Afghanistan Update – September 2021

OPSGROUP Team
13 September, 2021

The situation in Kabul remains dynamic. An update was issued today regarding ongoing changes within the OAKX/Kabul FIR and at OAKB/Kabul airport.

The full notice **issued by ICAO** following their most recent video-teleconference is available here.

The ongoing situation

Qatar and Turkey continue to work with the new Afghanistan government to help bring **Kabul airport back to operational status**, and to restore safe overflights. This includes the repair of damaged radar and other facilities, as well assisting in restructuring the CAA.

Qatar officials are coordinating with the Afghanistan CAA are conducting assessments on capacity and needs. They have apparently **deployed a technical team** to Kabul to carry out work. The DME has been re-established but notams suggest the VOR remains out of operation.

Turkey maintains a military presence at Kabul airport to assist and is apparently in discussions to help run the airport again – having done so for 6 years previously.

ICAO remain in contact with the Afghanistan Civil Aviation Authority who have provided updates confirming newly appointed members, and a designated point of contact.

Operational updates

- **OAKB/Kabul airport** and **OAMS/Mazar-e-Sharif airport** are both reported to now have **limited ATS services.** There is a limited tower service to support VFR operations at Kabul between 0330-1330 UTC. Mazar-e-Sharif has an FIS available, but the scope of this is unknown.
    - A shortage of ATC staff continues to reduce capability.

- **Pakistan** is assisting Afghanistan in the **restoration of the Afghanistan NOTAM service**. The service has been **partially restored as of Sep 6**, and is available via **https://www.afgais.com/**
    - Out of date Notams remain in the system so caution is advised using the site.
- The Kabul FIR remains effectively **closed to overflights** – the OAKX/Kabul FIR is uncontrolled.

Updated OAKX Notams

The following Notams are the up-to-date Notams issued by the restored office.

- **A0721/21** address **contingency procedures** and advises that aircraft requiring emergency descent should follow ICAO Doc 4444 procedures, but rather than advising ATS, should **broadcast on the relevant TIBA frequency.**
- **A0720/21** advises flights will encounter **delaying action prior to entering the Kabul FIR** to ensure **15 minute separation.** This is as per Notam A0715/21 which requires all traffic below FL280 to be spaced at 15 minutes prior to the FIR entry point.
- **A0719/21** advises that the AIS services including Notam office is now operational 24/7.
- **A0718/21** advises that all **flight plans must be filed at least 24 hours prior** to the flight. The contact email is permissions.acaa@gmail.com.
- **A0717/21** advises **PSR and SSR are now available** at OAKB/Kabul, with an advisory information service only.
- **A0716/21** advises that OAKB/Kabul is open for domestic and international flights. **Operating hours are 0330-1330 UTC.**

Our previous post covering the background to the situation can be read here.

The ICAO presentation from the recent video teleconference is available to view here.

IFALPA have updated their Safety Bulletin

Following the notice issued by ICAO, IFALPA updated their safety bulletin for the OAKX/Kabul FIR.

