



Federal Aviation Administration

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Saudi Arabia/Yemen: Houthi UAS Attack in Riyadh

On 10 March 2022, Yemen-based Houthi forces launched an attack against an Aramco oil refinery in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, utilizing multiple unmanned aircraft systems (UAS), which caused a small fire. No major damage or casualties were reported. The most recent prior long range attack into Saudi Arabia occurred on 3 January 2022 near Taif.

Long range Houthi UAS and missile attacks and the associated defensive operations pose an inadvertent risk to civil aviation operating in the region and to aircraft on the ground at potentially targeted airports; however Saudi Arabia's flight advisory and tactical procedures to deconflict the airspace during Houthi attacks and associated defensive engagements help mitigate the risk.

The recent Houthi attack demonstrates an ongoing capability to threaten key sites inside Saudi Arabia. Houthi forces have access to a variety of ballistic missiles and weaponized UAS capable of targeting critical infrastructure, including international airports, across the Arabian Peninsula. Long-range attacks tend to be infrequent, with the vast majority of Houthi missile and UAS cross-border incidents occurring in the southwestern border region of Saudi Arabia. As a result, three dual-use airports in the southwestern border region (Abha International Airport (ICAO: OEAB), Jizan Regional Airport (ICAO: OEGN), and Najran Regional Airport (ICAO: OENG) have been frequently targeted, posing a direct risk to civil aviation operating at those Saudi airports. However, these three airports are not last-point-of-departure (LPD) airports for direct service to the United States. Cross-border Houthi UAS attacks against Saudi Arabia have occurred near daily since 2021, although the majority occur in the southwest.

In addition to long-range attacks on Saudi Arabian critical infrastructure, the Houthis also conducted long-range UAS and missile attacks against the UAE in January 2022. On 24 and 30 January, Houthi forces launched complex attacks consisting of a combination of weaponized UAS and ballistic missiles targeting sites in Abu Dhabi. Additionally, on 2 February, an Iranian-aligned militia group (IAMG) in Iraq, Awliyat al-Waad al-Haq, claimed to have launched four UAS targeting the UAE, with the UAE Defense Ministry announcing it had destroyed several inbound hostile UAS during that attack.

The Houthis are likely to continue attacks against critical infrastructure on the Arabian Peninsula, particularly in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, as part of the Houthi's ongoing military operations in Yemen. Saudi Arabia and the UAE maintain flight advisories in their respective supplements to their Aeronautical Information Publications warning civil aircraft operators of the ongoing threat from Houthi long-range missile and UAS attacks, as well as the potential for defensive operations, such as from surface-to-air missile fire in a high traffic area.

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FAA Special Federal Aviation Regulation (SFAR) No. 115, 14 C.F.R. § 91.1611, prohibits U.S. civil flight operations at all altitudes in the areas of the Sanaa Flight Information Region (FIR) (OYSC) specified in the rule. Copies of all FAA-issued flight prohibition SFARs, flight prohibition Notices to Air Missions (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.



Depiction of Arabian Peninsula with Flight Information Regions. This graphic is for situational awareness only and is not to be used for navigational purposes.

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