



## Interview

**Ms. Yasmin Motamedi,  
Executive Director, Middle Eastern Affairs,  
U.S. Chamber of Commerce**

### ***Could you describe to us the international policy of the US Chamber?***

The Chamber leads a two-front battle to knock down trade barriers abroad and keep our markets open at home. Trade is no longer a luxury. It is in the vital self-interest of our nation. One-third of our economy is now trade dependent, and our future lies in international business because 95 percent of the world's consumers live outside the United States.

Trade skeptics are right on one score: too many markets abroad remain unfair and closed to the free flow of commerce. U.S. companies often find our intellectual property is being stolen, and our products are being pirated and counterfeited. But the answer isn't to close our markets—it's to open others and instill the rule of law. The five specific International priorities for us include:

- Level the playing field for international commerce by lowering barriers to trade and investment.
- Fight economic isolationism in all its forms, including undue restrictions on investment, procurement, exports, sourcing, and human capital.
- Champion innovation and intellectual property as vital for creating jobs, saving lives, and advancing economic growth.
- Align trade, regulatory, and competitive policy to ensure open and competitive markets.
- Shape the global agenda for energy security and climate change to promote American competitiveness.

### ***How do you work with your international counterparts and what are your goals?***

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce is actively engaged in building bridges for global commerce and establishing the relationships necessary to ensure that our members can succeed in international markets.

Abroad we advocate policies in foreign capitals that level the playing field. On emerging issues we work to be the first to

market in identifying and tackling opportunities. And we fix problems by helping members with overseas commercial issues. We work closely with our member companies and advocate for proinvestment policies that will impact the long-term investment climate in emerging economies.

To create jobs, drive innovation, and raise the standard of living, business must be able to operate in a stable legal and regulatory environment. The U.S. Chamber's experience in various emerging markets finds that for such an environment to emerge, it is imperative for the private sector to engage in the policymaking process. As the voice of business, the Chamber regularly leads advocacy efforts to create an environment conducive to economic development and growth.

Some of the priorities of the Chamber's Middle Eastern Affairs department are to:

- Provide information and access to the markets in the region to our members, and to ensure our members are not locked out of lucrative investment opportunities abroad.
- Deepen U.S.-Iraq trade and investment, including Iraq's accession to the WTO.

The U.S. Chamber leverages its established position as the premier business advocacy organization to serve the specific interests of American and Gulf-based entities in the U.S. Accordingly, the Chamber seeks to engage Gulf-based companies to support and provide strategic direction for this effort. In this regard, the Chamber's Middle East Affairs department works to:

- Ensure the U.S. market remains an attractive destination for Gulf-based investment.
- Press for continued trade discussions and engagement between United States and Gulf trade negotiators to facilitate cross-border trade.
- Continue to advocate for a more streamlined and predictable visa issuance process that will lower the hurdles to doing business.

- Advance a modernized export control process that is efficient, predictable, and supports U.S.-GCC commercial relations.

*The U.S. Chamber and the FGCCC have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) last October in Washington D.C. What are your expectations regarding this MoU?*

The FGCCC and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce entered into an MoU last October to work to advance the business relationship between the GCC and the United States.

This will also serve as a way of increasing the brand identity of both organizations.

*To date are there any examples of successful cooperation between Gulf SME's and American companies?*

Many partnerships have been forged between U.S. and Gulf companies. One particular example involves the launch of the Harir tomato paste processing plant in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, which was reinvigorated by U.S. private equity company, the Marshall Fund Capital Advisors. Since its launch last year, the factory has been a successful and growing operation.

*What, according to you, will be the major overall and sector by sector changes that will take place in short and medium terms?*

As the global economy and the Gulf region, in particular, grows and advances, technology and energy are the two sectors that appear to have the most potential for fast-paced change in the next five to ten years. The Gulf is already a hub of innovation in developing new energy technologies. Masdar, Qatar Science and Technology Park, and King Abdullah City are prime examples of the work and advancement the Gulf is experiencing in these industries.

*You have visited the Gulf region last February (Bahrain and Qatar). What are your impressions and how do you evaluate the GCC economies today and specifically the GCC Private sector?*

There is an enormous amount of potential for growth in the GCC countries. As we work to emerge from this global recession, I foresee major growth in all of the GCC countries. During these visits, we met with Bahraini and Qatari governmental officials as well as the local Chambers of Commerce. The visits were a first for the senior Chamber leadership to these countries. We were most impressed with the forward thinking approach of these two governments in the promotion and enhancement of their respective economies. For instance, the Qatari Ministry of Energy & Industry plays a vital role in the industrial development

process of Qatar. The Ministry's efforts in the development and support of industrial ventures towards diversification of national income sources, encouragement of private sector to increase contribution to the industrial development, and plans to integrate between oil and gas sector, the manufacturing sector and other sectors, among other things, is momentous. The U.S. business community applauds Qatar's move in the last several years toward economic and market liberalization, and economic diversification beyond the petrochemical industries.

*How do you envision the Gulf Region and its private sector in 10 years?*

There is great potential for Gulf countries to become global leaders in a number of arenas. Political stability, legal reform, sound economic policy, leadership and innovation are necessary elements for achieving this status. The countries that are able to promote and achieve these ideals will see enormous expansion in the coming years. With the region increasingly offering an environment that encourages investment, the Gulf is poised for enormous private sector expansion.

Environment/climate change, alternative energy, and financial services (including Islamic banking) are all sectors that the Gulf already has a leading edge on and could really capitalize on in the decade ahead.

We are already witnessing this with Saudi Arabia, which was recently ranked by the World Bank's "Doing Business 2010" report to be amongst the top 20 countries with business-friendly economies. Additionally, it is widely acknowledged that in the midst of a global economic downturn, Qatar is faring better than most other nations, and this is due to the forward looking economic policies of the government of Qatar.

Additionally, Qatar is one that encourages creativity and entrepreneurship, and that tells us that Qatar will continue to grow and thrive in the coming years and decades.

This is the kind of environment that attracts talented and intelligent professionals.

Beyond that, Qatar's dedication to education – setting up these state-of-the-art facilities for students – will be the key to continuing Qatar's influence and leadership role across the globe. Gulf countries including Abu Dhabi, Qatar, Bahrain and Dubai are focusing on another sector, tourism, sports tourism, in particular to raise their profiles worldwide in addition to further diversifying their economies away from oil.