Libya Airspace Update Oct 2019

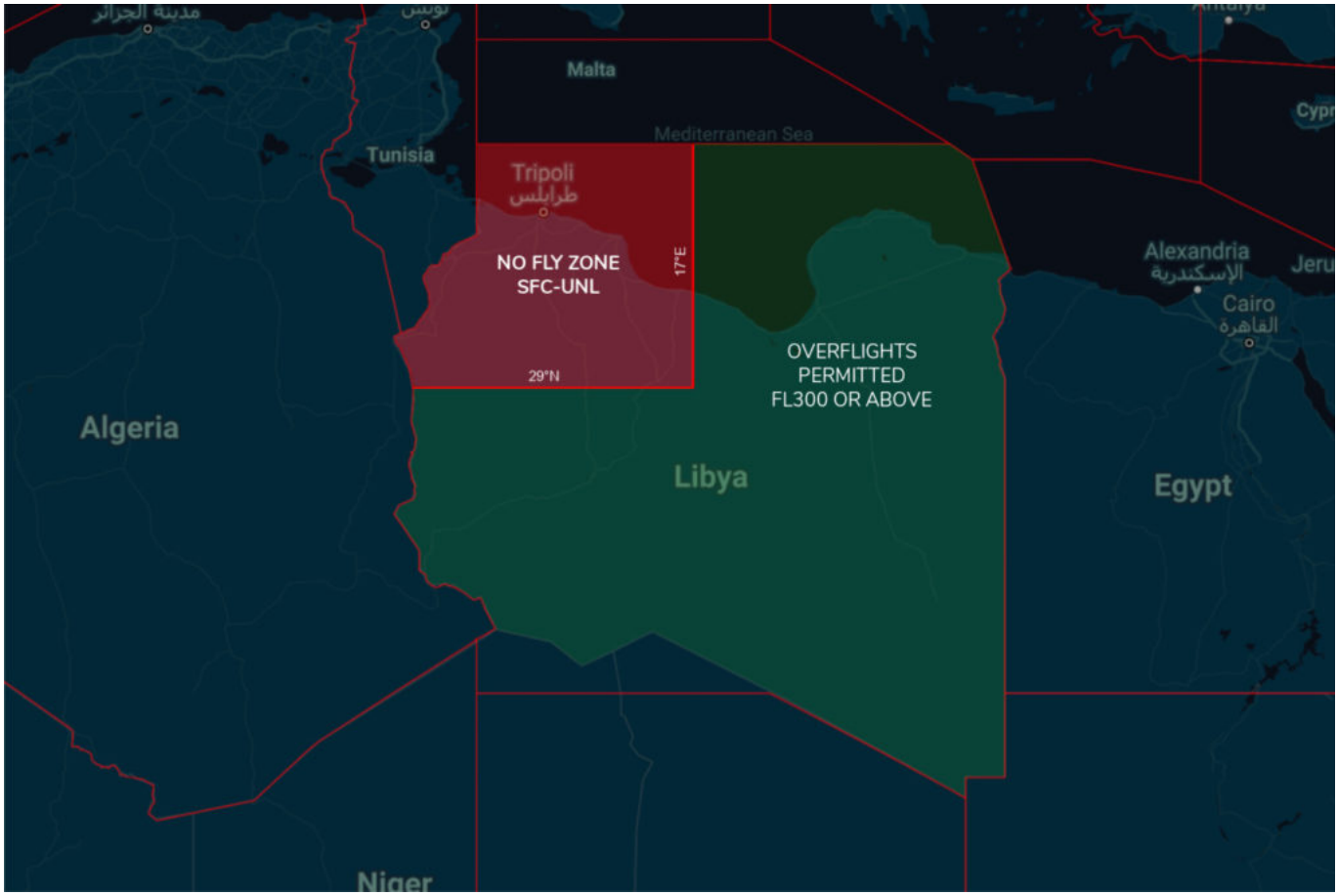
David Mumford
24 October, 2019

On 23rd Oct 2019, the US issued an emergency order **prohibiting U.S. operators from flying in Libyan airspace**. The guidance here is very clear: **do not operate anywhere in the HLLL/Tripoli FIR, at any flight level.**

This follows months of civil war in Libya, with militia from the east mounting a campaign to seize control of Tripoli, including HLLM airport, and threatening to shoot down aircraft operating in western Libya.

In recent months there have been a number of airstrikes targeting HLLM/Mitiga airport, the latest coming on Aug 15, which reportedly killed two people and forced the airport to close. There are videos on social media showing **planes landing at the airport as shells are falling** in the background.

