

The Doha FIR: Qatar is finally getting its own airspace

OPSGROUP Team
30 August, 2022



For such a small place, Qatar has some big history. It is in the news (and in aviation news) a fair old amount over the past few years.

And now another newsworthy event is occurring, because it is finally

getting

its

own

airspace!

We feel like we should send a house (well, airspace) warming gift? Send us ideas. Or maybe just go and use the airspace.

What's the story?

We posted this back in 2021 when the news first hit the headlines that Qatar was looking to get its own airspace.

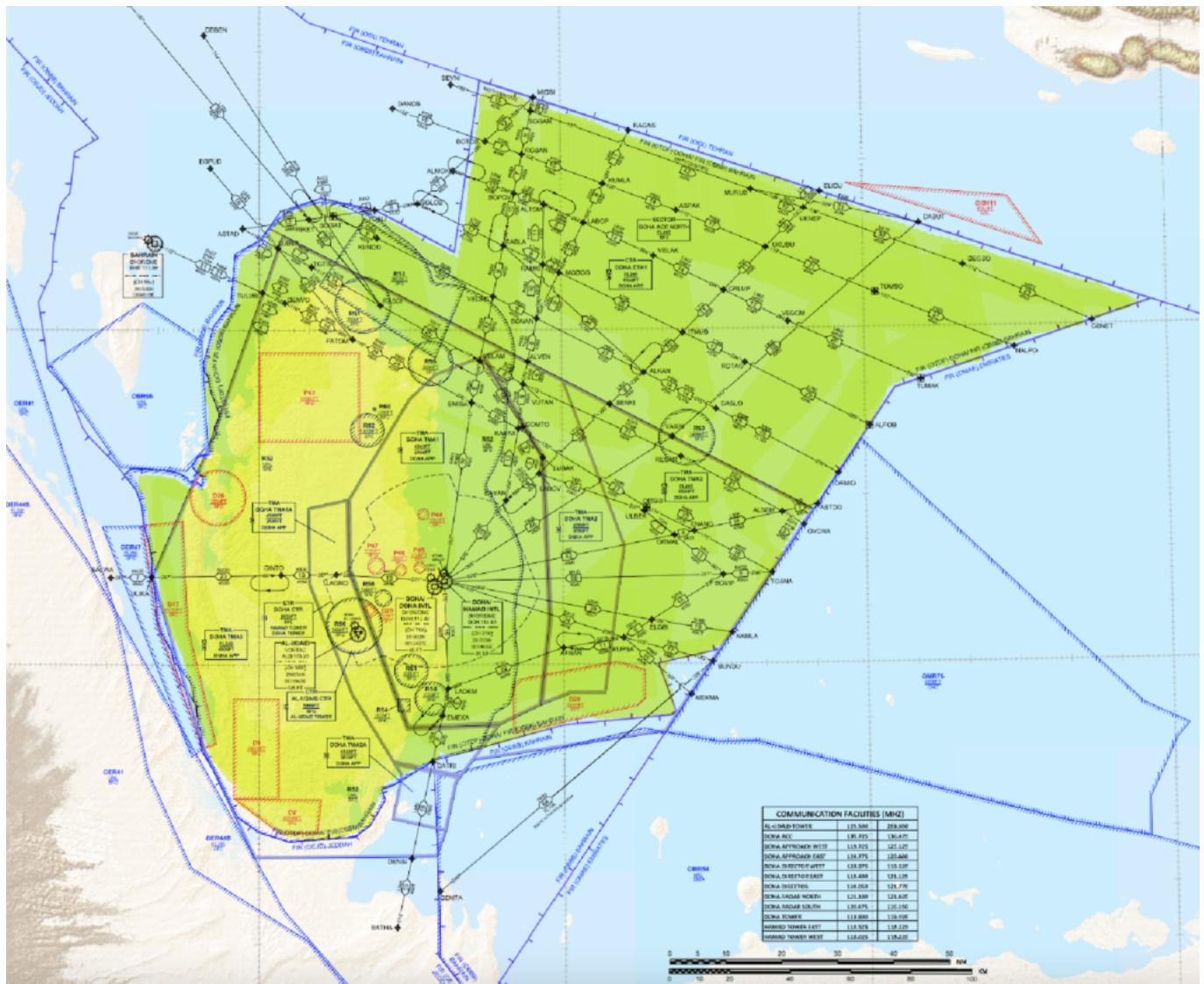
In short, (in case you can't be bothered to click the link and read it), with the exception of the OTHH/Doha terminal area, all the **airspace was controlled by Bahrain**. Which was never a problem until Qatar had a fairly large '*diplomatic dispute*' with many of their neighbours, and it reignited the campaign to get their own airspace.

