

No, Pakistan's airspace is not closed

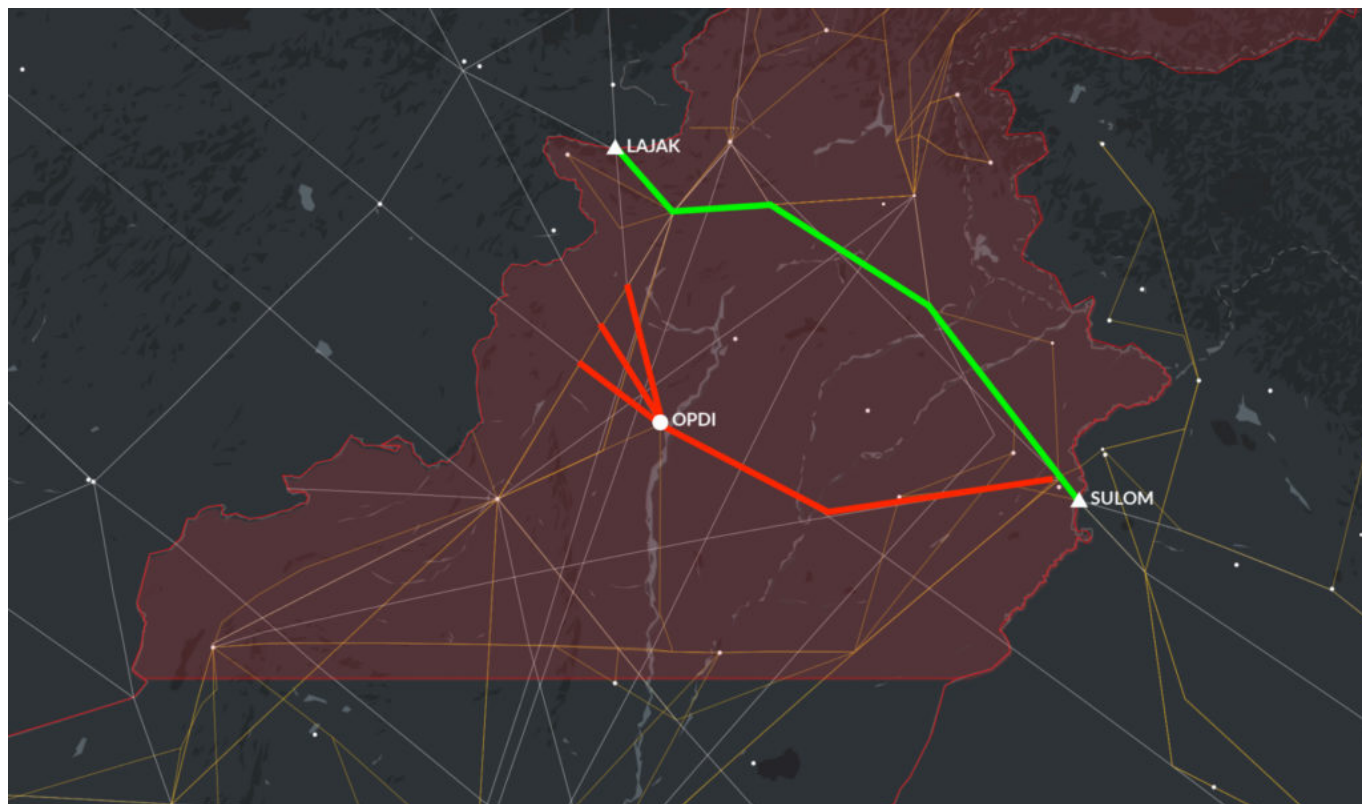
David Mumford

8 August, 2019



Several reports have emerged in the media over the past few days claiming Pakistan has closed a number of airways to Indian carriers, linking these closures to the rising tensions between the two countries over the disputed Kashmir region.

But these reports are not strictly accurate. Pakistan **has partially closed** some airways in the north of the country used for overflights between India and Afghanistan, which pass over OPDI/Dera Ismail Khan airport – but these particular airway closures have been ongoing since 23rd July. Local agents say these closures are simply due to operational reasons, and not related to the current political situation.



