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SUBJECT: OTHER MAURITANIAN VOICES

Classified By: CDA Dennis Hankins for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

Meeting with President of the Senate

¶1. (C) Charge met October 14 with President of the Senate Ba Mamadou who would constitutionally be designated interim president under the proposal put forward by President of the National Assembly Messaoud Ould Boulkheir whereby President Abdallahi would return to office only to resign. Ba said he sees strong consensus for a "NiNi" option that would see the departure of both President Abdallahi and General Aziz. He believes Abdallahi will resign freely if his advisors so recommend but was quick to add that neither he nor anyone else would make that commitment for him. Ba was already thinking through the terms of a post-Coup reality with him is a "transitional president." Taking a strictly constitutional line he noted that the last Waghef Government would constitutionally be the one to carry through the role of governance through a transitional period (indicating disagreement with those who would call for an extra-constitutional establishment of a government of national unity to work through the transition. Ba saw that the 3 months specified in the constitution for a transition government to organize new elections is too short and indicated that, if he assumes the transitional presidency, he would look for political/donor support for at least six months.

¶2. (C) While already discussing post-coup scenarios, Ba was not overly optimistic about the depart of General Aziz. He sees falling confidence by Aziz supporters over the future of the coup but see no movement from Aziz himself. Ba believes

still more pressure must be applied on Aziz directly and indirectly through his military, political, and business support base. He saw as vital U.S. action on bilateral sanctions before the October 20 meeting with the European Union.

¶3. (C) The President of the Senate discounted any signals that the junta was reaching out to the FNDD as pure theater and dismissed the upcoming National dialogue. He saw the multiple new internal "mediation" efforts as largely led by those who had sided with Aziz and are now trying to salvage a political place for themselves. He did, however, see the efforts by a coalition of Mauritanian human rights groups as sincere and potentially constructive. Ba believes there will be an anti-coup majority when the Senate reconvenes November 10 composed of the FNDD, Ould Daddah's RFD, and a group of senators who have left the pro-coup coalition. He expected the Senate will overturn everything enacted by the "illegal" emergency session. While an anti-coup majority exists in the Senate, the situation in the National Assembly is less clear.

¶4. (C) Ba, an Afro-Mauritanian Pullar, saw the risk that the largely White Moor military will try to create an ethnic conflict to divert attention from the coup. He believes the military is already starting to provoke racial tensions noting that some Afro-Mauritanian land titles are suddenly being disputed in his home region of Boghe. He added that most Afro-Mauritanian leaders will be cautious not to allow themselves to be drawn into a provoked dispute as long as they believe some resolution to the political crisis remains possible.

Meeting with Ahmed Ould Daddah

¶5. (C) The Charge also met October 14 with the now pro-coup/then anti-coup formal leader of the opposition Ahmed Ould Daddah. As always, Ould Daddah was thoughtful and nuanced in his views -- a trait that is not understood by the public which increasingly sees him as a flip-flopping opportunist. Ould Daddah said, "I occasionally feel a bit more optimistic about the situation," noting that two months after the coup there is national consensus on the need to get the military out. Aside from a few "independent" parliamentarians, Ould Daddah said the military no longer has any political base. That said, Ould Daddah said he was still not seeing much from Aziz indicating any willingness to quit. He was hard pressed to identify any key leverage point on the general since Aziz always keeps his own council and has few associates with any real influence on him. He saw little that could be done to get Aziz to voluntarily give up

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power. He saw the role of international pressure to be useful in getting those around the general to eventually abandon him -- a kind of "first penguin" strategy that would quickly make the general inconsequential once the first person who fears him takes the plunge.

¶6. (C) Ould Daddah told Charge he continues to reach out to the FNDD and that he sees the need for serious dialogue between all parties. He differs with the FNDD and Boulkheir on the question of President Abdallahi's return to office even if temporary -- seeing that as symbolically impossible for the military to accept. For Ould Daddah, if Abdallahi is prepared to resign he should do so without returning to office. Ould Daddah said he is not opposed to Boulkheir's idea of having the President of the Senate leading a transitional government but he saw the idea as unlikely to move forward citing (a) the view Ba is too close to Abdallahi and (b) Ba's "corruption" issues. Ould Daddah saw the exit through the establishment of a highly independent transition government that might even leave a role for Aziz as a purely titular President during the transition.

¶7. (C) Ould Daddah saw as the worst possible outcome of the current crisis being the return of Col. Vall. Ould Daddah condemned Vall for having blood on his hands over the late 80's attacks on Afro-Mauritanians, being deeply involved in the drug trade, and being perhaps the most corrupt of Mauritanians.

¶8. (C) Ould Daddah cautioned that any resolution to the crisis not be at the cost of the institution of the military which, he said, "Mauritania needs now more than any time in its history." He saw that the military's departure from politics needed to be matched by the political commitment to provide the training, equipment, and support needed to meet Mauritania's real security concerns.

HANKINS