

Fostering Our Partnership

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Ik heb zo veel respect voor de schoonheid van uw taal, dat ik niets meer ga zeggen in het Nederlands.

Et mon français n'est pas meilleur que mon néerlandais, donc je continuerai en Anglais.

Thank you so much for your wonderful introduction.

And thanks so much to the "Royal High Institute of Defence" for the honor of having me appear today. I have come here today for two reasons. First, to see friends. In Belgium, I meet only two types of people, those who are already friends and those who will soon become friends.

And, second, I have come here today, as friends often do, because I need your help. And there is no one better to help than Belgium.

Let me explain.

When I arrived a year ago, I knew the painful truth that for much of the preceding recent past, we had not really spoken to one another. It had been too long since Belgians and Americans, since Europeans and Americans, had listened to one another. Since we had heard each other.

And that is what Barack Obama knew, when he called me last year and told me he wanted me to represent him and the United States in Belgium. He told me that he believed people in Belgium, in Europe and around the world were taking a new look at America. The question was when they took that fresh look, what would they see? Would they see our renewed commitment to dialogue and to partnership? To listening and not always speaking, and to never lecturing? Would they see our commitment to a better planet not just for our children, but for theirs, and for all among the brotherhood of man? Would they see the integrity of our words; the transparency of our deeds? Would they believe what we had to say?

And even if they did see it, even if they did believe it,

Even if you do see it, even if you do believe it in Belgium, at the Royal High Institute of Defence . . .

What then?

Would you, would Belgium, would Europe, accept our openness as a sign of admiration and respect, or view it as weakness?

Would you trust us and come for the ride even when what we ask is difficult, as I hope we always will do for you? Will we be there for each other?

Will we be able to work together to make the planet safer – for citizens in the Grand Place or Times Square; for police officers in Antwerpen, Liege or Detroit, for young military officers at Fort Benning or Arlon.

And will we be able to do so in a manner which makes us both proud?

We of course will never demand, and indeed never really ask. Rather, we would always discuss. Partners discuss. And we can only march forward as partners.

But when we discuss, will we as partners get to “yes?”

Not to “maybe.” Not to “we would like to, but it is too hard, come back later.” Not to “let’s see what others do.”

But to “yes.” Will we get to “yes?”

History instructs that these should not be difficult questions. The graves of hundreds of young American soldiers at Flanders Field who died fighting with Belgians in World War I; the more than 13,000 American soldiers buried in Belgium in World War II, and the devotion of the thousands of Belgian families who have adopted those gravesites stand as a daily tribute to our past as the closest of allies.

But the past – even for dear allies – does not automatically become prologue. Allies must always renew their bond through mutual respect and mutual interest. In the last several years, we had caused that bond to weaken. So history alone would not get us to “yes, together.”

And I knew from the crowds in Berlin and from the roar of the cheer that swept across Europe that President Obama was rightfully respected, rightfully admired, rightfully beloved. He is indeed in some respects a star. But Belgium’s admiration and Europe’s admiration for President Obama could not be enough – it left a gap between feelings for the man as opposed to for the country that he leads . . . or for the policies he and our country must pursue.

Can we close that gap as partners so that the support runs not just to individuals, not just to Barack Obama or Herman Van Rompuy or Yves Leterme, but to the countries and the organizations that they lead? So that the support centers not on personality, but on policy – sometimes difficult and never certain?

I have spent, our Embassy has spent, a year learning the answers to these questions. I have spent, our Embassy has spent, a year learning whether we can close the gap that had erupted over the past several years and had left our relationship headed in the wrong direction. I have spent a year learning how strong the Belgian-American partnership can and should be.

I have spent and will continue to spend an hour each morning, each day, studying French one morning and Dutch the next, to be a better listener and a better partner.

I have travelled through all of Belgium, 186 cities, villages and communes so far, from Knokke to

Bree, from Tournai to Dinant to Bulligen, shaking hands and listening to Belgians, in search of these answers. For partnerships can be discussed in Minister's offices, in Parliament and in chateaus . . .

But partnerships are built with and exist between the people . . . all people. With counts and barons, CEOs and lawyers, and with mothers and fathers everywhere.

