



# Integrated Country Strategy

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## THE BAHAMAS

**FOR PUBLIC RELEASE**

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## 1. Chief of Mission Priorities

### Securing our Border

As the U.S. government attempts to stem irregular migration by land, we must also maintain our focus on the persistent and tragic trend of migration by sea. The Bahamas lies just 50 miles from the Florida coast at its northern point, and its 700 islands curve south all the way to the coasts of Haiti and Cuba. Throughout history, smugglers have used The Bahamas as a series of “stepping stones” to transport goods and people around the Caribbean and into the U.S. As we make progress dismantling criminal networks in Central America and Mexico, we must be prepared for the rejuvenation of alternate routes through The Bahamas. Traffickers do not discriminate, and they will use all available routes to smuggle any profitable good to the United States, whether drugs, weapons, wildlife, or people.

Fortunately, Bahamian law enforcement officers have a long history of cooperating with the U.S. to patrol their long and porous border. This cooperation is founded on one of the world’s most enduring law enforcement partnerships: Operation Bahamas, Turks and Caicos (OPBAT). U.S. Coast Guard officers, DEA agents, and Bahamian police are all frontline participants in this robust partnership, and it reaps benefits on both sides of the Florida straits.

A historic and popular destination for Americans traveling abroad, The Bahamas has long been home to vacationers, retirees, the yachting community, and wealthy ex-pats. While politically stable, The Bahamas is perennially among the top ten countries in per capita homicides, and violent crime threatens the safety of the five million Americans who travel here every year. The Mission’s work to improve the criminal justice system strengthens our bilateral relationship and protects the welfare of our citizens. That said, local officials have yet to successfully prosecute complex criminal cases or dismantle criminal networks, a clear indicator that we must assist the government in tackling crime at a higher, more strategic level.

In addition to new initiatives, the Mission continues to support one of 15 “CBP Preclearance” facilities operated abroad by U.S. Customs and Border Protection. CBP Preclearance officers inspect travelers to the U.S. before they board their flight, allowing them to bypass inspections upon arrival in the United States. Nearly one and a half million passengers pass through CBP

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Preclearance at Nassau's international airport every year. Most Bahamians already enjoy visa-free travel to the U.S., and CBP Preclearance further improves the flow of travel, supports the local economy, and pushes homeland security beyond the U.S. physical border.

### **Increasing Prosperity**

The Bahamas has been designated a "high income" country by the World Bank, but as with many Caribbean countries, this calculation is distorted by the incomes of wealthy foreign residents and does not reflect the very real pressures of poverty. Destructive natural disasters like Hurricane Dorian (2019) and the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2022) destroyed the livelihoods of poor Bahamians and pushed the national debt to untenable levels. Undocumented Haitian migrants and their descendants died at high rates from these twin disasters, while also confronting a rising tide of xenophobia.

For the government to ensure the prosperity and security of its people, it must showcase a commitment to transparency and responsible governance within a modern regulatory framework. Geographic proximity makes The Bahamas a natural destination for U.S. investment, but The Bahamas must first take these critical steps to improve the ease of doing business. Energy sector reform and investments in 5G will lower costs and remove major barriers to investment. Tourism will remain an economic mainstay, but the Mission will advocate for market-oriented reforms that create a more competitive, efficient, and transparent business climate.

### **Addressing Hemispheric Challenges**

The Bahamas gained independence from Great Britain in 1973 and has hosted free and fair elections ever since. As a Caribbean Community (CARICOM) member, the government traditionally resists breaking with consensus positions developed within its own country bloc. For example, CARICOM countries remain steadfastly opposed to the U.S. embargo against Cuba and critical of the role U.S. handguns play in high homicide rates across the region. The Bahamas does not always cohere to regional positions, however, and its diplomats often play a more dynamic role in multilateral fora by condemning authoritarian rule and advocating for democratic principles. We hope but cannot guarantee this activism grows in vigor, especially as

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we witness foreign actors gaining influence over sectors formerly dominated by U.S. entities. While the U.S. presence remains both strong and popular in The Bahamas, commentators regularly lament the decline of U.S. influence in the country.