They pushed the idea, there was some feedback, it wasn't good, so they put in a new proposal fixing the issues, and it was approved.

Now it is actually happening!

The **OTDF/Doha FIR** will be established, effective from **8th September 2022**.

Here is a map of what the **lateral boundaries** look like.



The yellow bits.

If you click here, you'll be transported to a lovely high res PDF fresh from the AIM (and minus the badly done highlighting) so you can see it all much more clearly.

The vertical boundaries will be surface level to FL245, which means flights above FL245 will still be in the Bahrain FIR and under their control. So if you're overflying, you probably aren't going to notice much during **Phase 1**.

You can access all the info on this in the Qatar AIP, available [here](#).

So that's it?

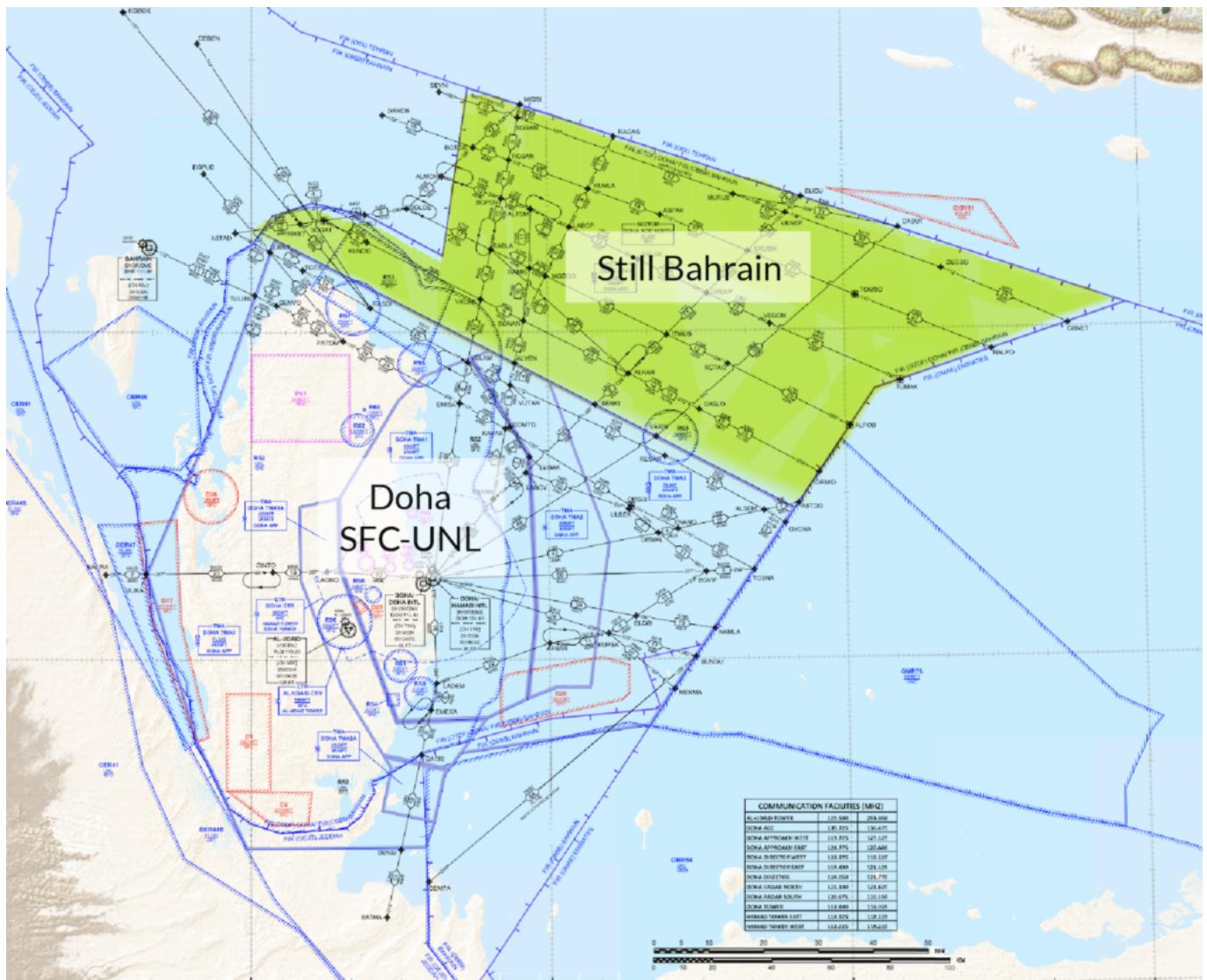
No, that's not it, because there are several phases.