In the year, I have learned that the answers are indeed out there. . .

The answers about our future . . .

Our future together. About our mutual pursuit of security. About our mutual passion for privacy and liberty.

The answers about our future and our partnership are on the lips, in the words, in the deeds, and in the smiles of the people – the people everywhere I have travelled -- on the beach in Oostende, in the port of Zeebrugge, at the Last Call in Ieper, at the Carnivale in Aalst, near the Krackling in Geerardsbergen, with law students in Kortrijk, on the port in Antwerp, next to Kim Clijsters in Bree, mourning lost school children in Mortsel, by the canal in Ghent, next to the Belfry in Brugge, under the carillon in Mechelen, at the racetrack in Waregem, at the Horebeke windmill village and in Oodenard, in an ice cream parlor in St. Nicklass, at a designer's shop in Hasselt, next to Fonske in Leuven, amidst the cauldrons at the Abbey in Westvleteren, amidst the construction of the new museum for the Red Star Line in Antwerpen, sailing in Koksijde, amidst the Fisherman on Horseback in Astridplein, winding around the WWII bunkers at Raversijde, throughout In Bev's corporate offices, at Pfizer in Puur, on Koppen, Phara, de Laatse Show, Villa Vanthilt, the Humo Pop Poll Awards . . . The answers are there.

Amidst the Cathedral in Tournai, at the Dou Dou in Mons, at midfield at the Standard Game, in the Christmas Village and Sunday market in Liege, at a corporate headquarters in Wavre, in a café in Nivelles, along the Meuse in Dinant, at a fair in Namur, with the Gilles in Binche, among technical students and firefighters in Charleroi, in the underground garage at Louvain-La-Neuve, in the town square in Malmedy, eating cheese in Orval, with monks in Leffe, amidst falcons in Bouillon, in Pierre Marcolini's kitchen, on the hill at Waterloo, in the courtyard in Chimay, with ear plugs to drown out racecars at Spa, in a housing project in Amay, at a windmill farm in Enghien, standing at attention in Neupre . . .

The answers are there.

At Memorials in Bastogne, and Bullingen and Butchenbach . .

At the Mannekin Pis, Cinquantenaire, in Molenbeek and Cureghem, cycling with Eddie Merckx and Stijn Devolder in Brussels; starting the Tour de France at the Palais, dancing with the Ommegang, along the Flower Carpet, next to the Meyboom in the Grand Place; , . And so much more.

The answers are there. I heard them. I saw them. I hear them and see them daily.

I learned that Belgians and Americans today indeed share common values. We share common goals.

Common ends. A belief in common means to those ends.

We share not just a history on the battlefield. Not just undying gratitude for past World Wars among a grateful generation now too close to dying.

We share not just respect for one man, even a transformative figure in history. Not just applause for a star.

But common values. Common goals. Common ends. A belief in common means to those ends.

And with proper communication and understanding, sharing common values, sharing common goals, a belief in common means to those ends, should mean that we should be able to tackle together the common problems . . . the world problems that we face together.

Two countries, one script, one page.

Whether your name is di Rupo, or De Wever or de Obama . . .

Who does not believe in the dignity of mankind? In peace before war? In social justice? In women's rights? In saving our planet for our children?

Who does not seek to prevent nuclear threats from North Korea and Iran? Who does not support the restoration of functioning civil society in Afghanistan?

Who does not believe in the pursuit and prevention of terror, in making our streets safe, in a manner which makes us not simply secure but proud about our shared values?

Who does not believe in climate and the need to pursue a binding and lasting agreement to limit our carbon? In the need to close Guantanamo and to do so now? In finalizing the withdrawal from Iraq? In ending gender violence in the Congo? In seeking peace and security for all in the Middle East?

So given that we share common values and common policies, we have the potential to achieve so much together. And we have so much work to do together. We have a future to build together. And this time, we have to get it right. And we have to get it right together.

We need each other to achieve our shared goals.

But I learned so much more this first year. I learned how much Belgium really matters. I learned the importance of Belgium – an importance that even Belgians do not fully realize. And therefore I learned that the potential for real success by working together – to meet real world challenges together – is real.

