shrine & The Birth Of Al-Qaeda

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## Synopsis

On November 20, 1979, worldwide attention was focused on Tehran, where the Iranian hostage crisis was entering its third week. The same morning-the first of a new Muslim century-hundreds of gunmen stunned the world by seizing Islam's holiest shrine, the Grand Mosque in Mecca. Armed with rifles that they had smuggled inside coffins, these men came from more than a dozen countries, launching the first operation of global jihad in modern times. Led by a Saudi preacher named Juhayman al Uteybi, they believed that the Saudi royal family had become a craven servant of American infidels and sought a return to the glory of uncompromising Islam. With nearly 100,000 worshippers trapped inside the holy compound, Mecca's bloody siege lasted two weeks, inflaming Muslim rage against the United States and causing hundreds of deaths.Despite U.S. assistance, the Saudi royal family proved haplessly incapable of dislodging the occupier, whose ranks included American converts to Islam. In Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini blamed the Great Satan-the United States-for defiling the shrine, prompting mobs to storm and torch American embassies in Pakistan and Libya. The desperate Saudis finally enlisted the help of French commandos led by Captain Paul Barril, who prepared the final assault and supplied the poison gas that knocked out the insurgents. Though most captured gunmen were quickly beheaded, the Saudi royal family responded to this unprecedented challenge by compromising with the rebels' supporters among the kingdom's most senior clerics, helping them nurture and export Juhayman's violent brand of Islam around the world.This dramatic and immensely consequential story was barely covered in the press in the pre-CNN, pre–Al Jazeera days, as Saudi Arabia imposed an information blackout and kept foreign correspondents away. Yaroslav Trofimov now penetrates this veil of silence, interviewing for the first time scores of direct participants in the siege, including former terrorists, and drawing on hundreds of documents that were declassified upon his request. Written with the pacing, detail, and suspense of a real-life thriller, The Siege of Mecca reveals how Saudi reaction to the uprising in Mecca set free the forces that produced the attacks of 9/11 and the harrowing circumstances that surround us today. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Reading just like a classic thriller written by the likes of Graham Greene or John Le Carre, Wall Street Journal reporter Yaroslav Trofimov's "The Siege of Mecca" is an important, comprehensive examination of the events leading up to the two-week siege of Mecca's Grand Mosque, the siege of itself, and subsequent events afterwards, which would lead inexorably to the rise of Al-Qaeda and the spectacular 9/11/01 terrorist attacks upon the United States. This is without question, an important event not only in contemporary Islam, but for the world too, and yet it is one that has been ignored these past few decades. Now, finally, the untold story of the 11/20/79 seizure of the Grand Mosque, has been pieced together by Trofimov, who has written what ought to be regarded as one of the most important books of the year. Surprisingly, Trofimov covers much terrain in what proves to be a relatively terse book on this bloody episode in recent Saudi Arabian history, emphasizing the origins, but even, the aftermath of this attack, which, he asserts was the first of many bloody incidents of Islamofascist terror leading up to the 9/11/01 terrorist attacks.Trofimov opens with a brief, but concise, history of both the Saudi royal family, emphasizing its 20th Century history and, especially, of the fundamentalist Sunni Islam sect known as Wahhabism; a sect which has been preaching Islamic Jihad (`Holy War") against the Western infidels encroaching upon Middle Eastern land for centuries.

November 20, 1979 was the first day of Islam's year 1400, and the beginning of the third week of the Iranian hostage situation. Much less well known, though probably more important, it also brought the siege of the Grand Mosque in Mecca, and launched modern jihad. "The Siege of Mecca" tells that story, despite the closed Saudi Arabian society and its highly restricted coverage of the event - at least partly because the royal family's response was seen as incompetent and lessening loyalty among its citizens.Mixing with the locals inside the mosque were 100,000 Muslims from all over the world. Hidden among them were hundreds of rebels, mostly Saudis of Bedouin stock. They smuggled in arms inside caskets supposedly carrying dead relatives brought for

blessing.Ragged-looking rebels chained shut and guarded all 51 gates as soon as the regular prayers ended. Machine-gun nests were set up atop the shrine's 7 minarets. The Saudis imposed a communications blackout and its soldiers were reluctant to act for fear of condemnation for fighting fellow Muslims in a holy place. Obtaining that essential religious support required that the Saudi rulers commit to stricter Islamic observation - no more women on TV, billions to be spent spreading rigid Wahhabi Islam around the world, etc.The Saudi Army then blasted the snipers out of the minarets (using U.S. Army TOW missiles), and then brought in armored personnel carriers to clear out the rebels in the above-ground portion of the mosque. Unfortunately, the mosque had a seemingly impenetrable underground labyrinth of rooms and tunnels that still housed rebels, and the Saudis were unable to dislodge them.Jordan volunteered help, but was declined because of the site's history - originally taken from Jordan.

I was prepared to dislike this book, suspecting an "action pack thriller", full of loopy historical inaccuracies, if not outright fantasy - all because of the jarring black and red cover. Instead I found a lean, scholarly, and almost certainly dispassionately accurate account of one of the more important and not very well understood events in the last quarter of the 20th Century. It is written in a fast-paced action style, flipping back and forth among the major actors in this drama, but that enhances and does not hinder his story. Ramifications of this siege are affecting us today.Mr. Trofimov knows his subject well, amazingly well. He deftly describes the numerous disparate historical antecedents to the taking of the mosque by Islamic fanatics, and the reactions of the major actors. The Ikhwan, the religious brotherhood which was instrumental in Abdul Aziz's conquest and consolidation of what would be the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and his decision that they overstepped their limits, and so he had to mow them down with borrowed British machine guns in the early `30's, leading to a sense of martyrdom in the remnants of the defeated communities. America was tired of "foreign adventures," Vietnam being the prime reason, and therefore the CIA was severely constrained, with the coups it directed in Chile and Iran very much in mind. There was the Kingdom itself, being overwhelmed by the "future shock" of oil revenues, and the attendant rapid "modernization," with its own ills, inevitably leaving some people behindAs with many events of this magnitude, ironies abound; they are described but not overplayed.

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