

2016 United Nations World Interfaith Harmony Week
Event Report: Voices of Moderate Islam

“Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed.”
UNESCO Constitution 1946

Event Name: Voices of Moderate Islam

Event Description: Initiated on 24 August 2010 and continuing through today, the Voices of Moderate Islam (VoMI) is a multi-faceted Strategic Communications initiative aimed at highlighting the values and beliefs of Islam through a series of multi-faith seminars, symposiums, and conferences.

Event Goal: VoMI aims to educate people who have received only a singular view of Islam through the messages and actions of radical extremist organizations.

Event Manager: Brigadier General Aref Al-Zaben, Jordanian Armed Forces/Arab Army

Event Point of Contact: Mr. Jim Johnson

Event Summary:

VoMI has been in effect for over five years and has included over 100 events in multiple countries. This program is a multi-faceted series of events that stretches across varied institutions and segments of society. Born from intellectual analysis of why radical extremism was so deeply rooted in areas of global conflict, Voices of Moderate Islam (VoMI) was first initiated in Afghanistan in 2010. This program brought 40 Afghan local leaders who were under the influence of Taliban radical extremism to Amman, Jordan for religious discussions and then to the Umrah in Mecca. The principles of VoMI were validated as the Cycle of Failure was reversed in two Afghan provinces. The VoMI Program is nested with the efforts established with The Amman Message. Issued in 2005 by H.M. King Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein in Amman, Jordan. The Amman Message sought to declare what Islam is and what it is not, and what actions represent it and what actions do not. Its goal was to clarify to the modern world the true nature of Islam and the nature of true Islam.

Event Highlights:

- *Event #1:* From 24 August 2010 to 14 September 2010, the VoMI Program took 40 Afghan local leaders who were under the influence of Taliban radical extremism to Amman, Jordan for religious discussions and education. While in Amman, they met with His Majesty, King Abdullah II, who personally reinforced the values of the Amman Message. The Afghan leaders were exposed to an environment where multi-faith harmony exists and creates an environment of spiritual enrichment for all. The Afghan leaders also came to understand the beliefs of Traditionalist Islam, to which they were not exposed to in Afghanistan. From Jordan, they traveled to Mecca for the Umrah. Upon returning to their communities as Hajji, these leaders reversed the cycle of frustration that was fueling conflict and war. After this event casualty rates and attacks on coalition forces dropped 450% in the communities of these Afghan leaders.

Voices of Moderate Islam (VoMI)

VoMI FACTS:

- 35 LOCAL LEADERS FROM TWO PROVINCES ; HASHEMITE CHARITY ORGANIZATION (HCO) IS OUR NGO IMPLEMENTING PARTNER
- THREE-PHASE OPERATION: AMMAN PHASE, UMRA PHASE, ENGAGEMENT PHASE
- INT'L INTERAGENCY TEAM EFFORT: THE WHITE HOUSE, COMISAF, US EMBASSY-KABUL, US EMBASSY-AMMAN, HIS MAJESTY KING ABDULLAH II, JORDANIAN MINISTRY OF HEALTH, JORDANIAN ARMED FORCES, SAUDI ARABIAN MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, US UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE, US DEPUTY SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

MEASURES OF EFFECT: COMMENTS FROM VoMI ATTENDEES

"THIS PROGRAM IS OUR LIFE. WE NEVER WOULD HAVE THOUGHT THE AMERICANS WOULD DO SOMETHING LIKE THIS FOR US."


"WHEN WE RETURN, EVERYONE WILL KNOW WHAT HAPPENED HERE. THEY WILL KNOW WHAT YOU DID."

"THE RESPECT YOU ARE SHOWING TO ISLAM AND AFGHANS WILL NEVER BE FORGOTTEN."

"WHO KNEW YOU HAD MUSLIMS IN YOUR ARMY? I CANNOT BELIEVE THIS. I THOUGHT YOU WERE ONLY ABOUT WAR. I SEE SO MUCH MORE NOW."

VoMI RETURNEE ENGAGEMENT PLAN:

ATTENDEES WILL BE EMPLOYED IN KEY LEADER ENGAGEMENTS, SHURAS, REINTEGRATION EVENTS, OFFICIAL CEREMONIES, TRITICAL RADIO BROADCASTS, SCHOOL AND MADRASSA OUTREACH INITIATIVES, RELIGIOUS OBSERVATIONS, AND MORE



- Event #2: On 10 October 2010, VoMI conducted a Reunion & Reintegration Ceremony in Afghanistan to expand the influence and reach of the original 34 VoMI attendees among their circles of influence. The event also exposed a larger audience to the VoMI program and message. Overall it reduced the relevance and effectiveness of the radical extremist narrative and facilitated a tolerant, moderate, Islamic message delivered by credible local Afghan and Jordanian key communicators tailored for a local Afghan audience.

