

Operation Orion: French Airspace Closures

OPSGROUP Team
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France are worried about *“the deterioration of the international context”*. Basically, they are worried about the state of the world. So, they have decided to run a fairly major crisis management readiness, preparedness sort of a thing over a 3 year period.

As they put it, it will *“consider the hypothesis of a major engagement of high intensity as possible”* and help the armed forces prepare for it by practicing a whole bunch of exercise.

Or as we put it – **“a great big load of military mayhem in French airspace to look out for”**.

Sounds big?

It will be. **The biggest in 30 years** in fact, involving a whole load of NATO members. But the main impact is going to be within French airspace.

Orion is the first of the 3 exercises which are planned over the next 3 years. It consists of 4 phases, expected to take place on the following dates:

- Phase 1 & 3 (computer assisted exercises, so no impact to ops)
- **Phase 2: from 21 Feb to 10 March** (taking place in the southern part of France)
- **Phase 4: from 17 April to 5 May** (taking place in the north-eastern part of France)

What does that mean for flight ops?

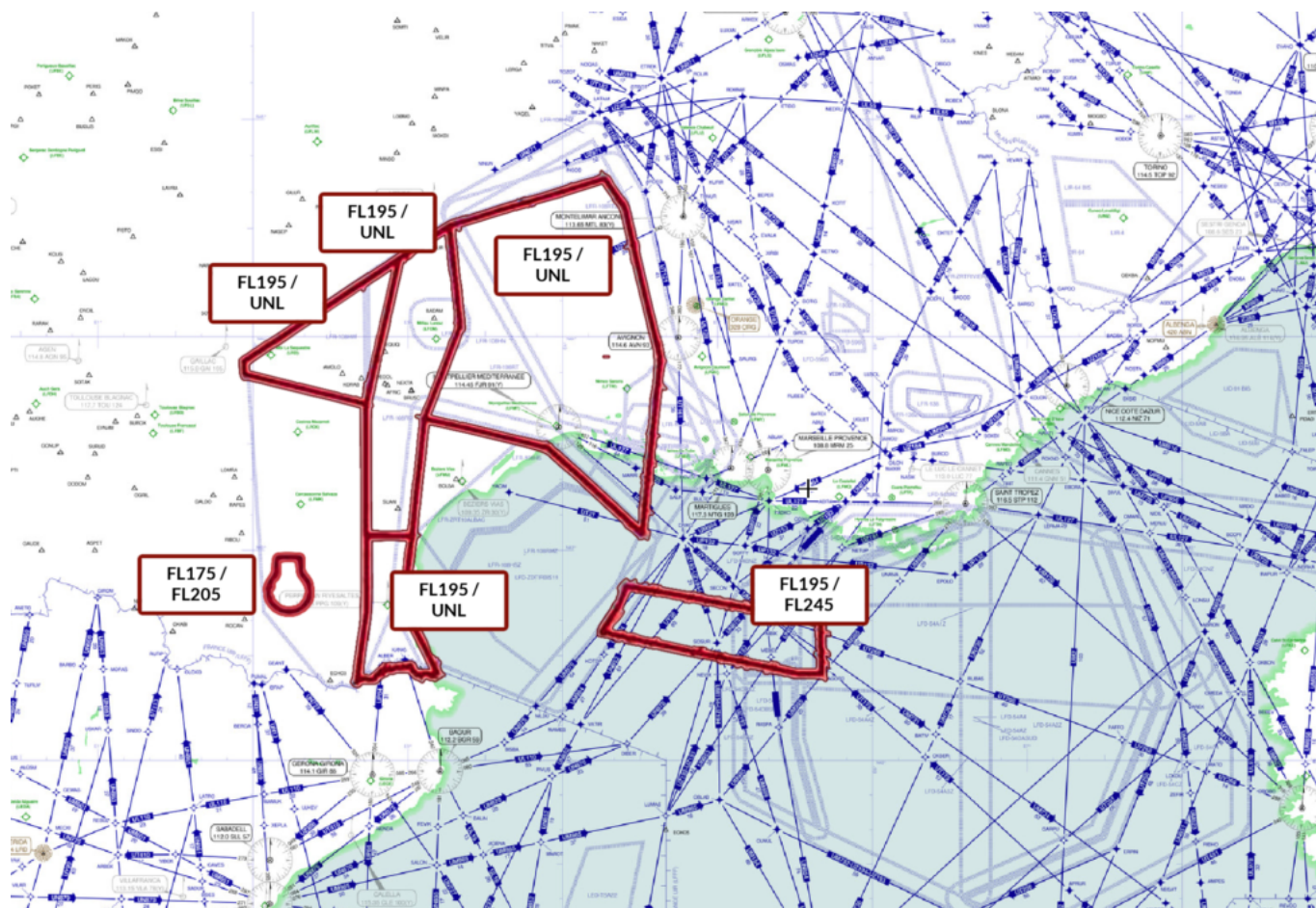
We heard someone say it will have a **“huge impact on the network”** with numerous flights impacted through re-routes, delays and probably cancellations because of airspace capacity reductions.

So, what do we need to worry about?

