



Belgium

NATO Country Assessment —TIER TWO—

ALLIANCE HEADQUARTERS • SUSTAINED UKRAINE SUPPORT • RUSSIAN ENERGY



JULY 2026



TIER 2

Average Ally



AT A GLANCE

Toplines

- **Real and Sustained Ukraine Support:** The F-16-to-Ukraine commitment (up to 53 aircraft by end-2029) is one of the most consequential material contributions any ally has made, and Belgium has backed it with a sustained €1B+ annual military aid pledge.
- **NATO's Home Base:** hosting NATO HQ, SHAPE, US EUCOM personnel, and B61 nuclear weapons at Kleine Brogel makes it the alliance's political and command spine in a way no other ally replicates.
- **Belgium Remains Europe's Second-Largest Importer of Russian LNG as of Late 2025:** spending €1.4 billion on Russian LNG imports between January and September 2025—exceeding its €1.2 billion in military aid to Ukraine over the same period.



FORCE STRUCTURE AT A GLANCE

LAND COMBAT



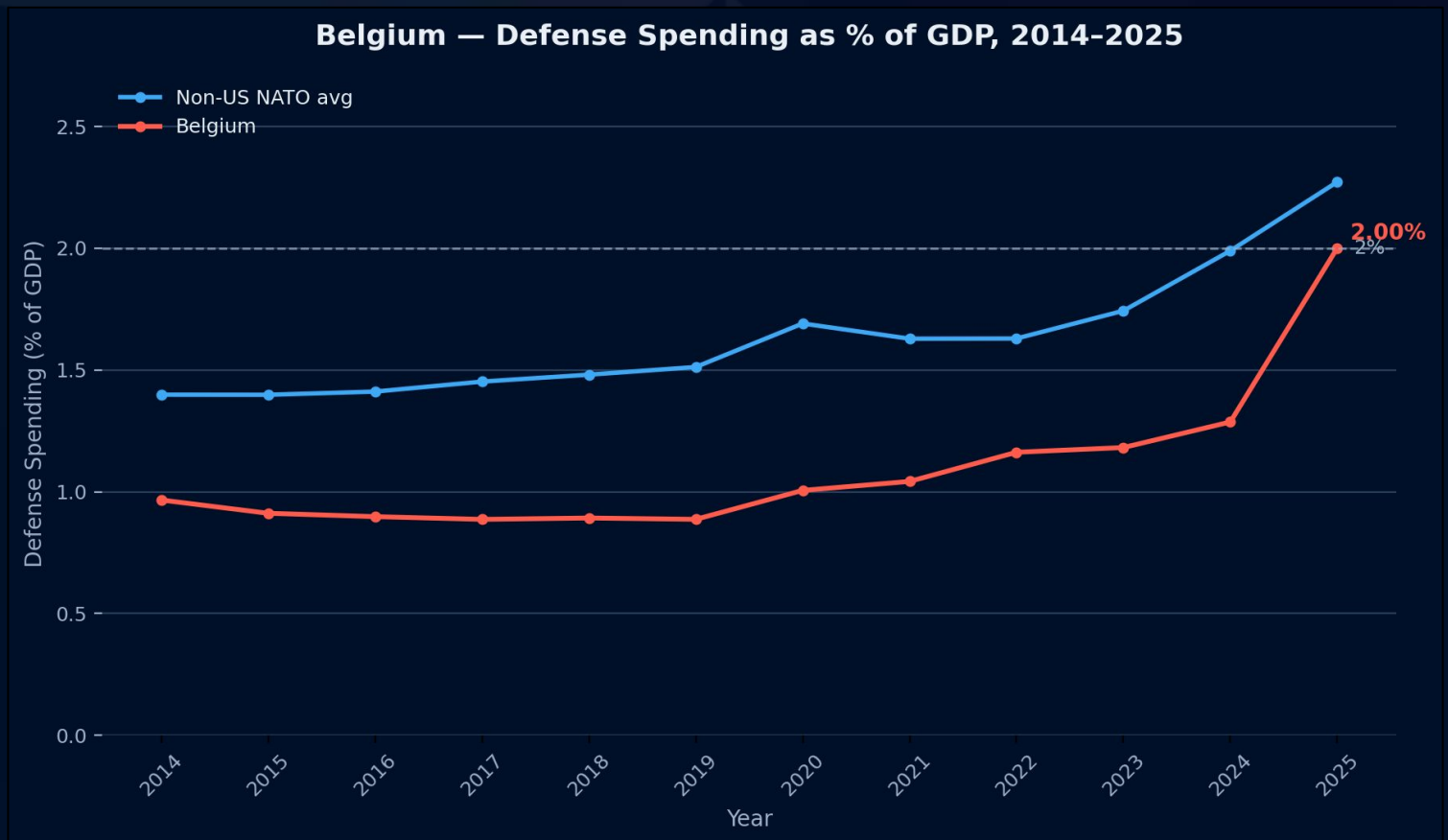
This radar chart compares a country's force structure to the Non-US NATO median (data from IISS's 2026 Military Balance) across six capability areas: Land Combat (tanks, IFVs), Active Personnel (total active-duty troops), Naval Combat (submarines, destroyers/frigates/corvettes), Air & Missile Defense (long/medium-range SAM systems), Air Combat (4th-gen+ combat aircraft), and Fires (artillery, rocket launchers). Scores are weighted, with modern platforms counted fully and legacy platforms counted at reduced weight.