Prior to yesterday's announcement, the U.S. guidance on Libya was that operators were allowed to overfly Libya at FL300 or above, except an area in the north-western part of the country over Tripoli, where all flights were prohibited. Here's what that looked like:



But this guidance is now defunct. The FAA website now shows the **updated guidance** for Libya – including the Background Notice.

Germany and **Malta** still have warnings in place which mirror the **old advice** of the U.S. – do not fly over the north-western part of Libya, but overflights of the rest of the country are permitted at the higher flight levels. **The UK** and **France** advise against all overflights. These warnings may be updated in the coming days, following the new advice from the U.S.

Libya remains politically unstable, with a fragile security situation across the country. In their SFAR issued back in March 2019, the U.S. said that the main threat to aviation at the lower flight levels stems from the widespread proliferation of man-portable air-defence systems (MANPADS) across the country:

"Both GNA and advancing LNA forces have access to advanced man portable air defense systems (MANPADS) and likely anti-aircraft artillery. These ground-based weapon systems present a risk to aircraft, but only at altitudes below FL300. LNA forces have tactical aircraft capable of intercepting aircraft at altitudes at and above FL300 within the self-declared military zone in Western Libya, which may present an inadvertent risk to civil aviation operations in Western Libya. While the LNA tactical aircraft threat is likely intended for GNA military aircraft, an inadvertent risk remains for civil aviation at all altitudes due to potential miscalculation or misidentification."

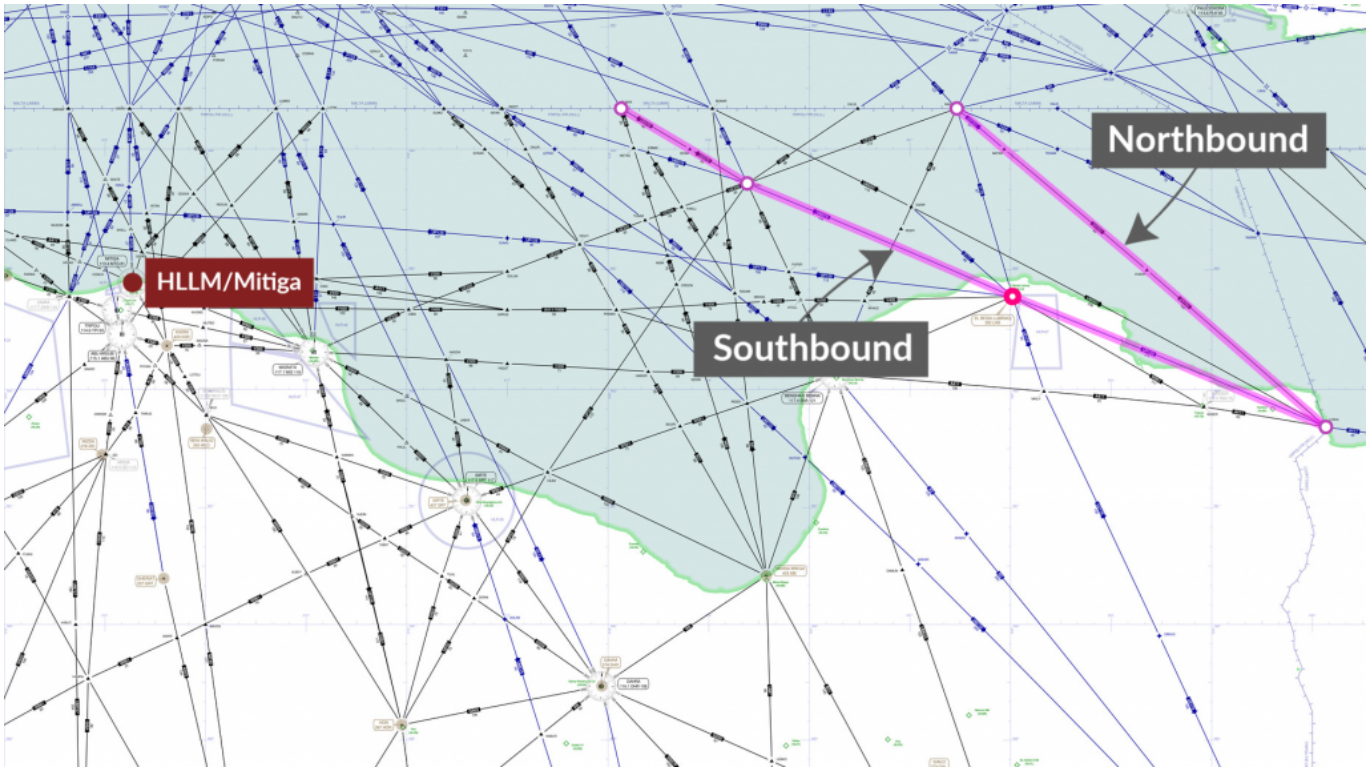
However, there are factions on the ground in Libya which possess weapons capable of targeting aircraft above FL300. The LNA is one of many armed groups in Libya which continues to use various rocket systems looted from Gaddafi's stockpiles at the end of the war in 2011. In May 2018, the LNA proudly displayed a refurbished Russian-made surface-to-air missile system at HLLB/Benina Airbase in Benghazi. This system has the capability to engage aircraft at altitudes up to FL450.

