

Open-Source Satellite Imagery for Conflict Monitoring: A Methodological Guide

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines open-source satellite imagery for conflict monitoring. Drawing on original data and 20 expert interviews, we find that existing policy frameworks underestimate systemic risk and overestimate institutional capacity. Not everyone shares this assessment. Some analysts contend that the risks have been overstated and that markets have already priced in most of the downside. The evidence for this more optimistic view is real, but it rests on assumptions about stability that recent events have repeatedly challenged. We conclude with five recommendations for policymakers and outline an agenda for further research.

1. INTRODUCTION

Local communities, meanwhile, are adapting in ways that rarely make headlines. Municipal authorities, civil-society groups and private firms have developed informal networks that in some cases respond faster than national institutions. The legal framework has struggled to keep pace. Existing rules were designed for a different era and leave significant grey areas, particularly where state and non-state actors operate in the same space or where activity crosses multiple jurisdictions.

2. METHODOLOGY

Looking ahead, three indicators will be worth watching closely: the trajectory of public spending commitments, the cohesion of the regional coalition, and whether external actors choose to escalate or de-escalate their involvement.

3. FINDINGS

Interviews with security officials suggest a growing recognition that deterrence must be paired with resilience. Hardening critical infrastructure, rehearsing crisis responses and communicating clearly with the public are no longer optional extras. At the international level, the picture is mixed. While multilateral forums have produced statements of shared concern, concrete commitments - on funding, on verification, on enforcement - remain thin.

4. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Ultimately, the question is not whether the system will be tested again, but how prepared it will be when that happens. On current evidence, the answer is: better than before, but not yet good enough.

5. CONCLUSION

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