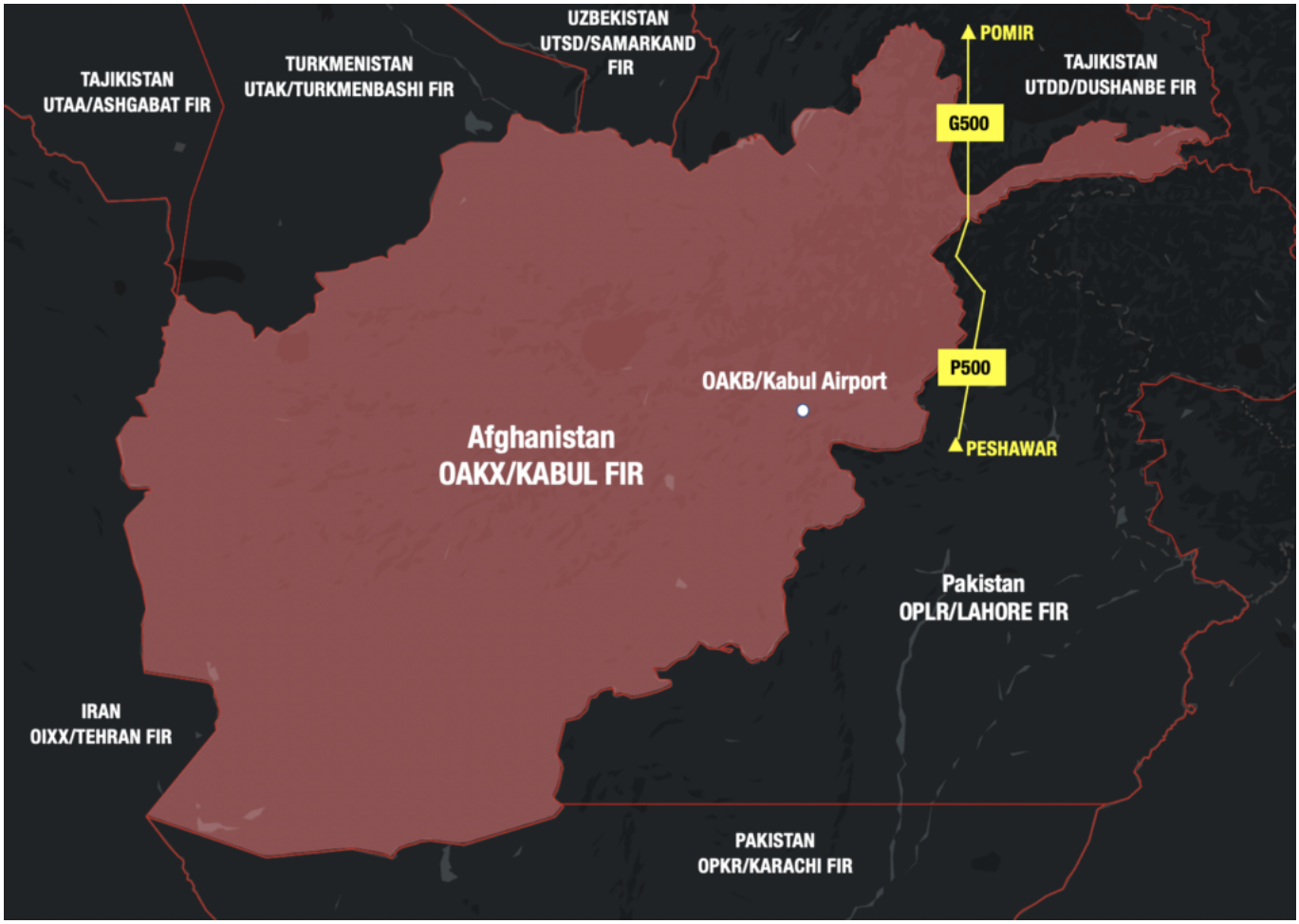
Here are the key changes:

- Unknown aircraft have been observed on random tracks between FL220 and FL250.
- There is limited ATS at OAKB/Kabul – radar services are advisory only.
- The ILS is working, but should be monitored closely.
- People and vehicles have been seen entering the runway.
- The status of other airports isn’t known.

Germany have changed their warning

EDWW has issued a new Notam B1244/21 valid from Sep 13. **German operators are prohibited from**

entering the OAKX/Kabul FIR, except for overflights above FL330 on airways P500-G500. The only change is the exception of those airways which connect Pomir in Tajikistan to Peshawar for alternate routing from Europe to Pakistan and Asia.



Airway P500/G500 in the OAKX/Kabul FIR remain available.

The US has published some new background info

On Sep 14, the US FAA published a new **Background Information** note for Afghanistan, following their flight ban issued in August as per KICZ A0029/21.

