

China's Irregular Warfare Strategy and Actions in the Bahamas

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Chinese investment across the Caribbean over the past two decades, has been framed as development assistance, commercial expansion, or participation in global infrastructure initiatives. Ports, resorts, highways, telecommunications networks, and logistics hubs funded or constructed by [Chinese state-owned enterprises \(SOEs\)](#) are often presented as mutually beneficial economic partnerships for small island states with limited domestic capital. This approach is very visible in the Bahamas, just 50 miles from the coast of Florida, where Chinese-backed projects have reshaped portions of the country's economic and physical landscape.

However, when viewed through the lens of irregular warfare (IW), these investments take on a different meaning. In this view, they are not solely economic activities. Instead, the investments are components of a broader strategy of strategic positioning, influence building, resource access, and long-term access creation within the [United States Northern Command \(USNORTHCOM\)](#) area of responsibility (AOR). China's approach in the Bahamas reflects a pattern of operating below the threshold of armed conflict. Without overt military goals or use, China appears to be leveraging infrastructure, finance, and commercial presence to shape the environment in ways that *could* be exploited during crisis or competition. This article argues that Chinese infrastructure purchases and development projects in the Bahamas should be understood or considered as a form of irregular warfare and/

or activities. Many of these activities and actions by China also apply to the broader Caribbean and could help China expand its growing footprint extremely close to the United States. These actions enable influence, create dependencies, establish potential access points, and complicate U.S. decision-making, all without triggering traditional defense responses.

China's Weaving of Tourism, Infrastructure, and Irregular Warfare

Irregular warfare can often be associated with insurgency, guerrilla operations, or non-state actors. However, modern IW is broader and includes tools such as economic statecraft, information operations, cyber activities, infrastructure control, and more as means of competition. In some instances, this transforms infrastructure from being a more neutral space into semi- or fully- controllable terrain in irregular warfare contexts. Ports, airports, telecommunications networks, energy grids, and logistics hubs can serve dual purposes: commercial functions during peacetime and strategic and operational utility during crises or conflicts. The key to understanding Chinese activity in the Caribbean is recognizing the dual-use nature of these investments, or at least the efforts to push toward dual-use capabilities.



IWC MISSION: The IWC prepares the warfighter to conduct irregular warfare across the spectrum of conflict by bridging instruction to operationalizing IW using next-generation techniques and concepts that enhance the lethality of the force and positions the United States and key allies and partners to remain ahead of the threat.

China is already developing their irregular footprint in the Bahamas through infrastructure which could serve dual-use purposes now or in the future. China's recent port investments in the Western Hemisphere and Caribbean continue to [raise concern of growing Chinese influence and potential follow on control of port infrastructure](#) dangerously close to the United States. For example, a port built to support tourism or trade can also function as access for foreign vessels, enable surveillance or monitoring, support logistics operations, or serve as a staging and refueling point. Importantly, none of these uses require overt militarization. The value lies in latent capability, providing China the ability to leverage infrastructure if/when needed. Many real-world examples of Chinese infrastructure projects in the Bahamas are illuminated below and indicate the web of Chinese irregular activities have already been happening for decades.

The Bahamas: A Case Study of Chinese Development in a U.S. Near-Abroad Region

The Bahamas is a useful case study because it is geographically close to the United States, economically dependent on tourism, and built around critical infrastructure that matters in both normal life and crisis. Tourism is the backbone of the Bahamian economy, relying heavily on visitors, hotels, airports, ports, communications, financial services, and the ability to quickly recover after storms. The U.S. International Trade Administration states that [tourism contributes over 70 percent of GDP and employs more than half of the workforce](#), while the United States remains the Bahamas' main trade partner. This factor alone creates a simple strategic reality; an actor or group of actors that can shape tourism, transportation, ports, telecommunications, financing, or disaster recovery in the Bahamas has influence over both business *and* over national resilience.

