

FAA Background Information Regarding U.S. Civil Aviation – Egypt Sinai Peninsula in the Cairo (HECC) Flight Information Region (FIR)

Due to ongoing fighting between military forces and extremist/militant elements and the continuing extremist threat to civil aviation, the FAA assesses there is continued risk to U.S. civil aviation operating into, out of, within, or over the Egyptian Sinai Peninsula in the Cairo Flight Information Region (FIR) (HECC), within the lateral limits described in NOTAM A0040/20, at altitudes below Flight Level (FL) 260.

International civil air routes transiting the Egyptian Sinai Peninsula at altitudes below FL 260 and aircraft operating to and from Sinai airports are at risk from extremist/militant attacks involving a variety of anti-aircraft capable weapons, including man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS), anti-tank missiles, small arms-fire and indirect fire weapons, such as mortars and rockets targeting aircraft and Sinai airports. Some MANPADS present a risk up to a maximum altitude of 25,000 feet.

The Islamic State in Iraq and ash-Sham in the Sinai (ISIS-Sinai), which is an Egypt-based affiliate of ISIS, continues to conduct attacks in the Sinai Peninsula, some of which have demonstrated their capability and intent to target critical infrastructure and civilian targets. Examples include an early February 2020 attack on a gas pipeline, a November 2017 attack on a mosque, and has previously conducted attacks on aviation-related targets between 2014-2017. During 2018-2019, ISIS-Sinai continued to focus its attacks on Egyptian security forces and police check points in the Sinai Peninsula. In December 2017, ISIS-Sinai used an anti-tank missile to destroy a military helicopter associated with VIP movement at Al 'Arish. The attack at Al 'Arish potentially demonstrated the group's ability to target sensitive activities.

While predominately operating in the northern portion of the peninsula, ISIS-Sinai has previously demonstrated the capability to project threats into the southern Sinai. In February 2017, ISIS-Sinai militants in southern Sinai fired rockets across the border toward Eilat, Israel. In October 2015, ISIS claimed responsibility for the improvised explosive device (IED) attack destroying a Russian passenger aircraft enroute to St. Petersburg, Russia, shortly after its departure from Sharm el-Sheikh International Airport (ICAO: HESH) in the southern Sinai. The group claimed the IED was placed aboard the aircraft prior to departing HESH, raising concerns about potential insider threats at the airport. In June 2015, ISIS-Sinai fired rockets towards El Gora Airport (ICAO: HEGR) located in northern Sinai. Regarding aircraft in flight, in January 2014, ISIS-Sinai fired small arms at an Egyptian military aircraft and used MANPADS to shoot down an Egyptian military helicopter flying at low altitude. Although MANPADS have not been used to target civil aircraft in the Sinai, extremists/militants could potentially do so at any time with little or no warning.

The FAA will continue to monitor for changes in the risks to U.S. civil aviation operations in the Cairo (HECC) FIR and will adjust its advisory for U.S. civil aviation operations as conditions warrant.

Posted: 30 Mar 2020