

What is Boko Haram and Why Should We Care?
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An army of dirt-ignorant terrorists has been running rampant in Africa for the past few years. They call themselves "Boko Haram," which has been liberally translated as "Foreign Education is Sinful." But this is as misleading as when the Taliban first appeared on the scene in Afghanistan. Their name was translated as "students," a strange term for phenomenally ignorant rote memorizers of the Koran in a language few of them understood.

Boko Haram is just what its words say: "Books Forbidden." They are the posterboys for illiteracy and mindless evil and their leader speaks directly to Allah, he says. No books needed there; he knows "pure" Islam.

Boko Haram was founded by Mohammad Yusuf in 2002, with the mission of establishing a "pure" Islamic state ruled by Sharia Law, fighting against anything that it thinks "western." Since their founding, this cult has exacted 10,000 deaths between 2002 and 2013. The figures for 2014 are not compiled yet, although their latest caper was to abduct 275 girls from a Nigerian boarding school. Rumor has it that they have crossed borders from Nigeria into other neighboring lawless states where they are selling the girls as "wives" (slaves) for as little as \$12 a piece. Yes, Chad and Sudan still host active slave markets, a practiced ignored by the Organization of Muslim States.

Both Nigerian Christian and Muslim parents are frantic and demand that their government do something to bring back the girls and wipe out Boko Haram. Nigeria, for all its oil wealth, is unable to carry out such a mission and has been, until now, too ashamed to ask for help.

This terror cult has attacked Christian and government targets. Nigeria is where Christians and Muslims recruit and conflict. The Islamists have bombed churches, police stations, and have kidnapped western tourists whom they exchange for ransom. They also go after particular Muslims whose views they do not like. Nigeria has failed to rein in the Islamists in the north, and now this movement has given rise to something even worse. Who is funding clothes, food, water, and toilets for 300 girls?

Their worldview is derived from the already growing Muslim literalism in Northern Nigeria. The world was shocked some years ago when Sharia Law was instituted in supposedly secular Nigeria, demanding the stoning of adulteresses, beatings for not covering up, and amputations of limbs of thieves.

Around the world, Muslim apologists insist that Boko Haram does not represent Islam, which, they say, does not accept violence and crime in any form. However, if one believes literally in the model for behavior promoted in the Koran itself, Islamists represent a possible interpretation of their religion. Warfare against "unbelievers" is urged in Koranic stories, including torture, beheadings, and the enslavement of all women and girls for sex and work. The model of marriage to a 6-year-old girl (with marital rights beginning at 9) is the Prophet Mohammad's own model.

Of course, such literalism defies centuries of other jurisprudence and practices when Islam had many faces. The literalists today (including Al Qaeda and the Saudi Wahhabi establishment) cherry-pick at will from the three Muslim texts: the Koran, the Hadith (recollected sayings and deeds of the prophet), and the Sharia (law), which had many changes until it was calcified in the 12th century. The early years of the struggle to create Islam should not be a model of how a once sophisticated world religion should behave. The Islamists (literalists) are enshrining a romanticized (and imaginary) version of their religion's origins.

Along with Boko Haram, other lethal sects are emerging throughout the Muslim world, ready for warfare, first against fellow Muslims, and then against Western or Christian targets. This is part of Islam's fever that is like all the other religious fevers that roiled Christianity and Judaism in the past. Like any fever, the patient will either die or change into something more civilized.

The US is working with Nigeria and other African states threatened by similar poisonous cults. With most of them, this is like rolling a rock uphill.

674 words

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