



Integrated Country Strategy

Belgium

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Table of Contents

1. Chief of Mission Priorities 2

3. Mission Strategic Framework 4

4. Mission Goals and Objectives 5

5. Management Objectives..... 10

1. Chief of Mission Priorities

Belgium is one of the United States' oldest and strongest allies with enduring bonds forged during two World Wars and the Cold War. It is at the heart of the transatlantic economic, political, and security alliances that have guaranteed our shared peace, security, and prosperity for more than 70 years. The National Security Strategy (NSS) notes that, "The United States is safer when Europe is prosperous and stable, and can help defend our shared interests and ideals." This principle drives our highest priority: to leverage our deep bilateral ties and shared values to ensure Belgium plays an active role in European and transatlantic alliances to address 21st century challenges. We actively encourage Belgium's continued participation in key coalition operations to bolster international security, including the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, deployments to protect NATO's eastern flank, NATO's Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan, and in EU and UN missions in Iraq and the Sahel. Despite its key role in these operations, the Belgian government has not devoted enough resources to defense to ensure it can meet 21st century threats and obligations. We push Belgium at every level to increase its defense investment to two percent of GDP by 2024 to meet the commitment all NATO allies made in recent NATO summits. As Belgium looks toward deeper European defense integration, we reinforce the transatlantic bonds which safeguard stability and prosperity, noting that more European integration does not have to lead to a weakening of transatlantic ties. We continue to press Belgium to modernize its military to face 21st century challenges in an open and transparent manner. We continue to seek more active attention to and cooperation on countering emerging threats, including cyber-attacks and Russia malign influence.

Partnering with Belgium to combat terrorism and transnational crime and to counter violent extremism remain top priorities. Belgian counterterrorism efforts have increased significantly since the November 2015 attacks in Paris and the March 2016 attacks in Brussels. But work remains to overcome Belgian institutional and resource constraints, as well as impediments to information sharing. Despite these challenges, our law enforcement and security agencies have developed strong partnerships with their Belgian counterparts that have led to successful prosecutions of criminals and terrorists. In order to meet the national Security Directives of securing our borders and interdicting international crime, the Mission will continue to focus on training programs and exchanges to increase Belgium's capacity to effectively use its own resources to identify, disrupt, and dismantle transnational crime. Using interagency task forces as a model during training exercises and bilateral cooperation, we will expand our law enforcement and counterterrorism cooperation while leveraging the Visa Waiver Program review process to increase the timeliness and quality of information sharing to improve both countries' security. We will continue to strengthen U.S. border security while facilitating legitimate travel through secure, accurate, and efficient visa services. Where appropriate, we will continue to jointly investigate fraud at its roots. And most importantly, we will continue to provide routine and emergency services to U.S. citizens abroad – protecting lives and serving their interests.

We continue to work with Belgians at every level of society through exchanges and public diplomacy to highlight the American experience, and the value we place on diversity to bolster social cohesion. We link U.S. and Belgian partners to promote integration and decrease the pull of radicalization. We are also a convening power between Belgian partners who work on the same problem sets, but do so separately in different regional or linguistic communities. Beyond encouraging integration and countering extremism, our people-to-people ties undergird every aspect of our bilateral relationship. These ties reinforce our shared values and interests, providing a crucial platform for continued partnership even when policy differences emerge.

Deepening our already strong economic relationship with Belgium to create more American jobs through export growth and Belgian investment in the United States is the cornerstone of our economic engagement. Belgium's Port of Antwerp is the gateway to Europe for many U.S. exports and its air cargo facility in Liège is a major transshipment point. The U.S. enjoys a large trade surplus with Belgium. We have a robust bilateral commercial relationship – with annual trade of around \$66 billion each year – and we will continue to work to make it stronger. Belgium is the 12th largest source of foreign direct investment (FDI) in the U.S., employing over 150,000 Americans, and we will expand our efforts to increase investment to the United States through programs like SelectUSA, and by encouraging more trade and investment missions. We seek to increase trade by expanding our focus to larger companies as well as SMEs. We identify new avenues of economic cooperation in health services, energy and e-commerce and will expand our science and technology ties with Belgium. We work with Belgium to promote innovation and entrepreneurship to increase opportunity and prosperity. As the 10th largest importer of U.S. goods, a more prosperous Belgium means a larger market for U.S. exporters.