The opposing GNA forces have surface-to-air missile systems of their own. Some reports indicate that the GNA are in possession of the Russian-made SA-3 system, which has the capability to engage aircraft at altitudes over FL800.

With the current conflict between these and other rival factions on the ground in Libya now escalating, it's not clear what level of control the main players hold over their missile systems.

Bottom line, there's still a potential risk to aircraft **at all altitudes** and **across all parts** of Libya.

Even if you are allowed to overfly the country, there are only two approved routes available, in the far north-eastern corner of the country, as per HLLL Libyan Notam A0063/17:



***Northbound**: LOSUL UP128 LAB UM979 RAMLI UZ270 OLMAX (even levels)*
***Southbound**: RASNO UY751 LOSUL (odd levels)*

Even on these routes, reliable ATC services cannot be guaranteed. The past few years have seen regular ATS and radar outages across the HLLL FIR airspace, and severe limitations in VHF capability, with operators having to communicate with Malta ATC for guidance.

Given the current security concerns, we continue to list the entire country as **“Level 1 – Avoid”** at SafeAirspace.net

A319, A330 hit by gunfire at Tripoli

David Mumford
24 October, 2019

Heavy clashes broke out in the Libyan capital Tripoli on Jan 15, leaving at least twenty people dead and forcing HLLM/Mitiga airport to close for five days, re-opening again on Jan 20.

Gunfire at the airport damaged multiple aircraft, including a few A319s and at least one A330.

Here are some photos of some of the damage:

Both airports in Tripoli are focal points for fighting. Given their strategic value, they periodically serve as headquarters for various local militias.

HLLT/Tripoli has been more or less completely closed since mid-2014, when at least 90% of the airport's facilities were destroyed in fighting between local militias. Since then, international flights to and from Tripoli have been using HLLM/Mitiga instead. Technically, HLLT/Tripoli is now only available for VIP, emergency and ambulance flights; but in reality, it should be avoided at all costs.

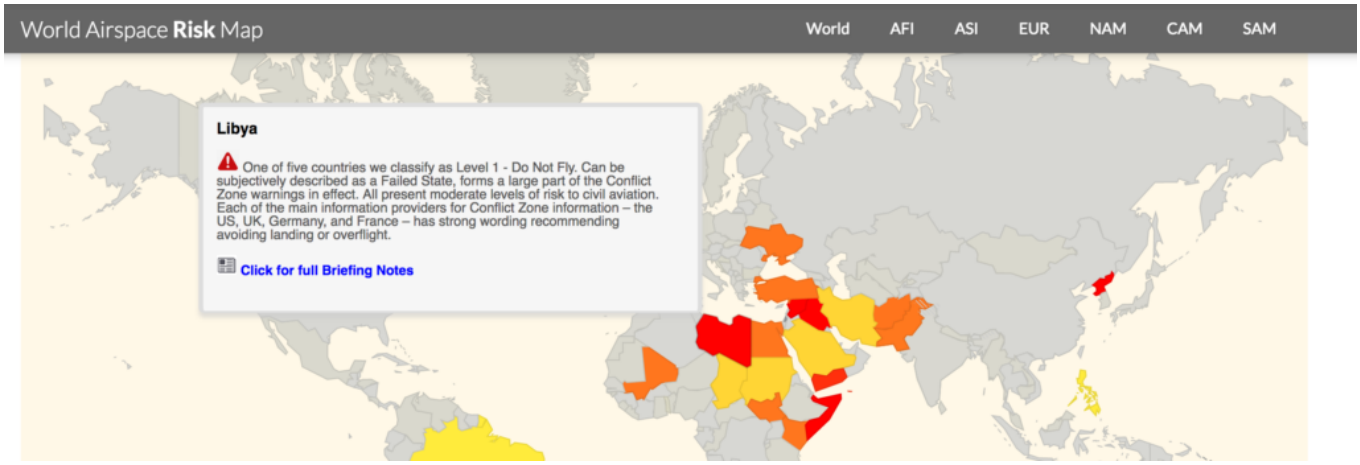
HLLM/Mitiga is the old military airfield, which is now being used for civilian traffic, since the closure of HLLT/Tripoli. However, the airport has been plagued by violence over the past few years, and has been forced to close a number of times.

