

Special Correspondence:**A Primer on Boko Haram Sources and Three Heuristics on al-Qaida and Boko Haram in Response to Adam Higazi, Brandon Kendhammer, Kyari Mohammed, Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, and Alex Thurston****by Jacob Zenn****Editorial Note**

The April 2018 issue of *Perspectives on Terrorism* included a special correspondence by Adam Higazi, Brandon Kendhammer, Kyari Mohammed, Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, and Alex Thurston in which the authors were critical of Jacob Zenn's article about Boko Haram that had been published in the December 2017 issue of our journal. The Editorial Board believes that the competing narratives in the research on Boko Haram (predominantly local vs. strongly influenced from abroad) can and should be debated in a healthy manner. However, upon reflection, the Editors acknowledge that the April 2018 piece criticizing Jacob Zenn's article also contained some allegations regarding Mr. Zenn as a person, detracting from the level of scholarly discourse we strive for in *Perspectives on Terrorism*. In the current issue, we provide Mr. Zenn with an opportunity to respond to his critics, focused specifically on how the evidence he has collected supports his analysis. We invite readers to have a look at his evidence and the evidence of his critics and judge for themselves their respective merits.

In the April 2018 issue of *Perspectives on Terrorism*, five individuals collectively argued against my research finding that al-Qaida, including al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and al-Shabab, had a "significant impact" on three phases of Boko Haram's history: its founding in 2002-2003; its launch of jihad in 2009-2010; and its campaign of suicide bombings in 2011-2012. I made this argument in the article "Demystifying al-Qaida in Nigeria: Cases from Boko Haram's Founding, Launch of Jihad and Suicide Bombings" in a special issue of *Perspectives on Terrorism* in December 2017.[1] The article originated from a paper I submitted to a conference called "Al-Qaida at 30" in Oslo, Norway on September 4-5, 2017. The conference organizers at the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (*Forsvarets Forskningsinstitutt, FFI*) requested the conference speakers, myself included, write on a theme related to al-Qaida and informed us that the article could then be double peer reviewed and, if accepted, published in *Perspectives on Terrorism*.

As noted above, the editors of *Perspectives on Terrorism* acknowledge that the five individuals' critique included multiple allegations that "detract from the scholarly discourse" they "strive for" in their journal.[2] In a separate article that I published (<http://www.aymennjawad.org/2018/06/jacob-zenn-replies-to-his-critics>), I rebutted 30 allegations made by those five individuals and explained why their critique did not contribute to the scholarly debate on analysis and interpretation of militant groups.[3] In this response for the readers of *Perspectives on Terrorism*, I discuss five key sets of source materials on al-Qaida and Boko Haram that substantiate all three of my arguments from my article in the December 2017 issue. There are other sources that support my arguments, such as Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) leader Abu Mus'ab al-Barnawi's 124-page history of Boko Haram published in June 2018, but in this correspondence I evaluate only sources that I previously discussed in my December 2017 article. The three phases in Boko Haram's history that I discuss—its founding in 2002-2003, its launch of jihad in 2009-2010, and its campaign of suicide bombings in 2011-2012—are also all pivotal because they represent the beginning of Boko Haram as a group; the beginning of its mass violence; and the beginning of its tactical sophistication.

Importantly, my 7,000-word article in that December issue did not aim to argue, nor did it have the space to argue, that al-Qaida had a significant impact on *all* phases and events in Boko Haram's history, such as the

period from 2007 to 2009 or Boko Haram's raid on Giwa barracks in 2014, which the five individuals alleged I "omitted" and "shied away from": those are examples of a phase and an event unconnected to my actual argument. Nor did I argue Boko Haram is a "mere" extension of the international jihadist movement, a word which the five authors implied I used: I argued, however, that Boko Haram is *an* extension of the international jihadist movement, which the group's becoming a "province" of the Islamic State in March 2015 proved to be true but was also true as early as 2003. My argument also did not "dismiss" that other factors have mattered aside from al-Qaida in Boko Haram's founding, launch of jihad and campaign of suicide bombings, which the five authors assert it did: an article focused on al-Qaida's "significant impact" on three phases in Boko Haram's history does not mean that religious ideology, geopolitics, corruption, urbanization, desertification, and porous borders or other factors are irrelevant or are not interrelated. In fact, I did not even weigh in on whether al-Qaida was the "dominant" factor in Boko Haram's founding, launch of jihad and campaign of suicide bombings, which the five authors said I did. However, 13 instances in my article specifically stated that al-Qaida had a "significant impact" on the three phases in Boko Haram's history that I discuss, and I never used the word "dominant".

In this correspondence, five sets of source materials on the relationship between al-Qaida and Boko Haram are discussed so that readers can review the evidence and judge for themselves the respective merits of each side's argument. Current and future analysts of Boko Haram can also use this as a 'primer on Boko Haram sources' and refer to the five authors' or my interpretation and analysis of those sources—or, of course, develop their own interpretation and analysis. In the conclusion of this correspondence, I provide three heuristics for analysts evaluating whether al-Qaida had a significant impact on Boko Haram's founding, launch of jihad and campaign of suicide bombings.

Source #1. Letters between AQIM and Boko Haram and AQIM treatise, 2009–2011 (released in April 2017) [4]

These primary sources are in a roughly 70-page Arabic language document called the "Documents of Advice and Sharia Instruction to the Fighters in Nigeria," which was released by al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in April 2017 and included an introduction by Mauritanian AQIM sharia official Abu al-Numan Qutayba al-Shinqiti. He is also a poet and was involved in AQIM's exchange of a Frenchman named Serge Lazarevic who was kidnapped in Mali in 2011. The documents include a series of letters between AQIM and Boko Haram from 2009 to 2011 and a treatise by the late AQIM sharia head Abu al-Hasan Rashid al-Bulaydi.

I strongly encourage analysts to appreciate what these letters have to offer. Such sources are not to be skimmed over and shrugged off. A responsible researcher knows the information we seek is not always blatantly in front of us, and it is our obligation to look closer, dig deeper, and find threads that can be tied together to help explain more comprehensively the subjects we study.

Referring to these letters and the treatise, the five critics of my work have argued that "all that the primary sources have conclusively shown about the post-2009 period is that some training occurred (the numbers are not yet known), and 200,000 euros may have been transferred." However, in my opinion a more careful examination of these primary sources reveals much more than that. These primary sources indicate that AQIM transferred 200,000 euros to Boko Haram because the letters include a first request and then a second reminder from AQIM leader Abdelmalek Droukdel to AQIM southern commander Abu Zeid for Abu Zeid to provide 200,000 euros to Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau. Shekau then wrote a letter thanking Abu Zeid for "the training and financial generosity" after Boko Haram carried out its first attack under his leadership in Nigeria in September 2010.

The five authors are certainly correct where they argue that "No serious historian of Nazi Germany, for example, would hold up Nazi sources as the sole key to understanding pre-war and war-time developments." Nor should anyone hold these primary sources as the "sole" key to understanding Boko Haram from 2009-2011. The fact that these primary sources were *internal letters* – and that some of them were found in Bin Laden's compound in 2011 in Pakistan – does increase their credibility in comparison to public jihadist propaganda. And when they

are evaluated alongside other secondary sources, one finds the information in them is additionally corroborated and enhanced. This is why scholars are encouraged to assess primary and secondary sources together.

Indeed, there are several secondary sources that attest to AQIM transferring the 200,000 euros to Boko Haram. In 2012, for example, a Boko Haram member on trial in Nigeria said Boko Haram received 200,000 euros (41 million Nigerian naira) from an “Algerian group”.[5] Also in 2012 the arrested Boko Haram spokesman for Shekau commented to the Nigerian security forces that this 200,000 euros contributed to infighting, which we can now discern was between Boko Haram and the members who split from Boko Haram to form *Jama'at Ansar al-Muslimin fi Bilad as-Sudan*, or Ansaru, in 2012 and took some of the money with them.[6] In 2012, Nigeria also released an intelligence report confirming it knew Boko Haram received the 200,000 euros and that the money was for kidnapping foreign engineers in Nigeria: this is precisely what Ansaru did with its four kidnappings of 11 foreign engineers in Nigeria from 2011 to 2013.[7] *Africa Confidential* also published in 2013 a report based on its sources confirming the transfer of 200,000 euros from AQIM to Boko Haram.[8] In sum, the 200,000 euros was transferred from AQIM to Boko Haram (not “may have been”) and it mattered enough that Shekau even wrote the letter to Abu Zeid to thank AQIM for the “training and financial generosity.”

