



Iraq: Violence Poses Elevated Risk to Civil Aviation amidst Political Turmoil

Ongoing political turmoil, militant activities, and third-party actors' military operations in Iraq present a challenging security environment, which poses an elevated risk to civil aviation-related infrastructure and safety-of-flight hazards in the near term, despite the absence of any known, specific, credible threats to civil aviation.

On 28 September 2022, political supporters of Iraq's influential Shia religious leader Muqtada al-Sadr attempted to storm the Green Zone in Baghdad to force their way past security guards during an Iraqi Parliament session. On 28 and 29 September, unknown entities fired rockets, which impacted in the Green Zone, damaging several buildings in close proximity to the Parliament complex and causing flight disruptions at nearby Baghdad International Airport (ICAO Code: ORBI).

Further contributing to the difficult security environment in Iraq, Iran continues to undermine security through arming, training, or otherwise facilitating hostile action by Iranian-aligned militia groups (IAMGs) and to conduct intermittent kinetic attacks using a variety of weapons, including firing ballistic missiles from Iranian territory on targets in northern Iraq. IAMGs and other militant groups have access to weaponized unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) and other anti-aircraft-capable weapons, including man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS) and the Iranian-produced 358 loitering surface-to-air missile (SAM). IAMGs have previously prioritized U.S. and coalition operations at airbases for attack. While IAMG attacks in Iraq have reduced in recent months, they remain a concern.

IAMGs active in Iraq also have demonstrated their willingness to conduct attacks outside Iraq, as observed in the 15 August long-range one-way attack with two KAS-04 UAS against U.S. interests at At-Tanf, Syria. IAMG attacks and weapons pose an inadvertent risk to civil aviation operations in the Baghdad Flight Information Region (FIR) (ORBB) at altitudes below flight level (FL) 320. Militant operators may lack appropriate training and may not have insight into the full airspace picture in Iraq making it difficult for them to conduct effective target identification and airspace de-confliction during attack operations.

Iranian and other third-party cross-border operations in Iraq continue to present a potential risk concern for civil aircraft flying at low altitudes in the vicinity of the targeted location(s) and for aircraft on the ground at airports collocated with, or in close proximity to, the intended targets. On 24 September, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) announced the start of an operation against Kurdish separatists in which Iran reportedly used weaponized UAS, artillery, and ballistic missiles in the Iraqi Kurdistan region (IKR). As part of these ongoing operations, Iran launched an unprecedented attack on the IKR that included over 70 missiles and numerous UAS attacks. After the announced initiation of the IRGC operation, Tehran issued two Notices to Air Missions (NOTAMs), A2959/22 and A2960/22, on 28 September, advising of risks to civil aviation in western Iran and in northeastern Iraq. ***Although, the FAA is not***

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aware of any incidents reported by civil operators during the recent Iranian cross-border operations, the potential for further operations remains concerning and warrants further monitoring for any potentially significant changes in the risk environment for U.S. civil overflight operations.

Finally, Turkey continues separate cross-border operations as part of an announced military action to clear Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) forces from the Turkey-Syria-Iraq border region. Turkish operations have included unannounced and uncoordinated artillery fire and manned and unmanned airstrikes.

Special Federal Aviation Regulation (SFAR) No. 77, 14 C.F.R. § 91.1605, prohibits U.S. civil aviation operations in that Baghdad FIR (ORBB) at altitudes below FL320. SFAR No. 117, 14 C.F.R. § 91.1617, prohibits U.S. civil aviation operations in the Tehran FIR (OIIX) at all altitudes. Copies of all FAA-issued flight prohibition SFARs, flight prohibition NOTAMs, and advisory NOTAMs are available on FAA's Prohibitions, Restrictions, and Notices website at: http://www.faa.gov/air_traffic/publications/us_restrictions/.

If there are any questions, please contact the FAA Threat Analysis Division (AXE-200) at 202-267-3203 or FAA-Watch@faa.gov.

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