MILITARY CONTRIBUTIONS

Defense Spending Level

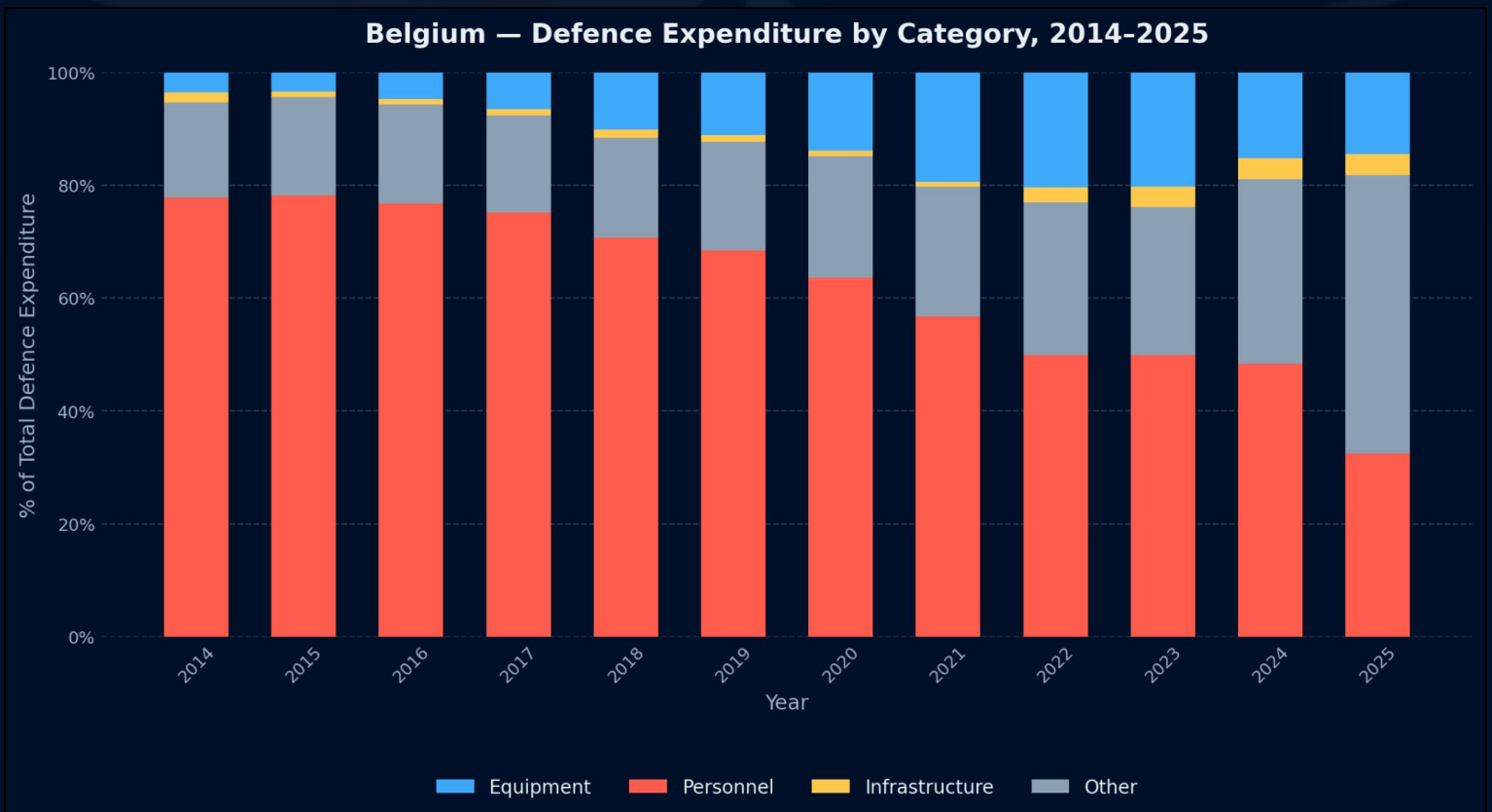
Belgium's [defense spending](#) trajectory is one of the most dramatic reversals in NATO's recent history, if belated. NATO figures show expenditure at just 0.97% of GDP in 2014, barely improving through the decade, reaching 1.29% in 2024 before a sharp 59% jump to 2.00% in 2025. The De Wever [government accelerated](#) the original 2029 timeline for reaching 2% into 2025 through an additional roughly €4B defense boost, and Belgium accepted the Hague framework commitment to 3.5% core defense plus 1.5% defense-related spending by 2035. In absolute dollar terms, Belgium is now a mid-major NATO spender, but the decades of chronic underinvestment mean it is rebuilding from a hollowed-out baseline.



