

Arms in and around Mauritania National and Regional Security Implications

Stéphanie Pézard with Anne-Kathrin Glatz



A study by the Small Arms Survey

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Contents

Boxes, figures, and tables	xi
List of abbreviations	xii
About the authors	xiv
Acknowledgements	xv
Map 1. Mauritania	xvii
Map 2. West Africa	xviii
Introduction	1
a) Origin and aims of the study	3
b) Methodology	4
c) Mauritania: a history marked by political instability	6
<i>i. From independence to the Western Sahara War</i>	7
<i>ii. The events of 1989</i>	7
<i>iii. A tentative move towards democracy</i>	9
I. State-held stockpiles	13
Security forces and their equipment	13
Poor stockpile security	14
II. Armed violence and perceptions of security	16
The rates and impact of armed violence	16
<i>Nouakchott</i>	16
<i>The interior of the country</i>	20
A worrying evolution in the security situation	22
The responses of the Mauritanian state and the international community	29
<i>The Mauritanian state</i>	29
<i>The international community</i>	31
<i>Regional and international commitments regarding small arms and light weapons</i>	33

III. Firearms ownership among the civilian population	37
Cultural factors	37
Firearms legislation	39
Loans and donations of arms	43
IV. Flows of small arms in Mauritania and the Sahel region.	45
Mauritanian imports of small arms	45
Illicit flows of small arms and light weapons	46
Arms in the hands of non-state armed groups	55
<i>The Polisario Front</i>	56
<i>Malian Tuaregs</i>	57
<i>Democratic Alliance for Change</i>	58
<i>Niger–Mali Tuareg Alliance</i>	60
<i>Ganda Izo movement</i>	61
<i>Nigerien Movement for Justice</i>	62
<i>Knights of Change</i>	64
<i>Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group and Salafia Jihadia</i>	65
<i>Libyan Islamic Fighting Group</i>	67
<i>Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, formerly the Salafist Group</i> <i>for Preaching and Combat</i>	68
<i>Al-Ansar Allah al-Murabitun (Army of Allah in the Land</i> <i>of the Murabitun)</i>	76
Conclusion	78
Endnotes	83
Bibliography	94

Boxes, figures, and tables

- Box 1 A brief overview of Mauritanian society
- Box 2 Definition of small arms and light weapons
- Box 3 Mauritania's resources
- Box 4 Islam and Islamism in Mauritania
- Box 5 Target shooting in Mauritania
- Box 6 Types of firearm covered by Decree No. 60.072 of 1960
- Box 7 How AQIM benefits from the increase in drug trafficking
- Figure 1 Types of violent act recorded between January 2003 and January 2007
- Figure 2 Mauritanian imports of hunting and sports rifles (1994–2008, in USD)
- Figure 3 Mauritanian imports, in USD, of ammunition for small arms, light weapons, and larger-calibre weapons (excluding cartridges for smooth-bore rifles)
- Table 1 Chronology of Mauritanian governments since 1963
- Table 2 Incidents in Mauritania for which the GSPC/AQIM has claimed responsibility or that are linked to the GSPC/AQIM, 1 January 2005 – 31 December 2009
- Table 3 Selected firearms in circulation in Mauritania
- Table 4 Major seizures of weapons and ammunition at the Malian border, January 2007 – June 2009
- Table 5 Types and prices of firearms available on the black market in Nouakchott, Nouadhibou, and Modibougou, 2006–07
- Table 6 Types and prices of ammunition available on the black market in Nouakchott, Nouadhibou, and Modibougou, 2006–07

List of abbreviations

ADC	Alliance démocratique pour le changement (Democratic Alliance for Change) (Mali)
AFRICOM	United States Africa Command
AQIM	Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
ATNM	Alliance touarègue Niger–Mali (Niger–Mali Tuareg Alliance) (Mali)
AU	African Union
BASEP	Bataillon pour la sécurité présidentielle (Presidential Security Battalion) (Mauritania)
CEAR	Commission española de ayuda al refugiado (Spanish Commission for Aid to Refugees)
CEN-SAD	Community of Sahel-Saharan States
DEA	United States Drug Enforcement Administration
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FARC	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia)
FLAM	Forces de libération africaines de Mauritanie (African Liberation Forces of Mauritania)
GICM	Groupe islamique combattant marocain (Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group)
GSPC	Groupe salafiste pour la prédication et le combat (Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat) (Algeria)
GTZ	Gesellschaft für technische Zusammenarbeit (German Technical Cooperation)
LIFG	Libyan Islamic Fighting Group
MNJ	Mouvement des Nigériens pour la Justice (Nigerien Movement for Justice)
NGO	Non-governmental organization

PoA	Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects
Polisario Front	Frente Popular de Liberación de Saguía el Hamra y Río de Oro, Sahara occidental (Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el-Hamra and of Río de Oro)
PSI	Pan Sahel Initiative
SADR	Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic
TSCTI	Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Initiative
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

About the authors

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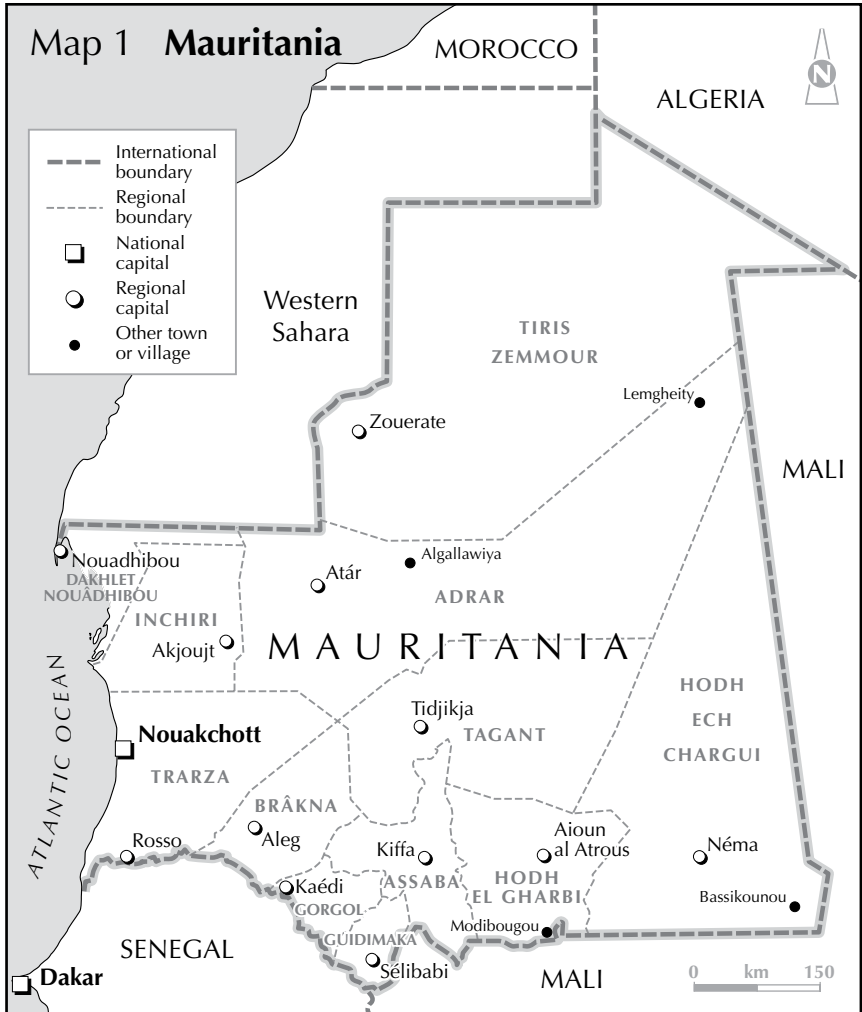
From 2005 to 2007, **Anne-Kathrin Glatz** was a researcher for the Small Arms Survey, investigating human security in Mauritania and transfers of small arms and light weapons. She is currently working as an analyst for the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) for the Norwegian Refugee Council, where she covers India, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka. She has also worked as programme director (Africa) at Geneva Call and as programme director (development and North–South relations) at the Berne Declaration. She was awarded a Master's degree in political science and American studies at the University of Bonn in Germany.

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Introduction

Located in West Africa, in the western Sahel, Mauritania has a population of only 3 million spread across a territory twice the size of France.¹ As reflected by the structure of its population, this huge country is located, both geographically and culturally, at the frontier between North and sub-Saharan Africa (see Box 1). The capital, Nouakchott, is much closer to Senegal and Mali than to any capital in North Africa, from which it is separated by the Sahara. Migrations from these two countries strengthen Mauritania's links with the sub-Saharan region. However, the government's efforts to Arabize the country since it gained independence in 1960 have counterbalanced this proximity, transforming Mauritania into a bridge between the two sub-regions.

Mauritania shares more than 5,000 km of land borders with Algeria, Mali, Senegal, and Western Sahara² (CIA, 2009). The greater part of the country lies within the Sahara desert and is relatively uncontrolled, which means that Mauritania has long been an ideal trade route for many goods, both legal and illicit. Consequently, it has become an important hub for cigarette smuggling, particularly en route to Algeria (ICG, 2007a, p. 19). It is also crossed by drug traffickers, whose business has increased considerably in the region since 2006 (Jane's, 2007). Small arms³ are included among the goods traded illicitly across the Sahel and Mauritania (Florquin et Pézard, 2006, p. 61).

This trafficking is sometimes closely linked to the activities of various non-state armed groups, which have been operating for varying lengths of time in the region. One of these groups, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), became al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in 2007 and has been carrying out attacks in Mauritania for several years. The first major incident occurred in June 2005, with an attack on a military post at Lemgheity, in the north-east of the country. Increasing numbers of Mauritanian soldiers and foreign travellers were killed or abducted in 2007, 2008, and 2009, with AQIM claiming responsibility for all of them. These events, and the country's

Box 1. A brief overview of Mauritanian society

The three main ethnic groups in Mauritania are the White Moors (Beydan), the Black Moors (Haratin)—formerly slaves of the White Moors and culturally very close to them—and the Afro-Mauritanians, who include various ethnic groups: Bambara, Halpulaar (Peul and Toucouleur), Soninke, and Wolof (Fichter, 2007, p. 3).² Historically, Mauritanian society was made up of warring tribes (Arab and Hassan) and of *marabouts* (the Zwaya or Tolba cleric classes). Other social groups include craftsmen, poets, and slaves (some of whom were freed)³ (Marchesin, 1992, pp. 34–35).

At the time of independence, the Afro-Mauritanians, who were close to the colonial power and educated in French schools, took up the first posts in the new Mauritanian civil service. President Mokhtar Ould Daddah reversed this trend by pursuing a policy of Arabization and limiting the number of posts reserved for Afro-Mauritanians in the civil service to 30 per cent (Vandermotten, 2004, p. 33).

Inter-community tensions increased with the coup d'état in 1978 and then, from 1984, with the presidency of Maaouiya Ould Sid Ahmed Taya, who was a member of the Smassid tribe. He deliberately excluded the other tribes and ethnic groups from political and economic power, particularly by falsifying official statistics and making serious efforts to Arabize the country (ICG, 2005b, p. 1; Fichter, 2007, p. 8; Marchesin, 1992, p. 52).

Since independence the Beydan have controlled the levers of power and the civil service. In 2001, for example, the Mauritanian government included 20 Beydan or descendants of mixed Beydan–Haratin couples, three Haratin, three Halpulaar, and one Soninke. Out of the 56 members of the Senate, 46 were Beydan or descendants of Beydan and Haratin. In the National Assembly, these latter groups occupied 60 of the 81 seats (Fichter, 2007, p. 3). The representation of the various ethnic groups within the institutions changed in April 2007: the president and the prime minister were still Beydan, but the president of the National Assembly was now a Haratin, while the president of the Senate was an Afro-Mauritanian (Bisson, 2007). With the creation in 2009 of a transitional government led by the president of the Senate, and before a new presidential election could be held, an Afro-Mauritanian led Mauritania—even if only briefly—for the first time in the country's history (AP, 2009b).

desert climate, have given rise to fears that the state may lose control over a large part of Mauritanian territory and that this 'ungoverned area'⁶ may be able to provide sanctuary or training grounds for terrorist groups. This fear has led the United States to become more involved in the region, including with the Mauritanian armed forces. These recent developments in the security situation highlight the need to examine the sources and destinations of arms circulating in Mauritania and in the rest of the Sahel region.

Origin and aims of the study

In 2001, the United Nations adopted the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (PoA). The PoA, which applies to all member states, recommends the creation of national coordination agencies to coordinate the work of all the competent bodies in the field of small arms, the adoption of national action plans, and the publication of regular reports on the implementation of the PoA at the national level.⁷ At the time of writing, Mauritania had still not created a national agency nor adopted an action plan. It has submitted only one report, in 2005, on the situation regarding small arms.

In November 2005, the office of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Nouakchott organized a workshop with representatives from the Mauritanian government to study the problems relating to the illicit trade in small arms. One of the aims of the meeting was to prepare the ground for the creation of a national agency and the implementation of an action plan. In order to identify the priorities, the attendees stressed the need to carry out a detailed assessment of the situation regarding small arms in Mauritania (UNDP, 2005). This assessment was entrusted to the Small Arms Survey, which undertook the work with the financial support of the German Foreign Ministry and logistical support from the UNDP in Nouakchott.

This report presents the results of this assessment. Its main purpose is to provide the Mauritanian government with the information and references it will need to implement the PoA. The study also offers an overview of the demand for small arms and the stockpiles of small arms in Mauritania. It seeks to answer several questions: which categories of the population (civilians, security forces, members of armed groups, criminals) look for and possess small arms? Why do these groups and individuals possess (or wish to possess) weapons? How have armed violence and the perception of security changed in Mauritania in recent years?

Second, the study examines the extent of the illicit trade in small arms in Mauritania, particularly in certain border regions. How is this trade structured? Who are the main actors? What types of arms and ammunition are concerned, where do they come from, and how much do they cost?

Finally, this report assesses the situation in Mauritania with respect to small arms and light weapons in a regional context. What other regional actors possess, purchase, sell, and use arms? Is it possible to talk about emerging transnational threats? What measures have been taken by Mauritania and by sub-regional, regional, and international organizations to prevent or combat these developments?

Methodology

Sources for this report include individual interviews and focus groups that were conducted between October 2006 and February 2007, in Nouakchott, Nouadhibou (in the north-west), and Aioun al-Atrous (in the south-east).⁸ In Nouadhibou and Aioun al-Atrous, members of the following four groups were interviewed: Moorish women, Moorish men, Afro-Mauritanian women (mainly Halpulaar), and Afro-Mauritanian men (mainly Halpulaar). Each group consisted of about ten adults of various ages. Each session was run by a moderator who, when possible, had the same profile as the participants. Two interpreters (Hassaniya Arabic–French and Pulaar–French) were also present at some focus groups. The focus group organizers and moderators were recruited thanks to the assistance of CEAR in Nouadhibou, and with the help of the GTZ in Aioun al-Atrous.

Nouadhibou and Aioun al-Atrous were chosen due to their proximity to the national border. Nouadhibou is close to Western Sahara and is located in a region where there are still many landmines (Landmine Monitor, 2008). Arms were distributed to the civilian population in this area during the Western Sahara War in the 1970s. Cross-border trafficking in various goods remains significant. Close to the Canary Islands, the town is also a transit point for many African nationals (from Guinea, Mali, and Senegal) trying to emigrate to Europe (Lamazou, 2008). This situation is likely to stimulate the demand for small arms, as the smugglers seek to protect their illegal activities, sometimes resorting to violence in the process.

Aioun al-Atrous is close to Mauritania's southern border with Mali. Mauritanian and Malian farmers and nomads migrate from north to south

depending on the seasons and the fertility of the land. The rebellion of the Malian Tuaregs against the central power in Bamako in the 1990s turned the regions in the north of Mali into an arms depot from which firearms can be leaked into neighbouring countries, including Mauritania.

Additional groundwork was carried out in April 2009 in Nouakchott and Bamako. About 40 individual interviews were conducted with members of the government and security forces, journalists, representatives of civil society, officials, diplomats, and representatives of international organizations. Telephone interviews and meetings with experts and national and international officials involved in the analysis of the region were carried out in France (December 2008) and in the United States (March 2009).⁹

As this study is based mainly on interviews that took place in Nouakchott, Nouadhibou, and Aioun al-Atrous, its conclusions do not necessarily apply to other regions of the country. Nevertheless, given the distribution of the population (between one-third and one-quarter of Mauritians live in Nouakchott) and the locations of the towns under review (Nouadhibou is in the north on the border with Western Sahara, while Aioun al-Atrous is in the south, near the border with Mali), this report may be expected to reflect the national situation as faithfully as possible.

This report uses the terms 'small arms' and 'light weapons' as defined by a UN panel of experts in 1997 (see Box 2).

Box 2. Definition of small arms and light weapons

In this report, the term 'small arms and light weapons' follows the definition used in the *Report of the UN Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms* (UNGA, 1997):

Small arms: revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles and carbines, sub-machine guns, assault rifles, and light machine guns.

Light weapons: heavy machine guns, hand-held under-barrel or mounted grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft and anti-tank guns, recoilless rifles, portable launchers of anti-tank missile and rocket systems, portable launchers of anti-aircraft missile systems, and mortars of calibres of less than 100 mm.

The Small Arms Survey uses this definition to identify small arms and light weapons, whether commercial or military. In this report, firearms are also included in this definition and, unless there is information to the contrary, the general use of the term 'small arms' includes 'light weapons'. The expression 'firearms' means 'hand-held weapons that fire a projectile through a tube by explosive charge' (Small Arms Survey, 2006, p. 9).

Mauritania: a history marked by political instability

Internally, Mauritania is characterized by chronic political instability. From 1978, the year in which President Mokhtar Ould Daddah was deposed by the military, the country lived through 13 coups d'état or attempted coups d'état before its first free, lawful, multi-party presidential election in early 2007 (Fichter, 2007, p. 17). The presidency of Sidi Mohamed Ould Cheikh Abdallahi, however, was brutally interrupted on 6 August 2008 by another coup d'état, which terminated the country's first experience of democracy and brought the head of the presidential guard, Gen. Mohammed Ould Abdelaziz, to power. After a year during which his power was disputed, Abdelaziz won the presidential election on 18 July 2009, which confirmed his legitimacy as the head of state (see Table 1).

Table 1. **Chronology of Mauritanian governments since 1963**

Dates	Type of government	Party in power	Leaders
1963–78	Single party	Hizb ash-shaab al-muritani (Mauritanian People's Party)	Mokhtar Ould Daddah
1978–84	Military dictatorship	Military Committee for National Salvation	Moustapha Ould Mohamed Saleck (1978–1979) Mohamed Mahmoud Ould Ahmed Louly (1979–1980) Mohamed Khouna Ould Haidallah (1980–1984)
1984–92			Col. Maaouiya Ould Sid Ahmed Taya (1984–2005)
1992–2005	Multi-party with an appearance of democracy	Al-hizb al-jumhuri ad-dimuqrati al-ijtimai (Democratic and Social Republican Party)	
2005–07	Military dictatorship	Military Council for Justice and Democracy	Col. Ely Ould Mohamed Vall
2007–08	Multi-party with an appearance of democracy	None ¹⁰	Sidi Mohamed Ould Cheikh Abdallahi
2008–09	Military dictatorship	High Council of State	General Mohamed Ould Abdelaziz
2009–...	Multi-party and democratic	Union for the Republic	

Sources: Ould-Mey (2008, pp. 81, 87); Reuters (2008b)

From independence to the Western Sahara War

The Islamic Republic of Mauritania gained independence on 28 November 1960, after 40 years of belonging to French West Africa. Its first president, Mokhtar Ould Daddah, set up a single-party political system and replaced French Arabic in the civil service and the educational system. In 1973, Mauritania joined the Arab League, withdrew from the African Financial Community, and printed its own money, the ouguiya (Vandermotten, 2004, p. 36).

After the Madrid Agreement of 14 November 1975 organizing the decolonization of Western Sahara, the former Spanish colony was claimed and divided by Morocco and Mauritania. In February 1976, Mauritania occupied Río de Oro, in the southern part of Western Sahara, triggering attacks by the Polisario Front, which was fighting for the independence of the former colony. The country was involved in the Western Sahara War until the overthrow of President Mokhtar Ould Daddah by Col. Moustapha Ould Mohamed Saleck in July 1978.¹¹ After signing a ceasefire agreement with the Polisario Front, the new Mauritanian government withdrew from Río de Oro. In 1979, it gave up its claims to Western Sahara before formally acknowledging the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) as an independent state (BBC, 2007).¹² Since then, successive Mauritanian governments have made clear their neutrality towards the conflict between Morocco and the Polisario Front (Ould-Mey, 2008, pp. 84–85).

The events of 1989

The ethnic composition of the Mauritanian population is a particularly sensitive issue, which led to major inter-community tensions in the 1980s. In 1966, in Nouakchott, the first race riots between Arab Berbers and Afro-Mauritans claimed about 100 lives (Vandermotten, 2004, p. 33).¹³ Then Col. Mohamed Khouna Ould Haidallah, who was in power from 1980 to 1984, strengthened the Arabization of the country by replacing French law, which had been in force since independence, with sharia law. In response, Afro-

Mauritanian nationalist sentiment emerged among various political parties, which merged in 1983 to form the African Liberation Forces of Mauritania (FLAM). In April 1986, the *Manifesto of the Oppressed Black Mauritanian* was published. The authors of this work were arrested and imprisoned, and many senior Afro-Mauritanian managers were dismissed (Vandermotten, 2004, pp. 36–37). On 22 October 1987, members of the army close to the FLAM made an unsuccessful attempt to overthrow the government. The officers involved were executed and the army purged of its Afro-Mauritanian troops.¹⁴ Moorish control over the state security forces increased as a result (Vandermotten, 2004, p. 38).¹⁵

In 1989, clashes between Mauritanian herdsmen and Senegalese farmers led to serious violence accompanied by massive population displacement. Remembered now as the ‘events of 1989’, the clashes began on 9 April with a minor incident between Senegalese Soninke farmers and Mauritanian Peul herdsmen whose animals were grazing on Dunde-Kore island, near Bakel, in Senegalese territory (Vandermotten, 2004, p. 13). This tussle, which was not the first of its kind, escalated rapidly. Attempting to re-establish order, a Mauritanian brigadier fired on the Senegalese, killing one of them and wounding two others; a dozen Senegalese were arrested by the Mauritanian guards. In response, Moorish Mauritanian shops were looted in Bakel, and then in other Senegalese towns, as far away as Dakar. This looting provoked violent reprisals on the other side of the border: about 100 Senegalese were lynched on 24 and 25 April in Nouakchott and Nouadhibou. On 28 April, about 60 Senegalese Mauritanians were massacred in response (Vandermotten, 2004, p. 15).

As a result of this violence, each country rapidly repatriated its own nationals: 60,000 to 70,000 Senegalese living in Mauritania returned to Senegal, while 160,000 Mauritanians living in Senegal returned to Mauritania. In some cases, the repatriation was accompanied by expulsion and expropriation (Vandermotten, 2004, p. 15; UNHCR, 2008). The Senegalese remaining in Mauritania suffered threats, arbitrary detention, torture, rape, and murder at the hands of the army and the National Guard (AI, 1990). These events led Mauritania and Senegal to sever diplomatic relations from August 1989 to April 1992.

Firearms played a role in this violence. The Mauritanian government had allowed Haratin, some of whom had themselves just been expelled from Senegal, to settle on the land of Afro-Mauritians who had been expelled to Senegal. Amnesty International reports that 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 (AI, 1990, pp. 5, 7).

The government used these events as a pretext to purge the civil service of Afro-Mauritians, particularly Halpulaars, who were particularly active within the FLAM¹⁶ (Vandermotten, 2004, p. 16; ICG, 2006, p. 2). During the 'exceptional period' in 1990–91, the Mauritanian government arrested more than 3,000 Afro-Mauritians who were members of the army and the civil service, while 500 others were reported missing¹⁷ (ICG, 2005a, p. 14; Baduel, 1994, pp. 14–16).

