
Abstract

This paper examines commercially available overhead remote sensing systems and the ways they might be usefully employed for applications related to international security. An introduction is provided on commercially available satellite and aerial remote sensing systems to explain their basic operating characteristics and features. Two case studies are used to examine potential applications of commercial satellite imagery. In the first, imagery acquired during the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1988 and 1989 is used to assess whether commercially available satellite imagery would be useful for monitoring large-scale withdrawals of conventionally armed forces. In the second case study, imagery of selected sites in Namibia and Angola is used to examine whether such imagery could have supported United Nations peacekeeping operations in those countries. Potential applications of airborne remote sensing systems are also demonstrated using previously acquired imagery to show the kinds of results which could be obtained using commercially available systems.

The results outlined in this paper clearly demonstrate that commercial remote sensing systems can provide valuable information for certain applications related to international security. They show equally that the applications must be chosen carefully to ensure that the required data can be provided by current commercial remote sensing systems.