MILITARY CONTRIBUTIONS

Equipment Share

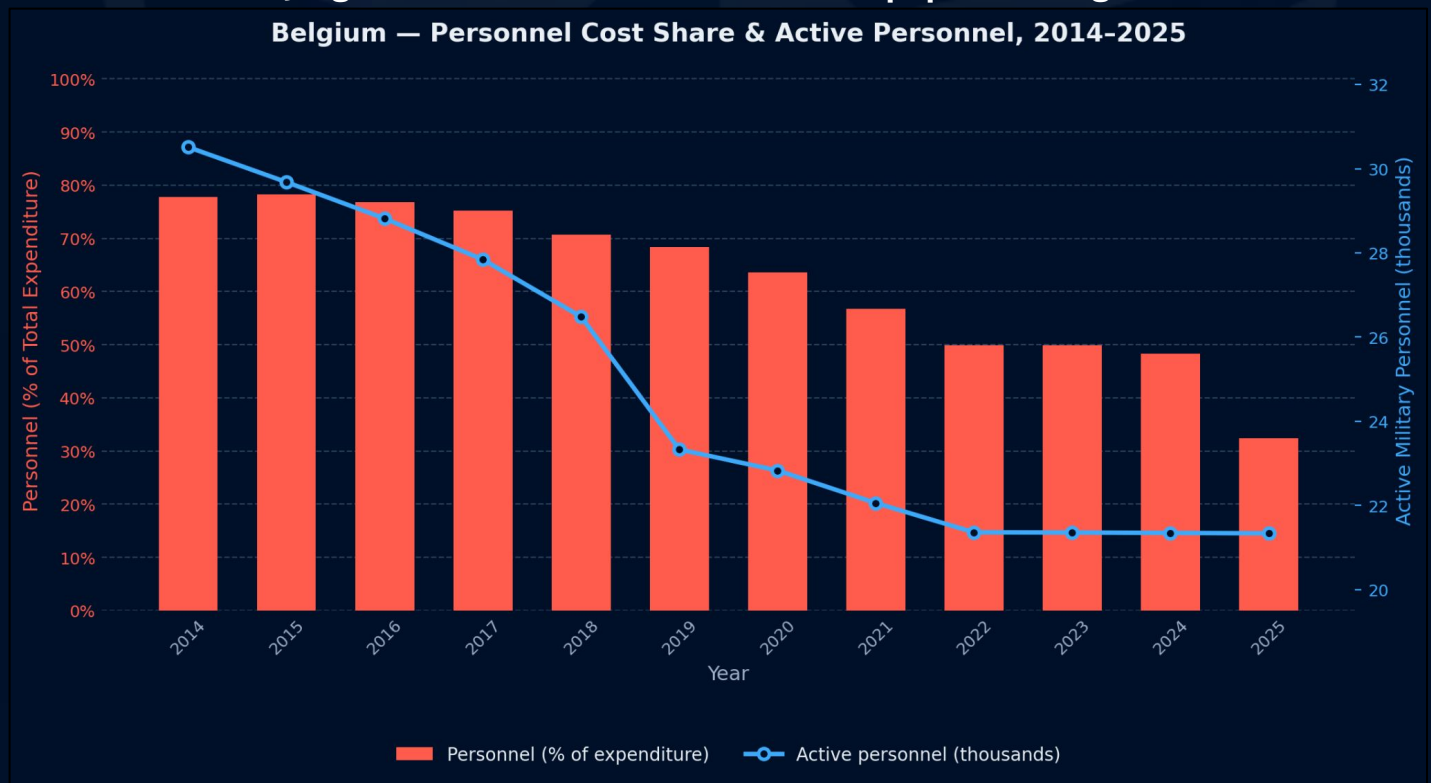
Belgium's [equipment share](#) trajectory is a promising but incomplete. For most of the past decade, equipment investment was essentially negligible—barely registering in the budget while personnel consumed roughly 78–79% of total expenditure in 2014–2015. That began shifting around 2021–2022, and by 2025 equipment share has settled to roughly 15% of the budget, while personnel has fallen to approximately 32%. The 2025 procurement surge (F-35 additions, NASAMS, frigates, 1,500 combat vehicles, MQ-9Bs) is now visibly registering in actual expenditure rather than remaining a paper commitment. Belgium spent decades as NATO's clearest example of a personnel-heavy, equipment-light budget; that structural imbalance is now being corrected.



MILITARY CONTRIBUTIONS

Manpower & Recruitment

Belgium's personnel cost share has fallen dramatically from roughly 78% of total defense expenditure in 2014 to approximately 32% in 2025, but not solely due to other investments. Active military personnel collapsed in parallel, dropping from around 31,000 in 2014 to roughly 21,500 by 2022, driven by a wave of retirements and a failure to recruit replacements. Almost 15% of newly recruited service members leave within their first year, and experts have argued Belgium needs to massively expand personnel to credibly contribute to NATO deterrence. The De Wever government is now treating the collapse as an emergency, with plans to recruit 2,800 new soldiers annually and double the total military workforce by 2035 through a voluntary service year and a new Cyber Force. The falling personnel cost share is therefore not a story of a professionalizing and specializing force. Rather, it is a story of a force that shrank through neglect and is now attempting to rebuild from a weakened baseline at the same moment it is trying to execute its most ambitious equipment surge in decades.