This is where irregular warfare becomes useful as an analytic frame. According to DoDI 3000.07, the [Department of War \(DoW\) defines and describes irregular warfare](#) as "a form of warfare where states and non-state actors campaign to assure or coerce states or other groups through indirect, nonattributable, or asymmetric activities." It favors indirect and asymmetric approaches and can use military and non-military tools to erode an adversary's power, influence, and will. At the same time, the [2020 IW Annex to the National Defense Strategy](#) notes that state adversaries increasingly compete below the threshold that may trigger a U.S. conventional response. In plain terms, IW isn't always guerrillas, insurgents, or proxy forces. In some cases, and in this particular case of China

in the Bahamas, it's about shaping the environment before a crisis happens. Currently in the Bahamas, this includes China's use of money, construction, technology, public messaging, relationships, and control/influence over key systems as ways and means of conducting IW.

Mechanisms or Characteristics of Irregular Warfare

Chinese infrastructure activity in the Caribbean aligns with several core IW mechanisms and/or characteristics, such as (1) access without presence; (2) influence through dependency; (3) shaping the information environment and decision space; and (4) blending or blurring civilian and strategic activities. While this list is not fully inclusive of all mechanisms or characteristics, they are increasingly clear lanes that China operates in or fosters in the Bahamas.

Access Without Presence: China does not need a permanent military base in the Bahamas to achieve strategic advantage. Infrastructure investments provide things like potential access points for future use, familiarity with local systems and environments, and/or relationships with key political and economic actors. This creates a form of proactive pre-positioning, similar in concept to [cyber persistence operations](#), but in the physical domain.

Influence Through Dependency: Infrastructure financing often involves large loans from Chinese state banks. For smaller economies, this can lead to long-term debt obligations, political leverage for China, or reduced willingness to oppose Chinese interests. Instead of "traditional" coercion, China's approach is more about structural influence embedded within economic relationships.

Shaping the Decision Space: By embedding itself in critical infrastructure sectors, China gains the ability to influence/shape policy and regulations in the region and affect how the Bahamian government and other involved or impacted governments respond during competition and crisis. It can also further complicate U.S. engagement in the Bahamas and broader region. Allies and partners may be less willing or able to align fully with U.S. priorities if doing so threatens their economic stability.

Blending Civilian and Strategic Activity: Ambiguity is a defining feature of irregular warfare and irregular activities. Chinese infrastructure projects are legal, transparent at surface level, and can be economically justified, all of which flow into a single challenge. The challenge is that there is no clear threshold at which

these activities become “hostile,” and in result, they persist largely uncontested.

Implications for Homeland Defense

The integration of Chinese-built or financed infrastructure within the Caribbean has several implications for homeland defense. To start, in a crisis or near-crisis scenario, Chinese-linked infrastructure could support logistics operations while simultaneously providing China with near-uncontested situational awareness. It can also enable a limited forward presence, whether overt or otherwise. Even if not used directly by Chinese military forces, the existence of these nodes creates uncertainty and risks for U.S. planners. As another implication, Chinese developments in the Bahamas create intelligence and surveillance concerns. Telecommunications infrastructure and digital systems present China with opportunities for data collection, network access, monitoring of communications, and more. In the gray zone, these capabilities may not be fully visible and become difficult to identify and/or counter. Third, these developments and actions can complicate partner relationships. Caribbean nations that are benefiting from Chinese investments and developments may avoid actions that jeopardize those relationships, may resist U.S. pressure, or may seek to balance between major powers. China complicating partner relationships with the Bahamas can reduce the effectiveness of traditional alliance-based approaches to security. Last, Chinese efforts in the Bahamas can