The people of the Bahamas feel a great deal of cultural affinity for the United States and rely on easy access to the U.S. for entertainment, education, and family visits. That affinity includes democratic values, though the enthusiasm with which Bahamians vote does not always extend to a public embrace of broader civil liberties. Malign actors easily take advantage of social media to sow discontent, fuel intolerance, and undermine this nascent democracy. The Mission will renew its support for corollary democratic values such as social inclusion and equal rights, especially for women and the LGBTQI+ community. The Mission will use government programs to support women entrepreneurs and youth activists to increase the number of Bahamian leaders capable of guiding the country to a prosperous future. The Consular Section's commitment to the smooth and timely processing of student visas will encourage more youth to select the United States for higher education.

External threats aside, the single greatest challenge to achieving Mission goals is not external, but internal: Post's crumbling chancery, inadequate staffing, and constant struggle for resources compromises an otherwise healthy diplomatic presence. Assets managed by the Coast Guard, DEA, and other federal agencies are regularly diverted to other hotspots in the region. Mission leadership must constantly fend off attempts to poach the assets that allow us to plan law enforcement operations, reduce migrant drownings at sea, and stop the flow of drugs up and down this long archipelago. The Bahamas is a stalwart partner and close friend of the U.S., but this young democracy requires a long-term U.S. commitment that is neither threatened nor interrupted by competing priorities.

## 2. Mission Strategic Framework

### **Mission Goal 1: A Secure U.S. and Bahamian Border**

- **Mission Objective 1.1:** The Bahamas increases its capacity to counter transnational criminal organizations
- **Mission Objective 1.2:** The Bahamas enhances citizen security and upholds the rule of law

### **Mission Goal 2: Mutual Economic Prosperity and Climate Resilience**

- **Mission Objective 2.1:** The Bahamas cultivates a commercial environment that attracts responsible, inclusive, sustainable investment
- **Mission Objective 2.2:** The Bahamas adopts policies to protect the country against extreme weather events and leads global efforts to reverse climate change
- **Mission Objective 2.2:** The economy diversifies to reflect a greater mix of local businesses, women-owned businesses, and green technologies

### **Mission Goal 3: An Inclusive, Tolerant Society that Champions Democracy and Human Rights**

- **Mission Objective 3.1:** Top officials advocate for democratic values and human rights in international fora
- **Mission Objective 3.2:** The Bahamas fosters a more equitable, representative, and inclusive society

**Management Objective 1:** A fully staffed and efficient Management Platform to meet the future operational requirements of the New Embassy Compound.

**Management Objective 2:** Improve quality of services through updated policies, information technology, and adequate staffing

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### 3. Mission Goals and Objectives

#### **Mission Goal 1:** A Secure U.S. and Bahamian Border

**Description:** Strengthening control over our borders and fighting transnational crime is our Mission's top priority. We will protect our shared maritime border by disrupting illicit networks and cutting off trafficking routes that lead to the United States. We will share information with our Bahamian partners to enhance the security of the pathways through which people and goods enter and exit the United States. Improving the Bahamian government's capacity to fight crime and secure its own border will protect U.S. citizens at home and abroad.

**Objective 1.1:** The Bahamas increases its capacity to counter transnational criminal organizations

- **Justification:** The porous maritime border presents a major vulnerability to the security of the United States and The Bahamas. Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs) rely on pathways through The Bahamas to smuggle narcotics and people into the United States, and weapons and money out of the United States. Expanding Mission assistance programs and supporting joint law enforcement operations will support bilateral efforts to monitor trafficking pathways, conduct investigations, seize assets, and dismantle criminal networks.
- **Linkages:** Interim National Security Strategy priority to protect the security of the American people; JSP Objective 5.2; JRS Objectives 3.1 and 3.4; NORAD-USNORTHCOM strategy objectives to develop and strengthen mission partnerships with allies and partner nations; United States Strategy on Countering Corruption Objectives 1.2, 1.3, and 5.5.
- **Risks:** Failure to support The Bahamas' efforts to bolster security in their territory poses a direct threat to the security of U.S. citizens. TCOs weaken the stability of Bahamian security institutions and create opportunities for corruption. A weak security framework leaves the country open to exploitation by competitors seeking to establish a presence and gain influence alongside the United States.