These primary sources do not only confirm AQIM’s transfer of 200,000 euros to Boko Haram at a time when Shekau’s emissaries had told AQIM that they were facing major shortages in Nigeria. The primary sources also confirm Boko Haram’s training with AQIM in Algeria and with al-Shabab in Somalia, the latter of which the five authors do not mention in their article as a finding from these primary sources. Khalid al-Barnawi wrote in one of the letters to a Mauritanian AQIM commander, Abdullah al-Shinqiti, that Shekau killed Boko Haram members who trained in Algeria or Somalia without his permission. Al-Barnawi later founded Ansaru, which split from Boko Haram after receiving guidance from AQIM in 2011. His letter substantiates that training in Algeria and Somalia must have taken place and also provides insights on Shekau’s ruthlessness in killing anyone he suspected of being disobedient. If there was no Boko Haram training in Algeria and Somalia, al-Barnawi would not have complained about Shekau killing Boko Haram members who trained there. Al-Barnawi’s letter is, in fact, the first time in primary sources that it is confirmed Boko Haram trained in Somalia. Previously, Boko Haram had only publicly claimed to have trained in Somalia and issued videos praising al-Shabab, while governments and international organizations, such as the U.S., Somalia and the United Nations, had only publicly stated that they had information on Boko Haram members training in Somalia.

According to these primary sources, AQIM also pilfered weapons from the Malian and Mauritanian armies at a barracks in Mali in 2010 and “donated” them to Boko Haram. Droukdel wrote in one of his letters to Abu Zeid that providing “weaponry support [to Boko Haram] is not a problem because of their abundance. The matter will be studied by the specialized leadership as to the amount in stock and the methods of supply.” The documents also say that Nigerians had been fighting with Algerian jihadists since the 1990s, which is earlier than has commonly been acknowledged. The documents also discuss the takfiri ideology of some of the early leaders of Boko Haram who debated Shekau’s predecessor as Boko Haram leader, Muhammed Yusuf, during Yusuf’s lifetime and the books Abubakar Shekau was reading, which inform scholars in greater detail about the ideological origins of the group. The fact that Droukdel uses the word *itisilat* (communications) and then the stronger *irtibat* (ties) to refer to AQIM’s desired relationship with Boko Haram and that Droukdel says that he “accepts as a martyr (*shaheed*)” Muhammed Yusuf also provides insights into Droukdel’s understanding of AQIM’s relationship with Boko Haram.

A close reading of the lengthy treatise in the document, which the five authors do not discuss in their article, also shows that it is not to be ignored either. It is, in fact, a theological explanation from AQIM’s sharia head, al-Bulaydi, in October 2011 about why AQIM finds that it is “necessary” for Ansaru to split from Boko Haram because Khalid al-Barnawi and his *shura* exhausted all other possibilities in trying to stay with Boko Haram, which would have been preferable. Therefore, these primary sources reveal details about the interrelationships between AQIM and Boko Haram (and what became Ansaru), the internal workings of AQIM, whose commanders deferred to al-Bulaydi on matters related to Boko Haram’s internal problems, as well as AQIM’s influence on the first split in Boko Haram in 2011-2012. Five years after al-Bulaydi’s treatise, in 2016, the Islamic State also weighed in on Boko Haram’s internal disputes and, like AQIM, encouraged members to split

from Shekau.[9]

There are also other interesting questions for inquisitive-minded scholars that these primary sources raise, but which are beyond the scope of this correspondence. For example, why did Droukdel have to remind Abu Zeid a second time to provide Shekau with the money? Did Abu Zeid not want to give the money to Shekau (and keep it for himself) or was there simply a gap in AQIM communications? Did Bin Laden know about this money because in a separate letter to one of his couriers he specifically referred to 200,000 euros in AQIM's possession? Why did Khalid al-Barnawi ask his letter to be forwarded to Mokhtar Belmokhtar? Was Belmokhtar out of the mainstream of AQIM communications? When Khalid al-Barnawi compared Shekau to former Algerian Armed Islamic Group (GIA) leader, Anton Zouabri, was al-Barnawi speaking based on his own personal experience in the GIA? When Abu Zeid wrote a letter to Droukdel stating that the Nigerian jihadists who visited him on Shekau's behalf in August 2009 were with Abu Zeid's brigade before 2009, including Khalid al-Barnawi, and stated that they requested financial, training, weapons, and communications support, did that mean Boko Haram had been immersed with AQIM well before July 2009? Indeed, after Boko Haram's clashes with the Nigerian security forces in July 2009, an AQIM letter to Bin Laden that was released by the CIA in January 2018 said that there were "more [Nigerians] than usual" with AQIM. That would indicate that Nigerians had been regulars in the Sahel with AQIM throughout the 2000s but more of them came after the clashes in July 2009.

Lastly, we must ask what other letters might exist between AQIM and Boko Haram that we have not seen? These letters seen so far cannot be the whole corpus of letters and communications between AQIM and Boko Haram about financial, training, weapons, and communications support. Moreover, the letters show that Abu Zeid and Shekau's emissaries, including Khalid al-Barnawi, discussed setting up an intermediary between them in Niger, which Droukdel approved. What was the outcome of this? In addition, the letter from Abu Zeid to Droukdel explained to Droukdel what Shekau's emissaries, including al-Barnawi, reported to him when they met in August 2009 in Mali. One can only imagine how not all of what they discussed after the clashes between the security forces and Boko Haram in Nigeria in July 2009 could fit in the confines of only several pages of the letter from Abu Zeid to Droukdel about that meeting. The fact that Shekau was able to send high-level emissaries like Khalid al-Barnawi to meet with Abu Zeid so soon after the clashes in Nigeria in July 2009 also shows that Boko Haram's relationship with AQIM must have been close *before* July 2009, or else such a meeting could not have happened so quickly. The existence of AQIM members on Muhammed Yusuf's *shura* before Yusuf's death in July 2009—probably Nigerian AQIM members—must have facilitated the upgrade in AQIM and Boko Haram coordination after July 2009.

Before closing the discussion of these primary sources it is relevant to point out that my five critical colleagues' collective interpretation of these primary sources presents a contradiction in terms where they write that the 200,000 euros from AQIM to Boko Haram "conclusively... may have been transferred." The words "conclusively" and "may have been" cannot function together in this way: either a terrorist group conclusively did something, or it may have done it. Further, their linguistic contradiction illustrates how the study of violent non-state actors, which are by their nature clandestine, rarely offers black-and-white, clear cut and "conclusive" answers. In fact, most findings in this field will tend to be somewhere in the grey area. This is why it is important when studying Boko Haram and AQIM (or other clandestine violent non-state actors) that scholars seek to find conclusive answers but should not stop there: they must also find and highlight information from the relevant sources that leads to a greater overall understanding of these militant groups, especially so when findings are *not* sufficiently conclusive. Therefore, where the five authors write that "all that the primary sources have conclusively shown..." their interpretation over-focuses on only "conclusive" findings while under-representing and, in fact, ignoring in their article other findings that provide a broader and deeper understanding of these militant groups even though such findings are not conclusive.

In addition, where my five detractors write that "some training" of Boko Haram members with AQIM occurred but that "the numbers are not yet known", it is quite an oversight if they are claiming that the "numbers are not yet known" makes the training of Boko Haram with AQIM somehow insignificant or unreliable information. The statement "numbers are not yet known" is not sustainable because such numbers *can never* be precisely known. It can never be known beyond rough estimates how many French people trained with the Islamic State

in Syria and Iraq, how many Russians fought in eastern Ukraine, or how many Boko Haram members trained with AQIM. But focusing on the fact in their conclusion that “some training occurred (the numbers are not yet known)” makes the mistake of implying that the numbers *can* one day be known (by using the word “yet”), and it avoids assessing the impact and significance of the training that does exist.

