



Integrated Country Strategy

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 not lose sight of the enduring humanitarian and security crisis of migration by sea. The Bahamas lies just 50 miles from the Florida coast at its westernmost point, and its 700 islands spread south all the way to the coasts of Haiti and Cuba. Throughout history, smugglers have used The Bahamas to transport goods and people around the Caribbean and into the United States. Over the past several years, transnational organized criminals have increased efforts to smuggle drugs, weapons, wildlife, and people.

Fortunately, Bahamian law enforcement officers have a long history of cooperating with the U.S. to patrol their expansive border. This cooperation is founded on one of the world's most enduring law enforcement partnerships: Operation Bahamas, Turks and Caicos (OPBAT). Officers from the U.S. Coast Guard, Drug Enforcement Agency, and Customs and Border Protection join forces with Bahamian police and military to patrol the northern Caribbean in search of drug traffickers. In addition to these counter-drug activities, the U.S. military and U.S. Coast Guard routinely offer training, conduct joint operations, and provide humanitarian assistance across The Bahamas.

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 six million Americans who travel here every year. The Mission's work to improve the criminal justice system is a bedrock of the bilateral relationship and protects the welfare of our citizens. However, local officials struggle to successfully prosecute complex criminal cases or dismantle criminal networks, a clear indicator that the government needs assistance tackling crime at a higher, strategic levels.

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In addition to new initiatives, the Mission continues to support one of 15 Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Preclearance facilities operated abroad. CBP Preclearance officers inspect over 1 million travelers annually before boarding their flight to the United States. This longstanding partnership offers Bahamian citizens the opportunity to enjoy visa-free travel and disembarkation in domestic terminals when traveling to the U.S. from Nassau. The CBP Preclearance facility improves the flow of travel, supports the local economy, and extends 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 metric does not reflect the reality of high-income inequality and pervasive poverty on the islands. Due to the country's heavy reliance on tourism, the twin natural disasters of Hurricane Dorian (2019) and the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2022) destroyed the livelihoods of poor Bahamians and increased national debt. Undocumented Haitian migrants and their descendants died at high rates from these twin disasters, while the broader Haitian community confronts a rising tide of xenophobia. Economic fragility makes The Bahamas vulnerable to cyber criminals and money laundering operations.

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 take steps to improve the ease of doing business. Energy sector reform and investments in 5G and SMART technologies will lower costs and attract 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. As a Commerce Department Partner Post, Embassy Nassau provides commercial services and advocate on behalf of U.S. firms interested in doing business in The Bahamas.

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Addressing Hemispheric Challenges

The Bahamas celebrated 50 years of independence from Great Britain in 2023, and free and fair elections remain a hallmark of its democracy. A committed member of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the government traditionally joins consensus positions developed within the bloc. For example, CARICOM countries remain steadfastly opposed to the U.S. embargo against Cuba and critical of the role U.S. firearms play in high homicide rates across the region. The Bahamas does not always adhere to regional positions, however, and its diplomats often play a dynamic role in multilateral fora by condemning authoritarian rule and championing democratic principles. The Mission works to support this activism, especially as we witness foreign actors gaining influence in sectors formerly dominated by U.S. entities. While the U.S. remains a strong and popular partner, commentators regularly lament the decline of U.S. influence in the country.

The people of the Bahamas feel a great affinity for the United States and rely on easy access to the U.S. for entertainment, education, shopping, and family visits. That affinity includes democratic values, though the enthusiasm with which Bahamians vote does not always extend to broader civil liberties. Malign actors persistently target social and traditional media outlets to sow discontent, fuel intolerance, and undermine this nascent democracy. Even when at odds with public opinion, the Mission agitates for social inclusion and equal rights, especially for women, Haitian descendants, and the LGBTQI+ community. U.S. government programs support women entrepreneurs and youth activists to increase the number of Bahamian leaders capable of guiding the country toward a prosperous future. The Consular Section's commitment to the smooth and timely processing of student visas encourages Bahamian 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: The 12-year absence of a U.S. Ambassador compromises an otherwise healthy diplomatic presence. Assets managed by the Coast Guard, DEA, CBP, and other federal agencies are increasingly stretched by irregular migration and trafficking exigencies. Mission leadership must constantly fend off attempts to redirect the assets that allow us to conduct law

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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 malign foreign influence and the presence of transnational criminal organizations and activities
- **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 2.3:** 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: Improve working conditions at the chancery and facilitate the move to a 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 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 malign foreign influence and the presence of transnational criminal organizations and activities

- **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 smuggling 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.

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- **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.

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.

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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.

Objective 2.2: The Bahamas adopts policies to protect the country against extreme weather events and leads global 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:** President's 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 economy diversifies to reflect a greater mix 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 small and women-owned businesses, 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 for all. 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, migrant detainees, 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: Improve working conditions at the Chancery and facilitate move to a New Embassy Compound.

- **Justification:** The Mission will relocate to the New Embassy Compound (NEC) in summer 2024. 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.