Yes, I imagine that many are thinking what I often hear. As I travel through Belgium, I often hear protests that Belgium is but a small country. That Belgium has relatively little manpower, relatively little funding. How can Belgium be needed to achieve our shared goals? Even if I am right that

Belgium and the U.S. share values and goals, how important could Belgium really be to achieving those goals? What could we really achieve working together that the United States cannot achieve without us?

Of course I understand that Belgium has a limited budget and limited manpower. But, though Belgium may be short on men and dollars, Belgium leads in credibility. I knew that and said that long before Europe decided that Herman Van Rompuy should lead Europe.

You see, Belgium does not speak on the international stage that often or that loudly. Belgium never speaks with a hidden agenda. Belgium never speaks simply to hear itself speak. Rather, when Belgium speaks on the international stage, it does so for only one reason: it has something to say.

So when Belgium speaks, people take note. People listen. People reflect and people ultimately agree, even if they do not know that they are following. Belgium indeed leads in credibility. It is that credibility that Belgium can provide as we work together to reach our shared goals. Credibility often expressed in actions. When Belgium acts, it is a clarion call to some. A shining example to all.

Having learned in the squares and markets that we share common values and goals, and are faced with common problems to be solved . .

Having come to understand the power of Belgian credibility in teamwork with U.S. efforts and the importance of a united Europe behind solid leaders . . .

We are indeed in such a wonderful position to address the leading problems of the world together. To coordinate and implement programs to tackle the leading challenges of the day – terrorism, Afghanistan, Iran, the protection of rights by the closing of Guantanamo, climate and so much more.

How well have we done together? How effective has the revival of the partnership been?

Well, we have had some measure of success. Our security services have a degree of cooperation in combating terrorism. Belgium is a reliable and meaningful ally in NATO and has sent 570 men to Afghanistan as part of the NATO mission. And in addressing nuclear threat by a rogue Iran, the EU has joined the U.S. in adopting rigorously-worded sanctions and Belgium has endorsed those rigorously-worded sanctions . The nations of Europe have taken Guantanamo prisoners and Belgium has successfully relocated one.

So we have indeed made much progress. We have achieved much for which we are truly grateful and thankful.

But truth be told, the U.S. and Europe have not gotten nearly as far as our shared joint values and goals would seem to be able to take us. And the road has been a bit bumpier than what my analysis of our partnership of ideas and hopes might have suggested. While my first year education would suggest that we should nearly always be firmly on the same page, we sometimes appear not to be even within the same book. While we have indeed come far, there is still sometimes a tension. Sometimes still a measure of skepticism, perhaps even occasionally distrust.

Such tension and skepticism is rarely acknowledged by officials, but it emerges in newspaper articles

and in editorials. It can be seen sometimes underlying decision making in capitals and legislative bodies.

How can this be?

That is the second reason I came here tonight. As I said, I need your help. We need your help. To close that remaining gap. To dissolve that remaining tension. To enlist our bonded partnership to eliminate that remaining skepticism.

And there is no place better to seek such help than Belgium. There is no better friend and no more credible partner to help close that remaining gap.

You see, the problem so often is not differences in values or goals, but failures of communication and failures of understanding. Old stereotypes often drown out changed circumstances. If we could just do a better job of communicating, the path of joint progress would be clearer. Suspicion and skepticism would not stand a chance.

For example, Europe and the United States, Belgium and the United States, have made a great deal of progress in resolving issues of balancing the need for access to information to protect our security with our shared desire to protect our privacy. We both cherish life, cherish security and value privacy. We have after perhaps too much struggle, skepticism and tension reached agreement on the Terrorist Finance Tracking Program that tracks suspicious financial transactions. And we now see some of the same factors as we discuss access to Passenger Name Record information from airplane bookings, currently under discussion among us.

There is in fact a long history of information sharing between the United States and Europe with no record of misuse of data. Because both of us have strong privacy and data protection cultures. Both of us have come to understand that this is not an either-or proposition – we need to protect both our security and our values to truly live free.

