

Airspace Risk Warning - Ethiopia and Eritrea

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17 November, 2020



There is a new Conflict Zone in the east of Africa, which carries elevated risk to flight operations that may not be obvious from NOTAMs or other risk warning sources.

Some airways have been closed by the Ethiopian and Sudanese CAAs. Other airways that are still open are very close to the Conflict Zone. These are frequently used by international operators on the Europe- East Africa route. In particular: UN321, UG300 and UL432. **We are concerned that operators may be using these routes without being aware of the risk.**

OPSGROUP has today issued an Airspace Risk Warning to its members.

17 NOV 2020
AIRSPACE RISK WARNING
OPSGROUP

SAFEAIRSPACE

Airspace Risk Warning

ETHIOPIA & ERITREA

HAAA FIR (ADDIS)
HHAA FIR (ASMARA)

ISSUED: 17 NOVEMBER 2020
TO: OPSGROUP MEMBER AIRCRAFT OPERATORS

Notice to Flight Crew and Dispatch

There is a new Conflict Zone in the east of Africa, which carries **elevated risk to operations that may not be obvious** from NOTAMs or other risk warning sources.

Under the SafeAirspace tier system, this airspace is assessed as **Level 2 – Danger Exists**.

New Conflict Zone – Tigray

LEVEL 2 – DANGER EXISTS

The region being disputed is called Tigray. It's in the north of Ethiopia. Government forces are fighting a regional force that wants independence, called the TPLF. In the past week, there has been heavy fighting, multiple airstrikes, missiles launched, and a growing refugee crisis. A domestic conflict has become a cross-border war.

Danger – Airways near Conflict Zone

Some airways have been closed by the Ethiopian and Sudanese CAAs. Other airways that are still open are very close to the Conflict Zone. These are frequently used by international operators on the Europe-East Africa route. In particular:

UN321
UG300
UL432



See full map on following page.

Guidance
Enroute – Overflight:

If you're transiting any airspace near or over Ethiopia, Eritrea, or Sudan, take a close look at the map and cross check the airways you are operating on. Several open airways are exceptionally close to the Conflict Zone. Just because they are open does not mean they are safe.

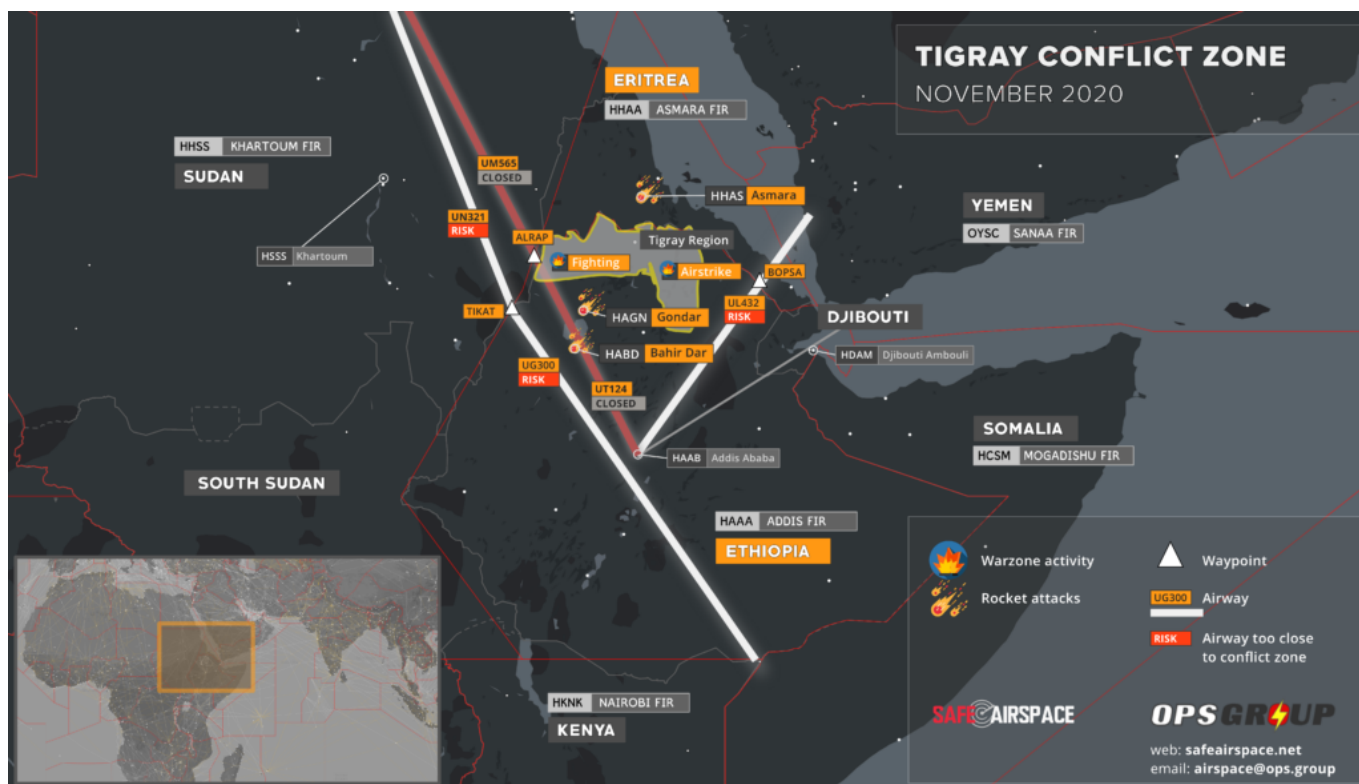
Landing – Airports:

Airports in the north of Ethiopia, including the Tigray and Amhara regions, are unsafe at present. Many are closed. There have been missile attacks on HABD/Bahir Dar, and HAGN/Gondar.

HHAS/Asmara in Eritrea should be avoided – missile attack on Nov 14, 2020.



Download OPSGROUP Airspace Risk Warning – Ethiopia/Eritrea (PDF)



Download Hi-Res version of this Conflict Zone map

Situation

The region being disputed is called Tigray. It's in the north of Ethiopia. Government forces are fighting a regional force that wants independence, called the TPLF. In the past week, there has been heavy fighting, multiple airstrikes, missiles launched, and a growing refugee crisis. A domestic conflict has become a cross-border war.

Our Concerns

There are many warning flags that point to previous shootdown incidents – not least MH17 and PS752. These are the reasons we are particularly concerned about the risk to civil aviation in this region:

Local NOTAMs are misleading

The NOTAMs issued by the Ethiopian CAA to close airways in the conflict zone (UM308, UT124) do not say why they are closed. NOTAMs issued to reroute traffic to adjacent routes (UN321, UL432) do not say why they are rerouted. The same applies to NOTAMs issued by the Sudan CAA to close airways and reroute traffic. Flight crews and aircraft operators are therefore not alerted to any conflict in the area by NOTAM.

Arbitrary Reroutes

Traffic is being rerouted to other airways by ATC, but it's not clear, or likely, that there has been any risk assessment. European flights are now using UN321/UG300, and UL432 – all of which come exceptionally close to the conflict zone. As we've learned from MH17 and PS752, just because airspace is open and available, does not mean it is safe.

Previous shootdowns

The Ethiopian Army shot down an Embraer 120 in May 2020, in Somalia. The Ethiopian Air Force shot down a US Learjet in August 1999 in the Eritrean border region. Both were misidentified.

No guidance to operators

No aviation authorities or official sources have issued any guidance or warnings to date via normal channels.

Rapid Escalation of Conflict

The situation has intensified rapidly, and is extremely unpredictable and unstable. The impact on aviation has not been widely reported.

Guidance

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Information Sources

The Conflict Zone & Risk Database at SafeAirspace.net contains all current published warnings and alerts for Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Ethiopia

Risk Level: **Two - Danger exists**

[\[about risk levels \]](#)

Nov 2020: Major escalation of the conflict in the Tigray region, along the Ethiopia/Eritrea border. Some airways have been closed by the Ethiopian and Sudanese CAAs. Other airways that are still open are very close to the Conflict Zone. These are frequently used by international operators on the Europe- East Africa route. In particular: UN321, UG300 and UL432. Multiple airports have been targeted by rockets. Missiles were fired across the border into Eritrea, targeting HHAS/Asmara. Within Ethiopia, HABD/Bahir Dar and HAGN/Gondar were also targeted.

Sep 2018: Risk due to hidden ATC strike. Ethiopian ATC controllers went on strike, and the ECAA and Ethiopian Airlines recruited both retired and foreign controllers to pick up the slack. Ethiopia denied several times that there was in fact a strike happening at all. The strike ended September 7th. Many were not qualified to operate in Ethiopian airspace, due to inexperience.



Ethiopia: What are other operators doing?

0 % with Avoid or Do Not Land policy

Avoid	0%
Do not land	0%
Specific routes only	0%
Case by case	0%
Unrestricted	0%
No policy	100%

TAKE PART

SEE ALL

Notifications

SUBSCRIBE

to receive Conflict Zone & Risk warnings.

