



# Federal Aviation Administration

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

FAA assesses all-altitude risks continue to exist for U.S. civil aviation flying into, out of, within, or over Mali's territory and airspace. Since 21 February 2024 when the FAA published Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) KICZ A0001/24, the security environment in Mali has further deteriorated as the government, with foreign support, has struggled to establish security amongst increased opposition attacks. Mali continues to host a semi-autonomous Russian private military company (PMC), Vagner, with access to anti-aircraft weapons capable of reaching up to 49,000ft. Mali's relationship with PMC Vagner almost certainly increases instability in the country, which challenges Mali's ability to manage and protect its airspace. Mali also remains in a protracted conflict with several armed extremist groups who have access to anti-aircraft weapons posing a low altitude threat to civil aviation operations, primarily during low-altitude phases of flight or while aircraft are located at targeted airports/airfields. Additionally, Mali's participation in the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) with Burkina Faso and Niger includes a mutual defense, economic, and diplomatic pact and allows member states to enter each other's territory in pursuit of armed groups, furthering challenging Mali's control of its territory and airspace. As a result, the FAA advises U.S. civil aviation to exercise continued caution when flying into, out of, within, or over the territory and airspace of Mali at all altitudes.

Since December 2021, Mali has employed PMC Vagner in its fight against separatist and terrorist groups active in the country. In the coming year, Russia might replace Vagner with the Russian Ministry of Defense-aligned Africa Corps; however, the FAA does not expect this change, if made, would result in any significant changes to the security situation in Mali over the next year. In 2021, Vagner introduced up to 2,000 personnel, attack helicopters, fighter jets, advanced detection systems, and weaponized UAS into Mali. Vagner personnel maintain direct control over several weapons systems in Mali, including the SA-22 (Pantsir) surface-to-air missile (SAM) system that is capable of engaging targets up to 49,000 feet (15,000 meters) and at ranges out to 19.4 nautical miles (36 kilometers) and weaponized unmanned aircraft systems (UAS). Vagner's previous use of anti-aircraft weapons in Libya raises concerns over the potential for inadvertent Vagner engagement of civil aircraft in Malian airspace without adequate coordination with the appropriate Malian authorities. Malian forces also have access to weaponized UAS, including the Akinci—which has a maximum altitude of 45,000 feet including (13,700 meters)—and the Bayraktar TB2. It remains unclear to what extent, and how well, civil-military deconfliction occurs between the Malian military, AES forces, Vagner weapons systems operators, and civil air control authorities.

Despite the Mali-Vagner partnership and the Malian military's use of weaponized UAS, terrorist and separatist groups have expanded their operational reach in Mali. Formerly, these groups were active in northern and central Mali, but they have now demonstrated the ability to conduct complex attacks in Mali's capital, Bamako. In mid-September 2024, members of the al-Qa'ida-affiliated Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) attacked Bamako's Modibo Keita International Airport (GABS) and a military training camp in the city, resulting in several aircraft at GABS being damaged. In 2024, JNIM also conducted attacks against Gao International Airport (GAGO) and Timbuktu International Airport (GATB).

In addition to JNIM, Islamic State Sahel Providence and the separatist group, Permanent Strategic Framework for the Defense of the People of Azawad (CSP-DPA), are very active in the country. JNIM and CSP-DPA have a history of attacking military aircraft and airports in Mali. Additionally, these groups almost certainly have access to a variety of weapons, including commercially available small UAS, small arms, rockets and rocket launchers, and explosives. JNIM and CSP-DPA claim to have successfully weaponized their UAS by modifying them to carry small explosives, which would pose a risk to aircraft operating at low altitudes, during departure and approach, and while at targeted airports. There are also unconfirmed and uncorroborated reports that these groups have access to MANPADS capable of reaching up to 25,000 feet.

The FAA will continue to monitor the safety and security environment for U.S. civil aviation operations in the territory and airspace of Mali and make adjustments to its advisory for U.S. civil aviation, as necessary.