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United States Department of State
and the Broadcasting Board of Governors
Office of Inspector General

Report of Inspection

Embassy Nouakchott,
Mauritania

Report Number ISP-I-09-23A, March 2009

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**United States Department of State
and the Broadcasting Board of Governors**

Office of Inspector General

PREFACE

This report was prepared by the Office of Inspector General (OIG) pursuant to the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended, and Section 209 of the Foreign Service Act of 1980, as amended. It is one of a series of audit, inspection, investigative, and special reports prepared by OIG periodically as part of its responsibility to promote effective management, accountability and positive change in the Department of State and the Broadcasting Board of Governors.

This report is the result of an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the office, post, or function under review. It is based on interviews with employees and officials of relevant agencies and institutions, direct observation, and a review of applicable documents.

The recommendations therein have been developed on the basis of the best knowledge available to the OIG and, as appropriate, have been discussed in draft with those responsible for implementation. It is my hope that these recommendations will result in more effective, efficient, and/or economical operations.

I express my appreciation to all of those who contributed to the preparation of this report.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "H. W. Geisel".

Harold W. Geisel
Acting Inspector General



CONTEXT



Mauritania is a large, underdeveloped country in north-west Africa with limited natural resources and a population of 3.4 million. Situated strategically on the edge of the Sahara Desert between the Arab Mahgreb to the north and those African countries to the south and east, Mauritania shares both an Arab and an African heritage. Ethnic strains exist among the three main groups of white Moors, black Moors, and Afro-Mauri-

tians. Slavery was not legally abolished until 1980. Officially an Islamic republic, Mauritania practices a tolerant form of Islam and is one of the few Arab League states to recognize Israel.

Since independence from France in 1960, Mauritania has suffered a series of military coups. A bloodless coup in 2005 deposed long-time President Taya and ushered in a military council that oversaw a transition to democratic rule and the election of President Abdallahi in April 2007. The successful transition to democratic governance, coupled with the increase in the terrorist threat in the region from Al Qaeda associated groups, resulted in significant U.S. engagement in Mauritania in democracy and counterterrorism efforts. Relations became close and cooperative as Mauritania developed into an important partner for the United States in the region.

The August 2008 coup deposing President Abdallahi and installing a military junta caused the robust U.S.-Mauritanian programs of cooperation to halt. Most military-to-military and other programs ended except for humanitarian aid. The United States and other international partners are strongly advocating a return to democratic governance. A return to closer U.S. cooperation with Mauritania remains in abeyance pending the outcome of that effort.

Embassy Nouakchott sits on a residential compound of older, low-rise buildings. Nouakchott is scheduled to receive a new embassy compound; however, the coup

has delayed the purchase of land for it. The mission has 269 locally employed (LE) staff, and 22 direct-hire Americans, including the Marine security guard detachment. There are three other agencies represented at the mission: the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), with one personal services contractor; the Peace Corps, with three U.S. direct hire employees and 140 volunteers; and the Department of Defense with three in the Defense attaché office and seven military personnel seconded from Special Operations Command Europe (SOCEUR).

The International Cooperative Administrative Support Services (ICASS) program, public diplomacy, and local guard budgets total approximately \$7.8 million. Bilateral assistance (2008 estimated) includes \$11.5 million in PL 480 food aid, \$2.4 million for maternal and child health, microfinance capacity building and related projects, and \$447,000 for a Famine Early Warning System project. The United States terminated USAID development assistance and most military-to-military programs following the coup. Department of Defense civil-military and information programs budgets total in excess of \$1.5 million.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTION

During the inspection, the Ambassador was in Washington accompanying a family member on medical evacuation. The Ambassador plans to work in the Department in the Office of West African Affairs for a number of months during the medical treatment of the family member.

In the interim, the FO-01 deputy chief of mission (DCM)¹ is leading Embassy Nouakchott very capably as chargé d'affaires. He has previous experience in Africa, including as DCM. Because of the likely extended absence of the Ambassador, the Department is sending a retired officer in a when-actually-employed status to serve as acting DCM for the next 2 months, which is expected to be a period of heightened political activity. Depending on developments, additional temporary duty support may be required in subsequent months.

Embassy Nouakchott is “a learner post.” The chargé d'affaires is the only officer at the Embassy who has previous experience serving in a position he or she now occupies. Nearly all other Department positions are encumbered by first-tour officers. The chargé d'affaires takes seriously and executes well his responsibility to mentor entry-level staff. He meets with section heads weekly and more often as necessary to help them learn their duties, provide guidance, and mentor them in their career development. In both a group meeting with inspectors and in individual meetings, entry-level staff expressed praise for the guidance and direction they receive from the chargé d'affaires. Their morale is high, and they are positive about their assignment in Nouakchott, despite the challenges of serving in an isolated hardship post with limited external recreation activities. They welcomed the broadening opportunities that service at a small embassy has offered them to learn other aspects of diplomatic activity.

The Country Team and Interagency Relations

Three agencies are represented in the mission in addition to the Department. USAID has one American personal services contractor. Peace Corps has three direct-hire staff and 140 volunteers spread widely around Mauritania. Department of Defense has three officers assigned to the Defense attaché office, and SOCEUR has seven personnel on temporary assignment to the Embassy.

¹ This report uses the term DCM to refer to the chargé d'affaires when he was filling his previous position and when DCM refers to specific expenditures or his assigned residence.

Interagency relations are good. The heads of all the other agencies praised the leadership and management style of the Ambassador and chargé d'affaires. One agency head commented, "Couldn't be better." All sections of the Embassy and heads of other agencies are included on the country team, which meets weekly under the Ambassador or the chargé d'affaires in his absence. Interaction among the country team was observed to be friendly and informal.

The seven military personnel seconded to the Embassy from SOCEUR trace their chain of command to their military headquarters in Germany. They serve on rotating 3- to 6-month tours known as "enduring presence" positions. National Security Decision Directive-38 approval is not requested for them, and they are not formally under Chief of Mission authority. They are listed on Annex B of the list of Department of Defense personnel for whom the Combatant Commander has security responsibility rather than Annex A for whom the chief of mission has responsibility.

