

FAA Background Information Regarding U.S. Civil Aviation in the Kabul Flight Information Region (OAKX)

The combination of ongoing military operations and extremist/militant activity has resulted in a fragile security situation across Afghanistan. U.S. civil aviation operating in the Kabul Flight Information Region (FIR) (OAKX) at altitudes below Flight Level 330 (FL330), particularly for aircraft operating at low altitudes, including during the arrival and departure phases of flight, and on the ground in Afghanistan face continuing risks, described in more detail below. For this reason, on 28 March 2021, the FAA issued Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) KICZ A0008/21, advising U.S. civil aviation to exercise extreme caution during flight operations when operating into, out of, within, or over the Kabul FIR (OAKX). Additionally, this NOTAM advises U.S. civil operators and civil airmen, to the maximum extent possible, to operate on established air routes, minimize flight operations at altitudes below FL330, and minimize ground time in Afghanistan. NOTAM KICZ A0008/21 renews the advisory previously contained in NOTAM KICZ A0038/20.

The primary risk to U.S. civil aviation comes from indirect fire targeting airports and from surface-to-air fire targeting aircraft operating at low altitudes, including during the arrival and departure phases of flight. Direct assaults and/or indirect fire have frequently targeted airports and airfields in Afghanistan, which are also susceptible to insider threats. Rocket or mortar fire has disrupted flight operations at airports and airfields in Afghanistan and damaged aircraft. For example, in December 2020, a rocket attack targeting Kabul's Hamid Karzai International Airport (ICAO: OAKB) disrupted flight operations and reportedly damaged two civil aircraft parked on the airport apron when multiple munitions impacted within the airport perimeter. Indirect fire targeted Bagram Airfield (ICAO code: OAIX) on multiple occasions in 2020. In March 2021, an Afghan military Mi-17 helicopter was shot down in central Wardak Province. In early December 2020 an Afghan military helicopter was targeted by small arms surface to air fire (SAFIRE) resulting in one death. The two shoot down incidents demonstrate the risk to low-altitude flight operations in the Kabul FIR (OAKX). A direct assault on a facility adjacent to Bagram Airfield on 10 November 2019 affected airfield operations, and insider threats also remain a risk concern, as demonstrated by the September 2017 suicide bomber attack at an entry control point at Bagram Airfield, and a November 2016 insider attack that killed four people, also at Bagram.

While operating at low altitudes, including during the arrival and departure phases of flight, aircraft are primarily at risk of encountering small-arms fire, rocket-propelled grenades, and anti-aircraft fire. U.S. and Afghan military aircraft and government-contracted civil aircraft operating at low altitudes have encountered a multitude of anti-aircraft fire incidents. There is also a risk from shoulder-fired man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS) when operating at altitudes below FL330. Although, to date, MANPADS have only been fired at military aircraft, there is a potential they may be used against civil aviation with little or no warning. Some MANPADS are capable of reaching a maximum altitude of 25,000 feet above ground level.

The FAA is closely monitoring for potential changes in the safety and security environment for U.S. civil aviation in the Kabul FIR (OAKX), including but not limited any changes associated with the May 1, 2021, deadline for coalition force withdrawal under the Joint Declaration between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States of America for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan, which is subject to the Taliban's fulfillment of its commitments under the U.S.-Taliban agreement done at Doha, Qatar, on February 29, 2020. The FAA will continue to evaluate the extent to which U.S. civil aviation is able to operate safely in the Kabul FIR (OAKX).

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