

US updates its Syria airspace warning

OPSGROUP Team

17 April, 2018



Following the US, UK and French airstrikes on Syria on April 14, the US FAA say there is now a risk posed to civil aviation within 200 nautical miles of the country due to increased military activity, GPS and comms interference, and the potential for more long range surface-to-air missiles in the area.

In the updated US FAA conflict zone Notam and Background Information for Syria, US civil aviation continues to be prohibited from operating within Syrian airspace, but has also now been instructed to “exercise caution” when operating within 200 nautical miles of Syria’s OSTT/Damascus FIR.

As they say in the Background Information doc, here’s why this updated guidance has been published:

“Heightened military activity associated with the Syrian conflict has the potential to spill over into the adjacent airspace managed by neighboring states and eastern portions of the Mediterranean Sea. Military operations may result in the risk of GPS interference, communications jamming, and errant long-range SAMs straying into adjacent airspace within 200 nautical miles of the Damascus Flight Information Region (OSTT FIR). These activities may inadvertently pose hazards to U.S. civil aviation transiting the region. This concern stems from the Syrian military response to previous airstrikes on 10 February 2018, which included Syrian forces launching long-range SAMs. Some of the Syrian SAMs flew into adjacent airspace and landed in Lebanon and Jordan, according to media reporting. GPS interference and communications jamming in the region may also occur associated with the military activity. Some U.S. air carriers have reported GPS interference in portions of the eastern Mediterranean Sea in the period following the 10 February airstrikes, and the interference may have originated from the Damascus Flight Information Region (OSTT FIR) as a defensive response.”

The US FAA haven’t provided a map to show where boundary would lie for 200 nautical miles from the border of Syrian airspace, but we think it would look something like this:

