Dr. John J. Hamre: Good morning, everybody. My name is John Hamre. I’m the president of CSIS. And it’s – I always get the great benefit of being able to open and attend conversations I want to participate in without doing any other work, you know? (Laughs.) It’s really a good thing. And that’s – Greg Poling has been doing all the work. I want to say welcome to all of you, especially, Ambassador. Thank you. We’re delighted you’re here. We look forward to your thoughts. You know, it’s – and I was saying to the ambassador, there’s a great deal of enthusiasm these days about Vietnam. And that’s really a good thing.

You have to watch out that we’re a little too enthusiastic sometimes, because there are a lot of Americans, their enthusiasm about Vietnam is really a way to say they’re unhappy about China, or something or other, you know? So we got to watch out for, you know, excessive enthusiasms, you know, here, and really to deal with Vietnam as Vietnam, you know, and the remarkable transition that’s been underway these recent years. You know, I talked to a lot of business guys, and they find Vietnam to be the most exciting place in Southeast Asia. And I hear that often. And, you know, so I think we need to explore, you know, the attributes, and the benefits, and the and the policies of Vietnam on its own, not being a derivative element of some other geopolitics. So that’s what our hope is for this conference.

And, you know, it’s unusual to have a dedicated conference. I think there’s probably only two or three other countries where we have a dedicated conference focused on a nation. And that’s now the importance of Vietnam for America, you know? And I think it’s a bright new day. It’s a remarkable transition. In my own personal life, I’ve lived long enough to go through the very lows and now coming to the highs. And it’s exciting for us. So delighted to have all of you here. You’re all going to play a very important role in the quality of this conference because you’ve got to be asking good, hard questions to the speakers. That’s what’s going to make this conference stronger and even more meaningful. So, Greg, let me ask you, come up to the stage and get this started for real. I do want to say thank you to all of you for coming and being here with us. And, Ambassador, thank you and your team. It’s been great to work with you. And we look forward to this wonderful morning. Thank you. (Applause.)

Gregory B. Poling: Thank you. When you come up after Dr. Hamre – there you go – I either need a box or I need to lower the microphone. Thank you all so much for coming this morning. It’s a real pleasure to see you all. This is, as Dr. Hamre said, somewhat unusual for us. We don’t usually in the Southeast Asia Program have the space and the interest for a full-day conference on just one member of ASEAN. And the fact that we can speaks to the importance of the U.S.-Vietnam relationship.
So before we formally get into it, I am Greg Poling. I direct the Southeast Asia Program here at CSIS, as well as the Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative. And everything you’re going to hear today is, of course, going to be on the record, streamed on our website. Both those watching online and here in person will have the chance to ask questions throughout the keynotes and the panels. The event is all made possible with the support of Energy Capital of Vietnam and the Vietnam-America Research and Education Foundation.

And we hope that this is not just a one-off conference. In fact, we are using it to formally launch a new Vietnam initiative here at CSIS. This will be the first standalone initiative for a single country within the Southeast Asia Program at CSIS. And we certainly hope it won’t be the last. But I think it entirely appropriate that it begins with Vietnam, given the close cooperation that we have with counterparts like the DAV in Hanoi, and with the embassy, and with all of you, and the enormous interest that we get here in Washington among both the U.S. government and up on the Hill, but also the private sector, as you’re going to hear throughout the day.

Let me start with a few words about our work on Vietnam, and I think how Vietnam has evolved overall here in Washington. As Dr. Hamre said, there is sometimes a bit too much enthusiasm to view the Vietnam relationship through the prism of China. And, undoubtedly, our strategic alignment on certain things related to China, including the South China Sea and economic coercion, helps provide ballast to this relationship. But the relationship is older than our current tensions with China. And I have no doubt that it will extend well beyond the relationship with China.

Vietnam is an enormous draw for U.S. business interest, for U.S. educational interest. Our ability to put our difficult history behind us has provided a degree of stability and broad-based support in the relationship that is rare to find. I’m sure many in this room, and certainly many throughout Washington, have a personal connection to the war and are very happy to see the continued deepening of the partnership as a turning page of the history. Me, myself, my father deployed in ’68. And, you know, when I tell him that we now have a Vietnam initiative at CSIS and Vietnamese companies are investing billions of dollars in auto manufacturing in North Carolina, and that, you know, U.S. defense contractors had the biggest boost at Vietnam’s first-ever defense expo last year, those things are a bit mind boggling for him. We have to step back at times and appreciate the rapidity and the remarkable progress that’s been made over just the last 30 years, since we’ve normalized ties.

