

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

There are continuing risks to U.S. civil aviation operating in the territory and airspace of Pakistan, particularly for aircraft on the ground and aircraft operating at low altitudes, including during the arrival and departure phases of flight, due to extremist/militant groups operating in Pakistan. For this reason, on 01 January 2021, the FAA published Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) KICZ A0001/21, advising U.S. civil aviation to exercise caution when operating into, out of, within, or over the territory and airspace of Pakistan.

Although there were no extremist/militant attacks against civil aviation in the territory and airspace of Pakistan in 2020, civil aviation remains an attractive target for extremist/militant groups due to the impact and visibility of such attacks. Between 2014 and 2019, extremist/militant groups operating in Pakistan demonstrated their ongoing capability and intent to target civil aviation through multiple attacks on aviation infrastructure, including airports. In August 2019, two individuals were arrested for firing small arms at a commercial aircraft on approach into Islamabad International Airport (ICAO: OPRN). In July 2017, media sources reported extremists/militants planned to conduct attacks against Jinnah International Airport (ICAO: OPKC) in Karachi. In 2015, extremists/militants attacked two remote airfields in Balochistan Province and a Pakistani Air Force base in Peshawar, resulting in a number of deaths and injuries. In an August 2015 attack on Jiwani International Airport (ICAO: OPJI) in Balochistan, extremists/militants destroyed an air traffic control radar facility. On 24 June 2014, a commercial airliner on approach into Peshawar's Bacha Khan International Airport (ICAO: OPPS) received a volley of small arms fire, leaving one passenger dead and two crewmembers wounded. On 8 June 2014, extremists/militants conducted a nighttime attack on OPKC, killing 30 people and damaging airport facilities. Pakistani officials speculated the attackers sought to hijack an aircraft and/or attack aircraft on the ground.

To date, there have been no reports of man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS) being used against civil aviation in the territory and airspace of Pakistan; however, some extremist/militant groups operating in Pakistan are suspected of having access to MANPADS. As a result, there is a potential risk that extremists/militants could target civil aviation with MANPADS. Some MANPADS are capable of reaching maximum altitudes of up to 25,000 feet above ground level.

Additionally, due to the potential for clashes in the Kashmir Region, operators should monitor regional NOTAMs for any airspace or air route closures. During October and November 2020, Pakistani and Indian military forces conducted multiple cross-border indirect fire attacks, resulting in casualties in the Kashmir Region. Although these attacks were limited, they pose a risk of further escalation, and flight disruptions and airspace closures may occur with little or no warning. Although India and Pakistan have no intent to target civil aviation, increased military air operations could present an inadvertent risk to U.S. civil aviation if the situation escalates. Historically, India, Pakistan, and neighboring air navigation service providers (ANSPs) have managed their airspaces appropriately to de-conflict and protect civil aviation overflight operations in response to clashes in the Kashmir Region.

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