

FAA Background Information Regarding U.S. Civil Aviation – Mali

Due to the worsening, fragile security situation, the FAA assesses there is increased risk to U.S. civil aviation flying into, out of, within or over the territory and airspace of Mali at all altitudes. Mali is experiencing ongoing fighting, extremist/militant activity, deteriorating rule of law, an expanding foreign private military presence, and the introduction of an advanced air defense system. As a result, on 23 Feb 2023, the FAA published Notice to Air Missions (NOTAM) KICZ A0001-23, advising U.S. civil aviation to exercise caution when flying into, out of, within or over the territory and airspace of Mali at all altitudes.

Mali continues to experience a variety of political and security challenges, and internal conflicts affecting the stability of governmental operations and the security environment in Mali. The security situation is complicated by the suspension of Western security assistance and the introduction and expansion of the Russian-backed Vagner Group private military company's (alternative, Wagner's) operations in Mali. Vagner is known for its unprofessional and heavy-handed tactics during operations in other conflicts in Libya, Central African Republic, and Mozambique, which creates potential inadvertent risks for civil aviation.

The Malian National Transitional Council (NTC) continues to be under internal and external pressure for their lack of progress towards holding national elections. In response, the Malian NTC has increased its distance from foreign assistance tied to Western humanitarian and/or political pressures and has increased its security cooperation with Vagner. Transitions in foreign counterterrorism and peacekeeping operations in Mali, as well as growing international pressure on Mali's NTC government, have created increased uncertainty in the rule of law in Mali.

In the spring of 2022, Vagner deployed over 1,000 private military personnel to Mali, along with various military weapon capabilities, such as unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) and more sophisticated air defense systems. A new SA-22 air defense system (Pantsir) is present near Bamako. The Pantsir is a radar-guided surface-to-air missile (SAM) system capable of engaging targets up to 49,000 feet (15,000 meters) with a range of 19.4 nautical miles (36 kilometers). While this SAM system is likely intended to counter possible extremist use of UAS, Vagner has a questionable record of air defense fire, which could lead to an increased inadvertent risk to civil aviation operations in the territory and airspace of Mali. For example, during previous Vagner deployments of SA-22s in Libya, Vagner SA-22 units fired on Turkish UAS operations, were likely responsible for multiple fratricide incidents, and misidentified other air operations in the Tripoli Flight Information Region (FIR) (HLLL). Vagner's record in Libya underscores the potential for misidentification, misperception, and airspace deconfliction challenges related to Vagner's air defense operations in Mali. Vagner's expanding operations in Mali may result in deployments of other anti-aircraft weapons, which could introduce additional potential risk concerns for civil aviation.

The security situation in the region continues to deteriorate, in part due to the freedom of movement extremists/militants have in the porous tri-border area between Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. Furthermore, the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) has continued its offensive, which began in March 2022, against Tuareg armed groups and local Al-Qaida affiliated groups in the Gao and Ménaka regions of Mali.

Extremist/militant groups also target Malian and international forces, who are often based in close proximity to civil airports, as seen in the July 2022 attack on Kati military base near Bamako. Additionally, ISGS forces in Mali claimed responsibility for shooting down a Vagner UAS with an unknown anti-aircraft weapon on 16 July 2022, showcasing continued extremist/militant anti-aircraft capabilities at lower altitudes. Extremist/militant groups have demonstrated their intent and

capability to conduct both direct and indirect fire attacks, particularly in northern Mali, targeting airports and/or adjacent military camps. Southern Mali has been subjected to lower, but growing levels of violence.

In addition to the risk concerns previously discussed regarding the SA-22 deployment extending the risk to 49,000 feet (15,000 meters), international civil air routes transiting Mali's airspace and aircraft operating to and from Malian airports, particularly in the area north of Mopti, are at risk from: small arms; indirect fire weapons, such as mortars and rockets; and anti-aircraft-capable weapons, including man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS). Such weapons could target aircraft at low altitudes, including during the arrival and departure phases of flight, and/or targeted airports and aircraft on the ground. Some extremist/militant groups in Mali are suspected of possessing or having access to MANPADS. Some MANPADS have the capability to reach a maximum altitude of 25,000 feet. Attacks against aircraft in flight and/or Malian airports may occur with little or no warning.

The FAA will continue to monitor the safety and security environment for U.S. civil aviation operating in the territory and airspace of Mali and make adjustments to its advisory for U.S. civil aviation, as necessary.

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