

THE DRIVERS OF INSECURITY IN MAURITANIA

Anouar Boukhars

MIDDLE EAST | APRIL 2012

CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT

FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE

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Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
Publications Department
1779 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20036
Tel. +1 202-483-7600
Fax: +1 202-483-1840
www.CarnegieEndowment.org

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Summary

The trans-Saharan region is emerging as a hotbed of instability and insecurity. A confluence of forces, from the revolts in North Africa and the proliferation of weapons to transnational trafficking of illicit goods and terrorist activity led by Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, are generating acute interest in this part of the world.

Born dirt poor and with a weak sense of common identity, states in this region have confronted daunting developmental challenges. Governments are chronically weak with feeble political institutions, ethno-political tensions run high, essential services and public goods are lacking, and corruption is endemic. Battling internal turmoil, these states exhibit a limited capacity to monitor their borders and maintain a monopoly on the legitimate use of force, with organized crime stepping in to fill the void.

Mauritania epitomizes the risks that these unstable states with weak capabilities pose to regional and international security. Three stresses emerge as critical to Mauritania's current state of insecurity: the weakness and corruption of state institutions; sociopolitical tensions rooted in old tribal structures and historical ethno-racial divisions; and the growing radicalization of Mauritanian youth. The problem of homegrown radicalization is further compounded by its interconnectedness with transnational forces like illicit trafficking and regional terrorist networks. These factors reinforce each other, creating a vicious circle that must be broken in order to restore some stability.

For Mauritania to break the cycle, the government needs to bolster its anti-corruption initiatives, professionalize its security apparatus, promote social justice, and improve the plight of those at the bottom of the socioeconomic pyramid. Citizens' level of political inclusion and cultural rights needs to be enhanced, and the 2007 legalization of the moderate Islamist party, Tawassoul, is only one step toward promoting engagement and broadening the system of participation. And with a lack of access to quality education disproportionately affecting citizens that are already poor and marginalized, further exacerbating their feelings of anger at the system that could lead to radicalization, reforms in this sector are urgently needed. International actors should support the government's education reform efforts.

Promoting good governance and reinforcing the state's capacity is critical to improving economic conditions and building people's trust in Mauritania's national institutions. But transforming the state-society compact will not be easy or quick. Such institutional transformation requires responsible national

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leadership as well as determined international donors willing to link economic assistance to improvement in human security. President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz has declared his commitment to improving public administration and deepening democratization. It is only fair that the United States and Europe hold him to his promises.

Introduction

Mauritania is an increasingly fragile state, with rising levels of insecurity conducive to homegrown violent extremism and cross-border criminal and terrorist activity. Internal stresses combine with external spoiler factors to sap the capacity of an already weak state to respond.

This fragility is not only a concern for Mauritania's citizens and those seeking to promote development in the country, but it is also a threat to broader efforts to stabilize the Sahel region by preventing conflict and promoting recovery. Specifically, it undermines the counterterrorism efforts that have been a high priority for Western governments and international donors.

Mauritania is unfortunately not the only Sahelian country at risk of descending into Hobbesian anarchy—with serious consequences for the region's stability and world security. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon raised such specter when he most recently warned the Security Council that the region might soon be faced with “a crisis of the magnitude of the one in the Horn of Africa.” The increasing reach and influence of organized crime in both state apparatuses and broader societies, a looming food crisis, and the suspected links between terrorist organizations, criminal networks, and insurgent ethnic groups threaten to reverse fragile democratic gains and hard-won peace-building progress in countries like Mali, Niger, and Mauritania. These forces could undermine social hierarchies and the very fabric of social cohesion.

These societies are among the poorest in the world, with absolute poverty rates exceeding 50 percent. Governments are chronically weak and indicators of state fragility are rife. States' penetration of society is limited—political institutions are feeble, essential services and public goods are lacking, tax bases are narrow due to the size of informal economies and endemic corruption, and there is cultural and ethnic resistance to state authority and territorial control. These governments also exhibit a limited capacity to monitor their borders and maintain a monopoly on the legitimate use of force.

In many ways, this precariousness dates to the birth of the modern Sahelian nation-state. Born dirt poor and with a weak sense of common identity, these states were soon confronted with daunting developmental challenges—worsened and at times induced by severe and recurring droughts and political and institutional instability, all of which negatively affected the ability of governments to provide for the political and economic needs of their people. These states are, of course, all varied in their capability to confront the stresses they face, but none so far has managed to overcome its fragility.

Mauritania is a useful case study in analyzing the nature and causes of state fragility and how they relate to the risks of internal instability. It is also a good place to evaluate the capacity of a fragile state to maintain itself in the face of significant stresses and limited resources. The conclusions reached here are in part based on interviews with clerics, journalists, civil society actors, and government representatives I conducted during a field visit to Mauritania in January 2012.

Internal Stresses

Three stresses emerged as critical in my interviews with a range of actors in Mauritania: the weakness and corruption of state institutions; sociopolitical tensions rooted in old tribal structures and historical ethno-racial divisions; and the growing radicalization of Mauritanian youth. These three factors reinforce each other, creating a vicious circle that must be broken in order to restore some stability.

Institutional Weakness and Corruption

All of my interviewees identified pervasive corruption and weak governance as critical sources of popular dissatisfaction, leading to social friction, tension, and potentially instability. A number of these interlocutors also affirmed that a link seems to exist between corruption, state fragility, and illicit activity. The roots of these trends run deep. The state has faced a precarious confluence of forces since its independence in 1960 that has given rise to the contemporary insecurity the country confronts. Unable to establish a modern system of governance, the state found itself undermined by the traditional ethno-racial tensions, tribal identities, and other forms of societal divisions that some leaders and local power brokers—sometimes with regional connections to smugglers or insurgents—inflamed and exploited in the scramble for control over the channels that distribute public resources (such as land attribution) or at least a share of the lucrative informal sectors of the economy (such as trafficking and contraband)

The trajectory that Mauritania has followed since independence epitomizes that of other Sahelian countries that were hampered by a colonial legacy that institutionalized political privilege along ethnic lines and kept the country extremely underdeveloped. In 1960, the country had no paved roads, a tiny number of schools, and a dearth of professionals and qualified labor.¹ With the exception of the French-exploited minefield in the town of Zouerat and the small fishing port of Nouadhibou, small-scale agriculture and nomadic herding formed the backbone of the economy.