Phase 2 is when Doha Control grabs control of **all the airspace above the State of Qatar and their**

waters. This means surface level to somewhere unlimited above them.

Bahrain will still be responsible for controlling the **international waters bits nearby, but only up to FL245**. Now you might notice the difference if you're overflying, but not much - just some new frequencies to talk to.

This will come in from **23rd March 2023**.



The bit Bahrain maintains.

Finally...

Sometime **after the end of 2024**, Doha will become the 'responsible authority' for the entire FIR, surface level to unlimited, including over the international waters.

What is important to know?

Communications:

Well, initially there won't be much change at all if you're only overflying.

Obviously, if you descend down into Doha then you are going to be speaking to someone not in Bahrain,

but you would have been anyway once you entered the OTHH/Doha terminal area. Now it will just be a little earlier.

There have **never been issues with the handover** between Bahrain and Doha.

Flightplanning:

OTHZPZX is the current *general* flight plan one.

All flight plans and departures messages for flights planning on operating through or within the Doha FIR must include addresses **OTDFZQZX**

If you're going to overfly on the A453, L602, L768, M600, M677, P559, P699, T308, T872, Y856 ATS Routes (via North of Qatar) then make sure you use **OTBDYWYX** in the message address.

In the absence of AFS, you can email: doha.comm@caa.gov.qa or fax at (974) 4462 1052 / (974) 4470 5075. An acknowledgement of receipt must be obtained via tel (974) 4470 5080 / (974) 4470 5081.

ATC (in general):

Controllers in the Doha TMA were always well trained and a good standard. There is no reason to suspect the new controllers responsible for the FIR won't also be.

Procedures are unlikely to have changed, it will now just be a Dohasian rather than a Bahrainian controller calling the shots.

(No, Dohasian isn't a real name, I made it up).

Weather:

Weather avoidance might require you to talk to both Doha and Bahrain if you'll be crossing the temporary boundary (into the international waters area).

Contingency procedures:

Until the official AIM is published this isn't confirmed, but the assumption is this will remain the same.

It's so small, why do we care?

While the airspace is smallish in the schemes of airspace size, it is biggish in terms of importance for the region. Around over **thirty percent of traffic in and out of the UAE** routes via Bahrain (soon to be Qatari) airspace, Kuwait and then up via Iraq to Europe, avoiding Iranian airspace to the right.

OTHH/Doha and **OKBK/Kuwait** provide two "final" alternates for en-route diversions for aircraft routing over Iraq, and also for aircraft routing south if UAE airspace closes. They are also close to Saudi airspace and useful alternates if ESCAT procedures prevent aircraft from operating into Saudi Arabia.

Anything else?

Not that we can think of, but you can tell us if you experience anything worthy of reporting once it goes live this September.

We did make this Airport Lowdown for OTHH/Doha in case you need it.