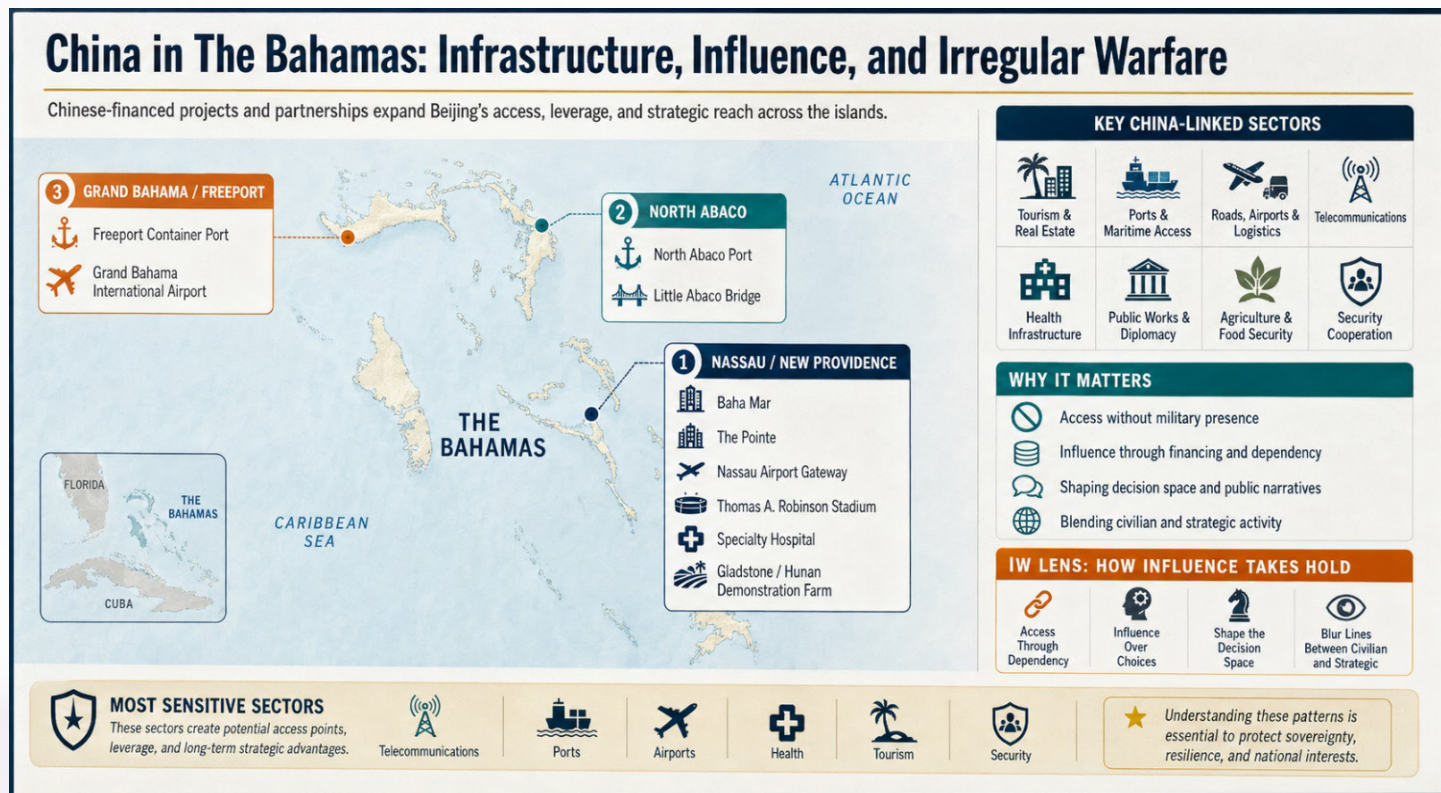
potentially reduce strategic warning. Irregular warfare thrives on ambiguity and gradual change. Infrastructure-based advantages may already be entrenched by the time they are illuminated or become apparent.

Irregular Warfare, or Normal Economic Activity?

It is important to distinguish between normal foreign investment and IW activity. Not all Chinese projects are inherently strategic, and not all economic relationships are coercive. However, the pattern observed in the Caribbean reflects characteristics consistent with IW. There are actions and factors like non-military tools being used for strategic effect, long-term shaping of the environment, operating below the threshold of conflict in the gray zone, and efforts to create asymmetric advantages without direct confrontation. This approach allows China to expand influence in the Bahamas and broader Caribbean while avoiding escalation.