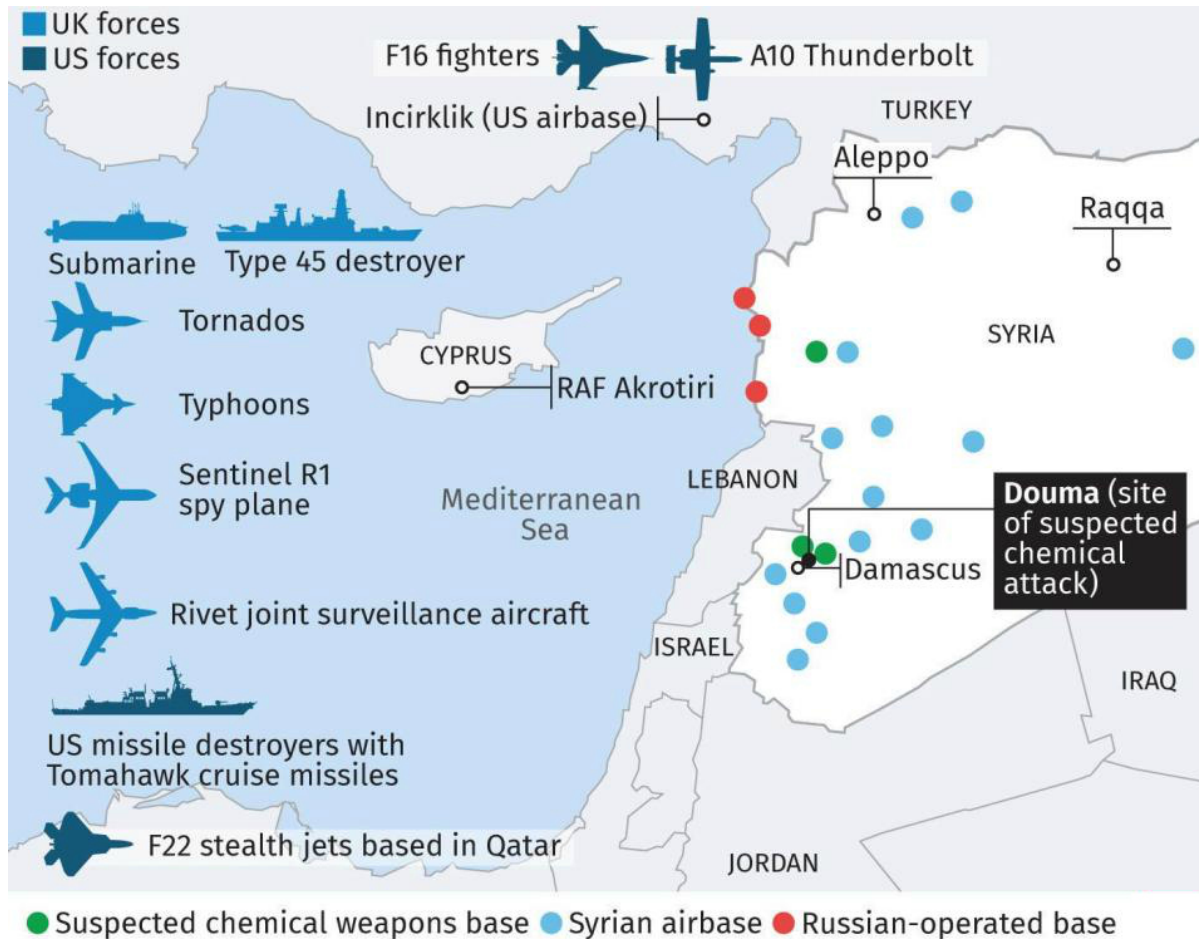


The 200 nautical mile zone would include the entire airspace of Lebanon, Jordan and Israel; half of Turkey and Iraq; and a portion of airspace over the LCCC/Nicosia FIR that covers the whole island of Cyprus!

The area may seem vast, but the possibility of further US, UK and French strikes against Syrian targets does still exist, as well as the Syrian military using surface-to-air missiles in response to any attacks.

During the airstrikes on April 14, the Syrian military reportedly used Russian-made missile systems to attempt to counter the strikes – these included missiles which have the capability to engage aircraft at altitudes well above FL900 and at ranges of around 190 miles.

While there is likely no intention to target civil aircraft, with all the missile defence activity going on in Syria and the spillover into neighbouring countries there still remains a risk of misidentification – and that's what the 200 nautical mile warning seeks to address.