To estimate the number of Boko Haram members who trained with AQIM one could note the U.S. has found that 90 Boko Haram members trained in Somalia after July 2009.[10] If, as is probable, there were at least as many Boko Haram members who trained with AQIM as al-Shabab after July 2009, then around 100 Boko Haram members would have trained with AQIM. According to a document found in Bin Laden’s compound, Abu Zeid reported to Droukdel that Boko Haram wanted “200 brothers” to train with AQIM.[11] In some terrorist groups only a few members with specialized training in bomb-making can have a major impact on the group’s operations.[12] In the case of Boko Haram, the specialized training of only a dozen or so members with AQIM (and al-Shabab) could have had a major impact on the group’s campaign of suicide bombings in 2011-2012, let alone 100 to 200 members. (This will be discussed in greater detail under Source #5 in this correspondence.)

The letters also provide additional details that help us estimate how many Boko Haram members trained with AQIM even though we cannot know exactly how many did. Khalid al-Barnawi requested “waves” of Boko Haram members to receive trainings with AQIM, and AQIM said that “the waves of youths coming from Nigeria to the Sahara for training were in the tens (*‘3asharat*)... and the cadres of Nigerian brothers who returned [to Nigeria] came under the commandship of Abubakar Shekau.” The letters also state that the trainings “continued in this manner with delegations coming and training, and then returning, and with weapons, money and support, until it was first noticed that Abubakar Shekau permitted taking the possessions of Muslims under the rationale that they lived under the rule of unbelievers by choice.” Evidently this training of at least several dozen, if not 100 to 200 Boko Haram members, therefore, stopped in mid-2011 when Khalid al-Barnawi alerted his AQIM comrades in his letter about the dangers of Shekau’s *takfirism*, which is why he split to form Ansaru in 2012.[13]

In the case of the primary sources discussed here – and the secondary sources that corroborate them – we can *conclusively* say, among other findings, that:

- AQIM transferred 200,000 euros to Boko Haram;
- Dozens of Boko Haram fighters trained with AQIM, especially after July 2009;
- Boko Haram members trained not only in Algeria but also in Somalia after July 2009;
- Doukdel sought to establish not only communications (*itisilat*) but also ties (*irtibat*) with Boko Haram in 2010; and
- AQIM intervened in Boko Haram’s internal organization in 2011 to endorse Khalid al-Barnawi’s decision to split from Shekau and form Ansaru by 2012.

Some of the other information provided by the letters about communications, ideology, weapons and the groups’ histories also help us to better understand the relationship between AQIM and Boko Haram and both groups individually from 2009 to 2011. These primary sources also support the argument that AQIM had a significant enough impact on Boko Haram that Abubakar Shekau, of all people, actually thanked them for “training and financial generosity”.

Source #2. International Crisis Group (ICG) Report on Boko Haram, 2014 [14]

In their critique, my five detractors collectively write that “if the issue of funding transfers from al-Qaida to one individual, Muhammad Ali, is murky, then the issue of what occurred in Yobe State in 2003 is exponentially murkier.” They also write “*Al-Risalah*, then, neither recognizes Ali as Boko Haram’s founder nor says that the money from al-Qaida members ever reached him.”

The *al-Risalah* article is discussed in Source #3 in this correspondence, but for now the ICG report is important because it provides numerous insights that are essential background reading on Boko Haram. I disagree with the five authors' description of Muhammed Ali, whom they refer to as "an individual" but do not assess the full range of primary and secondary sources about him that establish he was, in fact, the *founder* and first leader of Boko Haram. This is in spite of the fact that some of the five individuals themselves have claimed Muhammed Ali to be the founder of Boko Haram in their previous work.[15]

A colleague at Voice of America interviewed a Boko Haram member from the 2002-2003 period who knew Muhammed Ali and Muhammed Yusuf and confirmed that Ali was the "emir (commander)" of the group and was in Sudan in the 1990s where he studied with "Bin Laden's scholars".[16] Nigerian news reports about Boko Haram from 2004 after the group's first clashes with the security forces in Yobe State in 2003 also confirmed that Ali was the "leader" or "commander" of the group.[17] The Nigerian journalist Ahmed Salkida, who Abdul Raufu Mustapha described as the "journalist with the closest connections to the sect", has also written that Muhammed Ali was Boko Haram's co-founder with Muhammed Yusuf in 2002-2003.[18] Various other Nigerian Salafi scholars familiar with Boko Haram in 2002-2003 also recognize Muhammed Ali as the group's founder. By context the *al-Risalah* article discussed in Source #3 in this correspondence also confirms that Muhammed Ali was the founder.

Muhammed Ali, according to the ICG report, received a promise of up to \$3 million from Usama bin Laden in Sudan to start a jihadi movement in Nigeria while Ali was a student at the Islamic university in Khartoum, Sudan and Bin Laden was living in Khartoum in the mid-1990s. Ali then trained in Afghanistan and returned to Nigeria to found Boko Haram in 2002 and provided money from al-Qaida to Muhammed Yusuf. This establishes that al-Qaida had a significant impact on Boko Haram's founding because *Boko Haram's founder/leader/commander was an al-Qaida operative*.

If Boko Haram's founder was an al-Qaida operative, one then needs to reexamine what the purpose of Boko Haram was at the time of its founding in 2002-2003. Abubakar Shekau, another Boko Haram leader, an Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) video prologue on the group's history, and ISWAP leader Abu Mus'ab al-Barnawi, among other sources, affirm those were the group's two founding years.[19] Could a group with an al-Qaida operative like Muhammed Ali as a founder (or co-founder) have been "peaceful"? And were the clashes between Boko Haram and the Nigerian security forces in Yobe State in 2003 unanticipated, as has been commonly believed, or were the clashes an expectation for a group whose founder was an al-Qaida operative living in a "land of *kufir* (infidelity)" like Nigeria? I argue for the latter.

Other questions also arise: How close was Muhammed Ali not only to Muhammed Yusuf (Boko Haram's other co-founder/leader) but also to Yusuf's mentor, Nigeria's most prominent Salafi/*Wahhabi* cleric in the 1990s and early 2000s, Shaykh Jaafar Adam Mahmoud? If, according to the ICG report (and other sources), both Ali and Shaykh Jaafar attended the Islamic University in Khartoum at a similar time in the 1990s and Shaykh Jaafar was involved in the killing of Muhammed Ali in 2003, then they must have had a relationship and subsequently fallen out. Moreover, Shaykh Jaafar was known in the 1990s for calling *takfir* on various Nigerian Muslim scholars after he returned to Nigeria from his other studies at the Islamic University in Medina, Saudi Arabia; he later praised bin Laden and al-Qaida after 9/11. It is reasonable to conclude that Shaykh Jaafar was knowledgeable about Boko Haram's founding in 2002-2003 and could have initially supported the group, especially considering Muhammed Ali's co-founder was Shaykh Jaafar's own mentee, Muhammed Yusuf.

