

FRANCE  
WORKING PAPER  
SPACE IN THE SERVICE OF VERIFICATION  
PROPOSAL CONCERNING A SATELLITE IMAGE PROCESSING AGENCY

Progress in recent years has confirmed the need for verification arrangements specific to each disarmament or arms control agreement. However, the specific nature of this contractual verification may go hand in hand with a pooling of some of the data gathered.

While a State cannot expect to verify directly compliance with agreements to which it is not a signatory, all the members of the international community may legitimately hope to be supplied with information, since they all have an interest in compliance with disarmament agreements. Furthermore, it is desirable that they should be able to assess the situation leading up to and following on the adoption of such agreements.

Similarly, they must be in a position to evaluate military and non-military threats to their security, whether in terms of crisis management or in terms of prevention and handling of disasters and major risks.

This legitimate need for information may be met by various methods, but few of them would appear to be as exhaustive, as accessible and as appropriate as the use of satellite data.

For a long time a space-based remote sensing capability remained a monopoly of the United States and the Soviet Union. However, movement has recently begun in two directions:

Many other countries have acquired such a capability, of a civilian nature, and the commercial distribution of the data collected has expanded (Landsat, Spot-image, Soyuzkarta);

Simultaneously, specifications have improved and some civilian satellites now offer resolution down to 10 metres.

This situation potentially offers the international community a substantial set of data which are regularly updated and provide a wealth of security-related information.

In 1978, at the first United Nations special session devoted to disarmament, France, anticipating these developments and the importance which might be acquired by satellite observation in facilitating verification of disarmament agreements and crisis management, suggested the establishment of an international satellite monitoring agency (ISMA).