
Intelligence gathering...

An Organisation by Roger Stenning

COMMILINT: Commercial Military Intelligence, PLC

NOTE: This is FICTION.

Not fact.

Yet...

The advent of intelligence agencies using satellite photography to perform reconnaissance of sensitive military installations (and other sites) belonging to foreign powers is well known.

What is slightly less well known is that commercial concerns have now begun to offer similar - and, sometimes, superior imagery (as it's known in the trade), for sale, for very modest fees.

SPOT, in France, were the first company to offer such a service, relying on surveying companies, agricultural specialists, and academic customers for their trade. mainly due to the less than militarily useful resolution of the images. This was in the 1980's.

It's now 2000AD. In September 1998, a new company COMMILINT (Commercial Military Intelligence), based in London, England, launched a commercial spy satellite into orbit. They describe their service (in their brochure) as a "tool for companies to, amongst other things, assess their security requirements, by obtaining comprehensive 3-foot (90cm) resolution overhead imagery". The COMMILINT satellites, using state-of-the-art equipment, matched the very latest US Government equipment then in orbit. mercenary units soon cottoned onto this new resource, and COMMILINT found a VERY lucrative market.

For a modest fee (less than a thousand British pounds Sterling), a customer could obtain, from COMMILINT, a single monochrome (black and white) image of wherever the customer wanted across the globe. For a slightly less modest fee, COMMILINT can even provide a very accurate assessment, in the manner of an intelligence report, on the image in question, for the client..

Companies tapped this vital resource, using the imagery to toughen up their physical security at their high-security installations. Security companies, acting for their clients, used the imagery in the same manner. And some groups, mostly mercenaries, used the imagery to plan industrial espionage and sabotage strikes on behalf of their clients, who wanted their competition to become.. hobbled... in some manner or other.

Now, in the year 2000AD, COMMILINT is listed as a fortune 100 company on the New York Stock Exchange, and in the FT100 on the London Stock Exchange. Its' future looks assured. As long as Governmental powers keep their hands off it...

You see, while the governments in the western hemisphere tend to encourage this kind of entrepreneurial endeavours, they tend to view the technology used by COMMILINT as their own bailiwick. And jealously guard it. What's got up their collective noses, is that COMMILINT used readily available, 'off-the-shelf' technology, to put their three satellites into orbit. They placed them into geostationary orbits. Added relay transceivers to them, so that the earth station in London, had constant communications links with the satellites, and figured out - on their own - how to maximise their photographic coverage of the world's surfaces and seas.

Given, say, twelve hours, they can provide an orbital surveillance photo of ANYWHERE on the globe, provided (a) it's in daylight, and (b) there's no clouds in the way. rather good for a new company in the intelligence market. Even newspapers are using the service available to produce in-depth reports on breaking stories around the globe. And such exposure to the mass market hasn't been missed by COMMILINT. Their turnover tripled in 1999, when the London Times used one of their satellite photographs to show a series of terrorist training camps in Lebanon, used by MANY different terrorist groups. Information that had been unavailable to the press in the past, due to the nature of the camps, and their occupants, who tended to shoot 'nosey' journalists first, and ask questions later. Naturally, some of the resident terrorist groups at these camps were rather pissed off with COMMILINT, and tried to bomb the COMMILINT offices with a car bomb. The Metropolitan Police in London found it, and defused it.

Since then, there's been a permanent armed police presence around the office, which has not, it has to be said, endeared COMMILINT to the government of Britain. For the moment, though, COMMILINT are in business, serving their clients with first-rate satellite imagery.