

The latest move in taking war on terrorism to the terrorists finds soldiers being sent to Mauritania.

Mauritania bridges the “no-mans-land” between Africa’s white-skinned north and dark-skinned south. It, and other isolated “bridge” countries of the West African Sahel (Mali, Niger, Chad), have become the latest “soft spots” in which Al Qaida cells are finding refuge.

Peoples

The majority people of Mauritania are the Moors, or Maure, for whom Mauritania is named. These are descendants of original Berber inhabitants who, together with the descendants of their 15th century Arab conquerors and the descendants of their black African slaves, all speak the one language – Hassani Arabic. It is the language of the Hassan tribe of Yemen. This dialect is very close to the classical Arabic of the Quran and quite distinct from Arabic spoken in the Mahgrib.

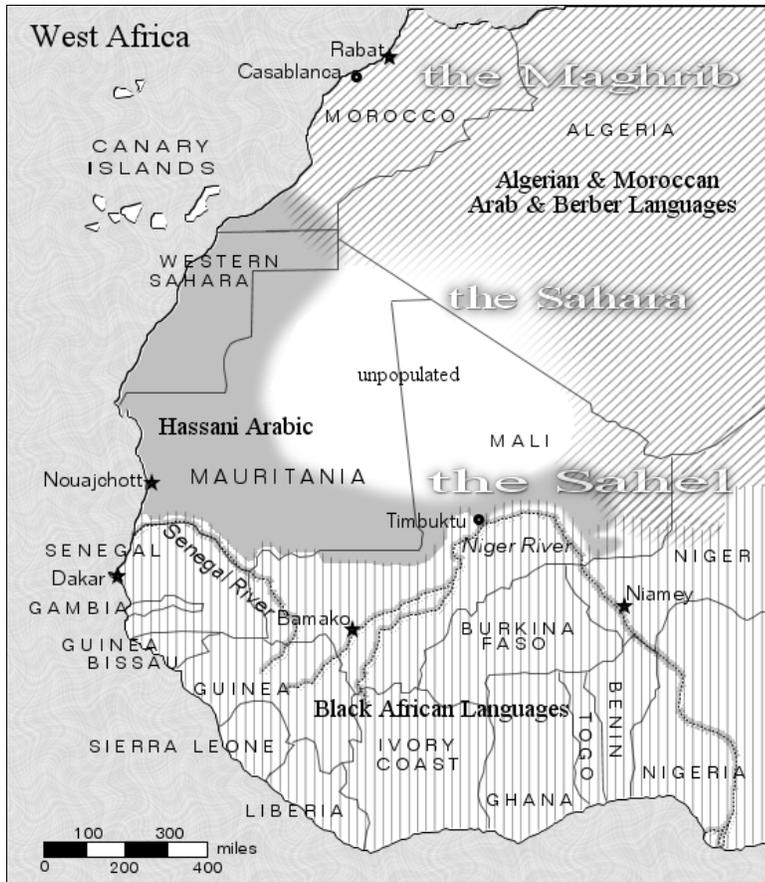
Roughly one third the people are blacks who live on coveted farm land along the Senegal River. These are of the Tukolor, Fulbe, Wolof, Sonike, and Bambara tribes whose population centers lie outside of Mauritania.

A small minority are expatriates. Most are French, many are Korean, and the rest come from other European and African countries. Both French and Hassani Arabic are national languages.

Religion

Mauritania’s constitution stipulates that Islam is the national religion and Muslim law is the foundation for all civil affairs. Muslim schools provide most of the country’s education. Officially, Mauritians follow the Maliki branch of Sunni theology. Unofficially, most Mauritians follow pre-Islamic mystical beliefs accomodated by various Sufi cults which hold their primary allegiance.

There are no Bible translations and no gospel broadcasts in Hassani Arabic. There are no churches of



native Mauritians. Roman Catholics have the only recognized church, and its members are all foreigners – mostly French. A small group of expatriate Protestants meets unofficially in the national capital. The last Protestant mission agency to officially work in Mauritania withdrew in 1965.

Conditions

Mauritania is one of the most impoverished nations on earth. Thirty percent of its children are malnourished. Infant mortality is 0.84%. Men usually die by the age of 54, women by 57. 63% of adults are illiterate. One in four households have television.

Drought struck the region hard in the 70s. Winds drove off top soil turning the once ranch friendly Sahel into Sahara desert and forcing a full third of the people who were nomadic herders into cities.

Race based discrimination abounds. Slavery was widely practiced as recently as 1960, and though it was outlawed again in 1980, “Jim Crow” style treatment persists. Though over half the population is black, these are linguistically and culturally divided. The black Moors speak Arabic and blend more smoothly with their former masters. Besides their different tribal tongues, the blacks along the Senegal River all speak French.

people name	language	est. % of 2.6 mil.	notes
White Moor	Hassani Arabic	42	Berber/Arab
Black Moor	Hassani Arabic	28	former slaves
Fulbe & Tukolor	Pulaar	16	over 2 mil. in Senegal
Wolof	Wolof	8	over 3 mil. in Senegal
Sonike	Sonike	4	nearly 1 mil. in Mali
Bambara	Bambara	1	nearly 3 mil. in Mali
Expatriates	various	1	mostly French