

June 2026

R. Evan Ellis

INTRODUCTION

Guyana is a country of both complexity and irony. It is one of the strongest U.S. partners in the Caribbean. It is a member of the “America’s Shield” initiative and has an economy whose transformational growth is closely tied to an Exxon-Mobil-led consortium of petroleum companies. At the same time, its relationship with the People’s Republic of China (PRC) is among the [longest and deepest](#) in the region.

Guyana received relatively little attention from U.S. policymakers or companies until the confirmation of major recoverable oil deposits in [May 2015](#), and even thereafter, principally received attention only from communities of interest in Washington that were focused on petroleum, Venezuela or Caribbean affairs.

As a former British colony which only fully gained independence in 1966, Guyana was one of the poorest countries in the region, a multi-ethnic society which largely whose politics and cooperation with the PRC were defined largely through the lens of the “Global South.” This include developmentally focused cooperation in [agriculture, small-scale manufacturing](#) and other areas as early as [1971](#).



The role of the Exxon-led consortium in developing Guyana's petroleum resources, combined with a relatively [positive interaction with the U.S. government](#) in the political crisis which ultimately brought the People's Progressive Party - Civic (PPP/C) back to power in 2020, arguably contributed to the importance that the current PPP government of Irfaan Ali has placed on maintaining [good relations with Washington](#). At the same time, the ties built by China with the PPP/C, combined with the [enormous inflow of new money](#) with the oil boom, has positioned the PRC and its companies to play a major role in Guyana's [rapidly transforming economy](#), from petroleum and mining to infrastructure projects to retail.

This work looks at that expanding PRC engagement, as the Ali government navigates its relationships with Washington, and with the PRC.

POLITICAL AND HISTORICAL RELATIONSHIPS

Guyana switched diplomatic relations from the Republic of China (Taiwan) to the PRC in [June 1972](#), just [six years after](#) the country's independence from Great Britain, one of the first countries in the Caribbean basin to do so. As noted previously, the relationship in the early years was characterized by [cooperation on developmental issues](#) such as agriculture and small-scale manufacturing. During the dominance of the People's Progressive Party (PPP) [from 1992 through 2015](#), the government worked closely with the PRC and contracted with Chinese companies, including on numerous infrastructure and other projects, many of which [were questioned](#) on bases of both [quality and suspected corruption](#).

When the opposition Party for National Unity / Alliance for Change (APNU/AFC) coalition came to power from 2015 through 2020, despite [prior sharp criticisms](#) by some in the coalition of their predecessor's relationship with the PRC, The APNU/AFC government of David Granger shifted, yet continued to embrace the PRC. In [July 2018](#), his government was one of the first in the Caribbean basin to join the PRC Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

As noted previously, when the PPP/C returned to power [in August 2020](#), the new government of President Irfaan Ali, while maintaining a close political and security relationship with Washington, of heightened importance due to the [active military threat](#) to Guyana's control over its Essequibo region from neighboring Venezuela, also continued Guyana's close commercial and political relationship with the PRC. President Ali visited the PRC in [July 2023](#), meeting with President Xi Jinping in [Chengdu](#), and signing a number of agreements on commercial, technology and development cooperation. In 2025, Guyanese Foreign Minister Hugh Todd traveled to the PRC to participate in the [4th China-CELAC forum](#), including holding talks with his counterpart Wang Yi.

Despite the warm political relationship, and although PRC-based companies have won a significant number of contracts and advanced their position in Guyana in the context of the country's substantial new oil wealth, the countries have not signed a strategic partnership.

The current PRC Ambassador in Guyana, Yang Yang, is relatively new, arriving in April 2025, but it considered a fairly skillful diplomat.

TRADE

Guyana's bilateral trade with the PRC has grown significantly in the past two decades, reaching \$2.9 billion in 2025, doubling over the prior year. That trade has been, however, imbalanced in China's favor. In 2024, Guyana's imports from the PRC of \$926 million were roughly double exports to it. Moreover, Guyana principally exports low value-added metals and minerals and other commodities to the China, while importing a broad array of higher value added goods and services from it.

