Thank you, Dr. Hamre [Dr. John Hamre, president and CEO of CSIS], for that great introduction. And thank you all for coming here today.

I am here to offer “A View from Iraq and the Region.”

Much of what is happening now in the Middle East – the challenges and the opportunities, the triumphs and the tragedies – has been taking place in Iraq for the past decade.

Iraq was the first country in our region to make the transition from dictatorship to democracy. We know that road is long and hard – but still worth taking.

As the Arab Spring has shown, countries that are going through transition are at risk of foreign intervention and domestic violence. In Iraq, we are confronting all these challenges – and more. But we are also making progress towards stabilizing our society, growing our economy, building our democracy, and developing good relations with all our neighbors.

Ten years after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, the better future that we seek is still a goal, not a given.

But some conclusions are as clear as anything can be in our region and in these times:

For all the suffering we have endured, the people of Iraq and our neighbors are much better off now that Saddam is gone. Iraqis are forever grateful for the sacrifices that Americans have made -- in time, in treasure, and in blood. Iraqis, of course, have endured even greater losses. And, as the recent acts of terrorism have reminded us, our ordeal is not over.

The Iraqi people and our government intend to redeem these losses by building a future worthy of our sacrifices. After decades of dictatorship, three disastrous wars, international isolation, economic sanctions, the displacement of more than a million Iraqis, and the deaths of tens of thousands more, including the latest victims of terrorism, Iraq is building our economy, building our democracy, and building bridges within our society and with our neighbors.
As Iraqis rebuild our own country, Iraq and the United States will benefit by building a long-term partnership. Together, we can and must develop what President Obama has described as “a normal relationship between sovereign nations, an equal partnership based on mutual interests and mutual respect.”

With our political progress, our economic progress, and our diplomatic progress, Iraq is taking its place as a partner for the United States, for our neighbors, and for the family of nations.

On the political front, we are building a multi-ethnic, multi-party democracy, with respect for the rule of law.

Our democratic process is moving forward at a strong and steady pace. Our local elections took place in April of this year. Our legislative elections – which will determine our national leadership – will take place next year.

We have a government of national unity. Yes, our ethnic, regional, religious and political differences are difficult to overcome. But, in spite of these disagreements, we are striving to reach agreements acceptable to all parties.

Slowly but surely, our efforts are achieving results. We are improving the relationship between the central government and the regions, including the regional government in Kurdistan. We are continuing the dialogue between the government and the Sunni community. We are promoting human rights, freedom of expression, and the advancement of women.

Terrorism takes lives and makes news. But all the political parties have accepted elections as a method of power-sharing and peaceful change. Iraqis want to decide our future with voting, not violence.

On the economic front, we are growing and diversifying. We have one of the world’s ten fastest-growing economies, expanding by 9.6 percent in 2011 and 10.5 percent in 2012. According to Bank of America Merrill Lynch, we will grow by 8.2 percent this year – beating China for the third straight year.

On the energy front, our oil production has increased by 50 percent since 2005. Iraq expects to increase oil production to 4.5 million barrels by the end of 2014 and nine million barrels a day by 2020.

As the International Energy Agency has reported, Iraq is poised to double our output of oil by the decade of the 2030’s. We will emerge as the world’s second largest energy exporter. And we will ease a strained global oil market.

In spite of this progress, we face serious economic problems. Ninety percent of our economy depends on oil. Our unemployment rate is 11 percent. Our poverty rate is 23 percent. Terrorism
contributes to the cycle of poverty, and young unemployed men can be ready recruits for terrorist groups.

In order to diversify our economy beyond energy, Iraq is investing oil revenues in education and crucial development projects, including restoring electrical power and rebuilding our transportation system.

Our economy will benefit from our progress on the diplomatic front as well.

Last month, the United Nations Security Council removed Iraq from Chapter VII – which imposed economic sanctions on Iraq after Saddam invaded Kuwait 22 years ago this month.

We are working with the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the Arab League.

Now that we are moving towards a market economy friendly to foreign investment, Americans can provide what our nation needs -- through investment and trade, not charity and aid.

We need expertise on energy technologies, engineering, design, construction and financial services.

Iraq offers Americans tremendous investment opportunities for Americans, developing and servicing schools, bridges and highways, health care, water treatment, telecommunications – and much more.

But make no mistake: Nothing that we build together will endure unless we win our war against terrorism. We see the violence in Iraq and the terrible toll that it has taken. And we have heard about the threats that compelled your own country to close your missions in the Middle East.

Al Qaeda is behind the terrorist attacks against America and Iraq. At a time when the United States is seeking allies against terrorism, we want to work with you against our common enemy.

We understand what is at stake in this struggle. It is our fight for survival, and it is at the core of our national and regional policy.

We consider terrorism a threat to world peace, to regional peace, and to the security of our people. We are working in close cooperation with the international community and our neighboring countries to fight all sorts and every manifestation of terrorism – whatever its source, whatever its intentions, and wherever we find it.

