



“The GCC has a very bright future in our view”

Interview

Mr. Neal Johnson Chairman of the Middle East Council of American Chambers of Commerce (MECACC)

The Middle East Council of American Chambers of Commerce (MECACC) has established itself as the voice of American business in the Gulf region. What do you mean by “the voice”?

MECACC represents the ten American Chambers of Commerce in the Gulf Cooperation Council Countries and in Iraq, and those Chambers of Commerce in turn represent more than 700 companies doing business in the GCC and Iraq, and more than 35,000 United States citizens living and working in the GCC and Iraq.

MECACC does not attempt to lobby or influence host governments in the GCC and Iraq.

MECACC instead lobbies the United States federal government in Washington to adopt policies and practices likely to enhance the competitiveness of United States business in the GCC and Iraq. MECACC focuses on those issues which are common to all United States businesses and individual United States citizens in the region. It is in this specific but important sense that MECACC is “the voice” of United States business in the region.

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What does the MECACC represent today in the Gulf region?

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The MECACC represents more than 700 US companies doing business in the Gulf. Moreover, United States sales of goods and services to the GCC have totaled more than \$20 billion annually. This creates or sustains more than half a million jobs in the United States.

Could you please describe us, which are the main sectors providing main resources? What are the sectors creating jobs?

All export-related sectors are creating jobs domestically in the United States. Particularly important, however, are the defense, telecoms and technology, transport (especially air), automotive and services sectors.

How are American businessmen and businesswomen promoting US exports in the face of intense international competition?

Very good question! The United States is a continental country, and its domestic markets are vast. One of MECACC’s perennial concerns is getting the United States federal government to pay more attention to important export markets such as the GCC. MECACC moreover advocates policy changes in the United States to meet intense international competition. Examples of such policy changes over the years have included secondment

of standards advisors to the GCC, and adoption of tax policies which are competitive with those of other exporting nations.

What do you mean by the MECACC is committed “to leveling the playing field” for US companies?

By “leveling the playing field” MECACC means changing United States policies so as to enable United States businesses to compete directly, robustly, and successfully with their global competitors. The United States is out of step in a number of areas, particularly with respect to corporate and individual tax policies, unilateral sanctions, and software releasability.

Do you feel difference with the countries (Oman, Bahrain) that have signed a Free Trade Agreement and the other that haven’t? How do you measure the impact of the Free Trade Agreement for the USA?

MECACC supports free and open trade. MECACC does not take a view as to whether Free Trade Agreements should exist at the national or at the GCC level; this is a matter for the governments of the region. The two GCC Free Trade Agreements, particularly the Omani Agreement, are recent developments, and it probably is too early to assess their contributions to bilateral trade

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with the United States.

How do you envision the Gulf Region in 10 years? What will be the next challenges for the US-Gulf Countries relations?

The GCC has a very bright future in our view. In the unfolding global economic crisis the GCC is one of the very few parts of the world where the nearer and medium term still hold great promise.

The United States has enjoyed an excellent business reputation over many decades in GCC, but that began to change in recent years. In my personal view the next challenge the United States faces, one which the Obama Administration in my view is likely to meet, will be to return to normal times, in which the business of America in this part of the world once again is business.

