



International Civil Aviation Organization

Special Coordination Meeting on the Implementation of ATM Contingency Arrangements

(Muscat, Oman, 16 – 18 July 2019)

Agenda Item 4: Enhanced Contingency Arrangements/Recovery Plans

**DISRUPTION OF AIR TRAFFIC FLOW IN AIRSPACE
OVER STRAIGHT OF HORMUZ ON THE UAE AIR TRAFFIC**

(Presented by the United Arab Emirates)

SUMMARY

The purpose of this working paper is to share the operational impact on the Emirates FIR and the UAE's aviation stakeholders and to urge states to enhance FIR's that could get congested rapidly.

Actions by the meeting are in paragraph 3.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 A Number of FIR's in ICAO MID region are currently disrupted by conflict zones. This limits the available options for alternative routes if new conflict(s) zone(s) arises.

1.2 The combination of FIR's affected by conflict zones and FIR's that were forced to impose ATFM measures, due to congestions caused by rerouting, is impacting not only Middle Eastern Airlines but also air traffic movement globally.

1.3 This working paper analyses the impact of the recent incident in the Strait of Hormuz, resulting in an airspace disruption in the region, and identifies airspaces that requires enhancements.

2. DISCUSSIONS

2.1 Under normal circumstances the airspace in close vicinity to where a US military drone was shot down, is heavily used by traffic originating from/to Asia, US and CIS countries. This airspace is also an important crossroad between Europe and Northern India/South East Asia.

2.2 A Day after the incident occurred, the FAA issued a NOTAM prohibiting all US Civil Aircraft operators from entering the Tehran FIR in the area above the Arabian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. Similar measures were taken by some other ICAO state members and a number of airlines, resulting in avoidance of the airspace over the Strait of Hormuz and therefore disruption to the ordinary traffic flow.

2.3 During the contingency phase, it was revealed that due to the present airspace restrictions / limitations in Baghdad, Karachi and Damascus FIR's, avoidance options of the affected airspace are very limited and the situation worsened as ATFM measures were introduced. The risk of additional workload and increased air traffic control incidents was very high, but as a result of close coordination with ICAO CCT and neighboring ANSP's, these risks were mitigated and now under close monitoring by the concerned states.

2.4 Emirates FIR operations were affected by the decision of states and airlines not to use a specific portion of the airspace above the Gulf of Oman. The impact occurred in two ways; some airlines elected to avoid the Strait of Hormuz from the north hence did not enter the Emirates FIR while other airlines elected to avoid it from the south, thus adding additional movements to the Emirates FIR. During the contingency and to date, no ATFM measures were imposed by the Emirates ACC and all rerouted traffic were accommodated without any delay.

2.5 UAE has conducted an internal analysis in conjunction with the UAE aviation stakeholders, to review the impact of the disruption to the network; The analysis and feedback that was received by aircraft operators that experienced the disruption, revealed that the airspace below might get congested very rapidly hence requiring improvements:

2.5.1 Karachi FIR

Some routes remain closed in Karachi FIR leading to extra delays and limiting rerouting options. Additional routes are required in the southern part of Karachi FIR.

2.5.2 Baghdad FIR

Baghdad FIR provides an essential link between the Middle East and Europe. Limited number of routes in this area, makes this airspace congested and leads to extra delays as well as has an adverse effect on flight profile by forcing aircraft to maintain low altitudes. UAE request relevant states to study the possibility to establish new routes connecting Kuwait, Bagdad and Ankara FIRs.

2.5.3 Additional routes between Jeddah and Cairo FIR

In case Bagdad FIR gets congested, airlines shall have an option to reroute via Jeddah and Cairo FIR's. Currently limited number of routes are available in this area, and more routes required to be introduced.

2.5.4 Airspace above Arabian Sea/Indian Ocean

The airspace above Arabian Sea/Indian Ocean was already congested before the airspace disruptions in Karachi FIR and over the Strait of Hormuz. In February 2019 as an initiative from the UAE, Oman, India and IATA were invited to a meeting in Abu Dhabi and areas for possible enhancement were identified. Results of the meeting were presented in MIDANPIRG/17 and RASG-MID/7 Meeting in Apr 2019.

As a result of the Karachi FIR closure, ATFM measures were increased and are still enforced to date. The UAE requests to introduce effective measures to alleviate the current ATFM measures and to continue the efforts to enhance the airspace capacity over the Arabian Sea/Indian Ocean as described in MIDANPIRG/17 & RASG-MID/7-WP/37.

3. ACTION BY THE MEETING

3.1 The meeting is invited to:

- a) note the information in this working paper;
- b) commend the involved FIRs and the CCT for their immediate and swift response to the disruption; and
- c) encourage States to work collaboratively with ICAO, IATA and relevant stakeholders to improve airspace capacity and establish more routes as proposed in this WP.

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