

FAA Background Information Regarding U.S. Civil Aviation – Egypt Sinai Peninsula in the Cairo (HECC) Flight Information Region (FIR)

The FAA assesses that U.S. civil aviation operating into, out of, within, or over the Sinai Peninsula in the Cairo Flight Information Region (FIR)(HECC) at altitudes below FL260 remains at risk from hazards associated with extremist/militant activities. On 30 March 2015, the FAA published Notice to Airmen FDC 5/9155 (reissued on 24 November 2015 as NOTAM KICZ A0025/15), which advises U.S. civil aviation to avoid flight operations into, out of, within, or over the Sinai Peninsula in the Cairo FIR (HECC) at altitudes below FL260. This background notice was revised on November 24, 2015 to provide updated information regarding hazards to U.S. civil aviation in this area.

International civil air routes that transit the Sinai Peninsula and aircraft operating to and from Sinai airports are at risk from potential extremist attacks involving anti-aircraft weapons, including Man-Portable Air Defense Systems (MANPADS), anti-tank missiles, small-arms fire, and indirect fire from mortars and rockets targeting Sinai airports and aircraft. Some of these weapons have the capability to target aircraft at high altitudes and/or during approach and departure. The extremist/militant group formerly known as Ansar Bait al-Maqdis (ABM), now known as Islamic State in the Iraq and the Levant – Sinai Province (ISIL), previously shot down an Egyptian military helicopter flying at low altitude using MANPADS. Although MANPADS have not been used to target civil aircraft in the Sinai, they could be used to engage civil aviation. Attacks against aircraft in flight or weapons fire targeting Sinai airports may occur with little or no warning.

There is also an improvised explosive device (IED) threat to civil aviation. On 31 October 2015, a Russian passenger airliner operating from Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt to St Petersburg, Russia crashed in the Sinai Desert, killing all passengers and crew. While the crash investigation remains ongoing, Russia and U.S. allied partners have publically stated that they believe the cause of the crash was an IED detonation aboard the aircraft. ISIL – Sinai Province has claimed responsibility for downing the airliner, further highlighting the volatility of this region.

The FAA will continue to monitor the situation regarding risks to U.S. civil aviation in the Sinai Peninsula and the HECC FIR and make adjustments as necessary to its advisory for U.S. civil aviation operations.

Posted: 27 November 2015