



**Intelligence and Terrorism
Information Center
at the Israel Intelligence
Heritage & Commemoration
Center**

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Israeli Embassy attacked by gunmen in Mauritania. The shots were apparently fired by Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, a branch of the global jihad. The attack was carried out on the background of Islamist pressures on Mauritania's government to sever diplomatic relations with Israel.



Scene of the attack in Nouakchott, the capital of Mauritania (Al-Arabiya TV, February 1, 2008).

Overview

1. In the early morning hours of February 1 shots were fired at the Israeli Embassy in Nouakchott, the capital of the Western African country of Mauritania, apparently by global jihad elements calling themselves **Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb**. Three local residents were wounded; the embassy staff was unharmed. Mauritania's security forces detained three suspects who, they claimed, were involved in the attack. It should be noted that voices have recently been raised in Mauritania in support of the Palestinians and in favor of severing diplomatic relations with Israel.

The Events

2. At 2:20 in the morning, Mauritanian time, armed men opened fire at the Israeli Embassy building in Nouakchott, the capital city, while shouting "Allahu akbar." Local security forces guarding the embassy returned fire. According to reports, the terrorists drove to the Casa nightclub, which is near the embassy, and from there fired their weapons. Immediately afterwards they drove off. The shots wounded three nightclub patrons. (Al-Akhbar News Agency, February 1). Two hand grenades and two weapons were found at the scene which had been used by the terrorists (Agence France Presse, February 3).

3. The Mauritanian security forces announced that three suspects had been detained in the center of the country about 150 kilometers (93 miles) from the capital. The three tried to evade a checkpoint by exchanging their vehicle for another which was waiting for them. No details have been made known about the three suspects (Al-Akhbar News Agency, Sahara Media News Agency, February 2).

Global Jihad Activity in Mauritania

4. An organization called **Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb** claimed responsibility for the attack. It issued an official statement entitled "At your orders, Gaza," which said that the attack had been carried out at a time when the Jews were "causing troubles for our brothers in Palestine," referring to recent developments in the Gaza Strip. The statement called upon "zealous Muslims" to force their governments to sever diplomatic and commercial relations with Israel. It also included a formal warning to the Israeli Ambassador in Mauritania, Boaz Bismut, threatening him with another attack, this one personal (Al-Jazeera Talk Forum, February 3).

5. The same organization also threatened France and Mauritania, leading to the last-minute cancellation of the last Dakar Rally, which was to have taken place at the beginning of January 2008. It recently claimed responsibility for two terrorist attacks in Mauritania:

1) **December 24, 2007**: Four French tourists were robbed and killed in the eastern part of the country (AP, December 24, 2007). The murderers escaped to Senegal; some of them were caught. Their interrogation revealed that Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb was apparently behind the murders (Ana al-Muslim Forum, December 29).

2) **December 27, 2007**: Three Mauritanian soldiers were killed at the entrance to a military base. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb claimed responsibility (Ana al-Muslim Forum, December 29).

Anti-Israeli Atmosphere in Mauritania



Anti-Israeli demonstrations in Mauritania (Al-Jazeera TV, February 1).

6. Israel has had official diplomatic relations with Mauritania since 1999. When its government changed in 2005, calls were frequently heard from people who had opposed relations with Israel. A number of times radical Islamic groups demanded they be severed. Recently the Mauritanian government even authorized the activities of a group calling itself the Mauritanian Garrison for the Struggle against the Zionist Invasion,¹ one of the more conspicuous organizations in the campaign against normalizing Israeli-Mauritanian relations. The organization's secretary general, Muhammad Ghulam, said that the organization would work against normalization with Israel and would demonstrate support for the Palestinian people (Al-Khaleej, January 30).

¹ The "Mauritanian *Ribat*" in Arabic. The Muslim garrison was originally situated in a frontier area. The term has positive Muslim connotations because the garrison's unit guards the border between the Islamic zone and that of Islam's enemies, and might be called into service if the jihad is renewed.

7. After the recent developments in the Gaza Strip, increased pressure was exerted on the Mauritanian president to sever diplomatic relations with Israel (Al-Arabiya TV, February 1). The chairman of the Mauritanian parliament called upon the government to reexamine the issue (Al-Quds Al-Arabi, January 27). The seven largest political parties in the country and the women's parties also called for diplomatic relations with Israel to be severed (Al-Khaleej, January 20). In response the Mauritanian government announced it was calling upon the Israeli government to end the so-called "blockade of the Gaza Strip" and "collective punishment of its residents." Mauritania, said the announcement, was carefully following the developments in the Gaza Strip (Al-Quds al-Arabi, January 27).

8. As a result there have recently been protests in Mauritania against Israel:

1) Political, parliamentary and civilian organizations announced that they intended to organize popular activity to show solidarity with the Gazans. The same organizations also condemned the Arab world and the international community for their silence over what was happening to the Palestinian people (Al-Khaleej, January 20).

2) In the capital city of Nouakchott students held demonstrations to condemn the blockade of the Gaza Strip and the silence of the Arab world and of the civilian institutions in Mauritania over Israeli "aggression" in the Gaza Strip. The demonstrators carried signs calling for Mauritania to sever diplomatic relations with Israel (Al-Quds al-Arabi, January 22).

3) Recently the Mauritanian media have been ruthlessly critical of Israel. The opposition media represent Israel as "an occupation country which kills Palestinians and slaughters civilians" (Al-Arabiya TV, February 1).