Now with that, I’ll leave it to actual experts on the bilateral relationship to delve in more in the panels we’re going to have today on economics, and
high tech, and energy, then on security cooperation, and finally on issues related to educational exchange and addressing legacies of war. But first, we're going to start off with a keynote. We're going to have a prerecorded message from Minister of Foreign Affairs Bui Thanh Son first. Just a few minutes, to provide a view from Hanoi. And then I'm going to call up our good friend, the ambassador. But, first, let's run the video with Minister Son.

(Video presentation begins.)

Minister Bui Thanh Son: Dr. John Hamre, president of CSIS, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to deliver the opening remarks at this important workshop on Vietnam-U.S. relations. The year 2023 marks an historic milestone in Vietnam-U.S. relations. In the spirit of leaving the past behind, overcoming differences, building on commonalities, looking towards the future, our bilateral ties was upgraded to comprehensive strategic partnership for peace, cooperation, and sustainable development during President Joe Biden’s visit to Vietnam.

This important development reflects the maturity of the relationship after almost three decades of normalization and 10 years of comprehensive partnership. It opens up a new exciting era, finally realizing President Ho Chi Minh’s vision of having full cooperation with United States that is profitable to the whole world, as set out in his letter to President Truman in 1946. The upgrade of Vietnam-U.S. relationship is an important component of Vietnam’s foreign policy of independence, self-reliance, peace, cooperation, development, diversification, and multilateralization of international relations, that aims at bringing about benefits to the people of both countries and, at the same time, contributing to peace, cooperation, and sustainable development in Southeast Asia and the world at large.

Both sides are now focusing on implementation. The 10 pillars of comprehensive strategic partnership, of which economic and trade remains the driver of our relations. And new areas of cooperation, such as green and digital transition, climate change, innovation, semiconductor, artificial intelligence, will provide fresh impetus to take Vietnam-U.S. relations forward. I would like to express our appreciation to the CSIS, a leading think tank, for your consistent, strong support for Vietnam-U.S. relations over the years. I welcome the CSIS U.S.-Vietnam Initiative, which will help strengthen exchanges of views and ideas, fostering mutual understanding on both sides. In this spirit, I wish the workshop a great success with many fresh and bold ideas on how to strengthen Vietnam-U.S. cooperation in the years ahead within the framework of the comprehensive strategic partnership. I thank you all for your attention.

(Applause.)

(Video presentation ends.)
Mr. Poling: Well, thank you to Minister Son and the team at the embassy for helping us get the video from Hanoi.

And now let me introduce our keynote speaker to open the morning. We'll be hearing from Ambassador Nguyen Quoc Dzung, who is the seventh ambassador of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, has been posted here in Washington since January 2022. Foreign Service officer for more than three decades now, he's held various positions, including most recently from 2016 to 2022 as the deputy foreign minister and Vietnam’s representative to the ASEAN senior officials meetings.

Ambassador Dzung, please. (Applause.)

Ambassador Nguyen Quoc Dzung: Thank you so much. And good morning. Thank you, Greg, President Dr. John Hamre.

Well, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, first allow me to express my heartfelt thanks to CSIS for offering me this gracious invitation, you know, this opportunity. My gratitude also extends to those who are joining us in person and virtually. I know you are all friends – good friends of Vietnam, and it is an honor to address this esteemed audience as we stand at the threshold of the new chapter in Vietnam-U.S. ties.

I wish to emphasize the significance of academic cooperations and exchange in fostering the bonds between Vietnam and the United States. This collaboration plays a pivotal role by strengthening mutual understanding, the bedrock of any enduring partnership and friendship. Moreover, it serves as a conduit for vital information sharing, a critical factor in shaping successful policymaking processes. Academic cooperation also stands as a forum where both sides can engage in discussion on difficult or sensitive issues, contributing to the effective implementations of policies.

