

Ethiopia: Increased risk for overflights

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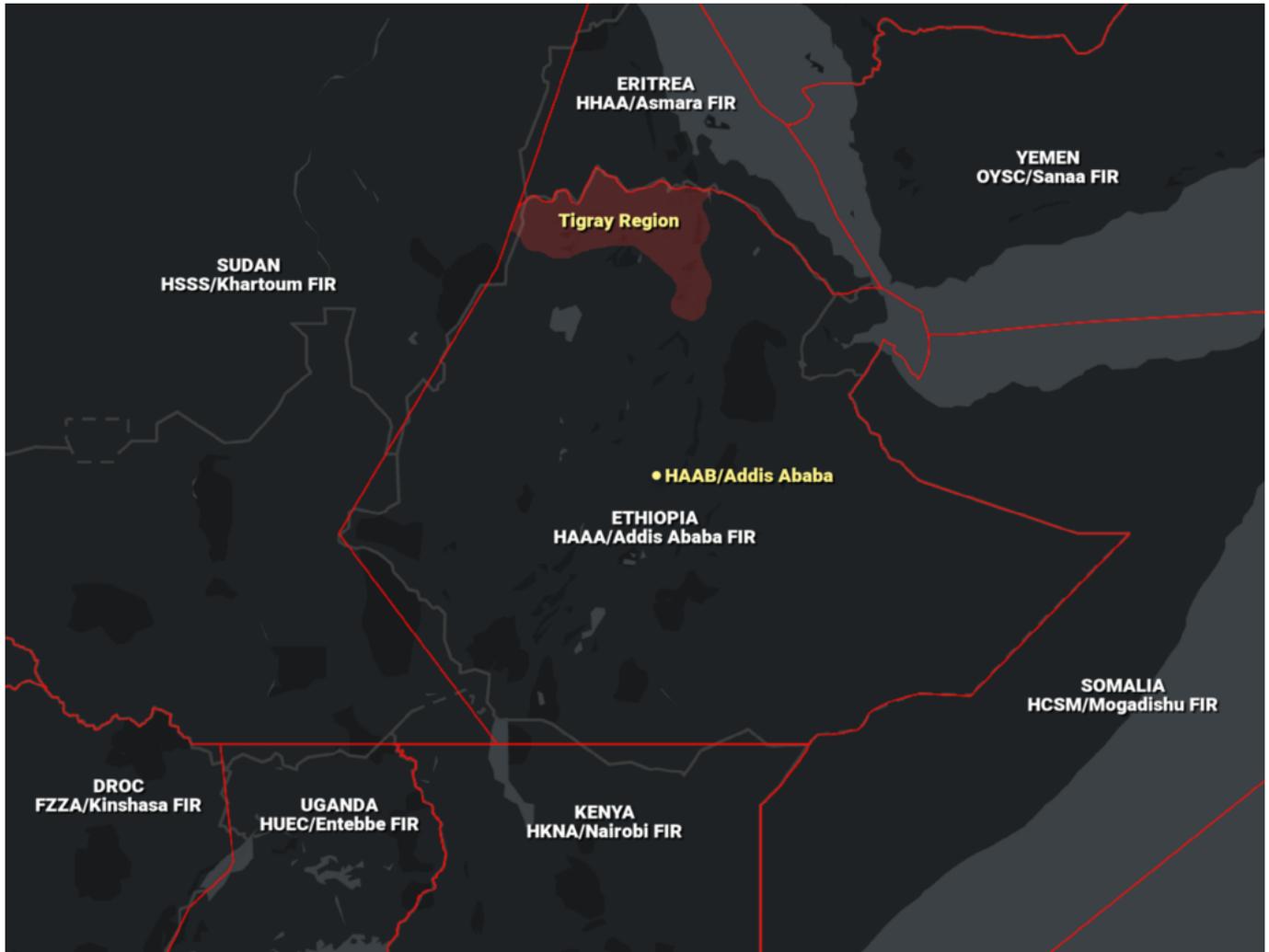
Here is an update on what has been happening in Northern Ethiopia recently, and *why* that changes the risk picture for aircraft in the HAAA/Addis FIR.

Nov 18 Update:

- **The US** has published a new airspace warning and Background Information Note for Ethiopia, **cautioning against overflights of the HAAA/Addis Ababa FIR below FL290**. The conflict between the Ethiopian military and opposition forces has intensified. Aircraft below FL290 are at increased risk from anti-aircraft fire which may soon include flights operating in and out of HAAB/Addis Ababa if the conflict continues to escalate.
- The US, the UK, Germany and France have all issued security warnings advising their citizens to **leave immediately**.

