July 2024: Afghanistan Overflight Update

Chris Shieff
9 July, 2024

Key Points

- **Read to the end for an OPSGROUP Team report from a recent flight over Afghanistan.**

- **Afghanistan's procedural Notams for overflights have been re-issued: the entire airspace remains uncontrolled.**

- **The US FAA has amended its airspace warning for the OAKX/Kabul FIR: US operators are still permitted to overfly at FL320 or above but they can now use airways P500/G500 in the far east of the airspace as low as FL300.**

- **For the large volume of traffic now using Afghanistan as an air corridor connecting Europe, the Middle East and Asia, we figured it was time for an update on what to expect, and the risks aircraft are taking to use it.**

A Little Background

For all intents and purposes, the security situation and the safety of the airspace above has not changed since the Taliban re-assumed control of the country in late September 2021.

What *has* changed is the **normalisation of risk** – as more traffic (including major carriers) has been using the airspace without incident, it is important to remember these two facts when considering an overflight (along with your own appetite for risk):

- **The entire FIR is uncontrolled.**

- **There is no guarantee of crew or passenger safety if you have to land.**

With these factors in mind, here is a brief refresher on what you need to know if you do choose to go

ahead and overfly.
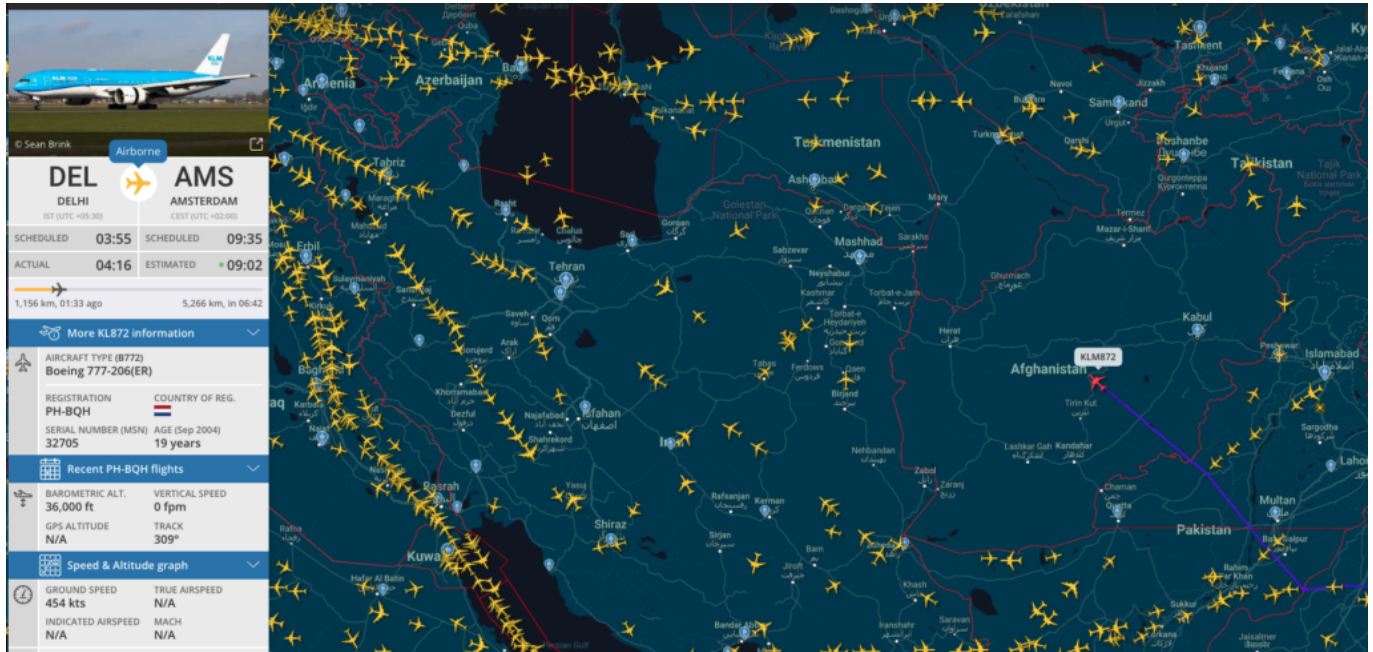
With major airlines now regularly overflying Afghanistan, the decision for GA/BA operators to do the same may be murkier than before.

Before You Go

Essentially you need to check three things:

1. **PPR.** All operators need prior approval to enter the Kabul FIR with at least 72 hours' notice. To get that, you need to email flightpermissions.acaa@gmail.com.

2. **Compliance with state-issued rules.** Several states have long-term airspace warnings in place for Afghan airspace. US operators need to check the current SFAR (more on that below) and any applicable KICZ Notams.

3. **Insurance.** Some providers will not cover extended flight through uncontrolled airspace with the risks that apply both in the air and on the ground in Afghanistan.

Overflight

The procedures to overfly the Kabul FIR have not changed – they're found in a series of Notams recently republished and extended. We previously took a detailed look at those here.

For the purposes of this article, this is the highlight reel:

- Adjacent FIRs manage the flow in and out of the Kabul FIR and apply 15 minute spacing.

- Only some routes and levels are available.

- **The entire Kabul FIR is uncontrolled**, with TIBA procedures in effect.

- You can't change speed or level once inside the Class G (except to avoid traffic or you have an emergency).

- **ICAO contingency procedures** apply if you need to descend in a hurry.
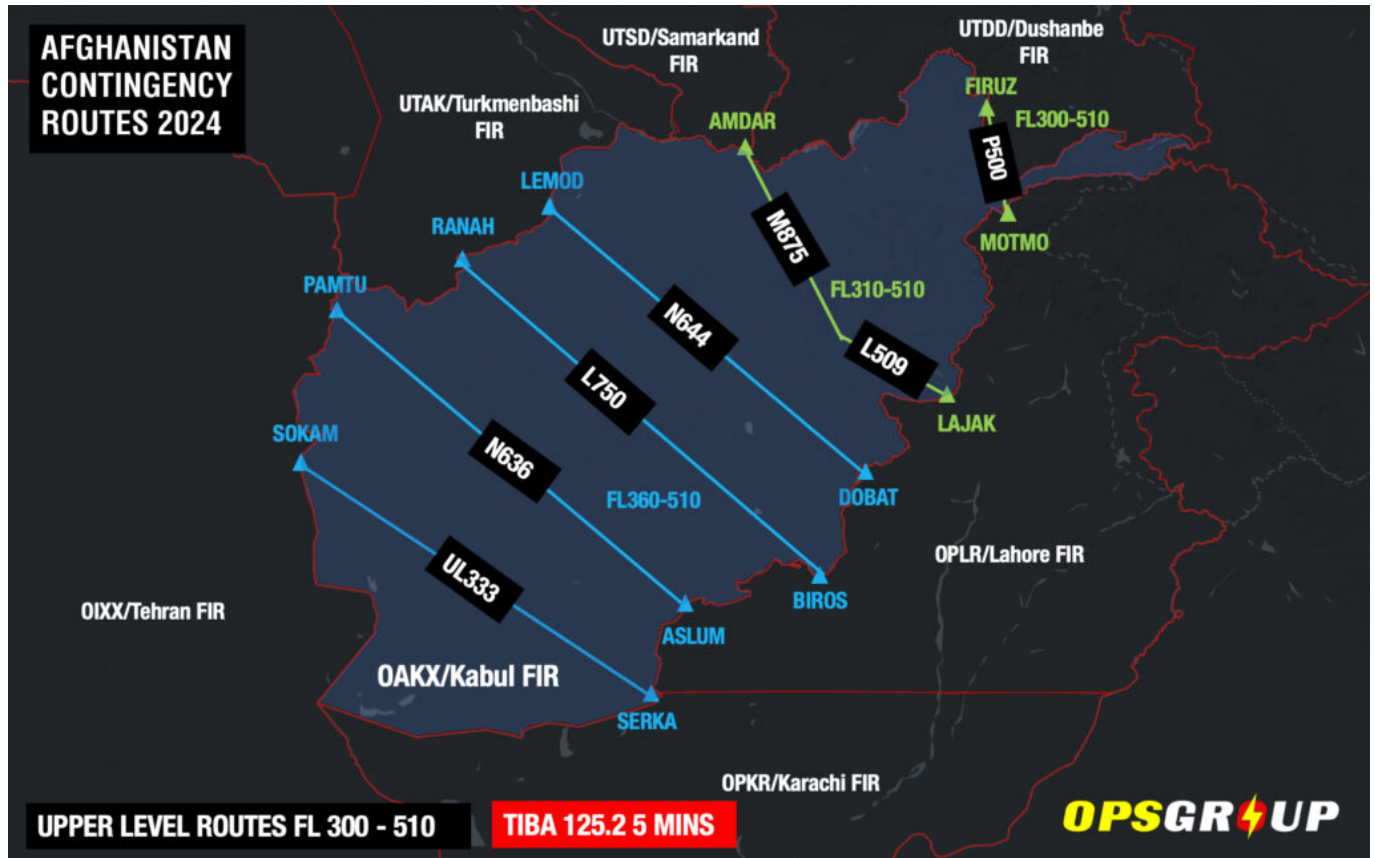
Unplanned Landings

For traffic deciding to overfly the Kabul FIR, it is critical to have contingency plans in place for a diversion.

For most operators, this would be to consider a landing at an Afghan airport a last resort **(akin to a ditching in oceanic airspace).**

Enroute planning should include ETP considerations for the most **fuel critical scenario** so that aircraft have enough on board to remain airborne and clear Afghan airspace before landing.

As such, be aware of westward diversions into Iran (the **OIIX/Tehran FIR**). US operators are currently banned from entering at any level due to high risk of misidentification, anti-aircraft fire and unannounced military activity. France, Germany, Canada and the UK also hold similar warnings.

On the Ground

If you do need to land in Afghanistan, **welcome to the wild west.**

OAKB/Kabul airport is your most likely target and there is no approach control, or tower service in use. As such, weather forecasting and Notams should be considered unreliable at best.

They do provide a phone number you can try and contact for the Kabul Notam Office, +93730006669. Failing that, try +93705769453.

As for crew/pax security, there is none. No country officially recognizes the Taliban as a legitimate government yet.

The Latest US Department of State Travel Advisory is stark – **do not go there**. If you do, you are at risk of

wrongful detention, kidnapping and crime. There is no consular assistance available.

Updated FAA Airspace Warning

Another change to report.

On July 5, the US FAA (slightly) amended its airspace warning for Afghanistan.

US operators are still permitted to overfly the OAKX/Kabul FIR at FL320 or above but they can now use airways **P500/G500 in the far east of the airspace as low as FL300.**
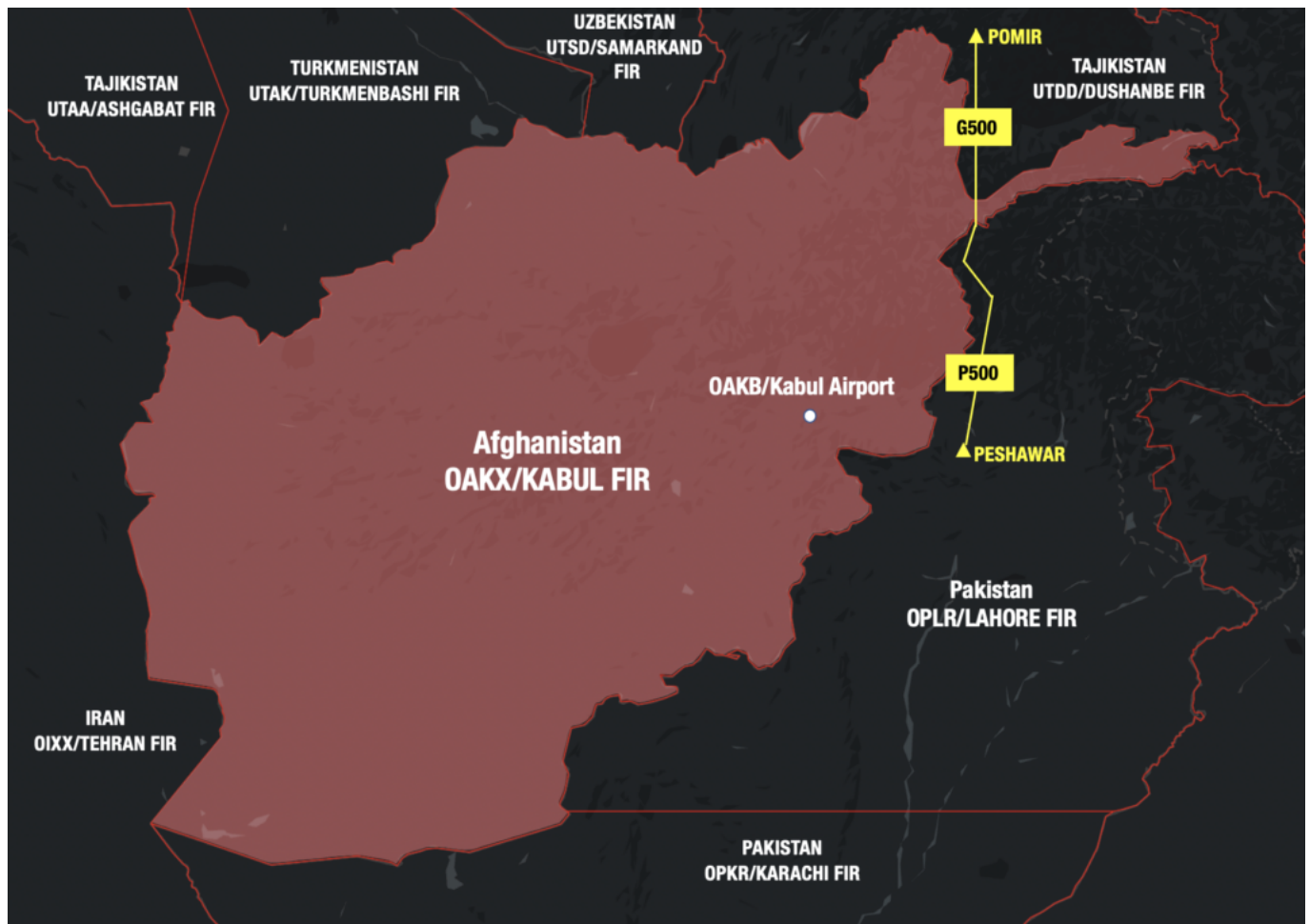
US operators can now use P500/G500 as low as FL300.

The FAA's reason for the change: *some operators were struggling to use these airways at higher levels. There have been no incidents here so far, and you don't spend much time in Afghan airspace while transiting them.*

You can view the updated SFAR here.

Our Pilot Report – here's what we did …

There is a hefty dose of 'at your own risk' about all of this. The choice to overfly is not an easy one. To give you a much better idea of what to expect, here's an **OPSGROUP Team report from a recent flight over Afghanistan:**

We operated through OAKX FIR on a EHAM/Amsterdam-WMSA/Kuala Lumpur flight

Overflight Permit: *Getting the permit was relatively easy. We emailed flightpermissions.acaa@gmail.com (cc to flightpermission.atm@mota.gov.af) and received a response within 24 hours. They replied to us saying that to cross the airspace is charged a flat fee of $700 USD. You will need to fill out the form provided (this Excel document) and then forward that, plus copies of your Insurance, Airworthiness Certificate, and Aircraft Reg. If you are operating commercially, they also want your AOC. They ask for a minimum of 48 hours' notice, although we put our application in a week in advance.*

Insurance: *Our insurance (like most) doesn't allow operations within certain countries; however, they permit overflights on ATC-approved airways, and if you end up diverting due to an emergency, you are covered. We checked, and L750 was considered OK. Several air routes are "open."*

Routing: *We had planned on L750, which runs from UTAV (Turkmenabat) to OPLR (Lahore). They also sent us the Kabul FIR Contingency Procedure document. The most important thing to read is the broadcast procedures since there is NO ATC service. The flight was very straightforward, and this route saved us a fair chunk of time and fuel.*

ATC Comms: *About 5 minutes before Kabul's boundary, the UTAV controller asked us to "report ATC established with Kabul." We tried calling Kabul on 125.2, knowing full well there was no ATC service. We told UTAV that we were going to continue TIBA procedures in Kabul FIR, and they told us, "Radar services terminated, frequency change approved. Good night." All our external lights were switched on. We used Comm 2 as our TIBA box (125.2), Comm 1 stayed with the UTAV frequency, and Comm 3 (our data link was set to SAT) to monitor 121.5. Revise your TIBA calls; they suggest you broadcast them every 5 minutes. We used each fix, and it worked at about the right time.*

Over Afghanistan: *There was one aircraft departing OAKB/Kabul airport, a commercial jet on its way to Dubai, and aside from that, there was no one else. Up at FL450, we had a great view of the terrain – the word is "inhospitable."*

We could continue to hear UTAV on Comm 1 until about 15 minutes into Kabul when we switched to 124.1, the OPLR (Lahore) FIR frequency; about 15 minutes before we got to the boundary, we could hear calls from other aircraft. We had about 10 minutes of "dead" time on Comm 1.

I had an ETP using UTAV/Turkmenabat and OPIS/Islamabad and did not consider using any of the airports within Kabul FIR as available airports. This was treated just like a NOPAC or NAT crossing. There is nowhere to go, so if something eventful happens, you can keep going or turn back based on your ETP.

We checked in with Lahore about 10 minutes before reaching BIROS, and they told us to call overhead BIROS.

Key Points: *It is relatively straightforward; brush up on the TIBA calls. There is more traffic nowadays as several airlines are using the routes for daytime flights, so it was a bit busier the last time I used it. However, at best, you will have a couple of airliners in the mid to high FL300s. There was no GPS Spoofing / Jamming or bad ATC, so I would use this route again, considering the other options in that region.*

Let's help crew make a **more informed decision** with more reports from other pilots.

You experience is invaluable – if you are overflying Afghanistan and have some operational advice, please share it with the group. You can reach us on team@ops.group, or **file an Airport Spy report anonymously** here.

NAT Crossing after GPS spoofing: a guide

Mark Zee
9 July, 2024

An increasing issue for the NAT Oceanic FIR's is how to handle aircraft with an in-flight degradation of GPS. This normally follows a **GPS Spoofing encounter** somewhere prior to Oceanic Entry, leading to a degraded RNP capability.

If you run into GPS issues before entering the Ocean, you will likely end up with RNP10 as the best you can manage for navigational accuracy. This presents some issues for the Oceanic controllers, as RNP4 is commonly used to ensure separation. We'll take a look at some scenarios and how to best handle these.

Normal RNP requirements on the NAT

NAT Doc 007 specificies two RNP options for entry into the NAT HLA.

The first is **RNP10** (accuracy of 10 nm, 95% of the time). An important consideration here is that **RNP10 is really RNAV10**, but they call it RNP10 to keep things simple [See NAT Doc 007, 1.3.4]. The critical difference is that for RNAV10, on-board monitoring is not required. Since this can only be done by GPS, that's an important relief when it comes to spoofed flights.

The other is **RNP4** (accuracy of 4nm, 95% of the time). RNP4 is only an absolute requirement for PBCS Tracks ("Half-Tracks"). In practice, ATC commonly uses RNP4 for separation purposes on the NAT (Since the introduction of ASEPS). GPS is required for the monitoring part of RNP4; without GPS, RNP4 is not possible.

Loss of GPS Prior to the NAT

Since GPS Spoofing became prevalent in September of 2023, increasing numbers of aircraft are arriving at the Oceanic Boundary with one or both GPS sensors inoperative. A textbook GPS Spoofing encounter will initially see the GPS sensors rapidly change from the real coordinates to fake coordinates. If all GPS sensors agree on the fake coordinates, the FMS becomes confused. IRU values will increase, and in some cases, the IRS may also become "infected".

The primary spoofing locations have not changed much since the onset of the issue: you will encounter spoofing at the Iraq/Iran border, the Sinai peninsula area (showing Tel Aviv as the spoofed location), Israel and Cyprus (showing Beirut as the spoofed location), and the Black Sea (showing Sevastopol as the spoofed location).

We have no reports in OPSGROUP that the other type of GPS interference – GPS Jamming – leads to lasting effects. Once the jamming has stopped, aircraft systems are normal.

However, we do have reports that if GPS inputs are turned off before departure, and later turned back on in flight, that issues may occur. This is mostly reported for departures from Tel Aviv (LLBG).

GPS failure, Ocean approaching

Since RNP4 requires a functioning GPS, if you encounter spoofing and lose your GPS, you can't fly RNP4. Assuming that you have an RNP10 approval (one of the only two options for the NAT HLA), you will become **RNP10**.

The problem occurs when Shanwick, or the OACC at the entry point, get late notice of this fact, and you are close to other aircraft. That leaves the Planning Controller with little time to figure out how to separate

you (an RNP10 aircraft) from the others (RNP4 aircraft).

In some cases, "spoofed" aircraft have had to descend to FL280 to exit the NAT HLA, and this has caused diversions.

How to best handle a NAT crossing with a failed GPS

The key is to advise Shanwick, or the first OACC, **early**. Shanwick's preference is that you use the RCL request to do this, and add a note to the end of the RCL along the lines of ATC REMARK/GPS DEGRADED RNP10 ONLY. If using voice to get your clearance, that's what to say as well. Shanwick NOTAM EGGX G0106/24, and a note on the OTS Track message, has this information.

The RCL for Shanwick should ideally be sent **90 minutes** before the Oceanic Entry in this case. Normal RCL timeframes are -30 to -90. An RCL sent any earlier will be rejected, but if you have something more unusual to discuss, you could use SATCOM to contact the supervisor and ensure a smooth crossing.

