

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

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20 January, 2021



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.

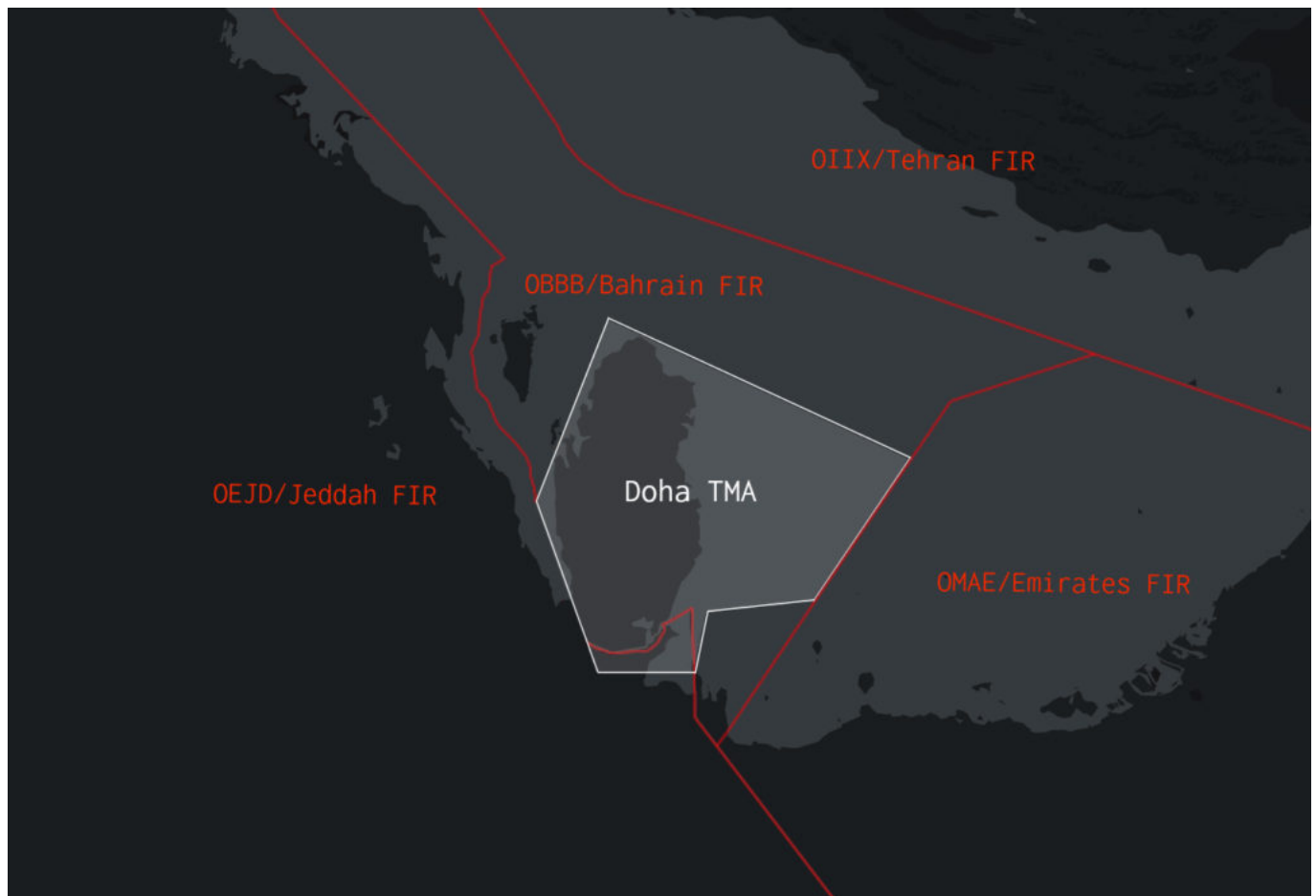
But this is also good news for **foreign operators.** For the past three years, foreign operators had been faced with various different restrictions if trying to fly to/from Qatar – they needed special permission from Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the UAE if planning to overfly any of those countries, and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