It was not until 2007 and the election of President Sidi Mohamed Ould Cheikh Abdallahi that the Afro-Mauritanian refugees living in Senegal were officially invited to return to the country. In 2007, 35,000 of the refugees resided in Senegal; the UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR, reported that around 24,000 wished to return to Mauritania (IRIN, 2008a). A repatriation agreement was signed in November 2007 between Mauritania, Senegal, and UNHCR (IRIN, 2008d). In July 2009, more than 14,000 Mauritanian refugees had already come back to Mauritania. The programme resumed in October 2009 after the rainy season; 5,000 to 7,000 additional refugees were expected in Mauritania before the end of the year (UNHCR, 2009). The fact that Nouakchott invited Afro-Mauritanian refugees to return gave rise to fears of further violence with the Moors in the south of the country. These fears proved to be unfounded; at the end of 2009 no serious violent incidents had occurred.

A tentative move towards democracy

In 1991 Col. Maaouiya Ould Sid Ahmed Taya, who had been in power since December 1984, attempted to move towards democracy with the adoption by referendum, on 12 July, of a new constitution introducing a multi-party sys-

tem. He won the elections that were organized the following year. This development was accompanied by a radical change of direction in foreign policy. Although Mauritania had been one of the few states to support Saddam Hussein during the Gulf War in 1990,¹⁸ the country joined NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue in 1994 and established diplomatic relations with Israel in 1999,¹⁹ amid widespread criticism from the Mauritanian public (RFI, 2007a; Jourde, 2007, pp. 88–89). Thus Mauritania became the third Arab country, after Egypt and Jordan, to normalize its relations with Israel (Jourde, 2007, p. 89). These good relations continued even after the outbreak of the Second Intifada in 2000, although Israel's limited relations with other Arab countries deteriorated as a result (Ould-Mey, 2008, pp. 73–74). To a large extent, this strategy of opening-up led investors to return to Mauritania and brought about an improvement in the country's relations with the United States, which was one of the main objectives of the rapprochement between Mauritania and Israel (Ould-Mey, 2008, p. 74).

Three presidential elections were held between 1992 and 2005, but the international community called their fairness into question. In 2003 officers who were mainly from the Oulad Nacer²⁰ tribe led an attempted coup d'état in which 15 people died (and 68 others were wounded); the event followed a battle in which putschist officers and troops who had remained loyal to the head of state clashed right in the centre of Nouakchott. The two camps fought with small arms, mortars, and tanks (Carroll, 2003; Bullard and Tandia, 2003).

On 3 August 2005 President Ould Taya, who had been in power for almost 20 years, was overthrown by Col. Ely Ould Mohamed Vall after a putsch that took place without bloodshed (N'Diaye, 2006, p. 431). Col. Vall kept his promise to initiate a transition towards democracy over the next two years. After a referendum in 2006, and legislative and municipal elections in November 2006 and January 2007, respectively, Sidi Mohamed Ould Cheikh Abdallahi was elected president of the republic in March 2007 (BBC, 2007; ICG, 2006; Ould Mohamedou, 2005).

What had been perceived as the start of a new political era ended abruptly on 6 August 2008, when President Abdallahi was overthrown by the commander of the Presidential Security Battalion (BASEP), Gen. Mohamed Ould Abdelaziz, in a coup d'état. This incident provoked vehement protests from

the international community. In February 2009 the African Union decided to impose sanctions against the civilian and military members of the ruling junta, including a travel ban and the freezing of their bank accounts (AFP, 2009d; BBC, 2009a). Mauritania was excluded from the organization and its delegation was turned away from the summit in Addis Ababa in February 2009. The United States suspended its military cooperation, its assistance in training peacekeeping troops, and its development aid, causing Mauritania to lose about USD 22 million in aid of various kinds (Fertey, 2008; Stearns, 2009a). France, the European Union, and the World Bank also suspended a large part of their development aid (Fertey, 2008; IRIN, 2008d; Stearns, 2009a).

The Arab League adopted a radically different approach, inviting President Abdelaziz to take part in the January 2009 Doha Summit in Qatar on the Gaza crisis—the general’s first foreign visit as Mauritania’s new head of state (AFP, 2009c). The coup d’état of August 2008 did not discourage all the investors. In January 2009, China announced an investment of more than USD 280 million designed to triple the capacity of Nouakchott’s port (AFP, 2009a). In general terms the change of government did not affect foreign investment or the pre-existing trade agreements in the mining, oil, and fishing industries (see Box 3). Kuwait officially invited Mauritania to take part in the Arab economic summit of January 2009, which Kuwait was hosting (AFP, 2008d).

In January 2009, the Abdelaziz regime radically changed the country’s foreign policy. Following the Israeli military operations in the Gaza Strip, Nouakchott closed its diplomatic representation in Tel Aviv before asking Israel to close its embassy in Nouakchott (AP, 2009a; Aziri, 2009). In the face of opposition from part of the population, the general was probably seeking to boost his popularity by echoing the indignation aroused among the local people by the Israeli offensive. At the same time Abdelaziz, the head of the junta, was probably also seeking to form closer ties with the Arab countries, which were among the few to have maintained normal relations with Mauritania.

After a year of conflict between Gen. Abdelaziz and those who, in Mauritania as well as in the international community, opposed his continued rule, and following long negotiations under the auspices of Senegal and the African Union, Abdelaziz and former president Abdallahi agreed to hold a presiden-

tial election (Stearns, 2009b). Consequently, on 1 July, the African Union lifted the sanctions that it had imposed on Mauritania (Reuters, 2009c). Despite a few incidents, including the resignation of the president of the electoral commission and accusations of fraud from three candidates, the international community declared the presidential election of 18 July, which Gen. Abdelaziz won by a wide margin, to have been free of any major irregularities (BBC, 2009e; Sillah, 2009). For Mauritania this election represents a 'return to normal', marked in particular by USD 100 million in financial aid from the International Monetary Fund at the end of December 2009 (Reuters, 2009e) and by the resumption of military cooperation with the United States (US Navy, 2009). 🗨️

Box 3. Mauritania's resources

Mauritania is mostly desert, with the exception of some arable land in the south along the Senegal river. Its surface area comprises more than one million km², of which less than 500 km² is irrigated. In this confined area Mauritania produces dates, millet, sorghum, rice, and maize. It also rears cattle and sheep. Its major resources, however, come from the mines and the sea. Below the ground lie reserves of iron ore, gypsum, copper, phosphate, diamonds, gold, and oil. Fish products, gold, and iron ore—the latter accounting for more than 40 per cent of the total²¹—make up most of the country's exports. The fishery resources, however, have diminished in recent years, giving rise to concern that certain species are being depleted in its waters.

Oil deposits were discovered in 2001. The reserves found so far, estimated at 310 million barrels, are mainly located in the Chingetti and Tiof offshore fields, as well as in the Taoudenni onshore field in the north-east of the country. In 2007 the World Bank estimated that by 2010 Mauritania would be able to achieve a GNP of USD 1,000 per capita compared to USD 420 in 2004. Nevertheless, due to the problems with extraction, production—originally estimated at 75,000 barrels per day—has been disappointing. Production and export began in 2006 at an average rate of 30,600 barrels per day but declined in subsequent years, falling to 12,000 barrels per day by 2008. As Mauritania does not have any refineries, crude oil is exported directly, but this could change if the decision to build a refinery in Mauritania, announced in September 2009 by Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez, is implemented. Although the Mauritanian oil resources are less plentiful than predicted, they are still attractive. Indeed, for the foreign companies operating in this sector, Mauritania provides a more secure environment than other regions, in particular the Gulf of Guinea. Moreover, the production of natural gas continues to show promise, especially the in Banda offshore field.

Sources: World Bank (2008); CIA (2009); *Le Monde diplomatique* (2005); Marchesin (1992, p. 55); UNDP (2006, 2008); Ould-Mey (2008, pp. 76–77); *El Universal* (2009)

I. State-held stockpiles

Security forces and their equipment

An internal report by the Mauritanian Department of National Security, which is responsible for allocating weapons permits, sets the number of weapons held by the security forces at 35,000 to 36,000, but without providing any details as to how this total was arrived at (DNS, 2008). The security forces include the army, the police, the National Guard, the gendarmerie, and a praetorian guard made up of the Presidential Security Battalion, the Battalion of Marine Fusiliers, and the Paratrooper Battalion (ICG, 2006, p. 2). The Mauritanian army comprises approximately 15,000 troops. During the Western Sahara War, it received aid from France in the form of machine guns and mortars. Mauritania also received arms from Iran, via Jordan (Barbier, 1982, p. 248). In 1990 Mauritania was one of the few countries to support Iraq in its invasion of Kuwait. Iraq supplied arms to Mauritania, which had excellent relations with Saddam Hussein (at the time, the Baasist party was particularly powerful in the Mauritanian army).²²

According to Jane's (2009b), the Mauritanian army uses the following light weapons: French 60, 80, and 120 mm mortars; Franco-German MILAN anti-tank missiles and Russian RPG-7s; 75 and 106 mm recoilless rifles (mainly US-made); and man-portable air defence systems (MANPADS: SA-7 and SA-9) and Soviet and Russian anti-aircraft guns. It is equipped with the following small arms: 9 mm French pistols (MAC-50, MAB PA-15); Russian 7.62 mm pistols (Tokarev); French and US rifles (MAS-49/56, FR F1, M1); French and Spanish sub-machine guns (MAT-49 and Star Z-45); and Belgian, French, German, and US machine guns (FN MAG, AAT-52, MG42, Browning M1919A4, and Browning M2 HB).

This list is very probably incomplete; it does not mention the Kalashnikovs with which many of the soldiers are equipped. It should also be observed that most of the models are old, even obsolete. Among the small arms mentioned above, only the FN MAG and the Browning M2 HB are still being produced today. If the information in Jane's is correct, the army stockpiles are out of date and will require at least partial replacement in the next few years.

The BASEP is an elite unit whose function is to protect the head of state. Officially, it operates under the authority of the Ministry of Defence, but in practice it takes its orders directly from the president. The BASEP was created by President Ould Taya, who took Saddam Hussein's Republican Guard as a model after a trip to Iraq. The BASEP comprises about 500 men,²³ some of whom are equipped with recently produced weapons. Between 30 and 40 members of the BASEP form the president's bodyguard. Wearing civilian clothes, they carry FN P90 guns (calibre 5,7 x 28 mm), a model that is often used by special forces, anti-terrorist units, and those charged with bodyguard functions.²⁴ The other members of the BASEP are also armed: the 40 officers of the Battalion have a handgun and a Kalashnikov; the soldiers have only a Kalashnikov.²⁵

Members of the police force are equipped in various ways. The riot police forces do not carry firearms; they are currently engaged in discussions with manufacturers of non-lethal weapons such as the Taser.²⁶ Other police units, such as the anti-banditry or the anti-terrorist unit, are armed.²⁷

Approximately one month after the incidents in the neighbourhood referred to as the *centre émetteur* (transmitting centre), where police officers and militant Islamists from AQIM had exchanged fire in April 2008 (see below), police officers fired on two men whom they took for fleeing terrorists. One of the two men died in hospital with more than 25 bullet wounds in the lower torso, suggesting the policemen misused their firearms. Incidents of this type remain rare, however—one per year on average, according to a medical source.²⁸

Poor stockpile security

Several sources asserted that the security of state-held small arms and ammunition left much to be desired.²⁹ It seems to be common practice for the general staff to sell or give away arms and ammunition. This usually involves 'downgraded' arms; that is, arms deemed unsuitable for use but offered to civilians instead of being destroyed.³⁰ The decision to 'downgrade' seems to be relatively arbitrary and is at the sole discretion of the general staff. Some

arms are sold for use as spare parts.³¹ In addition, the army supplies ammunition to shooting clubs for their competitions and, according to some sources, for training (see Box 5).³²

The relative ease with which arms and ammunition are misappropriated shows that the state exercises inadequate control over the security of its stockpiles.³³ Misappropriated weapons also feed the illegal arms trade. Such weapons are likely to fall into the hands of illicit armed groups, which can resort to military operations to secure them. In 2005, the GSPC (now AQIM) claimed responsibility for an attack that was carried out on 4 June against a border post of the Mauritanian army near Lemgheity, on the border with Algeria. Led by Mokhtar Belmokhtar, one of the leaders of the GSPC in the Sahara, the operation caused the deaths of 15 soldiers and nine other deaths in the ranks of the GSPC (Jane's, 2005; Lecocq and Schrijver, 2007, p. 152). Mokhtar Belmokhtar later said that his group had taken 1 SPG-9-type mortar, 1 anti-aircraft weapon, 58 Kalashnikovs, 2 RPG-7s, nearly 50,000 cartridges, and 7 vehicles in the operation (Marret, 2008, p. 547). 📄

II. Armed violence and perceptions of security

The rates and impact of armed violence

Nouakchott

Interviewed representatives of Mauritanian and international organizations in Nouakchott and focus group participants in Nouadhibou and Aioun al-Atrous converge on two points: the low rate of criminality, even though it has been increasing over the past ten years,³⁴ and the fact that firearms are rarely used in criminal acts, as criminals tend to use bladed weapons. Attacks on roads (committed by bandits known as *coupeurs de route*) are almost unknown in Mauritania.³⁵ Witnesses report only a few hold-ups and burglaries; car thefts and rape, which rarely involve the use of firearms, seem to be more frequent. The general inference is that the thieves, who are driven to criminality by poverty, do not have the means to buy firearms. There is another type of criminality among the privileged classes, namely young unemployed men committing rape.³⁶ Between these two categories, there does not seem to be any organized criminal activity by gangs.³⁷ Even in cases of self-defence, shopkeepers tend to use sticks and axes rather than firearms.³⁸ Some of them, however, possess handguns to dissuade would-be assailants.³⁹

The infrequent use of firearms is clear in cases of rape. According to the president of the Mauritanian Association for the Health of Mothers and Children, a non-governmental organization (NGO) based in Nouakchott, sexual violence is on the increase but attackers are rarely prosecuted, particularly because this issue remains largely taboo.⁴⁰ This association, which provides shelter for victims of sexual violence and their children, reports that since its creation in 2000, it has never recorded a rape committed under threat of a firearm; it estimates that four rapes out of five are committed under the threat of a bladed weapon.⁴¹ In 2008, the NGO took in 304 victims of sexual violence, only two of whom were over 18 (AMSME, 2008). It is therefore possible that the perpetrators, who attacked almost only children and adolescents, were able to rely on physical violence, without having to resort to firearms to get their way.

The statistics of the prison authorities confirm the limited use of firearms in criminal activity. Out of the 847 prisoners⁴² in the Dar-Naim prison in Nouakchott, only 46 committed offences involving the use of firearms: 3 were imprisoned for arms trafficking, 2 for homicide, and 41 for using or threatening to use arms.⁴³ These figures include individuals arrested in April 2008 for terrorism.

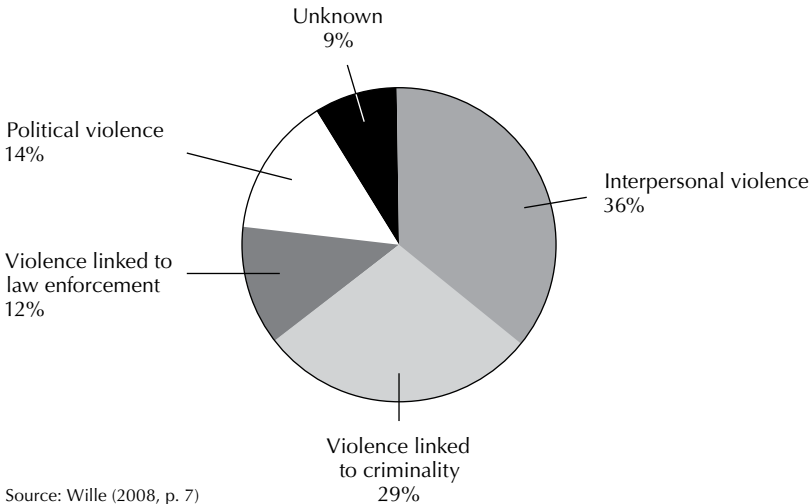
The rates of armed violence in Mauritania can also be assessed through an analysis of incidents reported by the media, using the Taback–Coupland method. According to a study of all the editions of seven French-language and Arabic newspapers published between January 2003 and January 2007, the French-language publications—*Nouakchott Info*, *L'Authentique*, *Le Calame*, *La Tribune*, and *L'Éveil-Hebdo*—mentioned 51 incidents of this type in the whole country. Over the same period, the Arabic publications—*El Akhbar* and *Essevir*—reported 31 incidents. These 82 references to armed violence covered 65 different incidents, 10 of which were mentioned in several of the newspapers studied (Wille, 2008, pp. 3–4). Over the four-year period, an average of 1.35 incidents were reported per month.

One of two reasons may explain this low figure: either there actually are few incidents of this type in Mauritania, or the local newspapers only report some of them (Wille, 2008, p. 1). A Mauritanian journalist who works for a newspaper that was not reviewed argues that some incidents are not reported by journalists, and that a story may arrive too late to be included. As a general rule, however, the interest of the general public in stories of this type encourages Mauritanian journalists to report all the incidents of armed violence that they know about, though these are relatively rare.⁴⁴

On the basis of this media analysis, several observations may be made regarding the profiles of the perpetrators and victims, and the types of violent acts generally committed. Acts of interpersonal violence (defined as act in which the perpetrator and victim knew each other before the incident) are more common than acts of violence linked to criminality, those occurring at the time of clashes with law enforcement, or those linked to political violence (see Figure 1). The acts of violence reported often involve criminals and ordinary individuals, or ordinary individuals in conflict with other ordinary individuals, but rarely clashes between different groups of criminals (such as

gangs). Acts of violence between members of the security forces and criminals or ordinary citizens are also rare (Wille, 2008, p. 11). The general ‘good conduct’ of the security forces is confirmed by the fact that only two people were killed in all the incidents in which the security forces were involved (Wille, 2008, p. 12), which suggests that the latter only make moderate use of their arms. Among the main types of violence recorded, thefts and burglaries were the most common (11 cases out of 65), followed by crimes of passion, ‘honour’ crimes, and acts of vengeance (ten cases), then acts of political violence (also ten cases committed during coups d’état or attempted coups d’état) (Wille, 2008, p. 7).

Figure 1. **Types of violent act recorded between January 2003 and January 2007**



The data also reveals information about the instruments used in these incidents. Out of 65 acts of armed violence recorded during the period under review, the knife was the weapon most used (34.7% of cases), with firearms used in about one-quarter of cases (Wille, 2008, p. 1). Firearms were only used in two of the 23 incidents of interpersonal violence. The fact that ‘weapons’ such as screwdrivers or broken glass were mentioned several times tends to suggest that firearms are not easy to come by in Mauritania, or that Mauritians use them rarely when involved in acts of violence (Wille, 2008, p. 15).

Eighty per cent of the incidents reported took place in urban areas, but this figure is probably not representative of the situation in Mauritania as a whole. The media probably provide more coverage of incidents that occur in areas that are easy to reach, and where they themselves are located, than of incidents in more distant locations. It should also be noted that acts of violence often take place at night or in the evening (32 cases out of 65) (Wille, 2008, pp. 8–9).

The fact that acts of violence are not usually fatal—14.3 per cent of the victims died—is consistent with the use of knives, which are statistically less lethal than firearms. Furthermore, given that criminal incidents usually predominate in the media, the high rate of incidents of interpersonal violence suggests that this criminality is relatively limited in Mauritania (Wille, 2008, p. 15). These elements distinguish the situation in Mauritania from that in the other parts of Africa studied using the Taback–Coupland method, such as Nigeria and Uganda (Wille, forthcoming, pp. 50–57).

A third approach by which the impact of armed violence in Mauritania can be assessed is studying the number of people with bullet wounds. Yet while the Ministry of Health records types and numbers of wounds, it does not document the cause of a wound.⁴⁵ According to an official Mauritanian source, establishing statistics on the number of people with bullet wounds is not a priority, given how rare this type of injury is.⁴⁶ The causes of wounds are sometimes mentioned in hospital registers, but this data is not systematically recorded or centralized. It should also be noted that the World Health Organization does not consider gunshot wounds a public health priority in Mauritania. Compared with injuries caused by traffic accidents, of which there are many in the country, the number caused by firearms is considered too low to justify maintaining statistics on this subject.⁴⁷

Nevertheless, the frequency of this type of wound can be assessed based on evidence provided by health workers. According to the former head of the emergency department of the National Hospital, the largest hospital in Nouakchott, there are no more than 20 cases per year. Patients are usually individuals living in rural areas who are admitted following a hunting accident, or who are injured due to poor handling of their weapons. The other reasons are interpersonal conflicts,⁴⁸ such as family conflicts or arguments about livestock or access to resources.⁴⁹

This figure does not include all the individuals wounded by bullets who die before reaching a hospital. This number could be significant, as only the hospital in Noakchott is equipped to deal with the most serious injuries, which are most likely to lead to the death of the injured person on the way to hospital. The figure of 20 cases per year cited above also excludes incidents relating to AQIM's activities in 2007–08, such as the killing of four French tourists in December 2007 or the gun battle between police officers and members of the Mauritanian branch of AQIM in April 2008 (see above). According to the former head of the emergency department at the National Hospital, bullet wounds are caused by all types of firearm: hunting weapons, automatic guns, and pistols. Whenever a person suffers a bullet wound, the doctor must notify the police or the gendarmerie and complete two certificates: the initial certificate records and describes the injury; the second certificate, which is completed after the injury has stabilized, assesses the resultant degree of disability, whether temporary or permanent. The victim may use the two certificates in a court of law, if he or she decides to report the matter to the police.⁵⁰ It should be noted that 85 per cent of the population does not have health insurance. The treatment of a bullet wound in the abdomen, for example, costs between 250,000 and 300,000 ouguiyas (USD 1,000–1,200), which represents about ten months' salary for an average civil servant.⁵¹

The interior of the country

According to a source at the Kiffa hospital, the country's second best-equipped hospital, which mainly treats the inhabitants of the Kiffa region and neighbouring areas in the south, the number of individuals wounded by firearms in the interior of the country is also low. This hospital treats 20 to 30 urgent cases every day, but only four individuals were treated for gunshot wounds in 2008; of those four, only one person died. The four victims were injured by hunting weapons; three of the cases were accidents while the fourth was intentional. According to the same source, the number of persons with bullet wounds treated in 2008 is representative of other years. Bullet wounds do not represent a real public health problem. Wounds caused by

bladed weapons (knives, swords) or by blunt instruments, such as sticks, are more common; the hospital treats five or six per month.⁵²

In Nouadhibou, members of the focus group stressed that theft and sexual violence were only committed in the most isolated neighbourhoods, such as Hay Dubai and around the artisanal port. Most thieves use bladed weapons, sticks, or screwdrivers, but sometimes also pistols. The presence of nationals from other African countries waiting for boats to travel to Europe, which is particularly significant in Nouadhibou, does not seem to have any impact on the level of security. The major problem in Nouadhibou, in terms of human security, remains the anti-personnel mines scattered along the border with Western Sahara; these mines still cause between 10 and 15 accidents every year.⁵³ In the north of the country, in the area around Zouerate, which is close to the border with Western Sahara, the level of insecurity is more pronounced due to the trafficking of arms, cigarettes, drugs, and other goods that takes place there. In fact, it was in the Zouerate area, around 30 km to the north of the small town of Tourine, that Mauritanian soldiers and their civilian guide were attacked, on 14 September 2008, by members of AQIM. Twelve of them were abducted and had their throats cut (BBC, 2008a; Ould Oumere, 2008b).

The security situation in Aioun al-Atrous, in the south of the country, was judged to be quite good by those who took part in the focus groups; they said that they did not systematically close their doors in the evening, nor feel at risk when they slept in the open air. Levels of criminality are low and offenders target property rather than people. Apparently thieves are arrested quickly.⁵⁴ When arms are used, they tend to be weapons such as knives, machetes, screwdrivers, and sticks, rather than firearms, which seem to be used mainly for reasons of prestige and for celebrations.

The price of arms in Modibougou, to the south of Aioun al-Atrous, is higher than in Nouadhibou or Nouakchott (see Table 5), which might suggest that the demand for small arms is higher in the region along the border with Mali. In fact, according to those taking part in the focus group, nomadic herdsmen possess weapons in order to defend their herds. Individuals who make a living from small-scale cross-border trafficking also possess weapons, including Kalashnikovs and pistols. According to the same sources, minor land disputes break out regularly among herdsmen and farmers and, while

weapons other than firearms are used most frequently, firearms have also been used several times. These small land disputes are particularly numerous along the border with Mali (between Selibaby and the region to the south of Aioun al-Atrous on the Mauritanian side, and Kayes on the Malian side).⁵⁵ As the population is also at risk of armed robbery, particularly the theft of cattle, some of the people are reportedly armed for reasons of self-defence, mainly with hunting weapons.⁵⁶

Private security firms, unknown in Nouakchott five years ago, have now multiplied. At the beginning of 2009, there were about ten of them.⁵⁷ Their agents, who are not authorized to carry firearms,⁵⁸ are usually equipped with clubs. Their activities are now regulated by legislation but, at the beginning of 2009, that legislation was not yet in force. The guards are often former soldiers. The firms are employed mainly by banks, embassies, large companies, and some private individuals (often expatriates) to guard buildings. The increase in the number of private security firms does not necessarily reflect an increase in the level of insecurity; rather, it seems to result from the discovery of an unexploited market and a copycat effect, with one firm appearing and others immediately following.⁵⁹ The novelty of the phenomenon means that any assessment of their future is premature. The number of such firms will probably stabilize, or even decline, when non-viable companies disappear from the market.

