

# Rebels Resurgent: Increasing Airspace Risk in DRC?

Chris Shieff

4 April, 2022



On March 29, a large UN transport helicopter crashed in Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo while operating a surveillance flight.

The DRC Government has accused (but not proven) a recently resurgent militant group of **shooting down** the aircraft, after renewed fighting against the government military in recent days.

The country itself has a chequered history of non-state actors actively targeting aviation assets including aircraft and airports, and there may be more to come.

This spells danger for civil aviation, and with an absence of official airspace warnings for the **FZZA/Kinshasa FIR**, the risks may be on the rise.

Here's a rundown on the current situation, and what you need to know to stay safe.

## What's been going on there?

A militant group known as M23, or March 23 Movement, has recently become active again in Eastern DRC, in a province called North Kivu. It sits close to the borders of Uganda and Rwanda.

The group were previously engaged in a conflict with the government who expelled them across the border in 2013. Then just days ago, M23 unexpectedly became active again by attacking military positions in North Kivu – which is where the UN helicopter crashed. This was amidst heavy fighting.

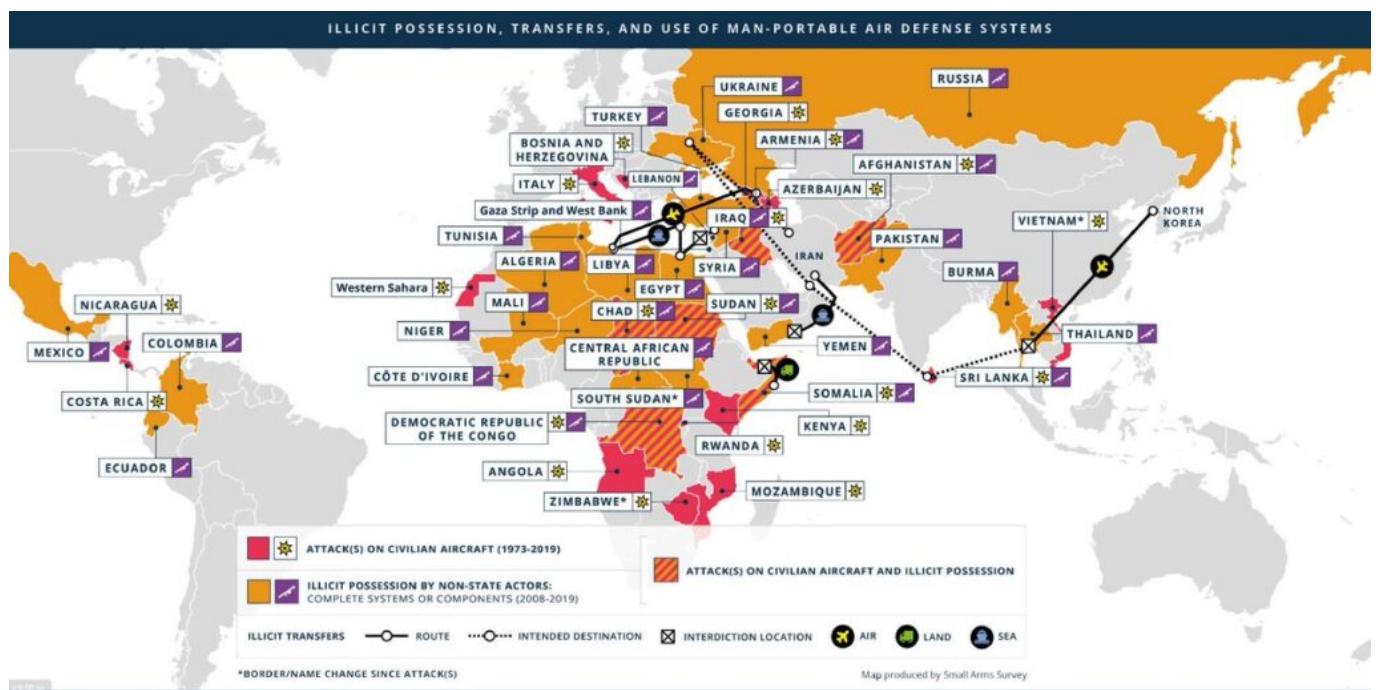
There is potential for the skirmish to develop into a larger and longer running war. And that means **risk** for aviation.

## A history of attacks on aviation.

If the UN helicopter was indeed shot down by M23, it wouldn't be the first time. They, along with other militant groups, have a known history of attacking government owned aviation assets:

- 1998: a civilian 727 was shot down by a shoulder fired surface-to-air missile after it took off from FZOA/Kindu airport.
- 2013: Militia attacked FZAA/Kinshasa airport.
- 2016: FZUA/Kananga airport was attacked by armed rebels on three separate occasions.
- 2017: An air force helicopter was shot down by anti-aircraft artillery in North Kivu, which was later claimed by M23.

And there are fears that since the ceasefire in 2013, M23 have been retraining and rearming themselves with weapons that could target low flying aircraft. This includes Man Portable Air Defence Systems (MANPADS) and anti-aircraft artillery which are distributed among militant groups throughout many countries of Africa – including the DRC.