Specific Examples of Chinese Irregular Warfare/Activities in the Bahamas

Below are some examples of Chinese influence, development, and other efforts in the Bahamas that may fall into the IW activity realm. These examples are a



* Depicted locations in the graphic above are approximate Source: Author

small subset that illuminate ways in which China gains placement, access, and/or influence close to or within the Homeland or the broader USNORTHCOM AOR.

The Baha Mar Resort

China's most visible project in the Bahamas is Baha Mar. The resort was [financed through a \\$2.45 billion secured loan facility from China Eximbank](#), with China Construction America (CCA), which is [a subsidiary of China State Construction Engineering Corporation](#), serving as a central construction actor. [AidData](#) records the loan agreement in March 2010, construction beginning in 2011, and the resort opening in 2017 after 3+ years of delays and restructuring.

How could this be IW? Baha Mar should not be exaggerated into something it is not, and it shouldn't be viewed as military infrastructure. However, it is one of the largest tourism assets in a country whose economy depends on tourism, potentially making it a form of economic leverage. A project like this can shape employment, tax revenue, land use, political pressure, and public narratives in the information space about who delivers development.

The Pointe in Nassau

The Pointe in downtown Nassau adds another layer to Chinese development and influence in the Bahamas. China Construction America [described The Pointe as a waterfront development near the cruise ship port](#) and said it was the owner, developer, and general contractor. CCA also stated that it [broke ground on the project in August 2015](#) and that The Pointe was entirely funded by CCA.

How could this be IW? Again, the issue is not that a hotel and entertainment district are automatically military infrastructure. The issue is location and influence. Downtown Nassau is a high-visibility tourism and cruise zone. Prime waterfront real estate gives China-linked firms visibility in the country's most important economic corridor and influences the information environment in favor of China.

The Nassau Airport Gateway Project

Transportation infrastructure is another important piece. The Nassau Airport Gateway Project was [financed by China Eximbank \(approximately 368.8 million\) through a concessional loan](#) and involved China State Construction Engineering Corporation. The 6.2 mile long gateway project connects the main

airport to Nassau's city center. The gateway also takes individuals directly to the Baha Mar Resort previously mentioned in this article, physically linking the gateway to another China-developed infrastructure project in the Bahamas.

How could this be IW? Airports and access roads support tourism during normal conditions and movement during emergencies. In a hurricane, evacuation, public safety crisis, or logistics surge, the same infrastructure used by tourists and commuters becomes part of national resilience.

The North Abaco Port and Little Abaco Bridge

The North Abaco Port and Little Abaco Bridge are even more relevant from a dual use perspective. China Harbour Engineering Company signed contracts to construct the bridge and port, and [China Eximbank provided financing](#). Caribbean Journal reported the project as a [roughly \\$40 million bridge-and-port package funded by China Eximbank](#).

How could this be IW? Ports are naturally able to function in dual-use capacities. They can move commercial cargo, support fishing and tourism, assist disaster response, and help law enforcement/military operations. In a crisis, ports can also become logistics points. There is no public evidence that North Abaco is a Chinese military facility. The better assessment is more measured. Chinese financing and construction in Bahamian port infrastructure creates access, influence, and knowledge of maritime infrastructure in a strategically located island chain.

The Freeport Container Port

Grand Bahama raises a related but different issue. The Freeport Container Port is not a Chinese SOE project in the same way as Baha Mar, North Abaco, or the Nassau Airport Gateway. It is linked to Hutchison Port Holdings, a Hong Kong-linked commercial port operator. It's a notable distinction that remains strategically important. The port's own history states that the [Freeport Container Port opened in 1997 under Hutchison Port Holdings](#) and serves as a major transshipment hub for containerized cargo. The port also describes itself as [a privately owned and operated Hutchison Port Holdings facility on Grand Bahama](#), located about 100 miles from Miami.