FAA Background Information Regarding U.S. Civil Aviation in the Kabul (OAKX) Flight Information Region (FIR)

The Taliban's seizure of the majority of Afghanistan, the collapse of Afghan governmental structures, and the ongoing threat of violent extremist organization (VEO) terrorist attacks, coupled with the coalition force withdrawal from Hamid Karzai International Airport (ICAO: OAKB), has resulted in a substantially degraded safety and security environment for U.S. civil aviation operations in the Kabul Flight Information Region (FIR) (OAKX), including at OAKB. The recent withdrawal of U.S. and coalition forces resulted in the removal of associated risk mitigation capabilities previously available at OAKB. In addition, the lack of a functioning civil aviation authority and air navigation service provider has created an unacceptable level of aviation safety risk for U.S. civil operations in the Kabul FIR (OAKX) at all altitudes. For these reasons, the FAA issued an all-altitude flight prohibition for the Kabul FIR (OAKX), Notice-To-Airmen (NOTAM) KICZ A0029/21, with an exception for transiting overflight operations on jet routes P500-G500.

Although the Taliban has assumed control of the country, the security environment in Afghanistan remains tenuous and complex and presents an enduring safety and security risk to U.S. civil aviation operating in the Kabul FIR (OAKX) at altitudes below flight level (FL) 260. Thousands of individuals have been released from Afghan prisons, and various groups, including VEOs outside of Taliban control, have seized large quantities of military equipment. In addition, some VEOs operating in Afghanistan have demonstrated their capability and willingness to target civil aviation as demonstrated by the suicide bombing, indirect fire attack and reported small-arms fire at OAKB during late August 2021 and previous instances of surface-to-air fire against U.S. government-contracted aircraft over the course of the U.S. presence in Afghanistan. On 26 August, the Islamic State in Iraq and ash-Sham in Khorasan (ISIS-K) conducted a complex attack against OAKB, and, on 30 August, ISIS-K employed indirect fire to target evacuation operations at OAKB. Military and civil aircraft operating at lower altitudes have previously encountered weapons activity, and further incidents may occur from deliberate or inadvertent targeting that could endanger flight operations.

Surface-to-air threats may include direct or indirect fire threats from small arms, rocket-propelled grenades, and low altitude anti-aircraft fire. The Taliban, ISIS-K, and other VEOs are known to possess small arms, automatic machine guns, anti-aircraft artillery (AAA), anti-tank guided missiles (ATGMs) and unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) that could pose a threat to aircraft during low-altitude flight operations, including the arrival and departure phases of flight, and while on the ground at targeted airports and airfields in Afghanistan. A limited threat currently exists from possible shoulder-fired man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS) use, which may be capable of reaching a maximum altitude of 25,000 feet above ground level (AGL). While the stockpile of MANPADS in Afghanistan is limited, there are VEOs seeking to acquire this capability. In the recent past, civil aircraft in Afghanistan have not been targeted with MANPADS. Military aircraft have been infrequently targeted with MANPADS since coalition operations in Afghanistan began in 2001. Although it is unlikely that Taliban would target civil aviation in the Kabul FIR (OAKX) now that they have assumed control of the country, ISIS-K and some other VEOs operating in Afghanistan are outside of Taliban control.

In addition to the above-noted weapons-related safety and security risks at altitudes below FL 260, there is also an increased safety risk to U.S. civil aviation operations in the Kabul FIR (OAKX) at all altitudes due to the lack of a functioning civil aviation authority and air navigation service provider.

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The primary risk on the ground and at lower altitudes relates to the ongoing threat of weapons activity and terrorist attacks – and following the withdrawal of US and coalition forces there are no longer any risk mitigation capabilities available at OAKB/Kabul airport. Although it is unlikely that Taliban would target civil aviation now that they have assumed control of the country, ISIS and other militant group are still operating in Afghanistan outside of Taliban control.

The primary risk for overflights relates to the lack of ATC service, functioning CAA and air navigation service provider.

Bottom line, US operators are banned from the OAKX/Kabul FIR except for airway P500/G500.

To view all current published airspace warnings for Afghanistan, head to SafeAirspace.net.