

FAA Background Information Regarding U.S. Civil Aviation – For the Overwater Airspace above the Persian Gulf and the Gulf Of Oman

Iran has de-escalated its military posture in the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman as of early February 2020. Given this de-escalation, the FAA assesses there is sufficiently reduced risk of Iranian military miscalculation or misidentification that could affect U.S. civil aviation operations in the overwater airspace above the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman in the Kuwait Flight Information Region (FIR) (OKAC), Jeddah FIR (OEJD), Bahrain FIR (OBBB), Emirates FIR (OMAE), and Muscat FIR (OOMM) to permit U.S. civil flight operations to resume.

While the risk to U.S. civil aviation operations in the above-named area has decreased, military posturing and political tensions in the region remain elevated, and there remains some inadvertent risk to U.S. civil aviation operations due to the potential for miscalculation or misidentification. As a result, on 14 Feb 2020, the FAA issued Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) KICZ A0014/20 (reissued on 17 Feb as A0016/20) permitting U.S. civil flight operations to resume in the above-named area while advising operators to exercise caution and to avoid operating on air routes nearest to the Tehran FIR (OIIX) boundary whenever possible. The situation in the region remains fluid and could quickly escalate if circumstances change.

The 8 January 2020 accidental shoot down of Ukraine International Airlines Flight 752 shortly after takeoff from Tehran's Imam Khomeini International Airport (OIIE) tragically highlights the airspace deconfliction concerns, which pose an inadvertent risk to civil aviation from air defense engagements during periods of heightened tensions and associated military activity. Following the accidental shoot down, the region has seen a lowering of tensions, despite Iran's continued air defense coverage along its southern coast. In June 2019, there were two incidents of surface-to-air missile fire from the southern coast of Iran targeting U.S. unmanned aircraft systems operating in the Gulf of Oman.

Iran possesses a wide variety of anti-aircraft-capable weapons, including surface-to-air missile systems (SAMs), man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS) and fighter aircraft capable of conducting aircraft interception operations. Some of the anti-aircraft-capable weapons have ranges that encompass key international air routes over the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. Although Iran likely has no intention to target civil aircraft, the presence of multiple long-range, advanced anti-aircraft-capable weapons in a tense environment poses a risk of miscalculation or misidentification, especially during periods of heightened political tension and military activity.

There is also the potential for Iran to use Global Positioning System (GPS) jammers and other communications jamming capabilities, which may inadvertently affect their command and control capabilities and potentially pose a risk to U.S. civil aviation operating in the above-named area.

The FAA will continue to monitor the risk environment for U.S. civil aviation operating in the region and make adjustments, as appropriate, to safeguard U.S. civil aviation.

Posted: 18 Feb 2020