But sometimes the balance is viewed as involving potential inroads on the privacy of Europeans mainly to foster the security of Americans. In other words, though we share the same values – we both cherish security fostered in the manner least intrusive on our privacy – somehow there is a sense that terror really is a problem that strikes only elsewhere, and that America cares little for others' privacy in pursuing its own security.

But the notion that the scope and targets of terror has or can be limited is indeed foolish and foolhardy. Although we just recently succeeded in having the information declassified and although Belgium has not previously heard, the truth is that Belgians have been attacked this year. Remember the Christmas airline bomber on a flight from the Netherlands to Detroit who tried to detonate the plastic explosives in his underwear and was tackled by passengers before he could do so? He was not going to commit simply the mass murder of Americans. In fact, he was going also to commit mass murder of Belgians as well. There were 7 Belgians on the flight. Proportionate to their populations, there were more Belgians on that flight than Americans. And there were in fact 100 non-Americans from 18 countries. One of the three major terror attempts viewed as having occurred in the United States this year actually endangered more Belgians proportionately than Americans. And access to

information-sharing databases would help law-enforcement prevent a repeat of that case happening on another plane.

As to the second of the three major U.S. terror arrests this year, the case of the smoking car bomb that was detected by a hot dog vendor in the middle of Times Square – remember that one? -- how many Europeans and how many Belgians do you think were in Times Square on a busy summer evening? On a planet as flat as ours, Times Square is no longer a target solely of Americans. The Taliban took credit for the attempted attack. And access to Passenger Name Records resulted in the arrest of the terrorist, Faisal Shahzad, after he had boarded a plane to return to Islamabad, Pakistan, but before the plane could take off.

And the third major United States arrest this year in a case of terror actually involved a threat somewhat near Belgium's backyard. U.S. law enforcement arrested David Headley, previously known as Daood Sayed Gilani, for traveling to Denmark to scout a Danish newspaper building and Danish synagogues for possible terrorist attacks. Authorities started with knowing only a first name – David – how many Davids are there in the world? – a partial travel itinerary and a vague idea of time (within a few weeks). Using databases, including Passenger Name Records, authorities arrested Headley, who pled guilty for his role in the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attacks. Headley's al-Qaeda contacts allegedly told him that the attackers should behead the employees of the newspaper which published the famous cartoons and throw their heads out the building windows to draw a response from Danish authorities.

There is sometimes speculation in the Belgian media that Belgium's assistance in fighting terror generated in Afghanistan would end on the day, God Forbid, that the first Belgian casualty were realized. As a person, a father, a fan of Belgium and the U.S. Ambassador, I pray every day that no Belgian life is ever so lost. But I pray as well that no Belgian or European life is lost on the next NW Flight 253 carrying 7 Belgians and 100 non-Americans from 18 countries. That no Belgian or European life is lost at the hands of the next David Headley targeting the media or synagogues in Europe.

I need your help with better communication. Access to Passenger Name records helps protect us all. And in the case of access to Passenger Name Records, think about the data privacy interests involved. All of the data on a Passenger Name Record was voluntarily supplied by the individual to the airline. All of the information was data that the flyer was willing fully to disclose simply to board a plane. Your concern is what happens to that data. As Vice-President Biden said earlier this year here in Brussels, our commitment to privacy is as profound as yours. We worked with the EU to provide robust safeguards of personal privacy in the Terrorist Finance Tracking Program, and we are now working to do so on Passenger Name Records.

Two more foreign affairs topics that, given the length, I will mention just quickly but we can address, if you would like, in the question and answer period.

First, Afghanistan.

Here I well understand the origins of the skepticism and tension. History is hard to forget and credibility is a badge slowly earned.

But, I submit, Barack Obama has earned that badge. Here again, I submit, the problem is not differences in values or goals, but failures of communication and failures of understanding. Again, if we could just do a better job of communicating, the path of joint progress would be clearer. Suspicion and skepticism would not stand a chance.

So here again, I need your help and again there is no one better to help than Belgium.