RNP10 time limit

With the change to RNP10 for your crossing, double check the **time limit** for RNP10. ICAO Doc 9613 (Volume II, Part B, Chapter 1) specifies that RNP is limited to 6.2 hours of flying. The timing starts from when "the systems are placed in navigation mode" or at the last point at which the "systems are updated". The logic here is that the IRS will drift without updates enroute, and after 6.2 hours of flying, will no longer be capable of maintaining the RNP10 accuracy.

For an aircraft spoofed in the Mediterranean, or Black Sea area, it will take 4 hours before Oceanic entry, so this time limit becomes relevant. If the impact of the spoofing is severe enough, there is potential for inputs – including DME/DME or VOR/DME – to the IRS to stop working. This is one of the potential unknowns at present.

Shanwick comments

Shanwick are encountering several GPS jammed aircraft per day, and it is sometimes difficult (or impossible) to find optimum profiles for aircraft without moving several other aircraft to accommodate. The only instance where they have to insist on FL280 and below, is when an aircraft does not meet the requirements for MNPS (such as single LRNS), and needs to be cleared outside HLA.

If a pilot advises that they have lost RNP4, but are still capable of RNP10, Shanwick controllers will look to find a solution where the aircraft can be cleared with at least 10 minutes longitudinal and 60nm lateral separation. These aircraft also need coordinating with the next Oceanic Center before clearance, and sometimes there are limited options available.

In general, the earlier they informed about the degradation, the easier it is for the Shanwick controllers to find satisfactory solutions.

Member input

This is a developing issue and we gratefully welcome any input from members on this. Email us at **team@ops.group**.

NAT Doc 007 – New Edition

Mark Zee
9 July, 2024

A new version of NAT Doc 007 has been published today (July 4th, 2024).

NAT Doc 007 is the main go-to guidance doc for ops over the North Atlantic. All the specifics about how to operate your aircraft safely through the complex airspace of the region are here. **As of this morning, the latest version is NAT Doc 007 2024 Amendment 4**. Download a copy.

What's changed?

For this particular update, **not a lot**. The changes relate to the language around the new RCL process, and what to expect back from ATC once you send your RCL. This is part of the Oceanic Clearance Removal project.

Earlier in the year, the new RCL response included the language "**RCL RECEIVED BY [ANSP]. FLY CURRENT FLIGHT PLAN OR AS AMENDED BY ATC**"

That turns out to have been creating confusion, so the RCL response will now just say:
"**RCL RECEIVED BY [ANSP]**"

These changes are in section 6.2.26 onwards.

What's the latest with the RCL/OCR project?

Santa Maria and Iceland have made the change, so entering that portion of the NAT HLA does not require an Oceanic Clearance. You do still have to send an RCL in the same way as if you were requesting an Oceanic Clearance, but once sent, and you get an ACK – that's it. For more on the new process, read about

Oceanic Clearance Removal.

Gander, Shanwick, and Bodø have postponed their change to **December 4th, 2024**. This means that for now, nothing has changed – you get an old-school Oceanic Clearance in the same way you always did – with an RCL, or via voice.

So there are two kinds of RCL then?

Yep. For Gander, Shanwick, and Bodø, **RCL** means **Request Clearance**. You send this message, then wait to get your Oceanic Clearance back, usually via an OCL message on datalink.

For Iceland and Santa Maria, **RCL** means **RCL Message**. This is a "Check-In" of sorts, but the format is the same as the old meaning of RCL.

Confused? You're not alone. But by Christmas, all will be easier – once everyone is on the same page. Play "Clearance or No Clearance" to help get things straight.
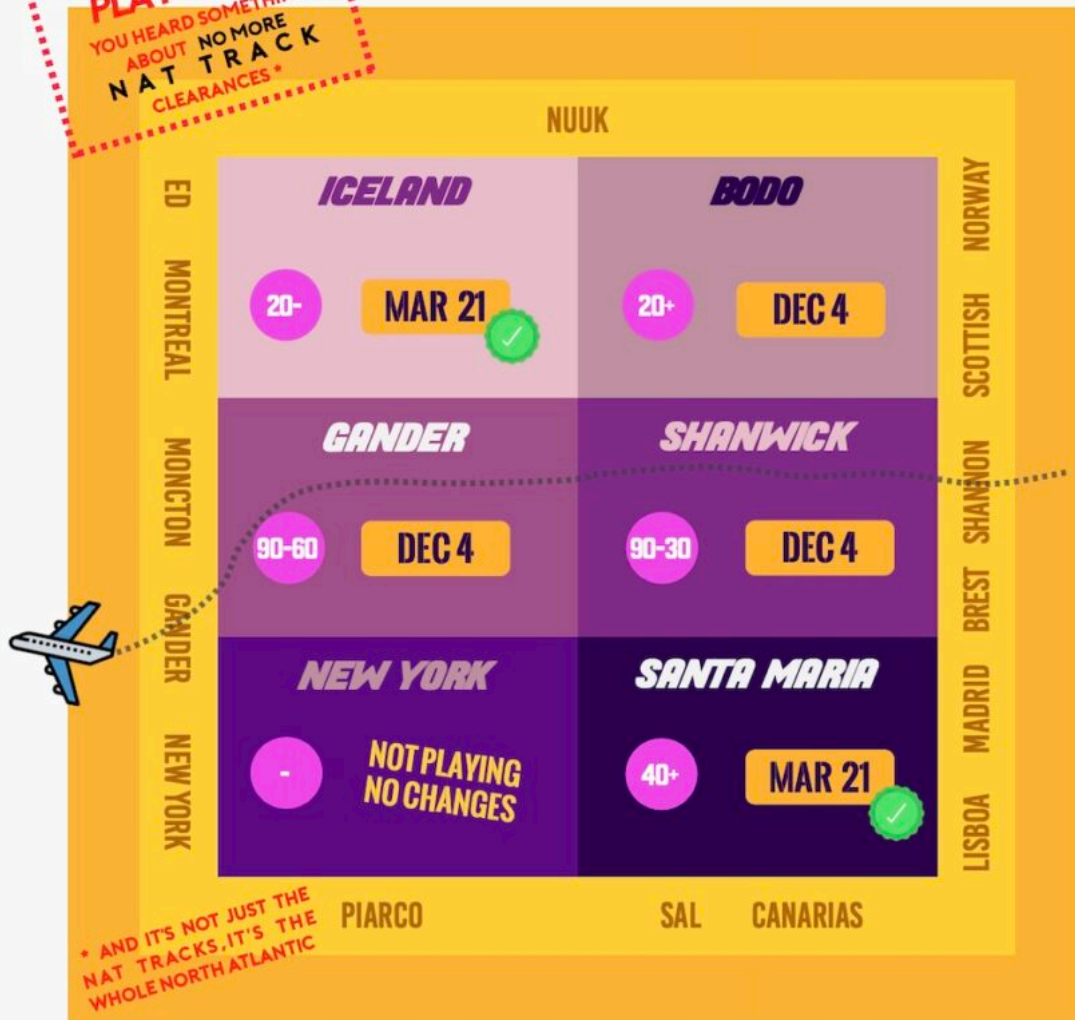
The hole in NAT Doc 007

There's one problem with NAT Doc 007 – we're in limbo land until Christmas. All of the guidance relates to how to send an RCL in a post-Clearance world. But for the next 5 months, most of us still need an Oceanic Clearance, and there's no information on how to actually get one.

In the previous version of NAT Doc 007, Chapters 5 and 7 related to the Oceanic Clearance process, but those **have been deleted**. So, here's a copy of the old NAT Doc 007 from 2023, which details that process.

Can we help?

If you have a question about this or need some help, just write us a note and we'll do our best:
team@ops.group.

Hurricane Beryl

Mark Zee
9 July, 2024

The OPSGROUP Hurricane tracker is now active for **Hurricane Beryl**, which is on track to hit **Jamaica** on Wednesday, with sustained winds of 110 kts. A hurricane warning has been issued for the entire country, along with the **Cayman Islands.**
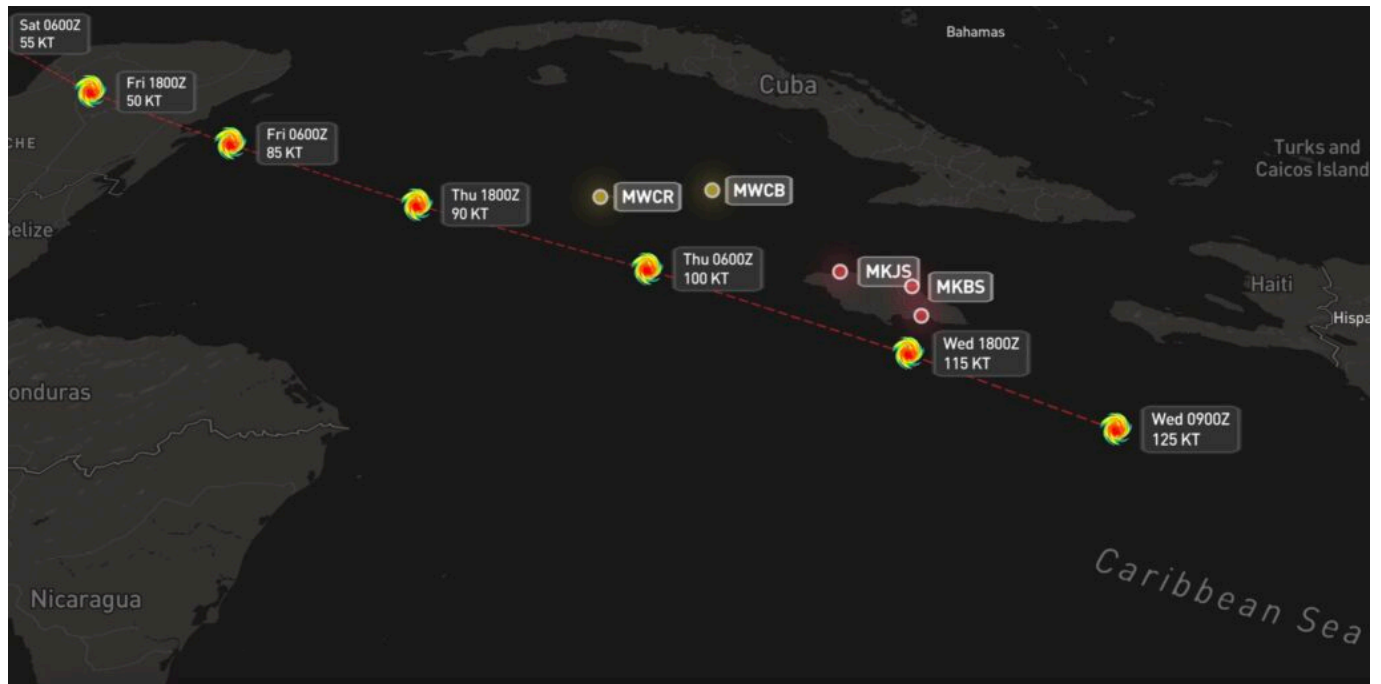
Click here for the interactive map.

MKJP/Kingston and **MKJS/Montego Bay** are **already closed.**

Further west, **MWCB/Cayman Brac** and **MWCR/Grand Cayman** will **close on Wednesday** at 1500 and 1800 local.

MKJP	Kingston	● Closed		Notam	**Wed** 0600 ET	Closed until 0500LT Thurs. No ATC avail.
MKJS	Montego Bay	● Closed		Notam	**Wed** 0600 ET	Closed until 1200LT Thurs. No ATC avail.
MKBS	Ocho Rios	● Closed		Notam	**Wed** 0600 ET	Closed until 0700LT Thurs.
MWCR	Georgetown	● Restricted		Notam	**Wed** 0600 ET	Will close 1800LT Weds.
MWCB	Cayman Barac	● Restricted		Notam	**Wed** 0600 ET	Will close 1500LT Weds.

The Hurricane Beryl Situation Report is being updated as airports close, and will have information on reopening.

There has been significant damage to airports in **St. Vincent & the Grenadines** post-Beryl, and all are now focused on relief operations. TVSA/Argyle is open and operating for relief flights, the smaller ones (TVSB/Bequia, TVSC/Canouan, TVSU/Union & TVSM/Mustique) have different degrees of infrastructure damage and are closed other than for specific relief operations.

If you have an **update** to share regarding **Airport Status** for any affected airports, please use the link below or email news@ops.group.

Ops to Paris for the Olympics

David Mumford
9 July, 2024

Key Points

- **Paris will be busy from July 22 to Aug 11 (Olympics) and Aug 26 to Sep 8 (Paralympics).**

- **LFPB/Paris Le Bourget will likely be the airport you want to go to, but expect quick turns only with reposition elsewhere for parking (options below).**

- **There's a procedure to know about (slots, PPR, no late changes).**

- **Paris will be a no-fly zone on July 26 for the opening ceremony.**

France has published new AIC 13/24 (effective 27 June 2024) with procedures for operators to follow if they want to fly to a Paris airport during the Olympics. *It's essentially a corrected AIC, because the previous one had confusing advice for business aviation!*

Here's what bizav flights have to do

- You must **file a "flight intention" for each flight** (send this to your handler/FBO no later than 2 hours before take-off for flights to LFPB/Paris Le Bourget, or 4 hours for other airports).

- There's **no accreditation** for pilots or operators during the Olympics, and everything will proceed pretty much as normal. The AIC only applies to VFR flights.

- The airport authorities will implement **slots/PPR** from July 12 to Sep 16 (these are obtained by the handler and sent to the operator), so you just need to fill out the FPL with the airport slot ID in Field 18.

- LFPB/Le Bourget airport authorities will **not allow any updates with two hours prior arrival or departure** – no change of timing, no change of crew or pax. The handler will send this info to the authorities prior to the flight, and if they don't reply then the flight is approved. If there is any issue with the pax or crew, the handler will be notified, and the flight will be refused.

- It's going to be busy, so LFPB/Le Bourget will **only be accepting quick turns** with parking elsewhere.

- **If you get a slot, you best keep it** – if you cancel it there's no guarantee you're going to get another one.

- Check with your handler of choice about their fees cancellation policy, as some of these will be **non-refundable.**

At LFPB/Le Bourget you have a few options for handling:
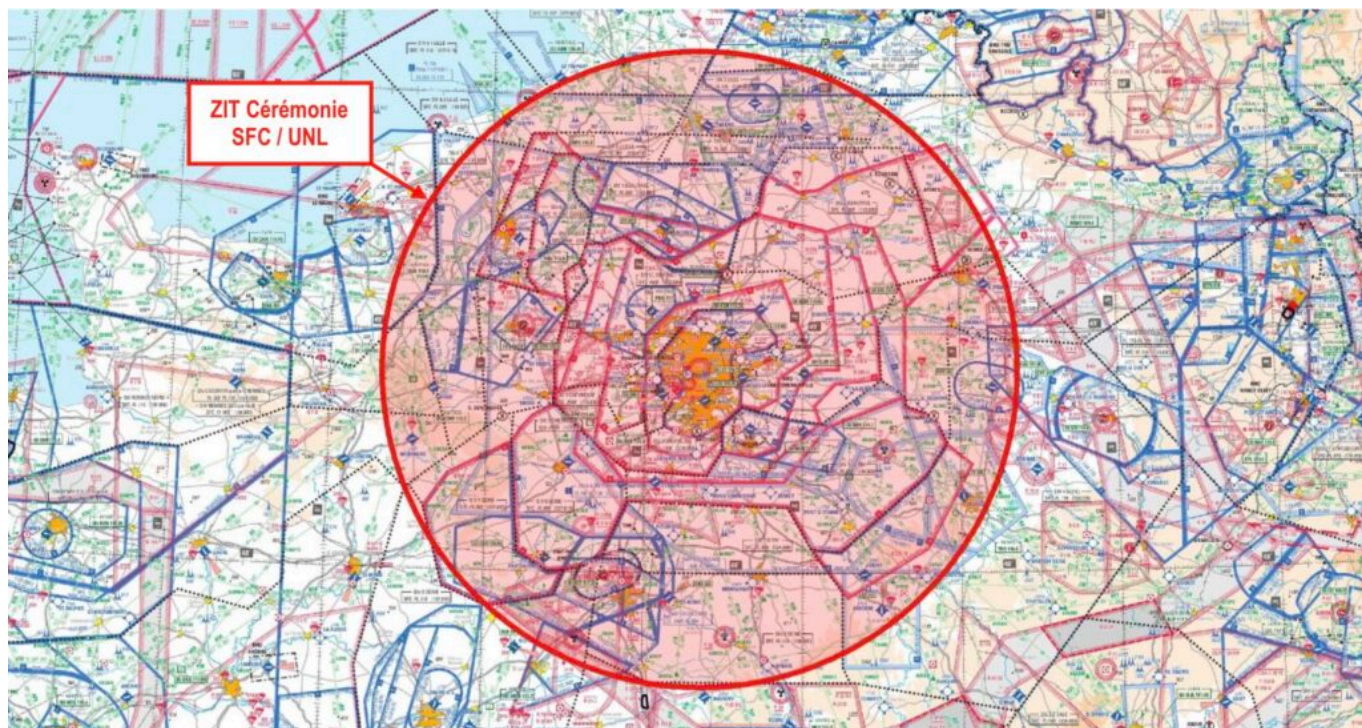
Astonsky – website
lfpb@astonsky.com

Dassault Falcon Service – website
handling@dassault-falcon.com

Jetex – website
fbo-lbg@jetex.com

Signature – website
lbgt1@signatureflight.fr

The Opening Ceremony

France has published a SUP showing the **closed airspace for the opening ceremony** of the Olympics in Paris on **July 26.**

On that day, between 1630-2200z, **Paris will basically become a no-fly zone** – no flights will be able to enter the airspace or go to/from the airports. Watch out for overflights too – these won't be allowed either!

Flight plans to Paris airports will be rejected starting 1530z. Departures from LFPG/Charles De Gaulle might be allowed starting 2130z with special approval.

Where to go?

LFPB/Paris Le Bourget, LFAQ/Albert, and LFOK/Vatry seem like the best bets.

LFPT/Pontoise and LFPM/Villaroche might be options too, but there's no customs available here, so these airports are only available for flights between EU/Schengen airports only (i.e. not direct from the likes of the US).

Ones to cross off your list

- **LFPO/Orly and LFPG/Charles De Gaulle** as they are dedicated to airline flights

- **LFOB/Beauvais and LFOP/Rouen** as they have no support for bizav flights.
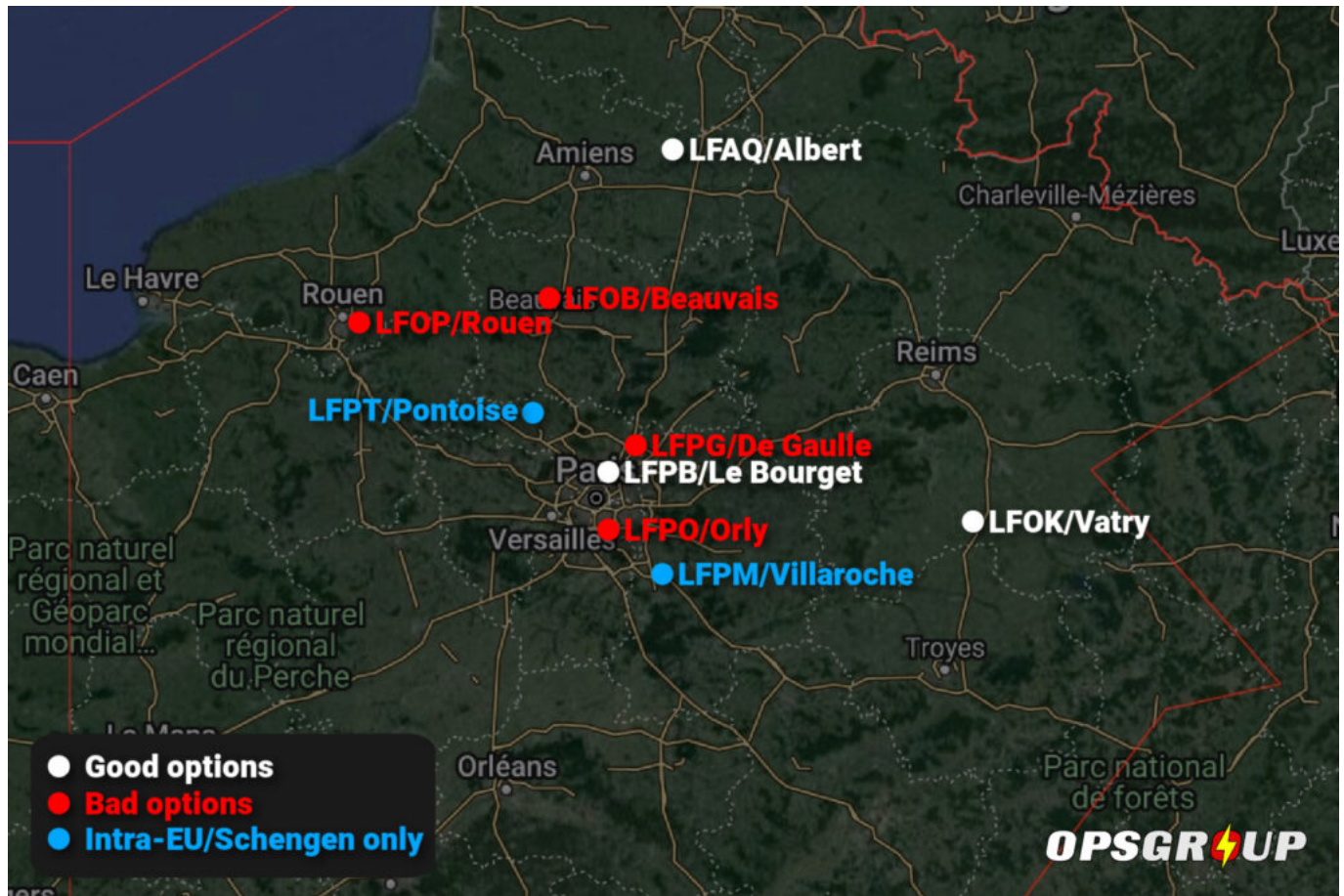
Most operators are doing one of the following

1. **Drop and go:** Get a slot into LFPB/Le Bourget, fly in, drop off pax and then reposition elsewhere for parking. LFPM/Villaroche and LFPT/Pontoise are good options for this.