This system was not able to generate sufficient tax revenue to support the basic economic functions of the state. Worse, the state had neither the capacity

nor the will to tax these two activities; it is, after all, hard to collect from nomads dispersed over large swaths of Mauritanian territory. It is also politically risky to try to impose taxes on agriculture, as the sector is controlled by powerful local notables with strong connections to state officials. And in a vicious circle, since it could not deliver social and economic development, the government lacked the popular legitimacy and the support of influential traditional elites necessary to enforce tax collection.²

The greatest weakness of the postcolonial government was this inability to raise enough tax revenue to begin the process of state building. Its reliance on foreign aid removed the incentive to invest in institutional development and enlarge the tax base, further impairing Mauritania's state-building efforts. These factors affected the overall governance capability of the state and created a permanent disconnect between the people and the authorities in the capital, Nouakchott.

Moreover, Mauritania lacks effective countervailing forces to check the misuse of power by influential power brokers within the military and tribal clans. After its liberalization in 1991, the party system became more fractured and factionalized than ever. With the exception of the few ideologically driven parties, mainly Islamists, the political system remains dominated by interest groups loosely linked by tribe, sect, ethnicity, or region. As described in the 2012 Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) country report for Mauritania, "These channels and networks are very fluid, multifaceted and often changing, but they constitute the principal way by which the political system is structured below the formal level of institutions."³

Wherever the state's presence is minimal—especially in the peripheral parts of the country—the opportunities for different stakeholders to pursue self-interested goals increase. The powerful governors, for example, "are often involved in local political, tribal or factional intrigues without proper monitoring from the center," as the 2010 BTI country report for Mauritania put it.⁴

At the center itself, political infighting and factional rivalries among senior military officers undermine the institutional capacity of the government and make coordination of policies between ministries and departments very difficult. The brief tenure of President Ould Cheikh Abdellahi (seventeen months in office), who in 2007 won the first democratic election since independence, was partially undermined by political factions supporting the former regime. Senior military officers and powerful political and tribal supporters of the former regime were suspected of instigating clashes between the executive and the legislature to undermine the authority of the civilian leadership. By helping create disorder and political paralysis, the military found the right pretext to intervene and stage a coup in August 2008. Factional struggles within the

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military at times led to personnel shake-ups in top command positions, as was seen following the coups of 2005 and 2008, but the oligopolistic order itself has not changed much.

In this clientelistic system, democratic and opposition forces are at a serious disadvantage. The dominant individuals and groups in parliament always belong to the ruling party and enjoy the support of the military. The same patterns and antidemocratic leanings exist in the bureaucracy and the civil service, as was evidenced by their endorsement of the 2008 coup.

This situation extends to the economic realm as well. Only a few individuals, families, and clans with ties to factions within the military dominate the most important sectors of the economy (for instance, imports and exports, banks, and agribusiness). Several reports, including those produced by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), have highlighted the hurdles that enterprises face in operating in the Mauritanian market. As the BTI 2012 report for Mauritania explains, the hurdles stem from “the power of the oligopolistic conglomerates which dominate all lucrative markets (banking, fishery, public infrastructure and construction, the import and export of consumer goods and foodstuffs, telecommunications, insurance, and so on).”⁵

The judiciary, which in theory is tasked with delivering justice, is also politicized and hampered by customary mechanisms and an informal system dominated by influential groups. Furthermore, the judicial and regulatory arms of the state are underfinanced. Wherever these institutions have an actual physical

presence, they are inept and more often than not compromised. In some instances, the government has abdicated its duty to govern, as is the case of health care and education—programs that would collapse without funding from international donors.⁶

This failure to provide basic social services and enforce the rule of law naturally affects the credibility of the state.

This credibility problem is further compounded by human rights abuses, the military’s dominance of power, and gross levels of endemic corruption. Mauritania ranks 143rd out of 178 countries on Transparency International’s 2010 Corruption Perceptions Index. That corruption undermines poverty reduction, exacerbates existing shortfalls in economic opportunities, and facilitates the rise of illegal economic flows.

The state’s loss of legitimacy engenders all forms of negative consequences on stability, foremost among them the risk of seeing citizens shift their allegiance to malevolent nonstate actors such as drug traffickers and violent extremists. In other words, capacity and legitimacy can be mutually reinforcing, contributing to either a virtuous or a vicious circle whereby weak state capacity weakens legitimacy, and vice versa, exacerbating state fragility.⁷ As Mauritanian ambassador Ould Dedach rightly stated, “the contraction of [the] nation-state and its failure to realize economic development and real social harmony, and its alienation

The failure to provide basic social services and enforce the rule of law naturally affects the credibility of the state.

from citizens have aggravated the problem in Sahel, especially as the region's peoples haven't known the national state throughout their long history."⁸

Mauritania's new president, Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, has vowed to restore trust in the country's public institutions and address the structural challenges that have heightened the state's vulnerability to destabilization. A new code of ethics for public servants was introduced with the desired goal of moralizing the activities of the administration, and the Investigations Unit of the Office of the Inspector General, created in 2005, launched several criminal investigations of agencies suspected of waste, fraud, and misappropriation of state funds. The result was the prosecution (the chairs of the National Human Rights Commission and of the national anti-AIDS agency were charged with corrupt practices) or dismissal of senior civil servants and government officials, including the governors of Nouakchott and Nouadhibou, and the heads of major state agencies, such as the Central Commission of Public Contracts and the public microcredit agency, Procapec.⁹

While applauded by the public, this campaign to minimize corruption and safeguard public finances still falls short of delivering improved economic governance. A number of companies or state agencies directed by allies of the president and his supporters (especially military officers) have so far escaped the scrutiny of the inspector general.¹⁰ Indeed, many of my interviewees doubt that the president has the political will to take on the vested interests of a small but powerful coalition of dominant status quo stakeholders and interest groups. The cynics, and there are many of them, believe that the investigations and judicial pursuits are politically motivated and target only the political enemies of the ruling faction in power. As his predecessors did, this president will also foster his allies' special interests and thus perpetuate the clientelistic system on which political survival is ultimately based.

Sociopolitical Tensions

The second source of insecurity resides in the stratified nature of Mauritanian society. Since it was established, the country has been divided along ethno-racial lines, which has increased the salience of identity-based conflict. The failure of the postcolonial state to create a unifying national identity based on inclusion, participation, and respect for diversity is a distinct cause of protracted tension and conflict in the country.

In particular, confrontations in Mauritania between Arab and black Africans (the non-Arabic-speaking minorities originally from the tribes found on both shores of the Senegal River, which separates Senegal from Mauritania) have deep roots. In the 1960s, the new regime began Arabicizing the education system and reducing the numerical dominance of black Africans in the administration to their proportion in the population.¹¹ The French colonial powers

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had privileged black Africans in administrative and other governmental posts, though they accounted for only one-third of the population. This Arabization program led to serious conflicts that degenerated into unrest, as happened in 1966 when riots broke out in response to the government's decision to make Arabic compulsory in secondary schools.