This issue is important because it highlights another key question about Boko Haram: whether the Nigerian Salafi/*Wahhabi* clerics are only victims of Boko Haram's wrath; or whether they are victims but some of them are also reaping what they sowed from the ideology they promoted and their support for Boko Haram at the time of its origins. This involved bigotry towards Sufis and Sunni Muslims who accepted secular laws, Christians and, in some cases, also women during the 1990s.[20] According to the latter interpretation, they provided initial support to Muhammed Ali's jihadi movement but pulled back just before Muhammed Ali finally launched the jihad in December 2003.[21] If some clerics in the Salafi/*Wahhabi* establishment was complicit in Boko Haram's founding in 2002-2003 – whether for turning a blind eye to the group or actively supporting the

group – then it also supports the argument that international factors contributed to Boko Haram’s founding. This is because Shaykh Jaafar and many of the leading Salafi/*Wahhabi* clerics around him cultivated their religious ideology, funding and credibility through associations primarily to Saudi organizations and Saudi-funded universities in Saudi Arabia or other countries, such as the Islamic University in Khartoum, Sudan. As the scholar Muhammed Mustapha Gwadabe of Ahmadu Bello University argues:

the disruption of the “normal” evolution of Islam (as result of *Wahbiyyah* interventions) created dangerous tensions across much of the Muslim world and provided for increase radicalism among Islamist movements, and produced the Boko Haram culture in Nigeria.[22]

Quoting Kyari Muhammed, Gwadabe added as an epitaph in his article that “Virtually every member of the Boko Haram moved from the Izala, making it the transit point for graduation into Boko Haram.”[23] Izala (an acronym for “Society of Removal of Innovation and Reestablishment of the Sunna”) is the largest Salafi/*Wahhabi* movement in Nigeria, was funded through contributions from Saudi Arabia, and was the group from which Shaykh Jaafar and Muhammed Yusuf emerged as prominent Salafi/*Wahhabi* clerics in the 1990s and early 2000s.[24]

Lastly, the veracity of the ICG report as a source must be considered. Two of the Nigerian journalists and researchers involved in preparing the report are well respected and also well connected, one of them with extensive reporting experience on Boko Haram and a record of interviews with Boko Haram members for an international news agency. More generally, ICG is credible. The report should be considered authoritative.

In sum, with a founder who was an al-Qaida operative like Muhammed Ali, it becomes clear that al-Qaida had a significant impact on Boko Haram’s founding in 2002-2003. The *al-Risalah* article below further corroborates the depths of al-Qaida’s relationship with Boko Haram at the time of its founding in 2002-2003.

Source #3. *Al-Risalah* Article, January 2017 [25]

Having established that Muhammed Ali was an al-Qaida operative and the founder (or co-founder/leader) of Boko Haram in 2002-2003, it is now relevant to turn to an article about Boko Haram’s and Ansaru’s history as written by the Ansaru leader, Abu Usama al-Ansari, in the al-Qaida magazine, *al-Risalah*, in January 2017. The purpose of the article itself and the publication of *al-Risalah* from its first issue in 2015 was for al-Qaida to emphasize that it opposes excessive *takfiri* ideology, which was represented by Abubakar Shekau and the Islamic State more generally. This was likely the same purpose for AQIM’s release of the letters and treatise in Source #1 in April 2017: to show that AQIM initially supported Boko Haram but dropped that support because it opposed Shekau’s excessive *takfirism*.

I do not disagree that, according to Abu Usama al-Ansari, “members of al-Qaida residing in the Arabian Peninsula” provided “financial assistance” to Muhammed Ali’s “shaykh and mentor”, Abu al-Bara al-Dourawi, but that Abu al-Bara al-Dourawi fled with the money from Nigeria to Saudi Arabia after 9/11. No amount of money is specified but al-Ansari describes it as “immense wealth” that al-Qaida intended for the “*jihad* in Nigeria”. It may have been all or a portion of the \$3 million that Bin Laden had promised to Muhammed Ali in the 1990s.

Where I differ from the five individuals’ collective analysis is that they are primarily concerned with the fact that the “money from al-Qaida members never reached” Muhammed Ali. While I recognize that most, if not all, of the money did not reach Muhammed Ali, what I am primarily concerned with is why al-Qaida would have wanted to provide Muhammed Ali with so much money – “immense wealth” – at the time of Boko Haram’s founding if al-Qaida was an insignificant player in Boko Haram’s founding. That al-Qaida *intended* to provide Muhammed Ali with this “immense wealth” is sufficient to assume that al-Qaida had vetted Muhammed Ali and the relationship between al-Qaida and Muhammed Ali was substantial enough that al-Qaida wanted him to have this money for the “*jihad* in Nigeria” in 2002-2003. Al-Qaida would not have intended to give this money to Muhammed Ali if not for a pre-existing relationship with Boko Haram and its leaders, such as Ali

and his deputies, and its recognition that Ali's goals were in accord with al-Qaida's.

Moreover, the implication of the transfer of money (even though it was stolen) is that there was a broader financial and logistics infrastructure in Nigeria for al-Qaida to fund Muhammed Ali and the "jihad in Nigeria" in 2002-2003. This further establishes that al-Qaida had a deeper level of trust and ties to Boko Haram than has been previously acknowledged in 2002-2003 and that Boko Haram was not "peaceful" at the time of its founding. One can also hypothesize that the loss of this money is among the reasons why Boko Haram's jihadi project stalled after the group's founding in 2002 and only revived in the months before the group's clashes with the security forces in Yobe State took place in December 2003 in which around 20 Boko Haram members were killed.

The *al-Risalah* article also raises additional questions, such as why did Abu al-Bara al-Dourawi flee to Saudi Arabia? Why did Muhammed Yusuf also flee to Saudi Arabia after the clashes with the security forces in December 2003 and stay there for nearly a year? Why did another one of Muhammed Ali's deputies, Abu Umar, flee to Saudi Arabia several weeks before the clashes with the security forces in Yobe in December 2003 where Interpol reportedly tried to track him down?[26] What relationships did Muhammed Ali have in Saudi Arabia, where, according to Kyari Muhammed, he was originally radicalized? What role, if any, did a Saudi-funded charity that funded the construction of Shaykh Jaafar's mosque in Kano have in Boko Haram's uprising in Yobe State or its members' escape to Saudi Arabia?[27] Did any of those Saudi funders meet with Muhammed Yusuf in Saudi Arabia during the roughly one year he spent there following the December 2003 clashes in Yobe State? Who funded and arranged the visa and housing and other logistics for Muhammed Yusuf in Saudi Arabia for that long period in 2004? In addition, if Shaykh Jaafar knew Muhammed Ali, which is almost certainly the case, did Shaykh Jaafar also know about Abu al-Bara al-Dourawi? During Boko Haram's founding years Saudi Arabia was a place for Boko Haram members to seek refuge and served as a negotiation and "diplomacy" grounds for the group, if not also a source of the group's funding and ideology: this reflects another international angle to Boko Haram history that has not been commonly covered.[28]

Lastly, the *al-Risalah* article is important because Abu Usama al-Ansari also mentions how after the clashes in Yobe State in December 2003 the "Algerian brothers" – a reference to AQIM's predecessor, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) – provided haven to Boko Haram members so that they could flee from Nigeria to the Sahel. This is also documented in other primary sources from al-Qaida and news reports by journalists in West Africa in 2004. The GSPC could not have helped Boko Haram in this way in 2004 if not for a pre-existing relationship with Boko Haram (then known publicly as the "Nigerian Taliban" and the "Nigerian brothers" to the GSPC). Abu Usama al-Ansari also confirmed in his article what the letters from 2009 to 2011 between AQIM and Boko Haram indicated: Ansaru "consulted" with the "Algerian brothers" before announcing its formation in 2012.

In sum, the *al-Risalah* article is important because it shows that al-Qaida trusted Muhammed Ali enough to provide him with "immense wealth" for Boko Haram and that al-Qaida must have had close and longstanding communications with Ali and his inner circle as well as a strategic plan for how that money would benefit al-Qaida's objectives in Nigeria. The article also establishes that Boko Haram was not peaceful when it was founded in 2002-2003 and that Boko Haram's relationship with AQIM, or its predecessor, the GSPC, dates not to 2009 but at least to 2004 and, in fact, earlier than that, as Source #4 will show below.

Source #4. Court Documents from the Case of Ibrahim Harun, 2017 [29]

The five authors ask in their article "what did Harun accomplish? Harun was arrested before he could perpetrate any of the terrorist attacks that Zenn describes him plotting. Told from one angle, the story of Harun is the story of Nigeria's close call with a master terrorist. But viewed from another angle, Harun's impact was negligible: a few plots, a few trips, minimal contact with the most influential Boko Haram leaders on the ground in northern Nigeria, and then a flight to Libya where he was soon caught."

Imagine if a few days before September 11, 2001, the FBI arrested some of the hijackers based on complaints

from flight schools, disrupted the entire plot, and the attacks never happened. It would not be analytically useful to write their plot off as having a “negligible impact” because it did not happen. Rather, investigators would seek to understand how al-Qaida built this network in the U.S and what the network indicated about al-Qaida’s intentions and other capabilities in the U.S.

