

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

The withdrawal of coalition forces from Afghanistan, coupled with the Taliban's increasing control of territory outside of the capital region, has resulted in a deteriorating security situation and increased risks to U.S. civil aviation operations in the Kabul FIR (OAKX) at altitudes below Flight Level (FL) 260, with the exception of operations into and out of Hamid Karzai International Airport (ICAO: OAKB) in Kabul.

In particular, the withdrawal of coalition forces from the outlying areas of Afghanistan has resulted in a reduced ability to deter hostile activity, defend critical infrastructure (such as airports and airfields), and assess and counter aviation risk concerns at locations in Afghanistan outside of Kabul. The primary risk to U.S. civil aviation operations is during low-altitude flight operations, including the arrival and departure phases of flight, and while on the ground at airports and airfields in Afghanistan outside of Kabul. There are risks of: indirect fire and weaponized unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) targeting airports and airfields; surface-to-air fire targeting or inadvertently engaging aircraft operating at low altitudes; and, anti-tank guided missiles (ATGMs) targeting aircraft on the ground. Due to the risk environment for U.S. civil aviation operations, on 25 July 2021, the FAA issued Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) KICZ A0020/21, prohibiting U.S. civil aviation from operating at altitudes below FL260 in the Kabul FIR (OAKX), with the exception of operations into and out of Hamid Karzai International Airport (ICAO: OAKB) in Kabul.

U.S. civil aviation operating at altitudes below FL260, in areas outside of Kabul, could be exposed to direct or indirect attacks, primarily from small-arms fire, rocket-propelled grenades, and low altitude anti-aircraft fire. ATGMs have been used to target military aircraft on the ground, and the potential use of ATGMs and weaponized UAS against aircraft on the ground outside of Kabul is a concern. Direct assaults and/or indirect fire have frequently targeted airports and airfields in Afghanistan, which are also susceptible to insider threats and possible emerging threats from weaponized UAS. Rocket and/or mortar fire have disrupted flight operations at airports and airfields in Afghanistan, as demonstrated by multiple indirect fire attacks, particularly during 2018- 2020 but also in 2021. Coalition forces improved risk mitigation measures at Hamid Karzai International Airport (ICAO: OAKB) during the 2021 retrograde operations to defend against indirect fire and UAS incidents.

Surface-to-air fire is a risk to low altitude flight operations, and known surface-to-air fire incidents within the last year have been directed at military aircraft. Although there has not been any recent evidence of direct surface-to-air fire against civil aviation, recent surface-to-air attacks have occurred against Afghan military helicopters, with two shot down earlier in 2021 in Ghazni and Wardak Provinces. Additionally, in early December 2020, an Afghan military helicopter was targeted by small-arms surface-to-air fire, resulting in one death. While a risk also exists from shoulder-fired man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS), some of which may be capable of reaching a maximum altitude of 25,000 feet above ground level, there is no reporting to indicate active planning of their use against civil aviation at this time. On rare occasions, MANPADS have been used against military aircraft since coalition operations began in 2001.

The FAA will continue to evaluate the extent to which U.S. civil aviation is able to operate safely into and out of Hamid Karzai International Airport (ICAO: OAKB) and at altitudes at or above FL 260 in the Kabul FIR (OAKX).

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