In the 1980s tensions reemerged when the regime introduced land reforms to deal with the problem of desertification, moving Arab herders closer toward the banks of the Senegal River and the black African farmers living there.¹² Black Africans perceived the government's move as yet another attempt to advance the interests of one ethnic and linguistic group at their expense, by depriving them of their land and the important resources of the river basin. Most controversially, the 1983 Law on Land Reform gave the state the right to expropriate private land (with due compensation) deemed necessary for "economic and social development needs." Local power brokers, especially the regional governors entrusted with "attribution of property rights," abused those powers.¹³

The bloody events of 1989 are but a manifestation of the difficulty that Mauritania—and indeed most societies in the Sahel with multiple ethnicities, tribes, and sects—has faced in establishing the conditions for intergroup coexistence. That year a border dispute between Mauritania and Senegal over herders' grazing rights quickly degenerated into mutual ethnicity-based repatriations and at times expulsions. The event exposed the historic cultural tension between Arab and black Africans and competition over power and resources.¹⁴ Radical forces took advantage of domestic power struggles to mobilize ethnic interest groups and majority opinion against fears of the "other," exacerbating ethnic and racial rivalries. Some of the worst killings and violent expulsions were the works of these officials and other elements in society.

In Mauritania, zealous government officials whipped up fears of black power and portrayed the border dispute as part of the struggle to correct the demographic imbalances and limit the losses inflicted by French colonialism. Black Africans were uprooted and expelled from their villages.¹⁵ The Mauritanian army was "cleansed" too of some 500 soldiers suspected of weak loyalties to the established order. In total, between 40,000 and 60,000 black Africans (Mauritanian citizens from the Halpulaar, Wolof, Soninke, and Bamana ethnic groups) were expelled to Senegal and another 15,000 to 20,000 to Mali.

The economic situation of the black African communities is not worse than the Bidhan (white Moors) of Arab-Berber extraction who make up the dominant racial group in Mauritania, comprising about one-third of the population. There are many poor white Mauritians in urban shantytowns and villages.¹⁶ But the problem for the non-Arabic-speaking minorities is that "their situation is structurally precarious," according to the 2010 BTI country report. Suspected by the "Bidhan power-holders," they "have always run the risk of being targeted by political and economic forms of punishment."¹⁷

The Haratin, the so-called black Moors who are Arabic-speaking, dark-skinned descendants of slaves, were not subjected to this systematic campaign of ethnic expulsion.¹⁸ Making up at least 40 percent of Mauritania's 3.1 million inhabitants, the Haratin came in great numbers to Nouakchott during the 1973–1990 droughts.¹⁹ They have assimilated into Arab culture and tend to side with the Bidhan, which does not mean, however, that the Haratin are well off. They rank at the bottom of the pyramid. Most Haratin are illiterate, are considered second-class citizens, and face severe socioeconomic conditions. They are denied basic rights and suffer from discrimination in various aspects of life.

A number of organizations have tried to raise domestic and international awareness of the severe plight of the Haratin as well as mobilize this community to pressure the government to address their status. The government's efforts have thus far been wanting. Corrupt implementation by local political leaders derailed a well-meaning policy to eradicate squatter settlements (*gazra*) in large cities, especially in and around Nouakchott. As a result, political scientist Cédric Jourde writes, “thousands of poor families, most of whom are from the low-caste Haratin, are being ejected from the ‘gazra’. Their land, the value of which is very high around Nouakchott, is then bought by connected people who can buy members of the survey commission.”²⁰ Additionally, the government recently established a “program for the prevention of conflicts and the consolidation of social cohesion,” but its impact has been very limited so far.²¹ The integration of Haratin remains one of the major challenges facing Mauritania.

Ethnic-based tensions over access to economic resources are symptomatic of the asymmetric power dynamics that cripple culturally plural states and complicate efforts at intercommunal coexistence and democratization. In any country where significant minority groups are discriminated against and poor governance prevails, it becomes hard to transcend identity cleavages and foster a sense of belonging to the nation. In Mauritania, the pervasiveness of ethnic identity-based politics leads to perpetual ethnic agitation.

In 2008, these tensions once again surfaced in the form of conflict over land. Clashes broke out “between local communities and local state authorities which had authorized the purchase of land titles by business persons in the Senegal River Valley,” as described in the 2010 BTI.²² The same problem occurred in 2010 when reports emerged that speculators were selling property rights on the black market designed to benefit the dwellers of Nouakchott's biggest shantytowns.

Protracted identity conflicts erupted in violence in March 2010 between black Africans and Arabic-speaking students after a statement made by the

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prime minister and the minister of culture referred to Arabic as a dominant language. And in late 2011, riots broke out in protest against a controversial civil census that the government said was designed to “give the country a modern and accurate biometric census as a step on the way to reforms.”²³ Black Africans, especially in the south, believed the census to be “racist” and “discriminatory.” Some genuinely feared that if they failed to provide documents (such as the death certificates of great-grandparents) proving their nationality, they might be deported, as happened in 1989. “How can you understand other than the fact that we are being targeted by this census when the commission of inquiry for instance asks a Negro-Mauritanian to prove his ‘Mauritanian-

ness’ by talking in Hassanya [a Moorish dialect] or reciting part of the Koran?” said Dia Gando, an activist with Don’t Touch My Nationality.²⁴

In the last few years, however, there has been a growing emphasis on conflict prevention and ethnic reconciliation. In 2007, the government took the unprecedented step of calling on the black African citizens who were expelled from the country in 1989 to return home from their exile

in Senegal and Mali. Since the beginning of this process of voluntary repatriation, over 20,000 refugees have returned. Granted, all of those returns did not take place after 2007—refugees began returning to Mauritania in 1993 when diplomatic relations between Senegal and Mauritania improved.

In another attempt to redress past wrongs and come to terms with the state’s legacy, in 2010 the current president publicly acknowledged the legitimacy of the deep-seated grievances felt by black Africans. Then in March 2012, parliament passed a number of constitutional amendments, affirming the multiethnic character of the state, criminalizing slavery (as already stated in a 2007 law), and prohibiting military coups. By recognizing the cultural and linguistic character of the black African polity and criminalizing extra-constitutional takeovers of the state, President Aziz wanted to contain the mobilization of black Africans, manage rising popular discontent with his rule, and send a strong signal that he wants a clean break with a past often marred by regular military interventions (out of seven leaders to rule Mauritania since independence, seven were military men) and ethno-racial conflict. Still, the state has many challenges to overcome before it can address its ethnic security dilemma and resolve the much-broader issues of democratic governance, rights, and citizenship.