Here's the Notam which has caused all the fuss:

OPLR NOTAM A0785/19
 FLW RTE SEGMENTS OF INTL ATS RTE WI LAHORE FIR WILL NOT BE AVBL
 AT OR BELOW FL460 DUE OPS REASONS.

INTL ATS RTE RTE SEGMENT
 =====
 A466 SAKUV-SAJAN
 N644 REGET-D.I.KHAN
 P500/M881 LAKRA-D.I.KHAN

ALTN RTE SEGMENT AVBL FOR TRANSITS AT OR ABOVE FL300:
 SULOM / LA - INDEK DCT NONIB - HANGU - LAJAK / SITAX (VIA SAJAN) / DOBAT (VIA REGET) AND VICE
 VERSA.
 NOTE: FLT BELOW FL300 TO OPR VIA INDEK DCT 3333N07251E (BTR VOR 114.6 MHZ) DCT KALMI NONIB
 AND
 VICE VERSA.

GND - FL460, FM 06TH AUG TO 05TH SEP 2019 BTN 0245-1100 DLY (EXCLUDING SUNDAYS),
 06 AUG 12:30 2019 UNTIL 05 SEP 11:00 2019.
 CREATED: 06 AUG 12:43 2019.

So these airways will be closed between 0245-1100z daily (except Sundays) until Sep 5. And there's an **alternate route** for operators to use, from SULOM on the Indian FIR boundary, to LAJAK on the Afghanistan FIR boundary. Hardly a big deal.

The rest of Pakistan's airspace remains **open to overflights**.

It is true that this week has seen a **worsening of diplomatic ties** between India and Pakistan with

regards to the disputed Kashmir region.

Indian-administered Kashmir has been on **lockdown** since 5th August, when the Indian government decided to take back control of the region by stripping it of its special constitutional status.

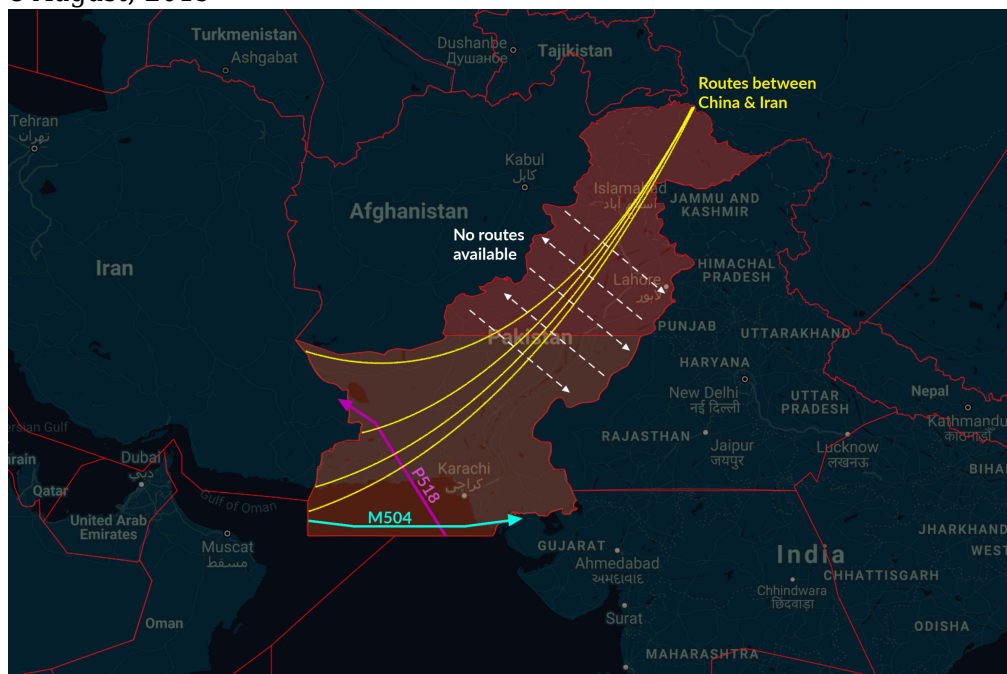
Authorities in Pakistan are not too happy about this, and have responded by downgrading their diplomatic ties with India and suspended trade between the countries. Both countries' air forces are now on high alert, and there has been **daily artillery shelling** along the Line of Control by both sides.