2. Mission Strategic Framework

Mission Goal 1: Ensure Belgium Addresses Emerging Global Threats to European and Transatlantic Security.

Mission Objective 1.1: Belgium meets its 2014 Wales commitment to spend the equivalent of two percent of GDP on Defense, and to allocate 20 percent of its defense budget for investments.

Mission Objective 1.2: Belgium continues to contribute to international security by maintaining a foreign policy that is aligned with the U.S., including participation in international operations.

Mission Goal 2: Strengthen Bilateral Cooperation to Combat Terrorism, Radicalization, and Transnational Crime to Protect the American People and Our Interests.

Mission Objective 2.1: Strengthen actions to defeat terrorism through bilateral information sharing, programming, and cooperation on countering violent extremism.

Mission Objective 2.2: Protect the lives and serve the interests of U.S. citizens overseas.

Mission Objective 2.3: Fortify bilateral law enforcement cooperation, assist Belgium in moving towards intelligence-driven investigations, and enhance U.S. border security while facilitating legitimate commerce and travel.

Mission Goal 3: Strengthen the Transatlantic Economy to Improve the Well-being of Americans and Belgians.

Mission Objective 3.1: Increase fair two-way trade and investment with Belgium to stimulate employment and economic growth on both sides of the Atlantic, promote political stability, and further align our interests.

Mission Goal 4: Build Resilience and Foster Support for Regional and Global Priorities.

Mission Objective 4.1: Increase public awareness of shared values and support for the transatlantic partnership to build resilience against foreign malign influence and give further impetus for bilateral cooperation in pursuing shared interests.

Mission Objective 4.2: Support government and civil society actors contributing to a Belgian society that values diversity and cohesion to promote a stable, inclusive, and able partner.

Management Objective 1: Improve and expand USG facilities and infrastructure to provide safe, secure, environmentally conscious, and efficient working and living space for the USG in Belgium.

3. Mission Goals and Objectives

Mission Goal 1 Ensure Belgium Addresses Emerging Global Threats to European and Transatlantic Security.

Description and Linkages: Belgium has been a reliable ally and an active participant in NATO, UN, and EU international operations, thus extending our “strategic reach,” as described in the National Security Strategy (NSS). However, spending on defense, and investments in new capabilities, in Belgium is well below the commitments that NATO allies undertook at the 2014 NATO Summit in Wales. This impacts Belgium’s ability to meet its readiness and NATO commitments, including participating in international operations. As stated in the NSS, “we expect our European allies to increase defense spending to two percent of gross domestic product by 2024, with 20 percent of this spending devoted to increasing military capabilities.”

Mission Objective 1.1 Belgium meets its 2014 Wales commitment to spend the equivalent of two percent of GDP on Defense, and to allocate 20 percent of its defense budget for investments.

Justification: U.S. national security objectives are dependent upon strong NATO partners. Belgium, a founding member of NATO and its country host, has been a reliable NATO ally and an active participant in international operations. However spending on defense in Belgium has declined over the past twenty-five years, and has fallen below one percent of GDP annually, impacting Belgium’s ability to respond to NATO’s needs. Belgium must also prepare to face new threats such as cyber attacks and malign influence from state and non-state actors. Belgium’s Strategic Vision for Defense (2016-2030), published June 29, 2016, outlines numerous programs by the Ministry of Defense which would support this objective, but is projected to get their defense spending to only 1.35 percent of GDP. Some experts indicate that full implementation of the Vision and utilizing the full potential of new investments would likely require 1.5% of GDP in defense spending, but the future government would have to agree to this needed funding. Belgium has committed to NATO Capability targets which, if implemented, would also grow defense spending.