2. **Clear customs elsewhere:** Clear customs at some intermediate EU airport (somewhere like LFAT/Le Touquet or LFOP/Rouen), do fast turns for just customs, and then fly to either LFPT/Pontoise or LFPM/Villaroche for parking and pax can access Paris directly. This avoids the slot situation at LFPB/Le Bourget.

3. **Do everything elsewhere:** Use LFOK/Vatry (2:30 drive into Paris) or LFAQ/Albert (2:10 drive into Paris) directly, where there is customs, and avoid a positioning, but have a very long car journey into Paris.

4. **Avoid!** Just avoid the Olympics altogether. Go somewhere else for your holiday instead.

Tell me more about LFPM/Villaroche

Here's a report from local handler Elyxan Aviation: ops@elyxan-aviation.fr

LFPT/Pontoise does not have a customs facility and neither do we. This is frustrating as we are the two main Paris airports within a reasonable driving distance of the city centre.

LFPM/Villaroche is actually a good option as we have lots of parking and a modern FBO/with VIP lounge. We can offer 24/7 operations, which even LFPB/Le Bourget cannot. That the French authorities don't allow LFPT/Pontoise or LFPM/Villaroche customs and immigration is extremely unfortunate, especially as LFPB/Le Bourget is overloaded even normally in the summer.

LFPM/Villaroche is marginally closer to Paris than LFPT/Pontoise in real world times as we have better and closer motorway connections. We're 45-50 mins from the center and LFPT/Pontoise is 50-55 mins. In reality we are the best for South Paris, and LFPT/Pontoise and LFPB/Le Bourget are better for North. LFPM/Villaroche and LFPT/Pontoise are about equidistant for the Versailles region in real driving times. As the heliport is on the south side of Paris, we at LFPM/Villaroche are better situated for heli transfer into the city (10-15 mins from LFPM/Villaroche and 20-25 from LFPT/Pontoise).

LFPM/Villaroche is less well known, but a substantial airfield and a longer runway than LFPT/Pontoise. Sadly, the airport is managed by the French State and not the private company ADP that manages LFPB/Le Bourget and LFPT/Pontoise. Hence, the lamentable marketing of our airports capability and absolutely superb position.

You can download the brochure for the Elyxan Aviation FBO at LFPM/Villaroche here.

Don't Climb! A Big NAT No-No

Chris Shieff
9 July, 2024

Last week, **Gander Oceanic** asked us to get the word out on this growing problem. More and more crews are getting this wrong, especially since OCR/RCL is starting to happen elsewhere on the ocean. The same issue is common on the other side of the pond, most frequently in the **Shannon FIR**.

What's the problem?

Pilots climbing without a clearance.

Why would we do that?

Because we think we have a clearance.

OK, tell me more

When you get your **Oceanic Clearance – or send your RCL**, it contains an Oceanic Entry Point, Flight Level, and Speed. From that point, that's what you should fly. But if you are currently at a different level to the Oceanic Cleared Flight Level, you have to **ASK** for the level change. That's really all there is to it.

Oceanic Clearance is not a Domestic Clearance

Your Oceanic Clearance is valid **only** from the Oceanic Entry Point (OEP). Take this example.

ACA123 CLRD TO LFPG VIA **NEEKO** 54NO50W 56N040W 57N030W 57N020W PIKIL SOVED
FM NEEKO/1348 MNTN F330 M082

Your Oceanic Clearance commences at NEEKO. You must be at FL330 by the time you reach NEEKO, and then track to 54N50W.

But, if you're still somewhere over Newfoundland at say FL320, you have to request higher from Gander Domestic ATC, before you climb to your Oceanic Level.

If you just decide to climb without asking, that's where your day will start to go wrong.

Recent procedural changes to the NAT may also be compounding the problem, so let's take a closer look.

Wait, I thought Oceanic Clearances on the NAT were a thing of the past?

Soon soon, but not yet. While Reykjavik and Santa Maria have removed oceanic clearances, Bodø, Gander and Shanwick are still targeting December 4 for the big switch. Until then, expect to receive a conventional oceanic clearance when approaching their airspace.
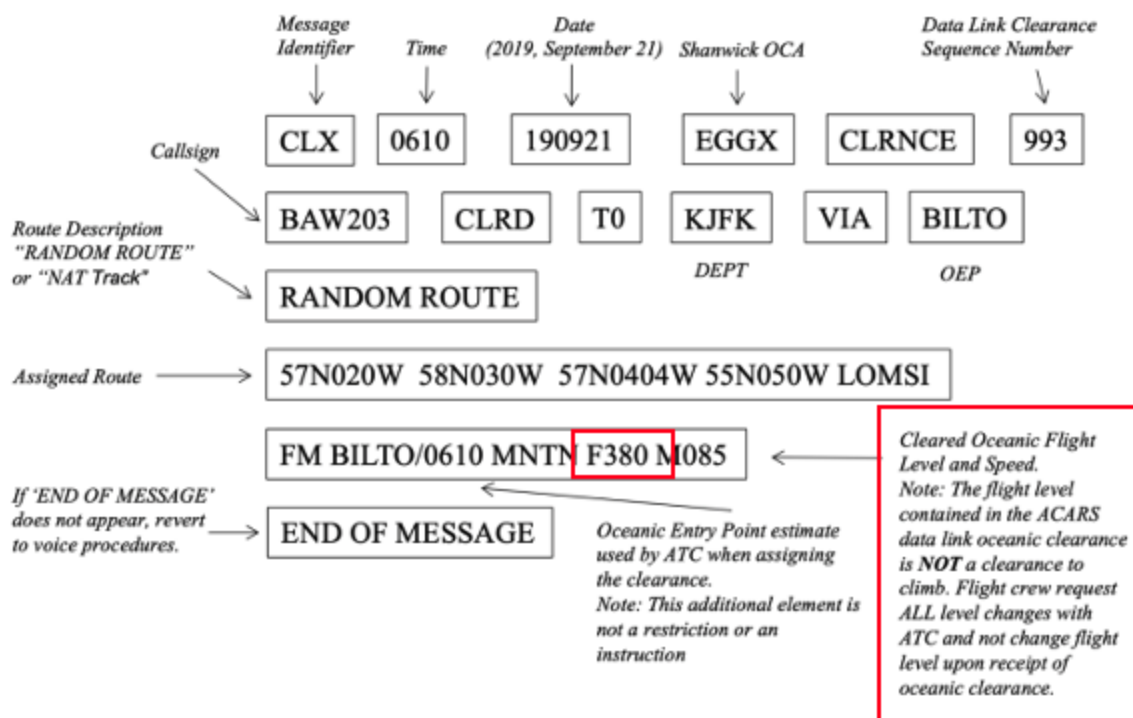
Oceanic Clearances

You can read all about them in NAT OPS Bulletin 2020_001 Rev 1, but the crux of the issue is found in Section 5.3 (Clearance Delivery):

... The flight level contained in the ACARS data link oceanic clearance is the "cleared oceanic flight level" for the purposes of complying with the lost communication procedures detailed in State AIPs, ICAO Doc 7030 (North Atlantic Regional Supplementary Procedures) and NAT Doc 007. ATC is responsible for providing a clearance to enable the flight to reach this flight level before reaching the OEP. If there is a concern, flight crews should contact ATC...

They made this handy picture too:

12. **EXAMPLE OF ACARS DATA LINK OCEANIC CLEARANCES**

In other words, the flight level contained in the ACARS datalink oceanic clearance is <u>NOT a clearance to climb (or descend)</u>. You need to request this with your active ATC.

Why is this becoming a problem again?

We can only speculate – Gander aren't sure either. But we suspect the use of datalink, in addition to recent RCL changes may be the culprit. For instance, back in May, the automated response to an RCL message was changed (ironically to reduce any ambiguity). It now only reads *"RCL Received by (ANSP)."* In other words, the *"fly current flight plan or as amended by ATC"* bit was removed. A full oceanic clearance therefore contains more information, and the use of ambiguous phrasing such as 'cleared level' may be creating more confusion on the NAT than ever before.

Questions?

Comment below, or email the OPSGROUP Team for help!

SAFA Ramp Checks: The Top 5 Offenders (+Alcohol test)

David Mumford

9 July, 2024

Highlights (updated 2024)

- **The Top 5 SAFA Ramp Check Findings are Flight Planning, Aircraft Documents, Defects, Charts, and Cabin Safety**

- **It's not a knowledge test, so feel free to say "I don't know"**

- **Alcohol testing is now common, see below for a guide**

Ramp check! Not our favourite couple of words in the aviation vernacular, but when your number's up, wouldn't it be good to know **what things most of us are getting wrong**?

Well, here they all are, in a handy little guide. Download, print, attach to wall-of-your-choice, and enjoy.

What do we base this on? Well, something pretty special happened recently. The French DSAC partnered up with IS-BAO to take a look at **hundreds of de-identified ramp check findings** in order to analyse **the most frequent CAT 2 and CAT 3 findings in business aviation.**

This is "special" for three reasons

1. It's great that an aviation regulator has actually shared this info because **now we can see the top things we're getting wrong.**

2. If we can see the top things we're getting wrong, we can stop getting them wrong, and then **ramp checks become faster and more efficient for everyone.**

3. It's great that this specific aviation regulator happens to be the one from **France – because that's where a lot of ramp checks seem to occur!**

So, all good. IS-BAO published the results here, and it's worth giving that a read first before we press on…

The Top 5 Offenders

As the good folks from IS-BAO point out – EASA Ramp checks cover **52 inspection items** spread over 5 areas: **flight deck, cabin, aircraft condition, cargo, and general/other.**

But some of those 52 items generate more findings than others. The DSAC/IS-BAO study found that the **top inspection items by number of CAT2 and CAT3 findings for business aviation** were these ones:

1. Flight preparation (RI checklist item A13)
2. Mass and balance calculations (A14)
3. Manuals (A04)
4. MEL (A07)
5. Checklists (A05)
6. Defect notification and rectification (A23)
7. Navigation/instrument charts (A06)

So essentially, these findings all relate to five key areas: **Flight Planning, Documents, Defects, Charts, Cabin Safety.** Get these right, and your "sweatin over a ramp checkin" days are over, partner!

Have you been ramp checked recently?

Let us know! **Where did it happen? How did it go? What things surprised you?**

As always, we will de-identify anything you share with us before we tell anyone else about it. But we'd love to hear your stories, and other people will too! Our idea is to gather together as many of these stories as possible, and put them into a little book to **help give other pilots and operators an idea of what to expect.** So if you've got a story to share, send us an email at news@ops.group

In related news: the EASA RIM has been updated.

What's the EASA RIM? Europe's version of the Pacific Rim movie only with **ramp inspectors saving the aviation industry from danger?** Or just an updated version of a rather boring manual?

Sadly, just an updated manual.

EASA have made some amendments, corrections and added some other details to their **Ramp Inspection Manual**, so here is **our guide to their 131 pages of guidance** (and an Appendix).

What's up?

The Changes to the RIM are contained in a 131 page document here. So this is the doc that **crew** might want to read. (The massive doc that ramp inspectors use is called the Appendix – we'll get to that later).

The big stuff to look out for (that we could see) is stuff on **Alcohol testing** and they've changed the name of the **"Standard Report" to "Safety Report".**

Page 76.

Let's start with something small.

This isn't actually a change, but just something we think might be of particular use. It is the Checklist for on-the-job training for ramp inspectors. Basically, it is a long list of all the stuff they need to check. Which means it's **a long list you might want to check so you know what you are going to get checked on.**

Alcohol Testing.

Scroll to page 98 (section 10.3) and it lays out all the info on alcohol testing and how it should be carried out. There is a lot of info here (most of it for the inspecting agents rather than you) but still not uninteresting to read.
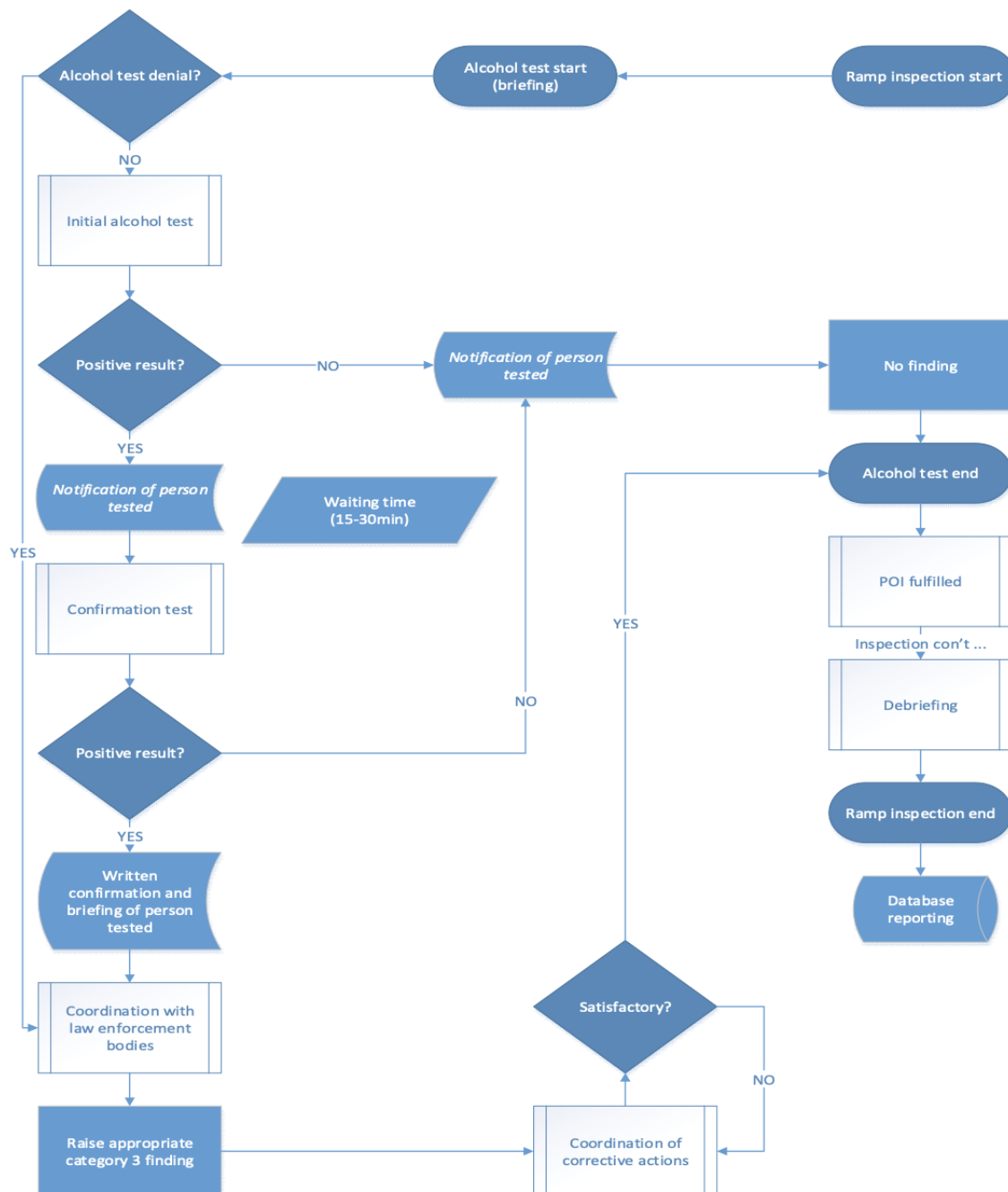
The general principles are that **it should be done somewhere private**, out of sight of anyone else, and if you aren't happy with the spot they pick then chose another.

They're testing to see if you blow **more than 0.2 grams of blood alcohol concentration**. If you blow below that then you pass. If you test above then don't panic straight out, **they must do a follow up confirmation test** which mustn't happen before 15 minutes, or outside of 30.

Certain drinks can mess up the results:

- "Aromatic beverages" like fruit juice *(never heard them called that)*
- Mouth sprays with alcohol content
- Medical juices (*I don't even want to know what that might be*)
- Burping on the test can create false positives.

Here is a particularly hideous flow chart of the entire process.

Flowchart

```
Ramp inspection start → Alcohol test start (briefing) → Alcohol test denial?
```

Alcohol test denial?
- NO → Initial alcohol test
- YES → Coordination with law enforcement bodies

Initial alcohol test → **Positive result?**
- NO → Notification of person tested → No finding → Alcohol test end
- YES → Notification of person tested → Waiting time (15-30min) → Confirmation test

Confirmation test → **Positive result?**
- NO → (back to) Notification of person tested
- YES → Written confirmation and briefing of person tested → Coordination with law enforcement bodies → Raise appropriate category 3 finding

Raise appropriate category 3 finding → Coordination of corrective actions → **Satisfactory?**
- YES → Alcohol test end
- NO → Coordination of corrective actions

Alcohol test end → POI fulfilled → Inspection con't ... → Debriefing → Ramp inspection end → Database reporting

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We think it's easier to sum up stuff like this:

1. **Don't ever go to work drunk.** Most operators/states specify a minimum time between drinking and working but if you aren't sure 12 hours is a generally decent one to work off.

2. Of course even **12 hours won't get you sober in time** if you've been on a mega bender the night before. So don't do that.

3. If you wake up before you're report time and realise you're drunk/potentially drunk then **CALL SICK!**

4. If you think a colleague is drunk, **stop them from going to the airport!** Report them if you need to.

5. If you are at work, and get picked for a random test, **make sure they do it correctly**, in a

private space following the right procedures.

6. **If you blow positive then don't panic** (unless you are drunk in which case do panic, you've messed up bad, partner). Have a think if you've maybe ingested something that could cause a false positive. Tell the inspector and wait for the confirmation test. They leave it at least 15 minutes, but don't push for more than 30.

Moving onto The Appendix.

The Appendix to the RIM is a whole 304 pages filed with **information on ramp check instructions and pre-described findings.**

Many of which have just been updated.

Now, you might be thinking *"why do I care how they're instructing their inspectors on stuff?".* But you should care because if you know how they're inspecting stuff, then it makes it a whole lot easier to not mess up on ramp checks and getting told off.

If you just want to scroll through **the list of changes**, then take a look here at the first 7 or so pages.

If you want a **full description** in standard EASA English, then read the whole 304.

If you want a **summary of the changes** then check this out.

Other useful stuff.

We wrote a whole post on ramp checks a while back and the stuff we wrote in that hasn't really changed that much.

While ensuring you are complaint is important, remember is works both ways. **Ramp Inspectors need to follow the rules and procedures as well.** Particularly when it comes to not delaying you or disrupting your duties too much.

The manual only recommends they must give you **8-10 minutes of quality quiet time** to set up for a flight. If you need more for safety reasons then tell them the time you need them to complete their checks by.

Final note.

Ramp checks can be frustrating. The best way to reduce that is make sure everything is in order and be prepared for them.

There are some airports we've heard are particularly *vigorous* with them:

- Anywhere in France
- Florence, Italy
- Edinburgh, Scotland
- London Heathrow
- Copenhagen, Denmark *(keen on the breath tests)*
- Amsterdam, Netherlands *(also keen on the breath tests)*

Let us know where you've experienced them so we can update the list!

Oceanic Clearance Removal mess – Version 4!

OPSGROUP Team
9 July, 2024

Update: 19th June 2024

Our excitement at seeing another OACC cross the "Oceanic Clearance Removal" finish line has been short lived. Bodø implemented the change on June 17, but it **did not go well**. As a result, they've rolled back the software, and have now decided to try again on **December 4**, when Shanwick and Gander are doing theirs. So, as things stand – **Iceland and Santa Maria have removed the clearance requirement**, and **Bodø, Shanwick, and Gander** will now all transition on the same day in December.

Original Story

Last August, the headlines pointed to a promising development for all of us: **No More Oceanic Clearances Required** on the North Atlantic. The reason? Rapid improvements in comms and surveillance coverage (through satellite-based CPDLC and ADS-C) have created an environment far more like a regular radar sector. The idea of getting a separate Oceanic Clearance was becoming dated.

The reality from the pointy end is – you guessed it – **not quite as exciting**. After the Oceanic Centre changes to OCR (Oceanic Clearance Removal), you don't have to request an Oceanic Clearance. This is true. But you **do** have to send a new-style "RCL message", which is precisely the same message as if you **were** getting an Oceanic Clearance. In fact, that Oceanic Clearance does still exist, behind the scenes. You just don't get a copy of it any more. More on that below.