Particularly in the past decade, a wide range of PRC-based companies have set up shop in Guyana. With that has emerged a community of both large and small PRC-based companies operating in the country. Some of the most significant of these are represented through the Association of Chinese Enterprises in Guyana (ACEG), currently headed by Jason Wong, who came into Guyana more than two decades ago doing project work, subsequently establishing China Trading, the most important PRC-oriented import-export business in the country, as well as other important companies. Founded in 2013, ACEG has between 14- and 20-members including behemoth PRC-based corporations such as China National Construction and Agricultural Machinery Import and Export Corporation (CAMC), China State Construction Engineering Corporation (CSCE), and China Communications and Construction Corporation (CCCC). ACEG coordinates regularly with the PRC embassy in Guyana.

PETROLEUM SECTOR

Chinese presence in Guyana's petroleum sector is led by China National Offshore Oil Company (CNOOC) which has a 25% stake in the Exxon-Mobil led consortium that dominates oil projects in the country. The consortium's reach has ballooned significantly with the addition of multiple new productive oil operations in recent years including Liza, Payara, Yellowtail, and Whiptail. In October 2023, when consortium partner Hess sought to sell its 30% share, CNOOC unsuccessfully sought to acquire Hess' interest for itself, which if successful, would have given it a controlling 55% interest in the venture.

Although a small number of China affiliated petroleum service companies (PSC) such as NABI/KCL operate in Guyana, the footprint of Chinese oil companies outside the consortium has been limited. CNOOC has, however, become increasingly sophisticated as a local operator, as illustrated by the company's \$4 million [donation in March 2023](#) to Christ Church secondary school, after its building was destroyed by a fire, an astute act of building goodwill with the local community.

MINING POSSIBILITIES

In Guyana's mining sector, Chinese companies have been active in both largescale and small-scale mining. The Chinese company Bosai has operated a bauxite mine near Linden since 2007, and in 2023, engaged in a [\\$115 million expansion](#) project. In the gold sector, in August 2020, the Chinese company [Zijin acquired the Aurora](#) gold mine [for \\$238 million](#), and has subsequently expanded its operations.

Beyond Aurora, however, those consulted for this work suggest that multiple PRC-financed companies registered to Guyanese also mine gold and other minerals in the country.

TIMBER AND AGRICULTURE

PRC-based companies have not had a significant presence in Guyana's agricultural sector, although Chinese technicians have provided training and support on agricultural matters as part of PRC developmental assistance to Guyana. One of the most recent examples was a two-person Chinese delegation [visiting in October 2023](#).

In 2009, the Chinese National Technical Import Corporation (CNTIC) was contracted to build the massive \$200 million Skeldon sugar processing plant, which was riddled by technical issues and [never opened](#).

In forestry, PRC-based company Bai Shan Lin was forced to halt operations in the country [in 2016](#) due to alleged violations of Guyanese laws. Beyond Bai Shan Lin, the export of raw logs from Guyana to China with insufficient oversight and little value added on the Guyanese side has become a [point of public discussion](#).

CONSTRUCTION SECTOR

PRC based companies have come to dominate Guyana's construction sector, both in public infrastructure projects, and commercial properties.

China Harbour played an early, albeit [troubled role](#) in the expansion of the Cheddi Jagan International Airport. PRC-based companies including [China Road and Bridge Corporation](#) (CRBC) have won multiple contracts for transportation along Guyana's coast and elsewhere, particularly the strategic [East Bank Demerara Highway Improvement](#), an effort [valued at \\$192 million](#). Similarly, in January 2024, the \$35 million Mackenzie-Wismar Bridge project was [awarded to China Harbour](#) (CHEC). The most significant PRC based transportation infrastructure project has been the \$260 million bridge over the Demerara River, awarded to [CHEC in late 2022](#), and opened in late 2025.