Internal Radicalization

The third internal stress in Mauritania emanates from violent extremism. The country initially seemed resistant to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb’s (AQIM’s) strategic ambition for tapping into the anger of the legions of young Mauritians frustrated by poor job prospects, injustice, corruption, and more. Before his ouster in 2005, President Maaouya Ould Sidi Ahmed Taya

repeatedly warned of the presence of dormant terrorist cells in the country, but very few Mauritians took him seriously, as he was notorious for instrumentalizing threats from within and without to delegitimize his political opponents, especially moderate Islamists whom he suppressed and excluded from the political system. Several incidences since June 2005—when a deadly attack perpetrated by AQIM against the Lemgheity barracks in the northeastern part of the country killed fifteen Mauritanian soldiers and wounded 39 others—have brought home the uncomfortable realization that Mauritania is a target of extremist armed groups and that disaffected youth might be at risk of falling prey to the lure of violent extremism.²⁵

Initially, Mauritians blamed a spike in abductions and killings of foreigners and the country's own soldiers on foreign AQIM actors. That reluctance to acknowledge the risk of youths' participation in violent extremism largely disappeared when evidence emerged that since late 2005 a few dozen Mauritians have become important players in AQIM or have gone through military and ideological training in the militant camps of northern Mali and Algeria. Numerous arrests in Nouakchott in 2008 demonstrated the extent of the links between Mauritanian youths and AQIM.

The threat should not be overstated. The number of youths recruited into AQIM remains very small and the attacks perpetrated or foiled on Mauritanian soil lack sophistication. AQIM's capabilities are extremely limited in the country and its affiliated networks are disorganized and weak. The government's aggressive pursuit and imprisonment of suspected violent extremists has temporarily disrupted the growth of a nascent militant movement from taking root in Mauritania. And several other elements have helped to stem the rise of extremism in the country, including tribalism and a pluralistic society that generally practices an open and moderate form of Islam.

But the penetration of imported Salafi ideas into Mauritanian society has impacted Mauritians' culture of tolerance and particularistic Islamic identity. That influence is clearly visible in an ever-more-public display of austere piety and in rising social pressures for conformity to ritual purity and rigid religious commandments. More perniciously, some of the Salafi ideas have contributed to the radicalization of religious discourse, fueling the contemporary wave of extremism in Mauritania.

Ironically, it was the state that encouraged the spread of Salafi ideas without seeming to appreciate that such a policy risked diluting its own monopoly on Islamic interpretation. The Arabization of education, for example, necessitated the importation of teachers from Egypt and the Near East. Those scholars exercised considerable influence over the introduction, reform, and interpretation of Islamic laws, and they provided the needed ideological depth for the upsurge in the Arabist/Islamist trend in Mauritania. Islamism also thrived

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thanks to financial donations and incentives coming from the Persian Gulf, particularly from Saudi Arabia, which funded mosques, Islamic study centers, and *mahadras* (religious schools) to propagate its own rigid version of Islam. The influence of Mauriticians coming back from the Gulf also contributed to the spread of Wahhabism.

Several of my interlocutors singled out these institutions as conduits for material and ideological support to radical Islamists. Some Saudi-influenced *mahadras*, particularly in the Trarza region, were especially cited as liable to produce fundamentalists and militant recruits. According to journalist Mohamed Mahmoud Abul Maali, the *mahadras* and mosques can become important social networks that bind together students that are already alienated and isolated from their surroundings. In this instance, strong bonds of brotherhood are forged and predate radicalization of thought and commitment to violence. Charismatic preachers play a crucial role in ideological formation and in reinforcing group solidarity and norms.

The *mahadra* network more often than not expands beyond its space, developing and spreading its reach through mechanisms like the Internet.²⁶ It is for this and other reasons that there is a widespread assumption that a connection exists between the important role that *mahadra* schooling generally occupies in the educational landscape and rising militancy in the country.

The majority of *mahadras*, however, do not propagate violent ideologies, and they cater to a sizeable population that is left behind by a failing educational

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system. It would therefore be a mistake to stigmatize their graduates—graduates who often have a hard time finding employment opportunities. Mauritania's biggest problem is not *mahadras* but the lack of access to education and the underperformance of the educational system.

The level of education a person attains appears to be an indicator of the risk that he will turn to violent extremism.²⁷ The Mauriticians who have been arrested for terrorism

offenses are young—aged sixteen to twenty-four—poor, speak only Arabic, and possess little education. Indeed, only a few completed high school while most failed to complete secondary school. Unlike many leading figures in terrorist organizations who are well-educated, no Mauritanian violent extremists that have been arrested thus far hold higher degrees, said one interviewee, professor Moctar Mohamed Cheikhouna.²⁸ The question of how low levels of education—often the result of poor performance in school, which leads to dropping out or expulsion—and its logical consequence, a lack of integration into the job market, contributes to extremism in Mauritania is therefore an obvious topic that merits further attention.

That risk is heightened when combined with other driving factors, such as the fragmentation of social structures and widespread feelings of unfairness.

Indeed, all my interviewees in Nouakchott identified a connection between feelings of injustice and violent extremism. These pervasive feelings of injustice are generated by anger about the treatment of Muslims in Palestine and other theaters of conflict and outrage at the obscene levels of corruption of the Mauritanian political elite. Journalist Mohamed Mahmoud Abul Maali said that in his opinion, injustice breeds conflict and invariably fuels the flames of revenge and reciprocal violence. At each instance, he said, the main driving force behind the emergence of violent extremist movements was foreign military occupation or brutal repression of Islamists. This pattern was noticeable in the 1980s in Lebanon and Afghanistan and confirmed in the decades that followed in Iraq. Throughout the 1990s, Algerian terrorists could not recruit regionally or in Mauritania specifically, but that changed after the invasion of Iraq. Other interlocutors, mostly imams and religious scholars, noted that the first extremists in Islam's history were Khawarij who revolted against what they considered political oppression of the Umayyad dynasty.²⁹