Country	Non-QATAR registered	QATAR registered
		Ban on Qatar-registered aircraft lifted 11 Jan 2021.
<b>Egypt (HECC)</b>	No NOTAM'd restrictions.	(NOTAM A0027/21) Temporary RNAV route established for Qatar Registered aircraft between Beirut and North African Airports.
<b>Bahrain (OBBB)</b>	No longer any special requirements for foreign-registered aircraft flying to/from Qatar via Bahrain airspace. However, Bahrain publishes a Standard Routes Document as an AIP SUP which contains all the routes they want you to fly, depending on who you are, and where you are flying from/to. They also publish a bunch of Notams with corrections to this document. So be sure to check both the AIP SUP and the OBBB Notams before planning a route through Bahrain's airspace.	Ban on Qatar-registered aircraft lifted 10 Jan 2021.  (NOTAM G1202/20) Establishment of temporary RNAV route for Qatar Registered Aircraft arriving Qatar Aerodromes.
<b>Saudi Arabia (OEJD)</b>	No NOTAM'd restrictions.	Ban on Qatar-registered aircraft lifted 4 Jan 2021.
<b>UAE (OMAE)</b>	No NOTAM'd restrictions.	Ban on Qatar-registered aircraft lifted 7 Jan 2021.
<b>Oman (OOMM)</b>	No NOTAM'd restrictions.	No NOTAM'd restrictions.
<b>Kuwait (OKAC)</b>	No NOTAM'd restrictions	No NOTAM'd restrictions  Various Traffic Orientation Schemes are NOTAM'd depending on your routing through the Tehran FIR.
<b>Iran (OIIX)</b>	No NOTAM'd restrictions.	OIIX will not be publishing a AIRAC AIP amendment in January or February 2021, so watch for the plethora of NOTAM'd ATS route closures, amendments, or installations. Next AIRAC AIP amendment due 25 March 2021  OEJD/Saudi NOTAM A0604/17 purports to be a NOTAM "On behalf of Republic of Yemen/Aden." "All aircraft registered in the State of Qatar not authorized to overfly Republic of Yemen airspace.
<b>Yemen (OYSC)</b>	See Safeairspace.net - there is ongoing conflict in the region. Risk Level One - DO NOT FLY. We strongly recommend avoiding this airspace entirely.	Although it appears Qatar aircraft are not strictly adhering to this. No such NOTAM issued by OYSC FIR.  See Safeairspace.net - there is ongoing conflict in the region. Risk Level One - DO NOT FLY. We strongly recommend avoiding this airspace entirely.

**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.

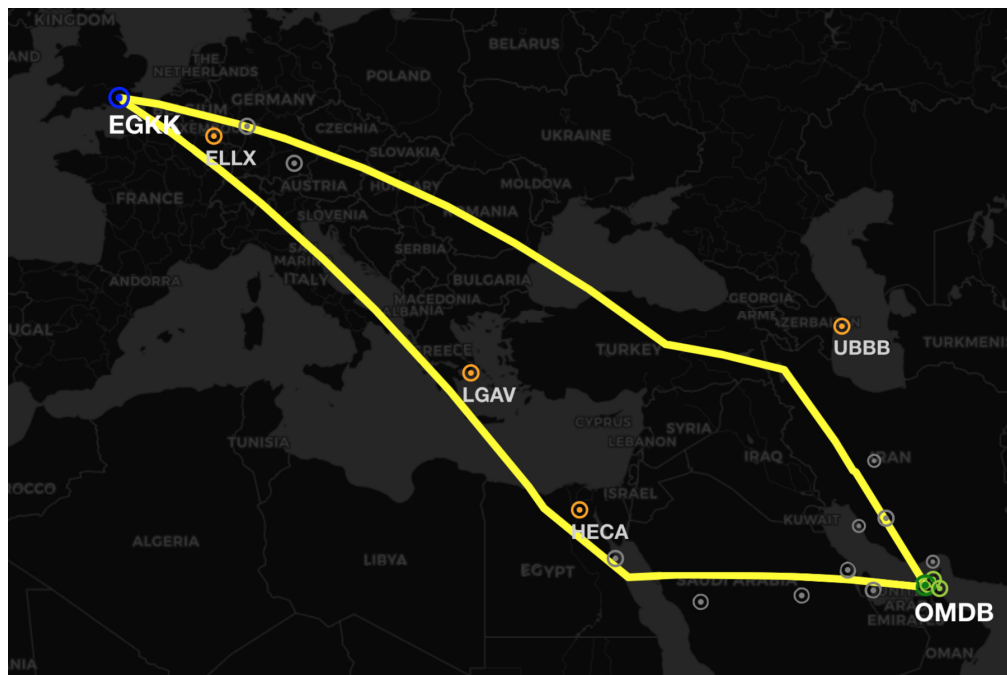


If you have a question or have information to share, use our Slack channels! We are a community based on sharing information and resources to help each other – jump in!