The Lowdown on OTHH/HAMAD	
THE BASICS	Hours: 104 Timezone: UTC-3 Permits/Slots: YES
	Runways: 10L/28R 16,094ft / 4,886m x 63m ILS CAT III 10R/26L 13,544ft / 4,130m x 80m ILS CAT III
	Facilities: AIRPORT MAINTENANCE / HANDLING / FUEL / CUSTOMS / BYP TO
THE BIG	Low Level Off Turn: MISSED APPROACH High Temperature Ops/Thermals:
THE OPS	AIRPORT/DEPARTURE: Close proximity to 2 other airports. Strict adherence to speed and altitude constraints required. AIRPORT: Large, busy airport. Caution TIAS. AIRSPACE: Restricted and prohibited areas to west of airport. NAIP: Radio complex missed approach routes
THE ALTERNATES	DEPARTURE: 08L/16R 10,833ft / 3,300m ILS CAT II/III 08R/26L 10,833ft / 3,300m ILS CAT II/III ARRIVAL: 08L/26R 10,833ft / 3,300m ILS CAT II/III 08R/26L 10,833ft / 3,300m ILS CAT II/III GEOPOLITICAL: NE/SE 10,740ft / 3,270m ILS CAT II/III NW/SE 10,540ft / 3,200m ILS CAT II/III
THE ENVIRONMENT	Rain: Minimal throughout year. Some storms occasionally. MC: Very rarely inc, mostly clear skies. Occasional sandstorms. Wind: Predominantly NNE at 7-10kts Temp: Highs of 40°C / Lows of 12°C
THE CONTACTS	ATC: 124.850 MHz AIRPORT (HAMAD): +974 4022 1771 / +974 4022 9999 HANDLING: QATAR AIRWAYS: +974 4022 1790 / +974 4022 9999
THE OTHER	Procedures: It is illegal to bring alcohol into Qatar. Caution passengers on other airline counters. Drugs containing cocaine, carry prescriptions with you.

New Airspace On The Way In the Middle East: The Doha FIR

Chris Shieff

30 August, 2022



Plans are underway to establish a new flight information region in a busy air corridor over the Middle East.

Since 2018, Qatar has been campaigning to control its own airspace by establishing the **Doha FIR** – a process that would involve cutting the existing **OBBB/Bahrain FIR** in half.

For the first time, an improving political environment has led ICAO to give Qatar the go-ahead, as long as it can work directly with Bahrain to sort out all of the technical side of things. When established, over **thirty**

percent of traffic in and out of the UAE will pass through the new airspace and so it is worth taking a closer look.

A little background.

With the exception of terminal airspace at **OTHH/Doha**, Qatar's air traffic is controlled by Bahrain in a long standing agreement. Qatar first proposed to assume control over its own airspace three years back – a suggestion that was opposed by several countries including the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain.

Why?

Primarily because it came at a **politically sensitive time**.

Just the year before a diplomatic crisis led to Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt (among others) cutting ties with Qatar. From an aviation perspective, **a blockade was formed** which prevented Qatari registered aircraft from using their airspace and vice versa. From an operational perspective there was likely little regional appetite to release a large chunk of Middle Eastern airspace into a political road block.

Thus criticisms were quickly tabled. The primary feedback was this:

- Qatar hadn't provided operational justification for the change.
- An additional ANSP in this busy piece of airspace would make co-ordination more complicated.
- Safety may be compromised, while cost would go up for operators.
- Bahraini air traffic control had done a great job of safe and efficient flow of traffic for decades, why change?
- Capacity would tank.

Qatar on the other hand argued that the proposal would **improve safety** while providing some economic award for the industry too.

Then things changed.