So, thus, in this spirit, I highly appreciate CSIS U.S.-Vietnam initiatives. This is very timely after our leaders agreed to elevate the relation to the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, or CSP for short, last September. It aligns with the growing interests and demands of scholars and public in both nations regarding our bilateral ties. As president said, big enthusiasm on that. The initiative, along with today's seminars, mirrors the goals articulated in the September 2023 Vietnam-U.S. joint statement, and represents a tangible step in implementing the CSP.

So before going through a discussion on various aspects of Vietnam-U.S. partnerships, allow me to provide you with a brief recap of Vietnam-U.S. relations, especially the decision to elevate our bilateral ties in September
2023. I aim to address three fundamental questions. First, why the upgrade, why now, and why CSP? Second, how does Vietnam perceive this new partnership? And third, what steps does Vietnam plan to take to ensure that its CSP with the United States reaches its full potential?

So, ladies and gentlemen, let me go right into the first major question: Why an upgrade, why now, and why CSP and not some other form of partnership? As you can surely recall, as we mentioned many times, during President Joe Biden’s historic visit on Vietnam on September 10th last year; the top leaders of our two countries issued a joint statement on the elevation of U.S.-Vietnam ties to a CSP for the purposes of peace, cooperations, and sustainable development. This upgrade, though historic, is a natural progression.

It is, first and foremost, a crucial step that helps to realize Vietnam’s longstanding goal for full cooperations with the United States, as articulated by President Ho Chi Minh in his letter to President Harry Truman in February 1946.

Second, it provides an updated framework of cooperations, one that takes into account the remarkable growth in Vietnam’s shift in U.S. policy towards the region as well as the noteworthy trends and developments that have shaped the region and the world since 2013.

Thirdly, it represents the next logical step following a decade of implementing our Comprehensive Partnership. The unmistakable growth in Vietnam-U.S. ties, highlighted by a nearly fourfold increase in bilateral trade between 2013 and 2023, underscores the imperative for an upgraded partnership.

Finally, the upgrade is in line with Vietnam’s foreign policy independence, self-reliance, multilateralizations, and diversification of ties. Besides, it should be noted that by September 2023 the United States remained the only UNSC permanent member with whom Vietnam did not have a strategic partnership.

Now, why did we choose 2023 as a year for an upgrade? The timing aligns perfectly with the 10th anniversary of the Comprehensive Partnership, demonstrating a commitment on both sides to ever deepening cooperations. The strong political will and tireless efforts of our senior leaders, initiated by the pivotal phone call between General Secretary of the Party Nguyen Phu Trong and President Biden in March 2023, helped to accelerate this process.

Furthermore, respective policies of Vietnam and the United States toward the region created favorable conditions for the elevations of the Vietnam-
U.S. partnership. In November 2022, the United States upgraded its ties with ASEAN to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Vietnam, for its part, made concerted efforts throughout 2023 to strengthen relation with other countries in the region, including Australia, Indonesia, and Singapore.

So why a CSP and not some other form of partnership? Establishing a CSP is not a decision taken by chance; it must align with the strategic interests of both nations. For Vietnam, these interests revolve around peace, independence, and development, as embodied in our vision for socioeconomic development 2030 and 2045. Recognizing and sharing these goals, the United States has committed to supporting Vietnam in achieving its objectives.

In addition, though our two countries continue to work together effectively under the 2013 Comprehensive Partnership, Vietnam-U.S. ties had long achieved strategic significance in many, many facets, especially our joint efforts to address regional and global issues. A CSP, then, is not just a label; it establishes a framework that enables Vietnam and the United States to enhance the scope and substance of our cooperation for many years to come.

So, ladies and gentlemen, this brings me to the second major question: How does Vietnam perceive its new CSP with the United States? This – the CSP is fundamentally grounded in principles that have guided Vietnam-U.S. relations for decades, particularly from 2013 to the present. It rests on the pillars of mutual respect for each other’s independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and political systems. It embraces the ethos of setting aside the past and looking towards the future. It is designed for both countries to better contribute to peace, stability, cooperation, and development in the region and the world.