A worrying evolution in the security situation

While incidents of armed violence seem to be infrequent, the Mauritanian authorities have nevertheless seen a worrying evolution in the security situation. An internal report produced in 2008 by the Mauritanian Department of National Security estimates that ‘the proliferation of uncontrolled arms 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’. The same report states that ‘the use of arms to commit a wide variety of offences against property and persons is more and more frequent. [...] Generally speaking, the circulation of arms is a growing cause of concern’ (DNS, 2008).

The report also notes that there were 70,000 weapons in circulation among the Mauritanian population. It provides no indication of the method used to arrive at this figure, which must therefore be viewed with caution.

The above-mentioned report also refers to attacks carried out in Mauritania by AQIM (formerly GSPC). Before 2007, one single attack—the Lemgheity attack of 2005—was attributed to the GSPC in Mauritanian territory. The attack, which was prepared and carried out by two GSPC units,⁶⁰ was apparently meant to be a reprisal for the arrest by the government of President Ould Taya of seven young Mauritians on their way back from GSPC training camps in Mali. It also intended to condemn the activity of the US military in the country as part of the Pan Sahel Initiative (PSI), a regional anti-terrorist programme (Jane's, 2005; Lecocq and Schrijver, 2007, pp. 152–53).⁶¹ According to another source, the GSPC group in Mali, led by Mokhtar Belmokhtar, decided to get fresh supplies of arms by attacking the garrison. It seems to have had the support of another GSPC cell, led by Abdel Hamid (also known as Abid Hammadou), active in the region of Tindouf, in the south of Algeria (Ould Oumere, 2008c). After this attack, the GSPC issued a statement announcing that other actions would follow, referring to Ould Taya as the 'Karzai of Mauritania' (Lecocq and Schrijver, 2007, p. 152). In fact, the Lemgheity 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 (Lecocq and Schrijver, 2007, p. 153). In May 2007, 21 people suspected of having taken part in the Lemgheity attack were tried by a court in Nouakchott (AP, 2007).

The Lemgheity operation revealed the operational capacities of the Saharan cells of the GSPC, which changed suddenly from being a network of traffickers and occasional hostage takers to a group with sufficient resources to attack a military post, even in a country in which they had not previously been active. Since it changed its name to AQIM, the group has multiplied its attacks in Mauritania, which has seen a rapid succession of incidents for which the group has claimed responsibility or which have been attributed to it (see Table 2).

Mauritania's links with Israel, along with its participation in military exercises run by the United States (see below), probably explain why the country

Table 2

Incidents in Mauritania for which the GSPC/AQIM has claimed responsibility or that are linked to the GSPC/AQIM, 1 January 2005–31 December 2009

Date	Place	Target	Arms/method used	Outcome of the attack
5 June 2005	Lemgheity	Military post	Firearms	15 soldiers and 9 members of the GSPC killed, several wounded
23 October 2007	Autonomous Port of Nouakchott	Receipts held at the harbourmaster's office	Simonov rifle (shots fired in the air)	Theft of 45 million ouguiyas (USD 170,000) ⁶²
24 December 2007	Aleg (in the south)	4 French tourists	Automatic rifles	4 dead, 1 seriously wounded
27 December 2007	Army post at Al Ghallawiya (in the Atar region)	3 Mauritanian soldiers, theft of an army SPG-9 ⁶³	Unknown	3 dead
1 February 2008	Nouakchott	Israeli embassy and 'The VIP' nightclub	Firearms	3 wounded, property damage
7 April 2008	<i>Centre émetteur</i> neighbourhood to the north of Nouakchott	Police	Firearms (gun battle)	1 police officer and 2 GSPC militants killed
15 September 2008	Tourine, near Zouerate (in the north)	12 Mauritanian soldiers	Machine guns, rocket-propelled grenade	12 dead (11 soldiers and their civilian guide)
23 June 2009	Nouakchott	1 US humanitarian worker	Automatic rifles	1 dead
8 August 2009	Nouakchott	French embassy	Suicide attack	1 dead (the perpetrator of the attack), 3 wounded
29 November 2009	Road between Nouadhibou and Nouakchott	3 Spanish humanitarian workers	Kidnapping	Under investigation
18 December 2009	Near Kobenni, 8 km from the border with Mali	2 Italian tourists and their Ivorian driver	Kidnapping	Under investigation

Sources: Lecocq and Schrijver (2007, p. 152); Jane's (2008b); Adams (2008); AFP (2008a; 2009j); Choplin (2008); interview with Moussa Ould Samba Sy, publications director of the *Quotidien de Nouakchott*, Nouakchott, April 2009; interview with a Mauritanian judicial source, April 2009; Ould Oumere (2008a; 2008b); Reuters (2009d; 2009f); Daniel (2009)

has been chosen as a target by AQIM. The change of regime on 6 August 2008 seems to have had the effect of further radicalizing AQIM against Mauritania. On 10 August 2008, the leader (or *emir*) of the group, Abdelmalek Droukdel, also known as Abou Mossaab Abdelouadoud, announced on the Internet that the country should 'prepare for total war', calling on Mauritians to rebel against the government of Gen. Abdelaziz (AFP, 2008b; BBC, 2008b; Ould Oumere, 2008b). In September 2008, a few days after the killing of 11 soldiers and their guide in Tourine, Droukdel said in a statement that Mauritania was a 'nest of spies, with Mossad in the first line' and pointed out that it was 'the first Arab country, outside of the Tawq (Arab nations surrounding Israel), that recognised the state of Israel' (AFP, 2008c).

After the shootings on 1 February 2008, there was a second attack on the Israeli embassy in Nouakchott, on 31 December 2008, which failed. Yet it seems that the attacker, who was arrested by the police, was not a member of any particular group.⁶⁴ His act may have been an individual reaction to the Israeli military intervention in Gaza (Afrik.com, 2008). Other threats have been thwarted in time, including a plot to abduct the German vice-consul in Nouakchott, which was foiled in April 2009, only a few hours before the kidnappers were due to put their plan into effect.⁶⁵ In July 2009, two individuals, including a Sudanese national, were arrested by the police on suspicion of preparing an attack against the National Industrial and Mining Company, which is located in Zouerate, not far from the place where 12 Mauritanian soldiers had already been killed by AQIM in September 2008. The two suspects were also accused of having taken part in the 2008 attack (Panapress, 2009c).

The circumstances surrounding the killing of four French tourists at Aleg, in December 2007, are obscure. Was it an abduction that went wrong or an intentional murder? It seems certain that the attack was not planned; the three men responsible for the massacre, Sidi Ould Sidna, Mohamed Ould Chabarnoux, and Marouf Ould Haiba, probably spotted the French people in Aleg and followed them as they left the town, gunning them down with machine guns at that point.⁶⁶ Four of them were killed and the fifth was seriously wounded.⁶⁷ Sidi Ould Sidna and Mohamed Ould Chabarnoux were arrested in Guinea-Bissau in February 2008; however, the third perpetrator

managed to escape when he was being questioned at the courts in Nouakchott. The police found him several weeks later in a house in the *centre émetteur* neighbourhood to the north of Nouakchott, along with other members of AQIM. Three people were killed and around ten others were wounded in the gun battle around the house on 7 April 2008, between the members of the group and the police (Panapress, 2008). Three of the terrorists, including Sidi Ould Sidna, managed to escape, taking Kalashnikovs, a PK machine gun, and grenades with them.⁶⁸ After the shooting, the police searched the house and found explosives and detonators whose technical features suggested that a sizeable operation was imminent.⁶⁹ Marouf Ould Haiba was arrested several days later by the police in Nouakchott (RFI, 2008). Sidi Ould Sidna was finally arrested on 30 April by a police patrol; a few hours later, Khadim Ould Semane, the leader of the Mauritanian AQIM cell (see below), was also taken after being spotted in a house in the working-class district of Arafat, in Nouakchott (ANI, 2008). A number of items were found in the house after the arrests: police uniforms and bullet-proof vests; binoculars; small arms (two type-56 Chinese rifles, and 4 AKM and AKMS Kalashnikovs, probably Russian⁷⁰); gas canisters; and explosives belts.⁷¹ These two arrests were followed by many others (ANI, 2008).

In April 2009, a total of 53 individuals were imprisoned in Nouakchott for terrorism;⁷² most of them were still awaiting trial at this writing (see Box 4). Six terrorist cells that were active in Mauritania have been broken up (Ould Oumere, 2008b). Around ten arrest warrants have been issued against individuals who have fled.⁷³

Box 4. Islam and Islamism in Mauritania

Islam was a key element in the foundation of the Mauritanian state. In a country with marked ethnic, tribal, and regional differences, religion is considered an important unifying force (ICG 2005b, p. 4; Jane's, 2008a).⁷⁴ Since the ninth century, with the expansion of the Berber Almoravid dynasty, Islam has been firmly implanted in the whole of the Western Sahara. The Arabization of the Berber populations (nowadays the Mauritanian Moors) was complete by the 17th century. The Afro-Mauritanian populations converted around the 19th century, at a time when Islam was perceived as a force of resistance against European colonial expansion (Jane's, 2008a; ICG, 2005b, p. 4). Nowadays, nearly all Mauritians are Muslim (Sunni), most of them belonging to the Maliki tradition.⁷⁵

Mauritania defines itself as an Islamic republic; however, the place of Islam in political life has fluctuated in line with the wishes of the various heads of state. Mostly ignored by President Mokhtar Ould Daddah, Islam increased in importance with Col. Haidallah, who was in power in 1980–84 and replaced French law, inherited from France on independence, with sharia law. A significant change was made when the weekly public holiday was moved from Saturday and Sunday to Friday and Saturday (ICG, 2005b, p. 8).

President Maouiya Ould Sid Ahmed Taya, less religious than his predecessor, made a sharply anti-Islamist move when he drew closer to the United States and Israel. Under his presidency, it became illegal to set up a political party based on religion and Saturday and Sunday were reinstated as the weekly public holiday. Militant Islamists were arrested in 1994 (ICG, 2005a, p. 15). In 2003, 32 Islamist leaders were arrested and accused of plotting against the Constitution. Although it is unlikely that this factor played a role in the coup d'état that was attempted one week later—which was motivated mainly by dismissals from the army—many Islamists were targeted in the repression that followed (Carroll, 2003). That same year, a law prohibiting all political activity in mosques was passed and thereafter only the Malikite form of worship was allowed (ICG, 2005a, p. 15).⁷⁶

President Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdallahi, who was elected democratically in 2007, was widely perceived as more religious than many of his predecessors. He reinstated Friday and Saturday as the weekly public holiday⁷⁷ and declared two Islamist political parties official: el-Fadila and Tawassoul. The Fadila party ('virtue' in Arabic) is relatively powerless, but the Tawassoul party, which is affiliated with the Moslem Brotherhood, has several members of parliament. Until the ministerial reshuffle in July 2008, it even had members in the second government of President Abdallahi. The Tawassoul party was one of the main organizers of the many demonstrations in Nouakchott at the beginning of January 2009, protesting against the Israeli intervention in Gaza (AFP, 2009b). It also belonged to the National Front for the Defence of Democracy, an alliance of parties opposed to the August 2008 coup d'état. Its candidate, Mohamed Jamil Ould Mansour, won only 4.57 per cent of the votes in the presidential election of 18 July 2009 (RFI, 2009).

The administration of Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdallahi freed some of the Islamists imprisoned in Mauritania. In June 2007, the authorities released 14 individuals who had been held since 2005 for having run mosques that the former president, Ould Taya, suspected of indoctrinating the young. Nine other people, imprisoned since mid-2006, were also freed in July 2007. Only two prisoners, both of whom took part in the Lemgheity attack, remained in prison at this writing. The releases were Abdallahi's reply to the civil society and international organizations that denounced the arbitrary detentions and poor treatment meted out to prisoners.⁷⁸ The releases were strongly criticized by Gen. Mohamed Ould Abdelaziz, who justified his coup d'état on 6 August 2008 by accusing President Abdallahi of weakness in the face of the terrorist threat.

The risks of Mauritania moving towards extremism are generally considered low. Salafism⁷⁹ is very far from the Malikite tradition and Mauritania's population does not seem to be particularly drawn to the fundamentalist version of Islam. The activities of

AQIM inspire little enthusiasm in this country: interviewees all agree that calls for witnesses and the free hotlines set up by the police dealing with terrorist matters are generally very successful.⁸⁰ The tribal system, which structures the whole of the country's social, political, and economic life, also makes widespread radicalization unlikely (*Economist*, 2008). Apart from a few rare cases, such as one of the leaders of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, Abou Yahya al-Libi, who studied theology in Mauritania (Filiu, 2009, p. 222, n. 46), Mauritanian mosques do not seem to have become a recruiting ground for jihadists. It may be that after the Lemgheity attack, the Ould Taya government deliberately exaggerated the 'Islamic threat' in order to subdue the opposition to his regime and obtain financial and military support from the United States (ICG, 2005b, pp. i–ii; 2006, pp. 5–6; AP, 2007).

The presence of Mauritanian combatants in Afghanistan, Algeria, and Iraq is, however, a new development (Ould Oumere, 2008b).⁸¹ Three Mauritanian citizens were held at Guantánamo Bay.⁸² The first generation of Mauritanian Salafists date from 2004, when volunteers set off for GSPC camps in the hope of going to fight US troops in Iraq. Instead, most were sent to Algeria.⁸³ According to Moroccan sources, the Zouerate area, among others, is said to have been a recruitment area in which members of al-Qaeda were operating (Botha, 2008, p. 94). In August 2008, about 40 young Mauritanians were reported in the company of several veterans of Afghanistan in the AQIM camps in the north of Mali.⁸⁴ In 2009, it was thought that about 30 Mauritanians belonged to AQIM (out of a total of around 600 members).⁸⁵ In May 2009, the Mauritanian Abou Alkama El Mouritani (whose real name is Mokhtar Mohamed Ben Mohamed) was tried in Algeria for belonging to an AQIM cell based at the Algeria–Mali border; the cell is believed to have prepared attacks in Algeria (Bounira, 2008). Previously, in August 2008, his fellow countryman, Abdelrahman Abou Zeina al-Mauritani, became the first Mauritanian suicide bomber when he blew himself up in the Algerian town of Bouira⁸⁶ (Jameh, 2008).

In Mauritania itself, explosives belts found in a house in northern Nouakchott, in April 2008, suggest that an important operation, in which one or two people were to blow themselves up, was in preparation.⁸⁷ However, thanks to arrests in early 2008, many of the Mauritanian Salafist cells were dismantled and it is now thought that the Mauritanian branch of AQIM, Al-Ansar Allah al-Murabitun, no longer exists (see below). The murder of a US humanitarian worker in June 2009 and the suicide attack against the French embassy two months later, for both of which AQIM claimed responsibility (BBC, 2009d; NEFA Foundation, 2009), suggest that a new AQIM cell in Mauritania, more particularly in Nouakchott, could have formed.

The deterioration of the security situation is the cause of a serious decline in tourism in Mauritania. The killings of four French tourists in Aleg and three Mauritanian soldiers in Atar, one of the main local tourist destinations, have had serious consequences: the 2007–08 tourist season saw a 60 per cent drop in the number of visitors in comparison with the previous year, which is

critical for an activity that employs nearly 45,000 people and that earned the country USD 39 million in 2007 (AFP, 2008e). After threats from AQIM, and in spite of promises from the Mauritanian state to mobilize 3,000 men to provide security, the Paris–Dakar rally, which has crossed Mauritania since the race was first held in 1979, was cancelled in 2008 (AP, 2008a).⁸⁸ In 2009, the Africa Race between Marseille and Dakar only drew a very small number of participants. Yet Mauritania had deployed significant resources to ensure their protection, escorting the convoy and guarding the bivouacs at night with pick-up vehicles equipped with machine guns (Benmehdi, 2009; Reuters, 2009a).

According to an official Mauritanian source, the loss of revenue caused by the cancellation of the Paris–Dakar rally and the fall in the number of tourists was estimated, at the beginning of 2008, at several million dollars (Jane’s, 2008b). The massacre of 11 Mauritanian soldiers and their guide, in September 2008, only aggravated the situation: the first three flights between Paris and Atar, in December 2008, at the height of the tourist season, had to be cancelled due to a lack of passengers (IRIN, 2008e). The killing of the US humanitarian worker in June 2009 in Nouakchott, the attack on the French embassy in August 2009, and the abductions of foreign nationals in November and December 2009—a type of incident that had previously affected neighbouring Mali, but never Mauritania—can only heighten the feeling of insecurity and further reduce the number of visitors. In August 2009, the United States decided to withdraw about 100 Peace Corps volunteers from the country and transfer them to Senegal, which was deemed to be safer (BBC, 2009f).

The responses of the Mauritanian state and the international community

The Mauritanian state

The Lemgheity attack in 2005, the assassination of the French tourists in 2007, and the Tourine murders in 2008 had the effect of an electric shock on both public opinion and the government. The response of the Mauritanian state was mainly judicial and military. The arrests of militant Islamists, whose

numbers had increased rapidly since 2005, continued at the end of 2008 with the extradition from Mali of three Mauritians, all of whom were sentenced to ten years in prison for AQIM-related activities. These were the heaviest sentences ever imposed for this type of offence in Mauritania (BBC, 2008b). In July 2009, the Nouakchott Court of Appeals increased the sentences already being served by two men who took part in the Lemgheity attack (Panapress, 2009b). At the end of 2009, an anti-terrorist bill was put before the Mauritanian parliament. It gives more powers to law enforcement with respect to telephone tapping and house searches (AFP, 2009o).

In 2005–06, possibly to prevent more attacks like the one at Lemgheity, the government attempted to recover some of the weapons that the army had traditionally ‘loaned’ to the civilian population, but without success.⁸⁹ It is unclear whether any registers of lent arms were kept; while some interviewees mentioned such registers, adding that they were incomplete and carelessly kept, this information could not be verified. There might be only the name of the recipient, but no address or any other information by which to locate the recipient in a country where many people share the same names.⁹⁰ A certain number of arms were recovered by the authorities, but there is no further information; this measure was taken relatively discreetly, given the fact that the general staff never officially admitted to the existence of these loans.⁹¹

After the Aleg attack in December 2007, more police and gendarmerie checks were carried out and about 100 weapons were recovered.⁹² At the end of August 2009, just before the beginning of the month of Ramadan, security in Nouakchott was tightened further as the government feared more suicide attacks such as the one that targeted the French embassy some weeks earlier (Panapress, 2009d). Military patrols were also strengthened and extended to areas that had previously received little protection, such as the Adrar region (Ould Abdel Wedoud and Ould Khattat, 2009). In order to monitor the most distant parts of the country, close to the borders with Algeria, Mali, and Western Sahara, the army deployed new units of around 600 men known as Special Interventions Groups (Groupements spéciaux d’intervention) (IRIN, 2008e).⁹³ Mauritania also enhanced its cooperation with its neighbours in order to better monitor the borders, particularly by deploying mobile patrols on the roads, defining areas to be monitored as a matter of priority, and pro-

fessionalizing the personnel used to carry out this task.⁹⁴ Algeria, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger occasionally conduct 'simultaneous patrols' or 'joint patrols' in tackling regional problems.

This regional cooperation between the various countries affected by the presence or activities of AQIM was strengthened in 2009. In May, Mali sent three battalions to the north, apparently to dislodge militant Salafists. According to the Algerian press, Algeria, Mauritania, and Niger were getting ready to send reinforcements when operations were suspended at the request of a European country anxious not to endanger the two Swiss and British hostages still held by the group in that region (Reuters, 2009b). Algeria sent arms to Mali to carry out these operations and, in July, along with Libya, it promised Bamako to share the information held by its intelligence services and military resources in the fight against AQIM (AFP, 2009l; BBC, 2009b). At the beginning of September 2009, the military authorities of Algeria, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger met to strengthen their cooperation (AFP, 2009m).

The international community

Since the terrorist attacks against its embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, in 1998, the United States has reassessed the priority given to Africa, traditionally considered of only modest strategic interest. The country's *National Security Strategy*, which was published in March 2006, states that henceforth:

Africa holds growing geo-strategic importance and is a high priority for this Administration. [...] The United States recognizes that our security depends upon partnering with Africans to strengthen fragile and failing states and bring ungoverned areas under the control of effective democracies (USNSC, 2006, p. 37).

The announcement, on 6 February 2007, of the creation of the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) illustrates new interest in the continent, some of whose desert regions, or regions outside government control, are considered potential refuges for destabilizing elements.⁹⁵ AFRICOM has been opera-

tional since 1 October 2008 and has responsibility for the whole of the African continent,⁹⁶ which was previously under the supervision of three different military commands.

GSPC's decision to join forces with al-Qaeda, which was announced on 11 September 2006 by Ayman al-Zaouahiri, was perceived by the United States as yet another reason to be active in the region (Jane's, 2009f).⁹⁷ In the *Annual Threat Assessment* of the dangers facing the United States, the Director of National Intelligence, Dennis C. Blair, estimates that in February 2009 AQIM represented a 'significant threat to US and Western interests in the region' (ODNI, 2009, p. 6).

Along with the Horn of Africa, the Sahel region has benefitted from this new interest, which has led to increased military cooperation between the United States and the states of both regions. In 2003, the United States launched the Pan Sahel Initiative, followed in 2005 by the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Initiative (TSCTI). The military component of these two programmes is known by the acronym OEF-TS (Operation Enduring Freedom-Trans-Sahara).

The PSI, which was financed by the Department of State and run from Stuttgart, Germany, by the US European Command (EUCOM), covered Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger. Its aim was to develop and train a rapid reaction force of some 150 men in each of the countries concerned (RAND, 2007, p. 200). Out of a budget of USD 7 million, USD 500,000 were allocated to support Mauritanian forces. Members of the US Special Forces took part in the training of the Mauritanian First Battalion of Paratroopers (Jourde, 2007, p. 91). The main objective of the PSI was to enhance the capacity of the armies concerned to keep better watch over their territories and borders.

The TSCTI covers the same countries as the PSI as well as Algeria, Morocco, Nigeria, Senegal, and Tunisia. This programme has a much larger budget than the PSI; starting with USD 30–60 million in 2005, it is set to reach USD 100 million per year until 2011 (RAND, 2007, pp. 200–01). Like the PSI, the TSCTI concentrates on training the armed forces of the participating countries, particularly through the Flintlock exercise, which consists of testing the cooperation of 1,000 US soldiers and 3,000 Algerian, Chadian, Malian, Mauritanian, Nigerien, and Senegalese soldiers deployed in a common anti-

terrorist and anti-smuggling operation, once every two years. A second aim of the exercise is to strengthen the capacities of the participating countries for the purposes of humanitarian and peacekeeping operations.⁹⁸

After the coup d'état in August 2008, the United States immediately suspended its military cooperation with Mauritania. Washington withdrew from the country the troops charged with training the Mauritanian army in counterterrorism tactics and suspended its plan to create a local anti-terrorist unit (IRIN, 2008c). Initially known as the GLAT (Groupement de lutte anti-terroriste), this new unit was to comprise about 100 men trained by the United States. After the US withdrawal, Mauritania continued to develop this concept, but under a new name, the Special Interventions Group.⁹⁹ The 80 US soldiers and Marines charged with training their Mauritanian counterparts were recalled, along with the surveillance plane that was charged with flying over the desert regions in the north in search of Salafist camps (Schmidle, 2009).

The new Mauritanian administration has tried to make up for the defection of part of the international community by strengthening its links with the Arab world. In February 2009, the heads of the intelligence services of the countries of the Arab Maghreb Union, which brings together Algeria, Mauritania, Morocco, Libya, and Tunisia, met in Nouakchott in an attempt to establish better collaboration in security matters, particularly in the fight against the trafficking of drugs, arms, and people and against the activities of AQIM in the region (*Ennahar*, 2009).