Beyond transportation infrastructure, PRC-based companies have played a role in the repeatedly canceled and restructured 165-megawatt Amaila Falls hydroelectric project. This included [participation of a China Water and Electric](#) (CWE) led consortium in a 2023 version of the project, as well as current interest by Chinese companies in the latest solicitation of bids, [initiated in February 2026](#).

In commercial real estate, Chinese companies have advanced far beyond the [controversial \\$52 million Georgetown Marriott](#), completed in 2015 by Shanghai Construction Group. Its competitor, Pegasus, contracted China harbor for [\\$100 million expansion of its property](#). PRC-based companies are now reportedly working on a third tower at the facility. In 2023, CHEC was contracted for the \$50 million [Marriott Ogle at East Coast Demerara](#), among other examples.

ELECTRICITY SECTOR

As in construction, PRC-based companies have long been active in Guyana's electricity infrastructure, including a [\\$51 million contract in 2010](#) to China National Machinery Import Export Corporation for work in the greater Georgetown area.

In 2025, Guyana Power and Light (GPL) awarded a [\\$442 million contract](#) for electricity transmission lines to China Power Corporation. In 2026, it further gave China Power a [\\$27 million contract](#) for industrial battery storage for the public power grid. The company is also a participant in the installation of new solar energy generation through the [Guyana Utility-Scale Photovoltaic Program](#).

MEDICAL

In recent years, the PRC has built on its traditional development support for Guyana, to increase its presence in the country's medical sector. This includes construction of [six regional hospitals](#) in the country. In addition, in April 2023, the PRC [donated \\$60 million in medical equipment](#) Georgetown's public hospital. In November 2023 it made a similar [\\$10 million donation](#) to the hospital in Linden Guyana. Since 1993, the PRC has also sent [medical teams](#) with the [20th such group](#) in the country by 2025.

DIGITAL SECTOR

PRC-based companies play an important, if partially limited role in Guyana's telecommunications industry. In 2021, China donated [1,000 "internet boxes"](#) to expand digital coverage in the country. Chinese companies such as Huawei also supply telephones and other equipment to the country's major service providers, [Digicel Guyana](#) and One Communications Guyana (formerly GTT), although the later has sought to minimize the use of Chinese providers [such as Huawei](#) in its infrastructure. Similarly, Guyanese mobile service provider Enet has reportedly built its infrastructure on equipment from the U.S. company Mavenir, rather than using Chinese components.

Beyond public telephone and internet service, PRC-based companies have positioned themselves as the key provider of digital technologies for Guyana's government. Since 2016, Huawei has had the lead in building the country's [eGovernment](#) digitization network, including construction of the fiber optic [backbone to the country's interior](#) and the training of personnel. During President Ali's 2023 visit to the country, his government announced a possible initiative to work with Chinese companies to build an [Information and Communications Technology \(ICT\) university](#) in the country.

RETAIL SECTOR

As in other parts of the region, there has been a [proliferation of retail outlets](#) which are either Chinese-owned or specialize in goods imported from China. These are particularly prevalent on Guyana's Atlantic coast, and along the [East and West bank of the Demerara](#) river south of the Capitol, Georgetown. One of the most prominent examples is the "Real Value" Supermarket chain established by Chinese entrepreneur [Jason Wong in 2014](#).

This expansion of Chinese shops has caused tensions with owners of traditional retail outlets, many of whom are being displaced by the competition. In June 2024, a group of supermarket owners represented through the Guyana Business Owners Association demanded and secured a meeting with President Ali, complaining that Chinese businesses were competing unfairly, [not complying with tax and licensing regulations](#). In October 2025, an attempt to build a new Chinese shop in Brickdam, the [Chongking market](#), across from a school, without having secured a license, obligated the PRC embassy to issue a statement exhorting Chinese nationals [to comply with local laws](#).

PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE TIES

As in other parts of the region, the PRC has worked across multiple areas to expand “people-to-people” ties and associated influence in Guyana. It established a Confucius Institute at UWI Georgetown [May 2014](#), and has given out approximately [six to 12 scholarships](#) per year for academic studies in China, giving out [222](#) such scholarships between 1984-2022 alone.