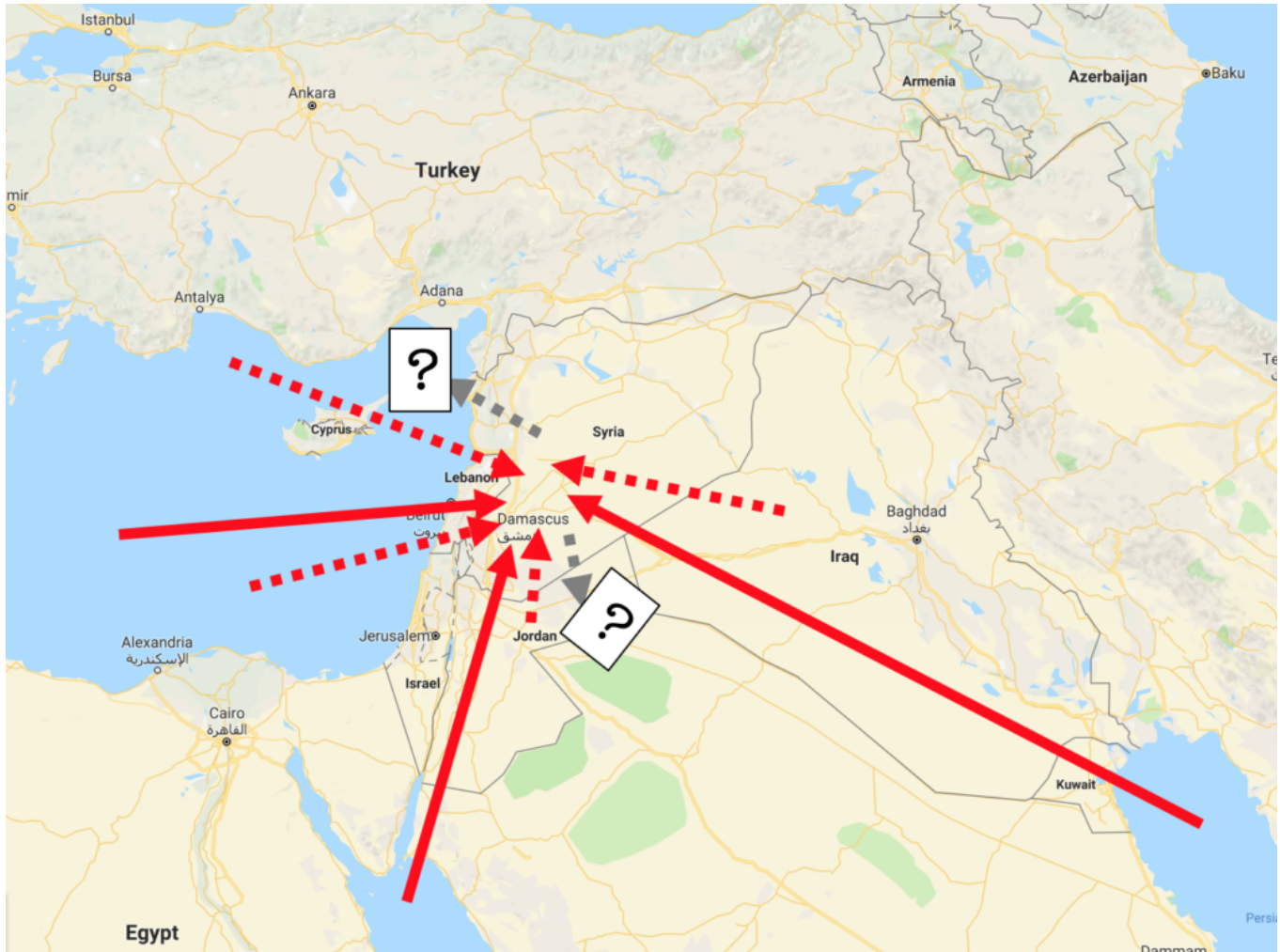


Amidst continued heavy military air presence in the region, almost all airlines are now avoiding Syrian airspace entirely. Lebanon's Beirut based MEA has now also re-routed all of their flights to avoid Syrian Airspace (was using it post recent attacks). Only local operators Fly Damas, Charm Wing Airlines, Syrian Air and Iran's Mahan Air continue to use the airspace.

Here's what the Pentagon had to say about the airstrikes on April 14:

- **105 missiles** were launched in the strikes against Syria. They included **30 Tomahawk missiles fired from** the USS Monterey and seven from the USS Laboon in the **Red Sea**. Another **23 Tomahawk missiles were launched from** the USS Higgins in the **North Arabian Gulf**.
- A submarine, USS John Warner, fired **six Tomahawk missiles from the eastern Mediterranean** and a French frigate in the same area fired another three missiles.
- At least one US Navy warship operating in the Red Sea participated in airstrikes, as well as US B-1 bombers.
- The air assault involved **two US B-1 Lancer bombers**, which fired **19 joint air to surface standoff missiles**. The **British** flew a combination of **Tornado and Typhoon jets**, firing **eight Storm Shadow missiles**, while **French** Rafale and Mirage fighter jets launched **nine SCALP missiles**.
- Four Royal Air Force Tornado GR4's were used in the strikes, launching Storm Shadow missiles at a "former missile base — some 15 miles west of Homs," according to the UK Ministry of Defense.

- **Syria fired 40 surface to air missiles 'at nothing'** after allied air strikes destroyed three Assad chemical sites.
- The United States remains **"locked and loaded"** to launch further attacks.
- **United States** and Allies **maintain positive posture of force** in the region, especially in the air.



