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It is an honor to have the opportunity to address the Center for Strategic and International Studies. CSIS has a reputation for bipartisanship - so it is a fitting place to discuss what I believe is the emerging common ground on the way ahead in Iraq.

As I listen to the debate here in Washington, there is growing recognition that failure is not an option in Iraq. Defeat in Iraq would create a safe haven for terrorists similar to what Afghanistan was before 9/11, only this time on some of the world's most strategic real estate - with vast natural resources available to fund future terrorist attacks. Defeat in Iraq would embolden the terrorists to pursue us, our friends and allies, throughout the region and to our own shores.

There is also growing recognition of the enormous benefits of success in Iraq. It will make America safer by strengthening a new ally in the war on terror. It will deliver a decisive blow to the ideology that fuels international terrorism. A democratic Iraq will serve as a beacon of liberty, inspiring democratic reformers throughout the Middle East. As freedom and democracy spread, it will ultimately lead to a Middle East that is more peaceful, more stable, and more inhospitable to terrorists and their supporters.

The strategic realities of our present situation in Iraq are recognized both by the President and many of his critics. The President's views on these points are well known. But here is what one Democratic Senator said: "[If Iraq] disintegrates and becomes a playground for Iraq's neighbors and a training ground for terrorists. . . it would embolden our enemies, encourage terrorism, undermine moderates in the region, [and] badly damage . . . credibility that we're going to need to lead other countries against new threats." A Republican Senator, who at times has been highly critical of the Administration's efforts in Iraq, stated: "We must get Iraq right because America's stake in that conflict is enormous. All Americans, whether or not they supported American action to topple Saddam Hussein, must understand the profound implications of our presence there. Success or failure in Iraq is the transcendent issue for our foreign policy and our national security, for now and years to come."

Given the stakes in Iraq, it is fortunate that common ground on the way forward is emerging across party lines...and across the divides of the past. If you look carefully at the strategies and proposals offered by various critics and compare them to the strategy described by the President in his speeches over the last couple weeks, you will find that they broadly share the same critical elements. There is an

emerging consensus that success in Iraq has five elements:

- Training the Iraqi Security Forces and shifting increasing security responsibility to them;
- Bringing Iraq's Sunni Arab population into the political process;
- Supporting Iraqis as they review, and possibly amend, their constitution, so that it becomes more of a national compact among Iraq's diverse groups;
- Expanding the support of the international community for Iraq and increasing international participation in the reconstruction effort; and
- Refocusing our support for Iraqi reconstruction and economic efforts so that they provide visible benefit and employment to Iraqi citizens.

Let me discuss each of these elements in turn.

First, many critics suggest we need to emphasize the training of Iraqi troops. One recently said we must "build Iraqi security forces that can provide law and order in neighborhoods, defeat insurgents, and isolate and eliminate foreign jihadists." But such critics are advocating what has long been fundamental to the President's strategy in Iraq.

Here is what the President said on this subject at the U.S. Naval Academy last month: "To defeat the terrorists and marginalize the Saddamists and rejectionists, Iraqis need strong military and police forces. Iraqi troops bring knowledge and capabilities to the fight that coalition forces cannot. Iraqis know their people, they know their language, and they know their culture -- and they know who the terrorists are."

The security track of the President's strategy emphasizes supporting Iraqis in clearing areas of enemy control, holding those areas with Iraqi forces, and building the capacity of local Iraqi institutions to deliver services and advance the rule of law. Iraqi security forces are the lynchpin of this approach. They are increasing in strength and effectiveness. As the Iraqi security forces take the fight to the enemy, they are gaining the trust and confidence of the Iraqi people.

Second, the Administration and its critics all recognize the importance of drawing Iraq's Sunni Arabs into the political process. One Democratic Senator recently said: "Our strategy must achieve a political solution that deprives the Sunni-dominated insurgency of support by giving the Sunnis a stake in the future of their country." The President has said much the same thing. Last week in Philadelphia, he emphasized the importance of "our efforts to help the Iraqis build inclusive democratic institutions that will protect the interests of all the Iraqi people. By helping Iraqis to build a democracy, we will win over those who doubted they had a place in a new Iraq, and undermine the terrorists and Saddamists." The political track of the President's strategy calls for isolating hardened terrorist and Saddamist elements, engaging those outside the political process to bring them in, and building stable, inclusive, national institutions that can represent all Iraqis.

Last week marked an enormously important milestone in this effort. More than 10 million Iraqis bravely went to the polls to select a permanent legislative assembly. Unlike last January's election, Sunni political coalitions competed for votes this time. Most importantly, Sunni Arabs voted in large numbers.

Third, although the recently ratified Iraqi constitution is already the most liberal document of basic governance in the Arab world, the Iraqis plan to review the constitution early this coming year. Our own Constitution has been amended 27 times and the President supports amending the Iraqi constitution if it helps build "stable, pluralistic, national institutions that can represent all Iraqis." So do the President's critics. As one Democratic Senator said: "We need to build a political consensus, starting with the Constitution, that gives the Kurds, Shi'a, and Sunnis a stake in keeping Iraq together."