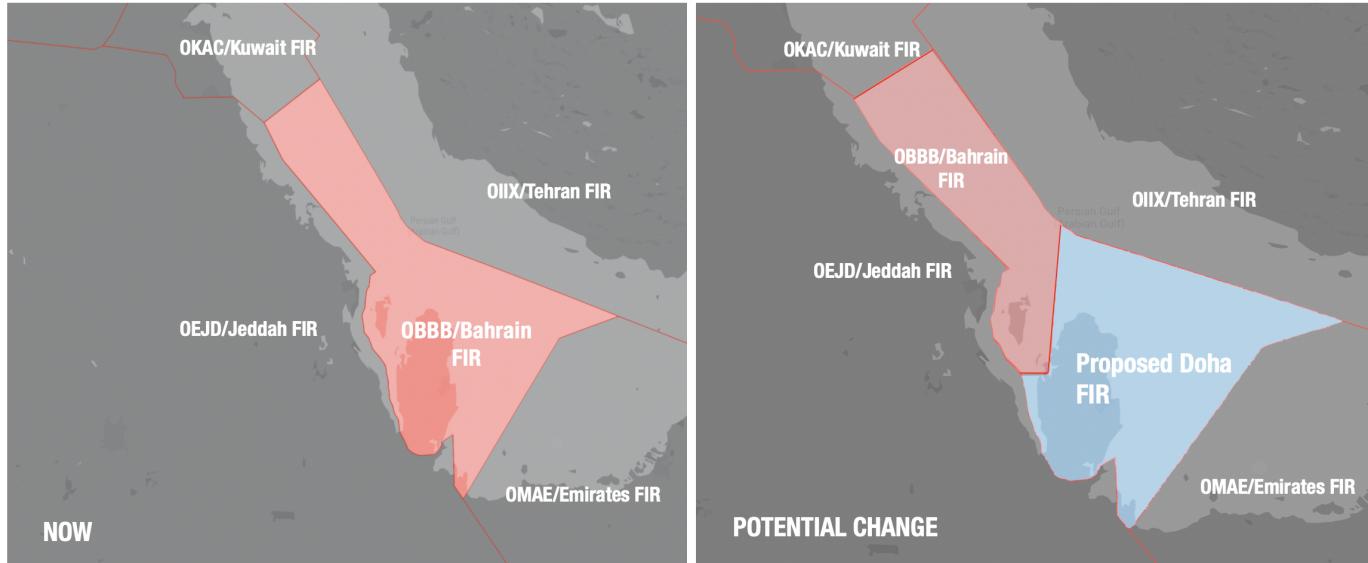
Earlier this year while the world continued to revel in the 'delights' of a certain pandemic, the political situation for aviation in the Middle East changed for the better. Following a successful GCC summit, the blockade was lifted. Meaning all parties could once again use each other's airspace. Tensions subsided and it was good news for fuel burns and flight times.

Enter the Chicago Convention.

The what? Spoiler alert: It has nothing to do with the Cubs. It's basically the landmark agreement among all ICAO member states that establishes the core principles for international ops. It's a big deal. Buried within its many hallowed pages is this: **each state has 'complete and exclusive sovereignty over the airspace above its territory'**. And ICAO have agreed that in this case, the principle applies.

So what is the proposed airspace going to look like?

Pictures are always better than words. So here are some pictures:



Why do ICAO only agree 'provisionally'?

Because quite a bit of work needs to happen behind the scenes to make the proposal a reality.

Essentially Qatar has to do two things:

1. Prove that **safe and efficient systems and infrastructure** are in place in their airspace to be.
2. They need to **work directly with Bahrain** to report back on all of the technical arrangements that will make the proposal real. It is not the easiest task for either side given diplomatic histories but in promising signs for the region, work is under way.

What happens now?

Qatar and Bahrain are due to report back to ICAO later this year, likely November or December. How long after that meeting the changes may be implemented is still up in the air (bad pun not intended).

But keep an eye out for updates on the change which appears to now be well on its way to altering the skies over the Middle East.

Gulf routings set to ease up as Qatar blockade comes to an end

Diogene De Souza
30 August, 2022



After three and a half years of political stalemate, **the Gulf blockade against Qatar by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, and Bahrain, is coming to an end**. These countries have restored diplomatic relations and opened their borders and airspace to Qatar – with Egypt also expected to follow suit shortly.

What does this mean for operators?