But for now, most of the airspace over Pakistan remains open to overflights.

Another Pakistan overflight route reopens

David Mumford

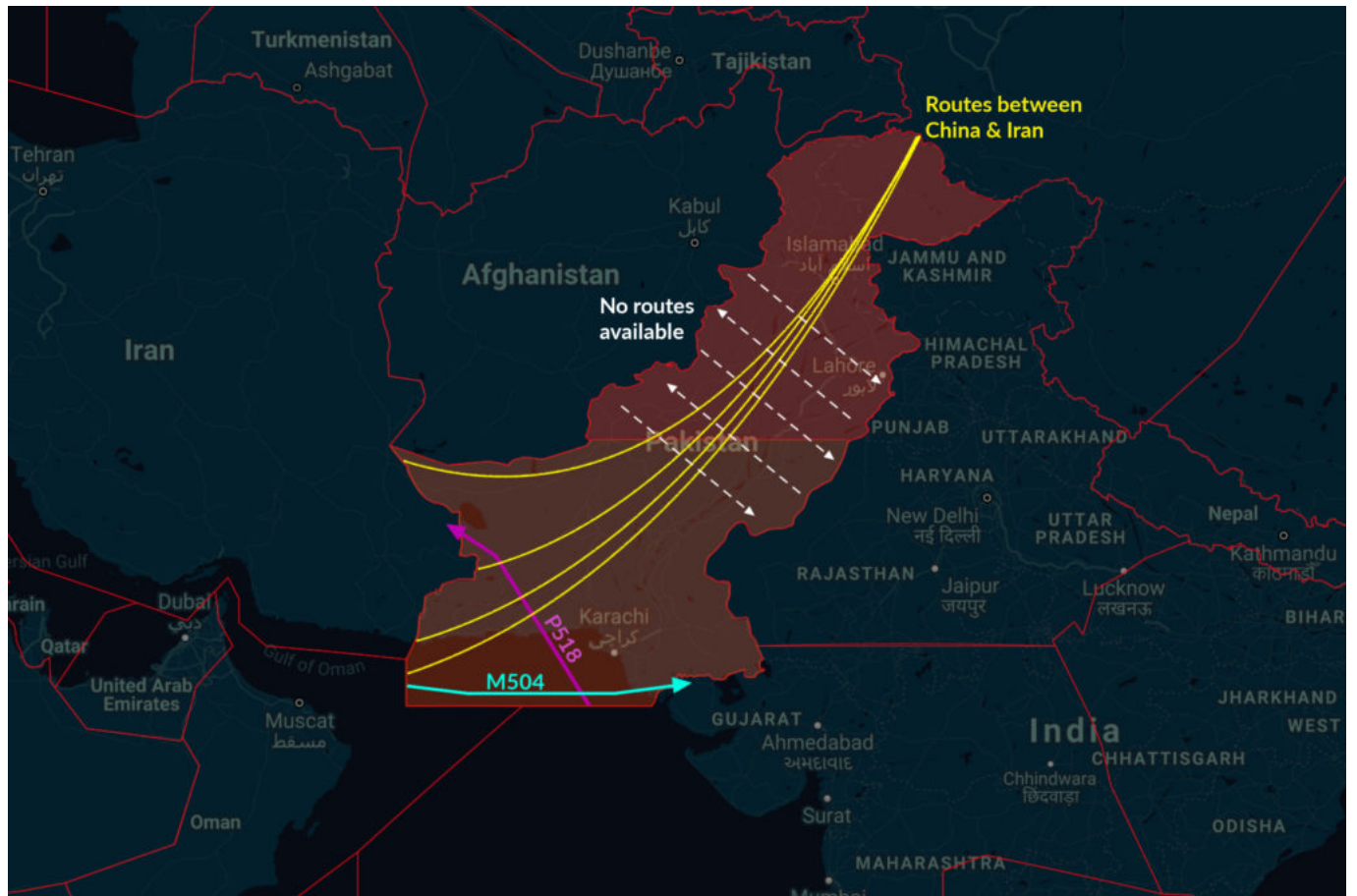
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Three months since the Pakistan airspace closure began, there are now finally some options for overflights between Pakistan and India.