How could this be IW? A deep-water transshipment hub near Florida is not something U.S. planners and

national security officials can ignore. Ports generate information, access, and logistics options. Developments like the Freeport Container Port provide China with danger-close staging and mobility capabilities should conflict or crisis arise.

Grand Bahama International Airport

The Bahamian government [came to an agreement with Hutchison to purchase the airport after Hurricane Dorian damaged Grand Bahama](#), and it later [closed the purchase of the airport in April 2021](#). Bahamian reporting described the acquisition as part of a government strategy to expand Grand Bahama's economy.

How could this be IW? Similar to maritime ports, airports can also be dual use. They support tourism and commerce in normal life, then become essential for evacuation, humanitarian assistance, medical movement, and security operations during crisis. The fact that the airport is now government-owned reduces one concern, but its past ownership structure and location still matter when mapping China-linked critical infrastructure exposure.

The Bahamas Telecommunications Company and Aliv

Telecommunications may be the most sensitive area. In 2014, The Bahamas Telecommunications Company launched LTE after [a network upgrade undertaken by Huawei](#). The country's second mobile provider, Aliv, also had major Huawei exposure. In 2020, Aliv's chief executive told Tribune Business that [its mobile network was all Huawei](#), also noting that ["the Chinese communications manufacturer provided it with help to launch its network and operations."](#)

How could this be IW? This does not prove espionage or sabotage. But telecommunications networks are critical infrastructure. They carry government communications, banking activity, emergency services, tourism operations, port coordination, and daily public communication. The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency describes [communications systems as critical to virtually every societal function](#). A country dependent on foreign-supported telecom infrastructure may face risk in maintenance, upgrades, supply chains, network visibility, and crisis resilience.

The New Providence Specialty Hospital

Health infrastructure is now part of the picture as well. In July 2025, the Bahamian government signed a framework agreement with China for the New Providence Specialty Hospital. Prime Minister Philip Davis described the event as the signing of a [China-Bahamas concessional loan framework agreement](#) for the hospital project. Later, in December 2025, the Office of the Prime Minister stated that the government was [considering borrowing up to about \\$201.2 million from China Eximbank to fund construction](#).

How could this be IW? Hospitals are not military bases, but they are critical infrastructure and primary resilience infrastructure. During hurricanes, pandemics, mass-casualty events, and national emergencies, hospitals become central to state capacity and resilience. Chinese financing in this sector creates another long-term institutional relationship in a system that matters during crisis.

The Thomas A. Robinson National Stadium

China has also invested in symbolic public works. From 2004 through 2011, the Thomas A. Robinson National Stadium was funded by a [Chinese government grant recorded by AidData](#), with construction beginning in 2006 and the stadium was later handed over to the Bahamian government. In 2024, China also supported the major stadium renovation and claimed the renovation project "will boast more modern and advanced facilities, become a cultural exchange center," and improve Bahamian health and unity via Belt and Road Initiative efforts. SINOMACH, the China National Machinery Industry Corporation, reported that its subsidiary SINOCONST, officially China Machinery Industry Construction Group Inc., was undertaking the [China-aided renovation project](#).

How could this be IW? A stadium may not create the same strategic risk as a port or telecom network, but it does create public visibility and effects in the information environment. Stadiums host national events, sports, ceremonies, and international visitors. They are useful tools of public diplomacy because the benefit is visible and easy to understand. Chinese messaging that the stadium will also act as a cultural exchange center highlights the intention to use the infrastructure for influence efforts.

Hunan Demonstration Farm at the Gladstone Road Agricultural Center

Agriculture and food security are vital in a nation's resilience capabilities. Chinese foreign ministry reporting states that the [Hunan-Bahamas Agricultural Cooperation Project was handed over at Gladstone Demonstration Farm in Nassau](#) in December 2025 after more than two years of cooperation.