Africa is particularly affected by anti-aircraft weaponry in the hands of non-state actors, including DRC.  
Credit: Small Arms Survey

## What's the actual risk?

Militant groups such as M23 tend to specifically target government and military interests. There has been no indication of desire to endanger civil aviation. But the renewed intent to attack Government owned assets also increases the chance that civil aircraft may be **misidentified**, or **mis-targeted**.

Aircraft are most at risk at low level and low speeds which means they are **most vulnerable when taking off, landing or on the ground**. The Eastern Provinces of Ituri, North Kivu and Katanga are particularly dangerous.



Three provincial hotspots to look out for where active conflicts are taking place.

There is little risk to overflying aircraft at higher flight levels. The issue for overflights becomes the **need to divert**. The Democratic Republic of The Congo is a huge country, which covers almost a million square miles of Central Africa – that's more than Alaska and Texas combined. If you're overflying it, you'll need somewhere to land if something goes wrong. This is when militant activity becomes more of a danger.

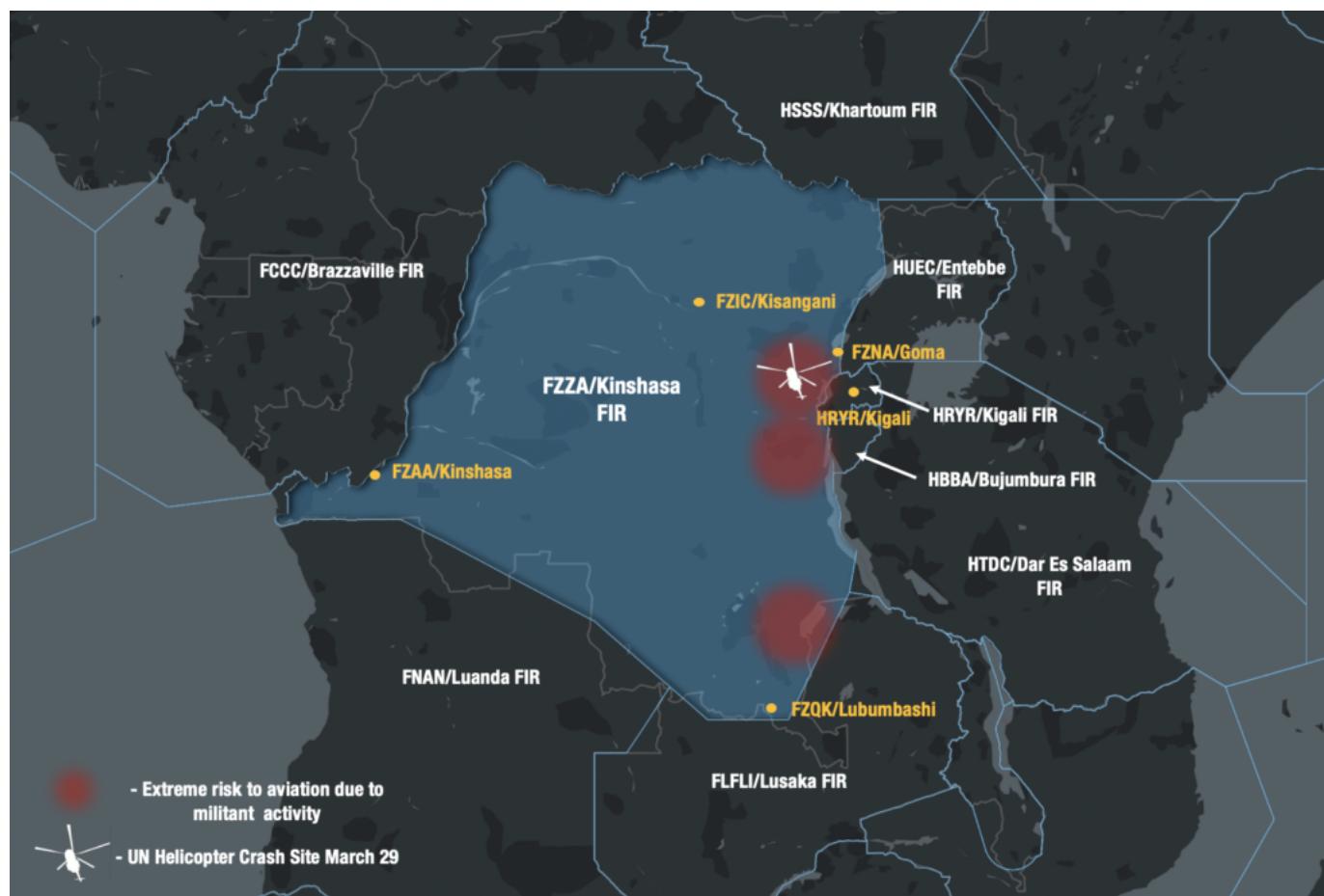
### Diversion Planning

Security risks in Eastern DRC are very high, and special care needs to be taken right now about options for diversions. Landings at airports in the above three regions are dangerous and should be avoided. For overflights in this region, alternates across the border are safer options – especially HRYR/Kigali in Rwanda.

