

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

Due to a continuing fragile security situation, including ongoing fighting, and extremist/militant activity, the FAA assesses there is continuing risk to U.S. civil aviation flying into, out of, within or over the territory and airspace of Mali at altitudes below Flight Level (FL) 260. As a result, on 26 Feb 2022, the FAA published Notice to Air Missions (NOTAM) KICZ A0009-22, advising U.S. civil aviation to exercise caution when flying into, out of, within or over the territory and airspace of Mali at altitudes below FL260.

Mali was suspended from the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) following a 24 May 2021 coup. On 7 November 2021, ECOWAS imposed sanctions on members of the Malian National Transitional Council (NTC) for their lack of progress towards holding national elections. In turn, the Malian NTC denied overflight access to Malian airspace to air carriers from ECOWAS countries and to international overflights departing from or destined for airports located in ECOWAS countries.

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 and regarding the rules of engagement for the various foreign security missions' airspace operations. France's Operation Barkhane counter-terrorism mission in Mali is scheduled to be drawn down by early 2022 with a reconfiguration of French forces into Task Force Takuba – a counterterrorism force composed of European Special Forces. However, Malian NTC officials are denying admission to Mali to personnel from some European countries. In late December 2021, Russian private military company Wagner began deploying to Mali, bringing over 1,000 personnel and military equipment. Wagner's expanding operations in Mali may result in deployments of anti-aircraft weapons, which may introduce additional potential airspace risk concerns, as seen in other Wagner deployments in support of counterterrorism operations, such as in Libya and Syria.

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. Additionally, extremists/militant groups are expanding their attacks on local governments, security elements, and civilians, with more than 1,500 civilians being killed across this Central Sahel region in 2021. Extremist/militant groups also target Malian and international forces, who are often based in close proximity to civil airports. As a result, attacks against these forces present an indirect threat to civil aviation and associated infrastructure at the collocated airports. 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.

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 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, including Wagner's deployment activity and potential introduction of advanced weapons capabilities, and make adjustments to its advisory for U.S. civil aviation as necessary.

Posted: 26 FEB 2022