

Military Coup: Sudan Airspace Closed

The OPSGROUP Team
14 August, 2023



Update

This article has been updated to reflect the current status as of Aug 14, 2023.

Key Points

- Following a military coup in April 2023, Sudan airspace remains closed to all civilian flights.
- In South Sudan, air navigation services remain suspended above FL245.
- HSSK/Khartoum airport is closed, but no Notams are being issued.
- There is a Contingency Plan available with published routes for ops in and out of HSPN/Port Sudan airport.
- For overflights, there are some north-south routes available via Egypt and Saudi, and some east-west contingency routes available over South Sudan.
- If routing via nearby airspace, be aware of other active warnings in close proximity.

The Coup

News first emerged on April 15. Sudan's paramilitary group 'Rapid Support Forces' (RSF) became engaged in active fighting with the state military in Khartoum in an apparent coup attempt. While the details were scarce, they reportedly seized control of several important assets, including **HSSK/Khartoum Airport**.

This has been brewing for some time. There has been a power struggle between the two rival military forces since an overthrow of the government back in 2019. A failure for the existing government to successfully transition Sudan to a freely elected one has fanned the flames. Along with this is strong public demand for the RSF to be merged with the regular armed forces. This now looks pretty unlikely.

Closed Airspace

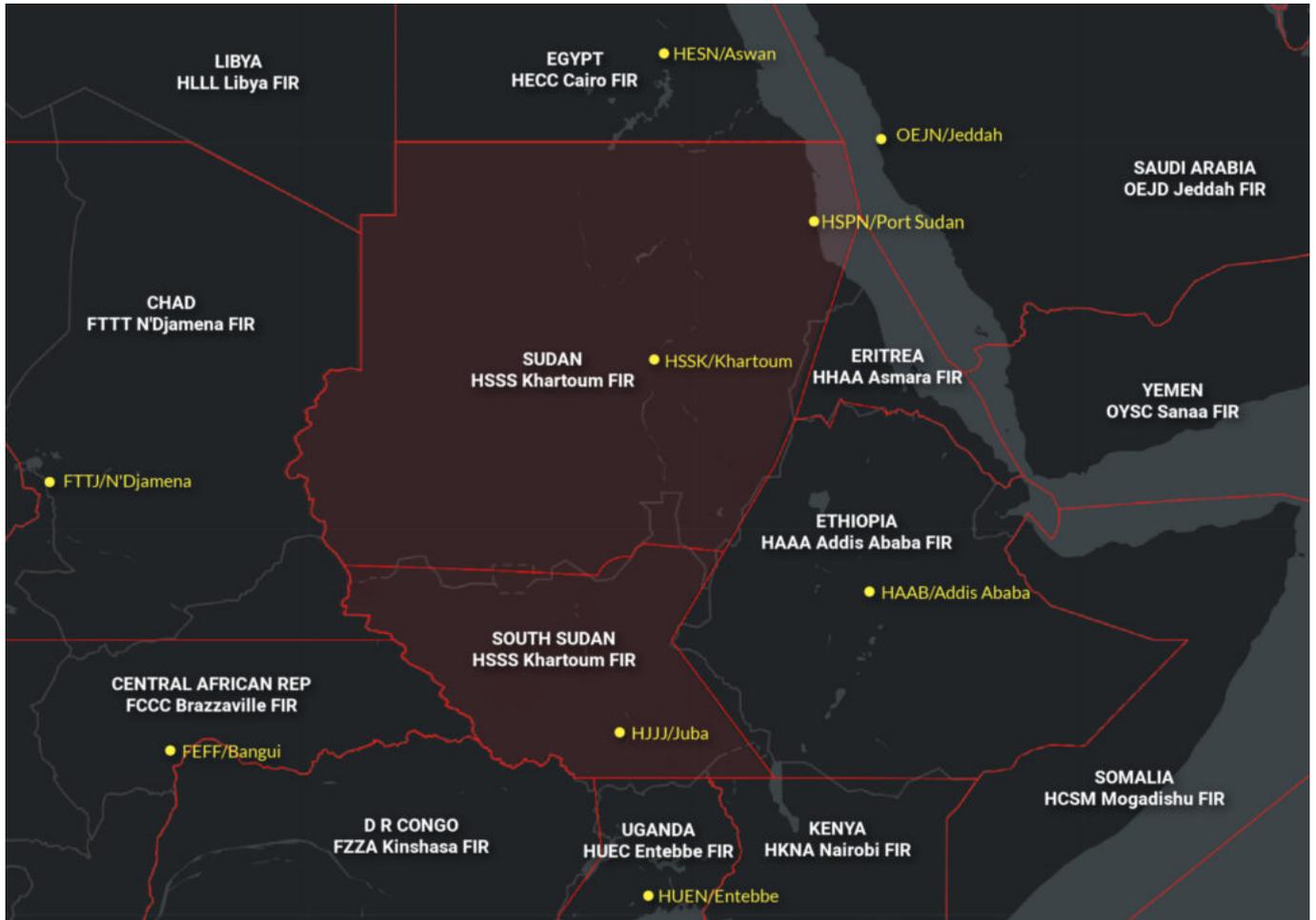
On April 15, the **HECC/Cairo FIR** advised Eurocontrol that Sudanese airspace had closed, and that local authorities were unable to issue any Notams to that effect.