France also supports the Mauritanian state in its fight against terrorism. In October 2009, it began talks with Nouakchott in order to strengthen bilateral military cooperation between the two countries (AFP, 2009n). This strengthening of links between Paris and Nouakchott follows on from the suicide attack on the French embassy in August 2009.

Regional and international commitments regarding small arms and light weapons

Mauritania's membership in various regional organizations reflects the ethnic diversity of its population and its particular geographical location between North and sub-Saharan Africa. As a member of the Organization of African

Unity from its creation in 1963, and then of the African Union (AU), which replaced it in 2002, the country has made a commitment to comply with the Bamako Declaration on the proliferation, circulation, and trafficking of small arms and light weapons (OAU, 2000), which preceded the UN Programme of Action (UNGA, 2001). This is, however, only a declaration of political intent and is not legally binding. Mauritania's membership in the AU was suspended after the coup d'état on 3 August 2005,¹⁰⁰ and then re-established in April 2007, after the presidential election (BBC, 2007). The coup d'état of 6 August 2008, although condemned by the AU, the UN, the European Union, and the Arab League, has not affected Mauritania's participation in the AU (AU, 2008).

Mauritania joined the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) when it was set up in 1975, but withdrew in 1999 (ECOWAS, 2000).¹⁰¹ Therefore, it is not involved in the ECOWAS process which, in 1998, turned its Declaration of a Moratorium on the Import, Export and Manufacture of Small Arms and Light Weapons in West Africa into a binding agreement (ECOWAS, 2006). This measure is one of the greatest advances in the fight against the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the region. On 6 June 2007, the Mauritanian minister for industry and commerce, Sid'Ahmed Ould Rayess, announced his intention to negotiate a free trade agreement with ECOWAS (Panapress, 2007a). In the long run, a connection of this kind might allow Mauritania to benefit from the experience of the ECOWAS countries in the control of the proliferation of small arms.

Mauritania is also part of the Arab League, which it joined in 1973. Small arms issues are co-ordinated by the League's disarmament department (BBC, 2007). A conference devoted to the implementation of the PoA by the Arab states was held in 2003 (Arab League, 2003). Member states have, since then, periodically renewed their commitment to the PoA (Arab League, 2006). Mauritania is still part of the Arab Maghreb Union, but this organization does not envisage its members making any commitment on the question of small arms.

Mauritania is also a member of the Western Mediterranean Defence Initiative (also known as the 5+5 Initiative); since December 2004, the group has united countries of the western Mediterranean that seek to establish a dia-

logue in the field of defence and security. The Initiative organizes joint activities in the fields of marine surveillance (which includes the fight against trafficking), protection of civilians, and air security (French Ministry of Defence, n.d.b). The member states—Algeria, France, Italy, Libya, Malta, Mauritania, Morocco, Portugal, Spain, and Tunisia—prepare a yearly action plan. At the annual summit in 2009, the defence ministers from the member states dealt with questions relating to the prevention of terrorism, the exchange of information, cooperation of the military commands concerned, and the promotion of women in the armed forces (Arfaoui, 2009). In 2010, the presidency of the Initiative passed to Mauritania (*Times of Malta*, 2009).

Alongside Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia, Mauritania is also part of the Mediterranean Dialogue launched by NATO in 1994. The country takes part in the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, which is a practical expression of the Mediterranean Dialogue, and which also brings in other countries in the Middle East.¹⁰² These two initiatives, whose main aim is to create a forum in which questions of security can be discussed, have not so far generated any particular approach in the field of small arms.

Mauritania also joined the Community of Sahel–Saharan States (CEN-SAD), which has 28 members and was set up in 1998 at the instigation of Libya. Its objective is mainly economic—the aim is to facilitate exchanges, to assist the development of the member states, and to promote investments; however, it also deals with security and defence (Panapress, 2009a). At the end of May 2009, the CEN-SAD heads of state finally met in Libya to discuss security matters, after the meeting had been postponed several times. The question of small arms was not specifically dealt with, but participating countries asked Mauritania to ‘re-establish constitutional order’ (AFP, 2009g).

As a member of the UN, Mauritania is a party to the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition. This document supplements the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, which came into force in July 2005. Mauritania is also bound to implement the PoA, but does not yet have a national commission or any other body capable of drawing up an action plan. In fact, it seems that the Mauritanian authorities are not totally convinced of the need to adopt such a plan. The only report submitted, in

2005, by Mauritania to the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs on its implementation of the PoA states that the illicit trade in arms 'does not have a major impact in Mauritania'. The report also asserts that 'at the present time, there is no traffic in small arms, nor any significant proliferation of these arms'; nevertheless, it acknowledges that the country is located in an area that is potentially at high risk due to the conflict in Western Sahara, the groups of armed terrorists operating in Algeria, and the arms trafficking carried out by the Mauritanian and Malian Tuaregs (Islamic Republic of Mauritania, 2005).

A comparative analysis of the national reports on the implementation of the PoA considers the Mauritanian report 'weak', which is the lowest classification (Kytömäki and Yankey-Wayne, 2006, p. 35). This poor mark is due to the fact that several particularly important issues are not dealt with in the report, such as the domestic legislation on small arms, the collection and destruction of arms, the management of stocks and security, the marking of arms and ammunition, and the registration and tracing of arms. 📄

III. Firearms ownership among the civilian population

Cultural factors

All of the respondents participating in this study agreed that Mauritania's civilian population was very heavily armed. Prior to colonization, it was normal for people to own weapons, mainly blunt instruments, for the purpose of settling tribal conflicts, and also for hunting and to protect livestock from predators. Firearms only arrived in the 1920s, with the colonizers. According to participants in the Aioun al-Atrous focus groups, it is common for nomadic herdsmen in the south-east to own rifles. Hunters, tribal chiefs, and the 'middle class' in this region often own *bouvelkes*, which are craft hunting weapons with a single cartridge. Hunting is strictly regulated, but poaching continues and has led to the virtual extinction of species such as antelopes and bustards. Moreover, hunters often use weapons of war rather than traditional *bouvelkes*.¹⁰³ Due to increasing urbanization, desertification, and a shortage of game, Mauritians are now using their firearms for self-defence, ceremonial shooting, and target shooting.¹⁰⁴ Carbines and weapons of war are used for ceremonial and sports shooting (see Box 5).¹⁰⁵

Box 5. Target shooting in Mauritania

Target shooting is a traditional sport in Mauritania. Together with camel racing, it is one of the few sporting activities practised by Moors in the desert. While racing has now all but disappeared, target shooting remains very popular, as is evident from the number of clubs, competitions, and prestigious prizes devoted to it. One of these is the President's Cup, held every year in Nouakchott. At the independence celebration on 28 November, the army traditionally organizes shooting competitions, and supplies the weapons and cartridges.

In a country devoid of gunsmiths, the methods of acquiring weapons and ammunition for target shooting are both well-established and opaque. Only three models are used in training exercises and championships: Mausers, FN-FALs, and G3s. FN-FALs and G3s are not used in automatic mode. These weapons are only loaded with three cartridges at a time, which are fired one after the other. They are 'downgraded' weapons, meaning that they are deemed obsolete by the army. Instead of destroying them, however, the army loans them out to private individuals. Normally, when a weapon is lent out, the Ministry of Defence gives the borrower a document stating that the weapon, whose serial number

is specified, has been loaned for an indefinite period to the person named, and may be recovered at any time. In the event of a check, this document acts as proof that the weapon has not been stolen and its keeper is legitimate. It also serves as a licence to carry firearms and exempts a keeper from applying to the Department of National Security, which theoretically issues such permits.

It has not been possible to determine how many weapons have been loaned to civilians by the army over the years, nor whether a register of the distributed weapons has been kept. Nevertheless, a report by the Department of National Security estimates that shooting clubs have 1,200 members and that, on average, each person owns two firearms (DNS, 2008).

Until the 1960s, the army also used to present weapons to soldiers who were returning to civilian life, as a type of farewell present. These were not issued systematically but left to the discretion of the officers, who were guided by the soldier's service record. The weapons in question were usually MAS-36s, MAS-49s, and Mausers. Nowadays, the first two models, which are of French origin, are virtually unusable, partly because of their age, but mainly because it is now impossible to find suitable ammunition (7.5 x 54 mm).

Ammunition must also be obtained from the authorities. The National Shooting Association (the official body in charge of the discipline) and its competitor, the Target Shooting Association, have to apply for ammunition to the gendarmerie when their championships are held. The gendarmerie issues the number of cartridges needed for all those taking part in the competition, distributes the cartridges at the place where the championship is held, and supervises the event. Afterwards, the cartridge cases are gathered to prove that the ammunition has been used for the competition and that no cartridges have been misappropriated.

A different procedure is used during training sessions. Here, intermediaries purchase obsolete ammunition (which is technically out of date, but still in working order) from the army and either donate it or sell it to shooting clubs. Theoretically, only 7.62 x 51 mm (NATO) cartridges—namely the calibre matching the three weapon models used by shooters—may be removed from the army's stocks. Selling or giving away 7.62 x 39 mm cartridges, suitable for the Kalashnikov rifles in use in the army, is generally prohibited.

Incidents linked to AQIM have put a damper on sports shooting. Since 2005, soon after the Lemgheity attack, the army appears to have ended the practice of loaning out weapons. Nowadays, the only legal way to obtain a weapon is to buy it from its owner or to obtain an import licence. In both cases, the new owner must apply to the Department of National Security for a permit to carry firearms. Following the killings of four French tourists in Aleg and of three Mauritanian soldiers at Algallawiya, all of whom were shot dead in December 2007, the President's Cup championship, due to be held in January 2008, was cancelled. Likewise, senior army officers have suggested withdrawing weapons from civilians and ending the practice of giving away ammunition, but no steps have yet been taken in this direction.

Source: interview with a regular target shooter, Nouakchott, April 2009

It seems fairly common for Moors to carry a weapon, either with or without a state permit.¹⁰⁶ In the so-called 'warrior' tribes, each family owns one or more weapons, and these are seen as symbols of prestige.¹⁰⁷ They are usually Beydan, but there are also warrior tribes among the Haratin, and among the Zomboti, Oulad Aïd, and Oulad Beinouk tribes, which are found mainly in the Trarza region, in the south-west of the country.¹⁰⁸ Even in the *marabout* tribes, the tribal chief is considered to have the right to own a weapon, a privilege also granted to lower-ranking members.¹⁰⁹ Weapons are generally regarded as a highly prestigious gift.¹¹⁰ Possession of these weapons is more about tradition, in which the weapon emphasizes social rank and constitutes a symbol of prestige, rather than a practical necessity. In Mauritania, even shepherds, who in other countries have a firearm to ward off thieves and predators, are usually armed only with a stick (in the case of Moorish shepherds) or a sword (in the case of Peul shepherds).¹¹¹

Firearms legislation

Mauritanian firearms legislation is strongly inspired by French law, which was in force in the country until it gained independence in 1960. The French West Africa decree of 19 November 1947 banned the production of industrially manufactured weapons and of 'weapons for exchange' (*armes de traite*; see Box 6); the general order of 20 April 1957 set an annual import quota for hunting weapons in each territory (Cissé, 2005, p. 8). After independence, the ban on production and the annual import quota were adopted into Mauritanian law. Today, all matters relating to firearms and their ammunition in civilian life are governed by Decree No. 60.072 of 1960, which lays down the regulations applicable to firearms and ammunition, and by Law No. 74-177 of 1974, banning the ownership of hunting weapons and their ammunition (Islamic Republic of Mauritania, 1960; 1974).

With a few exceptions, the 1960 decree prohibits the import, sale, transportation, stockpiling, and possession of firearms and related ammunition (Islamic Republic of Mauritania, 1960, art. 1). Nevertheless, the firearms to which the law applies are defined only in very general terms; reference is merely made,

in Article 6, to ‘sophisticated rifled-barrel weapons’, ‘sophisticated smooth-bore weapons’, and ‘weapons for exchange’ (*armes de traite*; see Box 6).

Box 6. Types of firearm covered by Decree No. 60.072 of 1960

Sophisticated weapons (rifled-barrel and smooth-bore). Mauritanian legislation does not provide any definition of ‘sophisticated weapons’. In Niger, for example, all firearms, with the exception of flintlocks and percussion weapons, fall into this category (Cissé, 2005, p. 11; Republic of Niger, 1963). In general terms, the expression ‘sophisticated weapons’ refers to industrially produced weapons.

Weapons for exchange (*armes de traite*). Historically, ‘weapons for exchange’ were also known as ‘weapons for trading’. These are inferior-quality firearms that the colonial powers used to sell or give to the indigenous populations in exchange for goods, information, or cooperation. These weapons were either surplus to requirements or were specially made in Belgium or the United Kingdom for this market, often bearing bronze or brass embellishments. Flintlocks and percussion weapons also come into the category of weapons for exchange (Cissé, 2005, p. 11; Republic of Niger, 1963). This was common practice in the colonies of Africa, the Americas, and Asia.¹¹² Today the expression sometimes refers to vintage or historical weapons (Cissé, 2005, p. 10), but it usually relates to any craft weapon, in contrast to industrially manufactured weapons (Republic of Benin, 2003, p. 7).¹¹³

As Table 3 shows, the vast majority of firearm types currently in circulation in Mauritania are industrially manufactured rifled-barrel weapons. To take account of the particular nature and specific impact of these categories of weapon, it would be useful if Mauritanian legislation could make special provisions for automatic and semi-automatic weapons, whose numbers have multiplied in recent years.

Article 2 of the 1974 law prohibits the industrial and craft production of firearms, and of any items used to make ammunition. There is no industrial production of firearms in Mauritania, but craft weapons (handguns and long firearms used for protection, hunting, and ceremonies) and ammunition are manufactured by local gunsmiths (Ly, 2007). Participants in the Aïoun al-Atrous focus groups said that they were aware of at least two craftsmen making carbines.¹¹⁴ Local blacksmiths are also able to reassemble weapons that have entered the country in the form of spare parts.¹¹⁶

There are three types of licence: an import licence for weapons and ammunition (art. 8), a licence to carry a firearm, and a licence to purchase am-

Table 3
Selected firearms in circulation in Mauritania¹¹⁵

Type				Category in Decree No. 60.072
Pre-NATO and NATO	Long firearms	Automatic	Kalashnikov	Rifled-barrel
			Simonov	
			G3	
			FAL	
			MAS-49	
			MAS-36	
			Mauser	
	Non-automatic	Carbine (unspecified)	Rifled-barrel or smooth-bore	
		US carbine (unspecified)		
		Hunting rifle (including <i>bouvelke</i>)		
	Handguns	Non-automatic	.38 special revolver	Rifled-barrel
			Revolver (unspecified)	
		Semi-automatic	Pistol (unspecified)	
			7.65 mm pistol (unspecified)	
6.35 mm pistol (unspecified)				
9 mm Helwan pistol (Egyptian-made)				
9 mm Star pistol (Spanish-made)				
9 mm pistol (unspecified)				

munition. A hunting licence is also required to obtain an import licence and a licence to purchase ammunition. According to a police source, 477 new licences to carry hunting weapons were issued in 2006;¹¹⁷ 400 in 2007; and 270 during the first four months of 2009.¹¹⁸ Private individuals are not allowed to own more than two firearms (art. 18).¹¹⁹ Article 19 of the 1960 decree stipulates that civilians who hold weapons must register them with the authorities (Islamic Republic of Mauritania, 1960). In practice, this requirement is not adhered to systematically. All import and firearms licences are subject to control by the Department of National Security (DNS, 2008). Firearms licences are issued at the same time as the corresponding import licences and a valid firearms licence is a requirement for importing such weapons. Yet an internal report issued by the Department of National Security indicates that ‘authori-

zations to import or own small arms have often been issued on the basis of criteria that do not match the regulatory provisions laid down by the law' (DNS, 2008).

The decree appears to be implicitly drafted according to the principle that, as a rule, firearms are applied for and obtained for hunting purposes. Other cases—such as self-defence, ceremonial shooting, target shooting, and collectors' weapons—are not covered by the decree. Proportionately, however, the share represented by these ancillary uses must have risen, given that hunting has been in steady decline for several decades.¹²⁰ According to a police source, although rifled-barrel weapons are normally prohibited, they may exceptionally be authorized at shooting clubs, for example. On the other hand, civilians are allowed to own smooth-bore rifles for hunting purposes, provided they satisfy certain conditions; in particular, they must be able to show that they are of good character.¹²¹

The decree prohibits merchants from importing or stockpiling firearms unless these have been ordered by someone in possession of an import licence (art. 17). Ammunition may be imported by merchants who are 'authorized by ministerial decree to keep a stock of ammunition and offer sufficient guarantees', but the guarantees in question are not described in detail.

Civilians can therefore only obtain a firearm if they are in possession of an import licence authorizing the purchase of a firearm abroad,¹²² if they are able to 'borrow' a weapon from the state, or if they acquire one on the black market. According to participants in the Nouadhibou focus groups, a forged authorization to carry firearms costs 50,000 ouguiyas (USD 192), which is a prohibitive price in a country where the average per capita income is USD 400 (Barrouhi, 2005). In all likelihood, the difficulty in obtaining weapons, coupled with their high price, has prevented them from being acquired by a large number of civilians (Fichter, 2007). Moreover, since 2006, civilians have not been allowed to own weapons of war.¹²³ Hunting weapons, on the other hand, may still be authorized.

Loans and donations of arms

The 1960 decree stipulates a number of exceptions to the general ban on importing, selling, transporting, stockpiling, and possessing weapons, but the circumstances under which these exceptions are granted are not specified. It merely states that individual authorizations may be granted to persons of high rank (art. 3) and that an import licence will not be issued to anyone found guilty of hunting violations or misdemeanours (art. 8 bis).

As discussed above, it is common practice for army general staff to lend out weapons. An internal report by the Mauritanian Department of National Security estimates that 50,000 of the 70,000 or so weapons thought to be in circulation among civilians originated from the armed forces (DNS, 2008). These are individual loans, granted to Mauritians of high social rank who have contacts with the authorities.¹²⁴ Tribal chiefs, in particular, benefit from this practice, as do their family members; the same applies to those who have connections or who can prove that they need to be armed, for example in order to ward off poachers.¹²⁵ Members of warrior tribes traditionally carry a weapon; this practice has involved all types of weapon—Kalashnikovs, Simonovs, G3s, FALs, and Mausers—and the related ammunition. Although weapons loaned must theoretically be accompanied by a document stating that the weapon is on loan, these weapons still regularly ‘disappear’ after being given away or sold.¹²⁶ It has not been possible to establish with any certainty whether a register of such loans has ever been kept. Some people say that the army general staff keep a record of the beneficiaries’ names, and the serial numbers of the weapons loaned.¹²⁷ The existence of such a register is a necessary precondition for estimating the number of weapons ‘loaned’ and recovering them if need be.

In addition to the ‘loans’ referred to above, there are also the weapons distributed by the government during the various crises that have rocked the Mauritanian state. On several occasions, those in power have sought to strengthen the defence capabilities of certain groups of the population. This was the case, for example, during the Western Sahara War in the late 1970s and during the conflict with Senegal in the late 1980s.¹²⁸

Weapons were distributed in the north of the country at the time of the Western Sahara War, when the civilian population was called upon to defend the territory against the incursions of the Polisario Front; this distribution appears to have been limited to one or two weapons per village.¹²⁹ The Beydan peoples, which held political power and represented the majority of the population in the north of the country, were the main recipients of this distribution during the Western Saharan War.

At the time of the conflict with Senegal, between 1989 and 1991, the government distributed weapons to the Haratin peoples who came to occupy the lands of the Afro-Mauritanian people, who had either fled or been expelled to Senegal. The Beydan also appear to have received weapons from the government at that time.¹³⁰ The distributed weapons were mainly Kalashnikovs and, to a lesser extent, FALs, though a number of 9 mm Iraqi-made Tariq pistols were also distributed.¹³¹ Considerably more weapons were put into circulation on that occasion than at the time of the Western Saharan War.¹³² As with the 'loaned' weapons, it has not been possible to establish whether the distribution was systematically logged. Thus far, the government has not recovered the weapons distributed at that time. 📄

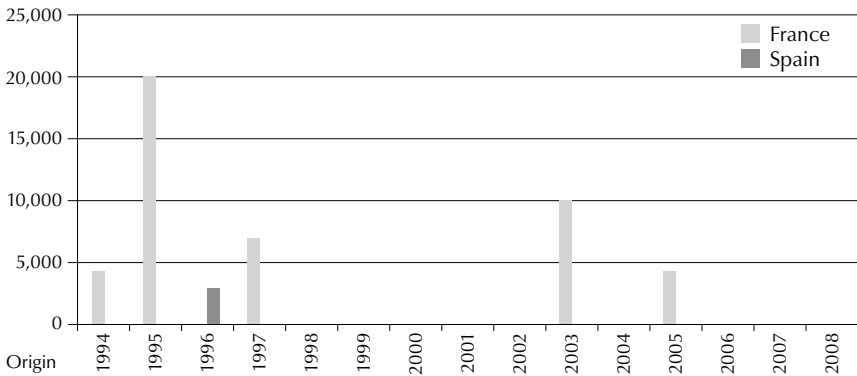
IV. Flows of small arms in Mauritania and the Sahel region

Mauritanian imports of small arms

Mauritanian arms imports, as declared between 1994 and 2008 to Comtrade, the United Nations database listing imports and exports of goods worldwide, are mostly made up of hunting rifles and guns destined for use in sports shooting (see Figure 2) and of ammunition for small arms. No transfers of military small arms and light weapons were listed by or for Mauritania over the same period (Lazarevic, 2009).

Figure 2

Mauritanian imports of hunting and sports rifles (1994–2008, in USD)



Source: Lazarevic (2009)

Notes: – This data is derived from UN Comtrade.

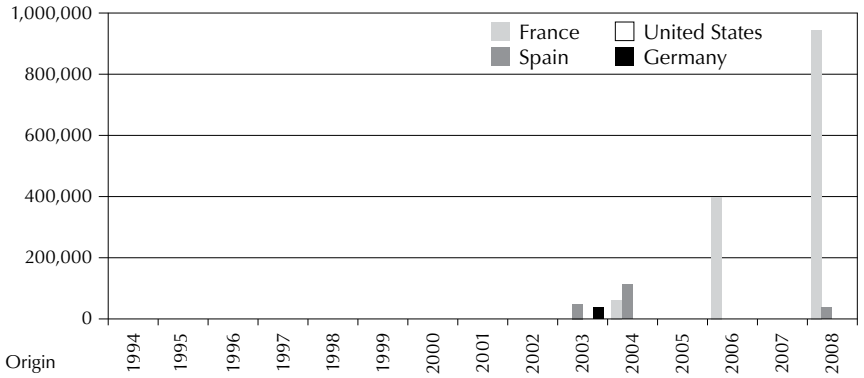
– Values have been rounded up or down to the nearest thousand.

– Only transactions valued at more than USD 2,000 for a particular country and year are shown.

In 2005, the United States declared that it had exported USD 11,000 worth of spare parts and accessories for military weapons to Mauritania. During the 14 years covered by the study reported on in Figure 2, this sum, modest though it may be, represents the largest listed transfer of spare parts for small arms and accessories (Lazarevic, 2009).

Nevertheless, between 1994 and 2008, transfers of ammunition (for small arms, light weapons, and larger-calibre conventional weapons) to Mauritania were substantially larger than transfers of small arms and light weapons. In 2003, 2004, and 2008 Spain exported a cumulative total of USD 200,000 worth of ammunition to Nouakchott (see Figure 3). France, for its part, exported ammunition worth nearly USD 1.4 million to Mauritania in 2004, 2006, and 2008. Over the same period, Mauritania also imported ammunition for smooth-bore rifles, a typically non-military weapon, mainly from Spain and France (Lazarevic, 2009).

Figure 3
Mauritanian imports, in USD, of ammunition for small arms, light weapons, and larger-calibre weapons (excluding cartridges for smooth-bore rifles)



Source: Lazarevic (2009)
 Notes: – This data is derived from UN Comtrade.
 – Values have been rounded up or down to the nearest thousand.
 – Only transactions valued at more than USD 10,000 for a particular country and year are shown.

Illicit flows of small arms and light weapons

Due to its geographical position and relatively ungarded borders, Mauritania is attractive to traffickers of the Sahelian zone. Just three military posts, at Chegatt, Lemgheity, and Al Ghallawiya, attempt to control the vast area of desert in the north-east of the country (Ould Oumere, 2008b). These were

strengthened in the wake of the Tourine attack in September 2008, but they are still insufficient in number and lack the resources needed to ensure that the territory comes under proper surveillance.

