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**"U.S. BASED COUNCIL KEEN TO FOSTER US-ARAB TIES"  
EMIRATES NEWS AGENCY INTERVIEW WITH DR. JOHN DUKE ANTHONY**

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U.S. BASED COUNCIL KEEN TO FOSTER US-ARAB TIES  
ABU DHABI, FEB. 10, 2002 (WAM)

-- A US-Arab relationship that is characterized by a reciprocity of respect for American and Arab culture, values, moral principles and religious beliefs, a range of common as well as complementary strategic economic, political, commercial, defense, educational and developmental needs, concerns and interests and a mutuality of benefits, is the vision of the US based National Council on US-Arab Relations, according to its President and CEO Dr. John Duke Anthony.

In an interview with the Emirates News Agency (WAM), Dr. Anthony also stressed that there is a genuine, deep rooted and widespread eagerness in the United States among people from all walks of life who want to learn as much as they can about Arabs and Muslims - about Arab and Islamic culture, about Islamic beliefs, values, practices, and institutions - that has never previously existed in quite the same manner and degree before the September 11 attacks in the US. He said that the present time provides an unprecedented opportunity to enhance people's awareness and understanding of Arab and Islamic culture.

The National Council on US-Arab Relations which was founded in 1983, is based in Washington DC. It is a non-profit and non-governmental educational organization that sponsors cultural exchanges between American and Arab leaders in several walks of life. It has 18 regional, sub-regional and state committee branches throughout the United States. Dr. Anthony said that the National Council's mission is to conduct educational programs, projects, events, activities aimed at enhancing American awareness of the richness of the Arab culture and heritage, knowledge of the many important and diverse Arab contributions to world civilization and the contemporary as well as long term importance of the Arab world and its people to the United States and Americans and to a great many other countries and their people as well.

The National Council has also organized and escorted familiarization and study tours to select Arab countries for more than 200 members of Congress and other senior US foreign policy and defense advisors as well as legislative and communications affairs directors. Since 1986, it has served as the secretariat for 18 American multi-national corporations with interests, investments and other involvement in the economies of the six GCC countries.

In association with the corporate committee, the council co-publishes a thrice-weekly GulfWire, an e-mailed newsletter of news, regional voices and perspectives on issues pertaining to the US relationship with the GCC and its member countries. GulfWire is sent free of charge to 3,000 regular

subscribers who collectively send it to another 12,000 readers. There is no such publication to be found among any other organizations in either Europe or the US, he added.

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Following is the full text of the interview with Dr. John D. Anthony.

**WAM: What is the National Council on US- Arab Relations?**

**JDA: The National Council, which was founded in 1983, is a non-profit and non-governmental educational organization based in Washington, D.C. It has 18 regional, sub-regional, and state committee branches throughout the United States. The National Council sponsors cultural exchanges between American and Arab leaders in several walks of life: members of Congress, their chiefs of staff, foreign policy and defense advisers, and legislative and communications directors, university professors in the arts, humanities, and social sciences, future defense leaders from armed services academies and serving military commands, journalists and professors of mass communications, high school and university students, and select leaders of business, civic and professional associations.**

The National Council's vision is a U.S-Arab relationship that is characterized by a reciprocity of respect for American and Arab culture, values, moral principles, and religious beliefs, a range of common as well as complementary strategic, economic, political, commercial, defense, educational, and developmental needs, concerns, and interests, and a mutuality of benefits. The National Council's mission is to conduct educational programs, projects, events, and activities aimed at enhancing American awareness of the richness of Arab culture and heritage, knowledge of the many important and diverse Arab contributions to world civilization, and the contemporary as well as long-term importance of the Arab world and its people to the United States and Americans, and to a great many other countries and their people as well.

