



Iraq: FAA Permits U.S. Civil Aviation to Resume Overflights above FL320

On 22 October 2021, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) rescinded Notice-to-Airmen (NOTAM) KICZ A0036/20, which prohibited U.S. civil aviation operations in the Baghdad Flight Information Region (FIR) (ORBB) at all altitudes. Special Federal Aviation Regulation (SFAR) No. 77, 14 C.F.R. § 91.1605, remains in effect and continues to prohibit U.S. civil aviation operations in the Baghdad FIR at altitudes below Flight Level (FL) 320 due to the continued unacceptable level of risk to the safety of U.S. civil aviation operations at those altitudes.

The FAA assesses the risk to U.S. civil aviation operations in the Baghdad FIR at altitudes at or above FL320 has diminished sufficiently that U.S. civil aviation may safely resume operations at those altitudes. Since the FAA issued NOTAM KICZ A0036/20 in March 2020, there have been no known threats or attempted attacks against aircraft operating at altitudes at or above FL320. Although ground-based attacks against U.S. and Coalition forces in Iraq continue, and incidents involving weaponized unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) have risen significantly, these attacks have posed no direct threat to civil aircraft overflying the Baghdad FIR at or above FL320.

Outlook:

Iranian-aligned militant groups (IAMGs) in Iraq have repeatedly targeted U.S. interests in Iraq, which are often collocated with airports and airfields used by civil aircraft, e.g., U.S. facilities at Baghdad International Airport (ICAO: ORBI) and Erbil International Airport (ICAO: ORER), in an attempt to influence a U.S. force withdrawal from Iraq. These attacks have included the use of indirect fire weapons, such as rockets, and weaponized UAS, presenting a safety-of-flight hazard to civil aircraft during low-altitude phases of flight, including approach and departure, and pose a risk to civil aircraft while on the ground at the targeted airports. Additionally, IAMGs and other extremist groups have access to anti-aircraft weapons systems, to include the Fateh-358 surface-to-air missile (SAM), which present an inadvertent risk to civil aviation operations at altitudes below FL320. Attacks on U.S. interests and Coalition may increase in the near term as militia groups try to influence foreign military troops' withdrawal by year's end.

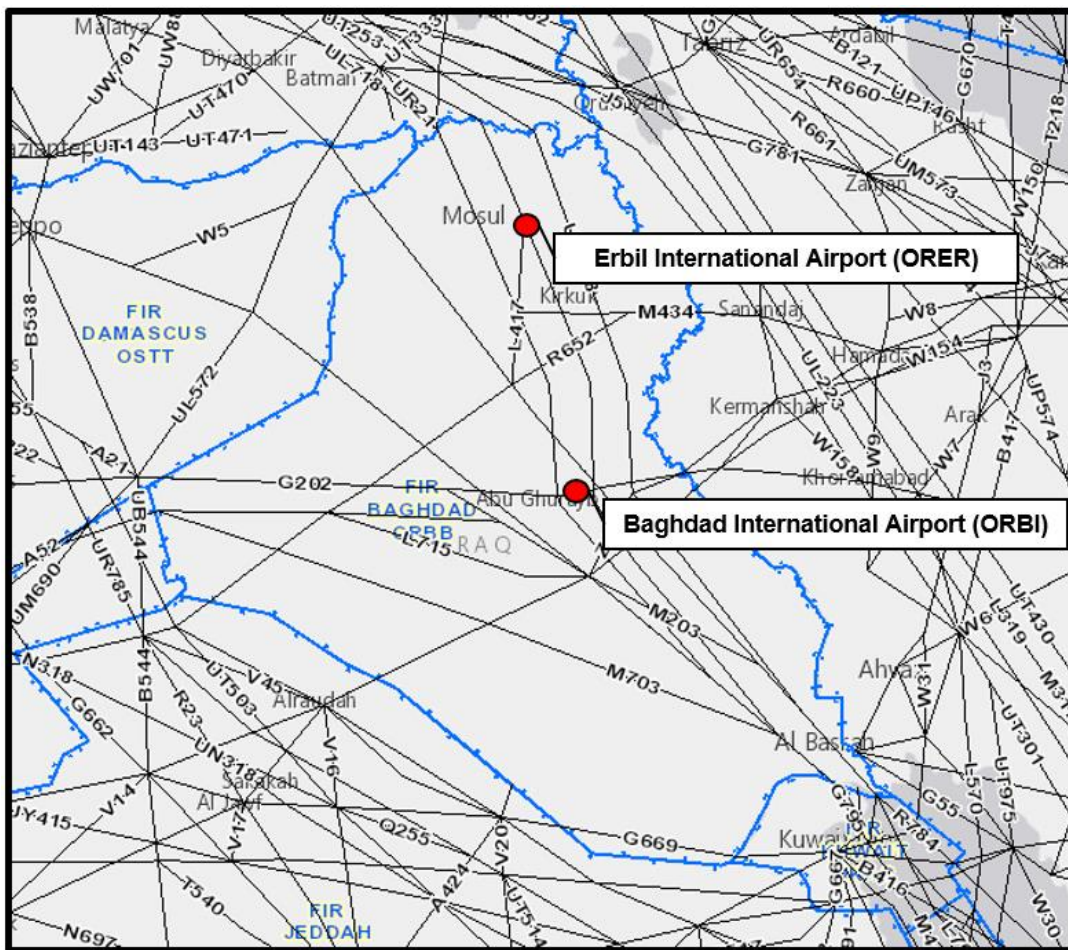
Separately, neighboring countries cross-border activities likely will continue to present a safety-of-flight hazard at altitudes below FL320. Iran and Turkey likely will continue limited cross-border operations into northern Iraq using various military capabilities, including manned and unmanned aircraft and indirect fire weapons. Additionally, there remains limited spillover risk emanating from the Syrian conflict, as Syrian air defense forces respond to third party airstrikes, including the launching of SA-5 long-range SAMs potentially impacting or detonating in adjacent airspace. The last known such incident in the Baghdad FIR occurred on 08 October 2021, when Syrian air defense forces launched an SA-5 that impacted in an uninhabited area

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of western Iraq near al-Qaim. A check of open source flight tracking tools indicated there were no civil aircraft operating in or near the likely missile trajectory or point of impact in western Iraq for the SA-5 incident on 08 October.

While the rescission of NOTAM KICZ A0036/20 permits U.S. civil flight operations to resume in the Baghdad FIR (ORBB) at altitudes at or above FL320, the FAA continues to prohibit U.S. civil aviation operations in the Baghdad FIR (ORBB) at altitudes below FL320 under SFAR No. 77. Additionally, the FAA also maintains advisory NOTAM KICZ A0009/18, which warns U.S. civil aviation to exercise caution when operating in airspace within 200NM of the Damascus FIR (OSTT) due to heightened military activity in and around Syria. 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/.



The Baghdad FIR (ORBB) with high-level air routes.

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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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