Nov 9 Update:

- Ethiopia is on the verge of **civil war**. The government declared a **six-month nationwide state of emergency** on Nov 2, following increased fighting between the Ethiopian military and opposition forces in the Tigray region in the north of the country.
- Ethiopia is **no longer banning flights below FL290** in the conflict zone in the northern part of the HAAA/Addis FIR – despite the fact that **the conflict has actually intensified** in recent weeks.
- ATC services in the HAAA/Addis FIR may be affected with little notice. Overflights of Ethiopia may be at **increased risk of anti-aircraft fire** at all levels.
- **The conflict will likely intensify** in the coming weeks – the government has urged people in the capital Addis Ababa to arm themselves, as opposition forces advance to the south.



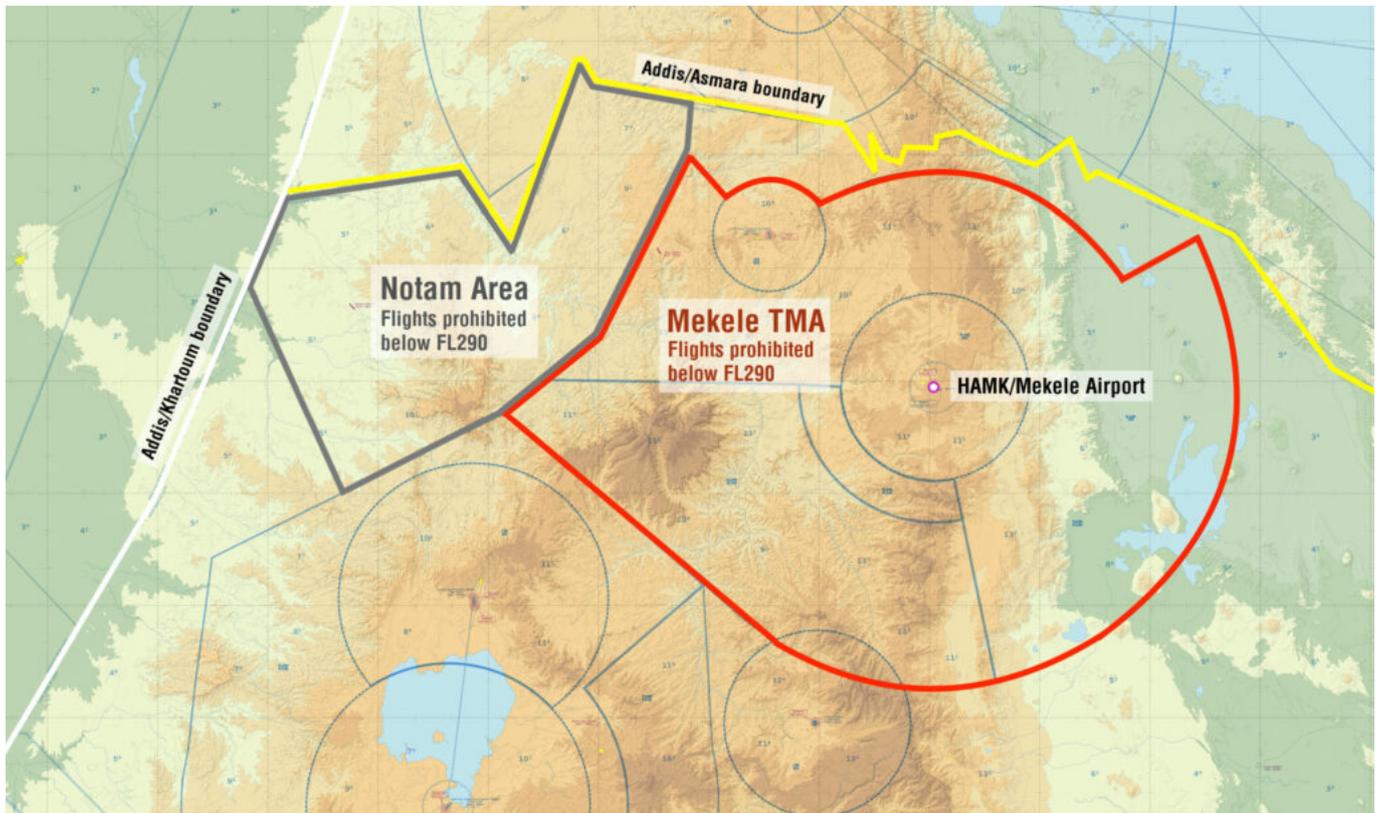
Tigray is the main conflict zone - a region of Northern Ethiopia, bordering Eritrea and Sudan.