Since April, there has only been one airway available for flights between the two countries – airway **P518**, for **westbound flights only**.

At that time, Pakistan also published a bunch of Notams saying that they would allow **eastbound overflights** on a few airways which connect Oman and India through Pakistan's airspace over the Gulf of Oman, but initially India did not authorise the use of these.



That changed on 2nd June, when India published a Notam saying they would allow eastbound flights to enter Indian airspace at waypoint TELEM.

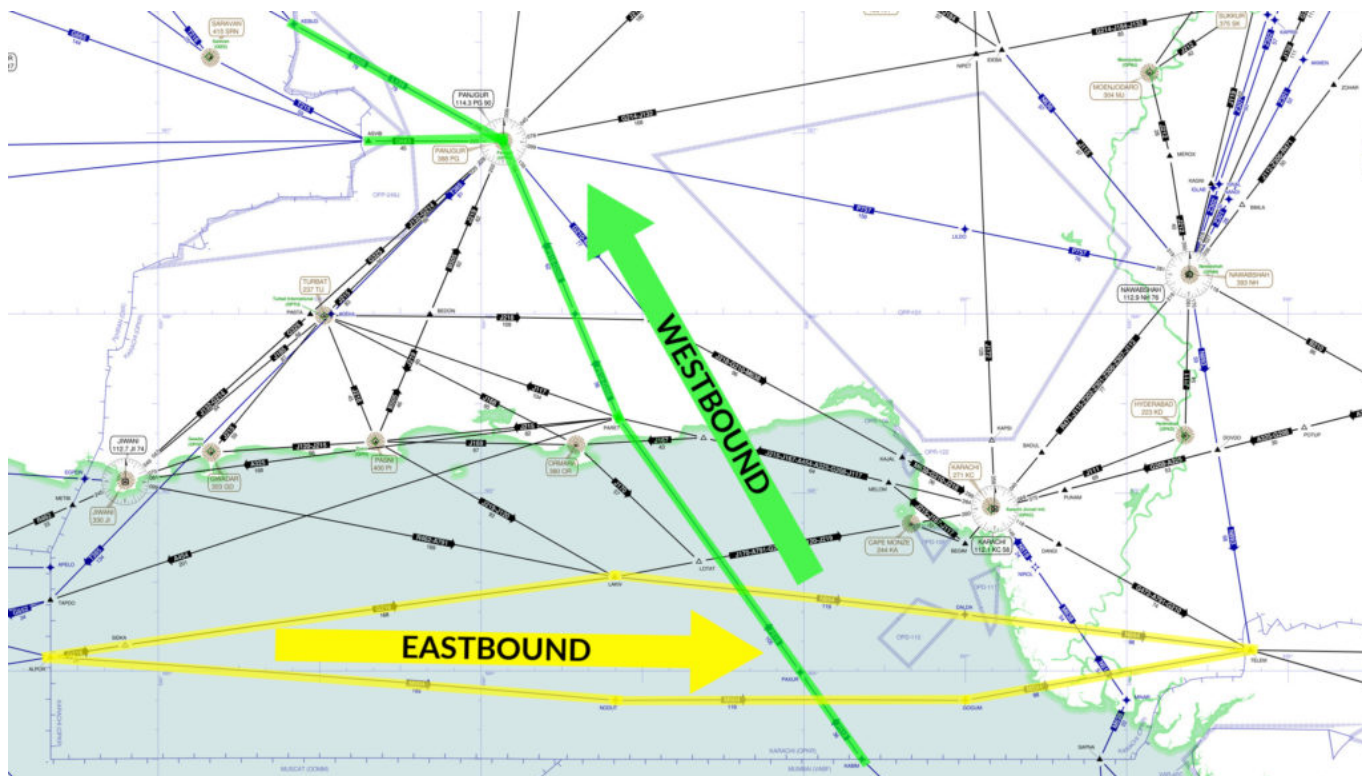
So now, piecing together the Notams issued by both countries, here are the options for overflights:

Westbound

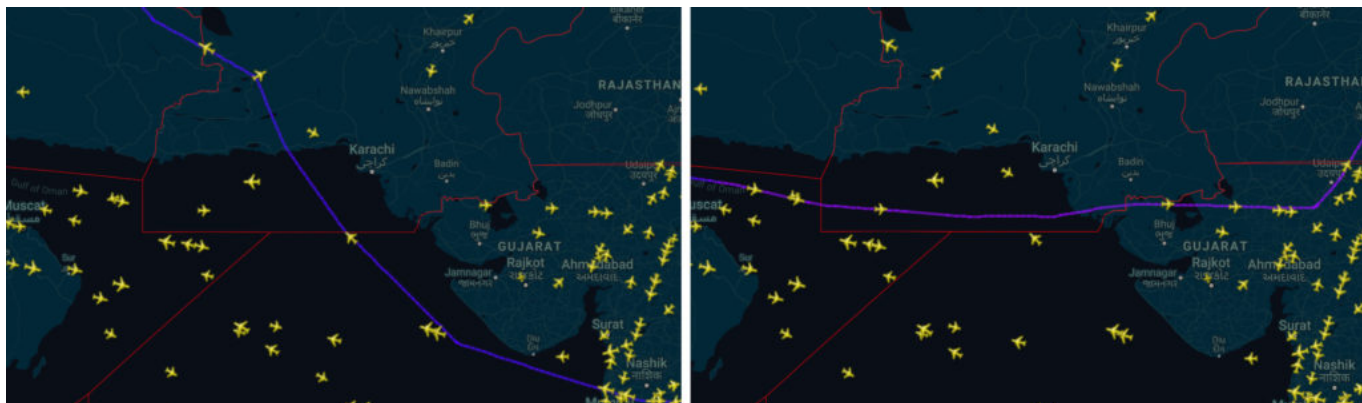
Airway P518, from waypoint KABIM on the Pakistan/India border in the south, to either KEBUD or ASVIB on the the Pakistan/Iran border in the north.

Eastbound

Choice of two routes from waypoint ALPOR on the Oman/Pakistan border in the west, to waypoint TELEM on the Pakistan/India border in the east.



Some airlines have started using both these eastbound and westbound routes, although many continue to avoid Pakistan by routing south over the ocean instead.



India and Oman both therefore remain congested with extra flights – they have published Notams showing all the restrictions on the various different overflight routes, are advising operators to carry extra fuel, and to expect lower flight levels than requested.

Most of the Pakistan airspace restrictions which were introduced in Feb 2019 have been **extended to 27 July**: specific routes remain open for international flights to all the main airports in Pakistan, and for east-west overflights of the country (i.e. between China and Iran).

Why?

On Feb 26, Pakistan shot down an Indian military jet and captured a pilot in a major escalation between the two countries over disputed Kashmir. This came a day after India launched air strikes on militant bases across the border in Pakistan, which itself was a response to a deadly attack on Feb 14 when a militant killed more than 40 Indian troops in Kashmir. The captured pilot has since been returned to India, but tensions remain heightened between the two countries in wake of airstrikes by each side in areas in the border region.

Airspace warning

The US FAA has since updated its airspace warning for Pakistan, which now notes that military activity by Pakistan and India in the disputed Kashmir region poses a potential inadvertent risk to aviation at all altitudes. The US continues to warn against flying into or over Pakistan due to the risks posed by “extremist and militant activities”, although it does not recommend any specific minimum safe altitude for overflights; other countries advise FL250 or above, but we think FL300 is more sensible. More info

If you have further ops info to report, please do! Email us at blog@ops.group, or comment below.