

This proposal, which met with a wide welcome, had been studied in depth by a group of experts appointed for the purpose. In its preliminary conclusions, the group

"recognized the valuable contribution which monitoring by satellites could make to the verification of certain parts or types of arms control and disarmament agreements. This contribution from satellites to the verification process must not in general be seen as excluding other means of verification. The Group also appreciated the positive role that satellite monitoring could play in preventing or settling crises in various parts of the world and thus contributing to confidence-building among nations. The Group considered the gradual approach to the establishment of an international satellite monitoring agency technically feasible and saw in it a way to limit and control the financial commitments required from the international community. With respect to the legal nature of the agency, it appeared that action would have to be taken to ensure its independence, which would constitute an essential guarantee for the objectivity of its analyses".

A detailed study of the technical, legal and financial implications of the establishment of an ISMA was subsequently undertaken, and the report presented to the United Nations General Assembly (1981). The group of experts expressed support for three-phase implementation:

The first phase would see the establishment of an image processing and interpretation centre which would have at its disposal satellite data retransmitted by States possessing remote-sensing satellites;

In the second phase, the agency would be provided with its own ground segment to receive information from the satellites directly;

In the third phase, the agency would acquire its own satellite facilities.

This step-by-step approach, together with an evaluation of the agency's personnel requirements, was intended to allow for its phased establishment. However, despite the favourable reactions expressed, constraints of a political, technical and financial nature have so far prevented the initiation of this process.

The disappearance of the American-Soviet duopoly on remote sensing, and the consequent emergence of more abundant commercial data, prompted France to