The bigger issue for operators and pilots is trying to align cockpit procedures and crew expectations with the ever-shifting dates of **when this is happening**. Originally, all 5 Oceanic Centres (Shanwick, Gander,

Iceland, Bodø, Santa Maria) were going to do this in March of this year. The current dates are now:

- **Shanwick**: ~~April 9~~ ~~May~~ ~~Q4 2024~~ **December 4**

- **Gander**: ~~March~~ ~~May 3~~ **December 4**

- **Bodø**: ~~March~~ ~~May 6~~ ~~June 17~~ **December 4**

- **Santa Maria**: completed March 21

- **Iceland**: completed March 21

Shanwick, Gander and Bodø have now delayed OCR implementation until December 4. This creates a 2024 year-long limbo for NAT crews, and raises some questions about the way in which changes to this complex airspace are made.

OCR Delayed – So, what now?

- If you are crossing the NAT solely via **Shanwick** and **Gander**'s airspace, don't worry about OCR/RCL changes until **December 4**. Do everything as you normally do. You will request, and get, a clearance as normal. **But** keep in mind that a lot of confusing documentation will now be out there with incorrect dates and procedures that are not yet in place.

- If you are entering via **Iceland** or **Santa Maria**, the Oceanic Clearance Removal has been completed. You don't need a clearance, but you **do need** to send an **RCL message**. The same will apply in **Bodø** from December 4. If you are transiting into Shanwick or Gander, **you don't need** a separate clearance. Iceland/Santa Maria will take care of that for you.

- If you are entering via **New York**, nothing has changed, and won't. New York already operate without Oceanic Clearances, and your flight is coordinated tactically with the next Oceanic Unit.

- ICAO NAT Bulletin 001/23 (Rev 4) was issued on June 20, and all the dates are now finally correct!

Gotcha's to watch out for

- **NAT Doc 007 is unreliable**. The Chapter on Oceanic Clearances (Chapter 5) was removed for the current edition, and crossings now refer to an RCL process that the majority of traffic will not use.

- **Your EFB/Ops manuals** are likely to have incorrect dates and procedures regarding Oceanic Clearances.

- AIP, AIP SUP, and AIRAC updates relating to Oceanic Clearances are likely to be confusing, as a lot of AIP changes have already been made for the planned March/May dates – which are now not happening.

Complexities and Confusion

The North Atlantic is probably the most complex piece of airspace in the world for crews to get to grips with. NAT Doc 007, the bible for NAT Ops, runs to about 170 pages. This complexity is the primary reason for the NAT "HLA" airspace itself, and needing specific approval to be able to operate within it. Crews need

to know **a lot**.

Every **change** on the North Atlantic imputes responsibility on the flight crew to understand and execute it. Being able to do that requires clear and simple wording, and above all, for the information to align between the various centre's and domestic units involved. Potential confusion for flight crew should be minimised, and not underestimate just how hard it is for pilots to keep up with the litany of changes around the world every month.

The Oceanic Clearance Removal change has now created quite significant doubt in the minds of crews as to what is happening, and when. In the first place, the headline story "No More Clearances" is misleading. There is still an Oceanic Clearance, we're just not getting a copy of it (An Oceanic Clearance Message (OCM), is still sent to domestic ATC units, so they can see your clearance!). This mismatch between what the pilot _thinks_ is happening (no Oceanic Clearance), and what is actually happening (there is still an Oceanic Clearance) gives rise to understandable confusion, and potential for errors. This explains why an RCL is still required … and also explains why trying to think of the RCL as something other than "Request for Clearance" is difficult.

The **continual shuffling of dates** further creates a big workload for operators and pilots, and points to the need for a more integrated approach to making changes on the North Atlantic. **One single date** for a change of this magnitude would have been ideal, but as mentioned, it's complex airspace. Nonetheless, the way this has played out has been frustrating for everyone involved.

Clearance game update

We've updated the "Clearance or No Clearance" game with the **new dates**, and some FAQ.

Download the current version (PDF, 0.5 Mb).

NAT Clearance changes – a game! (V4)

David Mumford
9 July, 2024
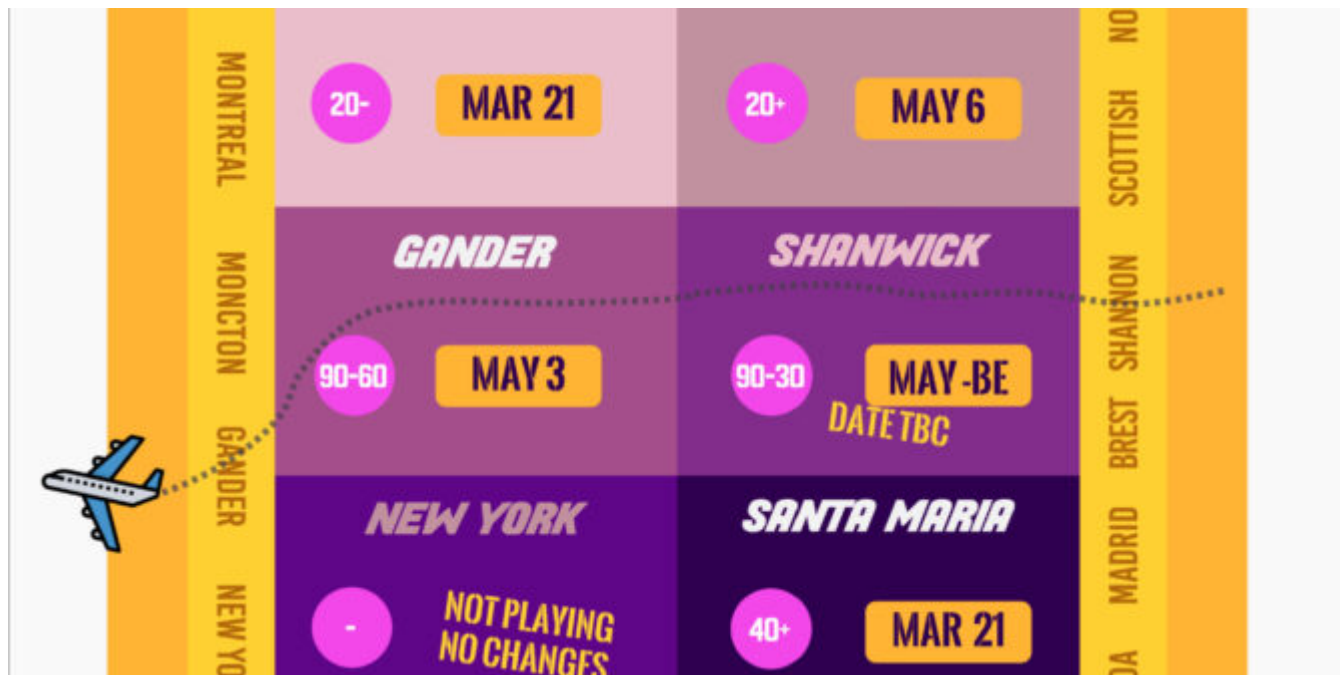
- **We've made a little game to help with Oceanic Clearances changes on the NAT.**

- **You can download it here.**

- **Updated June 19, 2024 – Edition 4!**

Why the game?

By **Christmas** of 2024, all OACC's on the NAT will stop transmitting an Oceanic Clearance to you. They still want you to send an "RCL" message, which used to mean "Request Clearance", but now it just means "Tell us your latest preferences". Think of it as Checking In.

There are different dates when Oceanic Clearances will cease to be issued in the following FIRs:

- **Shanwick**: ~~April 9~~ ~~May~~ ~~Q4 2024~~ **December 4**

- **Gander**: ~~March~~ ~~May 3~~ **December 4**

- **Bodø**: ~~March~~ ~~May 6 June 17~~ **December 4**

- **Santa Maria**: completed March 21

- **Iceland**: completed March 21

But let there be no further blather about it here! We've done enough of that already – check here for our full post on the topic. **Just play the game – it's fun, and will tell you everything you need to know in 3 pages!** Print it out, share it, pin it on a wall somewhere if you so desire. We *do* so desire.

And if you have a question not covered in the game, send it to us at team@ops.group, and we'll help you out – and add it into the next version.

Edinburgh security rules create painful delays

David Mumford
9 July, 2024

Key Points

- **EGPH/Edinburgh airport has a rule that means all aircraft have to go through outbound security screening, regardless of weight or type of flight.**

- **Airport Spy reports suggest this can easily take an extra hour to complete, so plan for departure delays.**

- **If planning a trip to the region, consider EGPF/Glasgow instead!**

There's a rule in the UK that means outbound security screening is required for commercial flights over 10 tonnes MTOW, and all flights over 45.5 tonnes whether commercial or private.

But at **EGPH/Edinburgh**, outbound screening is required for all flights, regardless of weight or type of flight.

This means all crew and pax must pass through security, and abide by the 100ml liquid rule for carry-on luggage.

A recent Airport Spy report says that this **whole process took around an hour**, and they were the only crew there at the time!

Another Airport Spy report says to consider using **EGPF/Glasgow** instead, where they just have the standard UK rules for screening, and also don't have arrival or departure slots.

The reason that EGPH/Edinburgh has this strange rule is something to do with it being a **"Critical Part" airport.**

What is a "Critical Part" airport?

Some folks we spoke to called this term *"Critical Park"*, others *"Critical Path"*, but we think it's *"Critical Part"*.

Either way, there's nothing about it in the UK AIP or seemingly anywhere else online.

It's apparently something to do with how the *specific layout of the airport affects zoning for security purposes*.

And that's all we know.

Are there any other UK airports that do this?

Yes. **EGLL/Heathrow** and **EGKK/Gatwick** are both "Critical Part" airports, so both have the same rule: <u>all</u> outbound flights must have security screening here.

EGWU/Northolt is the only other airport in the UK that we know of which has mandatory outbound security screening for <u>all</u> outbound flights, but that's due to some kind of requirement in place from the military there, as the airport is a joint civil/military field.

We contacted a whole bunch of other airports (EGSS/Stansted, EGGW/Luton, EGMC/Southend, EGLC/London City, EGTK/Oxford, EGLF/Farnborough, EGKB/Biggin Hill), and they all said the same thing: no weird "Critical Part" stuff here – the normal UK rules apply.

So tell me the rules again?

EGPH/EGLL/EGKK/EGWU: Outbound screening is required for <u>all</u> flights, regardless of weight or type of flight.

All other UK airports: Outbound screening only required for commercial flights over 10 tonnes MTOW, and all flights over 45.5 tonnes whether commercial or private. You can read more about this here.

Mexico Permit Confusion – The Latest

David Mumford
9 July, 2024

Right on the heels of the implementation of the new **Single Entry Authorization**, known as an "AIU", the Mexican Civil Aviation authority (AFAC) has issued a new **Mandatory Circular** which is **causing issues at certain airports for BOTH Part 91 and Part 135 operations.** Here's the lowdown:

Issue #1: **Private flights might get mis-identified as Commercial flights.** The Circular claims that the "majority" of non-mexican registered aircraft indicate the type of service they are authorized to perform in their Registration or Airworthiness Certificates. Mexican registered aircraft identify their intended use through their tail number XA-Commercial, XB-Private, XC-Government. However, this claim in the circular could lead to an incorrect interpretation of Standard Airworthiness Certificates in the commuter, or transport categories to be an indication of the type of operation being performed. With this incorrect interpretation, a Private operation could be mis-interpreted to be a Commercial operation.

Issue #2: **You need a noise certificate to get a landing permit.** The minimum documents required now include a noise certificate. While required under 14 CFR 91.703 (a) (5) many pilots and operators do not know where to find it. In turboprop and turbojet aircraft, it is usually in the AFM. Smaller aircraft may need to create their own using the FAA Circulars AC 91-86 and AC_36-1H

Issue #3: **You also need a Journey Logbook.** An aircraft Journey Logbook is indicated as a required document. The aeroplane journey log should contain aeroplane nationality and registration, dates of flights, crew member names and duty assignments, departure and arrival points and times, purpose of flight, observations regarding the flight, signature of the pilot-in-command.

Issue #4: **You also need Radio Station Licenses.** Radio Station Licenses are now specifically required. While required under US law, many pilots/operators have chosen to ignore this and could be in for a harsh surprise.

Issue #5: **Watch out for cabotage rules.** Charter flights can only extract from Mexico those passengers that they brought in and cannot make any flights from one Mexican airport another.

Issue #6: **You *might* need Mexican insurance for private flights.** The circular states that the insurance policy for all aircraft must be a Mexican approved policy. It does not indicate that for private aircraft, the policies issued in their country of registry are accepted. This may be interpreted that ALL aircraft must now buy Mexican policies. ***More news to follow!***

Issue #7: **You *might* need a copy of the Mexican AIP.** The circular states that the Aeronautical Information Publication (AIP) must be carried aboard in physical or electronic form. In the past, an

equivalent document (Jeppesen Trip Kit) was accepted in lieu of the AIP. ***More news to follow!***

Issue #8: You *might* **need a review of your AOC.** The circular states that for charter/freight/ambulance flights, a Mexican AOC must be obtained. There is no guidance on whether this is simply a review of the existing AOC of the operator or they actually want operators to undergo some new procedure to obtain a Mexican AOC. ***More news to follow!***

The circular is sufficiently ambiguous and referring to numerous articles and sections of Mexican laws and Circulars that it will require a lot of homework to understand. As such, **much appears to be left to interpretation** which will most likely go against a pilot rather than to their benefit.

We recommend that you **contact the civil aviation authorities at the Mexican airport of your intended arrival** to determine what they are going to require of you.

If you are a Part 135 charter operator AND even if you have a blanket Mexican Charter Permit, you should **contact your handler immediately** to determine whether you will be allowed to operate at your intended Mexican airport of landing. We were informed that over the past weekend, **well over a dozen charter flights were denied entry** as a result of this Mandatory Circular.

Unfortunately, this Mandatory Circular is sufficiently vague that it is being **handled differently airport to airport.** However, we are receiving reports of charter flights being denied entry into Mexico at huge cost to all involved. We have not heard any reports yet regarding Part 91 but the ambiguity in this Circular leaves that door open as well. Just **check in advance** to avoid unpleasant surprises on arrival in Mexico.

Thanks to Rick Gardner of CST Flight Services for this article. CST Flight Services provides a wide range of international trip support services in Mexico and beyond. You can contact them for more info at: customersvc@cstflightservices.com

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South Korea Airspace Risk Update

Chris Shieff
9 July, 2024

Key Points

- **There are no official airspace warnings for South Korea, but the risk situation seems to be getting worse.**

- **Airspace safety is gradually deteriorating due to several factors: GPS Interference, North Korean space launches and missile tests, military drills and failed agreements with North Korea, and weird balloon incidents.**

If you're operating in the **RKRR/Incheon FIR**, it is important to stay up to date with airspace risk.

In stark comparison to North Korean airspace, which is rife with warnings and flight prohibitions, operations over South Korea continue with almost **no active advisories** to crew – save for the odd FIR Notam.

It is not so much a matter of disinformation, but a **lack of it** that can create complacency amongst pilots operating there.

The situation on the Korean Peninsula is unique. The two nations are not at war but remain in a state of **constant readiness** to engage in one. They live in what was once described as a 'reciprocal fear of surprise attack.'

This means South Korea's airspace is at constant risk of instability caused by some kind of political crisis. Things have potential to change quickly, and **without warning.**

It is therefore vital to monitor changes in airspace that is considered by most to be completely safe. Here is a review of what has been happening in the RKRR/Incheon FIR lately that may have subtly been **increasing risk** to civil aircraft.

GPS Interference

The US FAA previously published a warning for GPS interference in South Korean airspace via a KICZ Notam – but this was cancelled back in 2018. The signs are that this advice may need to be re-visited.

On March 11, the RKRR/Incheon FIR issued a new warning advising **extreme caution for GPS interference** including the vicinity of RKSI/Incheon, Seoul. The nature of the interference wasn't specified but was likely to have included spoofing.

```
RKRR Z0558/24 - CAUTIONARY INFO FOR ACFT OPERATING IN INCHEON FIR :
PILOTS HAVE REPORTED THAT GPS SIGNALS ARE UNRELIABLE OR LOST
INTERMITTENTLY IN INCHEON FIR(AROUND INCHEON AND SEOUL AREA).
EXERCISE EXTREME CAUTION WHEN USING GPS.
10 JUN 05:51 2024 UNTIL 17 JUN 15:00 2024.
CREATED: 10 JUN 05:51 2024
```

The source of the interference was suspected to be North Korea attempting to interfere with military drills in the area.

This was followed by an **OPSGROUP member report** of GPS interference during an approach to RKSS/Seoul on May 16:

"GPS spoofing into RKSS/Seoul [while] on approach to RWY 32R. We disabled hybrid and deselected GPS after seeing the risk reported on ATIS..."

Any kind of GPS interference, especially when operating in and out of Seoul, is cause for concern. It's 20nm

from the North Korean border and a bunch of prohibited areas which carry chart warnings that say in very clear language that **you may get shot at** if you inadvertently enter.
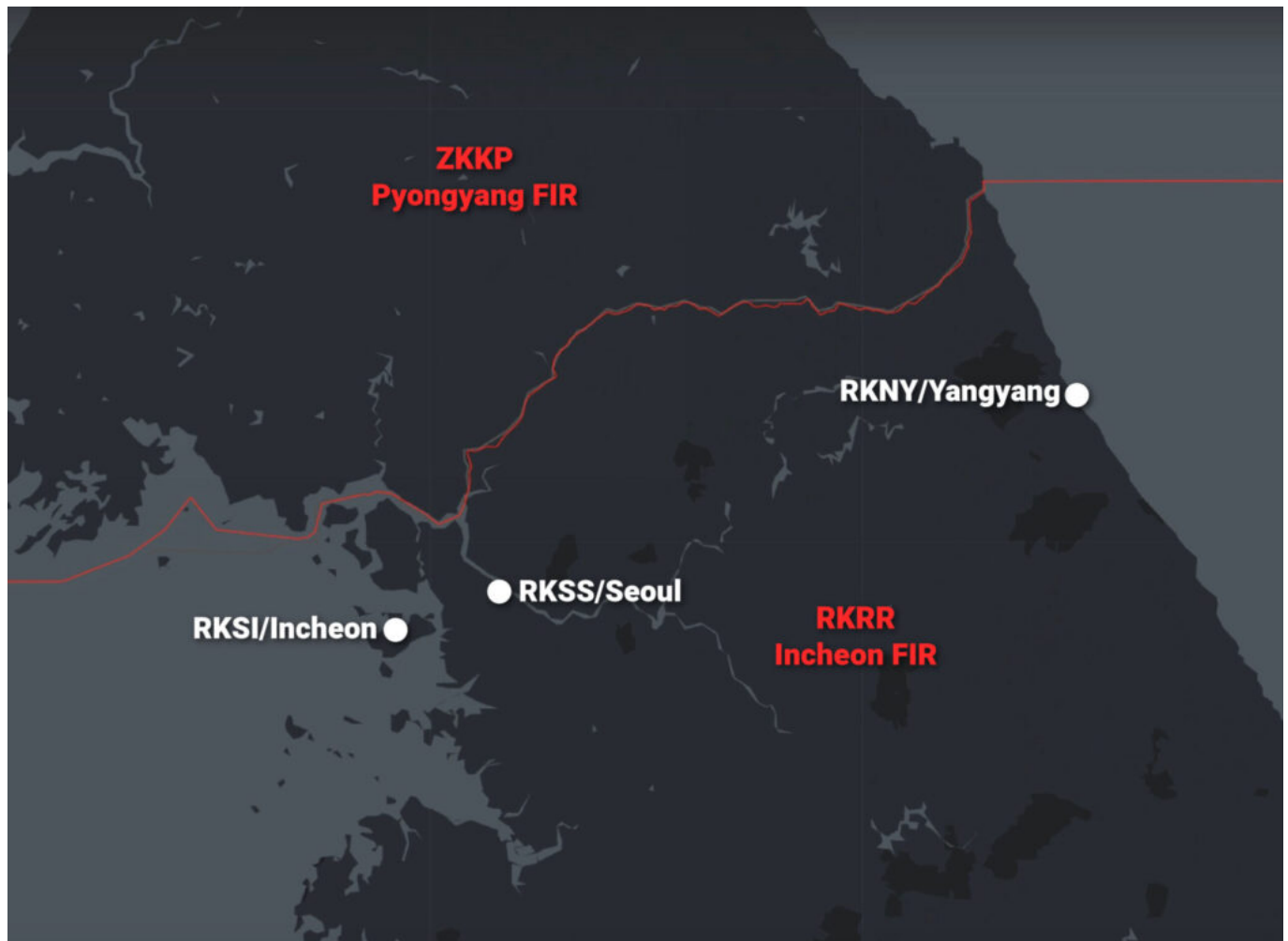
North Korea's Race to Space

Late last year, North Korea surprised the world by launching a satellite into space creating a potential **debris field** in the Yellow Sea between South Korea and China. The launch prompted a missile warning in Southern Japan.

Unlike conventional missile tests, space launches create hazards to aviation that **extend far beyond the ZKKP/Pyongyang FIR** rendering existing airspace warnings arguably inadequate. Here is an example of a warning hurriedly issued for large portions of the RKRR Incheon FIR following a previously attempted space launch.

```
Q) RKRR/QWMLW/IV/BO/W/000/999/3535N12700E999
A) RKRR B) 2305301500 C) 2306101500
E) ROCKET LAUNCHED FROM NORTH KOREA. IN THE
INTEREST OF AVIATION SAFETY, WI INCHEON FIR ALL
ACFT ARE STRONGLY ADVISED TO KEEP LISTENING TO THE
FREQUENCY AND FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTION OF ATC.

EXPECT FALLING AREAS ARE AS BLW :
1. 360656N 1233307E-352431N 1232247E-352001N
1234837E-360226N
1235911E
2. 340554N 1230159E-332328N 1225153E-331632N
1232940E-335858N
1234004E
3. 145410N 1284006E-111918N 1291050E-112649N
1295408E-150142N
1292403E
```

Then just weeks ago, North Korea attempted to launch another (with no prior warning) which failed spectacularly in a mid-air explosion. This prompted South Korea to conduct **air drills** with over twenty military fighter jets near the demilitarised border zone.