All of my interviewees painted the same profile of violent extremists in the country—young males, living on the periphery of Nouakchott where social fragmentation permeates poor neighborhoods, as evidenced by high divorce rates and delinquency.³⁰ This leads to a decline in the social cohesion at the community level and an exacerbation in social exclusion, said professor Yahya Ould El Bara.³¹ Most of those who have been arrested on charges of extremism were stuck in a vicious cycle of social fragmentation, social exclusion, and human insecurity. Most followed the same trajectory: After failing at school, they were drawn into extremism through radical preaching. All blame their plight on the corruption of the state and its serious deficiencies of governance. Violent extremist groups in Internet forums, mosques, and prisons have taken full advantage of the dissolution of these societal controls and the pervasive marginality of significant numbers of youths to lure them into extremism. The groups not only magnify the youths' grievances and whip up their frustrations and anger at an unjust domestic system and unfair international order, they also provide them with a way to rectify those injustices through violence. The extremist organizations help empower those marginalized by society.³²

So far, most of the recruits into the extremist networks have been white Moors, but there is growing concern that other racial groups, especially the Haratin, might be vulnerable to radicalization as well.³³ Having suffered structural injustices and subjugation, members of Mauritania's large Haratin population have been lured by the egalitarian and anti-traditionalist rhetoric of the Islamists. By contrast, the Islam of the Qadiriya and the Tijaniyya Sufi brotherhoods is tainted in the eyes of these oppressed Mauritanians due to those brotherhoods' close association with a rigid caste system.

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The Tablighi movement, a transnational Islamist group that preaches re-Islamization of society through nonviolent means and opposes ethnic divisions, has made inroads among the Haratin population. More worrisome for Mauritanian authorities is the fear that some Haratin might be tempted by the message of violent extremist movements who also denounce the stratification of society. Many terrorists do not act out of religious zealotry alone but instead act in reaction to a system they perceive as unjust and oppressive. Al-Qaeda thrives on manipulating people who are hungry for social justice—and that might be one of the reasons why the only two Mauritanian suicide bombers (so far) have been Haratins. A U.S. National Counter Terrorism Center terrorism bulletin reported in 2009 that AQIM leader Mokhtar Belmokhtar “wanted to attract black African recruits because they would agree more readily than Arabs to becoming suicide bombers and because poor economic and social conditions made them ripe for recruitment.”³⁴

Interestingly, AQIM has failed to attract any recruits among the Halpulaar, Soninke, and Wolof. In the past, similar struggles for social justice based on ethno-racial identity have typically pushed these groups further toward the fringes of society. It is only natural that there is a high level of distrust between black Africans and AQIM, a movement led and dominated by Arabs. The non-Arabic-speaking black Africans minorities are also not particularly drawn to Islamism more broadly. The Halpulaar, Wolof, Soninke, and Bamana “conceive of Islamism as a reincarnation of an older ‘Arab nationalist’ ideology that favors the ‘Arabness’ of Mauritania to the detriment of its non-Arab communities,” as Cédric Jourde rightly points out.³⁵

The Mauritanian government has undertaken several steps and initiatives to combat extremism. In addition to improving its fighting capability and modernizing its military equipment through the acquisition of high-performance aircraft and other matériel, the government has bolstered its legal system. New antiterrorism legislation tries to balance security and the rule of law, as establishing the legitimacy of counterterrorism laws is essential to gaining popular support for prosecuting the country’s war on extremism and terrorism.

The government has also tried to delegitimize the ideological justifications for radicalism by hiring hundreds of new imams to preach in the country’s mosques as well as engage extremist prisoners through a dialogue with state-sponsored Islamist scholars and clerics.³⁶ The goal is to rehabilitate violent extremists as well as to demobilize and deradicalize potential recruits. According to Mohamed Mahmoud Abul Maali, the program has been very effective, leading to the repentance of dozens of former radicals. There has been only one case of recidivism out of the 40 to 50 people who have been released from prison, he said.

External Stresses: Drug Traffickers, AQIM, and Arms Dealers

The problem of homegrown radicalization in Mauritania is further compounded by its interconnectedness with transnational factors like illicit trafficking and regional terrorist networks. The country has traditionally played a central part in trans-Saharan trade as well as cross-cultural and religious exchanges and influences. Due to its location and vast and porous borders, Mauritania has been especially vulnerable to all kinds of trafficking, including arms. That has also put the country at risk of becoming a major transit route for global cocaine trafficking. Leaked confidential documents from the U.S. embassy in Nouakchott reveal such concern and raise the specter of Mauritania becoming a new drug-trafficking hub.³⁷

Such a development would be troubling in any country, but that is particularly true for Mauritania, which suffers from serious deficits in governance and an easy availability of arms. The insecurity is even more pronounced in the north of the country given its proximity to the Western Sahara, a conflict-ridden territory. Cross-border traffic of illicit products with the Western Sahara has been a booming industry, with the Polisario Front, which is fighting for the Western Sahara's independence from Morocco, dominating the supply side of arms to Mauritania.³⁸ A 2008 report by the Mauritanian Department of National Security estimates that the number of uncontrolled weapons in Mauritania stands at 70,000. This "has led to a wave of criminality due to the fact that it is easier and easier to procure arms of different types and calibres, including weapons of war," according to a study by the Small Arms Survey.³⁹

The recent influx of more weapons from Libya as a result of the conflict there and the continuing inflow of refugees from Mali (more than 31,000 to date) fleeing the armed clashes between ethnic Touareg rebels and the army add to the combustible mix of a looming food crisis, cross-border criminals, and regional armed militants linked to banditry. "The entry of al-Qaeda, trafficking networks, training camps and [their] involvement in traditional conflicts have turned [the] Sahel from a grey zone to a powder keg ready to go off," said Mauritanian ambassador and former housing minister Mohammed Val Ould Belal. "This puts us in the face of interrelated and overlapping wars between Touaregs and the Malian army, al-Qaeda and Mali, Arabs and al-Qaeda and Touaregs and Arabs."⁴⁰

If the illicit drug industry intensifies, the consequences for state and society could be severe. The funds generated by drug trafficking can destabilize a weak political system through the financing of electoral campaigns, further erosion of the rule of law, and corruption of the elite. Already, public suspicion of the complicity of top-ranking officials in the drug trade is rampant, with several of

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my interlocutors pointing out such involvement. The involvement began during the tenure of President Ould Taya, who was known to control the major trafficking and contraband hub in the north of the country thanks to the alliances he forged between the Rgueibat tribe, which also controls the Polisario independence movement, and his own tribe, the Smacid. Such suspicions deepened in 2007 after the arrest and sentencing of a former Interpol agent and cousin of President Ould Taya as well as the son of former Mauritanian president Mohamed Khouna Ould Haidalla. These strategic alliances were sustained by commercial, political, and military patronage networks.