Similarly, Ibrahim Harun’s failed plots against the U.S. embassy and other Western targets in Nigeria in 2003 are not cases of a vaguely defined “master terrorist” but of an al-Qaida member who pledged *baya’* to Usama bin Laden in Pakistan through Abd al-Hadi al-Iraqi, lived with Abu Faraj al-Libi in Pakistan, trained under the supervision of Abu Zubaydah in Afghanistan and met various other East African al-Qaida members in Pakistan. The question I ask is *how* and *why* did al-Qaida arrange for Ibrahim Harun travel to Nigeria in 2003 and meet with Muhammed Ali’s deputy in Boko Haram in 2003 even if his plots failed? Harun’s case again challenges the idea that Boko Haram was “peaceful” in 2003: if the group was “peaceful” why would the group welcome and host Harun in Nigeria, as discussed in the documents from his court trial in the U.S. in 2017 where he was convicted of killing two U.S. troops in Afghanistan before his mission in Nigeria in 2003 and of plotting to attack the U.S. Embassy in Nigeria in 2003-2004?

Harun’s mission in Nigeria also raises questions about the logistics infrastructure for al-Qaida in Nigeria in 2003. Someone in Boko Haram had to know from al-Qaida that he was coming, someone from Boko Haram had to receive him, and someone from Boko Haram had to escort him around the country and lodge him in Kano. Harun, who was Saudi but had parents from Niger, knew Hausa, so he did not need translation in northern Nigeria, and al-Qaida leaders also cautioned him to avoid being seen reading publicly in Arabic for operational security reasons.[30] While in Nigeria, Harun was also receiving letters from the GSPC. He even sent a Boko Haram courier who had lodged with him in Kano to train in Pakistan with al-Qaida, and Harun arranged trainings for Boko Haram youths with the GSPC in Niger. The Boko Haram courier whom Harun sent to Pakistan was returning to Nigeria with money from al-Qaida before his arrest in Pakistan in 2004. The letters from the GSPC to al-Qaida, which were passed through Harun and the courier he sent from Nigeria to Pakistan, and the letters from al-Qaida to Harun, which were also passed through that courier, also reveal information about al-Qaida strategy in Nigeria, the reasons why al-Qaida wanted to target Nigeria in 2003, and the reasons why al-Qaida wanted Harun and Boko Haram to coordinate with the GSPC to set up a West African hub for allied jihadist groups. The documents from Harun’s court trial, therefore, show al-Qaida was already working with Boko Haram and the GSPC strategically in 2003, as the *al-Risalah* article corroborates.

My data point about Harun was not, as the five individuals claimed, me “presenting failures as successes in order to paint the most distressing possible picture of al-Qaida and AQIM.” Rather, it was intended as further evidence that Boko Haram’s cooperation with al-Qaida to receive Harun in Nigeria demonstrates the group was not “peaceful” in 2003, had violent intentions in 2003, and had a logistics and communications relationship with al-Qaida and its regional allies in West Africa (such as the GSPC) as early as 2003, if not earlier. In addition, this data point about Harun is not what I built much of my analysis around, as they claim, but rather it was one data point among others, such as the three sources mentioned above, that reveal al-Qaida had a relationship with and significant impact on Boko Haram at the time of its founding in 2002-2003. In order for Harun’s mission to take place and for al-Qaida to have intended to provide the “immense wealth” to Muhammed Ali, it logically follows that other clandestine interactions between Boko Haram, the GSPC and al-Qaida had to take place aside from the evidence provided in the sources presently available.

The five individuals in their collective analysis also describe the members of Boko Haram in 2003, based on their interviews with anonymous “local informants”, as a “heterogeneous group who engaged in activities as diverse as fishing, providing wage labor on nearby farms, and meeting with local authorities”. This is an innocuous portrayal of the group compared to what we know about the way the group’s leaders were communicating and strategizing with al-Qaida and the GSPC. In addition, according to ICG, Muhammed Ali did not even tell Muhammed Yusuf that his money came from al-Qaida, so one should not expect “local informants”, such as villagers in the area near Boko Haram’s encampment in Yobe State in 2003, to have known about Boko Haram’s dealings with al-Qaida.

Moreover, the “local informant” my colleague at Voice of America interviewed for a project we collaborated on together in 2017 made clear that both Muhammed Ali and Muhammed Yusuf planned for jihad but that Ali was much less patient about engaging in jihad than Yusuf. Moreover, this local informant was an *actual member* of Boko Haram’s encampment in Yobe State in 2002-2003 and was introduced to us by a psychologist in Nigeria’s de-radicalization program. Aspects of the dispute between Muhammed Ali and Muhammed Yusuf are detailed in an article written by Abdulbasit Kassim.[31] Moreover, Ahmed Salkida—a so-called “local informant” and is as close to Boko Haram as anyone who is not a member of the group—wrote in 2014 that Muhammed Yusuf “never hid the desire to carry out jihad and ultimately secure *Daula* (State)”; that “Yusuf orchestrated the script Shekau is playing out today”; and that the difference between Ali and Yusuf was that Ali opted for a “more extreme version” of *takfir wal-hijra* (*excommunication of Muslims and migration*).”

Even if some Boko Haram members in 2003 were fishermen and wage laborers and met with local authorities, this does not rule them out as violent jihadists as well. Indeed, one of the new disciplines in terrorism studies – Jihadi Culture – finds that poetry, sports, and other hobbies can all coexist at a terrorist camp even while terrorists are preparing for attacks. In the case of the “London Bridge attackers” in 2017, for example, they were known by “local informants” around their neighborhood to be working at local gyms, Islamic television channels and bakeries, to have taught youth about Islam, attended swimming pools and barbecues, and to have occasionally run into the law for fraud and assault.[32] That was part of their “jihadi culture”. At the same time, the London Bridge attackers were communicating with the Islamic State online, reading Islamic State materials and preparing for a violent attack in the name of the Islamic State, which took place in June 2017 and led to seven deaths at the London Bridge. This is similar to how Boko Haram members to the villagers close to the group in 2003 may have been seen as “fishermen and wage laborers” in their non-combat time, while at the same time they were training, amassing weapons and preparing for violent jihad, especially if they sided with Muhammed Ali.

In sum, if Boko Haram formed primarily to address or respond to corruption, poverty, or marginalization, the fact that it became violent in 2003 could be considered exceptional and unanticipated. But the evidence at hand indicates that the group was founded by an al-Qaida operative, Muhammed Ali, whose co-leaders in 2003 were in contact with al-Qaida and the GSPC logistically, financially, and operationally. The fact that the group engaged in violence in Yobe State in 2003 was no accident: it was woven into the purposes of the group from the beginning.

Lastly, the case of Harun fits into another underdeveloped genre in scholarship on violent non-state actors: “unsuccessful attacks.”[33] Such unsuccessful attacks are rarely studied because they are considered to be “negligible.” But because al-Qaida and other terrorist groups are learning organizations, “unsuccessful attacks” often provide groups with knowledge so that future attacks will be more precise and likely to succeed. Boko Haram’s suicide car bombing at the United Nations building in Abuja in 2011, for example, which will be discussed in greater depth in Source #5 below, has been an aberration in the group’s targeting since the start of the most recent iteration of the insurgency in 2009. It is beyond the scope of this correspondence, but I argue that the network masterminding that suicide car bombing at the United Nations in 2011 was similar to the network of Boko Haram members coordinating with Ibrahim Harun on his plot on the U.S. and others embassies in 2003. Studying his plot, therefore, could have raised awareness of the potentiality of the United Nations attack in 2011.

Source #5. News Reports and Academic Article about Suicide Bombings, 2010-2011

I now turn to news reports about Boko Haram’s first two suicide bombings in June 2011 and August 2011 and an academic article by Michael C. Horowitz from Winter 2010 for International Organization about the “diffusion of innovations” between terrorist groups with a focus on suicide bombings.[34]

There were many suicide bombings (person-borne) and car bombings (vehicle-borne) and some suicide car bombings (person in vehicle-borne) in Nigeria starting with Boko Haram’s first suicide car bombing at the Federal Police headquarters in Abuja in June 2011. My dataset (found in Appendix A at the end of this

correspondence) reflects 36 total suicide bombings, car bombings and suicide car bombings in Nigeria from June 2011 until the end of December 2012. According to that dataset, 31 of those 36 attacks were suicide bombings (person-borne or person-in-vehicle borne) and five were only car bombings (without a person inside).