14 OCT 10		Bayonet Information Operations: Voices of Moderate Islam Reunion & Reintegration Shura
		<p>Purpose /Mission</p> <p>On 14 OCT10 conduct the Voices of Moderate Islam Reunion & Reintegration IVO the Logar OCC-P on FOB Shank IOT to expand the influence and reach of the original 34 VoMI attendees among their circles of influence; expose a larger audience to the VoMI program and brand; identify attendee social networks; create opportunities for future VoMI-sponsored engagements; reduce the relevance and effectiveness of the INS narrative; facilitate a tolerant, moderate, Islamic message delivered by credible local Afghan and Jordanian key communicators tailored for a local Afghan audience</p>
		<p>Discussion</p> <p>The Voices of Moderate Islam initiative was initially launched by the 173rd ABCT (TF Bayonet) on 25 AUG 10 in partnership with TF Nashmi, the Jordanian Ranger Battalion attached to the 173rd and the US Department of State. As part of the program, 34 Afghan key communicators selected from across Logar and Wardak provinces were sent from FOB Shank to Amman, Jordan aboard a US C-130 to participate in a comprehensive Islamic seminar, debate, and immersion tour experience in Amman, Jordan. The purpose of the Amman phase of VoMI was to expose Afghan key communicators to a more moderate, tolerant version of Islam as practiced in Amman, Jordan and embodied in His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan's <i>Amman Message</i>. The capstone experience of the VoMI program occurred when the attendees were sent from Amman, Jordan, to Mecca, Saudi Arabia aboard a Jordanian C-130 for the Umra, or lesser Hajj. The Umra portion was led by Shaikh Najm Muhammad, senior Imam for TF Nashmi. When the attendees returned back to FOB Shank on 15 SEP 10, COL Johnson invited the Hajjis to come back to meet at the base one month later with five guests to continue and expand the dialogue about their VoMI experience. On 14 OCT 10, TF Bayonet hosted the VoMI Reunion and Reintegration Shura. 204 Afghans total were invited to the event and 270 attended far exceeding our expectations. The reunion was a multi-faceted inform, influence and inspire psychological operation. By end-of-day, over 307 Afghan and CF guests attended the event. The primary objectives of the Shura were to consolidate and expand the gains of the VoMI initiative among the original attendees and their friends and family; market the program as a youth movement to achieve long-term strategic effects; and to expose all attendees to the VoMI brand using a distinct logo that embodies the VoMI values of: Respect, Tolerance, and Unity.</p>
		<p>S-7s Assessment + Future Impacts</p> <p>VoMI is a program with tipping-point implications for the Afghan theater. The power of Islam among Afghans is central to their culture and psychology and the VoMI exploits that by investing in actions that simultaneously benefits the Afghan people while making the insurgent narrative irrelevant. By marketing the program to youth, and with financial assistance from external donors, assess that VoMI has exportability beyond Afghanistan with the power. Finally, assess that expanding the program too quickly without refining program TTP's in Afghanistan first, could be its undoing if not carefully managed.</p>
		

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Event #3 - On 15 November 2010, VoMI hosted its first Interfaith Harmony Event in Logar Province, Afghanistan. This powerful event built upon the initial gains of the first two events. This event grew into a quarterly annual event that has grown and continued in various countries to include the United States and Jordan.



- *100+ Continuous Events 2010-2016*: What started as a program to mitigate the risk of radical extremism in an area of conflict has grown into an international program that stretches across many institutions and many different parts of society. The VoMI message has been effective in the Middle East and in Western countries. The VoMI message has impacted potential terrorists, as well as hearing impaired children in Jordan. The VoMI message has positively changed the views of followers of many faiths. The VoMI message has had a lasting effect on religious leaders to engage in a dialogue based on two common fundamental religious Commandments; Love of God, and Love of the Neighbor, without nevertheless compromising any of their own religious tenets. Top 20 events from the 100+ events are listed below:

Event	Location	Participants
Initial Event - Umrah	Jordan, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia	35
VoMI Reunion	Afghanistan	145
Interfaith Harmony	Afghanistan	80
VoMI Initiative	Italy, Germany	80
VoMI Review -US Naval War College	USA	175
VoMI Review- US National Defense University	USA	250
Kuwaiti Staff College Seminar	Kuwait	125
Arab Thought Foundation	Morocco	750
US National Defense University Symposium hosted by King Abdullah II Special Operations Center	Jordan/USA/multi-national	125

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Event	Location	Participants
“Countering Radicalism: Implementing the Amman Message from Afghanistan and Beyond,” at the Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Islamic Studies Program at Harvard University	USA	150
US Naval Academy	USA	225
Jordan Defense College and Geneva Center for Strategic Policy	Jordan/multi-national	35
Al Bakr University	Jordan	150
Bahrain Staff College	Bahrain	55
Friends of National Security Organization	Jordan	75
Sofia Security Conference	Bulgaria	200
Hand's of the Jordanian Youth Commission	Jordan	75
Middle East University	Egypt	45
Egyptian Nasser Military Academy	Egypt	45
Al Amal Elementary School of the Hearing Impaired	Jordan	35

Event POC: Mr. Jim Johnson, jhjohnson3@gmail.com , +962-790139054