

GulfWire

Perspectives



April 5, 2004

Qatar and the United States: A View from Doha

By John Duke Anthony

Following is a report submitted by GulfWire's publisher who is attending Qatar's Fourth Annual Conference on Free Trade and Democracy

[Doha, Qatar - April 5, 2004] In a meeting four others and I participated in today with a top Qatari leader, several topics of interest to *GulfWire* readers were discussed. These included matters pertaining to Qatar's current April 5-6 hosting of the Fourth Annual Conference on Free Trade and Democracy; the implications of the U.S.' Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI); Qatar and the United States' recent signing of a Trade, Investment, and Finance Agreement en route a possible Free Trade Agreement; the impact in Qatar of U.S. visa restrictions leveled at foreign visitors since 9-11; and what he thought the American public most needed to hear regarding Iraq. Following, in the format of questions and answers, is an unofficial report of what transpired.

Q. This year's conference has brought together a large number of people of diverse experiences, specializations, and perspectives to exchange views. How do you compare this conference to the three previous ones?

A. Four years ago, we hoped 100 people might come. One hundred and twenty did. This year, more than 480 are here. Virtually every continent is well represented. Forty-eight Americans are attending. There would be more but for this being an important U.S. election year. The British and French delegations are substantially larger.

VISAS: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE RELATIONSHIP

Q. Since 9-11, how has the revision of America's visa policies for foreign visitors affected the Qatar-United States relationship?

A. What the United States did to tighten its rules and regulations regarding visitors after what happened to it on 9-11 is understandable. Revisions were necessary. Had 9-11 happened here, we would have done the same, possibly more. However, you asked about the impact. Aspects of the implementation have had a negative effect on both of us. This has particularly been the case in two areas: education and health care. Many of our students and others are fearful of how they will be treated at American airports upon arrival..

Q. ..But are they aware that there is a difference of viewpoint and even a degree of suspicion that distinguishes the American agencies involved? Do they know that one U.S. agency is tasked with issuing the visas and another one is responsible for receiving and processing the visa holders upon their arrival in the United States?

A. Yes, most do. But law enforcement officers everywhere share certain things in common. They seem to prefer having one overall policy. Many are more comfortable in administering a single position that applies to everyone. Few want to have to distinguish between different nationalities. This is understandable. The implementation of such a policy, however, can be harmful. In this case, it is. It is also unfair. It is not right to lump such widely diverse groups of foreigners together. From one country and its citizens to the next there are major differences. Some countries' nationals may warrant a heightened degree of scrutiny. Not all others do. Here many people feel that nothing they have done deserves their receiving the same kind of treatment as that applied to those of other countries.

Many of our students, as a result, have been hurt. They have chosen to go to school in Great Britain and France instead. This is costly to us both. You are hurt because the students you educate, when they return home, are often your best advocates. Both of us suffer in another way: the moderates in this region have been weakened.

In addition, many Qataris and other Arabs have sold their homes in the United States. A lot of families used to love taking their vacations in your country. Not many do so any more. Who would want to place either themselves or their children at risk of being humiliated upon arrival? Older people with special health care needs have been especially hard hit. Large numbers had grown accustomed to American medical services. Many now go elsewhere.

COOPERATION IN PROMOTING SHARED VALUES

Q. The U.S.' MEPI proposes to promote shared American and Arab values in such areas as democratization, human rights, and women's empowerment. It is something of which many Americans feel proud. Many in Europe, however, seem to be of a different view. How do you see the initiative?

A. Many have welcomed it. Not as many say so publicly. A major reason is their disappointment with your policies regarding Iraq and Israel. One thing for sure: in doing so, you have raised a lot of people's hopes. If you go back on your word, many will be disappointed. In their eyes, your image and reputation would pay a price.

STRENGTHENING PRIVATE SECTOR COOPERATION

Q. The recent conclusion of a Trade, Investment, and Finance Agreement (TIFA) represents major progress between the two countries' private sectors. This comes after the conclusion of a Free Trade Agreement between the United States and Morocco and one with Jordan. A third one, between the United States and Bahrain, is on the way. What do you see following the TIFA?

A. We seek the same, a Qatar-U.S. free trade agreement.

THE SITUATION IN IRAQ: MESSAGES ..

Q. When you meet with your fellow leaders in other Arab countries, what do

you and they agree are messages that the American public most needs to hear regarding Iraq?

A. We informed the United States from the beginning that it did not know what it was getting into in Iraq. The question was not what you would do to invade it. It was about what you would do afterwards. There are three key points here. One, U.S. troops would do well to get out of Iraq's cities. They need to withdraw to satellite points elsewhere. These need to be away from the urban centers. Authority for municipal affairs needs to be handed over to the Iraqis themselves. This needs to be done even if, as a result, the Iraqis end up committing errors.

Two big mistakes were made. They can be reversed. The first mistake -- to dismiss all the Baathist police authorities -- was huge. Under Saddam, which prominent leaders among the police were not Baathists? What realistic choice did they have? Dismissing the highest ranking police officials was understandable. Letting go such vast numbers was not. With the armed forces, it was the same. Deciding to fire the top one hundred officers, and those who were Saddam's relatives or among his closest supporters -- that made sense. Letting such vast numbers of soldiers go, with their diverse range of skills that would be necessary, did not. The price paid in terms of security and order is obvious.

Dr. John Duke Anthony, Publisher of *GulfWire*, is President and CEO of the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations. In addition to founding and heading the National Council since its inception in 1983, he has been a consultant to the U.S. Departments of Defense and State for more than three decades. The author of four books and more than 200 articles, essays, and chapters in other published works on the Arab countries, the Middle East, and the Islamic world, he has testified before Congressional committees and appeared on most mainstream American, British, and Arab television networks. Dr. Anthony is the only American to have attended each of the heads of state summits of the Gulf Cooperation Council since the GCC's establishment in 1981. He is also one of only two Americans to have served as an observer in all three of Yemen's parliamentary and presidential elections (1993, 1997, and 2003). In 1999, he was knighted by King Muhammad VI, who bestowed upon him the Order of Quissam Alouite, Morocco's highest honor for excellence.

Qatar's 4th Annual Conference on Free Trade and Democracy: Context and Perspective

by John Duke Anthony

GulfWire Perspectives

http://www.arabialink.com/Archive/GWPersp/GWP2004/GWP_2004_04_02.htm

Qatar's Heightened Profile

By John Duke Anthony

GulfWire Perspectives

http://www.arabialink.com/Archive/GWPersp/GWP2002/GWP_2002_10_27.htm

Visit the GulfWire Archive ~ ~ <http://www.ArabiaLink.com/Archive>

**GulfWire is a public service of the National Council on U.S.-Arab
Relations and the U.S.-GCC Corporate Cooperation Committee**

Independent commentary provided in 'GulfWire' and materials contained in the linked Internet sites do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations or the U.S.-GCC Corporate Cooperation Committee.

Visit <http://www.arabialink.com/GulfWire> for terms and conditions

Copyright 2004