How could this be IW? Agriculture is not usually treated as a hard security issue, but in island states, food imports, storms, port access, and supply chains are all connected. Agricultural assistance may be useful and somewhat benign, but it still gives China another channel into a sector tied to resilience and supply chains.

China-Bahamas Security Cooperation

Security cooperation is smaller than the economic footprint, but it matters. In 2016, The Tribune reported that China [provided \\$1.2 million to help the Bahamas buy military equipment for the Royal Bahamas Defense Force](#). In 2024, the Royal Bahamas Defense Force reported that China and the Bahamas formalized a [handover of military materials and band equipment](#). The Bahamian Ministry of Foreign Affairs also reported that both sides discussed military exchange and cooperation.

How could this be IW? None of this proves a Chinese base or major operational role. However, it does show military diplomacy. Even limited cooperation can build familiarity, access, reliance, and develop influence with security institutions over time.

China-Bahamas Diplomacy and Bilateral Agreement

China and the Bahamas established diplomatic relations in 1997, a milestone that the Chinese Embassy highlights in [its account of China-Bahamas relations](#). In 2019, and a second time in 2023, the Bahamas [signed a \\$12 million bilateral agreement with China](#) for economic and technical cooperation. China's embassy messaging consistently frames the relationship around friendship, mutual benefit, development, and practical cooperation, including in the [ambassador's public message on China-Bahamas bilateral ties](#).

How could this be IW? This messaging matters because irregular warfare is partly about legitimacy. If China becomes known as the country that builds visible projects, provides grants, repairs stadiums, finances hospitals, supports agriculture, and offers security equipment, it gains influence without needing to threaten anyone.

Raising Awareness

The United States has already recognized this pattern. USNORTHCOM stated that China has made [deliberate attempts to increase economic and political influence](#) with close U.S. partners, including Mexico and the Bahamas. It also noted increasing Chinese investment in the Bahamas' tourism sector through marquee infrastructure projects. The Bahamas may be a small Caribbean market, but it sits close to Florida *inside* the USNORTHCOM AOR and near maritime and air approaches that matter to U.S. homeland defense. The best way to understand China's approach is through accumulation. A single resort does not change the strategic balance. A single road does not create a military threat. A single grant does not buy a country. But over time, projects across tourism, logistics, technology, finance, health, public works, and security can create a network of influence and access. That network can shape how leaders think, what options are available in a crisis, who has access to key sectors, and how the public views outside partners.

Conclusion

China's activity in the Bahamas is best understood as a layered pattern and/or web of economic, diplomatic, technological, and security engagement rather than a single isolated project or overt military threat. There is no public evidence that China is using the Bahamas as a military base or that every Chinese-backed project is inherently hostile. However, when these projects are viewed together, they reveal a broader influence network built through infrastructure, finance, commercial presence, public diplomacy, and institutional relationships. The influence grows and feeds into China's soft power projection into the Bahamas and broader Caribbean, degrading the region through false transparency and aiming to erode U.S. influence. This projection already impacts many sectors in the Bahamas.

The most significant areas of concern are those tied to critical infrastructure and national resilience including telecommunications, ports, airports, roads, health infrastructure, tourism, public finance, and security cooperation. These sectors matter because they support daily economic life, but they also become operationally important during emergencies, crises, or strategic

competition. Infrastructure, telecom networks, or grant agreements may appear separate on their own. Taken together, they create repeated points of access, visibility, and influence in a country located close to the U.S. Homeland and *inside* the USNORTHCOM area of responsibility. This is why China's footprint in the Bahamas fits an irregular warfare framework. The activity does not rely on conventional military force. Instead, it operates through gradual accumulation, am-

biguity, dependency, and influence below the threshold of armed conflict. China's presence in the Bahamas demonstrates how infrastructure and development can serve both commercial and strategic purposes. The key issue is not whether China is preparing for war from the Bahamas. Rather, it's whether its long-term positioning could shape the environment in ways that matter during future competition, crisis, or conflict.

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