

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

Due to increasing political instability and tensions in Venezuela, the FAA assesses there is an increasing inadvertent risk to U.S. civil aviation operating in the territory and airspace of Venezuela at altitudes below Flight Level (FL) 260. As a result, on 01 May 2019, the FAA issued Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) KICZ A0013/19, prohibiting U.S. civil flight operations in the territory and airspace of Venezuela at altitudes below FL260.

The FAA is concerned about increasing political instability and tensions in Venezuela, as well as recent electrical power outages, Venezuela's military posturing and possible fracturing of military/security force elements as military members have been observed supporting Guadio. Venezuela has conducted national-level military exercises and continues to posture forces to prevent Western aid deliveries into Venezuela. The Maduro regime has publicly threatened to defend its sovereignty from any foreign military aggression. In addition, the Maduro regime has increasingly turned to armed militias and colectivo groups to augment military and police forces by assisting with security functions and responding to protests. This confluence of events presents an increasing potential for violence, loss of security in and around airports, and possible miscalculation and/or misidentification of civil aircraft. These circumstances represent a risk to U.S. civil aviation operations in the territory and airspace of Venezuela at altitudes below FL260.

Venezuelan military forces have large stockpiles of advanced man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS), including SA-24s. Some MANPADS may be capable of engaging aircraft up to 25,000 feet. In addition, pro-regime militia and colectivo groups are equipped with small arms and may have access to anti-aircraft-capable weapon systems, potentially including MANPADS.

While there have been no reports of surface-to-air fire against civil aircraft, the increasing instability and heightened tensions, as well as the growing involvement of armed militia and colectivos lacking the level of training of professional military units, result in circumstances where inadvertent weapon fire endangering U.S. civil aviation could occur with little or no warning. Additionally, although Venezuelan military forces are believed to have no intent to target civil aviation, the evolving situation creates a concern for the possible loss of state control of some MANPADS into the hands of potentially violent and unpredictable non-state actors who may have different intent and a lower level of training. These concerns are greatest for U.S. civil aviation operating at airports in Venezuela and at low altitudes in the territory and airspace of Venezuela, particularly during the arrival and departure phases of flight.

There is also the potential for Venezuela to periodically operate Global Positioning System (GPS) jammers in a leadership force protection role in and around Caracas, particularly in light of the August 2018 unmanned aircraft system (UAS) assassination attempt. U.S. civil aviation operators may experience temporary GPS outages while operating in the territory and airspace of Venezuela.

The FAA will continue to monitor the risk environment for U.S. civil aviation operating the territory and airspace of Venezuela and make adjustments to its prohibition for U.S. civil aviation as necessary.

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