Mission Objective 1.2 Belgium continues to contribute to international security by maintaining a foreign policy that is aligned with the U.S., including participation in international operations.

Justification: Belgium is an active participant in NATO, EU, and UN international security operations. As host and influential member of the European Union, an active member in United Nations bodies, and a non-Permanent UN Security Council Member from 2019-2020, Belgium often plays a helpful role in building international consensus. Leveraging Belgian regional experience and expertise will assist in achieving U.S. interests in many parts of the world.

Mission Goal 2 Strengthen Bilateral Cooperation to Combat Terrorism, Radicalization, and Transnational Crime to Protect the American People and Our Interests.

Description and Linkages: The NSS states: “we must also deter, disrupt, and defeat potential threats before they reach the United States. We will target jihadist terrorists and transnational criminal organizations at their source and dismantle their networks of support.” Bilateral counterterrorism and law enforcement cooperation with Belgium is excellent, with ongoing cooperation and joint investigations leading to interdictions and prosecutions of criminals and terrorists. However, Belgium’s central location, open borders, and trade-based economy make it a desirable transit country for criminal elements. Additionally, Belgium has become a target of terrorist networks. As these criminal and terrorist networks continue to become more sophisticated, we must continue to raise the level of cooperation with Belgium to deter and disrupt their activities.

Mission Objective 2.1 Strengthen actions to defeat terrorism through bilateral information sharing, programming, and cooperation on countering violent extremism.

Justification: Since the March 22, 2016 terrorist attacks, U.S.-Belgian counterterrorism cooperation has increased significantly and Belgium has implemented numerous reforms to improve its capacity to prevent and investigate terrorism. However, work remains to be done, both on reforms within Belgium, and on information sharing and cooperation. As one of the leading countries of origin of foreign terrorist fighters (FTF) in Western Europe, Belgium will need to develop disengagement strategies for former FTFs and maintain focus on countering violent extremism (CVE) among Muslim communities in Belgium.

Mission Objective 2.2 Serve the interests of U.S. citizens overseas by providing consular services that efficiently and effectively protect their safety and security.

Justification: One of the most important functions of an embassy is to provide routine and emergency services to assist U.S. citizens abroad.

Mission Objective 2.3 Fortify bilateral law enforcement cooperation, assist Belgium in moving towards intelligence-driven investigations, and enhance U.S. border security while facilitating legitimate commerce and travel.

Justification: Bilateral law enforcement cooperation with Belgium is excellent, with ongoing cooperation and joint investigations leading to interdictions and prosecutions of criminals, terrorists, and contraband. However, Belgium's trade links and other characteristics have made it the top entry point for cocaine into Europe and a desirable transit country for other criminal elements. Additionally, Belgium was a leading source country for foreign terrorist fighters from Europe, and is host to high-profile targets such as NATO Headquarters, U.S. military forces, and the European Union, making it a target of terrorist networks. As these criminal and terror networks continue to become more sophisticated, we must increase cooperation and assist Belgium to implement intelligence-driven investigations which seek to dismantle these networks. Much of this effort will depend on the ability to share information.

Mission Goal 3 Strengthen the Transatlantic Economy to Improve the Well-being of Americans and Belgians.

Description and Linkages: Deepening our already strong economic relationship with Belgium to create more American jobs through export growth and Belgian investment in the United States is the cornerstone of our economic engagement. As the 10th largest importer of U.S. goods and the 12th largest supplier of foreign direct investment (FDI) into the U.S., Belgium's prosperity directly impacts American workers. Additionally, as the NSS states, the United States is safer when our European allies are "prosperous and stable, and can help defend our shared interests and ideals." This includes working with the Belgian government to improve its own energy security and regional European energy security.