North Korea have since announced to Japan their intention to try again with another **potential debris field** near the Korean Peninsula, and the Philippines Island of Luzon. The original target was June 4 but we're still waiting.

Behind this persistence to have satellites in space is Pyongyang's ability to gather intelligence on South Korea should a conflict escalate – **it seems that risk to civil aviation is an afterthought.**

Ballooning Tensions

Earlier this month, North Korea sent at least three and a half thousand balloons across the border into South Korea carrying animal excrement, garbage and scrap paper. Some landed in Seoul.

No flight disruptions were reported, but images circulating in the media show that the balloons were not small and could easily cause **low level hazards** to aircraft operating in South Korean airspace near the border.

Failed Pact

On June 4, Seoul axed a six-year old agreement with Pyongyang that was designed to calm things down between the two countries. It hoped to achieve this by prohibiting provocative military drills or carrying out psychological warfare near the border.

Just two days later, joint drills with the US were carried out using a long-range bomber to drop **precision-guided bombs** over the Korean Peninsula. It was the first time this has happened in seven years.

Existing Airspace Warnings for South Korea

They're extremely limited. The Incheon FIR routinely issues temporary ones by Notam, under the RKRR designator but these can be easily missed in briefing packages. There are no other state issued warnings or advisories to report.

Safe Airspace

Perhaps more concerning to airspace safety than a single large event (such as the outbreak of war) are situations where risk **gradually deteriorates** in open and busy airspace.

This is arguably what we are seeing right now over South Korea. All of these changes are reported on safeairspace.net – our conflict zone and risk database.
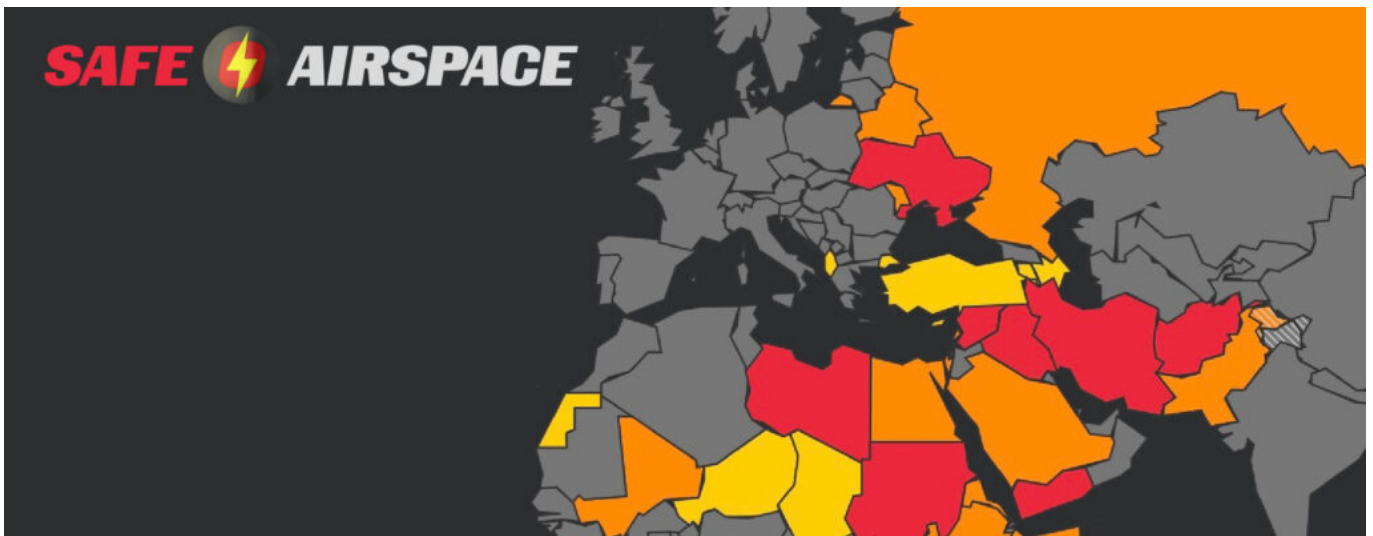
If you have more information to add to this briefing, we'd love to hear from you. You can reach us on team@ops.group.

OPSGROUP is hiring: Writer wanted

David Mumford
9 July, 2024

OPSGROUP is hiring. We're looking for a Writer – someone to help write some articles and interview some people.

What are we looking for?

- Someone with great energy! The most important thing is that you enjoy working with us, and we with you.

- **Writing experience**! The ability to tell good stories, and bring a sense of humour.

- *Experience in international flight operations is a bonus – pointy end, on the ground, dispatcher, flight planner, trip specialist – all good.*

What will you do?

- Write helpful, clear articles in plain, human-friendly English.

- Listen to members! Set up interviews with members to get their stories.

- Communicate with CAA's, FBO's, ATC, Airports to get the lowdown on the latest risks and changes.

- Research larger operational risks and changes.

- Interview pilots, dispatchers, and other ops people to get a story straight

About the role:

- Working hours: Weekdays, daytime hours, preferably based in the Americas (North or South) or Euro timezones, but flexible.

- Payment: Monthly, fixed-rate, 20 hours or so of work a week. Some weeks more, some weeks less – depends what's going on.

- Location: Anywhere you like!

What is OPSGROUP?

OPSGROUP is a membership organisation of Pilots, Air Traffic Controllers, Flight Dispatchers, Ops Managers and other dedicated people that realise that sharing information on dangers and changers is what keeps us all safe. We come together to make aviation more human-friendly for all of us.

How to apply?

You can do your first interview already! It'll take about 10 minutes, we'll take you on a little adventure, ask you some things, tell you some things. All you need is your big computer (couple of practical things to do, so your phone isn't ideal) and a little time.

Ready? Go … (or open in a new window)

SE Asia Monsoon Season: What Are LSWDs and Why Will They Cost You Fuel?

Chris Shieff
9 July, 2024

June marks the start of **monsoon season** throughout Southeast Asia. From now until October, enroute weather deviations will routinely exceed 100nm.

This creates a significant challenge for controllers and coordination between the high number of FIRs that span congested air corridors between **Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and Indonesia.**

To make matters worse, the 2024 Monsoon season is predicted to be a bad one.

And so, the answer is something called **Large Scale Weather Deviation Procedures (LSWD)** already innocuously appearing in FIR Notams like the one below.

```
RPHI/MANILA B1982/24 02JUN 0023Z

(NOTAMR B1981/24) – RNAV RTE FL ALLOCATION LTD TO:
N884 – (LAXOR–LEGED) – FL310, FL350, FL390
M767 – (TOKON–TEGID) – FL320, FL360, FL400

DUE TO ACTIVATION OF LARGE SCALE WX DEV (LSWD) PROC. 02 JUN 00:23 2024 UNTIL
02 JUN 09:00 2024 ESTIMATED.
```

This raises two important questions:

- **What does LSWD actually mean?**

- **What are operators doing about it?**

In a nutshell, your standard contingency allowance may no longer be enough – meaning unfamiliar operators (especially on fuel critical routes) may unexpectedly be caught with their pants down.

So, let's take a closer look.

The 2024 monsoon season is going to be bad.

The clever folk at the World Meteorological Organization recently said so.

Last year, in comparison, was weak.

You can take a look at their full report here, but the short story is that thanks to a spicy combination of 'ninas and ninos' much of Southeast Asia is about to receive up to ninety percent of its annual rainfall in the next few months. Which means **large scale build-ups** will be everywhere.

The airspace picture.

Spanning this area of unstable weather is a **large number of adjacent FIRs** serving some of the busiest air corridors in the world.

Take this routing (WADD/Bali to VHHH/Hong Kong) as an example, overlaid with current precipitation in the region. It's very early days, but you can already begin to see the extent of the deviations FIRs are dealing with.
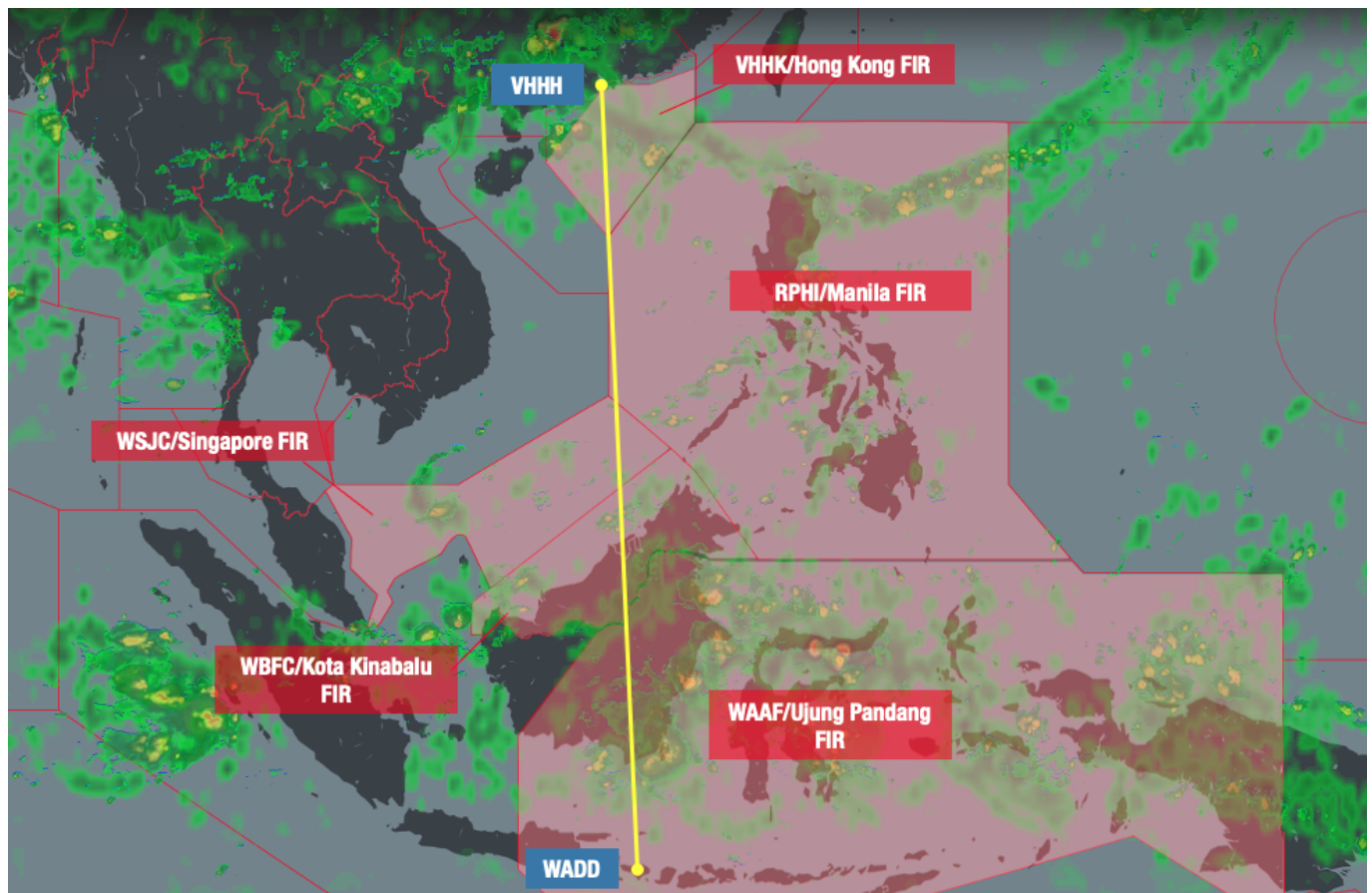
The sheer scale of weather deviations required by aircraft in this area creates a **major challenge for air traffic control.**

The lateral separation between adjacent airways is often far less than the deviation each aircraft will require, along with the narrower vertical margins of RVSM airspace.

This creates numerous problems for controllers – providing priority handling to one aircraft creates delays and disruptions for others. **It's your standard ripple effect.**

To create room, ATC has specific protocols to manage these deviations. They call them LSWDs and they are used to reign in the mess.

How do these procedures work?

Traffic will be processed through a **limited number of routes with level restrictions bound by their**

direction of flight. These routes can be found in each state's respective AIPs.

Here's an example found buried in Singapore's docs:

4.2.2　　FLAS for Large Scale Weather Deviations (LSWD) in Western Pacific / South China Sea Area as applicable by Singapore ACC:

Flight Level Allocation (LSWD)	ATS Route and Direction of Flight					
	L642 SW	M771 NE	N892 SW	L625 NE	N884 NE	M767 SW
410						
400	400		400			400
390		390		390	390	
380						
370						
360	360		360			360
350		350		350	350	
340						
330						
320	320		320			320
310		310		310	310	
300						
290						

To make co-ordination easier between the numerous ATS sectors, **all traffic operates with the same level availability whenever LSWDs are active.**

For business jets, this may become problematic as **higher flight levels (FL400+) may not be available** for extended periods of time.

As a locally-based G550 Captain explains:

"Even if higher flight levels are available in one FIR, controllers may be reluctant to give them to you. This is because there is no guarantee that the next sector can accommodate it and it can be hard to get you down again...

...The main thing with LSWD is knowing that a lot of levels we usually get won't be available. And so, we carry more fuel accordingly. It may also be worth briefing the pax that conditions may be bumpier than they're used to..."

Flow control and crossing time restrictions are also common which may mean the use of **less efficient mach numbers.**

This can also lead to **delays for start-up clearances** due to enroute spacing. When asked what additional fuel our local G550 Captain carries for these procedures, his answer was this – "*at least thirty minutes.*"
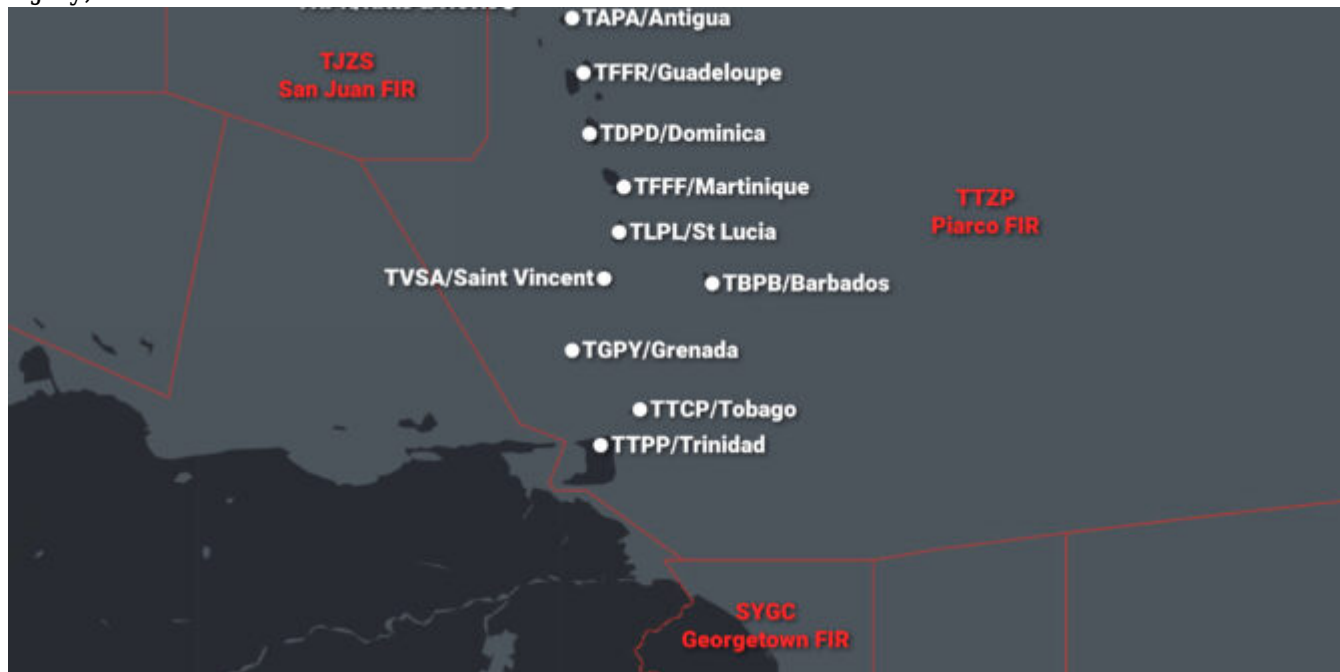
Have more to add?

Local operator feedback is invaluable to everyone in the group. If you've got anything to add to this article, get in touch with us at team@ops.group

# Caribbean: File Your Flight Plans Early!

David Mumford
9 July, 2024

The Cricket T20 World Cup is taking place at various spots in the USA and West Indies throughout June.

From May 20 to July 15, if you want to operate a flight to any airports within the TTZP/Piarco or SYGC/Georgetown FIRs, they want you to **submit your flight schedule to the authorities 72hrs before departure.**

So that's basically **every airport in the island chain** from TKPK/St Kitts & Nevis in the north down to SYCJ/Georgetown in the south.
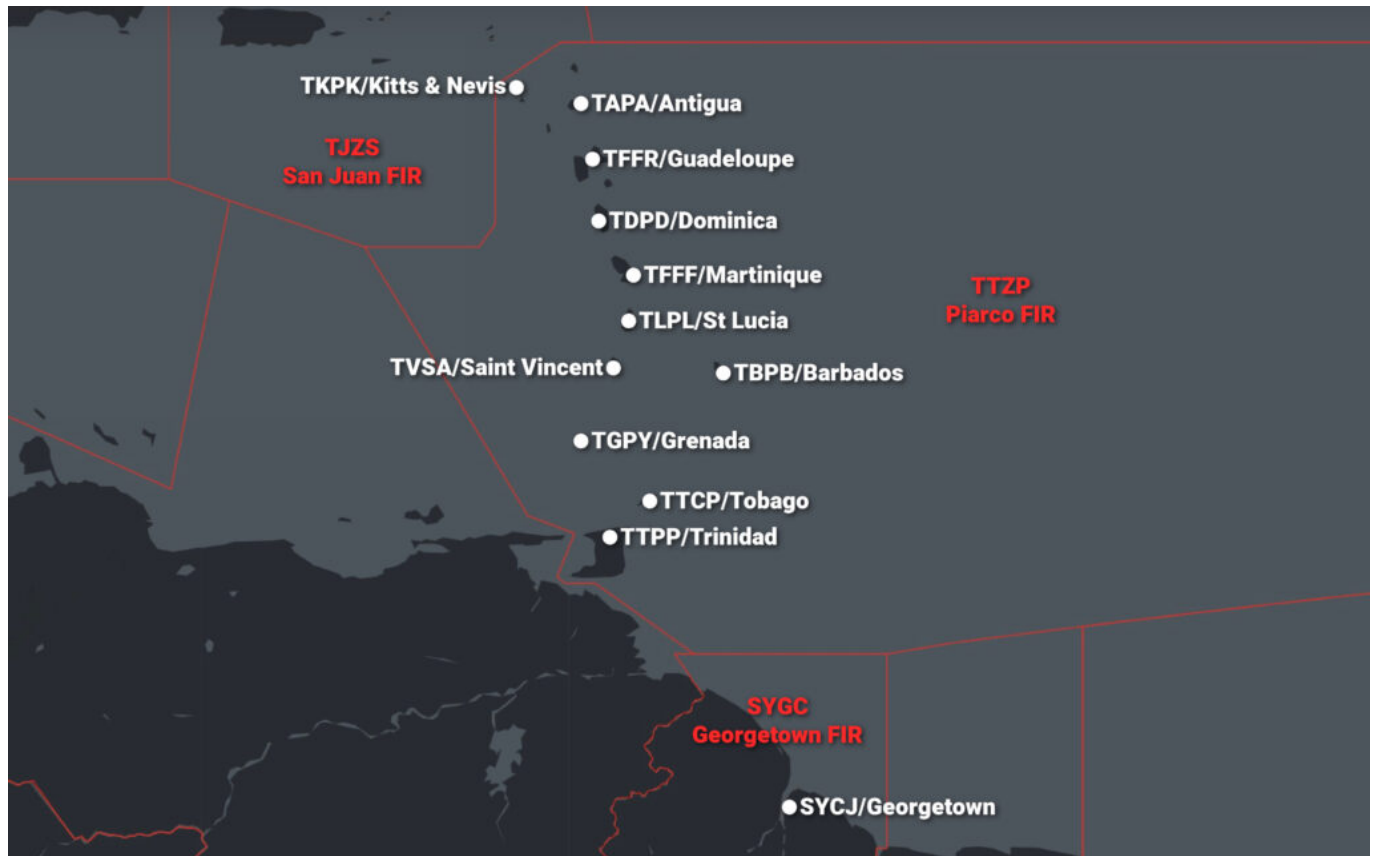
Check AIC 1-24 for details of how this is going to work. But essentially, if you're heading to any of these airports, send an email to piarcoatfmu@caa.gov.tt 72hrs before departure telling them the following info:

(a) Aircraft call sign
(b) Aircraft type
(c) Point of departure
(d) Date of flight
(e) Estimated Time of Departure (ETD)
(f) Destination
(g) Estimated Time of Arrival (ETA) for arrivals to airports within the Piarco (TTZP) FIR and airports within the Georgetown (SYGC) FIR
(h) Estimated Elapse Time (EET) for Piarco FIR
(i) Route
(j) Flight Level (FL) requested.