The OIG team has encountered this situation on other inspections and finds the ultimate cause to be unresolved issues between the Department and Department of Defense in Washington. The OIG team made an informal recommendation to address the lack of clarity about chief of mission authority over SOCEUR personnel in a classified annex to this report, which discusses the issue in more detail. Meanwhile, embassy leadership in Nouakchott has developed on-the-ground coordination arrangements with the Defense attaché and SOCEUR personnel, which function well and ensure that the work goes forward effectively. There is a good spirit of cooperation among the elements involved.

The Mission Strategic Plan Process

Embassy Nouakchott's FY 2010 Mission Strategic Plan (MSP) process was led by the DCM and began with a country team offsite meeting. The Ambassador encouraged open discussion and gave leeway to all sections and agencies in defining top priorities and strategies. The Chief of Mission Statement was drafted primarily by the Ambassador; the remainder of the MSP was drafted by the DCM.

The MSP was submitted in May 2008 at a time when Mauritania had a recently elected democratic government and Washington was ramping up cooperation in a number of areas including military-to-military counterterrorism and increased development assistance. Mauritania was close to receiving approval for a \$30 million Millennium Challenge Corporation threshold program. USAID had assigned its first resident American representative to Nouakchott. The MSP was used as a key strategy document in prioritizing the increasing U.S. program activities.

The August 2008 coup in Mauritania establishing a military junta upended the situation. Bilateral development assistance was terminated under section 608 legislative requirements and only humanitarian assistance continued. The Millennium Challenge Corporation threshold application was canceled. Most U.S. military-to-military counterterrorism programs ended and the majority of U.S. military personnel withdrawn.

Following discussions within the country team and with the Ambassador before he departed, the chargé drafted and approved a 12-page telegram containing a mid-course correction of Nouakchott's FY 2010 MSP. The revised MSP contains a cogent analysis of the post-coup situation and an appropriate strategy for focusing U.S. efforts on restoring democratic governance and countering the terrorist threat.

Security and Emergency

Mauritania is under threat from elements of Al Qaeda in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb. Within the past year, four French tourists were killed by terrorists south of Nouakchott, and 12 Mauritanian soldiers were killed and decapitated. In the capital there was an attack on the Israeli embassy and a nearby club where U.S. mission personnel were present.

Mission leadership and the RSO office take the threat seriously and respond appropriately. The Ambassador and chargé d'affaires are positively engaged in the mission's security programs and support the mission's security policies. They encourage personnel through formal directives and personal example to participate actively in emergency drills and to comply with security policies and procedures. The emergency action committee meets frequently. The Ambassador and chargé d'affaires rely on the RSO and the assistant RSO to manage Embassy Nouakchott's strong and effective security program. Their communication and interaction with the regional security office is frequent and productive. The RSO and assistant RSO received high praise from both American and LE staff at the Embassy. The regional security program is discussed in greater detail in the classified annex to this report.

Support of Equal Employment Opportunity Objectives

The executive office supports Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) objectives, but as discussed later in this report, the Embassy does not have a trained EEO counselor. The Embassy has made a concerted effort to provide reasonable accommodation for an LE staff member who uses a wheelchair.

Leadership and Morale

Although the Ambassador was absent during the period of the inspection, all mission sections and agencies praised his leadership as well as that of the chargé d'affaires. "The best leadership team I've encountered in all my posts," one experienced officer from another agency commented.

The chargé d'affaires, in his briefings to the OIG team and in his interaction with the different elements of the Embassy, demonstrated a detailed knowledge of operations and a sound grasp of policies and priorities the United States should be following in Mauritania in the uncertain post-coup political situation. He has an easy and informal style, if occasionally didactic, and his leadership as chargé d'affaires is well accepted and appreciated by staff. Some strains were evident from the heavy workload during the period of the coup, but morale is high, perhaps somewhat surprisingly so in view of the stress of work and the hardship conditions of life in Mauritania.

Public Diplomacy

The executive office is fully supportive of the public diplomacy programs the Embassy's public affairs section and the Military Information Support Team carry out in the Mauritania. The OIG team saw the Ambassador and the chargé d'affaires participate in digital videoconference and live public affairs programs, speaking fluent French and connecting easily with their Mauritanian interlocutors. The chargé d'affaires assumed the role of acting public affairs officer (PAO) while he was DCM and that position was vacant. He thinks creatively and strategically about the mission's activities, providing careful direction to the entry-level PAO.

Foreign Assistance

A number of U.S. civilian and military assistance programs in Mauritania are being terminated following the August 2008 coup. If the efforts of the U.S. and international partners successfully reverse the coup and restore democratic governance, some of these programs may be reactivated.

USAID is terminating all but three projects in Mauritania. The humanitarian activities that will continue include a PL-480 World Food Program totaling \$11.5 million, PL-480 counterpart food security projects targeting maternal and child health, microfinance capacity building, infrastructure development and income generating activities totaling \$2.4 million, and a Famine Early Warning System project totaling \$447,000. The single USAID U.S. personal services contractor in Nouakchott will

depart, and the ongoing humanitarian programs will be managed by USAID Washington and monitored by the two LE staff who also monitor the embassy's self-help and democracy and human rights projects.

The Peace Corps program continues in Mauritania with 140 volunteers spread widely around the country in programs including health, education, small enterprise development, and agro-forestry. The Peace Corps director has served 7 years in Mauritania and actively participates in the country team.

Other U.S. assistance for Mauritania includes funding from the Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, which provides \$1.8 million for refugee returns, administered primarily through the UN High Commission for Refugees. The Embassy also administers \$80,000 in self-help funds and \$40,000 in democracy and human rights programs.

Despite the cancellation of a number of military programs and the withdrawal of most of the military personnel from Mauritania following the coup, the remaining Department of Defense activities still constitute the largest sector of U.S. engagement at Embassy Nouakchott. Three SOCEUR military personnel from the Civil-Military Support Element work on democracy promotion projects, delivery of humanitarian supplies, and other projects with a budget in excess of \$1 million. The two-person Military Information Support Team has \$500,000 in good governance material committed. It is considering carrying out civil-military training and election support programs costing over \$1 million each, which would be activated if and when Mauritania returns to democratic governance and elections are scheduled. The Ambassador and the chargé d'affaires have established effective oversight and coordination of these military activities.