*105 missiles launched from multiple locations in the region.
Over 40 Syrian surface to air missiles fired "at nothing".*

Further Reading:

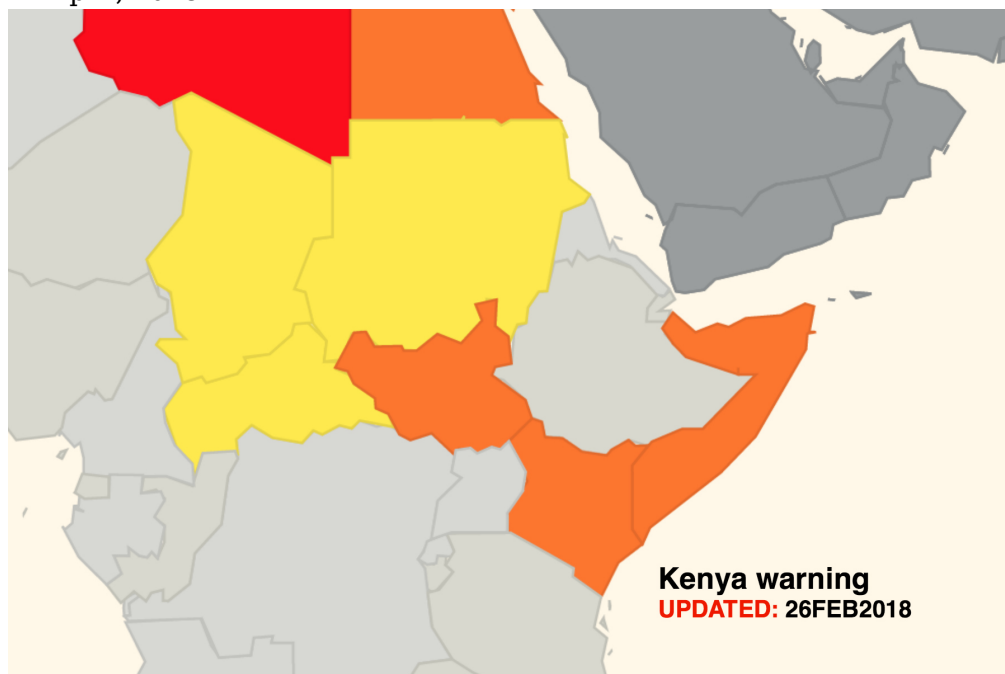
- Everything We Know (And No One Has Said So Far) About The First Wave Of Air Strikes On Syria.
- US FAA KICZ Notam 9/18 - Syria.
- US FAA Background Notice.
- Safeairspace has been updated to reflect the latest information.
- And finally, just in case you were wondering what the airspace authorities in Cyprus have to say about all this, here's the superbly vague Notam they issued on the subject:

THE DEPARTMENT OF CIVIL AVIATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS IS CONTINUOUSLY MONITORING THE GEOPOLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE REGION AND WILL NOTIFY THE AVIATION COMMUNITY IF AND WHEN ANY RELEVANT AND RELIABLE INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE. THE DEPARTMENT OF CIVIL AVIATION IS TAKING ALL APPROPRIATE ACTION TO SAFEGUARD THE SAFETY OF FLIGHTS. 12 APR 15:25 2018 UNTIL 12 JUL 15:00 2018 ESTIMATED. CREATED: 12 APR 15:26 2018

If you have anything to share that we've missed, please tell us by email bulletin@fsbureau.org

Kenya airspace threat downgraded

David Mumford
17 April, 2018



The FAA has revised its warning for Kenyan airspace – the area to ‘exercise caution’ is now limited **only** to that airspace east of 40 degrees East longitude below FL260 (i.e. the border region with Somalia, and 12nm off the east coast of Kenya). Prior to this, their warning applied to **all** airspace in Kenya below FL260.

Published on 26 Feb 2018, the warning maintains the same wording to clarify the type of weapons and phases of flight that the FAA is concerned about, specifically:

- fire from small arms,
- indirect fire weapons (such as mortars and rockets), and
- anti-aircraft weapons such as MANPADS.

The scenarios considered highest risk include :

- landings and takeoffs,
- low altitudes, and
- aircraft on the ground.

The updated guidance is intended for US operators and FAA License holders, but in reality is used by most International Operators including EU and Asian carriers, since only four countries currently provide useful information on airspace security and conflict zones.

The Notam uses FL260 as the minimum safe level, though we would suggest, as usual, that a higher level closer to FL300 is more sensible.

