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Joint Training Flights under the Treaty on Open Skies

This article reviews the purpose, process, and benefits of U.S. participation in joint training flights (JTFs). These flights allow the United States and its treaty partners to gain valuable experience and to implement the provisions of the Treaty on Open Skies more efficiently.

Overview

The United States, Canada, and 32 European countries are States Parties (34 total) to the Treaty on Open Skies, which entered into force on January 1, 2002. Treaty membership is open to all participating States of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

The Treaty is intended to promote greater transparency and openness regarding military activities occurring, moving east, from "Vancouver to Vladivostok." To promote this goal, the Treaty provides States Parties with the right to fly unarmed aerial observation missions over the entire territories of other States Parties to collect imagery data.

The international forum established to coordinate and facilitate treaty implementation is the Open Skies Consultative Commission (OSCC), which convenes monthly plenary meetings in Vienna, Austria. The OSCC reviews applications for accession to the Treaty and resolves treaty ambiguities and compliance issues.

The OSCC can establish informal working groups of experts to study and report on technical issues relating to the Treaty's approved aircraft sensors, notification formats, aircraft certifications, and other procedures associated with implementing the Treaty.

Open Skies aircraft certified for use during observation missions and JTFs are equipped with optical wet film panoramic and framing cameras in addition to video cameras with real time display. Although the Treaty also allows infrared line-scanning devices and sideways-looking synthetic aperture radar (SAR), no treaty member has yet implemented these sensors.

Joint Training Flights (JTFs)

Two or more States Parties may conduct a JTF for training purposes and to fine-tune implementation procedures in a low-impact environment. JTFs are designed to simulate actual observation mission flights to achieve maximum efficiency and to increase mutual confidence and cooperation among the States Parties.



Onboard Swedish Saab S340 Open Skies Aircraft

The United States regularly participates in JTFs (also known as joint "trial" flights prior to the Treaty's entry into force). The first JTF over the United States was conducted by Canada in April 1993. In July 1993, the United States flew two JTFs over Hungary. During these flights, the United States overflew several sites declared under the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty and collected optical images.

When selecting States Parties to invite to participate in JTFs with the United States, DTRA personnel begin by preparing a list of those States which have not participated in a JTF with the United States for the longest period of time. An interagency group reviews this list and may add or delete States in accordance with their analysis. When a final list is approved, DTRA personnel begin planning for the upcoming JTFs.

Typically, DTRA's On-Site Inspection Directorate (OS) coordinates with JTF partners to work out a date for the mission and administrative details such as payment rules and travel arrangements. OS representatives will then meet with their counterparts, either at DTRA or in the partner nation to finalize mission details including the flight plan and mission itinerary.

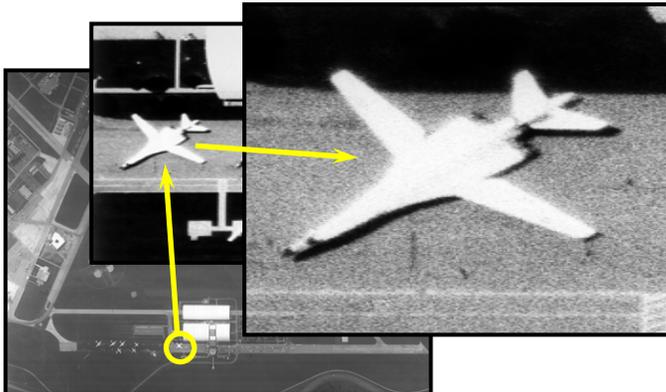
Approximately one week prior to the JTF, in accordance with treaty timelines, the observing Party sends a message to the host country detailing the arrival time and the names of the personnel participating in the JTF. The remainder of the JTF is subsequently carried out as closely as possible to an actual observation mission.

Adhering to all of the Treaty's provisions during a JTF, however, is not practical. Some exercise artificialities are required in order to minimize the impact of a JTF on the normal operations of the State Party being overflown.

The necessary differences between an observation mission flight and a JTF usually involve modifications to

notification timelines, flight path negotiations, and restricted distribution of the imagery collected.

For observation mission flights, Treaty timelines only require the observing Party to provide 72 hours notice prior to their estimated time of arrival at the observed Party's in-country point of entry. This permits very little time for advance preparation activities. In contrast, States Parties planning to participate in a JTF usually agree on the approximate dates months in advance.



Open Skies Imagery

During an observation mission flight, the Open Skies aircraft may overfly and image any area or facility on observed Party's territory. Areas may only be restricted for flight safety reasons—not for reasons associated with national security concerns. Conversely, JTFs follow one of the observed Party's pre-planned routes and may not violate special-use airspace. The United States has several previously approved and negotiated "canned routes" for JTFs.

The imagery and sensor data collected during a JTF is only available to the observing and observed Parties unless both Parties agree to release it to one or more third Parties. This restriction is in sharp contrast to the availability of imagery and sensor data collected during a mission flight. Any State Party requesting a copy and willing to cover the costs of duplication may receive a copy of the imagery collected during an Open Skies observation mission.

Benefits of JTFs



U.S. Open Skies Logo

Open Skies aircraft and sensors of other States Parties. While onboard, escorts have an opportunity to practice techniques for ensuring that the sensors are operated according to treaty provisions and that the

aircraft follows the agreed flight path. Whether a Passive or Active JTF, the U.S. team is exposed to alternate methods of executing observation missions and can further refine its own procedures.

In addition, U.S. escorts have an opportunity to inspect different Open Skies point of entry airfields. As a result, escorts have identified a number of aircraft servicing issues (e.g. fueling and maintenance) at certain airfields as well as a number of potential safety concerns associated with certain flight paths.

A final key benefit of participating in JTFs is that they allow DTRA personnel to evaluate and develop improvements to the Passive Overflight Module (POM) Telephone Notification System (TNS). The POM/TNS sends automatic messages to registered sites notifying them of impending observation mission flights and updating sites located along the flight path of the current location and flight status of the Open Skies aircraft. It is estimated that registered sites will have a maximum of 24-hours advance notice, during which time they will have an opportunity to prepare for the possibility of being overflown and imaged.



Russian TU-154 Open Skies Aircraft

Conclusion

This article has briefly reviewed the purpose, process, and benefits to the United States of participating in JTFs. Over time, JTFs have enabled the United States and its treaty partners to streamline procedures and to implement the Treaty on Open Skies more efficiently. JTFs have also helped to increase mutual confidence and cooperation among the States Parties.

For more information about the Treaty on Open Skies and related arms control security topics, contact the DTIRP Outreach Program Coordinator at: 800-419-2899 or by email at: dtirpoutreach@dtra.mil. You may also download information directly from the DTIRP Website at: <http://dtirp.dtra.mil>, or contact your local Defense Security Service (DSS) Industrial Security Representative or your U.S. government sponsor.