POLICY AND PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

REPORTING, ANALYSIS AND ADVOCACY

The August 6, 2008, coup d'état was the defining event for U.S. policy towards Mauritania. Embassy Nouakchott's reporting and analysis following the coup was comprehensive, timely, and well written. Reporting officers produced a daily flow of informative situation report cables immediately following coup and afterwards maintained a steady volume of analytical and information cables on political developments and the views of other embassies and international organizations located in Nouakchott. Washington agencies had strong praise for the Embassy's reporting efforts; one agency commented that it was clear that embassy officers were getting out, making new contacts, and gathering information above and beyond usual embassy reporting.

At the time of the inspection there was little clarity, and much speculation, as to whether the junta would hang on to power or would take steps towards a return to democratic governance. The Ambassador, from Washington, gave a digital video press conference emphasizing the U.S. Government's position calling for a quick return to democratic governance. Cable reporting continues to cover developments as well as commenting on the various possible future scenarios.

The chargé d'affaires is the principal political reporting officer, with the Ambassador and a first-tour political officer contributing the remainder. Another first-tour officer splits her time between consular functions and economic affairs. Embassy Nouakchott has one vacant FS-03 political position that the Department was unable to fill in 2008. A first-tour officer has now been assigned to that position and is due to arrive during the summer of 2009. The Embassy also has one full-time and one part-time political LE staff and one economic LE staff. An eligible family member will join the political section soon to help with reporting.

A variety of policy and reporting coordinating meetings are held on a regular basis. They include the weekly country team meeting and a biweekly political/security coordination meeting. The chargé d'affaires holds separate weekly meetings with the political and economic/consular officers. The first-tour, part-time political officer meets daily with the LE staff to review press reports and provide them guidance and

direction. The chargé d'affaires' editing and counseling of the first-tour officers has been important to their learning their jobs and to their high level of performance. However, with the Ambassador's absence, the chargé d'affaires is now the only experienced reporting officer at the Embassy.

Required reporting is done well and on time. Washington agencies praised a series of cables the consular/economic officer drafted on the 1-year anniversary of the previous democratic government. Similarly, Washington gave kudos to a more recent cable on the Mauritanian fishing sector. Travel funds are adequate and are shared among embassy sections; reporting officers have travelled to various parts of Mauritania. The potential of terrorist activity, however, has created added security concerns for travel in the northern and eastern parts of the country.

As noted earlier in this report, during Mauritania's democratic period a wide variety of U.S. Government agencies either initiated or were prepared to initiate programs in Mauritania. These agencies ranged from Department of Defense's Africa Command and USAID to the Millennium Challenge Corporation and the African Development Foundation. Each of their programs required numerous visits to Nouakchott with the attendant logistical and control officer support as well as a great deal of information gathering and reporting by embassy staff. Since the coup nearly all of the economic programs, and many of the Department of Defense programs, have been terminated or suspended, but the U.S. Government's demand for information has continued.

Prior to the coup, reporting officers were hard pressed to stay current with developments, make necessary contacts, and prepare their reports. Since the coup, additional contacts were required, political events needed closer monitoring, and the volume of reporting increased. Strong Embassy Nouakchott leadership and high morale have sustained this effort, but the effort also strained resources. These increased efforts will likely be required until the Mauritanian political situation stabilizes and its political future is clearer. However, even after the political future stabilizes, increased programs and reporting demands will impose additional program coordination requirements. The Embassy's 2010 MSP requests an additional mid-level (FS-02) political/economic section chief position and an entry-level full-time economic position to help meet these demands.

The OIG team concurs with the request for an FS-02 officer. An experienced political/economic section chief would help direct the efforts of the two entry-level officers, meet the responsibilities of mandatory reporting, stay current and report on political and economic developments, maintain ordinary diplomatic interactions, perform visit control, and help cover the inevitable staffing gaps that occur on a regular

basis. Without this additional position, Embassy Nouakchott will not have the depth of human resources and experience to sustain increases in reporting activity and program direction to effectively carry out Department objectives in Mauritania.

Recommendation 1: The Bureau of African Affairs should request, and the Bureau of Human Resources should reprogram, a mid-level political/economic officer position to Embassy Nouakchott. (Action: AF, in coordination with DGHR)

Trade Promotion

There is very limited trade between Mauritania and the United States. The major U.S. exports to Mauritania are heavy equipment for the iron mines in the north of the country. Through coordination with the Foreign Commercial Service officer in Dakar, Mauritanian businessmen have participated in foreign buyer missions to the United States. The Ambassador and other staff members brief all U.S. businesspeople interested in doing business in Mauritania.

Refugees

In 2007, the Government of Mauritania agreed to the repatriation of Mauritanian refugees in Senegal. The UN High Commission for Refugees estimates there are about 30,000 Mauritanian refugees in Senegal. About 20,000 have expressed a desire to return home, and approximately 4,500 have done so. The Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration has financially supported the UN High Commission for Refugees' efforts and has made grants to nongovernmental organizations operating in Mauritania to facilitate refugee resettlement. Embassy officers have monitored the repatriations and visited the resettlement areas near the Senegal border.

Grants

The chargé d'affaires supervises and is the grants officer for the Ambassador's special self-help fund and the democracy and human rights fund. In FY 2008, the self-help fund committed \$80,000 to assist community groups in 16 small development projects. The democracy and human rights fund committed \$40,000 during the same period. Each program is managed by an LE staff member, who reports to the chargé d'affaires.

LAW ENFORCEMENT COOPERATION

Mission cooperation on law enforcement is good. The RSO and consular section are in close contact with Mauritanian law enforcement authorities and with each other on law enforcement issues. The two RSOs are the only U.S. law enforcement officers at the Embassy.