The government's control of the northern zone, however, weakened as new forces emerged on the scene, namely illegal immigration networks, drug smugglers, weapons traffickers, and Touaregs.⁴¹ These networks have transformed Mauritania's already fluid and constantly shifting tribal-ethnic-caste-state relations. Rivalries between and among these actors have intensified the fight for control of the rents generated from lucrative criminal activities.

In the words of Ghanaian economist George Ayittey, in this "mafia-like bazaar" where those with the ability to capture rent "pillage at will," the distinction between state actors and criminal ones becomes blurred.⁴² Indeed, in many instances, state officials hail from the same tribe, clan, or even family as the insurgents or drug traffickers.⁴³ "The result is a seemingly irreconcilable tension," as Cédric Jourde aptly put it. "The state as an abstract entity is threatened by this illicit business, yet simultaneously many state agents are deeply involved in these activities."⁴⁴

Another major danger posed by drug trafficking is the insidious effect it can have on the local population. The significant value generated from drug sales can distort the economy and impact social stability and cohesion through increased levels of domestic consumption (cocaine is expensive but can easily be transformed into crack), violence (kidnapping, extortion, gang crimes), and delinquency.⁴⁵ Such criminality has also been linked to violent extremism in

Mauritania. In February 2012, ten people in Nouadhibou, the economic capital of the country, were indicted for possession of two tons of Indian hemp drugs, or *chanvre indien*.⁴⁶ Security officials said that "the drugs were used to finance al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) operations."⁴⁷

In Mauritania, there seems to be a connection between criminality and violent extremism, with the former acting as a stepping-stone to the latter. According to interviews I had with state officials and journalists who consulted police reports, a significant number of those apprehended for terrorism offenses had a criminal past. Of them, 50 to 70 percent were delinquents, said journalist Isselmou Oud Moustapha of *Tahalil Hebdo*.⁴⁸ Most were implicated in petty crime (car theft, drug peddling). Some were radicalized in prison through their interaction with radical

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preachers. All were believers, but before their radicalization, none was particularly pious. Many were devoid of any hope, as they faced a bleak future and the prospect of a lifetime of unemployment and disenfranchisement.⁴⁹

In some cases, the transition from petty criminality into violent extremism can be regarded as a sort of atonement for sinful misconduct. Radical Salafi preachers in Mauritania encourage such pursuit of religious redemption whereby “reformed” criminals make amends for their guilty soul and that of their community by joining the violent struggle against the forces of injustice. Only by purifying Mauritanian society of its corrupt elite and the pervasive influence of imperialist powers can Mauritanian youths put an end to the indefinite perpetuation of failed governance and dysfunctional statehood. In the eyes of the new converts, disorder and corrupt governance cannot be but the consequence of state’s deviance from the right path and purposeful ignorance of divine guidance. Indeed, it is not difficult to see how these moralizing arguments can be appealing to a generation that is increasingly socially isolated and whose desire for basic dignity and equal recognition is trampled on in a rigid and suffocating social structure perpetuated by a corrupt state and a religious establishment co-opted by the dominating elite.

To be sure, the elder generation suffered from the same patterns of state dysfunctions and neglect yet did not turn to criminality or extremism. The major difference is the emergence of new structural forces that disrupted the operational links between traditional society and its social support networks and familiar contexts. Rapid urbanization has weakened the traditional nomadic and rural mechanisms of social regulation. It has contributed to the breakdown of the traditional family. The high rate of divorce has led to higher rates of dropping out of school and higher levels of delinquency. With the state’s failure to create “alternative sources of incentives and sanctions,” writes USAID, “too many have slipped through the cracks of modern society, felt abandoned by it, and in some cases, turned against it.”⁵⁰

When it suits their ambitions, extremist networks have condoned and profited from drug trafficking. They have also provided moral legitimacy and religious validation for involvement in illicit activities as long as the profits generated are used to bolster the militant cause. In some jihadi circles, the recruitment of hardened criminals is justified on historic grounds, as well. The story of Umar bin al Khattab, the second caliph of Islam, is often cited as the best example of how one of the most ardent enemies of Islam—he worshipped idols, drank heavily, and wanted to destroy the tiny but growing number of converts to Islam—was transformed into one of its best-known fervent defenders and formidable warriors.⁵¹ Such validation and justification from independent religious figures can carry important weight with youths who are angry, disaffected, and disoriented.

The connections between illicit activities and militancy are also driven purely by self-interest. Drug barons and violent ideologues both have a common

interest in weakening the state's structures, bypassing its territorial control, and circumventing its interdiction—generally undermining its authority. The delegitimization of the state remains one of the key goals of violent extremists in a country where the traditional mechanisms of social regulation have already been weakened by a host of forces.

Most traffickers do not seek the overthrow of the state and do not share ideological affinities with violent extremists. One, of course, cannot assume that will always be the case, since what starts as an alliance of convenience for logistical and pragmatic reasons might develop into ideological unity. For now at least, such ideological affinities have not emerged.

In fact, there are instances where relationships between criminals and violent extremists have deteriorated and led to conflict. “In a game that involves three actors—criminals, state officials, and violent extremists,” however, “any two of them may be reluctant to forge an alliance when doing so might lead one of those two actors to expose himself to the costs involved in antagonizing the third one.”⁵² In other words, collusion with the state may be more beneficial to criminals than cooperation with violent extremists who are often at war with the state.

Conclusion

The confluence of the revolts in North Africa and growing regional and Western trepidation about the proliferation of weapons, transnational trafficking of illicit goods, and terrorist activity led by AQIM are generating acute interest in the trans-Saharan region. Like most of its neighbors, Mauritania has been plagued by poverty, ethno-political tensions, and corrupt governance—indeed Mauritania, Chad, Niger, and Burkina Faso, as well as Mali until a recent military coup overthrew the president, are currently led by former military men. In the dozens of interviews I conducted in Mauritania, a range of actors stress the clear correlation between insecurity and institutional weakness, as measured by misgovernance and the state's limited penetration of society. The evidence I garnered all points to institutional instability, corrupt governance, economic deprivation, and weakness of social trust as major risk factors contributing to insecurity.

Due to its strategic location between the Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa, and the pervasive and multifaceted insecurity problems confronting it, Mauritania has naturally become a focus of international development agencies and European Union and U.S. counterterrorism programming. For international development-oriented donors, of the many interlocking causal factors of conflict, the connection between the lack of broad-based economic development and insecurity in Mauritania is the most obvious and frequently cited driver of instability. International nongovernmental organizations operating in Mauritania stress that there can be no economic development without security.