Participants in the individual interviews and focus groups mentioned inflows and outflows of firearms across Mauritania's borders with Algeria, Mali, and Western Sahara. Interviewees in Aioun al-Atrous cited Mali as the origin of the weapons in circulation in the region. The possibility cannot be ruled out that some of these weapons are of craft production, as Mali has many artisans who can produce weapons that cost less than those of industrial origin, especially in the Mopti region. There is no craft production of ammunition, but it is manufactured industrially in a factory in Bamako, which produces mainly cartridges for 12-calibre hunting rifles.¹³³

In Mali, a craft handgun costs about 25,000–30,000 CFA francs (USD 55–65); a Baikal-type (Soviet smooth-bore) rifle or carbine can be purchased for around 50,000 CFA francs (USD 100). These weapons take a long time to reload, which affects their performance, but they are often used by bandits in Mali.¹³⁴

In Mauritania, the illicit market for small arms is supplied with weapons derived from cross-border traffic and stolen from the security forces and civilians. According to witnesses, weapons were still available on the Nouakchott market just a few years ago, but checks have been strengthened since the Lemgheity attack.¹³⁵ Participants in the Nouadhibou and Aioun al-Atrous focus groups said there was a sizeable black market in these two cities, as well as in Nouakchott, but that weapons traffic was even heavier at Zouerate, close to the border with Western Sahara, and at Bassikounou, in the south-east of the country. Zouerate and Nouadhibou are hubs for trafficking in drugs, cigarettes, and weapons (see Box 7); it seems that these various activities form part of the same networks, and—at least in Mauritania—follow the same routes.¹³⁶

Cigarettes, for example, are cheaper in Mauritania, and are resold in Algeria. They leave Nouakchott or Nouadhibou, travel to the interior of the country, and then on to Atar and Zouerate, before reaching Algeria.¹³⁷ There is also a line of supply to Morocco from Nouadhibou.¹³⁸ According to the International Crisis Group, this traffic in cigarettes 'could not be as significant without

the complicity of people close to power centres in Nouakchott, the Polisario, or to the Algerian army' (ICG, 2007a, p. 19). According to a representative of the international community interviewed in Nouakchott, cigarette cargos often contain large quantities of weapons, making them more lucrative.¹³⁹ Yet it has not been established that drugs and weapons are transported together; according to official sources, no seizures made by Mauritanian customs have revealed drugs and weapons concealed in the same cargo. This may suggest that they are transported in separate cargos or conveyed by different networks.¹⁴⁰

In the north of the country, cross-border traffic with Western Sahara operates in both directions. Automatic weapons (Kalashnikovs, Simonovs, and G3s) enter Mauritania illegally from Western Sahara, while weapons such as Mausers and MAS-36s travel in the opposite direction.¹⁴¹ According to one official Mauritanian source, the Polisario Front represents one of the leading suppliers of weapons sent to Mauritania.¹⁴² In the absence of a settlement of the conflict in Western Sahara, the Polisario has kept most of its weapons. Due to the support of certain states, notably Algeria and Libya, especially during the early years of the conflict, the Polisario was equipped with a relatively large arsenal, and this has been expanded further with weapons seized from the Moroccan army. The movement now has enough weapons of its own to be able to sell some and to supply the regional market.¹⁴³ In fact the months that followed the 1991 ceasefire saw hundreds of Polisario fighters cross the border to sell their weapons in Mauritania. Thus, in 1992–94, Kalashnikov-type weapons were cheaper in the north of the country, as at Atar or Zouerate, where they sold for around 90,000 ouguiyas (USD 350), than in Nouakchott, where their price reached 120,000 ouguiyas (USD 450).¹⁴⁴ Illegal weapons continue to be seized by the Mauritanian and Moroccan authorities, but usually only in very limited quantities.¹⁴⁵

In the south of the country, in the Aioun al-Atrous region close to the border with Mali, the village of Modibougou is also a centre for the black market in weapons.¹⁴⁶ Light weapons and ammunition are more expensive here than in Nouakchott or Nouadhibou. This higher price may be linked to the petty conflicts over land which are widespread in south-eastern Mauritania and boost the demand for weapons. In the south, these weapons arrive from Mali, but also from Sierra Leone, via Guinea-Bissau. Pistols (often Span-

ish-made Star pistols) also come from Guinea and the Gambia. In addition, there is traffic in weapons via Mali, coming from the east, mainly from Darfur and the south. Guinea, in particular, is a problematic neighbour. As Lansana Conté's grip on power grew weaker, the army had difficulty controlling its troops. Guinean soldiers were said to have sold not only petrol, but also their weapons and ammunition.¹⁴⁷ It is likely that some of these fell into the hands of Tuareg rebels from Mali or of AQIM; Table 4 shows seizures in Mali of weapons and ammunition from Guinea and Mauritania.

Table 4
Major seizures of weapons and ammunition at the Malian borders, January 2007–June 2009

Date	Border post or unit responsible for the seizure	Weapons or ammunition seized	Quantities	Provenance ¹⁴⁸
16 June 2007	Lere border post	7.62 x 39 mm cartridges	14,470	Mauritania ¹⁴⁹
19 April 2007	Bamako (Malian customs authority)	Chinese sub-machine guns	6	Guinea
February, June, August, September 2007	Kouremale border post	7.62 x 39 mm cartridges	16,000	Guinea
26 August 2007	Kouremale border post	Chinese sub-machine guns	30	Guinea
		Anti-tank rocket launchers	11	
		Light machine gun	1	
		Rifles (12.7 mm)	4	
4 September 2008	Kouremale border post	7.62 x 39 mm cartridges	14,500	Guinea
20 February 2009	Bamako (Malian customs authority)	Sub-machine guns	12	Guinea
		Russian- and Czech-made rocket launchers	9	
		Rockets	12	
June 2009	Kouremale border post	Automatic pistols	5	Guinea
		9 mm cartridge	250	

Sources: Interview with an official Malian source, Bamako, April 2009; Fall (2009); Bamba (2009)

Table 5

Types and prices of firearms available on the black market in Nouakchott, Nouadhibou, and Modibougou, 2006–07*

Type		Location	Price range (in ouguiya) per unit	Price range (in USD) per unit			
Pre-NATO and NATO	Handguns	Soviet	Kalashnikov	Nouakchott	70,000–200,000	269–768	
				Nouadhibou	120,000–200,000	461–768	
				Modibougou	200,000	768	
			Simonov (SKS)	Nouakchott	100,000 (buy) / 150,000 (sell)	384 (buy) / 567 (sell)	
				Nouadhibou	70,000–150,000	269–576	
		Long firearms	Automatic	G3	Nouakchott	100,000 (buy) / 150,000 (sell)	384 (buy) / 576 (sell)
					Nouadhibou	70,000–150,000	269–576
					Modibougou	150,000	576
				FAL	Nouakchott	200,000 (buy) / 250,000 (sell)	768 (buy) / 960 (sell)
					Nouadhibou	120,000	461
				MAS-49	Nouakchott	15,000 (buy) / 25,000 (sell)	58 (buy) / 96 (sell)
			Non-automatic	MAS-36	Nouakchott	15,000 (buy) / 25,000 (sell)	58 (buy) / 96 (sell)
				Mauser (type unspecified)	Nouakchott	50,000 (buy) / 65,000 (sell)	192 (buy) / 250 (sell)
Modibougou	100,000				384		
US carbine (type unspecified)	Nouakchott			30,000 (buy) / 45,000 (sell)	115 (buy) / 173 (sell)		
Semi-automatic	Carbine (type unspecified)	Nouakchott	80,000 (buy) / 100,000 (sell)	307 (buy) / 384 (sell)			
	Hunting rifle	Modibougou	20,000–30,000	77–115			
	<i>Bouvelke</i> (type of hunting rifle)	Modibougou	70,000–120,000	269–461			
	Imitation <i>Bouvelke</i>	Modibougou	18,000–40,000	69–154			
Semi-automatic	.38 special revolver	Nouakchott	30,000 (buy) / 50,000 (sell)	115 (buy) / 192 (sell)			
		Modibougou	70,000	269			
	Pistol (type unspecified)	Nouadhibou	30,000–40,000	115–54			
		Modibougou	50,000–70,000	192–269			
		Nouakchott	50,000 (buy) / 70,000 (sell)	192 (buy) / 269 (sell)			
		Nouakchott	70,000 (buy) / 110,000 (sell)	269 (buy) / 422 (sell)			
9 mm pistol (type unspecified) ¹⁵⁶	Nouakchott	80,000 (buy) / 120,000 (sell)	307 (buy) / 461 (sell)				

Notes: USD values have been calculated at the average exchange rate between 1 November 2006 and 28 February 2007 (1 ouguiya = USD 0.00384).

Source: This information is derived from individual interviews and focus groups conducted in November 2006 and in January–February 2007 in Nouakchott, Nouadhibou, and Aioun al-Atrous. It was not possible to obtain information on changes in the prices of small arms and related ammunition over a period of several months or several years.

In Mali, weapons of war arrive mainly from Mauritania and Guinea. Malian customs have seized Kalashnikovs, pistols, mortars, sub-machine guns (notably Israeli Uzis), rocket launchers, light machine guns, and Chinese- or Russian-type carbines.¹⁵⁰ The largest hauls are usually those seized by the Malian customs authority,¹⁵¹ but some border posts also seize weapons. A sizeable 'ant trade' is thought to go on between Guinea and Mali, with cyclists carrying weapons hidden beneath bundles of fodder.¹⁵² On the other hand, at this writing, almost no weapons come from Côte d'Ivoire.¹⁵³ Near the border with Mauritania, a substantial seizure of small-calibre cartridges was made in 2007, and there is traffic in staple foodstuffs, such as sugar and flour, especially between Fassala (in Mauritania) and villages on the other side of the border with Mali.¹⁵⁴

Table 5 lists the types of weapon in circulation in Mauritania and their black-market prices, compiled on the basis of information gathered during individual interviews and focus groups. This list, which relies on a limited number of witnesses, is neither comprehensive nor, in view of price fluctuations, definitive. Automatic weapons are the most expensive (costing between 70,000 and 200,000 ouguiyas), followed by semi-automatic handguns (50,000–120,000 ouguiyas), non-automatic rifles and carbines (15,000–120,000 ouguiyas), and non-automatic handguns (30,000–70,000 ouguiyas). Prices are dependent on several factors: the weapon's condition; its traceability (a weapon whose history can be traced after it leaves the factory costs more than a stolen weapon, for example); and any accessories or magazines supplied with it.¹⁵⁵

With one exception (ammunition for *bouvelke* in Modibougou), the price of ammunition for the weapons in circulation shown in Table 5 could only be determined for the city of Nouakchott. Old French cartridges and NATO-type ammunition (7.62 x 51 mm) are the most expensive, while Soviet-type ammunition (7.62 x 39 mm) is much cheaper (see Table 6). In 2009, a network

of ammunition traffic (mainly 7.62 x 39 mm) involving five persons was broken up, and 6,700 cartridges were seized.¹⁵⁷

Table 6

Types and prices of ammunition available on the black market in Nouakchott, Nouadhibou, and Modibougou, 2006–2007

Type of weapon		Related ammunition	Location	Price range (in ouguiya) per bullet (approximation)	Price range (in USD) per bullet (approximation)		
Pre-NATO and NATO	Soviet	Kalashnikov	7.62 x 39 mm	Nouakchott	30 (buy) / 50 (sell)	0.12 (buy) / 0.19 (sell)	
		Simonov (SKS)	Soviet M1943				
	Long firearms	Automatic	G3	7.62 x 51 mm	Nouakchott	120 (buy) / 170 (sell)	0.46 (buy) / 0.65 (sell)
			FAL	NATO			
			MAS-49	7.5 x 54 mm	Nouakchott	100 (buy) / 200 (sell)	0.38 (buy) / 0.77 (sell)
			MAS-36 (1936–55)	French service			
		Non-automatic	US carbine (unspecified)	5.5	Nouakchott	60 (buy) / 100 (sell)	0.23 (buy) / 0.38 (sell)
			Carbine (unspecified)				
			<i>Bouvelke</i> (type of hunting rifle)	ammunition for <i>bouvelke</i>	Modibougou	100–200	0.38–0.77
			.38 special revolver	.38 Special	Nouakchott	40 (buy) / 70 (sell)	0.15 (buy) / 0.27 (sell)
Handguns	Semi-automatic	7.65 mm pistol (unspecified)	7.65 mm	Nouakchott	15 (buy) / 25 (sell)	0.06 (buy) / 0.10 (sell)	
		6.35 mm pistol (unspecified)	6.35 mm	Nouakchott	30 (buy) / 60 (sell)	0.12 (buy) / 0.23 (sell)	

Notes: USD values have been calculated at the average exchange rate between 1 November 2006 and 28 February 2007 (1 ouguiya = 0.00384 USD). USD prices of ammunition have not been rounded up or down in order to retain a maximum degree of accuracy for these small values.

Although the information supplied relative to weapons prices varies from one source to another and from one region to another, Kalashnikov and Simonov rifles appear to be cheaper than G3 and FAL in Nouakchott and Nouadhibou. The same goes for their ammunition. This indicates that weap-

ons with cheaper ammunition are not necessarily the most expensive. Soviet-type weapons and ammunition are either available in greater quantities on the black market than other weapon types, or are less popular with buyers. It may also be that buyers are looking for cartridges for weapons that they have owned for a long time, or even inherited, which might explain the high price of ammunition for vintage French firearms. In a country such as Mauritania, which has not experienced any internal or external armed conflict for nearly 20 years, and where the demand for weapons is largely determined by tradition and customs, factors such as the prestige conferred by a particular weapon may prove more important in determining prices than the availability of the related ammunition. The more significant presence of Soviet-type weapons and ammunition on the black market may also be explained by the fact that two of Mauritania's neighbours, Algeria and Mali, have been equipped with these since the 1970s (IISS, 2007). Soviet-type weapons may also come from Western Sahara, where they are owned by the Polisario Front, which has been armed by Algeria and Libya (IISS, 2007).

Box 7. How AQIM benefits from the increase in drug trafficking

Narcotics traffic from South America has risen substantially over the past five years throughout West Africa. Between the periods 1998–2003 and 2004–07, annual seizures of cocaine rose five-fold, on average, to almost 6.5 tons in 2007 (UNODC, 2007, p. 3; 2008, p. 8). These seizures usually take place at sea, but they also occur on land (UNODC, 2007, p. 7). According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), this increase is mainly due to three factors:

- improved checks along the traditional routes from the Caribbean and Europe are pushing the traffickers to find alternative routes. West African routes are at a reasonable distance to permit the transportation of cargos originating in Venezuela and Brazil.
- the decline in cocaine consumption in the United States and its increase in Europe.¹⁵⁸
- finally, problems of governance and rampant corruption, which make West Africa a zone of least resistance to penetration by traffickers (UNODC, 2007, p. 6; 2008, p. 8; Brice, 2009).

In 2005–07, Mauritania was in third place among African countries for cocaine seizures (UNODC, 2007, p. 15).¹⁵⁹ On 13 August 2007, in Nouakchott, the Mauritanian police made the largest drug seizure in its history. In the previous May, it intercepted 630 kg of cocaine, which had arrived from Venezuela in a twin-engined Cessna 441 (RFI, 2007b; Ould Salem, 2007; UNODC, 2008, p. 10, n. 7).¹⁶⁰ In Europe, this haul represented a street value of more

than USD 30 million (UNODC, 2008, p. 10). The Nouadhibou seizure led to the arrest of several Mauritanian officials, two French nationals, and a Moroccan man (UNODC, 2007, p. 9).¹⁶¹ In total, between May and August 2007, nearly 1.5 tons of cocaine were seized in Mauritania (UNODC, 2007, p. 5). It is, however, remarkable that in the north-east of the country, where trafficking is reportedly at its heaviest, the Mauritanian police and customs service did not make any seizures at all; in all likelihood, this is due to a lack of patrols and controls in the area.¹⁶²

Mauritania was also a transit country for drugs in two other cases. On 21 June 2007, in the Canary Islands, the Spanish authorities seized 800 kg of cocaine, which were discovered aboard an airplane that had taken off from an unidentified location in the Sahara, in northern Mauritania (UNODC, 2008, p. 12, n. 14). A further 28 kg of cocaine were discovered in a car driven by a Frenchman who had arrived in Morocco after travelling from Senegal via Mauritania (UNODC, 2008, p. 12, n. 14). On the other hand, given its modest levels of air traffic, Mauritania is rarely a country of embarkation for drug smugglers attempting to reach Europe's major airports (UNODC, 2008, pp. 15, 16, 23). Drug seizures and arrests continued in 2008, mainly in Nouakchott and Nouadhibou. Although some drugs are transported by air, the most common method of transport remains shipment by sea, with the goods being passed from one boat to another all the way to Spain (*Afrique en ligne*, 2009; UNODC, 2008, p. 11).

Offences linked to the consumption of hard drugs are rare in Mauritania, probably because they are too expensive for the average Mauritanian.¹⁶³ Yet this situation could change: Guinea-Bissau and Mali recently experienced their first cases of crack consumption (UNODC, 2008, p. 48).¹⁶⁴ If this worrying phenomenon continues, it might lead to a serious increase in acts of armed violence.

As discussed above, the increases in drug trafficking and jail sentences for narcotics-related activity do not appear to have led to the emergence of gangs or to an increase in armed violence. It may still be too early for these types of developments, or it could be that drug trafficking is currently run by a monopoly, from which competitors, who might be tempted to assert themselves through violence, are still excluded. UNODC suggests that booming consumption in Europe, combined with the weakness and corruption of Mauritania's police force and customs service (which represent a minor threat to the traffickers' activities¹⁶⁵), may explain the absence of competition. For the moment, there is room for everyone in the burgeoning drug market (UNODC, 2008, p. 28). These conditions may change rapidly, however, potentially creating the type of situation seen in Venezuela, where drug trafficking has led to a significant increase in armed violence (UNODC, 2008, p. 9). In view of the substantial sums of money at stake and the chronic instability of certain West African countries, UNODC also warns against the political dangers posed to the region by such traffic (UNODC, 2008, p. 35).

Lastly, drug trafficking represents an important means of financing for some armed groups. According to one official Mauritanian source, AQIM guarantees the security of

drug convoys through the desert in exchange for weapons.¹⁶⁶ This information was confirmed in late December 2009, when three Malian nationals were arrested in Ghana and extradited to the United States. They were accused of organizing the trucking of a cargo of cocaine from Ghana to Spain,¹⁶⁷ commissioned by US agents working for the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) who claimed to belong to the Colombian FARC rebels. AQIM members were to guarantee the cargo's security as it crossed the Sahara. The three arrested traffickers, whose area of operation appears to cover Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mali, and Togo, are reported to have previously smuggled two tons of hashish to Tunisia, again with the assistance of AQIM, and to have trafficked Bangladeshi, Indian, and Pakistani migrants to Spain (Johnson, 2009; BBC, 2009g; Rashbaum, 2009). In December 2009, Antonio Maria Costa, head of UNODC, proposed to the United Nations Security Council that a trans-Saharan crime monitoring network be created at the regional level (Aziakou, 2009).

Arms in the hands of non-state armed groups

Armed violence motivated by politics and religion is a recurring phenomenon in North Africa and the Sahel. Some groups, such as the Tuareg rebels in Mali and Niger, are fighting a national government. Others have recently set up links with international terrorism; a case in point is the GSPC, whose status has changed from that of a dissident *Groupe islamique armé* (Armed Islamic Group), pitted against the government in Algeria, to that of a branch of al-Qaeda in the Sahel, under the name of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. All of these groups operate in and around Mauritania, especially in its border areas east of Western Sahara, south of Algeria, and north of Mali. Most of them are involved in the various types of trafficking, which provide a means of subsistence for many inhabitants of this desert region. According to the account of a Mauritanian AQIM member, the desert also harbours weapons caches that the group can pinpoint if need be using their GPS (Global Positioning System) coordinates (Bounira, 2008). The profiles of the groups presented here also include certain armed organizations originating in Western Sahara or the North African countries; they move around the Sahel and maintain operational, logistic, and ideological links with Sahelian groups.¹⁶⁸

The Polisario Front

Status: These days, the group is practically dormant. The ceasefire negotiated by the UN and accepted by Morocco and the Polisario Front in 1991 is still in force, despite a number of occasional minor violations on both sides (Jane's, 2008d). Since the signing of a peace agreement with Mauritania in 1978, the Polisario Front has not conducted any armed activities on Mauritanian territory.

History and objectives: Founded in 1973, the Polisario Front claims independence for Western Sahara. It fought first against the Spanish colonial power, and subsequently against Morocco, which partially occupied the territory in 1975, after the Spanish had left. In 1976, the Polisario Front proclaimed the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic and created its military force, the Sahrawi Popular Liberation Army. Only a few countries have recognized the SADR, which controls only a fraction of the territory it is claiming (Jane's, 2008d). Despite a ceasefire signed in 1991, supervised by the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara, the fact that the referendum, which was agreed to by the belligerents, has not taken place makes Western Sahara a potential source of regional instability.

Leadership and structure: Since 1976, the Polisario Front has been led by Mohamed Abdelaziz; since 1982, he has also been president of the SADR (Jane's, 2008d).

Strength: The Polisario Front was able to muster 20,000 fighters in 1980 (Barbier, 1982, p. 281), but their numbers are now reported to have fallen to between 6,000 and 8,000 (Jane's, 2008d). Nevertheless, it is estimated that 40,000 of the 170,000 Sahrawi refugees in the camps set up around Tindouf, Algeria, could easily be mobilized if the conflict were to resume (Jane's, 2008d).

Area of operation and strategy: The Polisario Front is mainly active in Western Sahara; armed actions and sabotage were carried out in northern Mauritania between 1976 and 1978, when the latter briefly joined in the war alongside Morocco. The group was waging a war of attrition against Morocco, characterized by guerrilla attacks against the Moroccan armed forces. This tactic has been countered relatively successfully by the Moroccan army, which has entrenched itself behind a fortified sand wall (the *berm*), which is 2,400 km long. The wall constitutes a boundary between the territory occupied by Mo-

roccan forces in the north, and that occupied by the Polisario Front in the south (Jane's, 2008d; MINURSO, n.d.).

Weaponry: The Polisario Front has a high level of armament for a non-state armed group (IISS, 2007). Prior to the 1975 Madrid agreements, which marked the departure of the Spanish, the Polisario Front was armed by Libya (Barbier, 1982, p. 179). When the group confronted Morocco and Mauritania, arms were provided by Algeria, which also sent troop reinforcements, notably to take part in the battle of Amgala in January 1976 (Barbier, 1982, p. 185). Algeria's support allowed the Polisario Front to benefit from a well-stocked and sophisticated arsenal throughout the war. As a consequence, anti-aircraft missiles supplied by Algeria inflicted heavy losses on Moroccan planes. In addition to rifles and machine guns, the Polisario Front was equipped with SA-7 missiles, 60 and 80 mm mortars, and 75 mm cannon (Barbier, 1982, p. 185). The group also used heavy armaments, including 120 mm mortars, 110 mm Russian-made cannon, anti-aircraft missile launchers, tanks, and armoured vehicles (Barbier, 1982, p. 217; Jane's, 2008d). Algeria is also said to have supplied the Polisario Front with large quantities of fuel.¹⁶⁹ Lastly, some of the group's armaments consisted of seizures made during their confrontations with the Mauritanian, Moroccan, and Spanish armed forces (Jane's, 2008d).