You can read the NOTAM in full on our Kenya page on **SafeAirspace.net**, a **collaborative and information sharing tool used by airlines, business jet operators, state agencies, military, and private members of OPSGROUP**.

A319, A330 hit by gunfire at Tripoli

David Mumford
17 April, 2018



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.

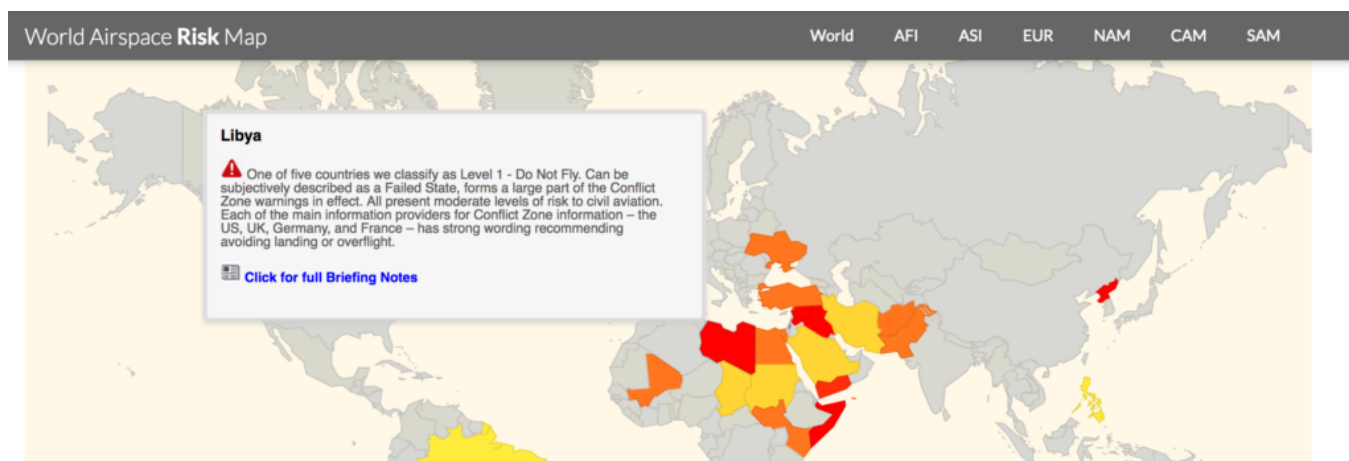
Back in July 2017, we reported on the **intense fighting that took place at Mitiga airport where 5 people were killed and 32 injured**, and then on 19 Oct 2017, a Libyan Airlines A330 at the airport was hit by gunfire during an exchange of fire between local militia in the district directly south of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

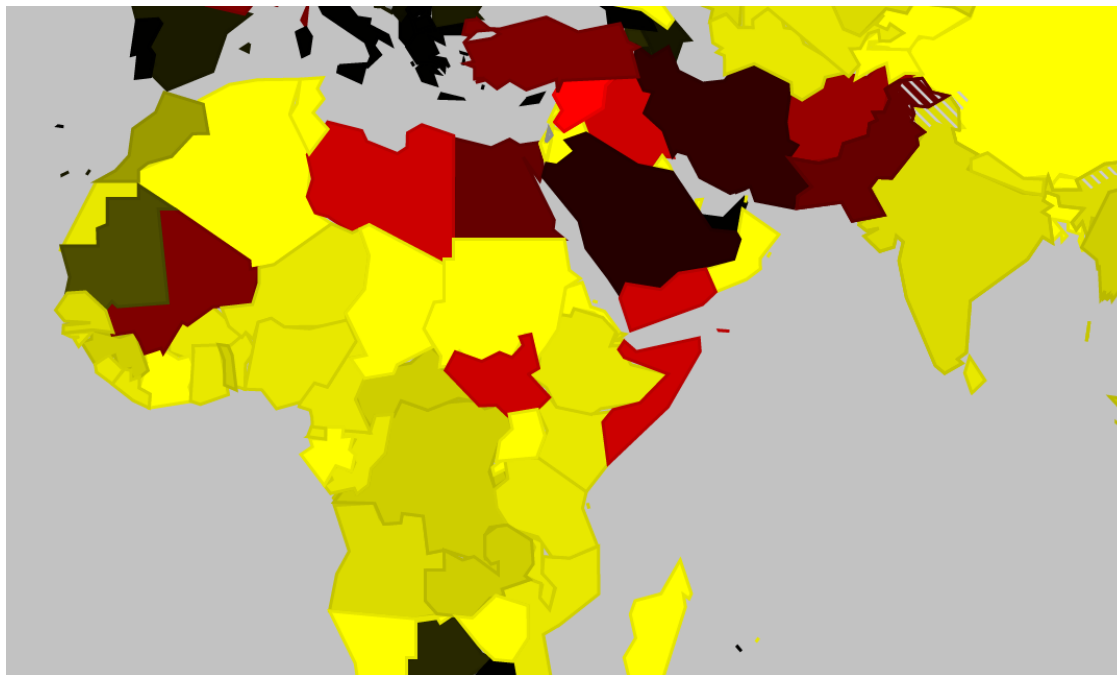
So we suggest you ignore whatever gets pumped out on the HLLL FIR Notams about airports being "AVAILABLE H24 FOR INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS AND EN-ROUTE DIVERSIONS". (You can read that nonsense in full by clicking [here](#).)