The five individuals say in their collective analysis that “some of these attacks were claimed by Boko Haram, but can Zenn prove that every attack was carried out by Boko Haram or Ansaru?” Indeed, a portion of these 36 attacks may have been misreported, but that does not affect the representativeness or conclusions that can be drawn from the data. The key is to understand that there had been virtually no reports of suicide bombings or car bombings in northern Nigeria ever until Boko Haram’s first suicide car bombing at the Federal Police headquarters in Abuja on June 16, 2011. Considering that the tactics of suicide bombings, car bombings, and suicide car bombings require some expertise (unlike, for example, arson), and that these attacks started exactly one day after Boko Haram warned the press that its members returned from Somalia on June 15, 2011, and that these attacks continued after June 2011 at a rapid pace (36 attacks until the end of December 2012), it is likely that Boko Haram was responsible for most, if not all, of the suicide bombings, car bombings, and suicide car bombings from June 2011 until the end of 2012. The five individuals also provided no evidence of alternatives about who conducted these attacks if not Boko Haram. It is highly doubtful it could have been Boko Haram members in the Nigerian army in false flag operations, as Thurston has suggested (without any sources)[35]; “Christian elements” who attacked their own churches after “being paid by Boko Haram” or “in the name of Boko Haram”, as Kyari Muhammed and Adam Higazi have suggested (without any sources)[36]; or some other (non-existent) terrorist group in northern Nigeria.

A review of the data also shows that the targets were predominantly churches, rival Muslim leaders of Boko Haram, military or government facilities, media houses and telecommunications facilities, which are all consistent with Boko Haram’s overall targeting strategy. These targets are also similar to the ones that AQIM leader Abdelmalek Droukdel suggested Boko Haram should target in his letters to Boko Haram in the previously mentioned Source #1. As such, I maintain that my dataset (in Appendix A, which is based on news reports) is fundamentally accurate and that Boko Haram or Ansaru – not some other unspecified entity – were responsible for most of these approximately 36 attacks in the period from June 2011 until the end of 2012.

Michael C. Horowitz’ article is relevant to understanding these attacks because his article shows how suicide bombings are a tactic that tends to be transferred from group to group because of the skills, ideology and internal group organization it requires. Horowitz finds two hubs have been primarily responsible for the diffusion of suicide bombings:

the first hub is Hezbollah, through which the Palestinian organizations and the LTTE [Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam in Sri Lanka] adopted. The second hub comes from al-Qaida, which learned from Hezbollah but then became a central node through which multiple Jihadi groups around the world appear to have learned. Having links to one of these hubs seems to play a major role in predicting which groups will adopt.[37]

Horowitz’ model explains why the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA), Basque Fatherland and Freedom Group (ETA) or Shining Path in Peru did not adopt suicide bombings: they were not connected to any of these hubs. In addition, Horowitz argues the organizational changes involved in preparing a group for suicide bombings weighs towards new groups with less established “bureaucracies” like Boko Haram becoming more likely to adopt suicide bombings, whereas “older” groups like the PIRA are less likely to undergo the necessary internal organizational restructuring to adopt suicide bombings.[38] Boko Haram’s insurgent attacks began in September 2010 and suicide bombings began less than one year later. Because Boko Haram was a “new” group, it was more likely than an “old” group to launch suicide bombings, according to Horowitz’ hypothesis.

In addition, Boko Haram’s key link to the suicide bombing hubs were to AQIM and al-Shabab. AQIM’s first major suicide bombing campaign began in 2007, right after its leader Abdelmalek Droukdel pledged loyalty to Usama bin Laden and the group became an al-Qaida affiliate. That same year an AQIM member wrote a letter that was found in Bin Laden’s compound, which also reflected AQIM’s own need for external support (just as

Boko Haram would later request from AQIM) where he wrote that “The brothers [in AQIM] require oversight, guidance, and expert instructors with Iraqi and Afghani experience in all arenas.”[39] AQIM’s inspiration – as reflected in its first videos celebrating its suicide bombings – was al-Qaida and the knowledge transfer for the suicide bombings likely came at least in part from Algerians who fought with al-Qaida in Iraq and returned to Algeria by 2007.[40]

The two news articles I reference here in Source #5 describe the first two suicide bombings in Nigeria’s history at the Federal Police headquarters in Abuja in June 2011, which killed three people, and the United Nations building in Abuja in August 2011, which killed more than 20 people. Ahmed Salkida reported on the first suicide bomber in June 2011, Muhammed Manga, who he described as “someone who began to travel to Cotonou in Benin Republic and later Dubai frequently in order to buy all kinds of goods. He was a major contributor to the Boko Haram’s arms build-up.”[41] The Boko Haram spokesman described the bomb that was used in that first suicide bombing as a “ready-made one, which [Boko Haram] acquired from abroad”, which was most likely from AQIM.[42] One day before that suicide car bombing Boko Haram also warned the press that their “brothers returned from Somalia” and would soon launch attacks.[43] One day after that suicide bombing, Abu Fatima, who would later join Ansaru and become its commander for suicide bombings, claimed the suicide car bombing.[44] The evidence clearly weighs towards AQIM and al-Shabab involvement in that first suicide bombing.

The second suicide car bombing at the United Nations building in Abuja was widely reported by the U.S., United Nations and Nigerian government sources to have been masterminded by Mamman Nur, who (according to the U.S.) brought 90 Nigerians to Somalia after July 2009 and trained with AQIM.[45] The target of that attack was also consistent with AQIM, al-Qaida in Iraq, al-Shabab and other al-Qaida-affiliated groups, which regularly have targeted United Nations facilities. Several days prior to that suicide car bombing at the United Nations building, a Boko Haram member named Babagana Ismail Kwaljima was arrested for plotting a major attack. Kwaljima had trained with AQIM and was arrested in Nigeria in 2007 alongside future Ansaru commander Adam Kamar.[46] However, Kwaljima and Kamar were released from custody for the same reasons as Ibrahim Harun's courier in Boko Haram, who was arrested after training with al-Qaida in Pakistan and then deported back to Nigeria in 2004, such as pressure from Islamist groups in Nigeria that considered the trials to be Islamophobic, a lack of terrorism legislation in Nigeria, and Nigeria’s desire to avoid being seen as a “terrorist safe haven”.[47] The major attack that Kwaljima was plotting was, in fact, the United Nations building attack. Boko Haram also for the first time in its history made a jihadi “martyrdom video” of the suicide bomber in the United Nations building attack with a nasheed and Shekau also saying that the “United Nations is the forum for global evil,” which reflects the group’s inspiration from international jihadist groups.[48]

In my December 2017 *Perspectives on Terrorism* article, I detailed how Boko Haram’s first two suicide car bombings in June 2011 and August 2011 (discussed earlier) and the seventh suicide car bombing in Nigeria on Christmas Day 2011 – the three attacks with the most information for case studies to be made about them – weigh heavily in favor of AQIM and al-Shabab supporting those attacks. I also provided and elaborated on other reasons why not only those three suicide car bombings involved AQIM and al-Shabab support, but also how most of the suicide bombings from June 2011 until the end of 2012 in Nigeria were outside of Shekau’s main area of operations in northeastern Nigeria and were similar to the area of operations of Ansaru attacks and cells. This is why I argued that it was not necessarily Ansaru carrying out the suicide bombings in Nigeria from June 2011 until the end of December 2012, but that “Ansaru-leaning” or “Ansaru-aligned” Boko Haram members were behind the suicide bombing campaign. As such, they heeded AQIM’s advice on targeting, trained abroad with AQIM and al-Shabab, including Mamman Nur and Kwaljima, or received some of the 200,000 euros from AQIM, including the mastermind of the seventh suicide bombing. I also argued that the masterminds of the suicide bombings stayed with Boko Haram and did not join Ansaru despite “leaning” towards Ansaru operationally (in targeting Christians, the security forces and Westerners) and ideologically (in avoiding Muslim civilian casualties). Since Shekau killed many Ansaru members who formally defected from Boko Haram, this likely influenced their decision to remain with Boko Haram.

