MOSLEMS DENOUNCE MOSLEM TERROR

A useful update to TTP's "Gresham and the Currency of Islam" last week. Let's see if the Voices of Peace claimed by this essay in Singapore's main newspaper gain strength or will soon be muffled. -JW

Moslems around the world are increasingly speaking out against the Islamist militants behind the recent terrorist attacks in Russia and Indonesia. In the wake of these recent attacks, there has been a chorus of condemnation of extremism.

From Jakarta to London, Cairo to Paris, Moslems have been calling radio talk shows, writing newspaper columns and firing off letters to the media condemning terrorist acts in the name of Islam. These voices are crying out against the hatred and intolerance towards the West that remains widespread in Moslem communities. The violence of those who claim to be defenders of the faith, they argue, only tarnishes Islam's reputation.

Jakarta television station MetroTV has been inundated with calls and SMS messages from Indonesians calling on Moslems not to defend the bombing which killed 11 people outside the Australian Embassy last week.

Typical was Jakarta resident Syaeful, who said: "Moslems in this country should not protest if the perpetrators are found to have indeed been Moslems." The comments seem to reflect a greater acceptance among ordinary Indonesians that terrorism is an issue that the Moslem community must urgently address.

In a column in yesterday's Tempo magazine, Mr Ullil Abshar Abdalla of the Liberal Islam Network joined the chorus of condemnation: "I regret that Moslem leaders are fearful when certain groups of Moslems are identified as the perpetrators of terrorist acts, as if this would tarnish the name of Islam. Why are they so afraid? It will do a lot of good if leaders are open about criticizing their own community, instead of being defensive."

In Singapore, Mr Masood Mohajer wrote an impassioned letter to The Straits Times in reaction to the Jakarta blast: "Shame on those who use the name of Islam or any other religion to commit these heinous and egregious acts of terror... The time has come for all Moslems to say: Enough, enough is enough."

In a BBC radio show this week on worldwide Moslem reactions to the Beslan and Jakarta atrocities, British Moslem Jamal Ahmad echoed that sentiment: "Moslems should basically stop making all these excuses most of the time and start dealing with the problems in our own religion and our own community, not because of the religion but the way religion is interpreted, especially by these extremists."

A leading French expert on Islam, Gilles Kepel, told Reuters this week that Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaeda group has left a trail of freelance terror and chaos that is backfiring on the Moslem world: “It was Osama's hope that the Sept 11, 2001 attacks on America would mobilize the masses in Moslem countries to bring Islamist rulers to power.
But all they have succeeded in doing is creating imitators whose bloody attacks are undermining their cause by creating uncontrolled strife. Three years after Sept 11, the Jihad has turned against those who launched it.” Mr. Kepel is the head of Middle East Studies at the Institute of Political Studies in Paris.

Condemnation of terrorism is also on the rise in the Middle East.

Islamic columnist Ahmed Bahgat, writing in Egyptian daily Al-Ahram, lamented how the images of bloodied Russian victims in Beslan “showed Moslems as monsters fed by the blood of children.” Grand Sheikh Mohammed Sayed Tantawi, Egypt's top Moslem cleric and the leading Sunni authority in the Moslem world, told kidnappers and terrorists: “You are taking Islam as a cover, and it is a deceptive cover. Those who carry out the kidnappings are criminals, not Moslems.”

Voices of Peace such as these seem on the rise throughout the Moslem world.