The current airspace picture.

In July 2021, the Ethiopian CAA closed a large portion of Tigrayan airspace below FL290. Here was the Notam:

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HAAA A0222/21 - FLIGHT IS PROHIBITED TO FLY AT OR BELOW FL290 WITHIN  
MEKELE TMA AND WITHIN THE AIRSPACE DEFINED BY JOINING  
THE FOLLOWING SUCCESSIVE POINTS AND LINES  
135914.7N 0362048.9E  
130042.8N 0365122.9E  
ET0BU(132132N 0373433E)  
TILUD(134116N 0375950E)  
EVITO(142911N 0382424E)  
THE COMMON FIR BOUNDARY BETWEEN ADDIS AND ASMARA AND  
THE COMMON FIR BOUNDARY BETWEEN ADDIS AND KHARTOUM  
REF AIP SUP A 04/2021. GND - FL290, 27 JUL 09:00 2021 UNTIL 27 OCT 09:00  
2021.  
CREATED: 01 AUG 05:52 2021
```

Better yet, here's a picture of what this actually looks like:



Curious about the why? *We were too.* Don't look to the Notam for help there.

The answer - because the opposition forces have access to conventional surface-to-air missile systems that can reach aircraft as high as FL260. They have also previously shown an intent to target aviation interests with rockets and ballistic missile attacks on airports within the region, as well as across the border in Eritrea last November.

It is also being widely reported that one of these systems was used to **shoot down a C130 transport plane** at low level near the region's capital Mekele, on June 23. Although this is difficult to confirm.

To make matters worse, the Ethiopian Notam was cancelled at the end of October. **There has been no change to the risk to overflying aircraft** - the conflict has actually intensified. What began as a regional skirmish is now developing into a civil war.

Building a risk picture.

ICAO Doc 10084 deals with **how to assess the risk for overflights over or near conflict zones**. And according to it, several aspects of the situation in Northern Ethiopia are cause for concern right now.

Fundamentally, there are two major things that are needed for there to be an overflight risk. The first is **ability**, or whether there are actually weapons down there. The second is **intent**, or whether they will be used.

Opposition forces in Ethiopia have already proven that they have both.

ICAO also identify other factors when assessing whether there is risk to overflights. The current situation in Tigray is ticking many of those boxes. Namely:

1. Military aircraft are being used in combat roles, or to transport troops in the region.

In addition to airstrikes, the C130 that was allegedly shot down was reported to be transporting troops at the time.

2. Unmanned aircraft are operating.

There is solid and reliable intelligence that combat drones have been deployed in the region.

3. The region's politics are unstable.

This is a political conflict.

4. The conflict is spilling over into adjacent regions.

There has been recent fighting in two neighbouring regions – Amhara to the west, and Afar to the east. In November last year, the opposition forces made the conflict international when they attacked HMAS/Asmara airport in Eritrea with rockets.

Any one of these factors could lead to **misidentification** and **miscalculation**. Or in other words, you may be mistaken for something of military interest, or you may simply be caught in the crossfire.

Airspace warnings

The US, UK and Germany have all issued airspace warnings for Ethiopia **cautioning against overflights of the HAAA/Addis FIR** due to the risk of anti-aircraft weaponry.

Ethiopia's old Notam (now cancelled, for no good reason as far as we can tell) **closed the airspace below FL290** in the Tigray region due to ongoing conflict. So according to Ethiopia, aircraft can currently overfly the region on any airway and at any level. But it is still an active conflict zone – **just because an airway is open, doesn't mean it's safe**. And several international air routes fly over or close to the conflict zone.

The opposition forces in Ethiopia have access to MANPADS. But it is also important to be aware that other military interests in the area have weapons capable of reaching much higher – including the Ethiopian military. More sophisticated systems are present in or near the region that are capable of reaching as high as FL490.

For context, in August 1999 the Ethiopian military shot down a Learjet near the border with Eritrea. Then in May 2020 they also downed an Embraer 120 in Somalia. Both were misidentified.

Further reading

SafeAirspace.net is our conflict zone and risk database. Click here for a full briefing on the situation in Ethiopia.

SAFE AIRSPACE Conflict Zone & Risk Database
All current warnings, in one place

Updates Alerts

Type a country 🔍

Level 1 Level 2 Level 3

Syria 07 Oct
German warning updated, no change to guidance. Do not enter Syrian airspace.

Mali 07 Oct
German warning updated, no change to guidance. Avoid GATB, GAGO, GAMB and GAKL airports; overflights should be at FL260 or above.

Libya 07 Oct
German warning updated, no change to guidance. Operators are advised to avoid Libyan airspace.