For defense officials and military strategists, Mauritania epitomizes the risks that states with weak capabilities pose to regional and international security. It is a case that illustrates how the internal drivers of insecurity intersect with external factors, reinforcing in the process the vulnerability of the state to destabilization. Besides impoverishing their populations, weak governments are usually corrupt and easily infiltrated by organized crime groups, undermining their efforts at building workable governance structures. This creates a debilitating service gap amid already-weak state capacity. “Ungoverned, undergoverned, misgoverned and contested areas” are breeding grounds for organized crime groups and terrorists, says the Pentagon’s National Defense Strategy. The European Union’s security strategy also advances the fragile state-organized crime-terrorism nexus: “Neighbours who are engaged in violent conflict, weak states where organised crime flourishes, dysfunctional societies or exploding population growth on its borders all pose problems for Europe.”⁵³

Combating transnational criminal syndicates becomes a futile endeavor as long as their main enablers (namely corruption) are not tackled. Stemming the tide of youth radicalization would also be unsuccessful unless the sources of disillusionment and frustration are addressed. The greater the chasm between youth expectations and the capability or willingness of the state to meet them, the greater the risk that angry youths might look to nonstate actors for essential goods.

The analysis here supports the contention that the risk of societal conflict and insecurity increases where the state and its social institutions are unwilling or incapable of meeting the basic needs of its citizens. Promoting good governance and reinforcing the state’s capacity is therefore critical to improving economic conditions and building people’s trust in national institutions. For Mauritania to move away from its state of fragility, the government needs to bolster its anticorruption initiatives, strengthen the reforms of its education sector, professionalize its security apparatus, and promote social justice.

The urgent steps that need to be taken are as follows: First, anticorruption commissions already exist and need to be empowered to fulfill their auditing functions (by being given bigger budgets as well as competent and nonpartisan staff, for example). Second, effective controls must be established to protect against fraud, expropriation of land, and abuse by provincial governors and other regional agencies that provide services and programs for rural areas. Mismanagement of land titling projects in urban areas is a major problem and source of societal conflict.

Third, the level of political inclusion and cultural rights needs to be enhanced. The 2007 legalization of the moderate Islamist party, Tawassoul, was an important step toward promoting engagement and broadening the system of

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participation. Similar political efforts are needed to increase the representation of black Africans and Haratin in state institutions. These steps are necessary to bridge the cultural and ethnic divide and move toward a more inclusive and egalitarian society.

Fourth, immediate steps are required to improve the economic plight of the Haratin. The government has established programs to address their marginalization, but the resources allocated so far are insufficient. It is here that international donors can play a significant role. Investing in such development programs can help promote peace and stability in the country.

International donors should support the government's (timid) efforts to address the education supply gap in the country. Lack of access to education disproportionately affects citizens that are already poor and marginalized, further exacerbating their feelings of anger at the system. Low levels of education, when combined with other drivers of extremism, can become an important factor in the radicalization of Mauritanian youth. There is enough empirical evidence to show that equitable (quality) education provision reduces the risk of societal conflict.

Transforming the state-society compact will not be easy or quick. Such institutional transformation requires responsible national leadership as well as determined international donors willing to link economic assistance to

For reforms to be successful, national reformers within the government need to establish broad-based and inclusive coalitions with influential sectors in society as well as international donors and investors.

improvement in human security. Economic aid, as the new European Neighborhood Policy states, must be linked to the idea of “more for more” with “precise benchmarks and a clearer sequencing of actions.” President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz has declared his commitment to improving public administration and deepening democratization. It is only fair that the United States and Europe hold him to his promises.

The stakes are considerable. There are powerful constituents who will resist any substantive reforms to rationalize public-expenditure management, and to strengthen rules for procurement procedures and those governing conflicts of interest. For reforms to be successful, national reformers within the government need to establish broad-based and inclusive coalitions with influential sectors in society as well as international donors and investors. Those forces will have a better chance of withstanding the pressures that are bound to emanate from groups standing to lose out in the reform process.

Notes

- 1 Interview with sociologist Cheikh Saad Bouh Kamara, January 21, 2012, Nouakchott.
- 2 See Alain Antil and Sylvain Touati, “Mali et Mauritanie: pays sahéliens fragiles et États résilients,” *Politique Etrangère*, 76(1), Spring 2011, 59–69.
- 3 *BTI 2012—Mauritania Country Report* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2012), 12, www.bti-project.org/fileadmin/Inhalte/reports/2012/pdf/BTI%202012%20Mauritania.pdf.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 6.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 16.
- 6 Mauritania was ranked 150th out of 169 countries on health and on education by the UNDP’s Human Development Index.
- 7 “The State’s Legitimacy in Fragile Situations: Unpacking Complexity,” OECD 2010, 20, www.oecd.org/dataoecd/45/6/44794487.pdf.
- 8 Jemal Oumar, “Sahel instability impacts Mauritania,” *Magharebia*, March 19, 2012, www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2012/03/19/feature-02.
- 9 *BTI 2012—Mauritania Country Report*, 10.
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 Ron Parker, “The Senegal-Mauritania Conflict of 1989: A Fragile Equilibrium,” *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 29, no. 1 (March 1991): 155–71.
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 In this tense ethno-racial climate, in 1983 three underground parties created the African Liberation Forces of Mauritania (Flam). In 1986, the state started cracking down on dissent, especially after the appearance of the “Oppressed Black African Manifesto,” a document accusing the regime of pursuing an apartheid policy that purposefully marginalized black Africans. The authors of the pamphlet were arrested and tortured. Others were fired from their jobs in the public service. In 1987, the authorities targeted several Halpulaar army officers after a failed coup plot.
- 14 Stéphanie Pézard, with Anne-Kathrin Glatz, “Arms in and around Mauritania: National and Regional Security Implications,” *Small Arms Survey*, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva, 2010, 8, www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/B-Occasional-papers/SAS-OP24-Mauritania-EN.pdf.