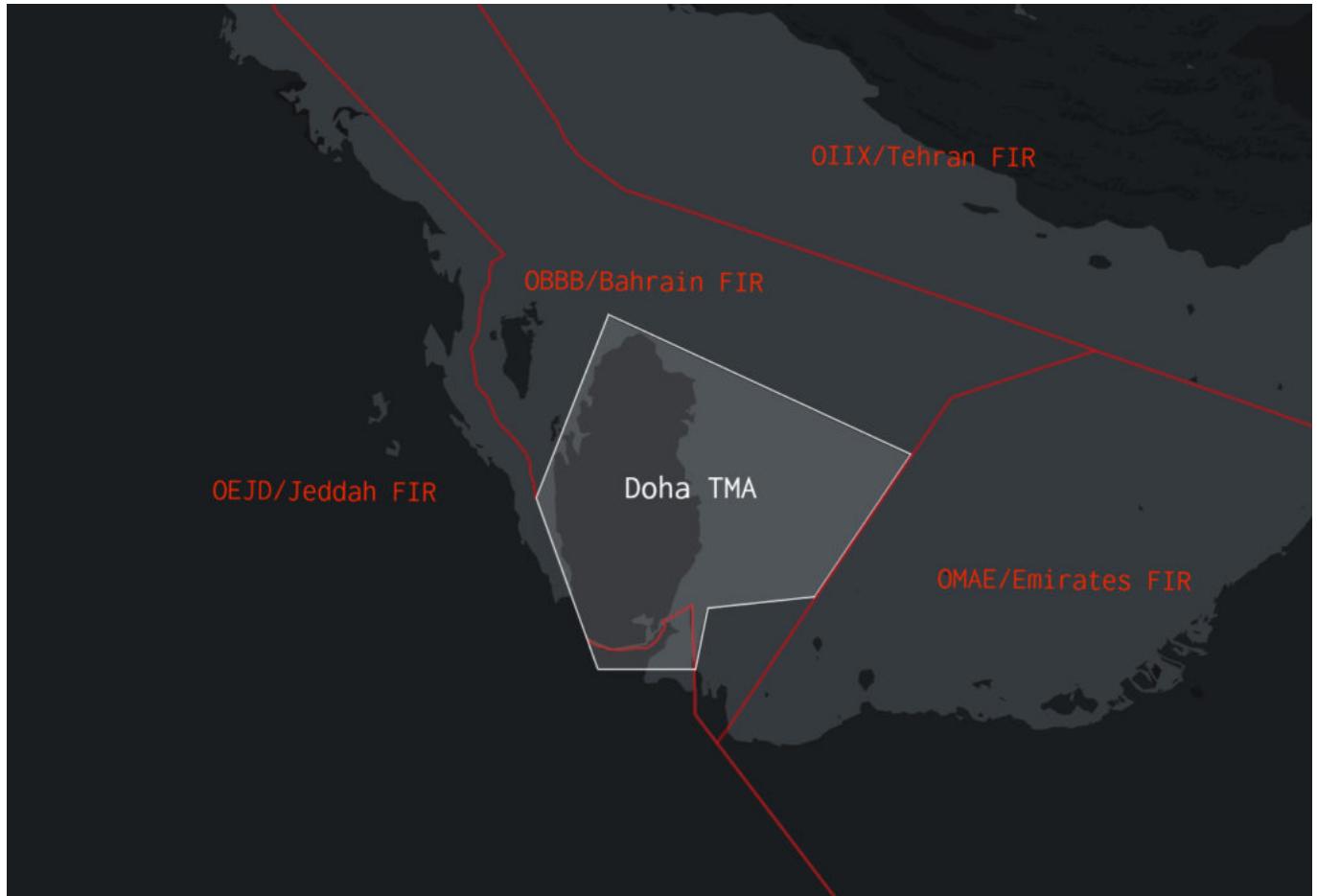
The biggest change seen will be for **aircraft registered in Qatar (A7-)** which will now be allowed to route via OEJD/Jeddah FIR and OMAE/Emirates FIR, and gain more efficient use of OBBB/Bahrain FIR – in addition to reinstated landing rights in those countries. This is as opposed to routing via OIIX/Tehran FIR, which incurs time and fuel penalties and in the worst cases requires a tech stop.

But this is also good news for **foreign operators**. For the past three years, foreign operators had been faced with various different restrictions if trying to fly to/from Qatar – they needed special permission from Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the UAE if planning to overfly any of those countries, and Bahrain had banned direct flights from Qatar completely.