These terrorists are seeking to destabilize Iraq because they see our political, economic, and diplomatic progress as a threat to the desperation on which they feed.

If Americans are tempted to conclude that our concern with terrorism is extreme, then ask yourselves, how would Americans respond if a terrorist organization were operating on your soil as Al Qaeda is operating on ours?
Together with the threats against American embassies, the violence on our soil is an example of why Al Qaeda is still a threat to all of us. If America takes its eyes off the Middle East, then there will be a resurgence of Al Qaeda, more menacing than ever.

Our concern with the consequences of a terrorist haven next door shapes our views about Syria. For Americans, Syria is more than 5,000 miles away. For Iraqis, Syria is right on our doorstep.

Our border with Syria is porous, and, therefore, we are deeply concerned about the ability of terrorists to cross it.

That is why we are participating in the search for a peaceful solution in Syria that will reduce the violence and diminish the role of the extremists. Together with Mr. Kofi Anan -- the personal representative of the United Nations and the Arab League – I participated in the international meeting in Geneva last year.

And just as we participated in Geneva 1, we will participate in Geneva 2.

We support the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people for freedom, democracy and self-determination. We are against further militarization of the conflict, which will only mean more death and destruction.

We understand that, if we support one side in this fight, there will be more bloodshed. And our government is striving to keep the Iraqi people out of this conflict.

There have been fatwas from clerics – both from Sunni and Shiite sects – calling for Jihad in Syria. They have encouraged Iraqis to volunteer on both sides in Syria.

But let me be clear: The Iraqi volunteers who are fighting on either side in Syria do not represent the policy of the Iraqi government – in any way.

We are also opposed to the smuggling of arms from Iran to Syria. The government of Iraq is committed to implementing UN Security Council resolutions promoting peace in Syria. In keeping with our position against the militarization of the conflict, we are doing our utmost to prevent the shipment of arms across our airspace. But we cannot do this without the sophisticated radar equipment and air defense systems capable of conducting surveillance and control.

That is one more reason why the United States and Iraq need to deepen our partnership. To control our airspace – and to combat terrorism – we need to continue to fully implement the Strategic Framework Agreement that our countries signed before the withdrawal of American forces in 2011. That means expedited delivery of promised military sales, as well as assistance in counter-terrorism and training.

Iraq is in the process of purchasing over $10 billion worth of military agreement. We are paying for it with our own revenues. And we want to buy this hardware from our American allies. Our
recent purchase of 30 Boeing planes for our national carrier testifies to our potential as a market for American companies, American products and American services.

“The View from Iraq and the Region” also includes opportunities as well as challenges.

Over the past two years, relations between Iraq and Kuwait have improved enormously. In fact, there have been mutual visits between the two countries at the highest levels.

The problems, of the past are being resolved, through the Joint Ministerial Committee and UN Security Council Resolution No. 2107 on June 27 of this year. This included Iraq's compliance with our obligations towards Kuwait. The only remaining issue – compensation – is being resolved between our countries.

Now we are focusing on the future of the relationship between our countries, so that, together, we can promote peace, stability and security in the region.

Considering how much has changed between Iraq and Kuwait, there is new hope for our neighbors throughout our region.

We are encouraged by the elections in Iran and the victory of President Rohani and the selection of the new Foreign Minister, Dr. Zavad Zarif. Both are well-known internationally, and we believe that the West must appreciate the dimensions of this change and invest in it in a positive way.

We do not object to Iran having a peaceful civil nuclear power program – but we would be one of the first countries to object to Iran possessing nuclear weapons. In fact, we favor the universalization of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, and strict adherence to all of its obligations, particularly in the tinderbox of the Middle East.

Iran needs to convince the international community that their program is only for peaceful purposes. And the world community needs to engage with Iran to address the issues that have isolated it. We are against the use of force or threats, by any nation or group of nations.

In order to reach diplomatic solutions to the crisis of the nuclear program, Iraq has worked in cooperation and coordination with the Islamic Republic of Iran and the European Union to host a meeting of the 5 +1 group in Baghdad on May 23 and 24, 2012. Iraq will continue its efforts in this area in coordination and cooperation with the countries concerned.

As we face the future, Iraq seeks friendly relations with all the nations of the Middle East– not only with Kuwait, Iran and Syria but also with Turkey, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, among others.

As the first nation in our neighborhood to abandon weapons of mass destruction, we seek a Middle East free of nuclear weapons. Towards that goal, we support efforts to convene a UN conference in Helsinki.
Iraq seeks to forge friendships with our neighbors – and a strategic partnership with the United States.

Together, we can build a future of peace, prosperity, and democracy worthy of the struggles and sacrifices of Iraqis and Americans in our own time -- and the hopes and dreams of generations yet to come.