

## **FAA Background Information Regarding U.S. Civil Aviation in the Baghdad Flight Information Region (FIR) (ORBB)**

Due to a de-escalation in regional military activity and diminishing political tensions, the FAA assesses the risk to U.S. civil aviation operations in the Baghdad Flight Information Region (FIR) (ORBB) at altitudes at or above Flight Level (FL) 320 has been sufficiently reduced to permit such operations to resume. However, there remains an unacceptable level of risk to U.S. civil aviation operations in the Baghdad FIR (ORBB) at altitudes below FL320 due to heightened Shia militant activities and continued elevated political tensions in the region, which present an unacceptable level of inadvertent risk to U.S. civil aviation operations due to the potential for miscalculation or misidentification. As a result, on 27 February 2020, the FAA issued Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) KICZ A0032/20, which prohibits U.S. civil aviation operations in the Baghdad FIR (ORBB) at altitudes below FL320. NOTAM KICZ A0032/20 also continues the FAA's prohibition on U.S. civil aviation operations in the Baghdad FIR (ORBB) at altitudes below FL320 for descent into or departure from the Kuwait FIR (OKAC). Special Federal Aviation Regulation (SFAR) No. 77, 14 C.F.R. § 91.1605, remains in effect.

Shia militias continue to call for the expulsion of U.S. armed forces from Iraq, and Shia militia groups in Iraq are likely responsible for multiple indirect fire attacks targeting U.S. armed forces, as well as ongoing, intermittent rocket attacks targeting the U.S. Embassy and Baghdad International Airport (ICAO: ORBI). These attacks pose a risk to airports/airbases, aircraft on the ground, and aircraft operating at lower altitudes, including during the arrival and departure phases of flight. The continued attacks could also lead to further escalation of tensions in the region. Additionally, anti-U.S. Shia militants armed with various anti-aircraft capabilities, including light anti-aircraft artillery and man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS), have publicly threatened to defend their locations, following a string of third party airstrikes in 2019. Also, Iran has a history of proliferating advanced weapons capabilities, including advanced anti-aircraft weapons, to its proxy groups and could provide Shia militias with additional anti-aircraft capabilities, which could pose a risk to U.S. civil aviation operations at altitudes below FL320. Additionally, extremists/militants operating in Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham (ISIS)-controlled areas may have access to anti-aircraft weapons presenting a risk to U.S. civil aviation up to 25,000 feet.

In this fluid and tense security environment, military, third party, and militia activities affecting U.S. civil aviation safety may occur with little or no warning. On 8 January 2020, Iran conducted retaliatory ballistic missile attacks targeting U.S. air bases in Iraq. In late May 2019, Iraq closed portions of their established air routes due to potential military operations in northern Iraq. Both Iran and Turkey continue to conduct small-scale attacks along and across the northern and eastern borders of Iraq with little or no warning. Additionally, in September 2018, Iran conducted a ballistic missile attack on Kurdish targets in northern Iraq and a no-notice ballistic missile attack targeting ISIS positions in Syria in which the ballistic missiles transited over congested civil air routes in eastern Iraq. Additionally, there is a potential inadvertent risk to U.S. civil aviation operations in the Baghdad FIR (ORBB) from fielded GPS jammers. This confluence of circumstances presents a continuing unacceptable risk to U.S. civil aviation operations at altitudes below FL320 in the Baghdad FIR (ORBB).

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