Over a century has passed since the first airplane took off in 1903, piloted by the Wright Brothers. In contemporary times, the world has seen more than just airplanes when it comes to aircraft and aerial vehicles. Today, news headlines are splattered with information regarding drones, bomber planes, and military jets – aircraft far more sophisticated that the Wright Brother’s gliders. Flight has the power to connect billions of people in a matter of hours, allowing us to journey across the globe practically effortlessly. It also has the power, however, to bring great destruction such as the World War II bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan. Thus, to prevent such disasters, there are guidelines set in place to secure the airways. The United Nations has comprised what is known as the International Civil Aviation Organization, or ICAO for short, to develop international Standards and Recommendations Practices (SARPs) to keep everything in check; ensuring that air travel is secure, safe, and efficient for over 100,000 flights every day. The ICAO runs audits on a regular basis over ICAO member states to determine if the SARPs are being followed appropriately. The audits are under the Universal Security Audit Programme (USAP) and is composed of nine different principles.

One of the most dominating principles is Sovereignty. Air Sovereignty gives sovereign states the ability to control their airspace and enforce their own aviation laws, including the use of military aircraft. Sovereign states are also in command of their territorial waters which stretch twelve nautical miles (22.2 kilometers) out from their nation’s coastline. Countries, however, can gain control of areas outside of their territories through international agreements; this includes the control of water as well as airspace. A prime example is the United States control of waters in the Pacific although it is technically international space. Aside from territorial possession of airspace, there are also the Freedoms of the Air. The first freedom, set by the International Air Service Transit Agreement, allows flyovers of foreign member states, and the second freedom allows technical stops within limits. The third freedom is the right to carry passengers or cargo from one country to another. The fourth is to carry passengers or cargo from another country to your own. The fifth freedom allows revenue traffic. The following three freedoms, however, are considered unofficial, most of which pertain to cabotage. Cabotage refers to the transportation of cargo or passengers between two points within a single country.

In order to enforce security some countries – such as the United States’ Federal Aviation Administration – have implemented different flying zones: controlled airspace, uncontrolled airspace, restricted airspace, prohibited airspace, and no-fly zones. Controlled airspace is defined by flight that has access to
all Air Traffic Controls. The ICAO has various classes for all types of airspace, classes A to G, all of which contain different safety and security measures. Classes A through E are considered controlled. Classes F and G, however, are uncontrolled, meaning that they are not monitored by ATC. Restricted, prohibited, and no-fly airspace are all controlled by the ATC for security measures. For instance, no-fly zones exist due in part to military activity and the like which make in unsafe for air travel.

Armed conflict is nothing new to our planet, and recently it has been affecting airspace security. ICAO in July began to review the manner in which authorities determine whether airspace is safe enough for commercial flights or not in times of heavy conflict. This came under the spotlight after the Ukraine shot down Malaysian airline MH17 in route from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur, consequently killing 298 passengers and staff. Due to this tragedy, United States airlines are prohibited to fly over Crimea, The Black Sea, and the Sea of Azov. Other airspace issues that have become apparent in the following months include the China and Japan territorial disputes, as well as drone occurrences in the Middle East. China and Japan have recently experienced incidents in which each country’s militant aircrafts have flown precariously close to each other and thus sparking complaints. China was reported to be participating in maritime exercises with Russia. Across Asia, there is another problem in the limelight as Israel has begun to shoot down aircrafts from Syria, adding to the unrest, and leading to the implement of forty-four United Nations Peacekeepers in the Golan Heights region of Israel subsequently.

Questions to Think About:

1. Do you think the arising safety concerns in the Balkans and the Middle East will lead to the implementation of new airspace security measures?

2. What are the responses of other countries to the changes in measures as well as their reaction to incidents that have taken place?

3. Which areas would you predict to be classified as no-fly, restricted, and prohibited? Why?


http://www.icao.int/Security/USAP/Pages/USAP-Principles.aspx

http://www.faa.gov/


http://www.faraim.org/aim/aim-4-03-14-129.html

http://www.faraim.org/aim/aim-4-03-14-131.html

http://www.icao.int/Pages/freedomsAir.aspx

http://www.airtrafficmanagement.net/2014/07/icao-planning-airspace-security-review/