As a compliment, the Chinese government has also regularly brought Guyanese to the PRC for more short-term activities in a range of areas. From 2018-2023, at least [400 Guyanese went to China](#) for training courses alone.

As in other parts of the region, the PRC also periodically hosts Guyanese Parliamentarians. In August 2024, a [four-person delegation](#) led by National Assembly speaker Manzoor Nadir visited China at the invitation of Zha Leiji, Chairman of the Standing Committee of the PRC National People’s Congress.

Many PRC-funded trips have targeted Guyana’s media personnel. Since the 2010s, the PRC has brought an estimated five to 10 Guyanese journalists to the country per year, including [eight in 2024](#). As an example, in June 2023, the PRC brought Guyanese journalist [Shaquawn Hamilton Gill](#) to the country, leading to his exuberant testimonial carried in PRC state media about how [“China is helping other countries to get on their feet.”](#) In July 2024, such PRC-funded trips included bringing an [eight-member delegation](#) led by the Editor-in-Chief of the Guyana Times, [Tusika Martin](#), and also including persons from the Stabroek News, Kaieteur News, News Room, and Guyana’s state broadcaster NCN.

CRIME

Reflecting both expanding commercial connections and the longstanding, albeit modest Chinese community in Guyana, there is also evidence of Chinese organized crime activities in the country. Examples include a 2023 case involving the [laundering of 4 billion Guyanese dollars through local Chinese businesses](#). In 2022, Vice News created a scandal in Guyana when it published a story in which Chinese businessman [Su Zhirong](#), in a criminal scheme which [appeared to implicate](#) high-level Guyanese officials.

SECURITY COOPERATION

Guyana has long had modest, but important security cooperation with the PRC. This includes the Guyana Defense Force (GDF) purchasing a [Harbin Y-12](#) military transport aircraft in 2002. In 2012, the GDF signed a [\\$100 million contract](#) for trainers from the PRC-based manufacturer of the aircraft, China Aviation Technical Industry Corporation (CATIC), to come to Guyana to provide instruction, the first time China had deployed such personnel to Latin America to do so.

In 2014, the PRC [donated \\$11.9 million](#) in motorcycles, radio sets, body cameras and helmets, among other equipment, to the Guyana Police Service (GPS).

In April 2017, it further donated [31 pieces of equipment](#) to the Guyana Defense Force (GDF), including small patrol boats, bulldozers, an excavator, water and fuel tanker trucks, dump trucks, ambulances, and other support vehicles.

In November of the same year, it made an [another donation](#) to the GPS, including 56 pickup trucks, 44 motorcycles, 35 all-terrain vehicles, and five buses.

During the past three decades and before, an important number of GDF and GPS personnel, including some with whom the author has personally spoken, have regularly traveled to the PRC for training courses and other events.

Following the reapproachment with the US with the return to power of the PPP/C in 2020, Guyana's government has reduced the scope and profile of military and police interactions with the PRC. In addition, the aging Y-12 transport, and much of the other previously acquired Chinese equipment is no longer in service.

CONCLUSION

By contrast to some other countries in the region [such as Panama](#), Guyana's substantial and growing relationship with the PRC has not generated substantial tension with Washington, even though it involves sensitive sectors such as telecommunications and security cooperation.

Guyana's avoidance of conflict with Washington over the PRC arguably reflects the skill of the Ali government—particularly of Guyana's experienced Vice-president Bharat Jagdeo—in managing the relationship. It also may reflect the greater emphasis the U.S. has placed on Guyana's valued cooperation in other areas. Still, PRC activities in Guyana touch on two areas of concern named in the US National Security Strategy (NSS): [influence by U.S. adversaries](#), and [access to "key terrain."](#) The question of Chinese engagement in Guyana is thus likely to continue to be a question of interest for Washington, even as the US and the current PPP/C government continue to navigate a fundamentally positive relationship.



R. Evan Ellis

The author is Senior Non-Resident Fellow with the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). The views expressed here are strictly his own.