Following the August coup, all Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism-funded Antiterrorism Assistance Program courses were cancelled. Three courses had been completed before the coup, and one was terminated during the coup. The RSO is the coordinator for the Antiterrorism Assistance program.

PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Embassy Nouakchott's public affairs section (PAS) is still developing its structure. The section dates from the 2005 arrival of its first PAO. Even before 2005, however, Embassy Nouakchott had carried out an agenda of MSP-driven public diplomacy programs and developed considerable expertise.

Since the departure of its initial PAO in 2007, however, section continuity has been hampered by vacancies in that position. Two temporary duty (TDY) PAOs and the attention of the DCM as acting PAO provided program oversight and staff development until the arrival of the present permanently assigned PAO. Her arrival the day before the August 2008 coup coincided with the change in level of mission public diplomacy activities. In the months before the coup, PAS activities were implemented in cooperation with an expanding number of larger programs including those of Department of Defense, USAID, and Millennium Challenge Corporation. After the coup, mission programs have been reduced; however, PAS continues as a key embassy team member seeking to restore democracy in Mauritania.

PAS Nouakchott has a small but competent staff. The section consists of a public diplomacy core PAO in charge of four well-trained and enthusiastic LE staff. The PAO actively participates in the top embassy priority of the restoration of democracy, including through increased formal media reporting. The PAO, however, has not put on hold the development of standard operating procedures and staff development and has continued the complex work noted below of the development of an Information Resource Center. The PAO pays attention to the LE staff's training needs. Several of them have worked in the Embassy in other sections, bringing to PAS a natural capacity for cooperation with colleagues throughout the mission.

The return during the inspection of one of the former temporary PAOs (this time as acting DCM) will provide support for this section and help it hone its work priorities to address shifting post-coup program opportunities.

PAS carries out an active agenda of core public diplomacy programs that are directed to U.S. Government goals in Mauritania. It distributes a daily bulletin of media news and supports English, French, and Arabic public Web sites and the Embassy's Department intranet site. The section's cultural and exchange programs include modest Fulbright Trans Sahara Undergraduate, Fulbright Junior Staff Development, Humphrey, International Visitor, English Access Micro Scholarship, and English Language Fellow programs. With the modest level of programs, the section relies on the financial management section for, among other things, grantee travel support, and does not write its own grant documents. These cultural, educational, and exchange programs target MSP goals well and are a resource for all mission elements. PAS provides media support for the entire mission. Peace Corps and USAID expressed appreciation for PAS program support and cooperation as well.

Use of Technology

PAS Nouakchott has made good use of digital videoconferencing technology to bring speakers on high priority democracy-related programs to this isolated embassy. The OIG team attended a digital video press conference in French and Arabic in the Embassy by the Ambassador from Washington on U.S. policy towards restoration of democratic government in Mauritania. The team also attended a digital videoconference presentation and discussion on the U.S. election by two U.S. experts arranged by the Africa Regional Service office in Paris. The latter event brought together in the audience members of pro-coup and anti-coup political parties to bring home the value of democracy. Both events were strategically conceived and well planned, executed, and attended.

American Corners

PAS has two American Corners in Nouakchott; one in the University of Nouakchott and one at the ISERI (an Islamic University in Nouakchott). An earlier Foreign Service officer opened the centers without a memorandum of understanding with the host institutions, and the centers have shown mixed success. PAS has not continued financial support for the American Corners and is weighing the future of these programs.

Reporting

Following the August coup d'état, the Embassy focused on the restoration of democracy, and the PAO has taken on substantive reporting on the media as part of PAS support for that U.S. Government priority. The PAS, however, needs to step up its program reporting. The PAO is placing more emphasis on mission activities tracker program reporting. It is particularly important that officers who nominate Mauritians for International Visitor programs join with the PAS staff to debrief the grantees upon their return from their program visits. PAS uses these debriefing activities to draft standard reports on these activities. The OIG team made an informal recommendation on this issue.

Embassy Outreach Institutions

Since the 2005 assignment of the first PAO, PAS has sought support for an Information Resource Center on or outside of mission grounds or another variety of a program outreach platform in Nouakchott such as a binational center or an English-teaching center without a direct-hire staff supervisory presence. Before the coup, Embassy Nouakchott was scheduled to receive \$300,000 from Section 1207 Trans Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership funding for start-up costs for a binational center in cooperation with the Mauritania Alumni Association, but Section 608 prohibitions cut off that funding along with other mission assistance programs. Embassy Nouakchott continues to look for funding options for these purposes.

U.S. success in reversing the coup would allow the return of Department of Defense programs and personnel to Mauritania; however, this would reduce the space available for an Information Resource Center on the mission compound, the least expensive option for a center. In the more expansive assistance environment of a restored democratic government, other funding could become available to support program space outside the embassy compound. The Embassy is hiring an LE staff information resource center technician who can begin operations, particularly outreach programs, in PAS's present limited work area and establish an embassy presence in this field, but a larger, separate space would be more efficient.

The OIG team endorses the Embassy's view of the value of an Information Resource Center, binational center or English teaching center in Nouakchott as an effective outreach tool for democratic development and other public diplomacy goals. The OIG team underlined to the mission the value of establishing at the outset a permanent funding stream to support any outreach platform it establishes.

CONSULAR OPERATIONS

Embassy Nouakchott's consular operation is small, even by African standards. The section is managed capably and energetically by a half-time, first-tour officer supported by two LE staff members. There are no specific consular objectives in the current MSP, though it is likely that visa policy will have greater visibility in the post-coup environment, as Washington establishes visa sanctions on Mauritians among the junta leadership.

Consular Management

The officer leading the section occupies a split consular/economic officer position. She spends 40-50 percent of her time on consular work, which is adequate. The workload is low, but fraud is a factor, and thus the consular officer pays meticulous attention to management controls. This care minimizes the potential vulnerability of having two LE staff members work each afternoon while she is not in the section. The back-up consular officer is also a first-tour officer, the recently arrived PAO. She has had appropriate training and carries a consular title. The chargé d'affaires, a consular officer by cone, provides guidance and oversight, and has also served as a back-up consular officer. He frequently visits the section and is fully in compliance with standards for reviews of issuances and refusals. The Embassy benefits from the oversight of a regional consular officer who visits about once a year from Frankfurt, most recently in October 2008. There is good communication between the Embassy and the regional consular officer between visits.