Back in July 2017, we reported on the **intense fighting that took place at Mitiga airport where 5 people were killed and 32 injured**, and then on 19 Oct 2017, a Libyan Airlines A330 at the airport was hit by gunfire during an exchange of fire between local militia in the district directly south of the airport.

A number of countries already have blanket warnings in place against operating to Libya, and they all say pretty much the same thing: avoid the entire country – don't land at any airport, don't even overfly.

So we suggest you ignore whatever gets pumped out on the HLLL FIR Notams about airports being "AVAILABLE H24 FOR INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS AND EN-ROUTE DIVERSIONS". (You can read that nonsense in full by clicking **here**.)

Libya remains categorised as a Level One country (Do Not Fly) at **safeairspace.net**



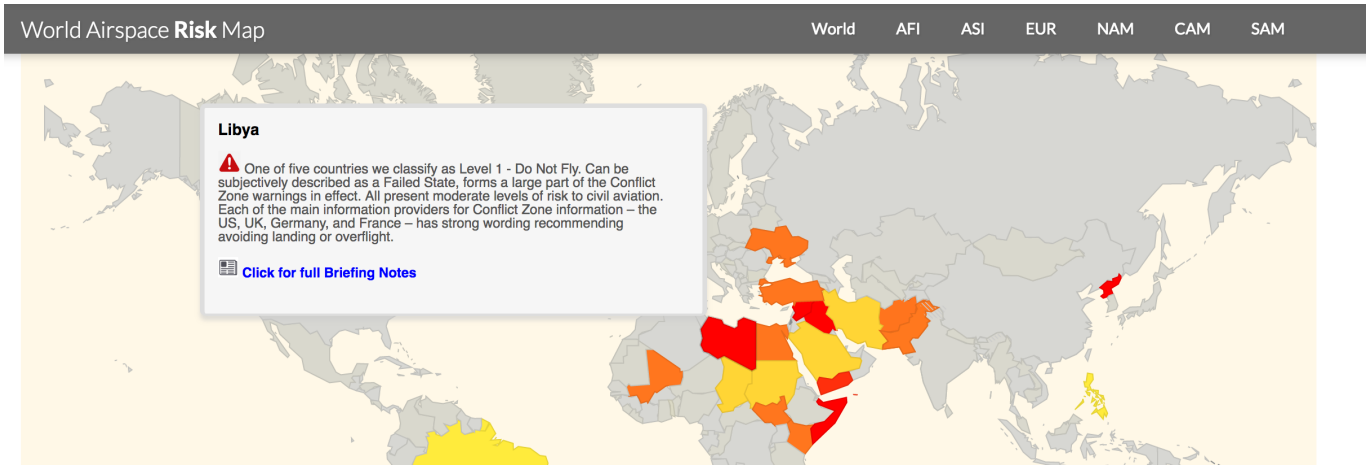
Fighting at Tripoli Airport, 5 killed

Declan Selleck
24 October, 2019

Update Jan 21: Heavy clashes broke out in the Libyan capital Tripoli on Jan 15, leaving at least twenty people dead and forcing the airport to close for five days, re-opening again on Jan 20. Gunfire at Mitiga Airport damaged multiple aircraft, including a few A319s and at least one A330.

July 5, 2017 – **HLLM/Tripoli Mitiga** : Intense fighting at the Airport yesterday, with 5 people killed and 32 injured. The fighting is ongoing between rival members of the Buni Brigade militia, which controls the airport terminal building. It is understood that there had been a falling out over the distribution of the income the militia earns from goods and passengers passing through the terminal.

Operations were switched to Mitiga from HLLT/Tripoli International in 2014, after that airport was severely damaged in the heavy clashes that broke out across the capital in mid-2014 and closed to all operations.

Also yesterday, July 4th, **the first flight in three years to land at HLLT/Tripoli International** arrived from Addis Ababa, which was a non-scheduled flight operated by Libyan Arab Airlines. There is no indication yet that HLLT is open again for regular traffic.

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