

BOOK REVIEW

Jacob Zenn. *Unmasking Boko Haram: Exploring Global Jihad in Nigeria*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers. 2020. 415 pp. Bibliography. Glossary. \$105. Ebook. ISBN: 9781626378933.

The Boko Haram insurgency has attracted worldwide attention and opened a floodgate of scholarly works. There are debates on several dynamics surrounding Boko Haram, particularly the question of whether it was motivated by local realities or whether there were foreign factors and international connections that combined to give birth to the infamous development.

In eleven chapters, Jacob Zenn's *Unmasking Boko Haram: Exploring Global Jihad in Nigeria* sets out to defend the school of thought in Boko Haram studies, which promulgates the thesis suggesting that Boko Haram took its roots from a prolonged connection with foreign, global Jihadi networks. These range from groups whose founders and actors either originated, had a stint, operated in, or were linked to countries such as Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon to figures who hailed from different parts of Nigeria, including from outside its northern strongholds. Zenn draws on written and oral sources as well as fieldwork in northern Nigeria.

Chapter One seeks to find the ideological and operational nexus between Nigerian "Jihadists" and nonstate Muslim combatants outside Nigeria. The second chapter looks at how some Nigerians in the diaspora were influenced by some Jihadists in their host countries and how this facilitated the former's smuggle of "Jihadi" ideology into their home country, which as the next chapter explores, paved way for the emergence of pro-al-Qaeda sentiments and Jihadi voices in Nigeria. In Chapter Four, Zenn narrates events undertaken by different figures which, according to him, represented the earliest instincts for Jihad in the model of al-Qaeda. Chapter Five examines the relationship between various Nigerian Jihadists and the mainstream Salafis, and how the latter disowned and refuted the former in debates and polemics. As unpacked in Chapters Six and Seven, various groups, each of which is encompassed in the broader conception of Boko Haram, had planned to wage Jihad and each group had prosecuted the plan at the time it deemed fit. Zenn indicates how al-Qaeda and its numerous offshoots had directly or indirectly contributed to the violent campaigns which these groups had launched, including both during the pre- and post-2009 uprising that opened another chapter in the history of the Boko Haram insurgency. The crackdown on Muhammad Yusuf-led Boko Haram and the leader's extrajudicial killing in 2009 only briefly silenced Boko Haram; as unmasked in Chapters Eight, Nine, and Ten, Yusuf's followers had dispersed into different regions within and outside Nigeria, and most of them, according to Zenn, had received guerilla training in

sophisticated Jihadi camps. Subsequently, they regrouped and began unleashing massive onslaughts on northern Nigerian society in more skillful ways. The seeming sophistication with which the groups operated and the highhandedness demonstrated by Yusuf's deputies and warlords such as Abubakar Shekau contributed to the capture of many territories and a momentary formation of a caliphate by Boko Haram. This same development, part of which manifested in a more robust connection with global Jihadi organizations, had ironically played a part in factionalizing the Boko Haram movement. Zenn concludes his work by outlining his thoughts and giving his remarks on what he believes will be the fate or the state of Jihad in Nigeria in future vis-à-vis global currents.

Unmasking Boko Haram has numerous contradictions and errors. For example, Zenn dates Nigerian Jihadism to 1994, but in a different breath asserts that it was Muhammad Yusuf's death in 2009 that "charted the group's course into global Jihadist movement" (322), thus giving some weight to the position of the rival school promoting the local origins of Boko Haram. Zenn's characterizations of Shaykh Ja'far Mahmud Adam, whom Zenn and others depict as a crypto-Jihadist, betray a shaky grasp of the Nigerian religious scene and established facts about the Shaykh's life. In general, Zenn's work is exceedingly hypothetical as it is full of expressions that convey theories and conclusions built on assumptions and conjectures. These include phrases such as "could have" (which appears 33 times), "may have" (which features 72 times), "might have" (appearing in 36 places), "must have" (which occurs in 21 places), "would have" (which is used in 69 places), "would not have" (featuring 17 times), "perhaps" (which appears 18 times), "probably" (occurring 35 times), "possibly" (in 40 places), "presumably" (in 22 places), "likely" (used 45 times), and so on. Needless to say, although this hypothetical approach has, understandably, enhanced Zenn's chances of impressively connecting the many dots surrounding the subject matter of his work, it nonetheless robs a lot of arguments raised in the book of their substance and factuality. Zenn's spellings, transliterations, and translations of Arabic and Hausa phrases and proper names are often incorrect or nonstandard. For example, the expression "Yan Kato da Gora" refers to vigilantes carrying sticks to provide security in a locality, and can be literally translated as "big men with stick" as opposed to Zenn's vague rendering as "stick figures" (228). The Arabic expression "ahl al-kheir" which Zenn translates as "moderates" (241) is better translated as "people of good virtue."

In terms of strengths, Zenn draws striking similarities and differences between Boko Haram's key actors and the founders of marginal sects such as Shia and 'Yan Tatsine. This is radically missing in some works narrating the ideological underpinnings of Boko Haram and violent extremism in Nigeria. Zenn's approach in this regard is quite commendable as it portrays his aspiration to present a broader picture of what contributed to the growth and formation of the Boko Haram radical group.

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