

POPE FRANCIS GETS PRESIDENTIAL TFR TREATMENT

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In preparation for the visit of **Pope** Francis to Washington, D.C., Philadelphia and New York City, the U.S. government erected a massive Temporary Flight Restriction (**TFR**) over the areas where he will be greeted by millions of people. The same as those used whenever President Obama travels or goes on vacation, the TFRs affect a number of airports and flight operations and seek to ground every drone and radio-control aircraft within a 30-mile radius and up to 17,999 feet. Likely reflecting growing concern about security for high-level visitors, the Pope Francis TFRs are far larger than the 2,999-foot, three-nautical-mile-radius TFRs that followed Pope Benedict in 2008, the last time a pope visited the U.S. before this tour by Pope Francis.

Vice president Joe Biden’s travel apparently doesn’t warrant security concerns as great as those for President Obama and Pope Francis. A September 16 trip to Los Angeles by Biden entailed three smaller 2,999-foot, three-nautical mile-radius TFRs.

Explaining the Pope Francis TFRs, the FAA said in a flight advisory, “The restrictions are designed to provide a safe and secure environment for the event but also ensure fair and equitable access to all airspace users to the greatest extent possible.” The FAA has banned all types of radio-control model and drone flights within these TFRs, and other prohibited operations include aerobatics, gliders, parachutes, ultralights, balloons, agricultural, banner towing, pipeline patrol, maintenance flights, flight training and practice approaches.

SPECIAL EVENT DESIGNATION

The size of the latest papal TFRs conformed with the visit's designation as a National Security Special Event (NSSE), according to the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA). "Within the NSSE designation there are a multitude of factors that are taken into account to determine protections such as TFRs, including anticipated attendance by U.S. officials and foreign dignitaries; size of the event; significance of the event; and existing or anticipated threats."

According to an AOPA spokeswoman, "Without having direct knowledge but given the statement released by the government on Sunday [September 13] that one plot has already been disrupted, we are sure that was a big factor in the decision. AOPA works closely with the FAA, DoD and TSA to ensure that the operational impact on general aviation is kept to the absolute minimum."

As of September 18 there were no credible threats against the pope Secret Service director Joseph Clancy told *USA Today*.

A pilot who attended a meeting with the U.S. Secret Service, TSA and Philadelphia airport personnel before the Pope's trip asked the Secret Service agent why the papal TFRs for this visit were so much larger than for the 2008 tour. The agent explained, the pilot told **AIN**, that it is a different world in 2015 and that once an event is designated a national security event it is treated just like a presidential event. The agent cited threats related to the Pope's visit and noted that airports and these kinds of events are magnets for "crazies to try to get access to the VIP."

In response to **AIN**'s question about the relative size of the papal TFRs, the FAA issued this statement: "The FAA develops the TFRs for each individual event by working with law enforcement and security agencies and does not discuss the specific reasons for the decisions we make."

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