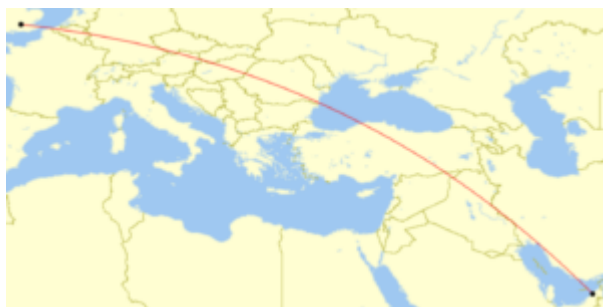
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## Dubai to London - which way is best?

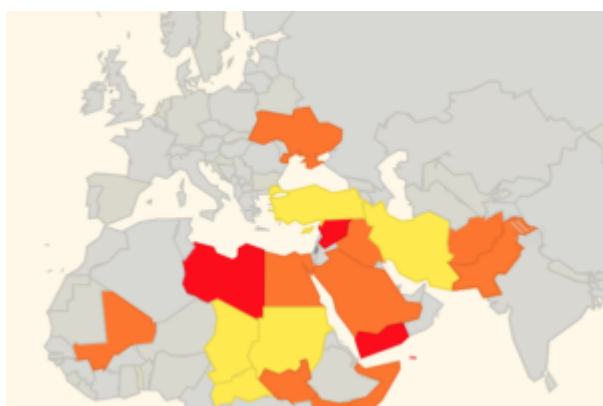
OPSGROUP Team  
20 January, 2021



**In Short:** Two main options, via **Saudi and Egypt** (safer, cheaper but longer) or via **Iran and Turkey** (shorter, busier and geo-politically more unstable). It's a **complicated** planning climate at present. **Review regularly based on latest risk factors.**



There are more business aviation operators flying between the Middle East and Europe than ever before. So we took the time to look over the route options between the two regions. For our example we will be using a flight from Dubai to London, but similar operational considerations are valid for the plethora of route combinations through this whole region.

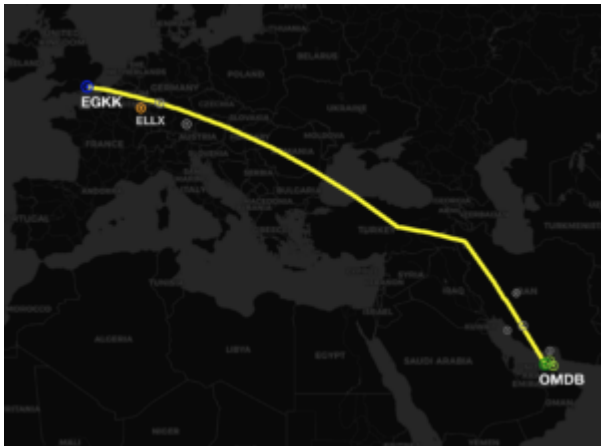


Firstly, we are sure you are a frequent visitor to our safe airspace website. Updated all the time with the latest notes and risk recommendations based on the latest intel. So, first things first, **we want to avoid Syria, Libya and the Sinai Peninsula**. As you can see however, this is a complicated geo-political region for flight planning. The direct great circle route would take us through Syria and would be around 3125nm. But that isn't going to work. So, what else we got?

We will look at the two ways to head over the region. One is via Iran, Turkey and onwards to Europe. The

other over Saudi Arabia and Egypt towards Europe.