In Eastern DRC, FZNA/Goma is considered to be a reliable option, along with FZQA/Lubumbashi in the south and FZIC/Kisangani to the north. Further west the best option remains FZAA/Kinshasa. It's important to remember though that **no parts of the country** are fully immune to militant activity and risks may be present at varying levels throughout the country.

This means if you're planning on operating there, it's important to carry out a risk and security assessment using trusted sources which may include local contacts, and security services offered by companies like Medaire.

Contingencies need to be in place for ensuring crew, passenger and aircraft security in the event of both planned and unplanned landings.



Safe diversion options are highly limited in the DRC.

### We'll keep you updated.

The ongoing situation in Eastern DRC is unpredictable. You can stay up-to-date with any changes or new risk alerts via SafeAirspace.net as they happen – it is our free Conflict Zone and Risk Database that we keep updated around the clock.

## Midweek Briefing: Oceanic and Remote Procedures Update, Rome Airport Closed Friday

Cynthia Claros  
4 April, 2022

# INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN

ISSUED BY FLIGHT SERVICE BUREAU

SITA HNLFSXH AKLFSXH AFTN KMCOXAAL

EMAIL INTL.DESK@FSBUREAU.ORG



**Oceanic and remote procedures updated:** 12OCT The FAA this week issued a significantly updated version of their “**Oceanic and Remote Airspace**” procedures document. There’s a lot of good stuff here, even if you’re not operating an N-reg. Take a look at the PDF.

**Rome Airport to close Friday** 12OCT A reminder that LIRA/Rome Ciampino will close fully from Friday, for two weeks, as a result of urgently required runway maintenance. You can use LIRF/Fiumicino instead, but with significant restrictions.

---

**LLBG/Tel Aviv** starts winter runway maintenance work on 01Nov until 17Nov – Runway 21 will become primary landing runway, associated restrictions, not available as alternate during this time – check AIC 3/16.

**LOWI/Innsbruck** starting December 14th, the airport will introduce parking restrictions for private flights every week from 1800Z Weds until 1800Z Sunday.

**TXKF/Bermuda** Tropical Storm Nicole is approaching, expect some disruption and check before using as an alternate over the next few days.

**HAZZ/Ethiopia** The Ethiopian government has declared a six month State of Emergency from 9 October 2016. While details of emergency arrangements are not formalised, measures to restrict communication, movement and political expression are expected. Carry identification, avoid all large gatherings and protests, monitor the media for details on the application of the State of Emergency and follow all instructions issued by local authorities.

**SPIM/Lima** radar will be off the air on Friday from 19-21Z for repairs, procedural control, expect enroute delays.

**EGGX/Shanwick**. An exercise to test to the Volcano eruption response is underway, you may see multiple references to an eruption in Iceland – it hasn’t happened, it’s just a test. Stand down. Katla is also back to code Green.

**UZZZ/Russia** Karymsky volcano in the Kamchatka peninsula is active with colour code Orange, check before operating.

**OKAX/Kabul FIR** continues to have comms issues in the north east portion of Afghanistan airspace, VHF comms are not working on 118.3 or 128.5. There are some "Nordo" procedures, refer to AIP ENR 1.6-1.

**MUFH/Havana** has a couple of new entry points to the FIR – FUNDI and IKBIX – but they're not for use yet, so don't.

**OPRN/Islamabad** If operating to OPRN, be aware that on Saturdays and Mondays ATC will be practising non-radar procedural approach from 0500-0900Z until the end of the year.

**SPJC/Lima** has overnight parking restrictions from 14-21NOV, check with Airport company or handler prior to operating.

**FZZZ/Democratic Republic of the Congo**: the security picture is uncertain following recent political protests and there have been calls for further protests in Kinshasa, including on 19 October; you should follow travel advice and monitor local media for updates

**SPZO/Cusco** will not allow overnight parking from 10-20OCT.

**FOZZ/Gabon** Following the results of recent elections in Gabon, further strikes or demonstrations could occur in the capital Libreville and in Port Gentil. Avoid demonstrations, large crowds and rallies as they may turn violent.

**UAZZ/Kyrgyz** Republic Multiple embassies located in Bishkek have issued warnings to their citizens of an increased threat of a terrorist attack in the Kyrgyz Republic, possibly involving kidnapping and hostage taking, against Kyrgyz authorities and foreign diplomats during October 2016.

**TQPF/Anguilla** has introduced a ban on visitors from Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, with a view to mitigating Ebola risk. Anyone who has been to those three countries in the last 21 days will not be allowed to enter.

**VTSP/Phuket** is suffering from ramp congestion, and will not allow non-scheduled flights to stay overnight until the end of the year.

**WSSS/Singapore Changi** has a couple of closures on 18 and 19 OCT due to a military exercise, check local Notams.

**ZUUU/Chengdu** has a new speed restriction inbound – fly 183 knots from IAF to IF, then 160 knots to 4nm. Notam U2748/16.

View full International Bulletin 12OCT2016