They also want you to **file your flight plan early**, to avoid delays. **4hrs prior to departure** should do the trick.

They're also warning of **extra delays in the TJZS/San Juan FIR** to the north.

For updates, keep an eye on the Cadena website.

France Wants Your Cash

David Mumford
9 July, 2024

Key Points

- **You must make a customs declaration when entering or leaving the EU with €10,000 or more in cash or its equivalent in other currencies – this rule has been around forever.**

- **But watch out for this gotcha in <u>France</u> – if you're planning on bringing in cash over**

this threshold and leaving it on the aircraft, you need to <u>declare it in advance</u>**, or else you might get fined.**

- **Both reports we have received relate to LFPB/Paris Le Bourget airport. It's not yet clear whether this issue is just limited to this airport, or affects other airports in France.**

OPSGROUP member report

On arrival at **LFPB/Paris Le Bourget** *recently, we were met by a team of customs officials who* **asked us if we carried aircraft cash on board.** *We were told that we should have declared any amount over €10,000.*

As we had not attempted to take any cash into the country we asked if we could file at that time. The answer was that we have to file before departure online and that failure to do so was counted as attempting to bring in undeclared cash from outside of the EU. **Unaccompanied cash must be declared online before entry and before departure.**

There is no limit to the amount of cash that you can declare, and once declared any amount can be taken into the country and spent. I would imagine that there may be a requirement to account for any difference between the amount declared inbound and the amount declared outbound, but have not tested this.

We were fined a substantial sum, put on a EU watchlist for 5 years and told that any repeat violations will be subject to a sliding scale of sanctions up to complete confiscation of the funds. *We have flown in the area for many years, but have never been notified of the this rule.*

ANOTHER member report

We had Customs officials board our aircraft in **LFPB/Paris Le Bourget** *for a "routine pre-departure check" and they were* **exclusively focused on declared/undeclared cash.**

We had not declared (we were not carrying anything close to the qualifying amounts of cash), so they **asked questions about our onboard safe.** *They knew most Global models had one, and they knew exactly where it was. We never use it, so we didn't even take the key on the trip and were unable to open it for inspection.*

That made them suspicious, so we were delayed 20 minutes while they phoned supervisors to **decide if we were grounded or not.** *They even discussed bringing in a team to* **physically break into the safe** *to verify contents, but supervisors decided to forego that option.*

They cautioned us to have the key with us next time we entered France. **Needless to say, it is onboard now.**

Bottom line: *They know about safes and want to inspect their contents. Be able to open it.*

What are the rules?

These are all in EU Regulation 2018/1672, which got updated in 2021, and are basically as follows:

1. You must lodge a cash declaration to customs when entering or leaving the EU with €10,000 or more in cash or its equivalent in other currencies (banknotes, coins, cheques, traveller cheques, promissory notes, money orders without a named beneficiary, and all manner of gold coins/bars/nuggets etc).
2. If customs think you're bringing in cash over this threshold in any kind of "unaccompanied

way" they can tell you to lodge a "disclosure declaration" – which you have to have to then do within 30 days.

So, nothing about having to tell them in advance.

Even on the French customs website, there's **no mention of having to declare or disclose anything in advance.** It says you either do it on arrival, or use their DALIA website to declare it online.

Where and when to file your declaration

A declaration can be submitted by the person transporting the funds:

- To French Customs, **at the time of entry into or exit from French territory**
- Online, via **DALIA**, the online declaration service, **at the soonest 30 days before the transfer date and at the latest before crossing the border.** To do so, you must create a user account on douane.gouv.fr.

How to make the declaration?

As of 2021, there's now a standard form that the EU have published for this.

This is available in other languages, if you're headed somewhere in the EU and they want a copy in something other than English.

Why the weird rule in France about having to do it in advance?

As far as we can tell, it's an incorrect reading and application of the EU Regulation.

Both reports we have received relate to **LFPB/Paris Le Bourget airport.** It's not yet clear whether this issue is just limited to this airport, or affects other airports in France. If you have experienced similar at LFPB or other airports in the country, please let us know: news@ops.group.

We did reach out to some local agents at LFPB, one of whom told us that from their understanding the principle is to do the declaration online before arrival, or if you are already on ground – go spontaneously to the customs advising that you have something to declare before they make any check!

US Domestic Enroute CPDLC Update

David Mumford
9 July, 2024

Key Points

- **Domestic en-route CPDLC in the US is now available to everyone – the Notam limiting GA/BA participation to approved trial participants has been removed.**
- **To get CPDLC, you've got to have the right avionics and submit a form – the FAA has published a list of aircraft types, which you will need to check to see if you comply.**

Here's a very brief summary. For the full, untarnished info, head to the dedicated FAA site here.

So for a long time, domestic en-route CPDLC in the US was only available to operators of bizav aircraft who were signed up to the FAA trial. That trial has now ended, and as long as your avionics make the grade, you can now make use of this service.

The FAA has published a list with a whole bunch of aircraft types on it.

If your aircraft is highlighted in **yellow** or **green**, you **can get datalink** (as long as you complete and submit the participation form).

If it's highlighted in **red** (or not on the list at all), you **can't get datalink.**

L3Harris have provided this guidance:

- *Ensure that your avionics are configured to use VDL Mode 2 as the primary media for U.S. Domestic En Route CPDLC. VDLM2 is the only approved media for participation in the domestic U.S.*
- *Ensure that both the 'J4' code in the field 10a equipment field as well as the FANSE (e.g. '1FANSE2PDC') DAT Code in field 18 (other information/DAT) are both included on the flight plan to indicate eligibility for U.S. Domestic En Route CPDLC (see the US Domestic Flight and Planning Guide for more information).*
- *Verify that VHF3/COM3 is set to DATA.*
- *The aircraft registration/tail in field 18 (other information/REG).*

- *If you are still researching your avionics in response to questions from L3Harris, please continue to file for CPDLC-DCL only (FANS) until your verification of eligibility is complete.*

Also, a member has reported that if you're now eligible but tried to log on in the past when you were not eligible, **your aircraft reg might have been placed on a "blocked list".** To get off this list, you need to contact L3Harris, who will forward to the FAA to ask to unblock you (should take less than 24hrs).

Where is CPDLC available in the US?

L3Harris published this updated map on 3 June 2024:
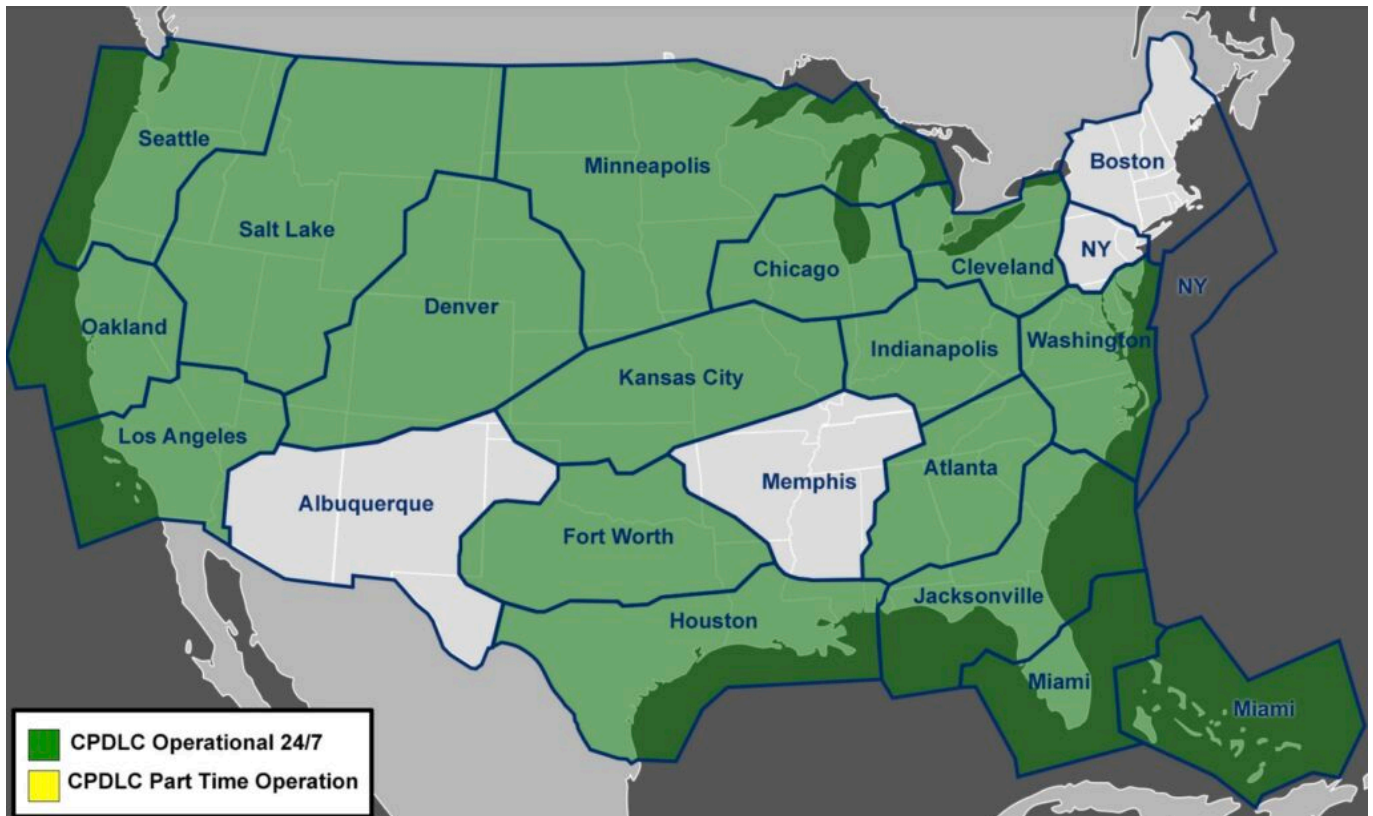
Come on, Albuquerque and Memphis!

So do I need CPDLC now?

No. US domestic datalink is not mandated.

What if I'm flying into the US internationally?

L3Harris have published a guide answering this very question. You can access it here:

For those of you who aren't so familiar with the US, **KUSA is the CPDLC logon code** – and that is the one and only logon code you need, all the way across.

Argentina: Overflight Permits Now Required

Chris Shieff
9 July, 2024

Key Points

- **Effective March 13, all foreign aircraft now need an overflight permit when transiting Argentinian airspace.**

- **There's been no change to landing permit requirements: private flights don't need one, all other flights do (including tech stops).**

- **AI is still not great at making images with planes or handshakes in them 🫠**

AIP SUP 32/2024 has been published with all the new requirements – but here's a quick summary of what you need to know.

Airspace Affected

This change applies to **all Argentinian airspace**, namely the:

- SAVF/Comodoro Rivadavia FIR

- SAEF/Ezeiza FIR

- SACF/Cordoba FIR

- SARR/Resisitencia FIR

- SAMF/Mendoza FIR
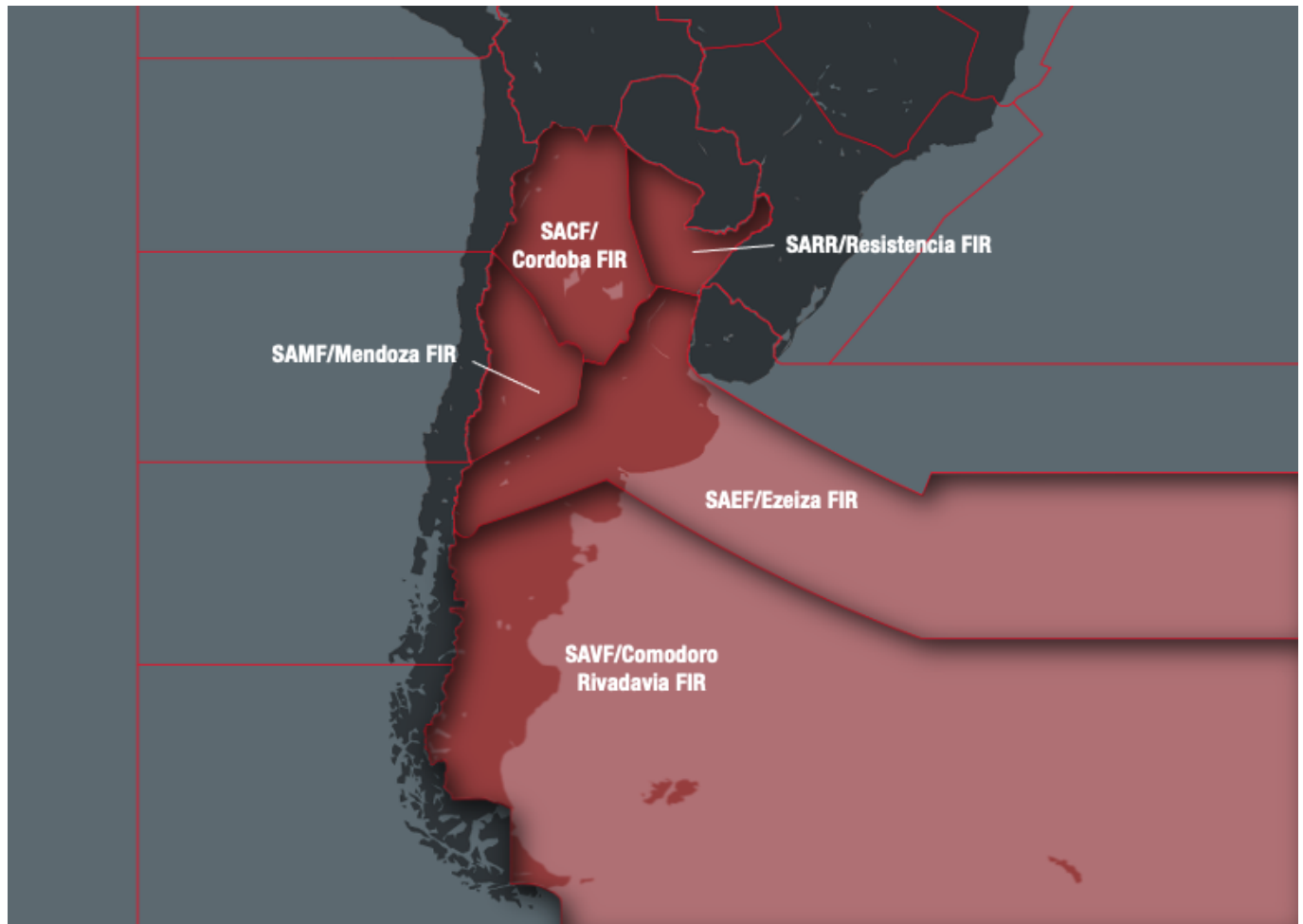
How to apply

You'll need to provide at least **72 hours'** notice.

Send your application to the National Administration of Civil Aviation (ANAC)'s AFTN address SABAYAYX, and via email to ovf@anac.gob.ar (also cc. in interaerodromosbis@gmail.com). For emails, use the subject line 'Application for Overflying the Argentine Territory.'

If you need to give ANAC a call, you can also reach them on +54 11 5941 3000.

Private operators will need to provide copies of two documents:

- **Certificate of airworthiness**
- **Proof of insurance**

Commercial operators also need to provide an air operator certificate.

Important: It may sound obvious, but they are quite specific about it. Don't assume you have been granted a permit until you have specifically heard back from them.

Exemptions to the 72-hour rule

You can only get around this if you are operating an **essential flight.** This basically means SAR, humanitarian, air ambulance or firefighting ops.
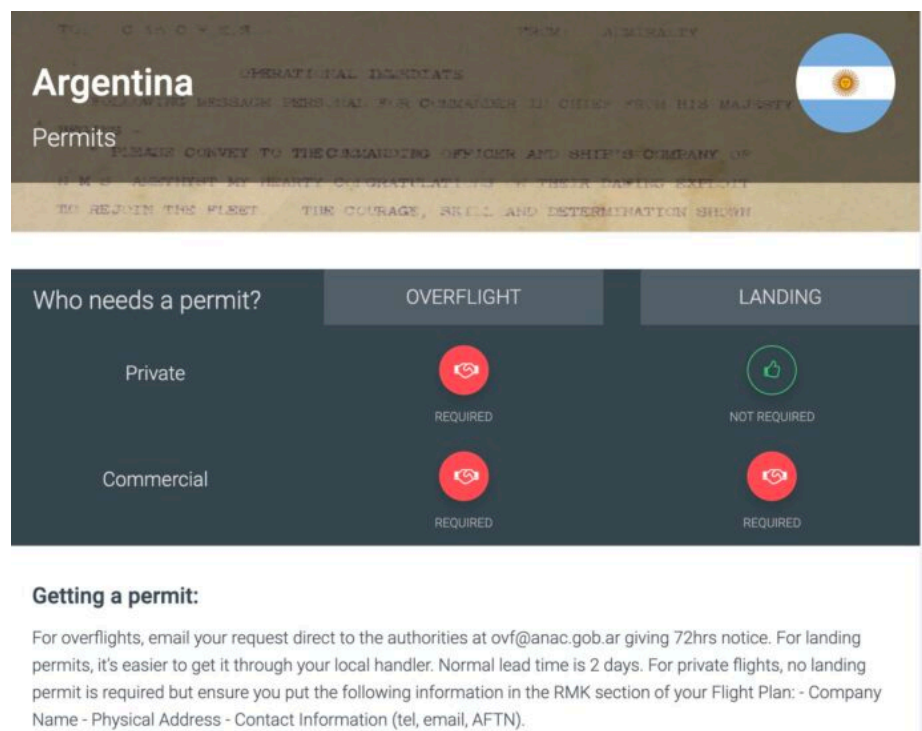
What about landing permits?

Nothing has changed! Private flights don't need one – but make sure you include your company name, physical address and contact info (tel, email, AFTN etc) in the RMKS section of your flight plans.

All other flights (including tech stops) must obtain one.

Need help with other permits?

OPSGROUP members have access to the Permit Helper, found under 'Apps' in your Member's Dashboard. Just search for the country you are planning to visit to see current overflight and landing permit requirements.

You can also reach out to the team (and other members) via the Slack channels, or email us team@ops.group.

Where is the spoofing today? Two maps to help

Mark Zee
9 July, 2024
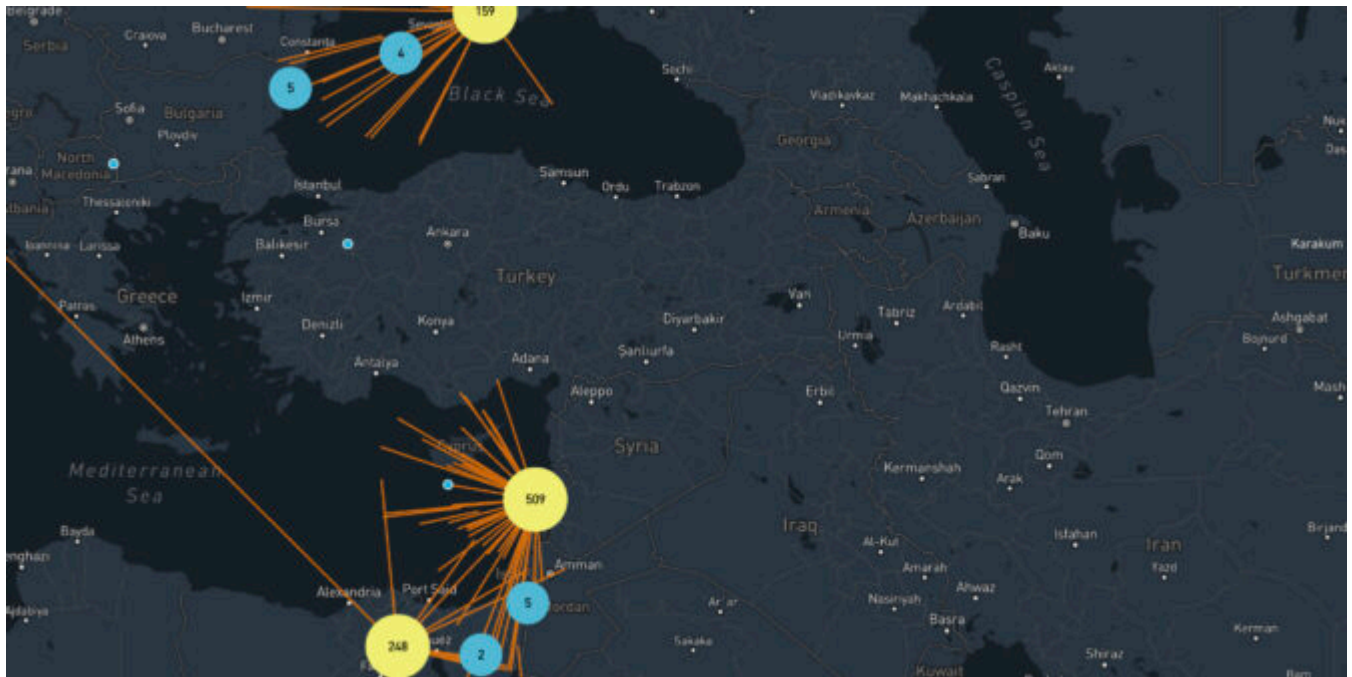
If you're keen to know exactly where GPS Spoofing – or GPS Jamming – might be happening today, there are two handy live maps to share with you.

Both of these use data from flight tracking websites to look for position anomalies, and convert those into hotspots that show where the activity is.

These are very useful in-flight to get a heads up on where you might encounter issues with GPS interference.