Links with other groups: Links with AQIM have been mentioned, especially by Moroccan sources,¹⁷⁰ but these have not been proven. In fact, the Polisario Front has several reasons to stay away from AQIM. Since the group's long-term aim is to run Western Sahara, it would not be in its best interest to give the impression that it does not control its own territory, nor that this territory is providing sanctuary for terrorist elements. Sahrawi culture is strongly matriarchal; it is also radically alien to AQIM ideology. Finally, an alliance with AQIM, even an informal one, would risk costing the Polisario Front the support of Algeria, which is fighting radical Islamists.¹⁷¹

Malian Tuaregs

Out of a population of some 13 million inhabitants, Mali has a Tuareg and Arab/Moorish population of about 800,000 people, mainly concentrated in

the desert regions of the north. There have been four waves of rebellion by Malian Tuaregs: in 1962–64, 1990, 1994–95, and 2006 (Tamboura, 2007). The demands made during the last rebellion differed little from those that preceded them: the Tuaregs were calling for greater regional autonomy and a better division of resources at the national level in order to promote the development of the north. In addition, there was a feeling of frustration over the delay in implementing the National Pact signed on 11 April 1992 (Jane's, 2009a).¹⁷²

During the Malian Tuareg rebellion in the 1990s, the Mauritanian government is thought to have distributed weapons to the civilian populations living near the border with Mali for their own protection. With Libyan help, the Tuareg rebels armed themselves by attacking Malian garrisons and by obtaining supplies abroad, especially in Mauritania.¹⁷³ There was therefore a significant build-up of arms in the north of Mali, particularly in the region bordering Algeria and Mauritania. Some weapons were handed in and destroyed during the 'Flame of Peace' ceremony, organized in Timbuktu in March 1996, but most remained in the hands of civilians.¹⁷⁴

The events of 2006 led to the formation of the following armed groups: the Democratic Alliance for Change (ADC), the Niger–Mali Tuareg Alliance (ATNM), and the Ganda Izo movement. Some Arab militias were also formed, but without becoming clearly defined armed groups, as had been the case at the time of the rebellion in the 1990s.¹⁷⁵

Democratic Alliance for Change

Status: Inactive since March 2007 (Jane's, 2009a).

History and objectives: The ADC was mainly made up of Tuaregs who had fought in the rebellion of the 1990s, before being integrated into the Malian army in accordance with the provisions of the National Pact. They were calling for better pay in the army, and more government investment in their native region (Tamboura, 2007). The rebellion broke out on 23 May 2006 with attacks on the military posts at Kidal and Menaka, followed by the desertion of 150 Tuareg soldiers with their vehicles and weapons.¹⁷⁶ It came to an end

on 4 July 2006, when the Algiers Peace Accord was signed under the aegis of Algeria, granting increased development aid, but stipulating that in exchange the Tuaregs give up their demands for political autonomy (AFP, 2008f; Tamboura, 2007). The accord also promised the demilitarization of the northern region¹⁷⁷ and the reintegration into the army of the rebels, who would have to return all the weapons taken during their attacks against the Malian army posts (Jane's, 2009a).

Leadership: The political leader of the group was Iyad Ag Ghaly, who had played an important role in the rebellion of the 1990s.¹⁷⁸ His deputy was Amada Ag Bibi (Jane's, 2009a). The military leader of the group was Lt.-Col. Hassan Fagaga, a member of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (Mouvement populaire pour l'Azawad) in the 1990s, who had deserted in February 2006 with some of his men, along with their weapons (Djaouane, 2006; Jane's, 2009a).

Combatants: The ADC had 1,000 members in 2006 (Jane's, 2009a). The rebellion was confined to the Kel Adagh tribe, living in the Kidal region. The other tribes and the other regions were not affected by the rebellion (Tamboura, 2007).

Area of operation and tactics: The ADC operated particularly in the Gao and Kidal regions, in the north of Mali. The mountainous regions of the Adrar des Iforas (in north-western Mali) and Tin Zaouatene on the Algerian border were used as rear bases in the rebellion (Jane's, 2009a). The ADC had a particular foothold in the Tigharghar massif, a particularly inaccessible region for the Malian army (Tamboura, 2007).

Arms: At the time of its attacks in 2006, the ADC captured almost the entire arsenal of the Kidal and Menaka military posts. Some of these weapons were handed over to the army in March 2007 in accordance with the Algiers Accord (Jane's, 2009a). On 17 February 2009, 578 ADC combatants also handed over their weapons during a ceremony in Kidal (Fattani, 2009; Jane's, 2009c). In their ranks were some members of the ATNM (see below), who had parted company with their leader, Bahanga (AFP, 2009f). The arms collected on this occasion, including Kalashnikovs, grenades, and rocket launchers, were returned to the arsenals of the Malian army (AFP, 2009f ; Jane's, 2009a), but there were far fewer than had been taken from the garrisons at Kidal and Menaka.¹⁷⁹

Links with other groups: The Malian Tuaregs are very close, both geographically and politically, to Algeria, which is the usual mediator in conflicts between the Tuaregs and the Malian state. Iyad Ag Ghaly refused to allow the Nigerien Movement for Justice (MNJ) or the GSPC/AQIM, to join the fighting.¹⁸⁰

Niger–Mali Tuareg Alliance

Status: The movement has been inactive since January–February 2009, when its leader, Ibrahim Ag Bahanga, fled Mali.

History and objectives: The ATNM split away from the ADC in May 2007, after the latter had accepted the government's offer of peace (Jane's, 2009a). The ATNM, like the ADC, is asking for a greater government commitment to develop the northern region, but also a reduced Malian army presence, particularly in the Tin Zaouatene area on the border with Algeria. The government refused to accede to this last demand on the pretext that it would allow free rein to trafficking, especially of drugs (AFP, 2008f). According to Jane's (2009a), the activities of the ATNM were more focused on trafficking and banditry than linked to a genuine political demand. The ATNM, which was thought to be close to the Nigerien Tuareg rebels, expressed pan-Tuareg demands (Jane's, 2009a).

Leadership: Ibrahim Ag Bahanga is the leader of the ATNM. He was forced to flee Mali in February 2009, under combined pressure from the Tuaregs of the ADC and part of the Arab population, who had come to help the Malian army to put an end to the activities of the ATNM.¹⁸¹ He was reported to be in Libya for a while; in late 2009, there were rumours that he had returned to his fiefdom in the Tigharghar massif (Ouazani, 2009).

Combatants: The ATNM never had more than about 100 combatants (Jane's, 2009a). According to other sources, Bahanga had 500 to 600 men under his command, a figure consistent with the kidnapping, in August 2007, of about 50 Malian soldiers (see below).¹⁸²

Area of operation and tactics: The ATNM was particularly active in the Tin Zaouatene area, access to which it blocked with anti-personnel mines (Jane's,

2009a).¹⁸³ In September 2007, a US plane that had come to resupply the Malian garrison at Tin Zaouatene was shot at by rebels (Reuters, 2007). By May 2009, this area had become accessible once again, having been almost completely cleared of mines.¹⁸⁴

The ATNM repeatedly took civilian and military hostages, who were freed in exchange for ransoms or various government concessions. At the end of August 2007, the ATNM abducted about 50 Malian soldiers in the Tin Zaouatene area (Jane's, 2009a). Like the ADC, the ATNM also attacked military posts. In May 2007, 12 Malian police and customs officers were killed during the attack on the post at Tin Zaouatene (Jane's, 2009a); in December 2008, 14 Malian soldiers were killed and 15 were wounded in an attack on another army post at Nampala, near the Mauritanian border (Reuters, 2008a).

Weaponry: During the attack on Nampala, the assailants took the opportunity to seize weapons and ammunition.¹⁸⁵ The ATNM had anti-personnel mines, which it used to prevent access to its rear base in the Tin Zaouatene area (Jane's, 2009a). The use of mines represents a new development in the 2006–07 conflict in comparison with that of the 1990s.¹⁸⁶

Links with other groups: The ATNM is believed to have links with networks of traffickers active in the Sahara and with the Nigerien Tuaregs of the MNJ (Jane's, 2009a). However, it is thought that one of the three or four groups that form the MNJ fought with Bahanga, but quickly withdrew from the fighting when the pressure on the ATNM intensified.¹⁸⁷

Ganda Izo movement

Status: Inactive.

History and objectives: The Ganda Izo movement was a self-defence militia, formed in response to the Tuareg rebellion of 2006–07 and directed against Tuareg and Arab groups. This movement follows in the tradition of the Ganda Koy movement, founded for the same reason in the 1990s.

Leadership: After the killing of four Tuaregs near the frontier with Niger on 1 September 2008, the Malian authorities, fearing inter-community attacks that could lead to widespread unrest in the north, arrested the movement's

leader, Amadou Diallo (IRIN, 2008b). He was released when the reconciliation process was launched (Diakité, 2009).

Strength: They were estimated to have 100 or 200 members, mainly from the Peul community but also some Songhai.¹⁸⁸

Area of operation and tactics: The movement was based at Ansongo, about 100 km from Gao, and was active throughout the Gao area. Its base was dismantled by the Malian government between September and October 2008.¹⁸⁹

Weaponry: The members of the Ganda Izo movement were armed, but the source of their weaponry is unknown; a certain number who were shepherds had personal weapons, usually used to protect their livestock.¹⁹⁰ They carried out some armed attacks, including attacks using grenades.¹⁹¹ Their weapons do not seem to have been recovered, unlike those of the Tuaregs involved in the rebellion.

Nigerien Movement for Justice

As in neighbouring Mali, there was a rebellion of the Tuareg populations in Niger in the 1990s. There was a resurgence of this rebellion in 2007, with the appearance of a new group, the MNJ, which was still active at the beginning of 2009. Contrary to his Malian counterpart, the Nigerien president, Mamadou Tandja, refused to negotiate for a long time, treating the members of the MNJ as bandits and preferring to respond with military force. Although talks between the Nigerien rebels and the government made significant progress in early 2009, the situation remained largely deadlocked at the end of the year, mainly because of the refusal of the MNJ to take part in the mediation organized by Libya (Jane's, 2009h; Guichaoua and Bouhlel-Hardy, 2007).

Status: Active.

History and objectives: The MNJ was formed in February 2007, probably under the influence of the Tuareg rebellion in Mali. The group has very similar objectives to those of the Malian Tuaregs: to force the state to invest more in the development of the northern region and to obtain a greater share of the profits generated by the mining sector, particularly from the production of uranium, which is the region's principal resource.¹⁹² The MNJ is also calling

for a speedier implementation of the peace accord signed with the Nigerien state in the 1990s (Jane's, 2009h).

Leadership: For a long time, the MNJ was led by Aghaly ag Alambo, who had been very active during the rebellion of the 1990s. At the end of August 2009 he was replaced by Amoumoune Kalakouwa. Alambo's second-in-command was Cpt. Mohamed Acharif, but he is said to have been killed by the Nigerien army in June 2008 (Jane's, 2009h). The movement itself was founded by other former rebels from the 1990s, Amoumane Kalakoua and Aboubacar Alambo (Guichaoua and Bouhlel-Hardy, 2007). The MNJ lost some of its members in March 2009 when a group, led by Aklou Sidisidi and particularly critical of Alambo's leadership of the movement, split away to form the Nigerien Patriotic Front (Jane's, 2009h).

Strength: The MNJ states that it has more than 1,000 combatants, but this figure could not be verified (Jane's, 2009h).

Area of operation and tactics: The MNJ's operations are confined to the Agadez area in northern Niger, particularly the mountainous Aïr region around Ifrouane. As in Mali, the MNJ attacks military posts, but it also targets mining development companies (Jane's, 2009h).

Weaponry: Between 1995 and 2003, nearly 5,000 weapons were recovered by the government after the first rebellion, but many small arms are still circulating in the region. The MNJ has automatic rifles, rocket-propelled grenades, and explosives (Jane's, 2009h). It is an established fact that the group possesses anti-personnel mines, but whether it uses them is unknown (Geneva Call, 2008, p. 12); anti-vehicle mines, on the other hand, seem to have been used by the group to secure the area surrounding its base at Aïr and to set ambushes for army vehicles (Jane's, 2009h; Geneva Call, 2008). The MNJ is said to obtain weapons from Libya (Jane's, 2009h);¹⁹³ from attacks carried out against the Nigerien security forces; from army deserters joining the Tuareg rebels; and, finally, from the looting of a military arsenal. In May 2009, the Nigerien government promised the Tuaregs of the MNJ an amnesty if they were willing to disarm, an offer the group did not accept. On 6 October 2009, during a ceremony organized in Libya in which the new leadership of the MNJ refused to participate, more than 1,000 Tuareg rebels laid down their arms (Jane's, 2009h).

Links with other groups: Collaboration between the Malian and Nigerien Tuaregs is only occasional. The MNJ is no more interested in creating a pan-Tuareg territorial unit than is the ADC or even the ATNM (Jane's, 2009h). There seems to be no link between the ADC and the MNJ, but according to Tamboura (2007), some of the weapons used by the MNJ could be those taken from the Malian army by the ADC when it attacked the garrisons of Menaka and Kidal. Otherwise, the MNJ collaborated briefly with Bahanga's ATNM (see above). The MNJ has also benefited from the support of the Algerian and Libyan Tuaregs (Guichaoua and Bouhlel-Hardy, 2007).

Knights of Change

Status: Inactive since 2004.

History and objectives: When the attempted coup d'état in Mauritania on 8 June 2003 ended in failure, its instigators fled the country. In exile, they joined the Knights of Change (Foursan el taghyir) movement under the leadership of Saleh Ould Hanena,¹⁹⁴ to continue the struggle against the government of Ould Taya. The group has broadcast several messages to the Mauritanian people on the Al-Jazeera television channel and on the Internet. The Mauritanian government accused the Knights of Change of maintaining links with Mauritanian Islamic extremists (ICG, 2005b, pp. 3–4; Ould Mohamedou, 2005).

Leadership and structure: When it was set up, the movement was led by Saleh Ould Hanena, a former tank battalion officer of the Mauritanian army, and by Abderrahmane Ould Mini. Today these two leaders are part of Mauritanian political life. Ould Hanena, deputy and Hatem party president,¹⁹⁵ stood as a candidate in the presidential election of 18 July 2009; Ould Mini is the president of the parliamentary group the Rally of Democratic Forces (ANI, 2009a; 2009b). It is not known exactly how many sympathizers the group had, but their number seems to have remained small.

Weaponry: The Mauritanian press claims that in July 2004, in anticipation of another coup d'état, a consignment of weapons was sent to Mauritania from Burkina Faso. Two months later, another consignment was intercepted

in Nouakchott (Ould Nenni, 2004). The seized lorries, which also came from Burkina Faso and would have gone through Bamako before arriving in the Mauritanian capital, contained Kalashnikovs and rocket-propelled grenades. Judging by the Arabic inscriptions on the crates, which corresponded to the names of Libyan barracks, the arms were probably of Libyan origin.¹⁹⁶ At the time, Libya was an ally of Burkina Faso, whereas relations with Mauritania, which had recognized Israel, were strained.¹⁹⁷ Saleh Ould Hanena and Abderahmane Ould Mini were convicted and imprisoned in Mauritania before being granted an amnesty by the government that was set up following the coup d'état of 2005.¹⁹⁸

Links with other groups: According to the government of Ould Taya, the attempted coup d'état in 2003 was fomented by radical Islamists, but most observers have seen these claims as a way for the Mauritanian president to increase his power and to win favour with the United States. The links suggested by the government of the day between the Knights of Change and the GSPC are considered to lack credibility (Jane's, 2005).

Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group and Salafia Jihadia

Jane's (2009d) reports that it is difficult to establish whether the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group (Groupe islamique combattant marocain, GICM) and Salafia Jihadia (Fight for the Ancestors) are truly distinct groups. Members of both groups were involved in the attacks in Casablanca in 2003 (Botha, 2008, pp. 91–94). This section treats them as a single Moroccan Salafist movement.

Status: Many GICM militants have been arrested and convicted during the last few years, including the military head of the organization. Whether the GICM or the Salafia Jihadia are currently active is uncertain (Jane's, 2009d; Botha, 2008, pp. 93–94).

History and objectives: The GICM was founded during the 1990s by Moroccans who had returned from Afghanistan. Their objective at that time was to set up a radical Islamist regime in Morocco. The struggle is no longer confined to Morocco; it is now a question of forcing the Western countries to withdraw

their support from the governments in the region in order to weaken them and facilitate a subsequent takeover of power (Jane's, 2009d).

Area of operation and strategy: The group has been active in Morocco and in Europe; it is considered responsible for the attacks in Casablanca on 16 May 2003, which killed 45 people, and those in Madrid on 11 March 2004, which killed 191 people. The United States claims that the group has also been active in Saudi Arabia (where an explosion in a residential complex, in May 2003, caused the deaths of 20 people) and in Iraq (Jane's, 2009d). GICM sympathizers have been arrested in Belgium, the Canary Islands, France, and Morocco (Botha, 2008, p. 93; Jane's, 2009d).

Leadership, structure, and members: The leader of the group, Abdelkrim Thami Mejjati, was killed in Saudi Arabia in 2005 (Botha, 2008, p. 91). Its presumed military head, Saad El Houssei, was arrested and, in February 2009, sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment (*Le Matin*, 2009). The group has an informal structure that relies on the Moroccan diaspora in Europe and Canada (Jane's, 2009d), which makes it difficult, if not impossible, to assess its number of operatives.

Links with other groups: The GICM is closely linked to al-Qaeda (Filiu, 2009, pp. 222–23), the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (see below), and the GSPC/AQIM (Jane's, 2009d). A GICM cell was broken up in Belgium in 2007; four of its members were imprisoned for having given logistical support to the GSPC/AQIM (Marret, 2008, p. 542). After the arrest of 15 people, who were in possession of chemicals and explosives, the Moroccan authorities announced, in August 2008, that they had identified and neutralized a terrorist cell linked to AQIM (*Economist*, 2008). Its members, who were thought to belong to the group Fath Al Andalous (Reconquest of Andalusia), had prepared attacks in several Moroccan towns (El Mahjoub, 2008). Only the local media broadcast this information, which somewhat undermines its credibility. The nature of the possible links between Fath Al Andalous and the GICM is also uncertain.

Libyan Islamic Fighting Group

Status: Officially inactive since 2009.

History and objectives: The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) is a product of the repression of the Islamic opposition to the regime of Libyan president Muammar Gaddafi. The group, which declared its existence in 1995, was founded in exile by militants who had fled Libya for Afghanistan and Pakistan (Knight, 2008). In November 2007, the group officially announced that it had joined al-Qaeda (Filiu, 2009, p. 225). As in the case of AQIM (see below), this decision represented an important change of direction for the LIFG, which, until then, had been entirely dedicated to the struggle against the government of Muammar Gaddafi (Knight, 2008). However, this movement seems to have been short-lived. At the beginning of July 2009, the group announced in an official communiqué that following long negotiations with the Libyan regime it was giving up all violent activity in Libya and abroad. However, it remains difficult to assess to what extent this change of mind represents the opinion of the whole group (Jane's, 2009g; Robertson and Cruickshank, 2009).

Leadership and structures: The leader of the group is Abou Abdallah Al-Sadek; he has been in prison since 2004 along with Abou Munder Al-Saidi, spiritual head of the LIFG (Marret, 2008, p. 543).

Strength: The LIFG developed a support network in Libya, which, even at its peak in the mid-1990s, never exceeded about 300 people (Jane's, 2009g). The founders and members of the group are in exile, mainly in Afghanistan and Pakistan (Knight, 2008). The movement also has support in Europe, especially in the United Kingdom (Jane's, 2009g).

Area of operation, strategy, and weaponry: The LIFG has no real military capacity (Marret, 2008, p. 543). It generally directs its violence against official targets, refraining from indiscriminate attacks (Jane's, 2009g). In May 2007 an LIFG cell was broken up in Benghazi by the Libyan security forces; a raid carried out one month later, against another cell, brought to light a list of potential targets in Benghazi and Tripoli (Knight, 2008). Islamic groups have carried out sporadic attacks against government forces in the north-east of Libya but, according to Jane's, there is no reason to link them definitely with

the LIFG (Jane's, 2009g). In the 1990s, the LIFG's arms came from thefts of Libyan soldiers and purchases in transit through Sudan (Jane's, 2009g). It seems that in the 1990s the group also carried out propaganda activities in Jordan, Mauritania, Senegal, Syria, and Yemen (Daragahi, 2009).

Links with other groups: The LIFG has been linked to al-Qaeda. One of its members, Abou Anas al-Libi (also known as Nazih al-Roukaii), was involved in preparing the attack on the US embassy in Nairobi in 1998, for which al-Qaeda claimed responsibility. Abou Laith al-Libi, who, until his death in 2008, was one of the military leaders of al-Qaeda in the area between Pakistan and Afghanistan, was also one of the leaders of the LIFG (Knight, 2008). According to the 'Sinjar Records' (see endnote 81), the Libyans formed the second largest contingent of foreign combatants who infiltrated Iraq, after the Saudis, a distinguishing feature attributed to the links between al-Qaeda and the LIFG (CTC, 2007, pp. 7–8).

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, formerly the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat

Status: Active.

History and objectives: Founded in 1998, the GSPC was originally a splinter group of the Armed Islamic Group, itself one of the principal players in the Algerian civil war of the 1990s. It was created largely in response to the massacres of civilians, which had become one of the defining features of the Armed Islamic Group (Filiu, 2009, p. 220). The GSPC announced its affiliation to al-Qaeda in September 2006, before changing its name to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb¹⁹⁹ several months later. The GSPC's initial objective was to replace the Algerian government with an Islamist regime conforming with sharia law, but starting in 2006–07 its alignment with al-Qaeda led it to adopt a more internationalist rhetoric, directed against the West (the 'Crusaders') and Israel (Black, 2008). AQIM's ambition is to create a union between the various Islamist groups and splinter groups in Algeria, Burkina Faso, Chad, Eritrea, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sudan, and Tunisia (AFP, 2009e). However, the dividing line between an 'ideological group'

and a 'network of traffickers' (of cigarettes, arms, drugs, or migrants) is blurred and changes according to the circumstances and personalities of the various cell leaders ('emirs') (Jane's, 2009c).

Structure: AQIM is a very structured movement, but each element within it has considerable autonomy. The organization operates on five levels. The head of AQIM is in charge of the different areas of the organization and their respective emirs; these in their turn control the *kata'ib* (units) in each area. The *kata'ib* are subdivided into three or four *fassilas*, themselves made up of two *sarayas*, each having 12 to 18 combatants (Botha, 2008, p. 46). At every level, from the single *katibah* (unit) to the top of the organization, operations are run by an emir, together with a Consultative Council, which sets the strategy and objectives of the group in conformity with sharia law. The Consultative Council of the highest level chooses the emir and the Consultative Council for the level immediately below it.²⁰⁰ This structure is more or less well respected depending on the zones and the *kata'ib*. The units act with relative autonomy, their orientation seeming largely dependent on the personality of their leader (Jane's, 2009f). It is therefore difficult to know to what extent the attacks attributed to AQIM have been approved by the organization or are the actions of autonomous agents. The murder of four French tourists in Aleg, for example, seems to have been mostly improvised by Sidi Ould Sidna, and AQIM has not claimed responsibility for it. AQIM has acknowledged, however, that Sidna's group was 'connected' to theirs (Jane's, 2008a; Ould Oumere, 2008c; Schmidle, 2009).

More fundamentally, there are disagreements within the movement, especially in the south, over the definition of its priorities: the struggle against the Algerian army, which was the traditional objective of the GSPC, or the jihad against the 'infidels', according to the traditional rhetoric of al-Qaeda (Ould Oumere, 2008c). These disagreements are reflected in the strategies chosen by the different *kata'ib*, which are made still less consistent by the rivalries that sometimes arise between the *kata'ib* themselves.²⁰¹ Hence Mokhtar Belmokhtar, who leads the El Moulathamoune *katibah* (*katibah* of 'the turbaned ones'), tends to favour kidnapping tourists and attacking Western interests, whereas the AQIM leader for the whole of the southern region, Abou Ammar (also known as Yahia Djouadi), favours attacks on military targets.²⁰² Dissent

also exists in the north, where some militants, such as Hassan Hattab, founder and first emir of the GSPC, rejected the group's affiliation with al-Qaeda, criticized the movement for the heavy losses caused to the civilian population by its attacks, and called publicly for the members of AQIM to leave the organization (Jonsson and Larson, 2008; Botha, 2008, p. 82; Filiu, 2009, p. 225). Another important member of the group active in the southern zone, Abou Daoud (also known as Abdelkader Ben Messoud), withdrew his support in July 2007 and revealed that many other combatants had also left the organization (Porter, 2007; Black, 2008).

Area of operation: The southern region of the GSPC, also called the 'ninth region', covers southern Algeria, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger, but the group has been active in several other countries (Botha, 2008, p. 46).