**WAM: What is the Council doing?**

**JDA: The National Council, in addition to administering a range of programs, activities, and public affairs services at the national level with the United States Congress and executive branch agencies and media that deal with the Arab world, is the only American non-Arab organization with a national headquarters and grassroots affiliates, 18 all totaled, that assist in conducting U.S.-Arab relations educational programs and activities throughout the United States.**

**One of the National Council and its affiliates' most important activities is an annual leadership development program: the Model Arab Leagues. From February through April each year since they began, the now 17 models in as many cities across the United States provide an extraordinary opportunity to build U.S.-Arab relations leadership skills and effectiveness annually for more than 2,000 university and high school students and 240 professors.**

Student delegates to the one and a half to three-day models prepare for the Models by studying parliamentary procedure and the foreign policies of the country they will represent among the 22 Arab league countries. Once at the Models, the students chair and participate in committee meetings that

address such perennial themes, issues, and challenges as Arab culture and society, Arab politics and foreign policies, Arab economics, Palestinian affairs, and Arab international defense and security relations. They have studied all of these topics in advance with the help of their teachers and professors, many of whom the National Council has previously taken as Malone Fellows to the Arab world where they have participated in Arab and Islamic studies programs in association with select Arab universities and a range of professional, business, and civic associations. At the Models, the students, with their professors serving as informal advisers, draft resolutions, hold caucuses with like-minded delegates representing other Arab countries, deliver speeches in support of the policies and positions of the country they are representing, work at building coalitions with other delegations, and meet in plenary sessions to try and achieve a successful outcome for "their country's" viewpoints.

All of this takes place in competition with other students representing different Arab countries and in front of adult judges with experience in Arab affairs. At the end of the Models the judges award certificates to individual students and delegations whose performance in different categories of expertise was outstanding. In addition, the top 80 students qualify for participation in Arab and Islamic study-abroad programs in Kuwait, Morocco, Syria, and Yemen, and for professional internships working at the National Council and other international affairs organizations in Washington, D.C.

In this way, the National Council, together with hundreds of professors and the Council's grassroots affiliates and sister institutions, is preparing the American leaders of tomorrow who will work to improve, strengthen, and expand the U.S.-Arab relationship. Thus far, since the program began in 1984, more than 30,000 young Americans have participated in this program, and the number of young people that their professors teach annually exceeds 250,000 students. Altogether, the National Council also has taken professors from 750 American universities to participate in Arab and Islamic studies programs in close association with major universities and chambers of commerce in all of the GCC countries of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates as well as Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, and Yemen.

The National Council has also provided Arab world journalism internships for 55 recent graduates of American schools of journalism and mass communications. This program has enabled the coming generation of American media specialists on the Arab and Islamic world to get a head start in their careers by having their first post-graduate experience in an Arab and Islamic setting prior to launching their careers. Alumni of this program have gone on to careers with Reuters, Associated Press, Dow Jones, United Press International, Time Magazine, the Financial Times, Washington Times, and Aramco World after having worked for three or more months for Arab News, Gulf News, Khaleej Times, Kuwait Times, the Jordan Times, and Cairo Today.

The National Council, for ten years, has also held an annual U.S.-Arab policymakers conference. On each occasion, 130 among the highest-ranking American policymakers in the fields of diplomacy, defense, and commerce, as well as select academics and scholars from think tanks, congress, and the media have participated alongside Arab ambassadors, Arab league and Palestine authority officials and, occasionally, officials from Europe and Asia as well to explore ways of improving Arab and United States public and private sector relations. The National Council has also organized and escorted on familiarization and study tours to select Arab countries more

than 200 Members of Congress, their chiefs of staff, foreign policy and defense advisors as well as legislative and communications affairs directors.

And, since 1986, it has served as the secretariat for 18 American multinational corporations with interests, investments, and other involvement in the economies of the six GCC countries. In association with the corporate committee, the council co-publishes three times a week GulfWire, an e-mailed newsletter of news, regional voices, and perspectives on issues pertaining to the United States relationship with the GCC and its member-countries. GulfWire is sent free of charge to 14,000 regular subscribers. There is no such publication to be found among any of the other organizations in either Europe or the United States.

WAM: What needs to be done in the United States these days?

JDA: There are many things that need to be done. Regrettably, there are not the resources in hand to do them all at once or even in sequence. Yet, at the same time, it is important to note that, current mainstream U.S. media commentary to the contrary notwithstanding, certain parts of the atmosphere have never been more receptive, nor has the moment in terms of widespread recognition of the need to move forward been more propitious, than it is at the present time. That is, literally out of the ashes of what transpired in America on Sept. 11, 2001, there is a thirst, a genuine deep-rooted and widespread eagerness in the United States among people from all walks of life who want to learn as much as they can about Arabs and Muslims -- about Arab and Islamic culture, about Islamic beliefs, values, practices, and institutions - that has never previously existed in quite the same manner and degree before.

