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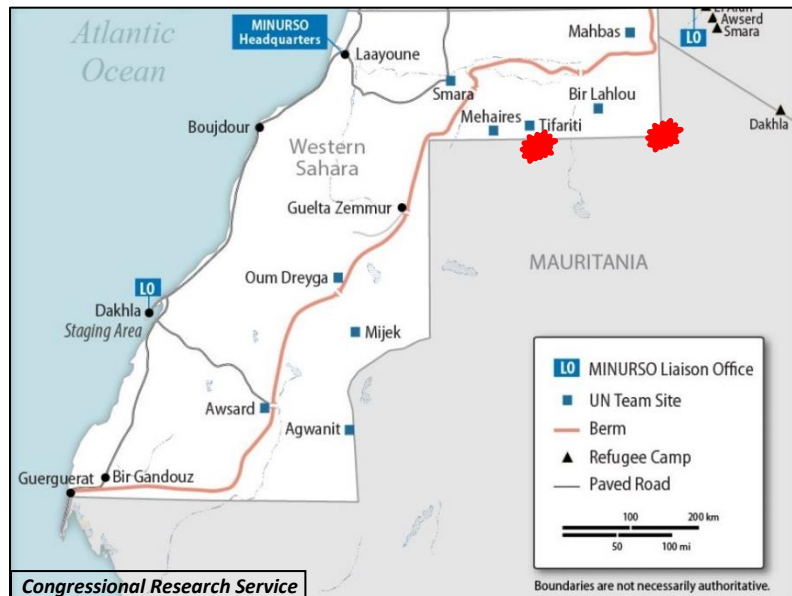
**FAA Threat Analysis Division
Morocco/Western Sahara – Information Note
as of 19 November 2020**

**Note: This information is provided for situational awareness only
and does not constitute an FAA flight advisory or prohibition.**

Morocco / Western Sahara – Potential Conflict Concerns

On 13 November 2020, the Moroccan army entered the demilitarized buffer strip between Moroccan-controlled Western Sahara and Mauritania and cleared the pro-Polisario Front protestors who had been blocking the road near the town of Guerguerat since 21 October. Hundreds of trucks pass through the Guerguerat border crossing each day, which makes the road an essential import route for Mauritania. On 14 November, the leader of the Polisario Front, Western Sahara's independence movement, stated the Moroccan Army had violated the terms of the 1991 ceasefire when it entered the demilitarized buffer zone. As a result, the Polisario Front declared the 29-year ceasefire with Morocco was at an end, and stated it would immediately resume armed operations against Moroccan military forces. Morocco has said its military operations were limited and it believes the ceasefire agreement remains in effect.

In press statements since 14 November, the Polisario Front has claimed Moroccan military unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) have operated over Polisario-controlled areas. The Polisario Front has conducted indirect fire attacks against Moroccan security posts, but there are no reports of surface-to-air fire or other air defense operations. The Polisario Front likely still has access to legacy SA-7 man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS) and tactical surface-to-air missile (SAM) systems, including SA-9s, which present a low altitude inadvertent risk to civil aviation operating in the contested region. SA-7 MANPADS and SA-9 SAMs present a risk up to 3,500 meters/11,483 feet.



Since Spain withdrew from its former colony in 1975, Morocco and the Algerian-backed Polisario Front have vied for control of Western Sahara. During the 1975 to 1991 Western Saharan War, the Polisario Front employed SA-7s against multiple military and civil aircraft, including several Royal Moroccan Air Force fighter aircraft and a Mauritanian Air Force Britten-Norman Defender transport aircraft. In 1985, the Polisario Front misidentified a civil Dornier Do 228 twin-turboprop aircraft operating at 2,743 meters/9,000 feet and shot it down with an SA-7 over Western Sahara, killing all three crewmembers. The Polisario Front later claimed to have mistaken the German-registered civil aircraft for a Moroccan military reconnaissance aircraft. In 1988, the Polisario

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Front also used SA-7s when it mistakenly shot down two civil Douglas DC-7CFs at 3,353 meters/11,000 feet flying from Dakar, Senegal, to Agadir, Morocco. Since 1991, the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) peacekeeping mission has monitored the ceasefire between the parties along a Moroccan-built berm of approximately 1,400 kilometers (869.9 miles) dividing the disputed territory.

The airspace over Western Sahara falls within both the Canarias (GCCC) and the Dakar (GOOO) Flight Information Regions (FIRs), potentially complicating airspace management should the conflict escalate. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) continues to closely monitor the risk environment for U.S. civil aviation in the region. Hostilities in Western Sahara may escalate quickly with little or no warning. Civil operators should remain in communications with the appropriate air traffic control authorities, closely monitor applicable Notice to Airmen (NOTAMs), and be prepared for the possibility of additional airspace restrictions, potential rerouting, and holds when operating in the region.

Copies of FAA-issued flight prohibition Special Federal Aviation Regulations (SFARs), flight prohibition NOTAMs, and advisory NOTAMs are posted as a reference on the FAA Prohibitions, Restrictions and Notices website at: http://www.faa.gov/air_traffic/publications/us_restrictions/. A summary of current FAA-issued flight prohibition and advisory NOTAMs and flight prohibition SFARs is also provided as an attachment.

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