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**Objective 1.2:** The Bahamas enhances citizen security and upholds the rule of law

- **Justification:** The U.S. depends on close cooperation with partner nations to overcome challenges to our mutual security. In The Bahamas, addressing weaknesses in the criminal justice system will underpin these efforts. More broadly, a strong criminal justice system will also promote faith in democratic governance and encourage foreign investment.
- **Linkages:** JSP Objective 3.3; JRS Objectives 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3; NORAD-USNORTHCOM strategy objectives to develop and strengthen mission partnerships with allies and partner nations; United States Strategy on Countering Corruption Objectives 1.4, 2.1, 2.2, 3.1, 3.3, 5.4.
- **Risks:** Without investments in the criminal justice system, courts and their law enforcement partners will fail to evolve to the point where they can prosecute complex criminal cases, dismantle criminal networks, or prevent public corruption. The failure of the criminal justice system wastes U.S. foreign assistance dedicated to supporting the rule of law and undermines the country's future as a healthy, functioning democracy.



## **Mission Goal 2: Mutual Economic Prosperity and Climate Resilience**

**Description:** Separated by just 50 miles at their closest point, the bilateral relationship between the United States and The Bahamas is critically important to both countries. We will promote mutual economic prosperity by encouraging policy and legislative reforms that increase the ease of doing business. Reforms will also improve financial transparency, promote economic diversification, and attract U.S. investment. We will address climate change by attracting “green finance” that leads to investments with better environmental outcomes. We will also reach out to U.S. suppliers of renewable energies and bridge fuels, especially those that are well suited to island nations, such as solar power and liquid natural gas

**Objective 2.1:** The Bahamas cultivates a commercial environment that attracts responsible, inclusive, sustainable investment

- **Justification:** Augmenting the close trade relationship while protecting U.S. investment requires government reforms that promote the ease of doing business. Encouraging public officials to adopt transparent business practices and modern financial reporting will stem corruption and promote good governance. These actions will result in an increased number of responsible, inclusive, and sustainable U.S. investments while developing and diversifying the Bahamian economy.
- **Linkages:** Interim National Security Strategy priorities to expand economic prosperity and ensure that growth we promote through our international policies is durable and equitable; JSP Objectives 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3; JRS Objectives 4.1 and 4.2.
- **Risks:** Failure to enact meaningful reforms would leave a culture of corruption in place and frustrate public outcries for accountability. The government would continue to rely on handouts and noncompetitive contracting rather than modernizing. Longer term, sluggish economic recovery and low diversification would leave the country vulnerable to natural and fiscal disasters along with lower standards of living. Strategic competitors may provide short-term access to financing that weakens the competitiveness of U.S. companies and damages long-term prospects for fair and equitable economic growth.

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**Objective 2.2:** The Bahamas adopts policies to protect the country against extreme weather events and becomes a global leader in efforts to reverse climate change

- **Justification:** Scientists note that a one-meter rise in sea levels will rob The Bahamas of 80 percent of its land mass. This loss not only poses an existential threat to the country but would affect U.S economic and security interests. The Bahamas' ability to increase its environmental resilience and encourage global action on climate change are critical to the country's future.
- **Linkages:** Presidents Emergency Plan for Adaptation and Resilience (PREPARE); Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad; JSP Strategic Objective 1.2; National Security Strategy priority to help partners mitigate the effects of climate change.
- **Risks:** The Ministry of the Environment is currently reviewing its climate change strategy. The Bahamas is excluded from "green" financing mechanisms due to its World Bank designation as a high-income country. The government pivots to strategic competitors for energy diversification. Due to regulatory, technical, and financing challenges, power utilities are unable to accept bigger renewables projects

**Objective 2.3:** The Bahamas diversifies its economy to reflect a greater number of local businesses, women-owned businesses, and green technologies

- **Justification:** The Bahamian economy is overly dependent on tourism and financial services, resulting in high inequality and susceptibility to external shocks. Supporting local businesses, particularly micro, small, and medium enterprises, will help diversity the economy. Incorporating marginalized populations will deepen the pool of skilled workers and create a more competitive labor market. Progress in these areas will bolster the country's capacity to mitigate natural disasters and infectious disease outbreaks.

- **Linkages:** Interim National Security Strategy priorities to expand economic prosperity and work with like-minded nations to advance an international trading system that promotes a global transition to clean energy; JSP Objectives 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3; JRS Objectives 4.1 and 4.2.
- **Risks:** Traditional sectors of Bahamian society might see the empowerment of marginalized populations as a threat, and create backlash in public and on social media that accuses the U.S. of undermining traditional values.