MILITARY CONTRIBUTIONS

Capability Modernization

Belgium is [modernizing](#) from a badly degraded baseline across every domain, but upcoming procurements tell of imminent modernization. The air force is in transition: 12 F-35As operational, ~50 legacy F-16s still flying, with the total F-35 order expanded to 45 and the entire F-16 fleet pledged to Ukraine. The F-35As already carry Belgium's NATO nuclear-sharing mission at [Kleine Brogel](#). The most glaring gap is air defense. Belgium currently has no Patriot and no national area air defense whatsoever, despite committing €4B+ to fix it (10 NASAMS, 3 long-range/anti-ballistic systems, 20 Skyrangers). On land, the army fields a single mechanized brigade of 9,500 troops with no tanks though [Strategic Vision 2025](#) calls for a 7,800-strong medium brigade with 1,500 combat vehicles by 2030. Naval modernization is the most concrete: two new ASW frigates contracted with Damen and Thales in 2023, a third added under the new strategy. Belgium is a country whose modernization plan is real and comprehensive, though almost entirely undelivered.



MILITARY CONTRIBUTIONS

Force Posture

Belgium's force posture value is disproportionate to its military size because of what it hosts rather than what it deploys. NATO's political headquarters sits in Brussels and SHAPE is at Casteau, making Belgium the institutional and command core of the entire alliance. Belgium also hosts approximately 1,150 US EUCOM personnel and roughly 10–15 US [B61 nuclear gravity bombs](#) at Kleine Brogel Air Base. On forward deployments, Belgium contributes approximately 200 troops to Lithuania's eFP battlegroup and 300 troops to Romania's eFP. A mine hunter rotates through NATO's [Standing Naval Mine Countermeasures Group](#). Belgium was the [first ally to conduct](#) Baltic Air Policing at Šiauliai in 2004 and has rotated through 16 air-policing missions over 20 years with nearly 200 interceptions; Belgian F-16s began Iceland Air Policing in 2025. The ports of Antwerp-Bruges and Zeebrugge are operationally central to NATO reinforcement logistics for US and allied equipment movements into Europe.



MILITARY CONTRIBUTIONS

Industrial Base

Belgium's most significant defense industrial asset [is FN Herstal](#), one of the world's premier small arms manufacturers that produces the M249 SAW and M240 machine gun used by the US Armed Forces and dozens of allied militaries. Beyond FN Herstal, the industrial base is limited, and Belgium acknowledges it: the STAR plan under [Strategic Vision 2025](#) explicitly targets domestic investment in armored vehicles, artillery, and munitions—sectors where Belgium currently depends entirely on imports. Belgium hosts critical NATO supply chain infrastructure through its port complex at Antwerp-Bruges and Zeebrugge, which serve as primary entry points for US and allied equipment flowing into Europe, though Chinese-linked port stakes in that logistics corridor remain an unresolved vulnerability. Belgium is not a significant ASAP or EDIRPA munitions producer.



STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

Declared Posture

Belgium's strategic posture is anchored in two documents: the 2021 [National Security Strategy](#) and the [Strategic Vision Defence 2025](#), which explicitly frames Belgium's defense transformation as preparation for large-scale conflict and territorial defense. On Russia, the doctrine is aligned with NATO's 2022 Strategic Concept. On China, former Foreign Minister [Lahbib's public framing](#) of China as simultaneously "partner, rival, and potential enemy" is the clearest official statement of Belgium's position, though still short of the hardline Baltic or Polish posture. On Iran, Belgium's declared posture is sanctions-based and EU-aligned, with no independent operational doctrine. Overall, Belgium's declared strategy places it firmly in the NATO and EU mainstream.