- *Algeria:* The group's principal area of operation remains Algeria. The majority of attacks take place in the mountainous region to the south and east of Algiers around the towns of Bouira, Boumerdès, and Tizi-Ouzou (Jane's, 2008c).
- *Tunisia:* The kidnapping in February 2008 of two Austrian tourists in Tunisia (released in Mali in October 2008) seems to indicate that AQIM has extended its area of operation. No incident linked to AQIM had previously been recorded in Tunisia (Jane's, 2008c).
- *Mali:* Although Mali is one of AQIM's main rear bases, no incidents linked to the group had been reported there until four European tourists—two Swiss, one German, and one Briton—were abducted in January 2009 in the border area between Mali and Niger. A second incident, probably linked to AQIM, took place in June 2009, when Lt.-Col. Lamana Ould Bou was shot dead at his home in Timbuktu; the Malian officer had been working for the intelligence services and had played an important role in the arrest of several members of AQIM. This was the first time AQIM attacked a representative of the Malian state (AFP, 2009h). Some weeks later, the Malian army launched an offensive against a base housing the group of Abou Zeid (see below), reportedly killing between 16 and 26 members of the group (AFP, 2009i). A second offensive, in which a particularly high number of AQIM members and Malian troops lost their

lives, took place on 4 July, prompting Bamako to strengthen the deployment of its forces in the north (AFP, 2009k; Naudé, 2009).

- *Niger, Chad*: In Niger, the kidnapping of the special envoy of the UN Secretary-General and his assistant, both Canadian diplomats, shows that AQIM is extending its sphere of activity, even if those responsible for the kidnapping do not appear to have been linked to AQIM, but merely to have sold their prisoners to the group (Jane's, 2009c).²⁰³ In Niger and in Chad, AQIM's attempts to set up bases have apparently been effectively countered by the countries concerned (Jane's, 2009a).
- *Mauritania*: In Mauritania, the various attacks linked to AQIM have taken place in locations that are very far apart, from the north to the south and from Nouakchott to the border with Mali (see Table 2), which indicates that the group has the capacity to act throughout the country.
- *Europe*: AQIM has sympathizers in Europe who contribute to its funding (Porter, 2007; Jonsson and Larson, 2008; Botha, 2008, pp. 45, 67). Algerians, Moroccans, and Tunisians suspected of supporting AQIM have been arrested in several European countries, but for the time being the group does not seem to have planned any attacks in Europe (Jane's, 2008c). Some members of a network providing logistical support to AQIM were arrested in France in December 2007, but the preparations interrupted by the police action seemed to be aimed at Algeria rather than Europe (Mekhennet et al., 2008).

Operational strategy: The methods used by the group depend very much on the cells and their objectives. In northern Algeria, attacks using explosives (improvised explosive devices at the roadside and booby-trapped vehicles) and attacks with automatic weapons are the most frequent methods of operation.²⁰⁴ On 11 December 2007, AQIM attracted a great deal of attention with a particularly bloody attack against the United Nations offices in Algiers, which killed 67 people and wounded several dozen others (AFP, 2007). In the Sahelian Zone, a first bomb attack was perpetrated against the French embassy in Nouakchott in August 2009. Furthermore, various indications suggest that Western mining interests could be the target of future attacks (Ould Oumere, 2008a; Laghcha, 2009).

The southern cells have become known for attacks using automatic weapons (the killing of the four French people in Aleg, the shooting at the Israeli embassy in Nouakchott) and, above all, the taking of hostages. The first of these, in 2003, targeted 32 European tourists kidnapped by a GSPC leader known as Abderrazak el-Para. El-Para reportedly obtained a ransom of nearly 5 million euros in exchange for their release (Ellis, 2004). For AQIM's Saharan wing, the kidnapping of Western tourists has become one of the principal ways of financing its purchases of arms, vehicles, and communications equipment. The most recent actions of the group may mark a change in its objectives. In addition to its hitherto exclusively financial demands, AQIM has recently begun to call for the freeing of imprisoned Islamist militants. In May 2009, for the first time, AQIM executed one of its hostages, the Briton Edwyn Dyer, whom London had refused to exchange for Abou Qatada, imprisoned in the UK and described by the *Guardian* as 'Osama bin Laden's right-hand man in Europe' (Weaver, 2009).

Leadership: The successive emirs of the GSPC, and later of AQIM, have been Hassan Hattab, also known as Abou Hamza (1998–2003), Nabil Sahraoui (2003–04), and finally Abdelmalek Droukdel, all Algerians. It was Hassan Hattab who extended the GSPC's sphere of influence towards the south, enabling him to bring into the movement networks of traffickers active throughout the Sahelian Zone (Filiu, 2009, pp. 220–21). Nabil Sahraoui (killed in 2004 by Algerian security forces) and Abdelmalek Droukdel represent a more internationalist tendency than Hassan Hattab, who was more focused on the struggle against the Algerian government. AQIM's southern area has been led since early 2007 by 'the emir of the Sahara', Abou Ammar, an Algerian who is also head of military operations in Algeria.²⁰⁵ One of the most famous emirs to lead a *katibah* in the south, Mokhtar Belmokhtar (nicknamed Bellaouar), is reputed to have excellent knowledge of the region and also to be heavily involved in cigarette trafficking (Florquin and Pézard, 2006, p. 65). Persistent rumours say that he has broken with Droukdel, or even that he is in negotiations with the Algerian authorities (Black, 2009). The other significant *katibah* in this area is that of Tarek Ibn Ziad Ou el-Fatihine, led by Abdelhamid Abou Zeid, also known as Hammadou Abid. Mokhtar Belmokhtar is more active in Mauritania, whereas Abdelhamid Abou Zeid covers Tunisia and northern

Mali (Botha, 2008, p. 50). The latter were behind the execution of the British hostage Edwin Dyer, who had been held prisoner by AQIM, at the end of May 2009 (BBC, 2009c).

Strength: In 2009, AQIM's numbers were estimated at 500 to 800 members (*National*, 2009; *Jane's*, 2009f). Counter-terrorist actions by the Algerian security services and the various amnesty programmes initiated by Algiers have helped to reduce AQIM's numbers; the group has also lost some of its most experienced fighters (Kennedy-Boudali, 2009, p. 4). According to US military estimates, the group has 300 to 400 combatants deployed in the mountainous area to the east of Algiers (Mekhennet et al., 2008), but in the southern area their number does not exceed 130 to 200 people (Marret, 2008, p. 547).²⁰⁶ During his interrogation by the Mauritanian police, Sidi Ould Sidna mentioned that 170 people were in AQIM's camps in northern Mali, and that 40 of them were Mauritians (Moor Next Door, 2008).²⁰⁷ Apart from them, the AQIM camps accommodate Malians, Moroccans, Nigerians, Nigeriens, Tunisians, and Sahrawis (Ould Oumere, 2008c), but according to Abdelmalek Droukdel the great majority of the group's members are Algerians.²⁰⁸ The kidnapers of six Canadian and European hostages abducted in December 2008 and January 2009 demanded the release of two Mauritanian members of AQIM, highlighting the role played by Mauritians in the group (McLeod, 2009). It appears that these two prisoners were part of the group of four activists freed in Mali in April 2008, in exchange for four of the Westerners: the Canadian diplomats Robert Fowler and Louis Guay, and two tourists, one British and one Swiss (Daou, 2009; Edwards, 2009).

Weaponry: In the mid-1990s, one of the GSPC's sources of arms dried up when the Algerian government introduced tighter control over weapons, including hunting weapons (Callies de Salies, 1997). However, the GSPC had other, more important, channels through which to obtain supplies. When they seceded from the Armed Islamic Group, Hassan Hattab and his men kept their weapons. They also maintained, and even developed, the supply networks set up many years earlier to provide the Armed Islamic Group with firearms; one of these networks uses a route through the desert region of southern Algeria and the northern parts of the countries that border it. The new organization has also succeeded in carrying out guerrilla operations

to steal arms and ammunition from the Algerian security forces.²⁰⁹ Since 2003, the money from ransoms and various attacks, such as the one against the border post at Lemgheity, have enabled AQIM to build up and replenish its arsenal (Florquin and Pézard, 2006, p. 65). The group is now well armed: the Mauritanian soldiers who escaped the ambush on 12 September 2008 stated that there was significant firepower in the ranks of their attackers (AFP, 2008b). AQIM also has automatic rifles and grenade launchers (Jane's, 2009f). Its recruits are trained in the use of explosives and mines, as was demonstrated in June 2008, when arms of this type were used against the Malian army during its attack on an Islamic base (Ould Oumere, 2008c; Jamestown Foundation, 2009).

AQIM obtains its weaponry principally from Mali, which is a country of transit for arms coming from countries further south and east, and relatively little from Algeria, Mauritania, or the Western Sahara.²¹⁰ At the end of February 2009, Malian customs seized a major arms delivery—including sub-machine guns, mortars, and ammunition—travelling from Guinea en route to northern Mali. The destination of these arms is uncertain: the Tuaregs have denied being the intended recipients. According to their spokesman, they were intended for AQIM, who had established a supply channel between Bamako and the north of the country. The intercepted load was the third of this size to have used this route. The arms had been bought with the 5 million euros of ransom obtained in exchange for the release of two Austrian hostages kidnapped in February 2008 and freed eight months later (Fingal, 2009). The Austrian government has always denied having paid any ransom at all for this release (*El Khabar*, 2009). However, it is thought that the disagreements between Mokhtar Belmokhtar and Abdelmalek Droukdel have reduced the latter's access to the arms and money obtained by trans-Saharan trafficking (Porter, 2007). Be that as it may, this trafficking remains an important source of revenue for the group, which transports drugs, cigarettes, and illegal migrants across the desert, in collaboration with other trafficking networks established further south, which also supply it with fuel and food (Rashbaum, 2009).

AQIM is unlikely to receive any arms deliveries from the Sahrawis, whose Algerian ally would view any such trade with a jaundiced eye. Given the geo-

graphical proximity of the Sahrawis and AQIM, however, arms transfers on a very small scale, such as those of the 'ant trade', cannot be ruled out.

Links with other groups: According to the Libyan security services, members of the LIFG have gone to Algeria and joined AQIM in the last few years (Robertson and Cruickshank, 2009).

The *kata'ib* of AQIM occupy the same geographical area as the Malian Tuaregs. Since the GSPC moved into this area—while the Armed Islamic Group confined itself to Algerian territory²¹¹—some Salafists have settled down among the local populations. Some speak Hassaniya and Tamachegh and have abandoned the traditional loose-fitting robes—the *burnous* and *djellaba*—for the *boubou* of the Malians and Mauritians.²¹² They have also developed family ties with the local tribes through marriage, and are thought to have invested in the region part of the ransom they obtained in 2004 for some German tourists who had been held hostage, thus building up the loyalty of the local populations (Lmrabet, 2008). As local people and Salafists have lived side by side for ten years, it is hardly surprising that prominent Tuaregs have often been involved in negotiations between AQIM and foreign governments trying to obtain the release of their nationals.

In spite of alliances of convenience, AQIM and rebel Tuaregs come into conflict on several fronts: ethnic (the majority of AQIM's members are Moors, and therefore Arabs, traditional rivals of the Tuaregs in this region), cultural, and religious (the Tuaregs practise a moderate form of Islam). More generally, AQIM competes with the Tuaregs for the control of the unofficial trade and the trafficking networks that constitute a large part of the region's economic activity (Jane's, 2009c). However, given the sparse population and huge geographical extent of the area, each group generally moves about on its own territory without encroaching on that of the other.²¹³ The fact remains that the presence of AQIM focuses attention on a region where trafficking represents an unofficial economic activity that supports a large part of the population, giving rise to a certain resentment on their part (Botha, 2008, p. 195). Finally, the threat that AQIM represents has persuaded several Western powers, foremost among them the United States, to support the Malian and Nigerien armies more vigorously, a development that only irks the Tuareg communities of the two countries (Lmrabet, 2008; Botha, 2008, p. 195; Jane's, 2009c). In 2006,

several skirmishes between AQIM and the ADC resulted in a number of deaths on both sides (Reuters, 2006a; 2006b). In July 2009, during a meeting of the monitoring committee set up following the Algiers Accord agreed three years earlier between the Malian government and the Tuaregs, the two parties decided to unite to fight against the presence of AQIM in northern Mali (Diarra, 2009).

Al-Ansar Allah al-Murabitun (Army of Allah in the Land of the Murabitun)

Status: Inactive.

History and objectives: Al-Ansar Allah al-Murabitun formed the first AQIM cell in Mauritania. It was broken up at the beginning of 2008, after the arrests of Maarouf Ould Haiba and Sidi Ould Sidna (see above), which made it possible to trace the network back to its leader, Khadim Ould Semane, who was arrested on 30 April 2008. In 2008–09, 41 people, members or accomplices of the group, were arrested; others are still being sought by the police (Ould Oumere, 2008b).²¹⁴

Leadership and structure: This group was founded and led by Khadim Ould Semane, a Mauritanian GSPC activist sent by Mokhtar Belmokhtar to Nouakchott in September 2007 (some sources say January 2008) to set up a Mauritanian structure (Schmidle, 2009).²¹⁵ The group is made up of seven cells, each having between three and eight members.²¹⁶

Strength: The group was estimated to have about 50 people (Ould Oumere, 2008b), mainly Mauritians. As with the other wings of AQIM, it was regularly involved in various illegal activities, such as car thefts (Moor Next Door, 2008). The group's raid on the harbourmaster's office in the autonomous port in Nouakchott in October 2007 brought it additional funds, estimated at some 45 million ouguiyas (USD 170,000).²¹⁷

Weaponry: Automatic weapons (rifles and handguns) and explosives were discovered in the houses where the group took refuge. When he was questioned in connection with the murder of the four French tourists in Aleg, Sidi Ould Sidna stated that his group only had one AK-47 magazine with which

to carry out this operation; the two other magazines in its possession had already been used to test its arms before the attack. This detail, if accurate, indicates how limited the group's arsenal was (Moor Next Door, 2008).

Links with other groups: Al-Ansar Allah al-Murabitun does not seem to have had links with any other groups, except the relatively loose ties with other AQIM cells. 🗨

Conclusion

A certain number of conclusions can be drawn from this study with reference to the circulation and possession of firearms in Mauritania, as well as the level of threat represented by the non-state armed groups in the region:

- The firearms circulating in Mauritania include various types of assault rifle, as well as handguns and hunting rifles. They are mainly held for reasons of tradition and prestige, for use during ceremonies (such as marriages), for target shooting, and for self-defence.
- The two sources of arms supply for Mauritians are the black market (where there are weapons from Western Sahara, Mali, and also from countries further south, such as Guinea) and organized 'leakages' from army supplies.
- Prison service statistics, media analysis, and the testimonies of health care personnel, individuals, and groups all point in the same direction: Mauritania experiences a limited number of incidents of armed violence involving firearms; however, the Department of National Security seems to have noted an increase in cases.
- The situation varies from area to area, some appearing more problematic than others. In the south-east of the country, near the Malian border, land disputes and disagreements between herdsmen and farmers are frequent, sometimes leading to the use of firearms. In this region, the particularly high price of firearms may indicate that they are in greater demand.
- In previous decades, firearms were used during periods of inter-community tension as well as in disturbances during coups d'état and attempted coups d'état. In a country where the standing of the various communities remains a sensitive issue, and where political instability is ongoing, the presence of large quantities of firearms among the population remains worrying.

The government that was elected in July 2009 must face a series of challenges in relation to the control of firearms. Several priorities can be identified to prevent the possible proliferation of small arms, as well as their illegal use:

- The formation of a National Small Arms Commission would be a useful step in the implementation of the objectives of the UN Programme of Action. Such an organization would have the advantage of centralizing the hitherto uncoordinated efforts to curb the proliferation of firearms. It would also facilitate the development of a national strategy to put an end to the limited and ad hoc initiatives focusing on the control and recovery of arms loaned to the civilian population, which have yielded mediocre results to date.
- Firearms legislation needs to be revised and updated in order to correspond to the situation facing Mauritania. The *Legislative Guides* developed by UNODC²¹⁸ and the model laws on this subject drafted by the Arab League could provide useful examples. Appendix 1 of the report on the UNDP workshop, which took place in Nouakchott in 2005 (UNDP, 2005), and the UNDP aid report (UNDP, n.d.) also offer tools for the implementation of the UN Programme of Action.
- It is important to improve the security of the state's arms stocks in order to prevent thefts and the disappearance of weapons and ammunition belonging to the police and the army. In adopting the International Marking and Tracing Instrument in 2005, Mauritania and other UN members committed themselves to marking the weapons held by the army and police. The implementation of such a measure could considerably limit the frequent 'leakages' of arms in Mauritania.²¹⁹
- Mauritanian institutions would benefit from being equipped with a more effective system for monitoring armed violence. Data on these issues is rare or even non-existent, making it impossible for the government to anticipate future problems. In order to be able to adopt targeted and effective measures, it is crucial to know if the perpetrators and victims of acts of violence and the weapons used to commit them (such as firearms and bladed weapons) vary from region to region.

Beyond the borders of Mauritania, prospects for security in the Sahelian region are difficult to assess; while certain developments appear disturbing, this does not mean that undue alarmism is justified. Assisted by its partners, Mauritania can reduce the risks by adopting certain measures:

- The increase in drug trafficking in the last few years constitutes a significant threat. The considerable financial profits to be made through this trade encourage corruption and undermine governance; trafficking finances armed, semi-criminal, and semi-fundamentalist groups, and perhaps certain separatist movements. The struggle for the control of this very lucrative market may also lead to the appearance of criminal gangs and a level of urban violence comparable with that in the South American countries through which cocaine is smuggled (Venezuela, for example).
- Through its affiliation with al-Qaeda, the GSPC, which was previously entirely focused on insurrection against the Algerian government, has developed an international dimension. This transformation has encouraged the arrival of recruits from all over West Africa; these members have a limited interest in Algeria but are ready to embrace jihad, in Iraq or elsewhere.
- The Algerians, Malian, Mauritians, and other combatants who have returned from Iraq are swelling the ranks of AQIM with seasoned fighters, which is a worrying development. Since 2008, their influence has already made itself known in the attacks in northern Algeria, for which AQIM claimed responsibility.

However, it is important not to exaggerate the threat AQIM represents for Mauritania, for several reasons:

- Since GSPC joined forces with al-Qaeda, the group's targets have diversified and become more international in scope; Mauritania has paid a heavy price, with 34 people killed on its territory between 2005 and 2008.²²⁰ Nevertheless AQIM remains principally an Algerian problem, with 381 deaths and several hundred wounded in Algeria during the same period.²²¹ Most of the attacks for which the group claimed responsibility were committed within a limited area to the east of Algiers (*Economist*, 2008).

- Even though AQIM is seeking to unite the various Islamist groups in the region, this objective may be all the more difficult to achieve because the movement struggles to remain united. Its affiliation with al-Qaeda has intensified the existing internal disagreements and has created new ones. Certain emirs are ideologues, whereas, for others, the criminality and trafficking in the Sahelian region are the priority; some have adopted the internationalist stance of al-Qaeda (which attracts new recruits) whereas others see the overthrow of the Algerian government as their sole objective. While these differing tendencies are not mutually exclusive (as demonstrated by the attacks against foreign targets in Algeria, or the financing by criminal acts), they cause disagreements between the key figures in the movement, creating conflicts over the definition of priorities and ultimately undermining the unity of the movement and the consistency of its actions.
- In many respects, AQIM, in spite of its affiliation with al-Qaeda, remains an isolated and marginal group; it is a disruptive, but not a destabilizing, force in the region. The Malian and Nigerien Tuaregs, reluctant to develop anything more than business relationships with AQIM members, could put up powerful resistance if the group began to threaten their traditional way of life—a reaction that is already beginning to be felt in Mali.

To face AQIM and other transnational threats, such as arms and drug trafficking, Mauritania and the international community can adopt various measures:

- Border security could be tightened further, and cooperation with neighbouring countries could be improved. In the absence of regional coordination, even seemingly positive developments—such as peace accords or the disarmament efforts taking place in certain countries in West Africa and North Africa (in Côte d’Ivoire or Western Sahara, for example)—could help to sustain the supply of small arms circulating in the region.
- These measures could be established on a bilateral basis, but they could also fall within the scope of the international and regional organizations of which Mauritania is a member, such as the African Union, the Arab Maghreb Union, the Arab League, and—if it becomes a member one day—ECOWAS.

- It remains vital not to intervene in an aggressive fashion in traditional societies, which are often economically dependent on small-scale trafficking.²²² This recommendation seems to have been generally followed by the partners of Mauritania and of its neighbouring states. The assistance given to local forces has been measured, and so far does not seem to have created new tensions.

The situation in Mauritania remains unstable, as evidenced by the disputed results of the elections on 18 July 2009. As concerns internal security, Mauritania enjoyed a respite between September 2008 and June 2009, perhaps because of more effective surveillance in the north and on the borders. But the kidnapping attempt, followed by the assassination of a US citizen, in broad daylight and right in the centre of Nouakchott in June 2009, and the kidnappings of foreigners in November and December 2009 in various parts of Mauritania, suggest that even though a Mauritanian cell of AQIM was broken up in 2008, AQIM still has a real capacity to strike. In this context, curbing the proliferation of small arms and light weapons must be a priority so that weapons belonging to civilians and the army, or coming from beyond the borders of Mauritania, cannot be used for criminal or political ends. 📌

Endnotes

- 1 Put another way, Mauritania is about 25 times the size of Switzerland.
- 2 Arabic is Mauritania's official language. The other spoken languages are Hassaniya (a local dialect derived from Arabic), French, Pulaar, Soninke, and Wolof.
- 3 According to research carried out in 1964–65, *marabouts* make up 36 per cent of the population, freed slaves 29 per cent, warriors 15 per cent, slaves 13 per cent, blacksmiths 5 per cent, and poets (*griots*) 2 per cent (Fichter, 2007, p. 5). For a chart summarizing the main social and cultural differences between 'warriors' and *marabouts*, see Marchesin (1992, pp. 76–79).
- 4 Although the legal status of this territory is still not established, the name 'Western Sahara' is used in this report. Morocco and the Polisario Front (the Frente Popular de Liberación de Saguía el Hamra y Río de Oro, or Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguía el-Hamra and Río de Oro) both have claims over the former Spanish colony of the Western Sahara. The Polisario Front proclaimed the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) on 27 February 1976, one day after Spain relinquished control over this territory. The SADR was recognized as an independent state by the Organization of African States/African Union, of which it has been a member since 1984, though not by the United Nations. The SADR government in exile is based in Tindouf, Algeria.
- 5 For a definition of 'small arms and light weapons', see Box 2.
- 6 The concept of an 'ungoverned area' is cited four times in the *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, published by the US National Security Council in 2006 (USNSC, 2006).
- 7 The implementation of the PoA is regularly assessed by international and non-governmental organizations (Kytömäki and Yankey-Wayne, 2006). See also *Biting the Bullet* and IANSA (2006).
- 8 These interviews were conducted by Anne-Kathrin Glatz.
- 9 These interviews were conducted in 2008–09 by Stéphanie Pézard.
- 10 Sidi Mohamed Ould Cheikh Abdallahi stood in the presidential election as an independent candidate.
- 11 For information on the factors that led to the coup d'état, see Barbier (1982, pp. 257–59).
- 12 After the Mauritians withdrew from Río de Oro, Morocco occupied the region, triggering fighting between the Moroccan army and the Polisario Front. This only came to an end with the ceasefire in 1991, negotiated under the aegis of the UN and monitored by the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). Neither the 'Baker Plan' of 2003 (named after former US Secretary of State James Baker, appointed as special envoy of the UN in 1997) nor renewed negotiations in 2007 and 2008 made it possible to organize the expected referendum on self-determination, nor to settle what is now considered a 'frozen conflict' (ICG, 2007b).
- 13 Interview with a representative of the international community, Nouakchott, April 2004.

