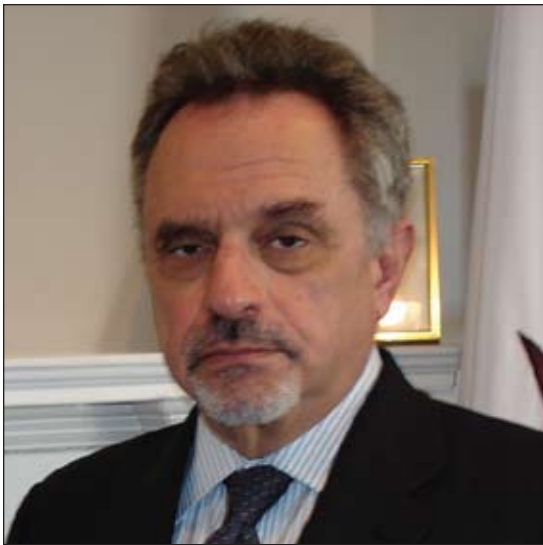


Strengthening U.S.-Qatar Business Relationships

An Interview with H.E. Patrick Nickolas Theros,
President and Executive Director, U.S.-Qatar Business Council



Patrick Nickolas Theros

EDITORS' NOTE A former U.S. Ambassador to Qatar, Patrick Nickolas Theros previously served as U.S. Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism, where he was responsible for the coordination of all U.S. Government counterterrorism activities outside the United States, and held numerous other positions since joining the Foreign Service in 1963. A graduate of Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service, he completed advanced studies at the American University in Washington, DC, and the Universidad Centroamericana in Managua. He also completed the Armed Forces Staff College at Norfolk, Virginia, and was appointed a research fellow at the National Defense University. He is fluent in Spanish, Arabic, and Greek.

COMPANY BRIEF The U.S.-Qatar Business Council (www.usqbc.org) is a nonprofit, private sector organization that provides a forum for discussion of key economic, commercial, and other issues of interest to American companies doing or planning to do business in Qatar. The Council also provides information and sponsors events and programs that provide insight into Qatar and its international and business environment. As the only American organization focused on improving commercial relations with Qatar, the Council plays a leading role in the expansion of the bilateral relationship. The Council is a membership-based organization, and its focus lies on providing value-added services to corporate members in the United States, in Qatar, and around the world.

After years of close involvement with Qatar, what is your assessment of the country's rapid growth and the changes it has brought?

Qatar's rapid economic growth since HH Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani became Emir in June 1995, has benefited from both inspired leadership and a vibrant and increasingly sophisticated business community. The Emir's vision goes far beyond the formation of wealth; he has often stated his intent to put the national wealth to the service of Qatar's citizenry through dramatic enhancement of education and the unshackling of the energies of Qataris, men and women alike, to contribute to and participate in the building of their country and society. Qatar's new wealth has been sensibly allocated toward investment in production facilities, the elimination of sovereign debt, the modernization of educational systems, and, finally, the provision of oxygen for the establishment of a modern social, political, and economic system. Qatar, first among Arab countries, abolished all censorship in 1996 and remains today as the only Arab state without a Ministry of Information, a pseudonym for the censorship department elsewhere. Qatar's emphasis on education, health, and social development has transformed the life of the average Qatari citizen in ways that differ markedly from rapid change in neighboring countries. Change in Qatar is less about its amazing increase in material wealth than about a rapid movement toward participatory government characterized by elections with universal suffrage. This is further supported by the only uncensored Arab-owned worldwide TV channel, Al Jazeera, and the opportunity for the most advanced university education in the entire Arab world.

This growth has not been without difficulties. The relatively small population of Qatar has strained at managing these momentous changes. However, Qatar has become a world leader in its utilization of great wealth to provide more than just material benefits and consumerism for its population.

The U.S.-Qatar Business Council represents more than 30 members that are doing business in Qatar. What are your members finding best, and most challenging, about doing business in the country?

Our members universally believe that doing business is as, or more, transparent in Qatar as anywhere else in the region. Opportunities for business have exceeded their wildest expectations. Today, our member companies have invested upward of \$70 billion in the Qatari

economy. However, I do not wish to minimize the challenges. The Government of Qatar has been working overtime to change antiquated legislation and other structural obstacles that have inhibited many American companies from realizing the full potential of success in Qatar. The Qatari government is meeting these challenges, and new investment reforms and the establishment of the Qatar Financial Centre have gone a long way toward streamlining investment and business participation in the state. Yet, many American companies still have difficulty coping with the fact that business success in Qatar requires physical presence in the country to build personal rapport and to demonstrate their investment in the relationship. Qataris in both the public and the private sectors want to meet their business partners before conducting major business; business in Qatar does not start with e-mails.

In what ways do you see the bilateral relationship between the United States and Qatar evolving in coming years?

The United States and Qatar enjoy the best possible relationships in the business, educational, and strategic fields. U.S. companies represent 90 percent of investment in the hydrocarbon field. Six of the most prestigious American universities have established seamless and fully accredited branch campuses at Doha's Education City. Without the use of Qatari facilities over the past seven years, America's regional strategic posture would be severely limited. However, we cannot rest on our laurels. The new administration must address the inconsistencies between our rhetoric and our actions toward democracy in the region, or we risk further eroding our moral and strategic position. Equally important, the proliferation of new big players in Asia and their very aggressive private and public sector companies have already challenged our position in a rapidly growing Qatari economy. American business must engage more closely, or we risk losing our advantage.

What else should those exploring opportunities in Qatar be aware of?

Qatar is still one of the best kept secrets in the Gulf. I hope that many people take the opportunity to come and visit Qatar, to spend some time here, and to get know the people of this small but incredibly dynamic country. They need to learn that this country is the microcosm of an exciting experiment, an adventure, in the transformation of a region that will become only more important in the future. ●