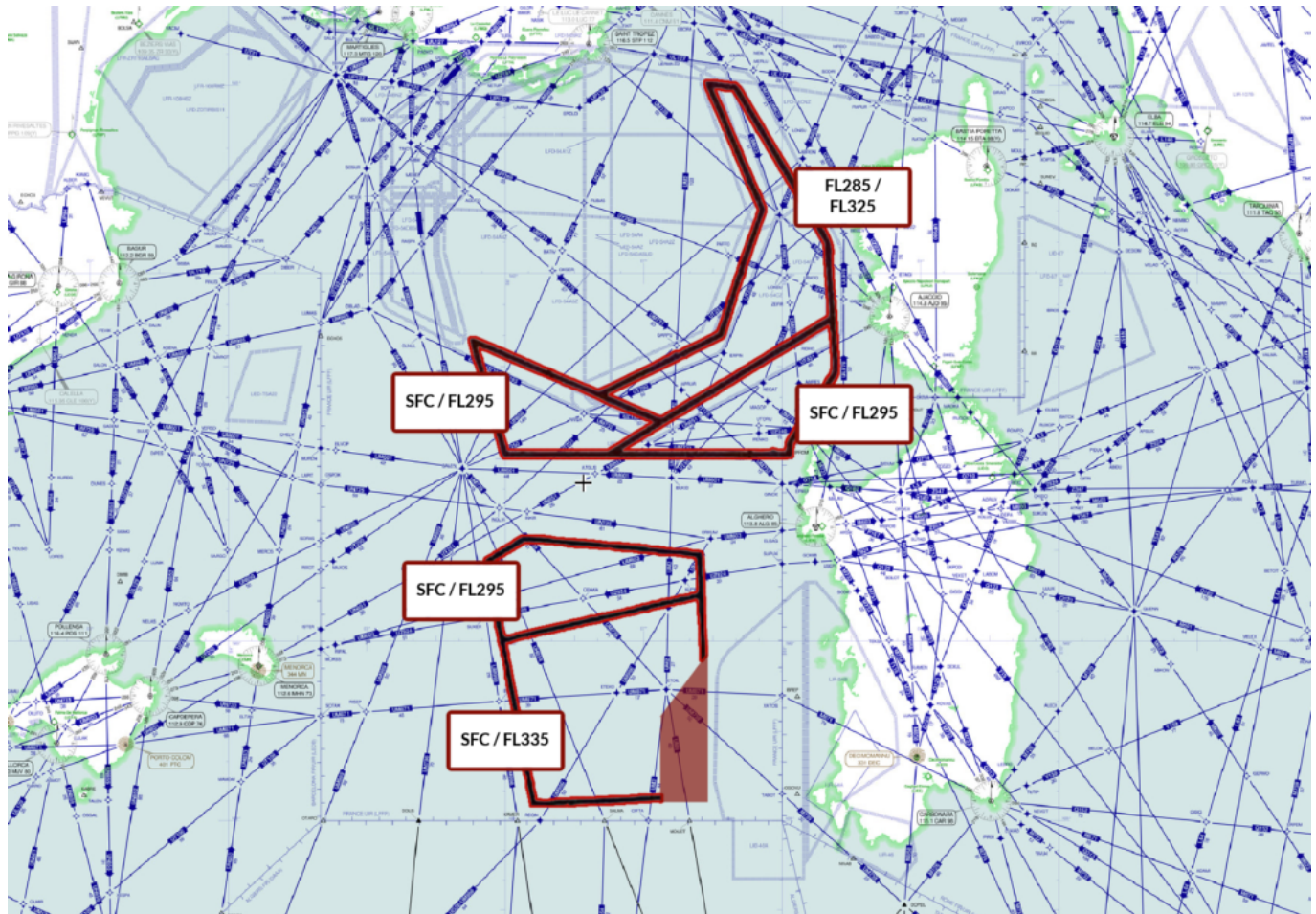
Phases 1 and 3 are computer assisted, but phase 2 involves real people and real military stuff including real military airplanes in **real bits of airspace we normally really like to fly in.**

The ramp up for this will start on **Feb 16** so you can expect disruption from them, through to **March 10** when the phase finishes.

The maps aren't the best quality but you can view them in the document [here](#). We have recreated the two main upper level ones for you below.



France upper level overlay.



Mediterranean upper level overlay.

Because there are various different areas scattered across the region, flights may be disrupted in the areas between resulting in significant re-routes for overflights, with the impact felt across France and into UK airspace with NATS managing the routings that end.

A summary of possible threats:

- Re-routes and inflight delays
- Congested airspace resulting in slots and disruption, possibly cancellations
- Reduced diversion options in France during exercises
- Military traffic to watch out for
- Complex danger and prohibited areas across multiple levels and regions to be aware of

There will be more information though right?

Yes, plenty hopefully:

- AIP SUP is due out imminently.
- Eurocontrol are expected to run some conferences on this which will be announced by their Network Operations Portal here.
- The specific danger and prohibited areas will have notams issued closer to the dates.

You can find a *calendar* of NATO planned exercises here to give a heads-up on future plans (and AIPs and Notams to look out for).

So, watch this space and be prepared for some frustrating planning and routing disruptions through Feb and March, and again in April.