Amidst the close-mindedness that one will always find among any people anywhere, there are large numbers of people who previously were not so much biased against Arabs or Islam. Rather, they had not studied the issues about which they had formed opinions. They lacked knowledge and familiarization with the facts. This was the reason for their ignorance, misinformation, and misunderstanding - not malice or meanness. In this, there is an unprecedented opportunity to enhance people's awareness and understanding like never before.

WAM: What is the situation in the American government and public opinion on recent developments in the region?

JDA: The American government has many facets. The two most important of course are the administration and the Congress. But there are major differences in focus and emphasis within these branches.

On matters of foreign policy, the executive branch is almost always paramount; when it is not, Congress tries to step in and determine policy. However, Congress is never as well-informed as the administration.

In addition, most of its members are only too keen to please their constituents, many of whom know little about the inner workings of foreign policymaking and are either unaware or do not care about the interests of Arabs or Muslims. So, whenever Congress has the upper hand in this area, the country's foreign relations seldom, if ever, benefit much as a result.

On matters pertaining to Israel, Congress is predictably far more openly biased, rigid, and doctrinaire than the administration. For this reason, the administration has to be careful not to alienate Israel's many friends in the Congress. No one in the executive branch is unmindful that Congress provides the funding that the administration needs to conduct diplomacy and administer numerous international programs, including foreign aid.

Presently, the foreign policy dimensions of the administration at its core - the White House and the National Security Council - have shown a commendable ability to resist the inclinations of certain personalities in the Department of Defense that are known to be anti-Arab and/or pro-Israel.

When cited in the media, as is increasingly the case, these individuals include Assistant Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, Chairman of the Defense Advisory Board Richard Perle, and Deputy Assistant Secretary Douglas Feith. Each of these individuals are known inside and outside of government circles as among the most pro-Israel partisans in American national life. There are degrees of partisanship among the three, but Feith is unique in having actually resigned from the Reagan Administration in protest against the administration's 1981 decision to sell Saudi Arabia AWACs airplanes.

Dating from before 9-11 and accelerating since then, these individuals, and many who share their views, have expressed with growing frequency the view that Iraq must be confronted militarily sooner rather than later. Specialists believe that these same individuals are, at a minimum, indifferent to the relentless campaign, replete with leaks from the administration, being mounted against Saudi Arabia and Egypt by the mainstream U.S. media. Various congressional leaders echo the media and professional pundits' pounding of Cairo and Riyadh's foreign policies.

In the past year, individual Congressmen have displayed an unprecedented degree of rudeness towards Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and his Foreign Minister, Ahmad Maher As-Sayyid, in the course of their meetings with congressional committees involved in foreign affairs. Others appear not to care how their negative remarks about Saudi Arabia and other key Arab countries are received in the region. What is more, in the aftermath of 9-11, there has been a formidable wall of congressional opposition to re-examining the nature and substance of United States policies towards the Arab-Israeli conflict in terms of how those policies have negatively affected American national interests in the Arab countries, the Middle East, and the Islamic world.

No more than ten percent of the members of the Senate as well as the House of Representatives would be exceptions to the portrait I have painted here. The fact that their numbers are so few is its own indication that all is not well in the present relationship between Arabs and the United States in general, and between key Arab allies and the United States, in particular. As to what is likely to happen in the near-term, one needs to take note that the so-called "silly season" is about to begin in the United States. The phrase "silly season" has to do with the fact that, from February through November in years such as the present one that are even-numbered, political rationality often takes a back seat to emotionality.

In such years, all members of the lower house must stand for re-election and one-third of the Senate must do the same. This being the case, it is unlikely that the tenor and tone of public discourse on issues of interest and importance to Arabs and Muslims will become more refined or rational. This is often particularly the case with regard to issues about which the Israeli leadership has strong feelings, such as the ongoing Al-Aqsa Intifada. (The Emirates News Agency, WAM)

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