Consular LE staff evaluations are up to date, and one staff member received an award recently. Both LE staff have taken consular correspondence courses, and one has had some training in Washington. The more experienced of the two LE staff members recently announced his resignation. The OIG team reminded the section chief of the importance of establishing a training and development plan for his successor.

The subcashier collects approximately (b) (2)(b) (2) in fees, mostly passport and notarial fees. These are deposited daily with the cashier, but sometimes it is necessary to seek out the cashier in order to make change for a customer. The regional consular officer suggested that the subcashier be authorized a small advance for making change; the OIG team agrees, and made an informal recommendation to this effect. The cashiering function is being executed correctly, but without benefit of a standardized operating procedure. The consular section created a Foreign Affairs Handbook-compliant standard operating procedure for cashiering during the inspection.

Space

The consular section occupies a wing off the main public entrance. There is adequate cooled waiting space and adequate outdoor covered space that applicants can use while awaiting security screening. Flags and a fee schedule are correctly displayed. There are two service windows and an appropriately designed cashier booth that affords the supervising officer a clear line of sight. There is no space for confidential interviews.

Visa Services

Embassy Nouakchott accepts nonimmigrant visa applications 2 days each week. LE staff members review the documents and enter data into the automated system. The officer performs the 10-fingerprint scan and interviews the applicant. There is no appointment system, and the wait time is zero. There are rarely more than 10 applications per day. Applicants pay visa fees at a bank. The memorandum of agreement with the bank is up to date, and collections are regularly compared with applications to ensure that payments match visa demand.

American Citizen Services

There are about 400-500 U.S. citizens in Mauritania, mostly in Nouakchott. The Embassy maintains a warden system organized by institutional affiliation. A text-message based system for sending warden notices was under development at the time of the inspection. The Embassy's duty handbook contains information on how to handle consular emergencies. The consular portion of the Emergency Action Plan is up to date.

Crimes, repatriations, and arrests occur, though rarely. The OIG team made an informal recommendation that this small embassy establish electronic precedent files for various types of cases when they happen in order to guide future action on the same type of case.

Fraud Prevention

Most nonimmigrant visa fraud takes the form of documents altered in order to strengthen the appearance of the applicant's case. It is relatively unsophisticated and easy to detect. There are frequent relationship claims in cases of relatives following to join a lawfully admitted permanent resident in the United States. This most commonly takes the form of information substitution on bona fide documents. For

this reason, the Embassy frequently requires DNA testing. DNA tests are available locally, and a consular officer personally witnesses the cheek swabs at the physician's office to ensure there is no substitution of one person for another when the tests are done. The Embassy recently began using the online reporting function in the consular automated system to inform the Department about fraud cases.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Although Embassy Nouakchott's management section is minimally staffed, it gets exceptionally high scores on OIG questionnaires. During the past 2 years at least, many TDY management officers have performed the management role along with TDY general services officers. During this inspection, a TDY management officer, at the Embassy for about 1 month, was accomplishing work that had languished for some time. An entry-level general services officer arrived during the second week of the inspection, and a new first tour management officer is expected shortly. Local staff have worked hard to fulfill requirements, often without recognition.

Agency	U.S. Direct-Hire Staff	U.S. Eligible Family Member and Local-Hire Staff	Locally-Employed Staff	Total Staff	Total Funding FY 2008
Diplomatic and Consular Programs	10	2	14	26	\$1,104,000
ICASS	3	4	102	109	3,564,600
Public Diplomacy	1		4	5	254,000
Diplomatic Security	2	1	105	108	1,785,959
Marine Security Guard	6		4	10	100,100
Representation					18,800
Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations					403,899
USAID		*1		1	Not Managed by Embassy
Peace Corps	3	1	**38	42	Not Managed by Embassy
Defense Attaché Office	3		2	5	224,798
SOCEUR - Special Operations Command and Control Element	2			2	391,000
SOCEUR - Humanitarian Assistance Program and Civil-Military Support Teams	3			3	Not Managed by Embassy
SOCEUR - Military Information Support Teams	2			2	Not Managed by Embassy
Total	35	9	269	313	\$7,847,156

*U.S. contractor

**Includes 36 LE staff contractors

OIG's 2002 Report of Inspection² said "Nouakchott has experienced curtailments, staffing gaps, and a high turnover rate. Even with a post differential of 25 percent, two rest and recuperation trips in a 2-year tour of duty, and the special 15-percent differential for a third year, Nouakchott cannot maintain stable American staffing." That statement remains accurate today.

Regional human resources, financial management, information management, facilities management, and medical and psychiatric support are based at Embassy Dakar. Financial management support also comes from Bureau of African Affairs rovers located in Paris. A nepotism waiver for the eligible family member, the chargé d'affaires' spouse, working in the human resources office as the supervisor, requires the human resource officer at Embassy Dakar to provide supervision and performance evaluations. The Ambassador is to review the evaluations. Should the Ambassador not return to provide the review, the Embassy will locate a suitable reviewer. The human resources section is in touch with Embassy Dakar's human resource section at least weekly.

Regional support is needed but not always timely. Given the expected gap in the health unit, for example, support for medical needs will be needed more frequently and possibly long term.

THE EMBASSY COMPOUND

The Embassy occupies a large compound, adjacent to the Presidential palace and the Spanish and German embassies. In the last 30 years, two incidents related to civil unrest affecting the Presidential palace raised slight concern regarding compound security. Based on that, the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations decided the compound was not suitable for a new embassy building. The present Ambassador, however, certified to the compound's suitability, acknowledging its proximity to the Presidential palace, but noting its size was appropriate. Its location behind and adjacent to the other embassies offers some safety and security. The OIG team's security inspectors believe the compound is reasonably safe and notes that moving the compound elsewhere would raise security concerns regarding the Embassy's new neighbors.

