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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 000688

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [AG](#) [ML](#) [MO](#) [SG](#) [MR](#)
SUBJECT: NEIGHBORING VIEWS

Classified By: Charge D'Affaires Dennis Hankins for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

[¶1.](#) (C) Summary: Following the November 10 Addis Ababa Communique and the transfer of President Abdallahi to Lemden, Charge checked with embassies of Mauritania's neighbors Algeria, Mali, Morocco and Senegal to discuss their views on the situation. As could be predicted, Algeria and Mali line up more closely against the coup though, in both cases, suggesting support for Messaoud Ould Boulkheir's plan that would not see President Abdallahi completing his mandate. Senegal and Morocco, while limited somewhat by the AU and Arab League positions coming out of Addis Ababa, voice greater support for the transition plan being forwarded by the regime.

[¶2.](#) (C) Algeria: Ambassador Kaid Chakib Rachid termed his government the strongest regional opponent to the coup and noted he had called President Abdallahi November 16 adding "I'm sure I'm the only Arab or African ambassador who called." Rachid noted the regime's efforts to try to make Algeria's condemnation of the coup part of the greater Algerian - Moroccan dispute over Western Sahara. He noted, "Algiers was the first to condemn the coup before we had any idea what Rabat's position would be." He stressed that even in the late 90's Algeria had been the leader within the African Union (then still the OAU) in pushing for the condemnation of coups in Africa saying "we condemned the coup against Taya as strongly as the coup against Abdallahi."

Rachid also noted Aziz' personalization of the presence of Algerians as envoys of the UN, AU and Arab League as an Algerian plot. "We're not so clever or interested in Mauritania to have put our people in place years in advance just for this day," noting that Algeria has many "brilliant diplomats" who represent not Algiers but the organizations they serve. While saying, "we are as one," in demanding President Abdallahi's return to office, Rachid thought the President may be "fatally weakened by the coup" and not in a viable position to complete his mandate. For Rachid, the Ould Boulheir plan calling for anticipated Presidential elections was likely the best long-term solution. Rachid added, "we are impressed by Ould Boulkheir as the individual who has best stuck to his principles through the whole affair while still trying to work for a solution."

¶3. (C) Mali: Charge d'Affaires Claude Tounkara explained he is also a prisoner of the coup. Bamako had received agreement for a new ambassador just before the coup but cannot send him now -- leaving Tounkara in place. The Malian government remains firmly against the coup and is hearing about it from the regime. Tounkara noted he had been convoked earlier in the week by the "Foreign Minister" who had complained bitterly about Mauritania's exclusion from the regional security conference recently held in Bamako. At the same time, Tounkara saw the current transportation dispute between Mali and Mauritania (that has resulted in Nouakchott sealing the border) as a sign of what life will be like if the military stay in place. At its base, Tounkara said the dispute resolves around interpretation of the ground transportation agreement between Mauritania and Mali. Several months ago, Malian businessmen started a very popular "Bamako Bus" service between Nouakchott and Bamako. The Malian buses are more comfortable and reliable than what Mauritanian operators have to offer so the Mauritanian operators got the government to agree to order the Malian buses to off-load passengers at the border to transfer to Mauritanian buses (although, ironically, the Malians were told they could still deliver the passengers' luggage because the Mauritanian buses don't have enough storage space). The Malians insist the bilateral agreement allows for passengers from anywhere inside Mauritania to anywhere in Mali (just not for travel between points inside Mauritania). Tounkara said the REAL reason for the dispute was that the popular bus route (that serves as a transit point for Mauritanian traders for points throughout west Africa) had cut into the passenger load for Mauritanian Airways which is controlled by Aziz' top financier Mohamed Hamayenne Bouamatou. The reliable bus service costing less than a tenth of airfare and with less baggage limits had dropped Mauritania Airways passenger loads to only 20% of capacity. The Malians are convinced Bouamatou provoked the transport dispute that has stopped all crossborder travel for the last two weeks.

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Turning to the political situation, Tounkara, like his Algerian colleague, highlighted the Ould Boulkheir plan as the most viable solution for the country -- one that sees the

military leave but recognizes Abdallahi's political frailty.

¶4. (C) Morocco: Charge d'Affaires Abdel Aziz Shelouati, speaking from talking points, was frank in saying that, while Rabat does not support coups, its policy in Mauritania is driven first and foremost by the need for security and stability in Mauritania that requires a firm military hand "for at least the next ten years." Shelouati cited the Tourine attack as evidence regional stability will be undermined if Mauritania were to risk the destabilizing return to power by Abdallahi. Political instability would not only invite Al Qaeda to act but also complicate the already difficult situation in Western Sahara. Shelouati dismissed Charge's argument that a strong and capable military is necessary but that it must respect civilian authority by saying, "What civilian authority? Abdallahi was never more than a figurehead for the military and there is no real political society in Mauritania -- only tribes and the military." Shelouati said his Mauritanian contacts could not understand U.S. indifference to the security threat in Mauritania and why the U.S. dismissed the proposed National Dialogue on Democracy as a viable solution to the problem. Charge responded that we saw the greater long-term terrorist threat coming from internal radicalization that several decades of military rule had shown the army cannot address -- only democracy can and even then over a long time. Charge noted that the National Dialogue organized under the auspices of the High State Council and its designated government could not be credible -- with the regime openly boasting how well they had manipulated the transition last time, there was no way on can accept having them repeat the same gameplan.

¶5. (C) Senegal: Ambassador Mahmoudou Cheikh Kane also emphasized stability in his government's approach to the coup. While remaining firm to the principles expressed in the Addis Ababa Communique, Kane noted Senegal has over 100,000 citizens in Mauritania and has previously suffered from refugee flows if Mauritania becomes unstable. Kane offered his "personal opinion" that closer observation and support to the National Dialogue proposed by the regime and international oversight of any anticipated elections could lead to a better and more solid result than the last transition particularly with stronger guarantees of military disengagement. Kane questioned whether President Abdallahi was doing right not to embrace the Dialogue as a means for getting his message out and contribute to his country's future. Charge explained the U.S. view that the National Dialogue as structured had no credibility.

HANKINS