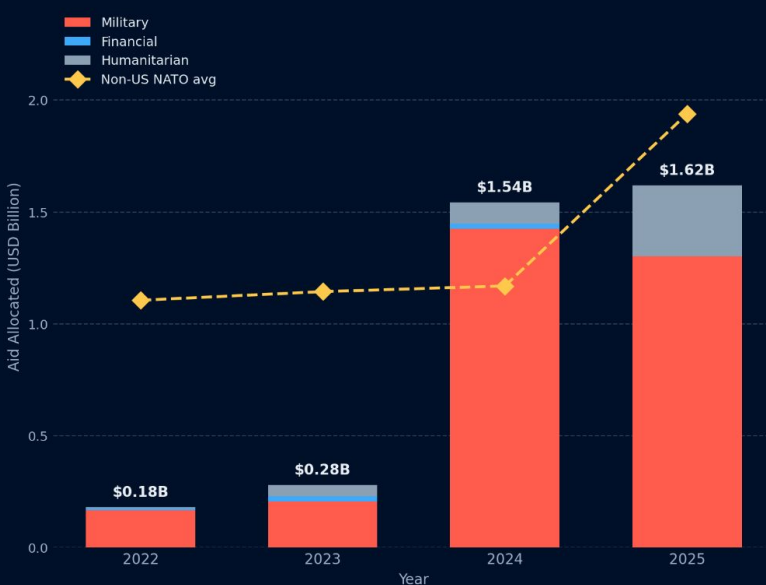
STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

Ukraine Support

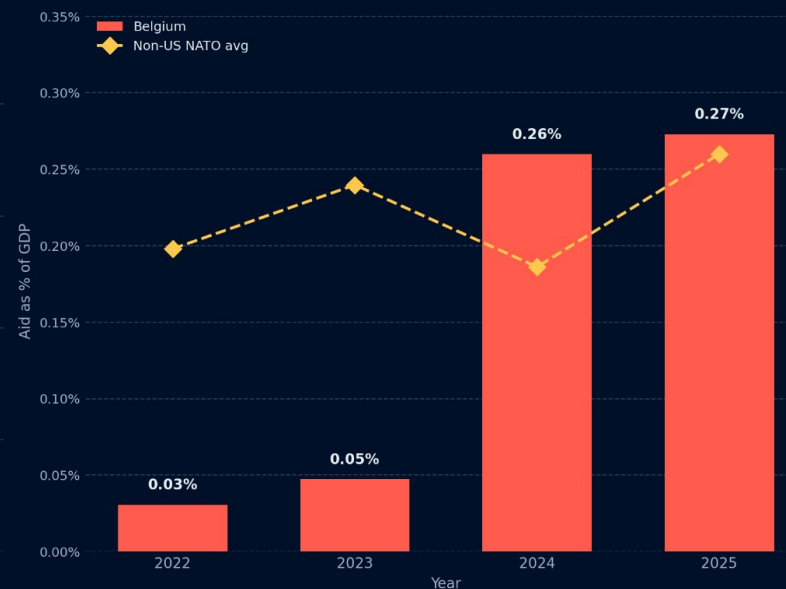
Belgium has committed €4.488B in total bilateral support to Ukraine since February 2022, with [Kiel tracking](#) €3.182B allocated and €3.710B committed (roughly 0.63–0.74% of GDP). The De Wever government pledged at least €1B per year in military aid, delivered €1.1B in 2025, and approved another [€1B package in April 2026](#). The headline military commitment is F-16 transfers: originally 30 aircraft, now reported as up to 53 by end-2029, tied to F-35 transition timelines. Belgium's most strategically distinctive Ukraine role runs through Euroclear: at end-2024, Euroclear held €183B in sanctioned Russian assets, generating €6.9B in annual interest and €1.7B in Belgian corporate tax revenue, with windfall proceeds already flowing to Ukraine financing mechanisms. F-16 delivery timing and a €0.528B commitment gap are the main concerns.