The U.S. Government acquired the compound about 40 years ago for a symbolic payment of one Central African franc. It is not clear when the various buildings were constructed, but there is no cost for them, except for maintenance and repair.

² OIG Report No. ISP-I-02-31, Inspection of Embassy Nouakchott, Mauritania - March 2002

There are approximately 10 separate buildings on the compound, including the chief of mission residence, controlled access areas, general services offices, warehouses, workshops, lunchroom, and (b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2) discussed later in this report. The Embassy planned to keep the compound after a new embassy was constructed. Because there were no plans to sell it, valuing a sale price for the present compound against the cost for a new embassy was not considered.

There is ample space for a small or even medium-sized chancery on the current compound, allowing for adequate set-back. Again in its 2002 Report of Inspection, the OIG team noted that the then Ambassador proposed a new chancery on the existing U.S. Government-owned property. It is a lovely oasis with green space and trees in contrast to the sandy and dusty property that had been identified for the new compound. It has a swimming pool, a tennis court, fitness facility, and other amenities. Buildings on the compound would be available for use as swing space during construction. The AISN's director recognizes the possibility that the school would need to move due to the construction and also noted that the school's plans to expand its curriculum suggest the school may need to move to larger space for that reason.

After the August 2008 coup d'état, plans to acquire land for a new compound were derailed for political reasons, and the \$5 million for the purchase was deobligated from a pending contract. The Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations took several years to identify this property, and the political and other complexities of finding another suitable site could delay a purchase indefinitely. Further, saving \$5 million in land acquisition costs is a strong incentive to use the present compound for a new embassy.

Recommendation 2: The Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations should use the present compound for the new chancery and begin construction as soon as practicable. (Action: OBO)

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

The financial management section, led by a senior LE staff member, has received praise and high grades at budget conferences and other venues. Accounts are maintained with precision, and spending is kept at a conservative level. A recent regional support visit and follow-up report recommendations confirmed that the section's

work is exceptionally well done. For example, overtime has been curtailed or denied based on financial limits. A current issue concerning local staff health benefits has been carefully reviewed and brought to the ICASS committee to review its budget impact.

The senior local staff member is also a certifying officer, and the entire staff is cross-trained. The cashier's office has been recently relocated to a more convenient space that does not require cashier clients to transit the human resources section. Now, the cashier is adjacent to the financial section. The financial staff appears to be highly motivated to work together and with other administrative sections. The section prepares all travel authorizations and vouchers and feels strongly that this procedure makes these documents more accurate and timely.

HUMAN RESOURCES

The human resources section employs three LE staff and an eligible family member supervisor. LE staff are crowded into a single small office that offers no privacy and no quiet space to work. Employees are reluctant to visit the office given the crowded and open conditions. The OIG team made an informal recommendation that the Embassy identify more suitable space for the unit.

The Embassy, in compliance with the 2002 OIG inspection report, solicited for a medical insurance provider in an effort to discontinue providing self-insured health benefits. Under the local compensation plan, the Embassy adjudicates employees' medical insurance claims and reimburses from 80 to 100 percent of various claims in cash. According to embassy staff, the solicitation for an insurance provider was unsuccessful. Embassy staff also said that the one comparator entity that uses a medical insurance plan is not satisfied with it.

The ICASS committee is requesting the Bureau of Human Resources, Office of Overseas Employment, to agree to a committee increase of benefits, including reimbursement for over-the-counter medications prescribed by medical professionals. One agency is reluctant to agree to the changes because they employ many personal services contractors and do not budget for the entire cost of medical reimbursement.

Raters have been delinquent in completing performance evaluations of local staff, and supervisors have not reviewed and reclassified position descriptions for some periods in excess of 5 years. The TDY management officer is addressing this

problem, and the OIG team made an informal recommendation that supervisory responsibility for timely evaluations and position description reviews should be included in the work requirements statements for all American and local staff supervisors.

Equal Employment Opportunity Program

The front office has designated a second-tour specialist with good interpersonal skills as its EEO counselor; however, the employee has not yet received the mandatory 32-hour training per FAM 1514.2. At the time of the writing of the report, changes were being considered to the Foreign Affairs Manual that would effectively limit the EEO counselor training requirement to larger missions; however, the OIG team feels the existing requirement should be enforced until proposed Foreign Affairs Manual changes are adopted. The Embassy reports there are no active EEO cases. There is a Federal Women's Program manager.

Recommendation 3: Embassy Nouakchott should provide the mandatory 32-hour training and formal certification for its designated Equal Employment Opportunity counselor. (Action: Embassy Nouakchott)

The OIG team found EEO materials and the EEO contact information correctly and prominently posted on a bulletin board in the cafeteria. The OIG team made an informal recommendation that it be added to the Embassy's OpenNet Web site.

The Embassy has an LE staff member who uses a wheelchair. She has appropriate office furniture, and the Embassy has installed automatic openers on some doors, which worked sporadically during the OIG team's visit. There are also ramps and accessible restrooms.

Rightsizing

Embassy Nouakchott developed a rightsizing implementation action plan, dated June 2008. The original rightsizing study is dated September 2007. Each of these plans is based on activities envisioned before the coup d'état.

Local Employees' Committee

The local staff committee presented an organized, succinct list of concerns. The medical plan was the first issue, discussed above. The committee made a cogent argument regarding school fees for its family member children, noting that Americans

focus on education but do not provide similar benefits for the LE staff. They noted that the compensation plan does not reflect comparators' salaries for local staff and, particularly, that the transportation allowance does not adequately cover taxi fares for those employees who live in distant suburbs. The OIG team left an informal recommendation regarding the possibility of providing a shuttle to the outlying areas.

The committee also noted that retirement benefits are inadequate for the LE staff. The committee asserted that the local social security plan pays only about \$100 every 3 months or about \$400 annually in retirement benefits. The OIG team made an informal recommendation that the Embassy determine the feasibility of a supplemental retirement plan and develop a methodology and strategy to end its requirement that the LE staff contribute to the local social security system.