NATO is plainly working as hard as it can to transfer security obligations to a trained Afghan Security Force so that NATO forces can exit Afghanistan just like U.S. forces have exited Iraq. Our values and our goals with regard to Afghanistan, I submit, are therefore identical. To transfer all security obligations as quickly as possible to trained Afghans and to have the NATO forces leave as swiftly as possible. As far as I can tell, no one in Belgium, not the left, center or right, not the media, not the North or South, disagrees with that goal. And we all—every Belgian and American and every NATO ally – take pride in the 7 million Afghani children now in school, including 37% who are female. We all remember the cruelty of those who oppose the Afghan government and ISAF forces.

And the good news is that NATO's recruitment targets for 2010 for Afghans to join the Afghani National Security Force and to be trained has been met. So the good news for all is that the replacements exist – the ranks of dedicated Afghans awaiting training to provide the future security infrastructure that will hasten the exit of the NATO forces has appropriately been growing.

So is there a serious question that the growing number of trainees needs a growing number of trainers? Don't we all – Belgians and Americans -- support getting the training done and getting the NATO forces home?

Lastly, the threat of a nuclear-armed Iran.

While we continue to offer Iran dialogue and a path back to international respectability with regard to the peaceful use of nuclear energy, the United Nations has found it necessary to call for strong international pressure to get Iran to comply with its international obligations. It has mandated controls on dangerous exports of goods and technology, on financial transactions that support proliferation activities, on suspect individuals, and on transport, among other things.

Once again, there are no differences in our values and goals. Belgium and the United States agree together to our core that we must do all we can to avoid the chaos in the Middle East that will ensue from a nuclear-armed Iran under President Ahmadinejad. Belgium and America agree that we must do all we can to ensure peace and stability in the Middle East. Belgium and Minister VanAckere have worked closely with Special Envoy George Mitchell to help foster Middle-East peace and stability.

And we have made much progress on the issue of Iranian shipping and the Iranian company known as IRISL – which has a track record of arms trafficking, assisting in proliferation activities and deception to avoid existing sanctions. Traditionally 72 IRISL ships a year have been serviced by the port of Antwerp – more than one a week. On June 16, at the moment when the U.S. Treasury published its list of designated entities including, among others, the new Iranian front company HDS Lines and its cargo ships – whose names had been changed and hulls have been repainted to elude the sanctions – one of the ships on Washington's list, the Sepanta, was in the port of Antwerp.

But like the U.N. and the U.S., the E.U. has now adopted strict sanctions. A provision of the July 26 decision of the EU requires Member States to inspect ships suspected of carrying illicit cargo, and I would submit that given its track record, IRISL and its affiliates are inherently suspect. Funds and economic resources of designated entities like IRISL – designated by the United Nations, the EU and the United States alike -- must be frozen. The effect of the asset freeze on IRISL and its affiliates should mean this – EU ports are effectively closed for business for IRISL.

Yet the language of sanctions is but a start, not a solution. Sanctions have to be aggressively enforced to be meaningful. When discussing enforcing sanctions at a North Sea port, uniformity is a key principle, in order to ensure fairness to all ports in Europe and the effectiveness of the sanctions regime. So someone needs to gather Antwerp, Rotterdam, Calais and the other ports to ensure a uniform and thorough enforcement of the sanctions. We all need to ensure that the UN sanctions are implemented worldwide and that no one takes advantage of strict enforcement in Europe and America. And it needs to happen now. In a time of the Belgian EU Presidency, on an issue relating to the North Sea, when what is at stake is our future security from the misuse of nuclear weapons, who better to lead than Belgium?

I spoke earlier of Belgium's credibility and the importance of its voice on the world stage. And I have asked for your help. If Belgium made the call that it is time to protect all by going forward on an agreement for access to Passenger Name Records; if Belgium made the call that it is time to get enough trainers into Afghanistan to hasten the principled withdrawal of NATO forces; if Belgium made the call that our shared goal of a peaceful and secure planet, free from the threat of nuclear horrors, required the uniform inspection of IRISL ships and seizure of IRISL assets, who would not answer those calls? If Belgium leads, who in Europe – or in the world for that matter -- could respond with tension and skepticism? Who would not follow? If Belgium made those calls, none would have an excuse.

And when we are discussing fundamental security for our children, can anyone afford an excuse?

Thanks so much and all the best.