At some point, Boko Haram probably internalized suicide bombings and no longer benefitted from outside

support to launch suicide attacks. Until that point I maintain that AQIM and al-Shabab—and al-Qaida as a suicide bombing “hub”—had a “significant impact” on Boko Haram’s suicide bombing campaign from June 2011 until the end of December 2012. After that point the impact can be described as residual.

Conclusion

This correspondence to *Perspectives on Terrorism* has provided five sets of sources about Boko Haram and AQIM, clarifying why I argue that al-Qaida had a “significant impact” on Boko Haram’s founding in 2002-2003, launch of jihad in 2009-2010 and campaign of suicide bombings in 2011-2012 and why I disagree with my five colleagues’ analysis that al-Qaida did not have a significant impact on these three phases in Boko Haram’s history.

This debate on the impact of AQIM (and al-Shabab) on Boko Haram dates back to as early as 2011,[49] and therefore this correspondence is the most updated addition to scholarship on that issue, which more broadly relates to the study of knowledge transfer between terrorist groups. The debate on al-Qaida’s role, specifically in Boko Haram’s founding in 2002-2003, is much newer and emerged as a result of analysis and primary sources that only became available about Boko Haram and al-Qaida since 2014, including the aforementioned ICG report and especially an article by Andrea Brigaglia in 2015 that first hypothesized Boko Haram’s encampment in Yobe State in 2003 was in fact “a training camp for (al-Qaida’s?) militants” [*sic*].[50] However, prior to Brigaglia’s article in 2015, and my own *Perspectives on Terrorism* article in December 2017, the narrative that Boko Haram was “homegrown” and a group of fishermen and radicals with no ties to al-Qaida at the time of its founding was largely unchallenged. This re-examination of Boko Haram’s founding should be seen as an opportunity to better understand the group’s origins and how its origins helps us to understand the group’s composition and trajectory today. The next addition to the discussion on Boko Haram’s origins will be in “The Oxford Handbook of Nigerian Politics”, which is edited by A. Carl LeVan and Patrick Ukata and will be available in November 2018. The Handbook includes a chapter written by Kyari Muhammed, who is one of the five individuals who wrote the collective analysis disagreeing with me and arguing that al-Qaida did not have a significant impact on Boko Haram’s founding, launch of jihad or campaign of suicide bombings.[51] His chapter will be called “The Origins of Boko Haram,” and it will be interesting to see how he engages, interprets, and analyzes these sources in his chapter.

Finally, I provide three heuristics for evaluating AQIM’s impact on Boko Haram’s founding, launch of jihad and suicide bombing campaign.

1. Founding (2002-2003)

If:

- A Nigerian al-Qaida operative meets Usama Bin Laden in Sudan in the 1990s;
- receives a promise of up to \$3 million from Bin Laden to start a jihadi group in Nigeria; and
- engages in military training in Afghanistan; and
- al-Qaida intends to provide this operative with “immense wealth” to found a jihadi group in Nigeria;
- sends an al-Qaida member from Pakistan to coordinate attacks on Western targets in Nigeria with this founder’s new jihadi group; and
- this group claims allegiance to the Taliban and communicates with al-Qaida’s regional allies in West Africa;

Then:

- al-Qaida is likely to have had a significant impact on the group’s founding. (This is distinct from addressing the geopolitical and inspirational significance of al-Qaida’s attacks in 2001 on Boko Haram’s

founding in 2002).

2. *Launch of Jihad (2009-2010)*

If:

- A Nigerian jihadi group engages in clashes with Nigerian security forces and within two weeks its leaders deploy three operatives to meet with AQIM's top commander in Mali; and
- that commander reports to AQIM's leader that he knows those operatives well; and
- AQIM's leader provides 200,000 euros to that group in Nigeria and increases AQIM trainings for dozens of the group's members; and
- that Nigerian jihadi group's leader writes a letter thanking AQIM for the "training and financial generosity" after its first successful attack in Nigeria;

Then:

- AQIM is likely to have had a significant impact on that Nigerian group's launch of jihad. (This does not even touch on the impact of al-Shabab).

3. *Suicide Bombing Campaign (2011-2012)*

If:

- A region of a country has never experienced a suicide attack but after a Nigerian jihadi group announces a jihad there is a rapid increase in suicide attacks; and
- the group that announced the jihad claims some of those suicide attacks and there is no evidence that another militant outfit launched those attacks; and
- some of the masterminds of those attacks trained with AQIM or al-Shabab and received money from AQIM; and
- the targets of those attacks are consistent with AQIM's recommendations to that Nigerian jihadi group;

Then:

- Al-Qaida is likely to have had a significant impact on that suicide bombing campaign.

All responsible researchers invite and appreciate constructive criticism and lively debate, especially when it is done with an open mind based on a careful reading of sources. This response to the April 2018 critique of my work is meant to inform and encourage a more balanced and nuanced assessment of the debate over al-Qaida's relationship with Boko Haram.

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Appendix A

Boko Haram suicide bombings, car bombings and suicide car bombings - 2012					Deaths
7-Feb-12	Kaduna	Kaduna	Military Barracks	SVBIED	3
10-Feb-12	Borno	Maiduguri	Customs Building	IED, VBIED	4
26-Feb-12	Plateau	Jos	Church of Christ	VBIED	5
11-Mar-12	Plateau	Jos	St. Finbar Catholic Church	VBIED	20
24-Mar-12	Kano	Kano	Joint Task Force (during a raid)	VBIED	2
1-Apr-12	Kaduna	Kaduna	Unknown	Suicide bomber	1
8-Apr-12	Kaduna	Kaduna	All Nations Christian Assembly & ECWA Good News Church	SVBIED	39
26-Apr-12	Kaduna	Kaduna	Media Offices	Attempted SVBIED	4
26-Apr-12	FCT	Abuja	Media Offices	SVBIED	5
30-Apr-12	Taraba	Jalingo	Police Commander Mamman Sule	Attempted Targeted Assassination; Suicide bomber	11
3-Jun-12	Bauchi	Bauchi	Living Christ Church/Harvest Field Church	SVBIED	16
8-Jun-12	Borno	Maiduguri	Borno Police Command	SVBIED	8
10-Jun-12	Plateau	Jos	Christ Chosen Church	SVBIED	3
17-Jun-12	Kaduna	Zaria	ECWA Church	SVBIED	4
17-Jun-12	Kaduna	Zaria	Kings Catholic Church	SVBIED	11
17-Jun-12	Kaduna	Kaduna	Shalom Church	SVBIED	11
15-Jul-12	Kogi	Okene	Living Faith Church	VBIED	0
29-Jul-12	Kano	Kano	Mosque	SVBIED, Armed Assault	4
30-Jul-12	Sokoto	Sokoto	Ungwar Rogo and Marina Police Stations	SVBIEDs (2)	4
2-Aug-12	Kaduna	Kaduna	Abduwahab Aliyu	Attempted Targeted Assassination; Suicide bomber	1
3-Aug-12	Yobe	Potiskum	Emir of Fika	Attempted Targeted Assassination; Suicide bomber	1
5-Aug-12	Yobe	Damaturu	Military Convoy	SVBIED	9
15-Aug-12	Borno	Maiduguri	Joint Task Force Patrol Vehicle	Suicide bomber	2
23-Sep-12	Bauchi	Bauchi	St John's Catholic Church	SVBIED	5
8-Oct-12	Gombe	Gombe	Colonel John Iwara	Attempted Targeted Assassination; Suicide bomber	0
28-Oct-12	Kaduna	Kaduna	St. Rita's Catholic Church	SVBIED	8
25-Nov-12	Kaduna	Jaji	St. Andrew's Church at Armed Forces Command and Staff College	SVBIEDs (2)	13
22-Dec-12	Kano	Kano	South Africa's MTN facility	SVBIED	1
22-Dec-12	Kano	Kano	India's Airtel facility	SVBIED	1
Boko Haram suicide bombings, car bombings and suicide car bombings - 2011					Deaths
16-Jun-11	FCT	Abuja	National Police Headquarters	SVBIED	2
15-Aug-11	Borno	Maiduguri	Borno State Police Command	Failed SVBIED	1
26-Aug-11	FCT	Abuja	UN Headquarters	SVBIED	18
4-Nov-11	Borno	Maiduguri	Military base	SVBIED	N/A
25-Dec-11	Niger St	Madalla	St. Theresa's Catholic Church	SVBIED	44
25-Dec-11	Plateau	Jos	Mountain of Fire and Miracles Church	SVBIED	N/A
25-Dec-11	Gombe	Gadaka	Unidentified church	SVBIED	N/A