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



Unsafe Airspace - a summary

Declan Selleck
17 April, 2018



With the events surrounding the shootdown of MAS17, risk assessment of potentially unsafe airspace has given far greater weighting to the situation on the ground. Access to reliable information to determine the ever-changing risk level, is by nature of it's inherent uncertainty, challenging.

Today we published International Ops Notice 02/16 - "Unsafe Airspace".

Three levels of airspace risk are used in our assessment.

- LEVEL 1. Moderate risk - No Fly
- LEVEL 2. Assessed risk
- LEVEL 3. Caution

The countries that issue the most relevant updates for unsafe airspace are: The US (FAA) - through FDC Notams and SFARs, the UK (NATS) - AIP and Notam, Germany (DFS) - Notam, France (DGAC)- AIC. **In general, the Civil Aviation Authorities of the countries whose airspace is determined to be unsafe are unlikely to issue reliable guidance.**

Five countries are currently included in the LEVEL 1 - Moderate Risk category: Libya, Syria, Iraq, Somalia, and Yemen.

The basis for inclusion is the highly unstable current events on the ground, and in all cases the ground factions having access to RPG's, Surface-Air missiles. We strongly recommend avoiding this airspace entirely. All countries have multiple warnings, and your country of registry is likely to have issued specific instructions not to penetrate these airspaces.

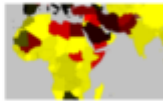
Download the full notice.

References:

- **Flight Service Bureau Notice 02/16**



SUBJECT:
ENROUTE AIRSPACE SUMMARY
VALID DATE: 08 JUN 2016



ShoeBn/Tenr

With the events surrounding the situation of IS/IS*, the assessment of potential conflict airspace has given for greater weighting to the situation on the ground. Access to reliable information to determine the ever-changing risk level, is by nature of the inherent uncertainty, changing. Through FSB Briefings and the work of The Airline Cooperatives, we give to provide operators with a useful summary of the current situation.

Danger

In assessing risk to flight over each country's borders, two scenarios are considered for our flight:
1. Risk of situation, situation is resolved.
2. Aircraft emergency requiring a landing.

Both these elements are taken into consideration in assessing a classification. The highest level of risk here is "ShoeBn" or the level that calling it "High" or "Severe" would exaggerate the actual level of risk in landing or overflying the territories concerned.

Classification

Three levels of airspace risk are used in our assessment:

LEVEL 1: Moderate risk - No Fly
LEVEL 2: Increased risk
LEVEL 3: Conflict

Guidance

This document is intended to provide operator guidance in determining whether to enter specific airspace. Exclusion from this advice, naturally, does not mean that other airspace is risk free.

Information Sources

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

- US (FAA) - through FOC/Notams and DM/Info
- UK (NATIS) - AIP and Notams
- Germany (DFS) - Notams
- France (DGAC) - AIC

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