The CSP serves as a continuation and deepening of the collaborative efforts and joint achievements of our two countries. Out of the 10 pillars of the CSP, nine are drawn directly from the Comprehensive Partnership. Prioritizing areas that foster development, the partnership identifies economic, trade, and investment cooperation and innovation-driven inclusive growth as core foundations and sources of momentum in the bilateral relationship, while regarding cooperation in science, technology, and digital innovation as a new breakthrough. This aligns with each country’s domestic priorities and the overarching objective of the CSP: peace, cooperation, and sustainable development.

In the area of defense and security cooperations, the two countries will continue to make steady progress tailored to the needs and capabilities of its size. Underlying this whole process is Vietnam’s steadfast commitment
to its “four no’s” defense policies. Noteworthy, is elevation of the regional and global issues to a new and – new 10th pillar, pillar number 10. This reflects a recognition of the depth and scope of Vietnam-U.S. relations, transcending bilateral matters to encompass challenges facing the global community. This additional pillar provides a solid foundation for both sides to coordinate more effectively on a broader stage.

In essence, Vietnam views the CSP as a dynamic and forward-looking framework that not only builds on – upon past successes, but also charts a course for a future marked by greater shared values, deeper mutual understanding, and ever-more-substantive cooperation at all levels.

So, ladies and gentlemen, let me now address the final major question: How does Vietnam plan to implement the CSP? Together with the United States, Vietnam is strongly committed to the full implementation of the CSP by translating the high-level agreements in September 2023 joint statement into tangible measures and activity of cooperations. In fact, this process was kickstarted during President Biden’s visit to Vietnam, when the two sides successfully finalized a plan of action and a memorandum of cooperations on the semiconductor industry.

Over the past four months, there have been encouraging developments notably on the occasions of attending multilateral events in the United States. Delegation from Vietnam led by Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh in September and Prime Minister – and President Vo Van Thuong in November engaged extensively with the U.S. officials and the business community to deliberate on bilateral cooperations, specifically focusing on the implementation of the CSP. Many function agreements were signed between two sides’ agencies, localities, and companies, which helps materialize relevant commitments under the CSP.

Additionally, there has been a concerted effort to promote exchanges of business delegation between the two sides, fostering a dynamic environment for economic cooperation. Last December, the U.S. Semiconductor Industry Association, SIA, led a delegation of U.S. semiconductor companies to Vietnam to explore cooperation opportunities arising from the rapid development of Vietnam’s semiconductor ecosystem.

Looking ahead to 2024, our emphasis will be on integrating the elements of the CSP into business exchanges and dialogue at all levels. As we are speaking right now, Undersecretary of State Fernandez is in Vietnam to talk with his counterparts about increasing trade opportunities, clean energy promotion, semiconductors, and supply chain cooperations, which we consider among the most prioritized issues under the CSP. Besides, we will work with – we will work with the U.S. to identify each side’s needs
and ability of paving the way for finding sustainable methods to achieve common objectives. We also hope to set in place strong mechanisms to coordinate efforts and monitoring the implementation of the CSP. Lastly, we continue to prioritize building of capacity for implementing the CSP, which includes investing in human resource training to meet the demands of science and technology cooperation.

In essence, Vietnam is poised to take proactive measures engaging in specific and targeted action to realize the vision set forth by the CSP. The commitment to turning aspiration into reality is reflected in the concrete steps already taken and the strategic focus for the year ahead.

So, ladies and gentlemen, in concluding, I wish to express my deep appreciation for the collaborative efforts between CSIS and the relevant agencies of Vietnam, including our embassy in Washington, D.C. This partnership has proven to be an invaluable complement to our track-one engagements with the U.S. government, including the visits by our top leaders, many of whom have spoken at your venues here over the years. So it all – would also like to call for collaboration between Vietnamese and U.S. scholars, particularly those from CSIS and the U.S.-Vietnam initiatives. Together, let’s embark on a journey of research and proposal contributing fresh ideas and practical recommendation(s) to help realize the full potential of our CSP.

During the weekend, a reporter told me it seems that nothing was impossible in the Vietnam-U.S. relationship. Perhaps I think he wanted to refer to Ambassador Ted Osius with his book. I could not agree more. And I said as long as both sides continue to harbor mutual understanding, mutual respect, mutual resolve, and sincerity, we can achieve what we can, what we want. So may this spirit continue in many more years to come.

So, with this, I turn the floor to Greg for further discussion. Thank you. Thank you all. (Applause.)

(END.)