This has now changed. With Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the UAE lifting their blockade against Qatar, they have cancelled a bunch of Notams which effectively means there are no longer any special requirements for foreign-registered aircraft flying to Qatar via Saudi/Bahrain/UAE airspace. In short, **more efficient routings are now available** if you are operating into, out of, and through the Arabian Gulf region.

Here is the current state of play as of **20 January 2021**:

Remember: Qatar does not have its own FIR, and is nested completely under the OBBB/Bahrain FIR – any Qatar Notams are therefore published under OBBB. The Doha TMA extends SFC to FL245, above which is the Bahrain UIR.



If you have a question or have information to share, use our Slack channels! We are a community based on sharing information and resources to help each other - jump in!

Qatar airspace update - military jets intercepting civil flights

OPSGROUP Team
30 August, 2022



In short: The situation is **volatile** and constantly changing, even by the hour. **Military interception has been reported** so the best advice is to be vigilant with sticking to assigned routes for all operations around the region.

The airspace blockade of Qatar has been ongoing since June 2017 with little end in sight.



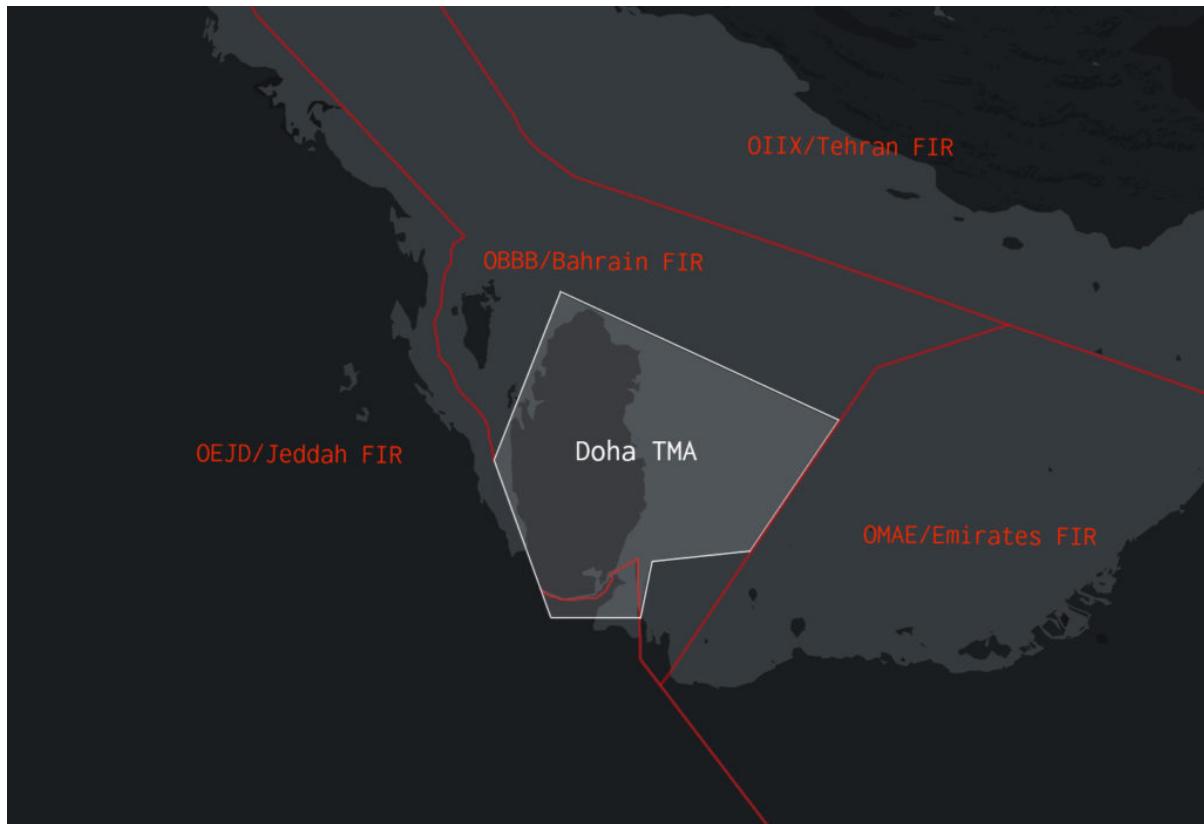
But over the past few months, tensions have been escalating;