SVBIED = Suicide Vehicle-Borne Improved Explosive Device;
 VBIED = Vehicle-Borne Improved Explosive Device

Notes

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- [2] Adam Higazi, Brandon Kendhammer, Kyari Mohammed, Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, and Alex Thurston, “A Response to Jacob Zenn on Boko Haram and al-Qa’ida”, Volume 12, Issue 2, April 2018; URL: <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/703/1374>.
- [3] Jacob Zenn, “The Folly of Crowds: Jacob Zenn Rebutts Adam Higazi, Brandon Kendhammer, Kyari Mohammed, Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, and Alex Thurston,” *aymennjawad.org* (22 June 2018); URL: <http://www.aymennjawad.org/2018/06/jacob-zenn-replies-to-his-critics>.
- [4] Shaykh Abu Al-Hasan Rashid, “Documents of Advice And Sharia Instruction To The Fighters In Nigeria,” (released in April 2017); URL: <https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2017/04/shaykh-abucc84-al-hcca3asanrashicc84d-22sharicc84ah-advice-and-guidance-for-the-mujacc84hidicc84n-of-nigeria22.pdf>. For a translation of key portions of these letters, see Abdulbasit Kassim and Michael Nwankpa, “The Boko Haram Reader: From Nigerian Preachers to the Islamic State,” London: Hurst (2018).
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- [8] “Taking the hostage road,” *Africa Confidential*, 16 March 2013.
- [9] See Abdulbasit Kassim, “Boko Haram’s Internal Civil War: Stealth Takfir and Jihad as Recipes for Schism.” In Jacob Zenn (Ed.), *Boko Haram Beyond the Headlines: Analyses of Africa’s Enduring Insurgency*, West Point CTC, New York, May 2018; URL: <https://ctc.usma.edu/app/uploads/2018/05/Boko-Haram-Beyond-the-Headlines.pdf>.
- [10] U.S. Department of The Treasury Press Center, “Treasury Sanctions Senior Boko Haram Leaders Treasury Sanctions Senior Boko Haram Leaders,” 1 December 2015; URL: <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/jl0290.aspx>.
- [11] The document is available at [https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ubl2017/arabic/Letter%20from%20Abdallah%20Abu%20Zayd%20%E2%80%98Abd-al-Hamid%20to%20Abu%20Mus%20%E2%80%99ab%20%E2%80%98Abd-al-Wadud%20\(Arabic\).pdf](https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ubl2017/arabic/Letter%20from%20Abdallah%20Abu%20Zayd%20%E2%80%98Abd-al-Hamid%20to%20Abu%20Mus%20%E2%80%99ab%20%E2%80%98Abd-al-Wadud%20(Arabic).pdf).
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- [16] Interview with Abu Aisha, Bauchi, Nigeria, March 2017.
- [17] See, for example, “The Big Haunt,” *Tell* [Lagos], Apr 26, 2004, pp. 22, 26. Malachy Uzendu, “Police arrest Taliban leader,” *Daily Champion* [Lagos], September 30, 2004 pg. 20.
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- [20] Abubakar Gumi, for example, who is considered to be the “originator” of Salafism in Nigeria and Nigeria’s “key link to the

Saudis” said before his death in 1992 that only Muslim men – not Christians and not women – should be leaders and declared Sufi practices as “infidelity”. He also argued that Muslim women should vote only so that Muslim men could become leaders.

[21] For a discussion of the paradigms on Boko Haram’s founding in which Kassim sides with Brigaglia’s paradigm over Thurston’s paradigm, see Abdulbasit Kassim, “Boko Haram’s Internal Civil War: Stealth Takfir and Jihad as Recipes for Schism.”

[22] This quote features in his article titled, “Islam, Izala and Boko Haram Dispute in Northern Nigeria: A Historical Perspective.”

[23] Ibid.

[24] See, for example, “Nigeria: Borno State Residents Not Yet Recovered From Boko Haram Violence,” *Wikileaks*, November 4, 2009; URL: https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09ABUJA2014_a.html.

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[27] Andrea Brigaglia, “Ja’far Mahmoud Adam, Mohammed Yusuf and Al-Muntada Islamic Trust: Reflections on the Genesis of the Boko Haram phenomenon in Nigeria,” *Annual Review of Islam in Africa*, Issue No.11, 2012; URL: http://www.cci.uct.ac.za/usr/cci/publications/aria/download_issues/2012/Andrea%20Brigaglia.pdf. See also “Head of Islamic Charity Denies Funding Islamist Rebellion,” *AFP*, February 25, 2004.

[28] Ibid. For an opposing view about Saudi Arabia’s “extremely weak organizational ties” to Boko Haram, see Alex Thurston, “How far does Saudi Arabia’s influence go? Look at Nigeria,” *Washington Post*, October 31, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/10/31/how-far-does-saudi-arabias-influence-go-look-at-nigeria/?utm_term=.b0d20c54687c.

[29] A number of documents from the court trial are available at <https://www.courtlistener.com/docket/4321526/united-states-v-hausa/>.

[30] See the letter (translated into English) from al-Qaeda in Pakistan to Harun, provided as an exhibit at Ibrahim Harun’s court trial, *United States of America against Ibrahim Suleiman Adnan Adam Harun*. Case 1:12-cr-00134-BMC-MDG, Eastern District of New York, August 2016–March 2017.

[31] Abdulbasit Kassim, “Boko Haram’s Internal Civil War: Stealth Takfir and Jihad as Recipes for Schism.” In Jacob Zenn (Ed.), *Boko Haram Beyond the Headlines: Analyses of Africa’s Enduring Insurgency*, West Point CTC, New York, May 2018; URL: <https://ctc.usma.edu/app/uploads/2018/05/Boko-Haram-Beyond-the-Headlines.pdf>.

[32] “Man featured in a documentary called ‘The Jihadis Next Door’ was one of London attackers,” *Washington Post*, June 5, 2017; URL: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/man-featured-in-a-documentary-called-the-jihadis-next-door-was-one-of-london-attackers/2017/06/05/6d47f918-49ed-11e7-987c-42ab5745db2e_story.html?utm_term=.0a9a8576363a.

[33] See, for example, the discussion with Petter Nesser on the #talkingterror podcast, <https://soundcloud.com/user-366747443/petter-nesser>.

[34] Michael C. Horowitz, “Non-State Actors and the Diffusion of Innovations: The Case of Suicide Terrorism.” *International Organization*, Vol. 64, No.1 (Winter 2010), pp. 33-64.

[35] Alex Thurston, “Response to NYT Article on Boko Haram,” *Sahelblog*, 19 August 2011; URL: <https://sahelblog.wordpress.com/2011/08/19/response-to-nyt-article-on-boko-haram/>.

[36] Kyari Mohammed, “The message and methods of Boko Haram,” Pg. 20. Adam Higazi, “Mobilisation into and against Boko Haram in North-East Nigeria,” in M. Cahen, M.E. Pommerolle, K. Tall (Eds.), *Collective Mobilisations in Africa: Contestation, Resistance, Revolt*. Leiden: Brill, 2015., Pg. 35.

[37] Horowitz, “Non-State Actors and the Diffusion of Innovations: The Case of Suicide Terrorism”.

[38] Ibid.

[39] The document is available at <https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ubl2017/english/Addendum%20to%20the%20report%20of%20the%20Islamic%20Maghreb.pdf>.

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