GENERAL SERVICES OFFICE

Embassy Nouakchott has been without a permanently assigned general services officer for approximately 1 year. An entry-level general services officer arrived at Embassy Nouakchott the day after the OIG team began its inspection. Although the local staff supervising each general services office section have been working at levels above those required for their grades and position descriptions, they have not been attentive to some internal control requirements. These deficiencies are addressed in the management controls section of this report.

Housing

During the OIG team's residential housing inspection, the inspectors detected a foul odor in two bathrooms in the DCM's residence (property S98641). The team also noted that the residence is cramped and does not adequately accommodate representational functions (15 FAM 264.3-3). The OIG team made informal recommendations on these issues.

Warehouse

The warehouse is small and in a substandard condition. Unneeded expendable and nonexpendable property has accumulated in an already overcrowded warehouse. According to 14 FAH-1 H-112.2 f., unused and unneeded property should be screened and classified regarding its condition and serviceability and disposed or reconditioned and returned to stock.

QUALITY OF LIFE

Responses to the OIG questionnaires indicate that Embassy Nouakchott's direct-hire staff have reasonably high morale. This is a credit to efforts by the executive office and the community liaison office coordinator, who provides well-received support and appreciated programs. The LE staff nurse, who is retiring shortly, is much revered and lauded. The school is attempting to expand its accredited program and also gets good marks. There is no recreation association; however, the community pool is open to all Americans, and the fitness center and tennis courts provide recreational opportunities. The ocean currents are strong, swift, and dangerous, limiting swimming, but nearby beaches also provide recreational outlets. Finally, a local contractor supplies lunches 4 days each week and serves them at a clean and pleasant lunchroom.

COMMUNITY LIAISON OFFICE

The community liaison office usually employs two coordinators who share a 40-hour a week position. One coordinator is working between 32 and 40 hours weekly until the second coordinator, already selected, begins to work. The second coordinator is scheduled for training in December 2008. The present coordinator provides all of the required duties and services and is well-liked. The OIG team joined more than a dozen other people who participated in a breakfast and shopping expedition the coordinator organized and found it well-organized.

The coordinator maintains an excellent relationship with the AISN and attempts to answer newcomers' questions. There are, however, unanswered questions about how the school addresses children with special needs.

The coordinator follows closely what her predecessors did and plans to meet bimonthly with newcomers and to split the position's responsibilities with her co-coordinator. She provides family member employment information, plans events, assigns sponsors, and lends a sympathetic ear to the entry-level officers and family members who have not had other overseas assignments.

HEALTH UNIT

A full-time LE staff employed nurse has provided medical care for the last 16 years. The nurse provides briefings, referrals, treatment, immunizations, first-aid training, and counseling. The health unit scored well above the worldwide average on the OIG questionnaire. Interviews confirm the high regard in which the nurse is held and, in particular, the value of her counseling and attention to morale.

The nurse is retiring in early December 2008. The Embassy has been engaged in recruiting a replacement and is advertising regionally for a third country national without success. There are few reliable local medical services available in Nouakchott, and the Embassy's demographics are changing to include more young children. The Office of Medical Services is aware of the problem but has yet to confirm what actions it will take to provide medical services in the near term, to cover a gap, and for the long term, if a local or third country national health care provider is not available.

Recommendation 8: The Office of Medical Services should provide continuous medical care to Embassy Nouakchott by assigning a temporary duty Foreign Service health practitioner when the embassy nurse retires. (Action: MED)

Recommendation 9: The Office of Medical Services should determine how to provide long-term health care if local or third country national medical care providers are not available and notify Embassy Nouakchott regarding its planned coverage. (Action: MED)

The health unit sees about 40 patients monthly. Embassy Dakar's regional medical officer visits periodically, and Embassy Accra's regional medical officer/psychiatrist visited in October 2008. In 2007, there were four medical evacuations. The Embassy's medical supplies are stored securely and properly inventoried. There is a limited supply of controlled substances, which are also securely stored and properly dispensed. The unit keeps logs regarding use and disposal of expired medications.

MANAGEMENT CONTROLS

The chief of mission management controls statement, dated August 15, 2008, states that the systems of management controls for Embassy Nouakchott, taken as a whole, comply with the standards prescribed by the Comptroller General of the United States and the objectives of the Department. It also states that there has been an explosive growth in programs not matched by a related increase in staff, and rather that there are significant gaps in the management function.

The statement also noted the “massive increase of Department of Defense activities in Mauritania.” It further stated that,

More than 50 percent of the financial operations conducted by the Embassy are for DOD procurements and contracts. While financial management personnel have duly verified funds availability and proper documentation of payments, the Mission does not have sufficient information concerning underlying procedures used by DOD contracting personnel to know whether all such contracts are in compliance with U.S. contracting regulations.

Importantly, the statement also notes deficiencies in inventory controls, some of which have been corrected, and some remain outstanding, which the OIG inspection confirms. The Embassy has corrected some discrepancies in WebNEPA and is reviewing the system to remove others.

Inconsistencies in inventories of chief of mission residence property were reported as potential material weaknesses or significant deficiencies. A review of accountable inventories of chinaware, glassware, and flatware identified significant discrepancies between actual inventories and previously certified stocks. While the Embassy planned to reconcile inventories, the OIG team found that discrepancies continue, to the extent that DCM holdings were reflected incorrectly on chief of mission residential property inventories. In keeping with 14 FAM 416.4 a., when discrepancies are found between the physical inventory count and the property record balances that are not traceable to errors in record keeping, immediate action must be taken to resolve the discrepancies.

Recommendation 10: Embassy Nouakchott should initiate, complete, and reconcile the annual inventory for chief of mission residence property. (Action: Embassy Nouakchott)

The OIG team conducted a physical verification of selected nonexpendable items stored in one of many storage containers outside of the warehouse. The inspector attempted to trace the items in the nonexpendable property application (NEPA) inventory. The items were not found in NEPA. Further, NEPA numbers were not affixed to the items; the numbers were simply written with markers on the cardboard containers. There is a lack of accountability because of the failure to maintain property records on nonexpendable items. Embassy Nouakchott is not in compliance with 14 FAM 413.5 b., which requires, with exceptions for property recorded in a group record file and certain heritage assets, that bar codes be placed on all property and appropriate entries be made in NEPA. Embassy Nouakchott also does not comply with 14 FAM 414.1 accountability requirements.