Live GPS Spoofing tracker

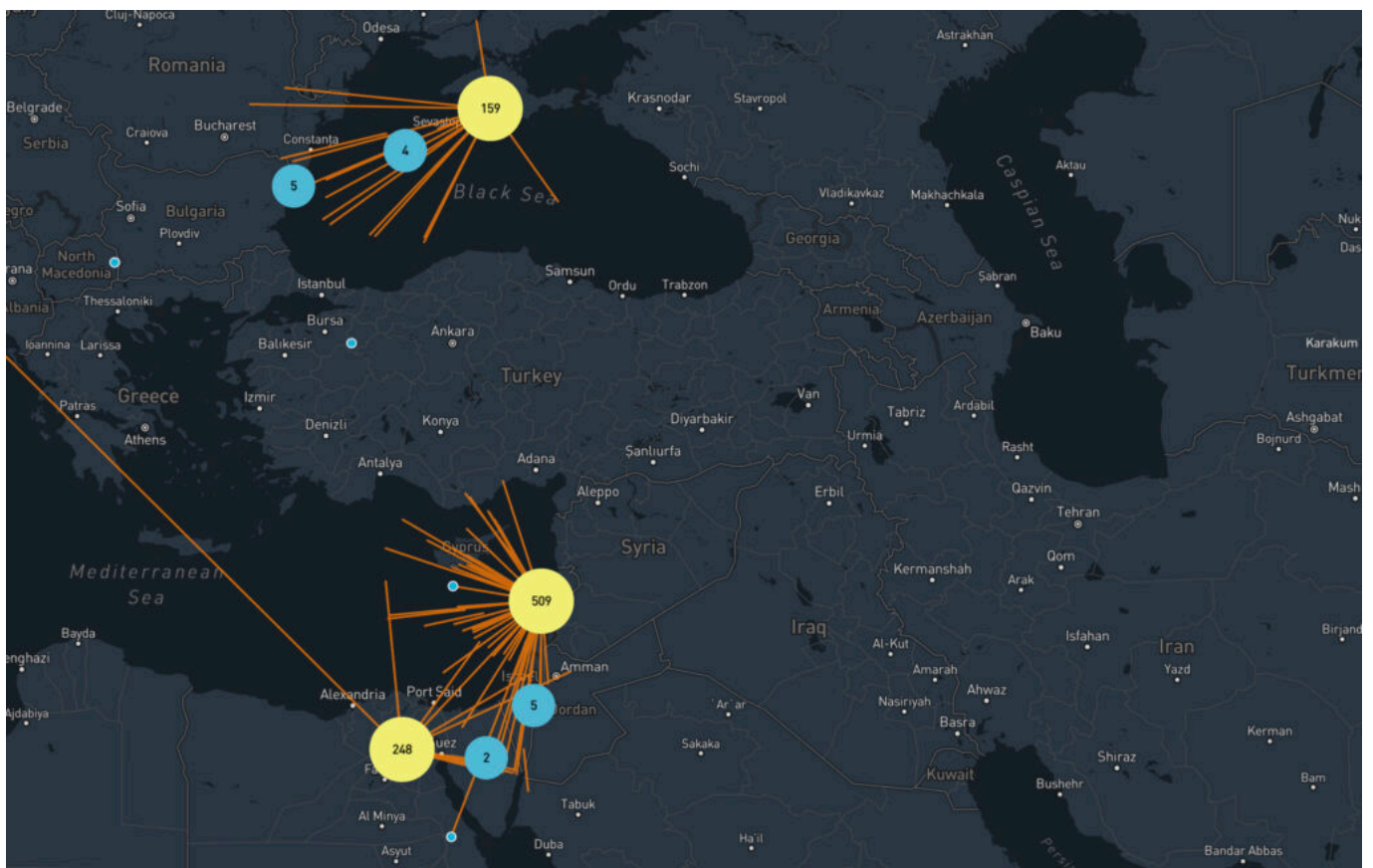First up is this live **GPS spoofing tracker** from SkAI Data Services, in partnership with the Zurich University of Applied Sciences.

About a month ago, SkAI and Zurich University were following the discussions about GPS spoofing, and wondered if they could detect spoofing in real-time based on the ADS-B data from the OpenSky Network. As it turns out, they can. Having up-to-date information can help raise the situational awareness and prepare the flight crew for the possibility of spoofing.

Their algorithm can detect spoofing anywhere in the world where they have ADS-B coverage. The website is free to use. Unfortunately, the receiver network doesn't quite have the same coverage as other ADS-B websites, let alone space-based ADS-B. Regardless, it's a great tool for planning flights into areas of potential GPS issues.

The screenshot above is from this morning, May 7th. It matches exactly the three primary GPS spoofing hotspots this year: **Sevastopol**, **Beirut**, and **Cairo**. These are the three locations that you can expect your GPS to "think" it's at, when you are over the Black Sea, Eastern Med/Israel, and Egypt, respectively.

GPS Jamming tracker
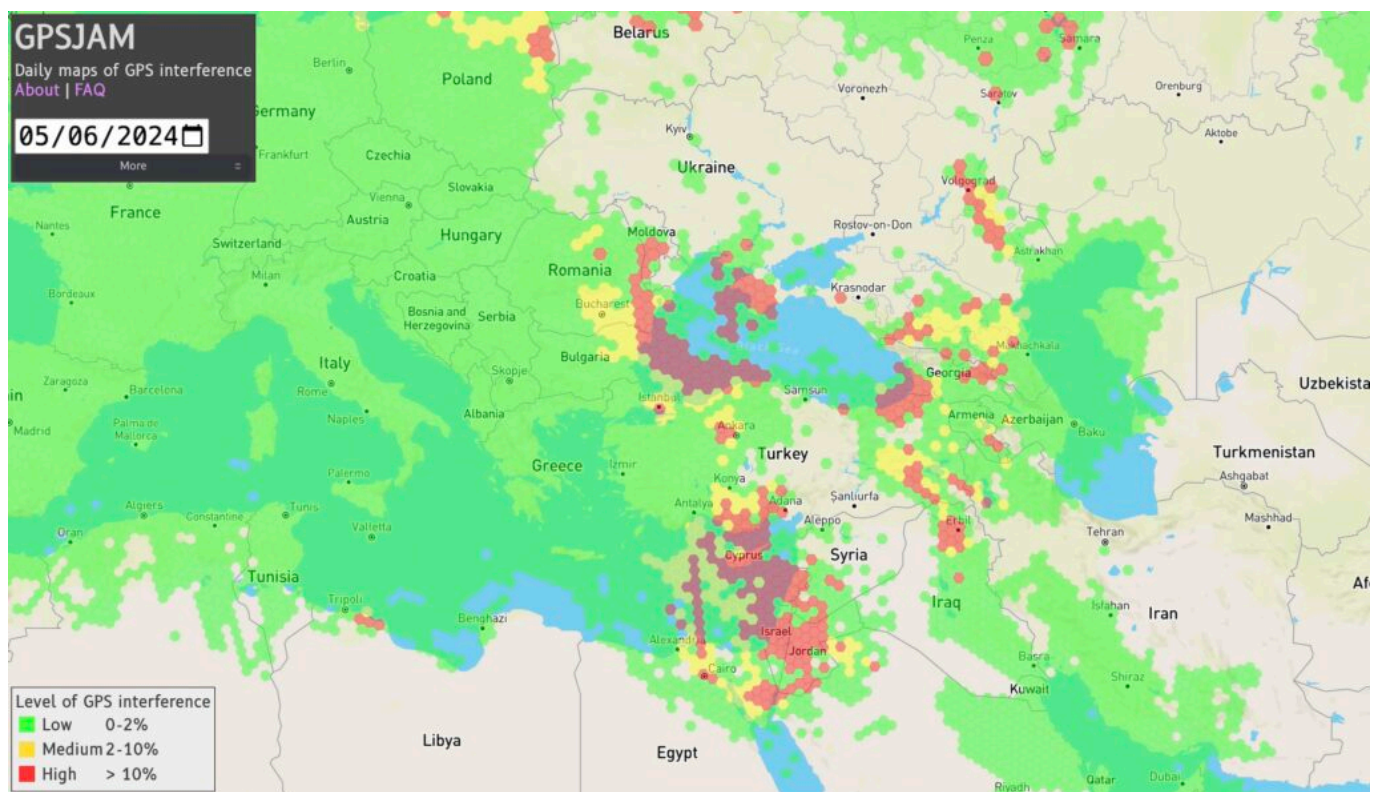
This map has been around a little longer, and will be familiar to some. GPS Jam uses data from ADS-B Exchange, and looks for aircraft indicating low navigation accuracy. More details are in their FAQ.

This was created when jamming was the only type of GPS interference we encountered, but now that spoofing is on the scene, it most likely shows both jamming and spoofing. That said, when being spoofed, the aircraft doesn't know it has an issue with navigation accuracy (and that's the very problem). Maybe someone knows more about this.

Either way, it's a great map to see potential GPS trouble spots.

What's the latest on GPS Spoofing?

The spoofing tracker above is probably the best answer to that!

Since OPSGROUP first reported the new GPS Spoofing phenomenon in September last year, we continue to receive daily reports of spoofing. However, the areas affected remain largely the same. Our GPS Spoofing Pilot QRH from November last year still holds true, except that we've seen far fewer reports from the Iraq/Iran area, and a new area in Sevastopol affecting Black Sea transits.

We continue to ask members to report GPS spoofing events (pictures are very useful too) to us at team@ops.group, or via WhatsApp to +1 747 200 1993. Thank you!

Philippines: Down The Permit Rabbit Hole

David Mumford
9 July, 2024

Key Points

- **Charter/Non-Sched/Pt135 landings in the Philippines need a Foreign Air Operator Certificate (FAOC).**

- **It's a bit of a pain to get one. Takes 2-3 weeks, but local agents can help get a landing permit while the FAOC is in process.**

- **Read below for the latest on all Philippines Permits**

A Cautionary Tale

An OPSGROUP member recently reported the following:

- *To operate non-scheduled air services into the Philippines we were told that we need a* **Foreign Air Operators Certificate.**

- *We were also asked to supply an **ICAO Airline Three letter code.** This is not something as a non-scheduled operator that we believe we can get!*

- *We used a local agent as our Third Party. They supplied the FAOC application form.*

- *We were successful in getting a **one-off permit**, however we still had to complete everything in the application form.*

- *We haven't determined if what we have submitted now as a one-off will be sufficient for the entire FAOC application – we'll find out soon…*

The Application Form

You can download it here:

What are the Philippines Permit Requirements?

Here's some **utterly useless official stuff** to "help" start you on your journey.

The Philippines AIP

Requires a log-in. Don't have one, and can't get one. Website doesn't even load most days.

I sent them an email and got a reply saying that even if you have a login, the site *doesn't actually have the eAIP on it.* But if you would like to pay them $324 USD each year, they can send you a hard copy.

Nope.

Philippines CAA Website

Searched for "eAIP". Nothing found. Moved on.

GEN 1.2

Backdoor access achieved via the EAD website! We have found the elusive AIP GEN 1.2!

But wait… it's dated 2011, and is an enraging mix of INCORRECT INFO and NOTHINGY PAP.

The quest continues…

Ask An Expert

We asked Jeff at Airmach Aviation for help – a local agent in the Philippines who knows **all the answers:**

- **All flights need a permit.** Landings, overflights, private, charter, scheduled, weird non-standard airworthiness… whatever you're doing, if you enter Philippines airspace, you need a permit.

- You'll want to use an agent here, as **Navigation Fees** and **CAA fees** must be paid prior to getting any permit.

- Permit approvals take anywhere between **48-72 hours.**

- They require the routing you'll use to calculate the **navigation fees.**

- **Permit fees** can add up, especially for Charter flights as there are different permits you need to get – one from CAAP (the CAA) and another from CAB (Civil Aeronautics Board).

- Scheduled and Charter landings will need a **Foreign Air Operator Certificate.**

OPSGROUP members can access all this info via the **Permit Helper** app on the Dashboard. This tool has **permit info for every country in the world** – what's required, and who to contact to get your permit.

Tell me about the Foreign Air Operator Certificate one more time

- This is required for Non-Scheduled (i.e. Charter/Pt135 landings) as well as Scheduled (i.e. Airline) flights landing in the Philippines.

- The application form is here.

- Download it, fill it in, gather together the required docs listed in the form, and ask a local agent in the Philippines to get it for you. We recommend Airmach Aviation. Other agents are out there.

- Yes, you could try going direct to the authorities instead (CAAP: odg@caap.gov.ph). We once knew some people who tried. Their bodies have never been found.

Have you been through this FAOC process? **Got any extra tips to share?** Or maybe you've operated a flight to the Philippines recently and have some stories to share? Let us know!


We Want Your Ops Stories!

David Mumford
9 July, 2024

Know something worth knowing about something? **Got a story to share?** Let us know! That's basically how OPSGROUP works – you tell us, and we'll tell everyone in the group.

- **Been to Nicaragua and had to use their silly new overflight permit system?** Let us know!

- **Experienced one of those annoying security checks at an airport in Germany where they try to sneak onto the plane?** Let us know!

- **Had to disinsect your aircraft heading into Italy?** Let us know!

Or maybe your story is weirder still. Maybe it's a NIGHTMARE. Something like this recent account of **what to do when trying to take-off in a cicada swarm…**
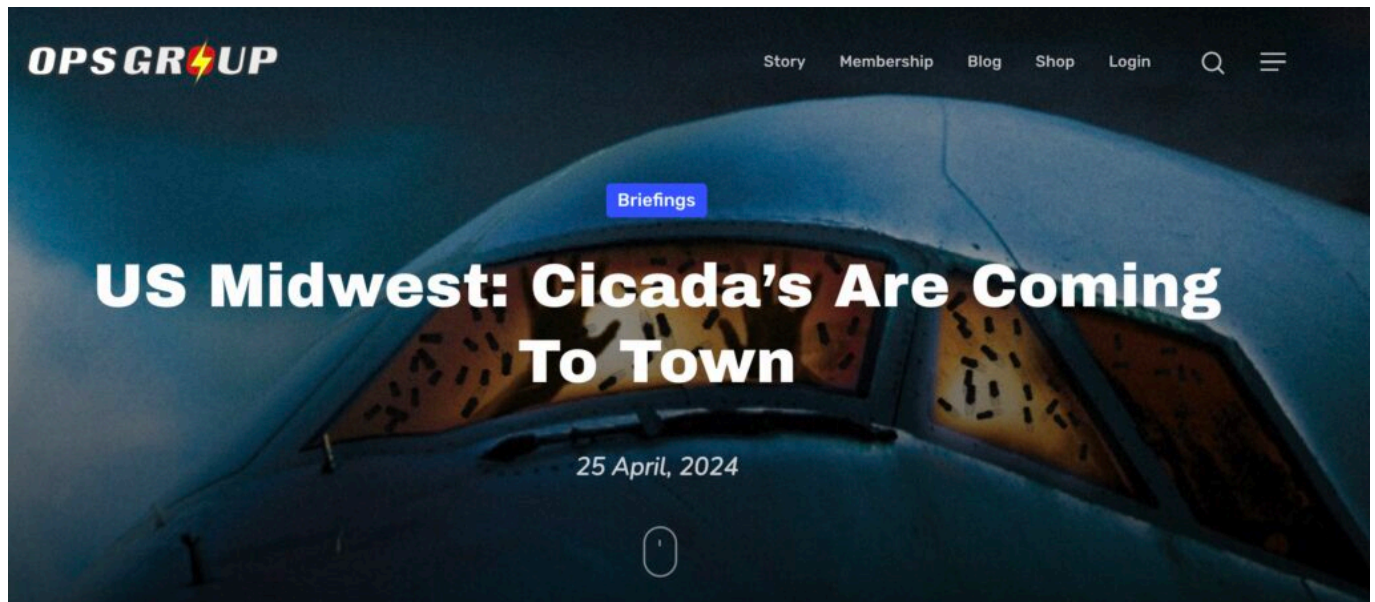
Ooh, that's a nasty one! But an *excellent story* – and **USEFUL!**

It's many years since we wrote this piece: What is OPSGROUP All About? It still holds true. We're still about all the same things – **keeping each other safe, being real, being human, helping each other out, speaking plainly, and sharing radically.**

So tell us your story! Chances are that other pilots and operators would be interested in what you know.

Or maybe you know how specific stuff works?

- **Know how to get an Australian TSP approved with minimal misery?** Let us know!
- **Got the lowdown on operating over Central Africa?** Let us know!
- **Fly regularly to China and know about Himalayan routings?** Let us know!

We've already published a bunch of posts written by people in the group who know about specific things like these. Here are some of our faves: (give em a click if you like!)

Briefings

NAT Conundrums Volume IV: Contingency Procedures

22 January, 2024

Briefings

Private Flights To The US

25 September, 2023

Briefings

EU Temporary Admission Of Aircraft – Busting Myths

11 September, 2023

OPSGRUP   Story   Membership   Blog   Shop   Login

Briefings

ETA & UPT – What Operators Flying To The UK Need To Know

5 December, 2023

OPSGRUP   Story   Membership   Blog   Shop   Login

Briefings

Mexico Permit Chaos: New Rules Explained

19 January, 2024

OPSGRUP   Story   Membership   Blog   Shop   Login

Briefings

Pilot Mental Health: What Can We Do Right Now?

26 April, 2023
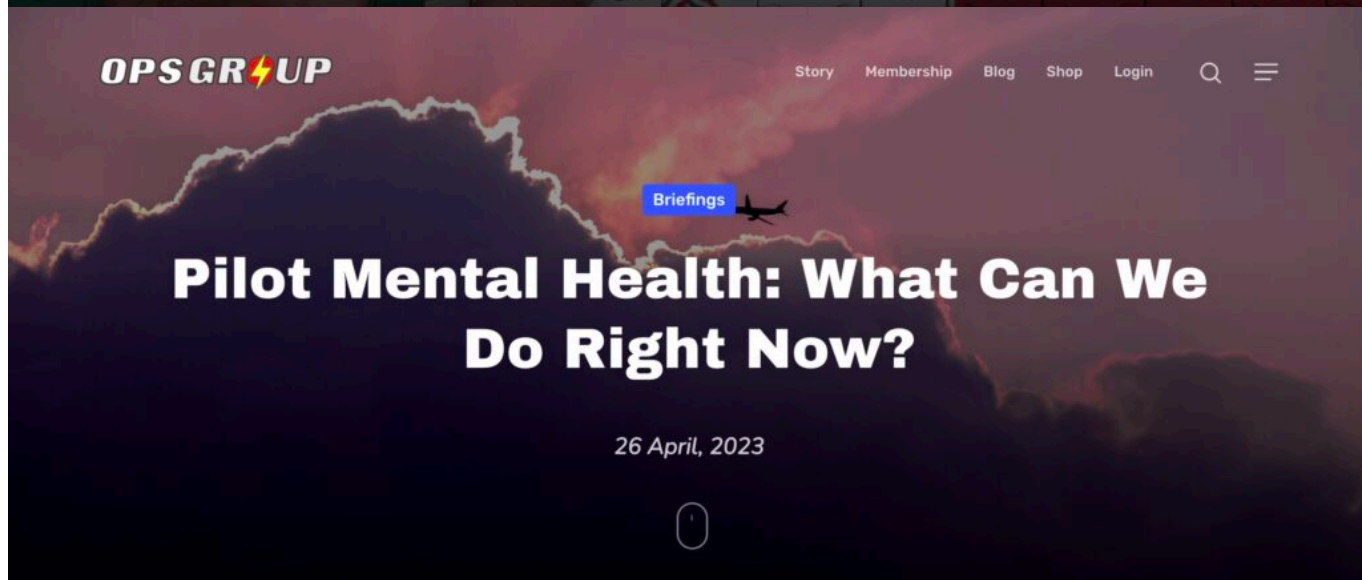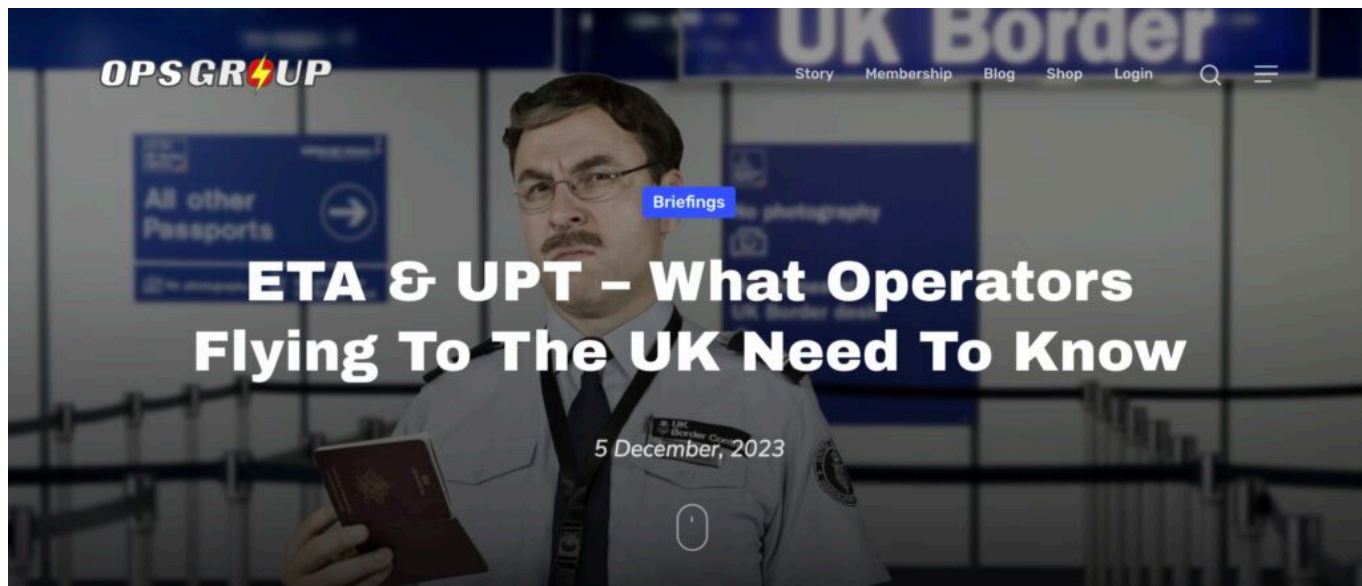
So if you've got a **story**, or you know about **some specific thing**, and you think other pilots and operators would be interested to hear about it, let us know!