At the same time, videos began to emerge of large passenger jets on fire on the tarmac at HSSK/Khartoum Airport. This included reports that **an A330 was shot at multiple times** while preparing to depart. The pax and crew evacuated, and were transported to safety at a local embassy.



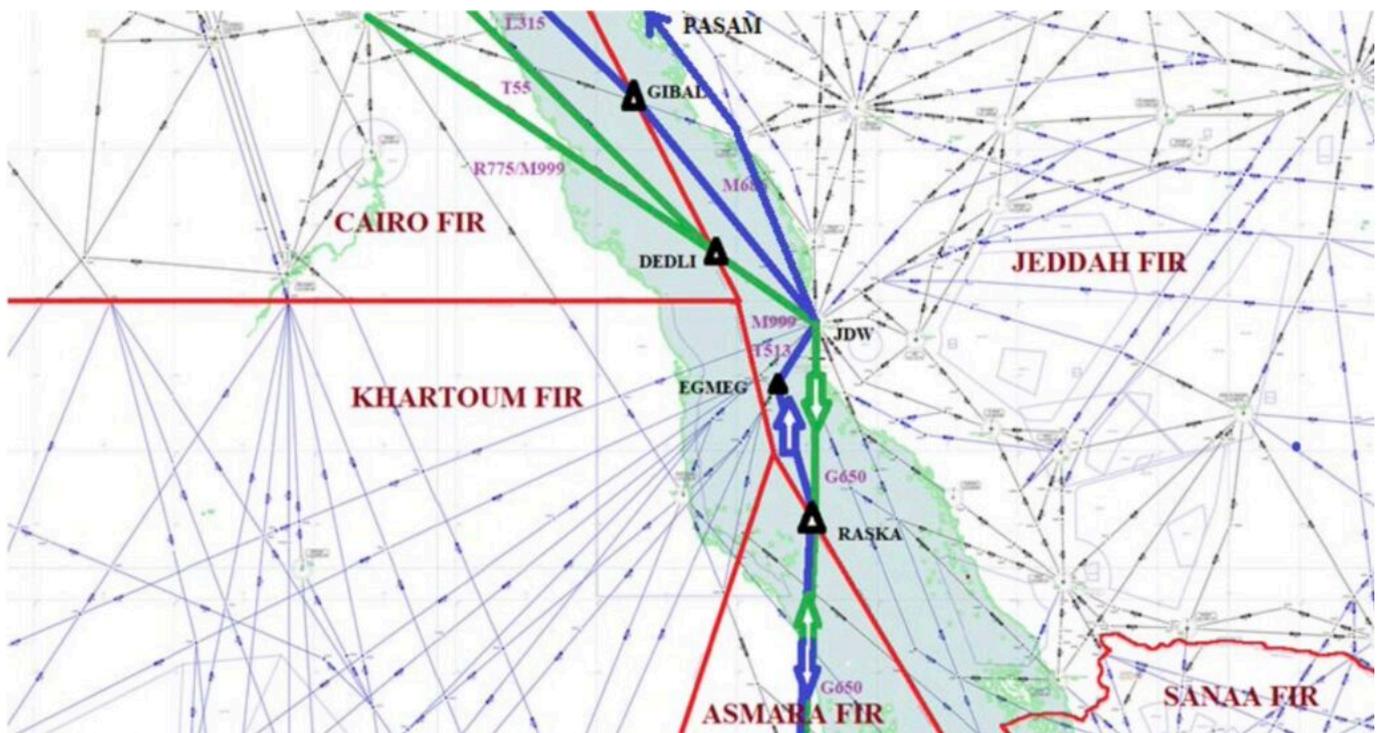
Satellite imagery taken on April 17 over HSSK/Khartoum airport shows damage from the fighting. (Image credit: Maxar Technologies)

As of June 2023, the HSSS/Khartoum FIR is now publishing Notams again, and they have said once again that **the airspace over Sudan is closed to all flights except for humanitarian and evacuation flights**. And in South Sudan, air navigation services remain suspended above FL245.