We will alert you when there are significant changes, and send you updated summaries when

The countries that issue the most relevant updates for unsafe airspace are:

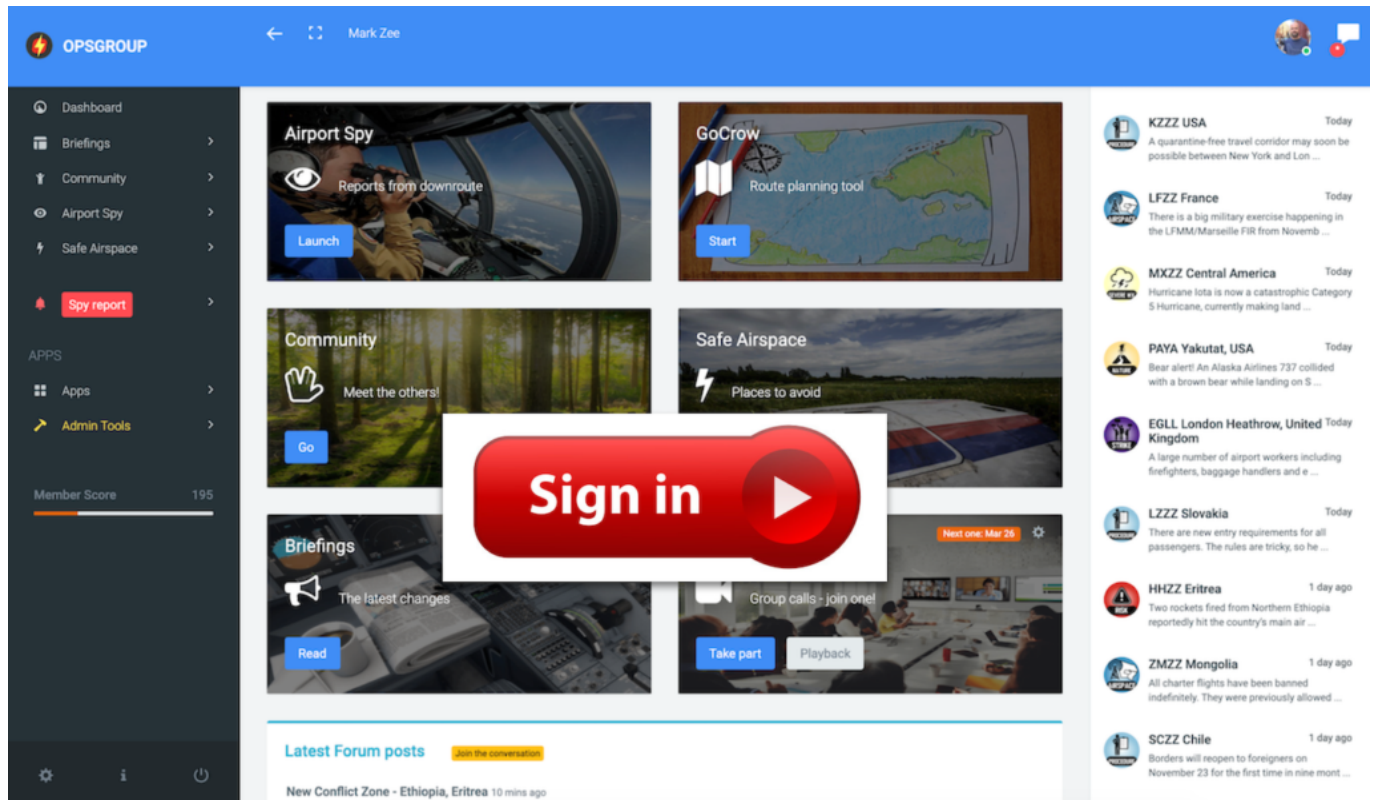
- US (FAA) – through Notams and SFARs
- UK (DFT) – by Notam and then AIP
- Germany (BMVI) – by Notam
- France (DGAC) – by AIC

Note: Operators should not rely on EASA Conflict Zone Information Bulletins (CZIB)'s as a primary source of information. These serve only as pointers to the above sources, and often are not issued until several months after updates, if at all. Note that the Civil Aviation Authorities of the countries whose airspace is determined to be unsafe are unlikely to issue reliable guidance.

Group effort

This information is compiled from OPSGROUP member input, information, intelligence and analysis. If you have additional information to share, please send it to report@safeairspace.net.

Members: More information



OPSGROUP Members: More information in the discussion in the Forum about Ethiopia/Eritrea:
Forum > International Ops > New Conflict Zone Ethiopia/Eritrea

All links to further resources are there.