Recommendation 11: Embassy Nouakchott should establish standard operating procedures in issuing, receiving, inspecting and updating nonexpendable property as required. (Action: Embassy Nouakchott)

Recommendation 10: Embassy Nouakchott should initiate, complete, and reconcile the annual inventory for chief of mission residence property. (Action: Embassy Nouakchott)

Recommendation 11: Embassy Nouakchott should establish standard operating procedures in issuing, receiving, inspecting and updating nonexpendable property as required. (Action: Embassy Nouakchott)

INFORMAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Informal recommendations cover operational matters not requiring action by organizations outside the inspected unit and/or the parent regional bureau. Informal recommendations will not be subject to the OIG compliance process. However, any subsequent OIG inspection or on-site compliance review will assess the mission's progress in implementing the informal recommendations.

PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

The nominating officers of International Visitor Leadership grantees do not meet with the grantees upon return as the basis for PAS standard reporting on the program impact.

Informal Recommendation 1: Embassy Nouakchott should establish procedures for nominating officers of International Visitor Leadership Program grantees to meet with the grantees upon return.

CONSULAR

The consular subcashier does not receive a cash advance making change.

Informal Recommendation 2: Embassy Nouakchott should provide a reasonable cash advance for its consular subcashier and provide an appropriate container to ensure it is properly secured.

Special consular services cases are rare but time consuming. The section does not have an electronically maintained precedent file, listing cases by type, for quick consultation when such cases occur.

Informal Recommendation 3: Embassy Nouakchott should create a precedent file for various types of consular cases.

HUMAN RESOURCES

Performance evaluations have not been completed on time, and position descriptions have not been reviewed or reclassified, as required.

Informal Recommendation 4: Embassy Nouakchott should include the requirement for timely performance evaluations in American and locally employed supervisors' work requirements statements.

The human resource office is overcrowded and does not offer quiet workspace or privacy for interviews or the computer-assisted job evaluation process.

Informal Recommendation 5: Embassy Nouakchott should locate larger and private workspace for the human resource office.

Local staff who live in distant suburbs pay high taxi fares to get to work.

Informal Recommendation 6: Embassy Nouakchott should determine the feasibility of providing shuttle services along a main route or routes, with adequate intermittent stops, to alleviate the expense of taxis.

Local staff get tetanus immunizations at the Embassy's health unit. They have requested yellow fever, hepatitis, and meningitis immunizations. Providing these inoculations would save the Embassy the cost of medical visits and immunization serum on the economy.

Informal Recommendation 7: Embassy Nouakchott should provide yellow fever, hepatitis, and meningitis immunizations for local staff.

The local social security system is inadequate and does not pay enough for annuities for retiring staff.

Informal Recommendation 8: Embassy Nouakchott should investigate the possibility of implementing a supplemental retirement plan.

Informal Recommendation 9: Embassy Nouakchott should develop a strategy and methodology to remove the requirement to pay into the local social security system, using information from UN Development Program and other organizations no longer in the plan.

Equal Employment Opportunity

Embassy Nouakchott's intranet Web site does not contain EEO information, including the names of the EEO counselors at Embassy Nouakchott.

Informal Recommendation 10: Embassy Nouakchott should add Equal Employment Opportunity information to its intranet Web site.

GENERAL SERVICES

Some general services staff require uniforms and/or protective gear, which has not been provided.

Informal Recommendation 11: Embassy Nouakchott should determine which of its locally employed staff should be furnished uniforms and/or protective gear and provide it at a cost not to exceed \$400 each for each fiscal year.

Fire extinguishers are not checked regularly. Some have not been checked for more than 4 years.

Informal Recommendation 12: Embassy Nouakchott should implement a program to check fire extinguishers annually.

The DCM's residence needs attention to remedy foul odors in two bathrooms. Further, it does not properly accommodate representational functions.

Informal Recommendation 13: Embassy Nouakchott should remedy foul odors in the deputy chief of mission's residence.

Informal Recommendation 14: Embassy Nouakchott should determine whether the deputy chief of mission's residence meets representational requirements and terminate the lease if it deems the residence inappropriate.

The warehouse is used to store Department and other agencies' property. As a joint storage warehouse, it is unorganized and inefficient. The location of other agencies' property is not clear.

Informal Recommendation 15: Embassy Nouakchott should organize and identify the location of the property of other agencies.

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

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The Embassy does not have a formal procedure or automated system for capturing and tracking help desk requests.

Informal Recommendation 17: Embassy Nouakchott should acquire and install an automated help desk application to track and manage help desk requests.

Training

Information management staff are not using individual development plans to identify their staffs' training needs.

Informal Recommendation 18: Embassy Nouakchott should require information management staff to develop individual development training plans.

PRINCIPAL OFFICIALS

	Name	Arrival Date
Ambassador	Mark M. Boulware	11/07
Deputy Chief of Mission	Dennis B. Hankins	08/07

Chiefs of Sections:

Management	Teresa F. Stewart (TDY)	09/08
Consular/Economic	Lindsay M. Kiefer	06/07
Political	Robert A. Lester	01/08
Public Affairs	Heather C. Fabrikant	08/08
Regional Security	Robert G. Castro	08/08

Other Agencies:

Department of Defense	LTC Charles O. Collins	07/07
Peace Corps	Obie E. Shaw	06/01
U.S. Agency for International Development	Kimberly A. Pease	03/08

ABBREVIATIONS

AISN	American International School of Nouakchott
DCM	deputy chief of mission
Department	Department of State
EEO	Equal Employment Opportunity
ICASS	International Cooperative Administrative Support Services
LE	locally employed
MSP	Mission Strategic Plan
NEPA	nonexpendable property application
OIG	Office of Inspector General
PAO	public affairs officer
PAS	public affairs section
RSO	regional security officer
SOCEUR	Special Operations Command Europe
TDY	temporary duty
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development

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