Mission Objective 3.1 Increase fair two-way trade and investment with Belgium to stimulate employment and economic growth on both sides of the Atlantic, promote political stability, and further align our interests.

Justification: We will work to create American jobs by ensuring fair trade practices, eliminating barriers to growth, and promoting investment in the United States. Belgium's Port of Antwerp is the gateway to Europe for many U.S. exports, and the United States enjoys a large trade surplus with Belgium. We have a robust bilateral commercial relationship – with annual trade of around \$66 billion each year – and we will continue to work to make it stronger. Belgium is the 12th largest source of foreign direct investment (FDI) in the United States, employing over 150,000 Americans, and we will expand our efforts to increase investment to the United States through programs like SelectUSA and federal and regional trade and investment delegations. As the 10th largest importer of U.S. goods, a more prosperous Belgium means a larger market for U.S. exporters.

Mission Goal 4 Build Resilience and Foster Support for Regional and Global Priorities.

Description and Linkages: Belgium's devolved political, economic, and social order creates domestic vulnerabilities that erode support for our shared policy objectives at the regional and international level. Generations of immigration and the struggle to innovate in the face of post-industrial realities are among the pressures that exacerbate these vulnerabilities. We will execute programs that produce new, and maintain existing, ties between individuals and organizations in the U.S. and Belgium that build on the strengths of our diverse populations. Our programs will also raise public awareness of the strong cooperation and shared values between our two nations. As identified in the NSS, we will deepen collaboration to confront threats to our common values, security interests, and shared vision. We will also work to encourage social cohesion in Belgium. As noted in the State-USAID Joint Strategic Plan, this will aid Belgium's stability and prosperity, and better position it to advance our shared interests.

Mission Objective 4.1 Increase public awareness of shared values and support for the transatlantic partnership to build resilience against foreign malign influence and give further impetus for bilateral cooperation in pursuing shared interests.

Justification: Our countries are connected at nearly every level from military and law enforcement cooperation, to business and education exchanges. We will build on the strength of our bilateral relationship to advance our shared interests and build resilience against the malign influence of state and non-state actors. By working together, Belgium and the United States can achieve greater security, increase economic opportunities for our citizens, promote the rule of law, and help preserve the environment for future generations.

Mission Objective 4.2 Support government and civil society actors contributing to a Belgian society that values diversity and cohesion to promote a stable, inclusive, and able partner.

Justification: The American experience, including the founding and building of our nation through immigration and the value we place on diversity, gives us a unique perspective to engage our partners on the importance of social cohesion. Establishing greater understanding of this experience and lessons learned from it for Belgian government and civil society partners will strengthen connections between our two nations. It will also improve Belgium's capacity to foster social cohesion for all members of its society, which will in turn aid its efforts to counter extremist narratives, contribute to a safer, more prosperous country, and increase its capacity to support our shared goals and objectives.

4. Management Objectives

Management Objective 1 Improve and expand USG facilities and infrastructure to provide safe, secure, environmentally conscious, and efficient working and living space for the USG in Belgium.

Justification: The security of the compound area shared by USEU, the Bilateral Chancery, Bilateral CMR, and the Joint Administrative Services (JAS) building continues to be problematic. We have very little setback from busy city streets and, until recently no gates to stop pedestrians from approaching the building. Due to Post leadership's serious concerns over the lack of a secure perimeter, Post received permission from the city and regional governments in 2015 to install temporary gates on both ends of Boulevard du Regent. These gates prevent pedestrian traffic from inadvertently wandering onto the property but do not meet anti-ram/anti-climb standards. The process for the receipt of this permit had been ongoing for over three years. We later secured permission to install similar gates at the other side of the compound, on Rue Ducale. In the long term, the only way to improve our security to an acceptable level is to relocate the missions to a New Embassy Compound (NEC) and locate a new CMR. In March 2016, OBO signed a Conditional Purchase Agreement for a prospective site for a NEC.