Fourth, many critics have called upon us to encourage international engagement on Iraq and international participation in its reconstruction. One Democratic Senator stated: "we have to launch a major diplomatic effort to get the international community, especially key neighboring states and Arab nations, more involved in Iraq." Again, the critics are advocating what has been a key element of the President's strategy in Iraq from the outset. As he declared in his address Sunday night, "We'll continue to encourage greater support from the Arab world and the broader international community."

And Iraq is steadily gaining more international support. More than 30 nations besides the United States have deployed forces to Iraq -- and NATO is currently training Iraqi security forces. Over 80 countries and international organizations came together in Brussels last June to pledge support for Iraq's political and economic reconstruction. The ongoing effort in Iraq has repeatedly received the unanimous endorsement of the United Nations Security Council. And the Arab League is now engaged.

Finally, critics argue that a refocused reconstruction effort must be a key component of our strategy for defeating the terrorists. One Democratic Senator recently said: "We need to jump start our own lagging reconstruction efforts by . . . expanding job creation programs, and strengthening the capacity of government ministries."

Again, we find ourselves on common ground. The economic track of the President's strategy in Iraq emphasizes restoring neglected or non-existent infrastructure, reforming Iraq's stifling command economy, and building government capacity and human capacity to allow Iraq to reach its full economic potential. The President agrees that the international community must better support Iraqis in improving basic services, such as electricity, clean water, and sanitation, services that were totally neglected under Saddam Hussein. But progress is nonetheless being made. According to a recent poll, 77% of Iraqi businesses anticipate growth in the national economy over the next two years, and 69% of respondents described themselves as "optimistic" about Iraq's economic future. Reconstructing a nation ravaged by three decades of war and tyranny is difficult work, but the progress is real and measurable.

In the end, many of the disagreements on Iraq are more tactical than strategic. Though presented as radical breaks with the current course, in reality many of the proposals made by our critics largely follow the strategic course established by President Bush. We have listened to our critics, and are already pursuing many of their proposals.

But not every proposal makes sense.

Several critics have suggested that a timeline for withdrawal be the centerpiece of any strategy for the way forward in Iraq. Others have called for the United States immediately to stand down and redeploy its forces from Iraq. And here there is no common ground. Whether calling for Coalition forces to stand down to barracks or to return to the United States, the advocates of these policies share a core belief that the war in Iraq is unwinnable - and that America and the world will be better off by abandoning Iraq.

The President respectfully disagrees. He believes that setting a timeline for withdrawal would send the wrong message to the Iraqi people, to the terrorists, and to our allies in the region. Most importantly, it would send the wrong message to our men and women in uniform and in civilian service in Iraq. As the President said Sunday night: "Not only can we win the war in Iraq, we are winning the war in Iraq. . . . To retreat before victory would be an act of recklessness and dishonor, and I will not allow it."

Advocates of a "withdraw now" strategy are welcome in our national discourse - this is exactly the freedom of expression we are fighting for in Iraq. But this strategy has been rejected by the bulk of opinion in both American political parties. And for good reason.

First, no one has explained how this policy would improve the situation in Iraq. Proponents assert that our withdrawal will create incentives for Iraqis to provide for their own security. Yet under the President's plan, Iraqi forces are already providing for Iraqi security as quickly as they can be brought on line.

Second, advocates of withdrawal fail to explain how abandoning Iraq to the terrorists and Ba'athists would make Americans more secure. We contend it would only encourage further attacks on America.

Third, the case for withdrawal is reflects a belief that the Iraqi people do not support our presence in Iraq. This is not the case. A recent poll conducted by ABC News found that the majority of those polled want us to stay either until security is established or until Iraqi security forces can secure the country on their own. Most Iraqis, in other words, share our strategy - they expect any Coalition force reductions to be conditions-based, not driven by arbitrary timelines.

It is our belief that most Iraqis share the President's definition of victory in Iraq. Last week he said: "We are pursuing a comprehensive strategy in Iraq. Our goal is victory, and victory will be achieved when the terrorists and Saddamists can no longer threaten Iraq's democracy, when the Iraqi security forces can provide for the safety of their own citizens, and when Iraq is not a safe haven for terrorists to plot new attacks against our nation."

On Sunday night, the President acknowledged that the war in Iraq has been controversial. It has inflicted suffering and sometimes unbearable loss on some American families. While assuring the country that in every decision he weighed the potential consequences for those who would be sent into harm's way, the President underscored how vital this mission is for our country. Most Americans want the United States to succeed in Iraq and for our troops to come home as soon as possible. The President could not agree more. But a desire to have our troops come home is not inconsistent with

recognizing that we can settle for nothing short of victory. The path home is the path of success.

As I have tried to lay out today, there is already much common ground on the strategy that is needed to achieve this success. The time has come for those who understand the importance of success in Iraq to make common cause together. The Iraqi people, and the security of our nation, deserve no less.

For last week's Iraqi election represents not only a historic moment for Iraqis, but an important victory in the global war on terror. The images of Iraqis celebrating as entire families cast their votes can serve as a beacon of hope in the Middle East. The success of democracy in Iraq will encourage the spread of democracy in the region. And the spread of democracy in this vital region will undermine the sources of violence and instability that give rise to terrorism, and will lay the foundation of future peace.

Thank you.

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