### **Option 1: Iran/Turkey**



**Safety:** Both Iran and Turkey are FSB Risk Level: Three –

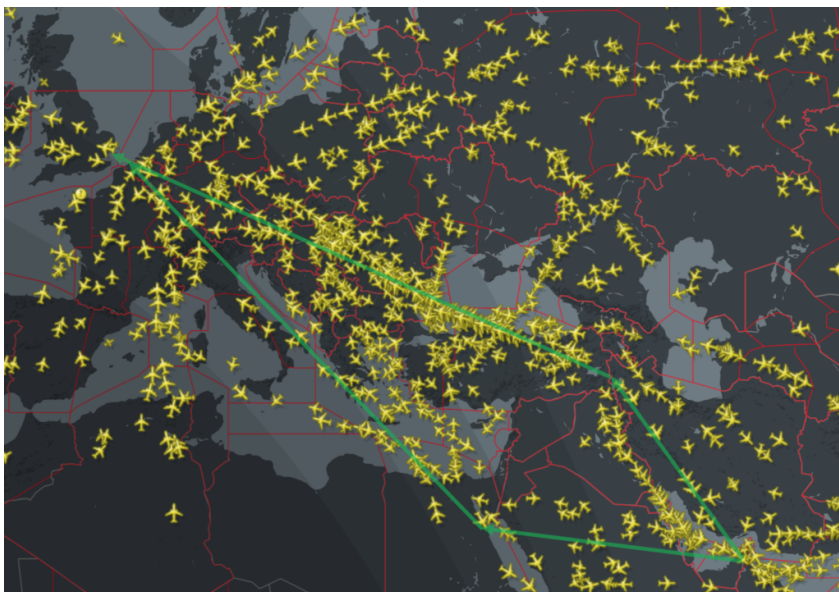
**Caution.** Iran is involved in the ongoing conflict with Syria and several Russian missiles crossed the Tehran FIR and several busy international routes. There are also increased tensions between the USA and Iran at present – if you had to divert in an N-reg aircraft, Iran would not be the friendliest of places to do so. Turkey borders with Syria and we have received multiple reports of GPS interference in the area.

**Distance:** an extra 100nm.

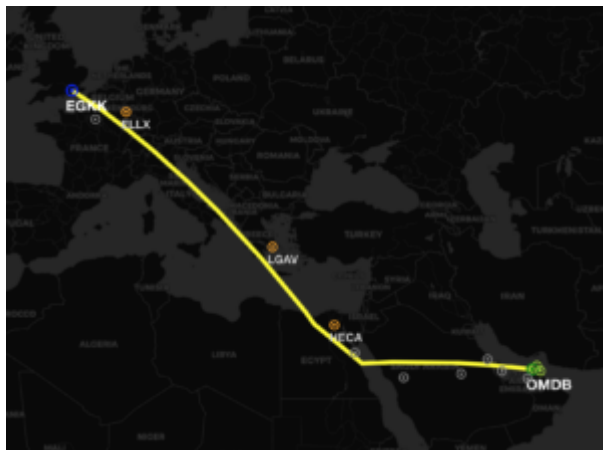
**Time:** About 15 minutes longer than great circle route.

**Ease and Cost:** Iran has higher overflight costs and for US based operators a reminder of the sanctions for dealing directly with Iran, or agencies in Iran. You'll want to use an approved agent if you're from the US (i.e.–not an Iranian company). Iran doesn't work on Fridays, so be aware there. Turkish overflight costs are reasonable and remember that Turkish authorities require the use of an agent to apply for permits.

**Traffic:** The biggest issue with this route is that everyone is using it! It's congested with a lot of airline traffic. It's a major corridor for Asia-Europe flights also. So, getting the levels you want, and off route deviations are more complicated. Things get busy, as you can see!



### **Option 2: Saudi/Egypt**



**Safety:** In terms of airspace warnings and risk, this route is **slightly** better. We have rated Saudi and Egypt airspace as FSB Risk Level: Two – Assessed Risk. Beyond the Sinai Peninsula and the Saudi/Yemen border, generally there is less of a chance of airspace security risks at present.

**Distance:** An extra 300nm from the great circle.

**Time:** Around 45 minutes longer.

**Ease and Cost:** Saudi and Egyptian airspace are generally a cheaper option (\$1,000USD+). In Egypt, by law you have to get your permit through an Egyptian agent, but it's a straight forward process. In Saudi, again, using an agent is best; they normally have three-day lead time – so keep that in mind. Also remember that the CAA only work Sun-Wed during office hours.

**Traffic:** For most of the day, much less of a traffic bottle neck.

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## Bottom line

Of the two options, routing via **Saudi/Egypt** is cheaper, and safer (as long as you steer clear of Egypt's Sinai Peninsular and Saudi's border with Yemen), but it's going to take slightly longer.

## What about Iraq?

We **don't** think it's a good idea. There's a lot of information out there saying certain airways are ok but only at higher levels. But if you needed to get down fast, or even make an unexpected landing, Iraq isn't the place you would want to go at present. **Treat with caution.**

Which one is your favourite choice? Let us know!

## Further reading:

- US updates its Syria airspace warning
- Don't overfly the Tripoli FIR, and don't land at any Libyan airports
- France add Saudi Arabia to their airspace warning list