

Examination of the Foreign Policy Implications of Using Commercial Space Imagery in Newsgathering and Dissemination

Robert A. McDonald

The Patterson School of Diplomacy and International Commerce, The University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY 40506-0027

ABSTRACT: This paper outlines key topics that were discussed during a remote sensing symposium held at the University of Kentucky Patterson School of Diplomacy and International Commerce. A unique problem associated with using remote sensing imagery in newsgathering concerns balancing the press's Constitutional right to report on the news, and the government's need to restrict the dissemination of selected information acquired through remote sensing. Academics and practitioners from the fields of journalism, broadcasting, foreign affairs, and defense came together to hear and discuss papers presented by experts from a range of multidisciplinary fields. Proceedings from this Symposium are available from ASPRS.

Peter Jennings used Landsat imagery in opening an ABC News (1990) special report on the crisis that was precipitated by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait on August 2, 1990. Landsat's view from space graphically introduced Jennings' report, "A line in the Sand." This kind of use clearly demonstrates that commercial space imagery has now reached a level of quality where it can be valuable to the news media in gathering and reporting on current events. This is especially true in the area of foreign affairs where access to events is often limited.

Evidence of its potential value in these instances readily can be found in the current literature. Defense Electronics (1986) reported that Japanese military analysts have used Landsat imagery to gather information on Soviet activities in Siberia. Richelson (1989) has argued that SPOT has a capability which permits analysts to locate military facilities where missiles like the CSS-2 are deployed. (The CSS-2 is a Chinese missile that is 20.62 metres long and has a diameter of 2.46 metres. It has a range that is between 2500 to 3000 km, and is capable of carrying multiple re-entry vehicles [Janes, 1988].)

The foreign policy implications of using commercial space imagery in newsgathering and news dissemination was the subject of a remote sensing symposium held at the University of Kentucky (UK) in Lexington during the spring 89 semester. The symposium was cosponsored by the American Society for Photogrammetry and Remote Sensing, the Department of State Foreign Service Institute, and the UK Patterson School of Diplomacy and International Commerce.

The purpose of the Symposium was to bring together specialists from various fields—not only from remote sensing, but

also from journalism, law, psychology, and foreign affairs—to bring these specialists together so they could present scholarly papers and share their perspectives. The objective of the sessions was to "challenge today's thinking with respect to taking advantage of today's satellite technology and looking forward to where that might take us in the next decade" (McDonald 1989, p. B1).



Participants listening to a session at the Campbell House Inn.

Symposium participants had the opportunity to view videotape excerpts that showed examples of how space imagery has been used in foreign affairs news reporting. These examples included Fred Francis (NBC News) using SPOT coverage of Rabta, Libya in his 1988 report on chemical weapons plants in Libya; and Rick Inderfurth (ABC News) using 1987 SPOT coverage of Strelka in his report on a phased-array radar near Krasnoyarsk, USSR. (In 1988, the U.S. Department of Defense (1988) noted the construction of the radar and charged that it was "in clear violation" of the ABM Treaty. The Department of Defense (1989) subsequently reported that the Soviets, as of October 1987, declared a moratorium on any fur-

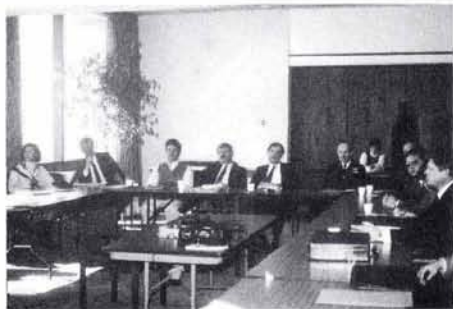
ther construction activity at this site.)

The wide range of potential applications for news reporting was demonstrated by the EOSAT (1987) videotape, "Landsat Reporting From Space." This tape simulated news broadcasts of a variety of events where Landsat multispectral imagery could play a key role in both gathering and disseminating the news. These events included the 1986 nuclear power plant accident at Chernobyl, the 1988 forest fires in Yellowstone National Park, and a landing approach of the Space Shuttle Discovery as recreated in three dimension.

For these applications, four broad issues need to be considered: (1) technological availability of space imagery, (2) broadcasting perspective for using this kind of imagery, (3) human factor constraints on using such imagery, and (4) legal and foreign policy constraints on using the imagery—especially for reporting on foreign affairs. The Symposium was organized around these areas, and experts from a range of multidisciplinary fields addressed the various questions that surfaced.



Dr. Herschel Leibowitz listening to a question on the role of human perception in viewing imagery.



Participants in session at Patterson Tower.

The first day focused on media use and commercial availability of space imagery. The Symposium opened with a keynote address from the broadcasting perspective by Charles Hoff, Managing Director of CNN Newsbeam. He noted that although there has been relatively limited use of satellite imagery by the news media in the past, the potential news value increases as quality and timeliness improve. He concluded by citing problems related to cost and security restrictions.

The agenda then turned to reviewing commercial imagery that is available to satisfy news requirements. Peter M. P. Norris (Executive Vice President of EOSAT) gave a comprehensive overview of Landsat imagery. He was followed by Dr. Frederick J. Doyle (Science Advisor at U.S. Geological Survey and former President of ASPRS), who expanded the discussion with a comprehensive comparison of space imagery from a range of current commercial sources, e.g., the French SPOT and U.S. Landsat, as well as sources from Japan and the U.S.S.R. Both Norris and Doyle included extensive imagery in their presentations.

Practical problems associated with using space imagery were discussed the second day. First, the more general problems associated with the perception and analysis of imagery were addressed by Dr. Herschel Leibowitz (Evan Pugh Professor of Psychology at Pennsylvania State University) and Max Miller (Director of Technical Services Programs, Earth Satellite Corporation). Second, the more specific problems related to using space imagery

in reporting foreign affairs were addressed by other experts. They focused on problems related to trying to balance the press's constitutional right to report on the news and the government's policy need to restrict the dissemination of selected information.

During this part of the Symposium, J. Laurent Scharff (General Counsel for the Radio-Television News Directors Association) outlined first amendment standards for judging national security risks in disseminating images from remote sensing satellites. Roland Inlow (former senior imagery intelligence advisor to the Director of Central Intelligence) then discussed national security risks from an intelligence community perspective, and Maj. Gen. Jack E. Thomas, USAF, Ret. (a senior consultant for the Department of Defense) presented the concerns from a military perspective. In closing, Congressman George E. Brown, Jr. (member of the House Science, Technology and Space Committee) commented on the issues from a congressional perspective.



Maj. Gen. Jack E. Thomas, USAF (Ret.) responding to questions on the issue of national security and space imagery.

Some fifty academics and practitioners from the fields of journalism, broadcasting, foreign affairs, and defense came together to hear these papers and participate in the discussions that followed. The presenters found themselves responding, not only to the questions raised by attendees, but also to issues that were surfaced in other presentations. This interactive dialogue resulted in several authors rethinking their own positions and either clarifying or expanding on what they initially said.

The papers gathered from the Symposium have been published as *Proceedings: Space Imagery and News Gathering for the 1990s: So what?* The book includes updated versions of the papers plus introductory comments by this author, who—as a visiting Diplomat-in-residence at the UK Patterson School of Diplomacy and International Commerce—chaired the Symposium.

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