- 14 There were many Afro-Mauritanians in the army, particularly as large numbers were recruited at the time of the Western Sahara War (Barbier, 1982, p. 228).
- 15 Ould Taya's tight control was not limited to excluding Afro-Mauritanians. Concerned about the influence of the Baas party in the security forces, particularly the police, he had its leaders convicted in 1988 and purged the army, the National Guard, and the gendarmerie of Baasist elements (Vandermotten, 2004, p. 38).
- 16 The events of 1989 are often presented as a clash between the Moors and the Afro-Mauritanians; however, Vandermotten (2004, p. 38) points out that not all the Afro-Mauritanian communities were equally involved in the conflict. The Halpulaar were on the front line, while the Soninke, for example, were mostly spared.
- 17 In 2005, the Nîmes Assize Court in France sentenced an officer in the Mauritanian army, Cpt. Ely Ould Dah, to ten years' imprisonment for acts of torture against Afro-Mauritanian soldiers in the period 1990–91. The International Federation for Human Rights found that this verdict was the 'first conviction for torture in France based on the principle of universal jurisdiction'. The judgment was, however, rendered in absentia, as Ely Ould Dah managed to escape to Mauritania after his arrest in France in 1999 (FIDH, 2005).
- 18 As a result of this decision, the country lost the development aid that it had previously received from the United States (BBC, 2007).
- 19 Meetings between dignitaries from the two countries had begun in 1994.
- 20 Ould Taya had long favoured the members of his own tribe, the Smassid, in bestowing promotions within the army (N'Diaye, 2006, p. 426).
- 21 During the Western Sahara War in the 1970s, the Polisario Front dealt a serious blow to the Mauritanian economy by repeatedly attacking the railway line between Zouerate, where most of the iron ore is mined, and Nouadhibou, the port from which the iron ore is exported. Bringing this vital artery of Mauritania's economy to a standstill was instrumental in causing the downfall of Mokhtar Ould Daddah's regime in 1978 and in leading to the country's withdrawal from the Western Sahara War (Barbier, 1982, pp. 216, 258; interview with Jedna Deida, journalist for the *Quotidien de Nouakchott*, Nouakchott, April 2009).
- 22 Interview with a representative of the international community, Nouakchott, April 2009. Officers in the Mauritanian army were also trained in Iraq.
- 23 Correspondence with Mohamed Fall Ould Oumere, chief editor, *La Tribune*, 14 August 2009.
- 24 This is the case, for example, in the French army (see French Ministry of Defence, n.d.a).
- 25 Interview with Moussa Ould Samba Sy, publications director, *Le Quotidien de Nouakchott*, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 26 Interview with a representative of the international community, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 27 Interview with a representative of the international community, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 28 Interview with a medical source, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 29 Interview with representatives of the state forces, Nouadhibou and Aioun al-Atrous, January–February 2007.
- 30 Interview with Moussa Ould Samba Sy, publications director, *Le Quotidien de Nouakchott*, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 31 Interview with a representative of the international community, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 32 Information obtained from a consultant in Nouakchott, November 2006; in an interview

- with a representative of the state forces, Nouadhibou, 29 January 2007; and in focus groups in Nouadhibou, January 2007.
- 33 Interview with Moussa Ould Samba Sy, publications director, *Le Quotidien de Nouakchott*, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 34 Interview with a representative of the international community, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 35 Interview with Moussa Ould Samba Sy, publications director, *Le Quotidien de Nouakchott*, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 36 Interview with a Mauritanian journalist, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 37 Interview with Mariata Kane, director, penal affairs and prison administration, Nouakchott, April 2009; interview with a representative of the international community, Nouakchott, April 2009; interview with a Mauritanian journalist, Nouakchott, April 2009; interview with an official Mauritanian source, Nouakchott, April 2009. Drug trafficking, which has recently developed in Mauritania, might change this situation in the next few years (see Box 6).
- 38 Interview with a Mauritanian journalist, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 39 Focus groups, Nouadhibou, January 2007.
- 40 For more information, see, for example, IRIN (2009).
- 41 Interview with Zeinabou Mint Taleb Moussa, president of the Mauritanian Association for the Health of Mothers and Children, Nouakchott, April 2009. This association cares for women in the outlying neighbourhoods of Nouakchott, where the level of violence is generally higher than in the rest of the capital.
- 42 These figures comprise male prisoners only, women being held in a separate prison. Both prisoners who have been convicted and those on remand are included.
- 43 Interview with Mariata Kane, director, penal affairs and prison administration, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 44 Interview with Jedna Deida, journalist, *Le Quotidien de Nouakchott*, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 45 This also applies to the causes of death, which are only recorded by the Ministry of Health as part of its reproductive health policy (interview with a manager from the Mauritanian Ministry of Health, Nouakchott, April 2009).
- 46 Interview with a manager from the Mauritanian Ministry of Health, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 47 Interview with a representative of the international community, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 48 Interpersonal conflicts are often reported by the injured and their friends and family as accidents, in order to avoid prosecution.
- 49 Interview with Dr Amar Mohamed Lemine, head (2003–09), emergency department, National Hospital, Nouakchott, and with a representative of the international community, Nouakchott, April 2009. Dr Amar estimates that an average of nine out of ten persons with bullet wounds come from the interior of the country, where weapons are less strictly controlled than in the capital.
- 50 Interview with Dr Amar Mohamed Lemine, head (2003–09), emergency department, National Hospital, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 51 This figure comprises the total cost, including surgery, hospitalization, and drugs, as estimated by Dr Amar Mohamed Lemine, head (2003–09), emergency department, National Hospital, Nouakchott, April 2009.

52 Telephone interview with a source at the Kiffa hospital, 30 May 2009.

53 The accidents involve human victims; interview with a representative of the international community, Nouakchott, April 2009.

54 Focus group participants, Aioun al-Atrous, February 2007.

55 Interview with a representative of the state forces, Aioun al-Atrous, 1 February 2007; interview with an official Malian source, Bamako, April 2009.

56 Interview with an official Malian source, Bamako, April 2009.

57 Interview with Moussa Ould Samba Sy, publications director, *Le Quotidien de Nouakchott*, Nouakchott, April 2009.

58 Interview with a Mauritanian source, Nouakchott, April 2009.

59 Interview with Moussa Ould Samba Sy, publications director, *Le Quotidien de Nouakchott*, Nouakchott, April 2009.

60 The GSPC/AQIM units are usually referred to by their Arabic name *katibah*, whose plural is *kata'ib* (Kennedy-Boudali, 2009, p. 3).

61 Interview with a Mauritanian journalist, Nouakchott, April 2009.

62 Some of this money was apparently guarded by the Mauritanian cell responsible for the attack (which was dismantled at the beginning of 2008), while the remainder was sent to Mokhtar Belmokhtar's *katibah* (interview with Moussa Ould Samba Sy, publications director, *Le Quotidien de Nouakchott*, Nouakchott, April 2009).

63 The SPG-9 is a recoilless man-portable anti-tank gun which, in this specific case, was mounted on the military vehicle attacked in Al Ghallawiya (Ould Oumere, 2008b).

64 Correspondence with Mohamed Fall Ould Oumere, chief editor, *La Tribune*, 14 August 2009.

65 Interview with a representative of the international community, Nouakchott, April 2009.

66 Interview with a representative of the international community, Nouakchott, April 2009.

67 Interview with Dr Amar Mohamed Lemine, head (2003–09), emergency department, National Hospital, Nouakchott, April 2009.

68 Interview with an official Mauritanian source, Nouakchott, April 2009.

69 Interview with a representative of the international community, Nouakchott, April 2009.

70 Thanks to James Bevan of the Small Arms Survey for identifying these arms on the basis of photos.

71 Interview with Moussa Ould Samba Sy, publications director, *Le Quotidien de Nouakchott*, Nouakchott, April 2009.

72 Interview with an official Mauritanian source, Nouakchott, April 2009.

73 Interview with an official Mauritanian source, Nouakchott, April 2009.

74 Focus groups in Nouadhibou and Aioun al-Atrous, January and February 2007; information obtained from members of the international community in Nouakchott, November 2006 and January–February 2007.

75 The term Malikite stems from the name of the Imam Malik bin Anas, who lived in the eighth century. Malikite Islam is particularly widespread in West Africa (ICG, 2005b, p. 4).

76 For more details about this wave of arrests, see, for example, the very critical report of the FIDH (2007).

77 Interview with Moussa Ould Samba Sy, publications director, *Le Quotidien de Nouakchott*, Nouakchott, April 2009.

- 78 Email correspondence with a Mauritanian journalist, June 2009.
- 79 The name and adjective ‘Salafist’ is used in this report to refer to ‘Salafist jihadists’ or ‘Salafist Islamists’, as distinct from ‘Salafist Quietists’, who do not advocate violence. For more information about the fundamental differences between these two strands, see Botha (2008, p. 12) and Jane’s (2009e). Instead of using the term ‘Salafist’, David Kilcullen prefers to use the term ‘Takfiri’ (referring to the doctrine that holds that ‘Muslims whose beliefs differ from the *takfiri*’s are infidels who must be killed’) as ‘most extremists are *salafis*, but few *salafi* believers are *takfiri*, and even fewer are terrorists’ (Kilcullen, 2009, pp. xviii–xix). ‘Salafist’ has nevertheless been used here, as it is by this name that the Mauritians and Malians generally refer to Muslim fundamentalists who use violence.
- 80 Interview with a representative of the international community, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 81 Interview with Jedna Deida, journalist, *Le Quotidien de Nouakchott*, Nouakchott, April 2009. The number of Mauritanian combatants in Iraq, however, seems to be low. The ‘Sinjar Records’ (named after the data files seized by the US Army in Sinjar, near the Iraqi–Syrian border), which contain information about foreign Islamist combatants who entered Iraq between August 2006 and August 2007, only mention one Mauritanian combatant out of the 606 individuals in the files (CTC, 2007).
- 82 None of the three, however, was tried and no charge was made against them. One of them, Mohamed Ould Sidi Mohamed, was freed in 2007; the upcoming release of the two others, Mohamed Ould Sellahi and Ahmed Ould Abdelaziz, was announced at the end of October 2009 (Meunier, 2009).
- 83 Interview with a Mauritanian journalist, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 84 Interview with a representative of the international community, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 85 Interview with a representative of the international community, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 86 Interview with a representative of the international community, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 87 Interview with a representative of the international community, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 88 Since 2009, the rally has taken place in South America.
- 89 Interview with a representative of the international community, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 90 Interview with Moussa Ould Samba Sy, publications director, *Le Quotidien de Nouakchott*, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 91 Interview with Moussa Ould Samba Sy, publications director, *Le Quotidien de Nouakchott*, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 92 Interview with a knowledgeable source, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 93 Interview with a representative of the international community, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 94 Interview with an official Mauritanian source, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 95 These representations already existed in colonial times in Mauritania (Jourde, 2007, p. 82).
- 96 Except for Egypt.
- 97 Good relations between al-Qaeda and the GSPC date from the birth of the latter organization in 1998, and a first move to tighten the link was initiated by the leader of AQIM, Nabil Sahraoui, who died in 2006 (Jane’s, 2009f).
- 98 ICG (2005a, p. 1); de la Grange (2007); Jourde (2007, p. 92); RAND (2007, p. 201).
- 99 Interview with a representative of the international community, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 100 Article 4(p) of the Constitutive Act of the African Union sets out the principle of the ‘Condemnation and rejection of unconstitutional changes of governments’ (AU, 2000).

- 101 ECOWAS only accepts a withdrawal one year after it has been announced. The official withdrawal of Mauritania therefore dates from 2000.
- 102 For more information on these two initiatives, see NATO (2004; n.d.).
- 103 Interview with a knowledgeable source, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 104 Focus groups held at Nouadhibou and Aioun al-Atrous, January–February 2007.
- 105 Interview with a representative of the state forces, Nouadhibou, 29 January 2007; focus groups in Nouadhibou and Aioun al-Atrous, January–February 2007.
- 106 Interview with a representative of the state forces, Aioun al-Atrous, 1 February 2007; interview with Moussa Ould Samba Sy, publications director, *Le Quotidien de Nouakchott*, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 107 Interview with a representative of the state forces, Aioun al-Atrous, 1 February 2007; interview with a Mauritanian source, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 108 Interview with a Mauritanian source, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 109 Interview with a Mauritanian source, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 110 Interview with a representative of the state forces, Aioun al-Atrous, 1 February 2007.
- 111 Interviews with two knowledgeable sources, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 112 Written communication with Jean-Pierre Bastié, economic historian, 16 June 2007.
- 113 Interview with a Mauritanian military source, Nouakchott, April 2009. See also FWA (1947).
- 114 This list was compiled based on individual interviews and focus groups, and therefore represents only a selection of the firearms in circulation in Mauritania.
- 115 Focus group in Aioun al-Atrous, February 2007.
- 116 Interview with a knowledgeable source, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 117 This figure comprises authorizations covering hunting weapons and handguns, including short-term authorizations for foreign hunters (interview with a representative of the Department of National Security, Nouakchott, 23 January 2007).
- 118 Figures for 2008 were not available.
- 119 As a rule, private individuals can obtain a permit for one hunting weapon and one handgun (interview with a representative of the Department of National Security, Nouakchott, 23 January 2007).
- 120 Focus groups in Nouadhibou, January 2007; interview with an official Mauritanian source, Aioun al-Atrous, February 2007.
- 121 Interview with an official national source, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 122 Interview with a police source, Nouakchott, January 2007.
- 123 Telephone interview with a representative of the state forces, February 2007.
- 124 Interview with a Mauritanian journalist, November 2006.
- 125 Interview with Jedna Deida, journalist, *Le Quotidien de Nouakchott*, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 126 Interview with a consultant, Nouakchott, November 2006.
- 127 Interview with Jedna Deida, journalist, *Le Quotidien de Nouakchott*, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 128 Interview with a knowledgeable source, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 129 Interview with a representative of the international community, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 130 Interview with a representative of the international community, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 131 Interview with a representative of the international community, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 132 Interview with a representative of the international community, Nouakchott, April 2009.

- 133 Interview with a representative of the international community, Nouakchott, April 2009; interview with a Malian military source, Bamako, April 2009.
- 134 Interview with an official Malian source, Bamako, April 2009; email correspondence with a representative of the international community, 18 June 2009.
- 135 Interviews with various sources, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 136 Interview with a representative of the international community, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 137 Interview with Moussa Ould Samba Sy, publications director, *Le Quotidien de Nouakchott*, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 138 Correspondence with Alain Antil, researcher, French Institute of International Relations (IFRI), 5 August 2009.
- 139 Interview with a representative of the international community, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 140 Interview with an official Mauritanian source, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 141 Focus group in Nouadhibou, January 2007. According to one participant, a Kalashnikov can be obtained for 120,000 ouguiya (USD 450).
- 142 Interview with an official Mauritanian source, Nouakchott, April 2009. This assertion could not be confirmed by other sources, however.
- 143 Interview with Jedna Deida, journalist, *Le Quotidien de Nouakchott*, Nouakchott, April 2009. The Polisario Front is also said to have given a number of small arms, such as Kalashnikovs, to key Mauritanian personalities supporting its struggle.
- 144 Interview with Moussa Ould Samba Sy, publications director, *Le Quotidien de Nouakchott*, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 145 A representative of the state forces at Nouadhibou mentioned that two weapons of war (one G3 and one Kalashnikov) had recently been seized by the Moroccan authorities (interview, 29 January 2007).
- 146 Focus group in Aioun al-Atrous, February 2007.
- 147 Interview with two representatives of the international community, Bamako, April 2009; interview with an official Malian source, Bamako, April 2009.
- 148 ‘Provenance’ indicates the country from which the weapons and ammunition had come at the time they were seized; it is not necessarily the country from which they were initially dispatched. For example, weapons arriving from Guinea often originate in Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, or Sierra Leone.
- 149 The cartridges were seized from a Malian trader based in Mauritania.
- 150 Interview with an official Malian source, Bamako, April 2009; interview with a representative of the international community, Bamako, April 2009.
- 151 It operates in the capital and throughout the neighbouring region.
- 152 Interview with an official Malian source, Bamako, April 2009.
- 153 Interview with an official Malian source, Bamako, April 2009; interview with a representative of the international community, Bamako, April 2009.
- 154 Interview with an official Malian source, Bamako, April 2009. These basic foodstuffs are subsidized in Mauritania but not in Mali; moreover, it appears that traders prefer to be paid in CFA francs rather than in ouguiyas. Similar traffic goes on between Algeria and Mali: the populations living in northern Mali purchase supplies of sugar, semolina, and fuel from traders who bring these goods from the Tamanrasset and Bordj-Mokhtar areas of

- Algeria. Algerian products are not only cheaper than their Malian equivalents, but can also be more easily supplied from Algeria (rather than brought from Bamako). In return, Algerians living in the south of the country purchase rice, which is heavily taxed in their country, millet, and wheat from Mali. Interview with an official Malian source, Bamako, April 2009; interview with a Malian journalist, Bamako, April 2009.
- 155 Interview with a representative of the international community, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 156 In all likelihood, these are mainly Star (Spanish-made) and Tariq (Iraqi-made) pistols; one interviewee pointed out that there were very large numbers of these in Mauritania (interview with an official Mauritanian source, Nouakchott, April 2009). The Tariq pistols were supplied by Iraq, a country with which Mauritania has maintained a long friendship, while the Star pistols are probably a vestige of Spanish colonialism in Western Sahara.
- 157 Interview with an official Mauritanian source, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 158 In addition to the growing number of consumers, several other factors make the European market particularly attractive: cocaine sells for a higher price, thus boosting the traffickers' profits; the euro has strengthened against the dollar; and 500 euro notes enable the traffickers to move large sums of cash more discreetly, whereas the largest denomination dollar bill is only worth 70 euros (Brice, 2009).
- 159 For cumulative seizures exceeding a weight of 100 kg between 2005 and 2007, Mauritania lies in third place, behind Ghana and Senegal (UNODC, 2007, p. 15).
- 160 The narcotics involved in this traffic are of both local, such as Moroccan cannabis resin, and of international origin, such as the cocaine intercepted in May 2007 in Nouadhibou, which came from South America (RFI, 2007b).
- 161 The son of the former Mauritanian president Khouna Ould Haidallah, who was wanted by the police in connection with this matter, was arrested a few months later in Agadir (Morocco) in possession of 18 kg of cocaine (Dehhani, 2007).
- 162 Interview with a representative of the international community, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 163 Interview with Mariata Kane, director, penal affairs and prison administration, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 164 Interview with a representative of the international community, Bamako, April 2009.
- 165 In July 2007, the police officer representing Interpol in Mauritania was arrested on suspicion of drug trafficking (Panapress, 2007b).
- 166 Interview with an official Mauritanian source, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 167 The three men are to be tried in the United States for 'conspiracy to commit acts of narco-terrorism [and] to provide material support' to three terrorist groups (al-Qaeda, AQIM, and FARC). For further details, see the deposition of DEA agent Daria Lupacchino (Lupacchino, 2009).
- 168 Some small groups with only limited operational capacities and little support among the population, such as the Tunisian Islamic Fighting Group (Groupe islamique combattant tunisien) and the Islamist Martyrs Movement (Mouvement des martyrs islamistes) in Libya, are not covered in this section.
- 169 Interview with Jedna Deida, journalist, *Le Quotidien de Nouakchott*, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 170 See, for example, Mouhieddine (2009).
- 171 Interview with a representative of the international community, New York, March 2009.

- 172 Interview with a representative of the international community, Bamako, April 2009. For details on the National Pact, see Mali and MFUA (1992).
- 173 Interview with a representative of the international community, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 174 Small Arms Survey focus group with former Arab, Tuareg, and Songa Koï combatants, Bamako, September 2004.
- 175 Telephone interview with a north Malian source, June 2009.
- 176 Email correspondence with a north Malian source, June 2009.
- 177 The demilitarization entails the withdrawal of units of the regular army and their replacement by Meharist or Tuareg units (correspondence with a north Malian source, June 2009).
- 178 At that time Iyad Ag Ghaly led the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Azawad, which triggered the Tuareg rebellion of the 1990s with the attack on the Menaka garrison. After the Algiers Accords of July 2006, he was appointed Malian consul in Saudi Arabia (interview with a representative of the international community, Bamako, April 2009).
- 179 Interview with an official Malian source, Bamako, April 2009; telephone interview with a north Malian source, 6 June 2009.
- 180 Interview with a representative of the international community, Bamako, April 2009.
- 181 Interview with a representative of the international community, Bamako, April 2009.
- 182 Interview with a representative of the international community, Bamako, April 2009.
- 183 According to Jane's (2009a), the fact that this area was traditionally a trafficking stronghold confirms the hypothesis that the main aim of the ATNM was to create a 'sanctuary' for illegal trade beyond the reach of Malian military forces.
- 184 Telephone interview with a Malian military source, 31 May 2009.
- 185 Interview with a representative of the international community, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 186 Interview with a Malian journalist, Bamako, April 2009; interview with an official Malian source, Bamako, April 2009.
- 187 Interview with a representative of the international community, Bamako, April 2009.
- 188 Interview with a Malian journalist, Bamako, April 2009; telephone interview with a Malian journalist, 14 August 2009.
- 189 Interview with a Malian journalist, Bamako, April 2009.
- 190 Email correspondence with a north Malian source, June 2009.
- 191 Interview with a Malian journalist, Bamako, April 2009.
- 192 On issues related to the mining sector, see Guichaoua and Bouhlel-Hardy (2007).
- 193 Interview with a representative of the international community, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 194 Interview with Moussa Ould Samba Sy, publications director, *Le Quotidien de Nouakchott*, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 195 Interview with Moussa Ould Samba Sy, publications director, *Le Quotidien de Nouakchott*, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 196 Interview with a Mauritanian journalist and Moussa Ould Samba Sy, publications director, *Le Quotidien de Nouakchott*, Nouakchott, April 2009; see also Ould Khattat (2004).
- 197 Interview with a representative of the international community, Nouakchott, April 2009; interview with Moussa Ould Samba Sy, publications director, *Le Quotidien de Nouakchott*, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 198 Interview with a Mauritanian journalist, Nouakchott, April 2009.

- 199 For a more detailed account of GSPC's affiliation with al-Qaeda, see Mekhennet et al. (2008) and Filiu (2009, pp. 222–23).
- 200 Telephone interview with Mohamed Fall Ould Oumere, chief editor, *La Tribune*, 19 April 2009.
- 201 Interview with a representative of the international community, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 202 Telephone interview with Mohamed Fall Ould Oumere, chief editor, *La Tribune*, 19 April 2009; interview with Moussa Ould Samba Sy, publications director, *Le Quotidien de Nouakchott*, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 203 The two men were released in April 2009. Telephone interview with a north Malian source, May 2009.
- 204 According to the Worldwide Incident Tracking System database of the National Counterterrorism Center, an organization funded by the US government, the 28 incidents attributed to AQIM in 2008 are divided up as follows: 10 cases of improvised explosive devices (one 'case' can include the use of several explosive devices), 7 cases of booby-trapped vehicles, 6 armed attacks, 3 kidnappings, and 2 assaults. See WITS (n.d.).
- 205 Interview with Moussa Ould Samba Sy, publications director, *Le Quotidien de Nouakchott*, Nouakchott, April 2009; email correspondence with a Mauritanian journalist, June 2009.
- 206 Telephone interview with a north Malian source, 6 June 2009.
- 207 The author of The Moor Next Door blog claims to have had access to the Arabic transcripts of the interrogations of Sidi Ould Sidna and Mohamed Chabarnoux, who were accused of being involved in the killing of four French people in Aleg in 2007; he also claims to have translated them into English. As these interrogations were conducted by the police in unknown conditions, their results must be treated with caution.
- 208 In July 2008 Abdelmalek Droukdel granted an interview to *The New York Times* (2008).
- 209 Correspondence with Franck Kasbarian, a counter-terrorism expert and member of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team of Committee 1267 of the UN Security Council, 7 August 2009.
- 210 Interview with a representative of the international community, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 211 Interview with a Mauritanian journalist, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 212 Interview with a Mauritanian journalist, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 213 Interview with a representative of the international community, Nouakchott, April 2009; interview with a Malian source, Washington, DC, March 2009.
- 214 Email correspondence with a Mauritanian journalist, June 2009. Only 23 of the 41 people arrested were known members of Al-Ansar Allah al-Murabitun (email correspondence with Mohamed Fall Ould Oumere, chief editor, *La Tribune*, June 2009).
- 215 Email correspondence with a Mauritanian journalist, June 2009; email correspondence with Mohamed Fall Ould Oumere, chief editor, *La Tribune*, June 2009.
- 216 Email correspondence with a Mauritanian journalist, June 2009.
- 217 Interview with Moussa Ould Samba Sy, publications director, *Le Quotidien de Nouakchott*, Nouakchott, April 2009.
- 218 Certain UNODC documents, such as the *Legislative Guides* for the implementation of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the protocols relating to it, could supply useful suggestions, even though they only apply to some of the issues related to firearms, mainly their illicit trade (UNODC, 2004).

- 219 See para. 8(d) of the Instrument (UN, 2005).
- 220 The victims were 29 Mauritanian soldiers, their civilian guide, and four French tourists.
- 221 Figures compiled from WITS (n.d.). The last incident recorded for the GSPC is dated 10 December 2006; the first for AQIM dates from 13 April 2007. For an unknown reason, the Lemgheity incident is not mentioned in the incidents attributed to the GSPC.
- 222 See ICG (2005a, p. 20).

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