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International Airspace Crisis Commission

Topic 1:

Protecting Civilian Aircraft in Ukrainian Airspace During Armed Conflict

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Topic Overview

\Civilian aircrafts are a major importance for transporting traveling passengers, it also assists in many other necessities such as delivering goods and aids in connecting countries. Conversely, armed conflicts can create risks for civilian aircraft. The active conflicts that are ongoing near or on the routes of civilian aviation can threaten the safety of international flights and aircrafts.
The closing and delay of airspace activity due to conflicted operations can raise major concerns regarding everyday life.

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine during February 24th of 2022, the airspace of Ukraine has been shut due to the danger civilians may face because of the ongoing conflict. Airlines with civilians in need of transportation have faced many struggles that led them to change routes, stay away from dangerous areas, and oftentimes risk operating around major conflict areas.

On July 17th of 2014, a major event led to the attention of this issue. The downing of the Malaysian Airlines Flight MH17, that had 298 passengers over Eastern Ukraine. All 298 passengers have lost their lives in this accident. This accident occurred even when the flight had no relation in the conflict. This goes to show how dangerous armed conflicts can be for civilian aircraft. In response, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 2166, calling for an independent investigation and accountability.

Today, one of the world's major concerns is the safety of aircrafts in conflict zones. Many organizations, including (ICAO) and (EASA) consistently work to improve the safety of aviation.

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Background Information

During 2014, fighting intensified in the zones of Donetsk and Luhansk causing the development of armed conflict following the political unrest and the Russian annexation of Crimea. As this conflict was ongoingly worsening, it sparked concerns in the safety of civilian aviation in conflicted areas, and particularly Ukraine's airspace.

Even during the war, aviation continued in Ukraine's airspace, and many parts of Ukraine. Nevertheless, the dangerous military activity began raising concerns about the amount of information assessed by airlines about the risks of flying over conflict-affected areas. This revealed that risks were weakly addressed and managed during armed conflicts.

On July 17th 2014, The Malaysian Flight MH17 was flying through Ukraine's Airspace making its way from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur, the flight had 298 passengers on board, when it was brutally destroyed over Eastern Ukraine. All 298 boarding passengers have lost their lives in this accident.
The incident became a major international aviation safety concern because it demonstrated the consequences of allowing civilian flights to operate in areas affected by armed conflict. It also raised questions about the responsibilities of governments to communicate potential dangers and the responsibility of airlines to assess risks before operating flights.

Resolution 2166 was adopted by the Security Council on July 21st 2014 condemning the incident and called for international investigations. This resolution also focused on holding those responsible for the incident accountable. In May of 2025, the ICAO Council determined that the claims brought by Australia and the Netherlands concerning the downing of MH17 were well-founded in fact and law. This marked an important development in the use of international aviation law to address the incident.

Russia launched its invasion on Ukraine on February 24th 2022, this led to the airspace of Ukraine to civilian flights to be closed completely due to the major dangers of the conflict and the security risks. International airlines had to resort to changing their routes and avoiding Ukraine completely. Since that event, EASA and ICAO updated their safety guidance to help airlines navigate the risks and stay away from dangerous airspace. Despite all precautions, many challenges remain.

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International frameworks and previous actions:

A lot of action has been taken since the accident, including the 1994 Chicago Convention, particularly article 3.

- Article 3 covers and affirms the important points regarding the protection of civilian aircraft and boarding passengers.
- The adoption of resolution 2166 by the Security council that promotes accountability and action through international investigation.
- The Risk Assessment Manual established by the ICAO (Doc 10084) that aims to help navigate airlines and governments in taking good measure of risks near conflicted areas.
- The Safer Skies Initiative led by Canada that aims to strengthen international cooperation and improve air transportation safety.
- The 2025 Assembly Resolution A42-4 led by ICAO
- (EASA) continued measures for safety and issuing bulletins regarding conflict zones.

Key Challenges:

Many problems remain unsolved despite all measures taken for aviation safety, including;

- Lack of reliable information on time for airlines. Airlines are not able to get up to date information on major conflicted zones on time or about potential dangers and risks, which leads to the difficulty of making safe decisions.

- International coordination is another struggle, the interconnectivity between governments, aviation authorities, and airlines is weak and not reliable.

- Risk assessment despite the previous adopted resolutions is still a major issue, military conflicts can change rapidly which in turn will require airspace authorities to constantly check the safety of airline routes.

- One of the most alarming concerns is airspace restrictions and rerouting that cause airlines to make risky decisions and considerations, moreover, leading them to take longer distances in transportation.

Possible areas for Resolution:

Possible solutions include improving information-sharing between governments, airlines, and aviation authorities, strengthening civilian-military coordination, and establishing clearer procedures for closing dangerous airspace. ICAO should promote consistent risk-assessment standards, while states improve monitoring of threats such as missiles, drones, and GPS interference. Stronger international cooperation and accountability are also essential to prevent future incidents.

Guiding Questions

1. How can countries improve information-sharing about threats to civilian aircraft during armed conflicts?
2. What responsibilities should governments have in protecting civilian aircraft within or near conflict zones?
3. How can ICAO strengthen international aviation safety regulations and risk-assessment procedures?
4. Should airlines be held responsible for operating in airspace considered potentially dangerous?
5. How can countries improve coordination between civilian aviation authorities and military forces?
6. What measures can prevent incidents similar to the downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17?
7. How can the international community ensure accountability when civilian aircraft are harmed during armed conflicts?

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Resources

International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)

ICAO – Risks to Civil Aviation Near Conflict Zones

https://www.icao.int/safety/conflictzones

ICAO – Aviation Security Policy: Conflict Zones

https://www.icao.int/aviation-security-policy-section/Conflict-Zones

ICAO – Manual on Risk Assessment for Civil Aircraft Operations Over or Near Conflict Zones (Doc 10084)

https://www.icao.int/Security/SFP/Documents/Doc.10084.Third%20edition.pdf

ICAO – Assembly Resolution A42-4 (2025)

https://www.icao.int/sites/default/files/Meetings/a42/Documents/Resolutions/a42_res_prov_en.pdf

United Nations (UN)

UN Security Council – Resolution 2166 (2014), Regarding Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17

https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/775348

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RESOURCES

European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA)

EASA – Conflict Zone Information Bulletin: Ukraine

https://www.easa.europa.eu/en/domains/air-operations/czibs/czib-2022-01r14

EASA – Information on Conflict Zones

https://www.easa.europa.eu/en/domains/air-operations/information-on-conflict-zones

Canada

Transport Canada – Fourth Safer Skies Forum Report

https://tc.canada.ca/en/initiatives/safer-skies-initiative/fourth-safer-skies-forum-report

International Aviation Law

ICAO – Convention on International Civil Aviation (Chicago Convention)

https://www.icao.int/publications/pages/doc7300.aspx