

Where does the moderate Muslim majority stand on terrorism?

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Thailand
August 2005
<http://chaamjamal.com>

In southern Thailand as in other parts of the world that have been subjected to mayhem by Islamic extremists, there appear to be credible moderate voices from the Islamic community that have come forth to condemn these acts as barbaric and un-Islamic. The chorus of condemnations has been widespread and sustained but it rings a little hollow in the absence of a proactive and effective response.

Consider for example that there has not been a Fatwa of any kind issued against the terrorists. The only Fatwa I know of was issued by an inconsequential Muslim council in Spain and it was in fact a rather banal statement of condemnation and nothing more.

Compare that with the Fatwa against author Salman Rushdie. This man wrote a piece of fiction, a part of which was considered to be offensive to Muslims. The Muslim clergy responded by issuing a Fatwa declaring the author to be a false Muslim and calling for his death. This Fatwa made it the affirmative duty of Muslims everywhere to kill Mr Rushdie on sight. There has been no Fatwa of this nature against known terrorists. One can only conclude that acts of terrorism carried out in the name of Islam have not offended Muslims nearly as much as a few words in a work of fiction.

When the media carried a story that the Americans in Guantanamo flushed a Quran down a toilet, Muslims around the world took to the streets to protest what they considered to be a desecration of Islamic values. Many of these protests turned violent and they resulted in injuries and even deaths. Some of the protesters were so overcome that they found it necessary to carry out acts of self-immolation. Contrast that with the vapid response of the world's Muslims to Islamic terrorism.

The reason for their non-reaction can only be that regardless of what their scholars might opine in carefully worded statements of condemnation, in their hearts Muslims actually feel that these acts of terrorism are justified. Therefore the difference between mainstream Muslims and the lunatic fringe is not one of ideology but one of courage. In that sense, the terrorist is actually a kind of hero for he has acted where the meek have not.

If that were not so and if the Muslim condemnations of terrorism were made in earnest there would have been protests of at least the same severity as those against Qurans in toilets and there would have been Fatwas declaring terrorists to be false Muslims along with a death sentence on the known ringleaders.

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