### **Mission Goal 3: An Inclusive, Tolerant Society that Champions Democracy and Human Rights**

**Description:** The strong ties between the United States and The Bahamas include a shared, fundamental respect for democracy and human rights. Post will work with The Bahamas to jointly address both global and regional threats to democracy. We will also build support for U.S. positions in multilateral fora, especially the United Nations and the Organization of American States. Domestically, Post will encourage stronger adherence to transparency and accountability, equity and inclusion, and humane treatment of migrants and prisoners.

**Objective 3.1:** Top officials advocate for democratic values and human rights in international fora

- **Justification:** The Bahamas is poised to play a greater leadership role in the region by challenging threats to democracy and human rights. As the most “pro-U.S.” country in the Caribbean bloc, Bahamian leadership in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) is key to achieving our objectives in the UN and other international fora. In addition, taking a more active role in support of democratic values and human rights will strengthen the country’s domestic policy in these areas.
- **Linkages:** Interim National Security Strategy priorities to reinvigorate partnerships around the world, join with allies to revitalize democracy, strengthen our enduring advantages, and allow us to prevail in strategic competition with other nations; JSP Objective 1.5; JRS Objectives 1.1, 6.1, 6.2, and 6.3; United States Strategy on Countering Corruption Objectives 1.1-5, 3.1-5, 4.1, 4.2, 5.1-5.
- **Risks:** Failure to encourage Bahamian advocacy for democratic values could weaken the collective resolve of Caribbean nations to embrace these principles and shun autocratic governments. It could also increase The Bahamas' economic dependence on strategic competitors and complicate efforts to promote strong democratic positions at multilateral institutions.

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**Objective 3.2:** The Bahamas fosters a more equitable, representative, and inclusive society

- **Justification:** The Bahamas will benefit from establishing strong democratic institutions and upholding human rights and dignity for all citizens. These foundations will become stronger as marginalized populations achieve greater political power and public services. A more representative society will also instill The Bahamas with greater resilience to economic shocks. Greater access to education will help citizens thrive economically, hold their government to account, and safeguard their rights.
- **Linkages:** Interim National Security Strategy priorities to expand engagement throughout the Western Hemisphere based on principles of mutual respect and equality; JSP Objectives 3.1 and 3.2; and JRS Objectives 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 2.2, and 6.1; United States Strategy on Countering Corruption Objectives 1.1-5, 3.1-5, 4.1, 4.2, 5.1-5.
- **Risks:** The Bahamas is a young democracy vulnerable to political, economic, and digital encroachment by malign actors and their proxies. The cooptation of The Bahamas by these actors would deprive the U.S. of a strong ally and potential regional leader. Social decay in The Bahamas would exacerbate geographic vulnerabilities on our southern maritime border; already a corridor for trafficking and other criminal activity.

## 4. Management Objectives

**Management Objective 1:** A fully staffed and efficient Management Platform to meet the future operational requirements of the New Embassy Compound.

- **Justification:** The Mission will relocate to the New Embassy Compound (NEC) in late 2023. Currently, the Mission operates out of an old office building that does not meet physical security setback standards. Space is limited and the infrastructure is outdated. Post is long overdue to move into a safe and secure facility where modern diplomacy can be conducted, and the U.S. properly represented.
- **Linkages:** JSP Objectives 4.3 and 4.1; JRS Bureau Cross-Cutting Management Sub-Objective 1.2
- **Risks:** Failure to successfully move to the NEC would result in the Mission having to continue operations out of a facility that does not meet setback standards, exposing personnel to physical security vulnerabilities. We will incorporate all Mission sections into a forward-looking planning process to mitigate post-transition impediments to embassy operations.

**Management Objective 2:** Improve quality of services through updated policies, information technology, and adequate staffing

- **Justification:** The Management Section has suffered from excessive turnover in American and local staff and low morale in the Mission community. Many local staff hired during pandemic lockdowns have not benefitted from leadership or technical training. Management will return to a traditional management platform supported by training and focused on efficient delivery of services. Because Mission Nassau operates across three major locations – the chancery, airport, and new embassy compound – promoting diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) practices will lead to improved services, communication, and morale.
- **Linkages:** JSP Objective 4.1; JRS Bureau Cross-Cutting Management Sub-Objectives 1.1 and 1.3; White House Executive Order to advance diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility.
- **Risks:** An inefficient and inadequately staffed Management Section puts the entire Mission at risk. These risks are associated with all levels of activity, from strategic policy goals to the health and wellbeing of family members.