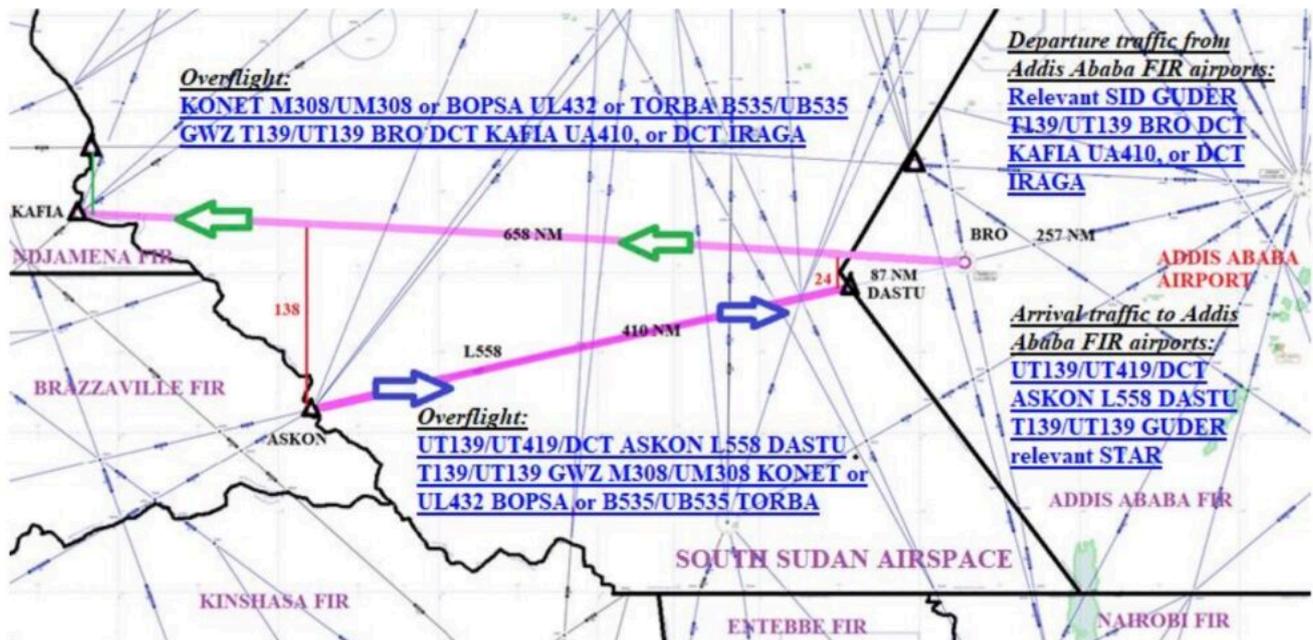


Air navigation services have been suspended in Sudan's airspace, including above FL245 in South Sudan.

For overflights, there are some **north-south routes** available via Egypt and Saudi, and some **east-west contingency routes** available over South Sudan. Check the HSSS Notams and the Contingency Plan for details.



North-South routes via Egypt and Saudi.



East-West Contingency Routes available in South Sudan above FL245.

Adjacent Airspace Warnings

The HSSS/Khartoum is a big piece of airspace. The scramble now will be how to avoid it. Unfortunately, several adjacent countries have their own **airspace warnings** in place and so it is important to take these into careful consideration. Here's a summary:

South Sudan

You may be tempted to fly below FL245 through South Sudanese airspace to ensure air traffic control services. However these have been the focus of recent scrutiny. The primary risk there is **poor levels of ATC provision**, especially for aircraft operating in and out of HSSJ/Juba. Back in 2021, ICAO issued a letter warning of disruptions, a lack of qualified controllers, communication issues and coordination issues with adjacent airspace. There have also been reports of nav aids being withdrawn from service and other changes without proper notification to crew. We've received no further reports of these problems since.

Chad

There are no active airspace warnings for the **FTTT/N'Djamena FIR**, although several states (including the US) advise against travel here. The main issue seems to be the risk of crime, kidnapping and terrorism. The general advice is to avoid landing here. We haven't heard of any issues for overflying aircraft, but keep safety during diversions in mind.

Ethiopia

Special attention needs to be paid to the **Northern Tigray Region**, near the border with Eritrea. A long running conflict there has recently come under ceasefire, but there may still be some resistance to this amongst militant groups with access to **portable air defence systems**. These can pose a risk to low level aircraft (below FL250).

Several states including Germany, the UK, France and Canada still have airspace warnings in place. Although they are due for review, they should still be considered active in the meantime. The US warning has previously been lifted. You can view all active advisories here.

Egypt

To the north of Sudan lies the **HECC/Cairo FIR**. There is still a reported threat of terrorism in Egypt, particularly in the Sinai Peninsular. Only the UK and Germany still have active airspace warnings here - both countries essentially advise against overflights below FL260 in the northern part of the Sinai region. The US had a similar warning in place until it was rescinded in March 2022.

Central African Republic

The news isn't great here. The **security situation** on the ground in the Central African Republic is fairly dire. There have been numerous attacks on civilians and peacekeeping troops in recent years.

FEFF/Bangui airport is operating under UN control, and is subject to regular power outages. The US and UK advise against all travel to the entire country due to violent crime, civil unrest, and the presence of armed groups who control large areas of the country. There are no official airspace warnings in place for the CAR, but the general advice is to avoid landings here completely.

What will happen next?

It is a developing situation and Sudan should be avoided until things stabilise. We'll continue to publish updates as they become available, both to OPSGROUP members, and also via Safeairspace.net - our conflict zone risk database.

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

Updates Alerts

Type a country

Level 1 Level 2 Level 3

Sudan 21 Jul
Germany Notam extended: German operators are prohibited from entering the HSSS/Khartoum FIR due to risks from anti-aircraft weaponry and military activity.

Sudan 13 Jul
UK Notam extended: UK operators should not enter the airspace of Sudan due to risks from anti-aircraft weaponry and military activity.