Belgium — Ukraine Aid, 2022-2025

Belgium: Aid to Ukraine by Type



Belgium: Aid to Ukraine as % of GDP



STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

Russian Decoupling

Belgium's energy decoupling is more complicated than most Western European allies because of Zeebrugge's role as a [major LNG terminal](#). Belgium aligned with EU coal, crude, and oil-product bans and has implemented restrictions on Russian LNG re-export and transshipment from Zeebrugge. However, as of October 2025, Belgium remained Europe's second-largest importer of Russian LNG over the first eight months of the year at 2.3 million metric tons, behind only France. Belgium's most strategically important decoupling contribution is Euroclear: €183B in [immobilized Russian assets](#) as of end-2024, with windfall mechanisms already generating billions for Ukraine financing. On sanctions enforcement, Belgium has aligned through all 20 EU packages, and Belgian police conducted meaningful enforcement action in the diamond sector in March 2024. The De Wever government has revoked the nuclear phase-out law and is pursuing domestic nuclear extension and potential new build under Western frameworks.



STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

Public Support & Political Resilience

In the [2024 NATO polling](#), 77% of Belgians said they would vote to stay in NATO, while 45% supported increasing defense spending, a notable shift for a country that long trailed on contributions. Sixty-five percent agreed Belgium should defend another ally if attacked, 65% agreed NATO membership makes a foreign attack on their country less likely, and Ukraine support stood at roughly 64% combined, just above the alliance median. The De Wever government has committed Belgium to meeting the 2% target and accepted the Hague 5% framework, and the governing New Flemish Alliance supports NATO hawkery and is not a political constraint on spending increases. Vlaams Belang, at roughly 25% of Flemish voters, remains ambivalent on Ukraine solidarity and is susceptible to anti-establishment frames that can undercut solidarity, but has not positioned itself as anti-NATO. The PCP (Communists) is the one force that explicitly opposes NATO membership, but at consistently below 5% of the vote it carries no governing leverage.



STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

Hedging Behavior

Belgium's hedging behavior is broadly clean with one significant unresolved exposure. There is no formal Belt and Road participation, no wartime high-level engagement with Moscow or Tehran by the De Wever government, and no adversary arms procurement—the entire modernization program runs through American and European companies. Huawei has been structurally displaced from Belgian 5G core infrastructure, the 2023 Royal Decree institutionalizes that posture, and Belgian [prosecutors launched](#) an aggressive enforcement action against alleged Huawei-linked political interference in the European Parliament in March 2025. The principal counter-alignment concern is [COSCO-linked minority stakes](#) in Antwerp-Bruges and Zeebrugge. This is not a formal BRI alignment problem, but Antwerp-Bruges is a strategically critical NATO logistics and military-mobility hub, making Chinese-linked infrastructure stakes in that environment qualitatively more serious than ordinary portfolio investment. The port exposure is unresolved and carries alliance-wide consequences.



STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

Operational Cooperation

Belgium's operational value to the US and NATO is primarily institutional and logistical rather than combat based. Brussels hosts NATO's political headquarters and SHAPE. Kleine Brogel Air Base hosts US B61 nuclear weapons under NATO sharing arrangements, with Belgian F-35As now carrying the [nuclear delivery mission](#). Antwerp-Bruges and Zeebrugge are the primary entry points for US Army rotational and surge deployments into Europe, making Belgian port infrastructure operationally critical to any major reinforcement scenario. On deployed contributions, [Belgium has conducted](#) 16 Baltic Air Policing rotations over 20 years with nearly 200 interceptions, rotates into Lithuanian and Romanian eFP battlegroups, and contributes to NATO Standing Naval Forces with niche mine-warfare capability. On Iran, Belgium aligned with EU snapback sanctions and the E3 framework but took no direct operational role during Operation Epic Fury. Belgium neither facilitated nor obstructed US strike operations—it did not follow Spain, France, or Italy in denying overflight or basing access, but also did not provide the kind of direct operational support Romania and Portugal offered.