- 15 The Halpulaar community suffered the most, especially those in the Brakna region, southwest of Mauritania. See Antil and Touati, “Mali et Mauritanie : pays sahéliens fragiles et États résilients.”
- 16 Ibid., 14.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Indeed, “[T]he Mauritanian government had allowed Haratin, some of whom had themselves just been expelled from Senegal, to settle on the land of Afro-Mauritanians who had been expelled to Senegal . . . these new inhabitants, who organized militias for their own protection, received arms from the government with which they committed serious acts of violence against other villagers, with the consent of the security forces present.” Pézard and Glatz, “Arms in and Around Mauritania: National and Regional Security Implications,” 9.
- 19 “Islamism in North Africa IV: The Islamist Challenge in Mauritania: Threat or Scapegoat?” International Crisis Group, Middle East/North Africa Report no. 41, May 11, 2005, www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/mauritania/041-islamism-in-north-africa-4-the-islamist-challenge-in-mauritania.aspx.
- 20 Cédric Jourde, “Mauritania 2010: between individual willpower and institutional inertia,” IPRIS, *Maghreb Review*, March 2011, www.ipris.org/php/download.php?fid=475.
- 21 *BTI 2012 — Mauritania Country Report*, 21.
- 22 Ibid., 17.
- 23 “Police arrest 56 in Mauritania over census protests,” Agence France-Presse, September 30, 2011, http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5hc_1JRI-LWVW6JeHTY4WISJ1JZQ?docId=CNG.d9df7a767e5cfba2d4b83b752fec7796.6e1.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 The AQIM attack was in retaliation against Ould Taya’s imprisonment of seven Mauritians who attended training camps in Mali as well as his support for the Pan Sahel Initiative (PSI) and diplomatic relations with Israel. Indeed, the terrorist attack “took place only a short while after the visit of the Israeli foreign minister to Nouakchott and just before the beginning of the ‘Flintlock’ military exercise organized as part of the PSI.” Pézard and Glatz, “Arms in and Around Mauritania,” 23.
- 26 Interview with Mohamed Mahmoud Abul Maali from Nouakchott, January 16, 2012.
- 27 See Guilain Denoex and Zeric Smith, “Mauritania Pilot – CT and Development,” USAID, June 2008, 8; Rebecca Winthrop and Corinne Graff, “Beyond Madrasas: Assessing the Links between Education and Militancy in Pakistan,” Working paper 2, Brookings Institution, June 2010, www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/papers/2010/06_pakistan_education_winthrop/06_pakistan_education_winthrop.pdf.
- 28 Interview with Professor Moctar Mohamed Cheikhouna, January 17, 2012.
- 29 Interviews on January 18, 2012, Nouakchott.

- 30 According to the USAID study, Boutlimit, Kiffa, and Néma were all “municipalities where radical preachers are active, where larger concentrations of extremists can be found, and/or as the locations from which extremists arrested in the past two years often originated.” My interlocutors confirmed such findings, citing Boutlimit as a particular area of concern. According to Abul Maali, Boutlimit is a hub of Salafi preachers and an incubator of extremist thought. Children are particularly vulnerable to indoctrination, he said. Boutlimit is also the area where a number of Mauritians who fought in Afghanistan originated.
- 31 Interview with Yahya Ould El Bara, January 19, 2012, Nouakchott.
- 32 Denoex and Smith, “Mauritania Pilot – CT and Development,” 12.
- 33 “Islamism in North Africa IV.”
- 34 Jake Tapper, “Terrorism Bulletin Says Highlighting Al Qaeda Racism Could Deter African Recruits,” ABC News blog, July 24, 2010, <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2010/07/terrorism-bulletin-says-highlighting-al-qaeda-racism-could-deter-african-recruits>. The NCTC bulletin stated that some AQIM recruits claimed that the organization “was clearly racist against some black members from West Africa because they were only sent against lower-level targets.”
- 35 Cédric Jourde, “Sifting Through the Layers of Insecurity in the Sahel: The Case of Mauritania,” *Africa Security Brief*, no. 15, September 2011, 4, www.ndu.edu/press/lib/pdf/Africa-Security-Brief/ASB-15.pdf.
- 36 According to Moctar Mohamed Cheikhouna, the government doesn’t control more than 10 percent of mosques.
- 37 See “Mauritania: A New Drug-Trafficking Hub in the Making?” WikiLeaks, June 9, 2011, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/06/09NOUAKCHOTT386.html>.
- 38 See Pézard and Glatz, “Arms in and Around Mauritania,” 47–48.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 22.
- 40 Jemal Oumar, “Sahel instability impacts Mauritania,” *Magharebia*, March 19, 2012, www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2012/03/19/feature-02.
- 41 Laurence Aida Ammour, “La Mauritanie au carrefour des menaces régionales,” Centre Français de Recherche sur le Renseignement, February 1, 2011, www.cf2r.org/fr/tribune-libre/la-mauritanie-au-carrefour-des-menaces-regionales.php.
- 42 George B. N. Ayittey, *Africa in Chaos* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1999), 151.
- 43 This is the dilemma that the international community faces when helping build Mauritania’s anti-organized crime units. The challenge is twofold: (1) making sure that better trained and better equipped anti-drug police and customs officers are not transformed into capable and potent drug smugglers and (2) convincing the ruling elites that the development of professional units would not pose a threat to the order of the state (that is, a coup).
- 44 Cedric Jourde, “Sifting through the Layers of Insecurity in the Sahel: The Case of Mauritania,” *Africa Security Brief*, no. 15, September 2011, 3.
- 45 See “Mauritania: A New Drug-Trafficking Hub in the Making?”

- 46 According to the U.S. Cables released by WikiLeaks, “Chanvre indien, also known as Diomba, is mostly used by the Soninke and Pulaar. It is a cheap drug—a tea glass costs 1,000 Ouguiya (approximated \$4 USD)—that comes from Ghana and enters Mauritania through Senegal.”
- 47 Raby Ould Idoumou, “Mauritania spreads moderation through mosques,” *Magharebia*, March 15, 2012, www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2012/03/15/feature-04.
- 48 Interview with Isselmou Oud Moustapha, January 18, 2012, Nouackchott.
- 49 Antil and Touati, “Mali et Mauritanie : pays sahéliens fragiles et États résilients.”
- 50 Denoeux and Smith, “Mauritania Pilot – CT and Development,” 8.
- 51 Interviews with Mohamed Mahmoud Abul Maali, January 16, 2012, and Moctar Mohamed Cheikhouna, January 17, 2012.
- 52 Denoeux and Smith, “Mauritania Pilot – CT and Development,” 12.
- 53 Ibid.

About the Author

ANOUAR BOUKHARS is an assistant professor of international relations at McDaniel College in Westminster, Maryland, and the author of *Politics in Morocco: Executive Monarchy and Enlightened Authoritarianism* (Routledge, 2010). He is a co-project leader of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Mauritania Working Group where scholars and policymakers gather in four roundtables, beginning in January and ending in June 2012, to discuss critical issues faced by the country and the response of the international community. Boukhars is a former fellow at the Brookings Doha Center where he published two papers “Political Violence in North Africa: The Perils of Incomplete Liberalization” and “Fighting the Growth of Terrorist Networks on the Maghreb.” His other publications appeared in a large number of journals and leading newspapers in the United States and the Middle East.

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