Why do we see US Military Notams?

Chris Shieff
9 July, 2024

Back in March, an OPSGROUP member reached out to us after the following Notam appeared in their flight plan briefing package.


```
EGKB: V0381/23 INSTRUMENT APPROACH PROCEDURE/NOT AVBL
QPIAU/ / /A/0/999  Valid: 05/12/2023 21:28 - 17/04/2024 23:59
( MILITARY NOTAM )
[US DOD PROCEDURAL NOTAM] INSTRUMENT APPROACH PROCEDURE NOT
AUTHORIZED ILS/LOC/DME/VOR RWY 21
```

As **EGKB/Biggin Hill** (UK) was their filed alternate, the Notam was of some interest. A quick email to the airport authority confirmed that the ILS was fully serviceable and available.

The member contacted Jeppesen directly about the Notam, and here was their response:

"The Notam in question is actually a US DOD procedural Notam which only applies to US military pilots and those flying under contract/partnership with the DOD. So, while the tower may confirm that the approach is in-service, the US military is not authorized to fly it for reasons known only to them..."

The following questions remained:

• **Why are we seeing these Notams in the first place?**

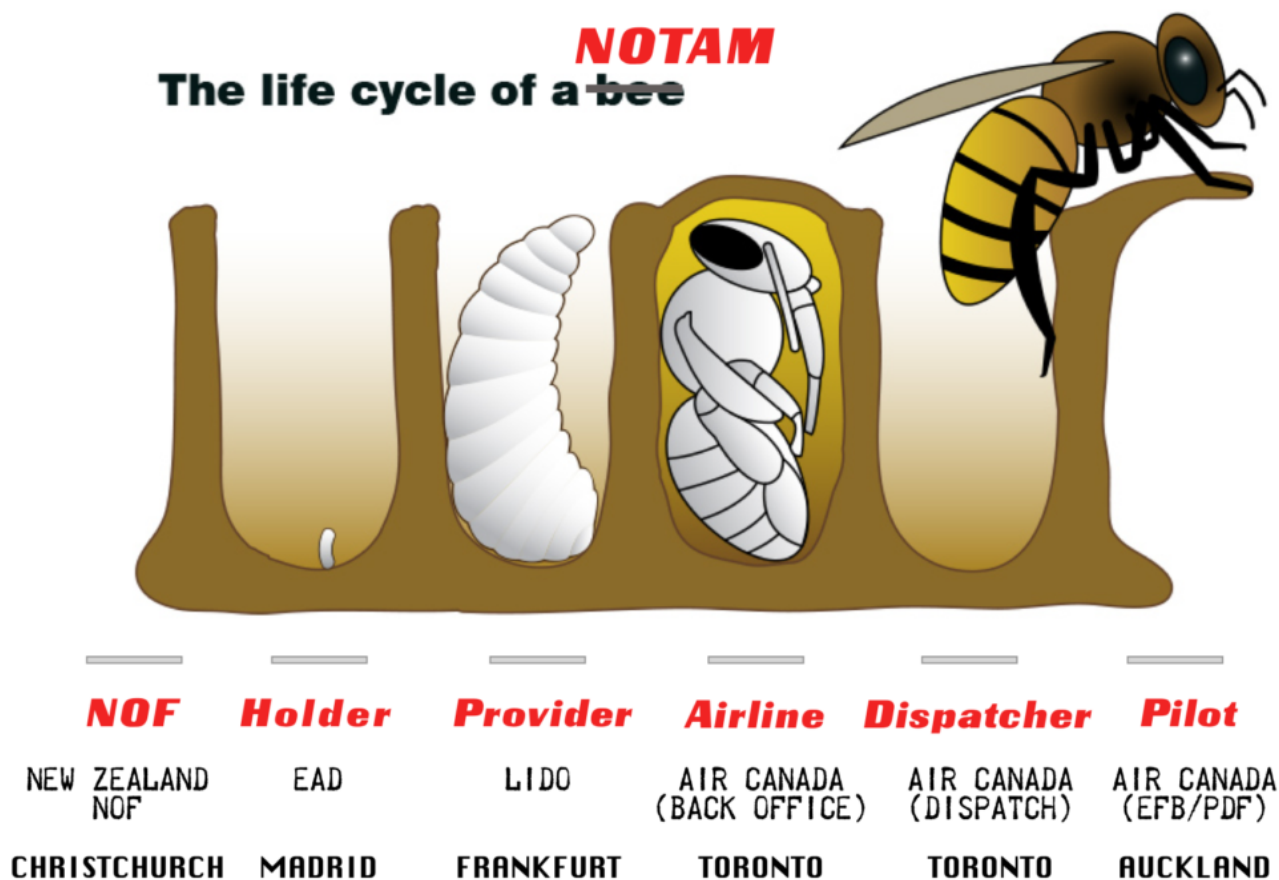• **What is the reason for the restriction on military aircraft?**

The short answer is that the response from Jeppesen was correct – but could use a little more explanation.

Where we get our Notams from.

There are **two primary "original" sources** for Notams around the world:

1. **The European AIS Database (EAD)** – run by Eurocontrol
2. **The US DoD (Department of Defense).** It supplies Notams to the FAA for their 'Notam Search' app, and their SWIM feeds – the FAA's information-sharing platform.

If your flight plan package is sourcing Notams from the US DoD (and not being filtered correctly), you will see military Notams included – like the one above. Think of them like company notams, for internal use. In this sense, they are not 'true' Notams and shoud be **completely disregarded by civilian operators.**

NOTAM The life cycle of a ~~bee~~

NOF	Holder	Provider	Airline	Dispatcher	Pilot
NEW ZEALAND NOF	EAD	LIDO	AIR CANADA (BACK OFFICE)	AIR CANADA (DISPATCH)	AIR CANADA (EFB/PDF)
CHRISTCHURCH	MADRID	FRANKFURT	TORONTO	TORONTO	AUCKLAND

But why the UK?

To use the DoD Notam feed correctly, military Notams need to be filtered out. But there may be more to it than that.

You'll see the EGKB Notam above has a 'V' designator.

In the UK 'V' series Notams mean the following:

"Notification of Security Advice to UK Air Operators by Government to provide guidance/instructions on Airspace Security Risks. Volcanic Ash related information within En-Route Airspace London FIR/UIR, Scottish FIR/UIR, Shannon FIR/UIR and Shanwick Oceanic FIR…"

In the US, they mean something different:

"A NOTAM information pertaining to a location's published instrument procedures, i.e., Standard Instrument Approach Procedure (SIAPs), Standard Instrument Departure (SIDs), Departure Procedures (DPs). These NOTAMs shall be published under the direction of TERPS personnel…"

Which is why in this case (and many others) we may still see these Notams find their way into our briefing packs.

In a Notam-tale as old as time: **just because they're there, doesn't mean they're relevant.** The potential for confusion holds strong – especially if civilian operators misinterpret Notams never meant for them in the first place.

Why does the military have their own restrictions?

Because they do! In the same sense one airline can do something another does not allow.

Common sense indicates that the way military aircraft are operated differs substantially from civilian aircraft – and that the margins and procedures designed for us do not necessarily work in the same way for them.

Have more info?

If you have something you'd like to add to this article, **we'd love to hear from you**. You can reach us at team@ops.group.

US Midwest: Cicada's are coming to town

Andy Spencer
9 July, 2024

This spring, the US Midwest will see Cicada's emerging in numbers that have not been seen in generations.

This is quite frankly terrifying. It may sound ridiculous that something like this matters, but rest assured, it

is crucial. **I know from first-hand experience.**

It was a hot summer afternoon in 2021 on the ramp at **KSUS/Spirit of St Louis airport**. There were **massive bugs EVERYWHERE**, buzzing around, hitting you in the head, flying into the rental car or aircraft if the door was open for even ONE second. Their dead bodies were scattered across the ramp from being run over or stepped on. **It was Cicada swarming season, according to the line guys**.

We had the APU running and the main cabin door open, attempting to cool the cabin while waiting for our passengers. **Even with the curtain closed, the Cicadas entered the cabin and cockpit through the cracks**. It was truly disgusting, and I still have nightmares to this day.

The captain was busily chasing the bugs around, attempting to capture each one and throw it back outside. Meanwhile, the FA and I were cowering in the corner, trying to stop them from flying into our hair. When the passengers arrived, they DASHED as fast as they could from their SUV towards the aircraft, hoping to escape getting hit in the face by a Cicada (spoiler: they did not escape this). The SECOND we opened the curtain for them to run in, a load more Cicadas flew in, and we were back to square one, trying to capture/dispose of each one. I heroically went outside, hastily loaded the bags, and shut the cargo door. **We had no choice but to close the main cabin door with many 2-3 inch bugs still hiding inside.**

Our attempt to escape was met with a **HUNG START**. QRH blah blah... after several minutes on the phone with our maintenance department and a few more attempts, we were fresh out of ideas. Right then, **a frightened Cicada almost flew right into my mouth**, prompting the realisation, that, of course this unique variable must be the thing causing the problem.

A quick climb up a ladder confirmed that the APU intake was COVERED in dead Cicadas. It wasn't getting enough air to provide high-load pneumatic functions. We got a ladder and a broom and brushed some cicada-carcass off the intake, a feeble attempt in rectifying a problem that was concentrated far deeper than the external grate. Somehow, though, we managed to get #1 running (it took precisely 59 seconds, of course), and we were off to the races.

As we taxied off the ramp the most foul, PUTRID smell began to penetrate our nostrils. **The smell of HOT/DEAD/LARGE BUGS is not a smell I'd wish on my worst enemy.** We quickly switched the bleeds over to the engines and prayed for no circumstances requiring us to switch them back.

Upon arrival, our maintenance team opened the APU and manually removed the burnt cicada crust. It took almost a year for the smell to be removed entirely from any APU-fed PACK usage. **We would later learn that Cicadas are attracted to the high-pitched sound of the APU, hence so many of them flew into the intake.**

If you're still reading, I'm surprised, but here's the point: **this year is supposed to be the most giant Cicada swarm in decades across the Midwest, specifically concentrated in Illinois (St.Louis and Chicago).** Allegedly this swarm will be at least twice as large as the one in the story above.

For my crews, given that we will likely find ourselves in these locations this spring, I've set out the following procedures for operating in a Cicada swarm (think of it like you would a cold weather operational procedure):

1. **Do not run the APU until RIGHT before you want to start the engines.**

2. **Attempt to leave all aircraft doors shut as much as possible.**

3. **If it is very hot and the swarms are very bad, try to get a hangar the night before departure. Also, have the aircraft put online as close as possible to departure so that the cabin isn't extremely hot for passenger boarding**

4. **As a precaution ahead of departure, research whether an air cart is available on the field and what the procedures would be to get it (just in case).**

I hope our "Cicada QRH Actions" can save you a new cabin fragrance for your aircraft this spring!

Got a story to share? Let us know!

If you come across a new risk, a new danger, a new procedure, something weird, something unusual – **tell us, and we'll tell everyone in the group**.

Saudi Arabia Overflights – Free Route Gotcha

Chris Shieff
9 July, 2024

Key Points

- **The Southeastern section of the OEJD/Jeddah FIR is now Free Route Airspace.**

- **It's not straightforward. New procedures have been published in the Saudi AIP.**

- **If your flight plan does not comply, you are likely to be instructed to descend below FL300.**

Background

We've received a new report from an OPSGROUP member after a recent run-in with ATC in the **OEJD/Jeddah FIR**.

The problem stemmed from a small (and confusing) change that became effective on April 18.

Essentially, ATC were upset that their filed route did not comply with newly published **Free Route Airspace (FRA)** procedures buried deep within the bowels of the Saudi AIP.

The fallout of non-compliance is the ATC equivalent to the 'naughty corner' with aircraft directed to **descend below FL300** for the duration of their crossing of the affected airspace.

In this case, the member was able to negotiate to remain at their preferred level but not before a fair amount of head scratching as to why they got in trouble in the first place.

As large amounts of traffic are now **transiting Saudi Arabia to avoid Iran** further north, it is especially relevant right now.

New Free Route Airspace

On April 18, a large chunk of Southeastern Saudi Arabia (known as the **SE Sector**) became Free Route Airspace (FRA).
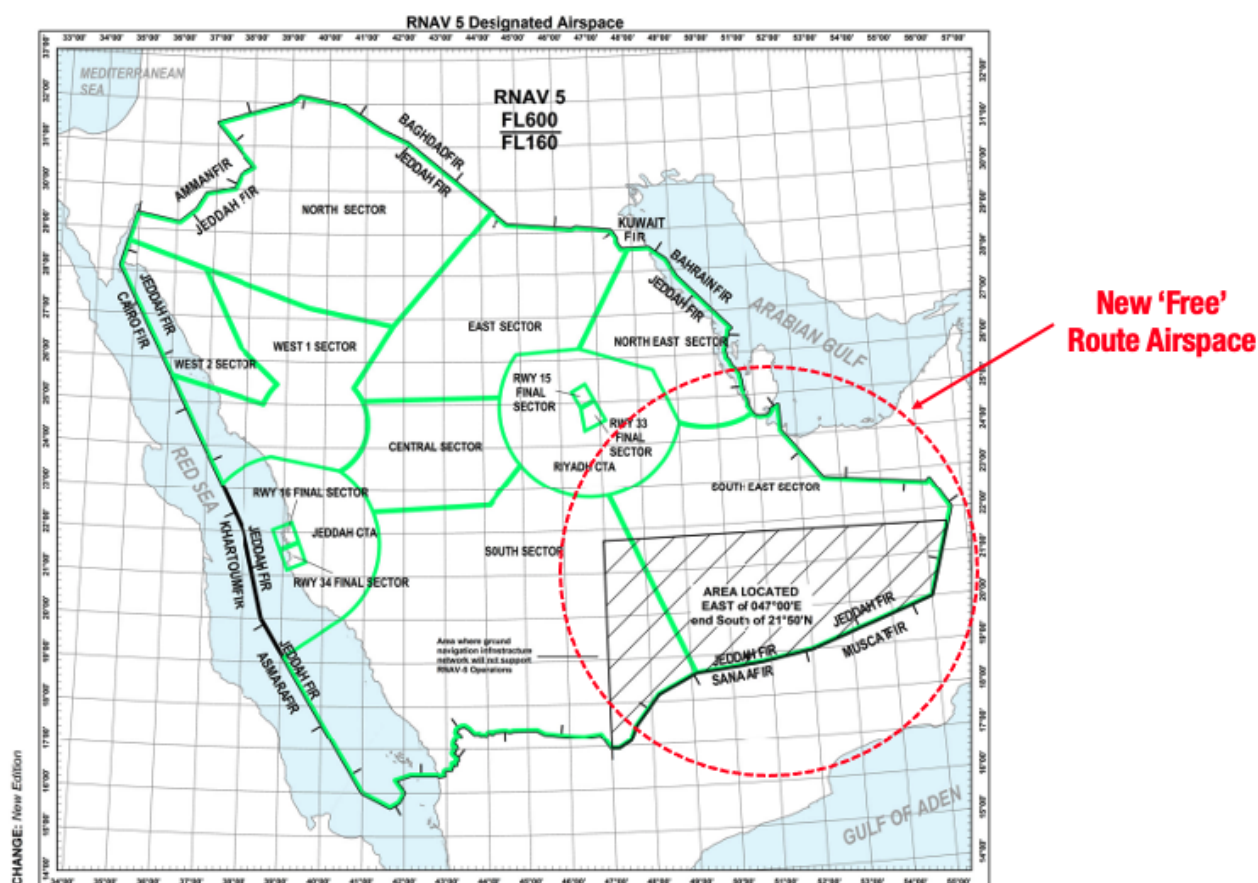
Typically, FRA means that pilots can freely plan any route they like between defined entry and exit points without reference to the ATS route network. This saves both money and time – simple.

However, this is where things get hazy.

The change was notified in this **easily overlooked FIR Notam**:

```
A0648/24 NOTAMN Q)
OEJD/QOATT/IV/BO/E/000/999/2501N04522E005 A)
OEJD
B) 2404180000 C) 2405012359
E) TRIGGER NOTAM - PERM AIRAC AIP AMDT 04/24
WEF 18 APR 2024 IS PUBLISHED AND CONTAINS:
1- UPDATE ON DEP PROCEDURES FOR OEGS.
2- UPDATE ON ATC SURVEILLANCE PROC FOR OETB.
3- UPDATE ON LVP FOR OERK.
4- IMPLEMENTATION OF FREE ROUTES AIRSPACE IN
THE SE SECT.
```

This directs you to the **Saudi AIP.** This is great if you have a spare half an hour to prove who you are, download a special app and access it. To save you the trouble, the relevant bit is ENR 2.2.4 which you can find here.

Here's the kicker – it's Free Route Airspace, but not really. **You still need to plan and file via the standard routes** found via the link above.

In other words – '*fly whatever route you like, as long as it is one of these ones.*'

Turns out if you don't, they will want you out of the 'FRA' which means a descent below FL300 (or a climb above FL600 if you're piloting the Space Shuttle).

Keep listening out.

There are also some really specific **comms requirements** you need to follow along each route as the sector is controlled by several VHF frequencies. It seems you cannot rely on ATC to tell you when to switch.

"Normal" routes.

Don't forget the **Free Route Airspace only applies to the SE Sector** of the Jeddah FIR. Everywhere else in Saudi airspace, you'll need to follow **"normal" ATS routes as per usual.**

But even these "normal" routes are a pain. Saudi Arabia (like many other countries in the region) has **preferred routes** depending on where you're flying from/to – so you'll need to make sure you file on one of these. For some reason Jeppesen recently stopped publishing them, so now you have to get them from (yes, you guessed it) the **Saudi AIP!** SUP 8/24 talks about it. You basically download this Route Availability Doc and work out a route from there.

Other Free Route Airspace in the region.

Qatar and the UAE are the only other countries in the Middle East that have implemented FRA, and unlike Saudi Arabia, both seem fairly straightforward.

Qatar – has implemented a corridor of FRA straight through the middle of the OTDF/Doha FIR, available from FL275-460. The Qatar AIP does not currently list any restrictions on its use.

The UAE – has implemented FRA in parts of the OMAE/Emirates FIR from FL355-600 – basically the parts around all the airports, and the airspace connecting with the OOMM/Muscat and OIIX/Tehran FIRs. Like Qatar, the UAE AIP does not currently list any restrictions on its use.

Please report back.

Thank you to the member who got in touch.

These changes can be hard to spot. Especially when you pay an operational penalty for procedures like this one that are poorly written, hard to find, or obscure.

We need your help to spread the word whenever you come across something different – in Saudi Arabia or elsewhere. Thousands of other like-minded pilots will thank you later.

If you have something you'd like to share, you can reach us on team@ops.group. We'd love to hear from you.

Outsmarting the GPS spoofers: A clever app

Andy Spencer
9 July, 2024

GPS spoofing is fast becoming a real headache in aviation, causing **confusion and navigation problems for pilots** in several hotspots around the world.

We first saw this happening in September 2023, when we started getting reports of spoofing across the Middle East, including instances near **Iraq, Iran, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Turkey, Cyprus, and Lebanon.**

Since then we've had reports from all kinds of strange places including **Pakistan, Niger, and China.**

GPS spoofing involves **sending false GPS signals to aircraft**, leading to potential navigation errors and safety risks.

Manufacturers have been slow to work out **what advice to pass on to pilots and operators** on how to counteract these issues. But the effectiveness of these measures can be limited without the right tools,

especially during live spoofing events where the reliance on ATC becomes critical.

NaviGuard, developed by APG, is a **new tool designed to counter GPS spoofing threats**. It's a plotting application that uses traditional ground navigation aids (e.g., VORs, DMEs, NDBs) to cross-check and verify the aircraft's GPS-reported position. And best of all – **it's free.** You can download it here.

When NaviGuard **detects discrepancies indicative of GPS spoofing**, it alerts the pilots with a clear "GPS anomaly detected" message, enabling them to take corrective action promptly.

NaviGuard offers pilots a straightforward solution for maintaining navigational accuracy amidst GPS spoofing threats.

I used NaviGuard last month when I was spoofed whilst operating in Cairo. I got to try out the app for 30 minutes **while our GPS tried to convince us that we were flying on top of Beirut.**

As promised by Michael and the team at APG, the app was easy to use, and it allowed me to **quickly verify that my IRS position was not compromised** (we have a Hybrid IRS, so a spoofed GPS signal can corrupt the position data).

This is a no-bells-or-whistles solution, which I believe is an excellent addition to any pilot's EFB; after this flight, I installed the app on all of our aircraft's EFBs. It takes up very little space and is free. **This is the great insurance when doubting your GPS position's integrity.**