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Sent:

Monday, September 22, 2008 10:29 AM

Subject:

Mauritania says 12 held by al Qaeda were decapitated

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SERE & PR RELATED OPEN SOURCE REPORTING

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Mauritania says 12 held by al Qaeda were decapitated

Reuters

Saturday, September 20, 2008; 2:56 PM

NOUAKCHOTT (Reuters) - Twelve Mauritanian soldiers who were abducted in an attack on their patrol claimed by al Qaeda have been found killed with their heads cut off, a senior official of the ruling military junta said on Saturday.

The soldiers had been missing since Monday, when gunmen ambushed their patrol in the northern Zouerate iron ore mining region of the West Saharan Islamic state.

Al Qaeda's North Africa wing had claimed responsibility for the attack and said it had captured the soldiers.

Mauritanian officials said their bodies were found on Saturday in the Tourine area, 70 km (45 miles) from Zouerate.

"Their bodies were found this morning after a search ... they were mutilated and had their heads cut off," Ahmed Bemba Ould Baya, secretary general of Mauritania's ruling High Council of State, told Reuters.

A Mauritanian army officer had earlier said the soldiers had been found with their throats cut.

Mauritania's military rulers, who took power in a coup last month that overthrew the elected civilian president, Sidi Mohamed Ould Cheikh Abdallahi, have called for international support to fight what they say is a serious terrorist threat in West Africa.

//SIGNED//

[REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

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b7C

Phone: (DSN)

Email:

Email:

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