- A **Saudi** newspaper reports of a potential project to attempt to turn Qatar into an island!
- The **UAE** General Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA) has lodged a complaint with ICAO after an incident last week in which two Qatari jets came “dangerously close” to two civilian aircraft from the UAE. Qatar’s Civil Aviation Authority (QCAA) said the Emirati statement was an attempt to cover up the UAE’s multiple breaches of Qatari airspace.
- The Kingdom of **Bahrain** has also officially complained to ICAO alleging that “two Qatari warplanes were detected flying at an altitude of 30,000 feet above the international waters, within Bahrain Flight Information Region (FIR) without any prior authorization. The two fighters flew deliberately under a UAE Airbus A320, with ident/call sign of A6HMS, en route from Fujairah to Rome.”
- **Qatar** has itself complained to the UN Security Council against Bahrain, accusing a fighter jet belonging to Bahrain of violating its airspace at the weekend.
- In response, **ICAO** is working to organise a regional meeting for Gulf civil aviation and air

traffic authorities in the next few weeks, as part of broader efforts to improve communication.

Here is the latest operational information we have:

A reminder that Qatar does not have its own FIR. It sits entirely within the Bahrain FIR- you will find Qatar airspace NOTAMs under OBBB. The Doha TMA extends SFC to FL245. Above this sits the Bahrain UIR.



Bahrain and Egypt have relaxed some of their initial restrictions. Saudi and UAE have not.

The current state of play as of **6 April 2018**.

Have you been through the region recently? Can you provide an update?

Extra Reading:

Some fascinating reporting about what this whole blockade is all about.

- ***“How a ransom for Royal falconers reshaped the Middle East”*** – New York Times
 - ***“What the falcons up with Qatar?”*** – NPR Podcast
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Qatar - What We Know

Cynthia Claros
30 August, 2022



There have been many reports of countries cutting diplomatic ties with Qatar. We'll leave the speculation to the media, we want to break down what it means for operators and aircraft owners. **Just the facts.**

Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Bahrain, UAE, Libya, Yemen, Maldives, and Mauritius have all cut diplomatic ties with Qatar.

As of now, only **Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt, and UAE** have placed flight restrictions on flights to/from Qatar. No known restrictions (beyond those known for Libya and Yemen anyhow) for the remaining countries mentioned in reports.

The new regulations are quite clear. **You cannot overfly or land at any airport in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt, or UAE with a Qatari registered aircraft.** If you have a non-Qatari registered aircraft, and need to operate to/from Qatar and use the mentioned countries airspace you'll need **special approvals** from the authorities below:

Saudi Arabia GACA:

+966115253336
special@gaca.gov.sa

Egypt ECAA:

+202 22678535
+202 24175605
AFTN: HECAYAYX

UAE GCAA:

+971 50 642 4911
avsec-di@gcaa.gov.ae

No special exemptions have been mentioned by Bahrain, but they've given the following routing for those

effected by the restrictions:

UT430 OUTBOUND VIA RAGAS
UR659 INBOUND VIA MDSI

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Due to the situation, Iran has published special routing schemes for transitioning their airspace, as they'll get quite busy:

Qatar to Ankara:

FL150-FL190, RAGAS-UT430-LAGSA-UL223-TESVA/ALRAM

Qatar to Muscat and Karachi FIR:

FL150-FL19, expect climb after KIS
RAGAS-M561-ASVIB (To Karachi)
RAGAS-M561-KHM-BUBAS (To Muscat)

Ankara to Qatar:

Between FL240 to FL300, ALRAM-UT36-MDSI

Muscat to Karachi to Qatar:

Between FL240 to FL260, N312/A453-MDSI

Also, if flying from Ankara to UAE (except OMAA), use the below routing:

BONAM-L319-RADID-M317-KUPTO-G666-ORSAR

The situation is fluid, and we will update this post as we continue to collect news.