

driven into space because airborne systems were unacceptable. The projected international political climate of the 1990s has made the change possible. Additionally, airborne and spaceborne should not be seen as being mutually exclusive. They constitute quite different capabilities. There are, however, a number of advantages to airborne reconnaissance systems in very practical dimensions. Some of these are underscored below:

(I) Technical Flexibility

- Scale of the imagery can be varied by changing, for example, the focal lengths of lenses or the flying height of the aircraft.
- The effective ground resolution of the imagery can be controlled, either providing very high resolution, if required, or coarser resolution, possibly limiting sensitivities regarding the intelligence potential of the data.
- Sensors can be specifically suited to monitor a particular situation, for example, by using particular wavebands in a multispectral scanner.
- Aircraft, if stationed locally, can collect coverage at specific times or on short notice (whereas for satellites, this is more difficult or not possible), provided suitable weather conditions are available.
- Real-time data can be provided using a downlink, otherwise data can be recorded on tape or film and can be turned around in a period of several hours to several days.
- Aircraft and airborne sensors can be repaired/replaced more easily than satellite-based reconnaissance systems.
- Airborne reconnaissance systems do not require the same degree of specialization in equipment as do satellite sensors. Airborne systems can use ordinary commercially-available aircraft and sensors. There are likely to be fewer problems associated with such factors as survivability in a potentially hostile environment.

(II) Political Acceptability

- Airborne surveillance capability is within the technical competence of a relatively larger number of countries than is a space-based system.
- Capability to restrict overflight coverage may make airborne imagery more politically attractive for some nations in a multilateral/international context. It would be less difficult to demonstrate that the coverage was restricted to specified areas.