

NIMA Pathfinder

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NextView Will Provide the Vision and Solutions for new U.S. Policy on Commercial Imagery

By Rick Akers

The Intelligence Community has been using space-based commercial imagery for decades. Early multispectral capabilities were useful for agricultural economic analyses, yielding accurate harvest estimates in denied areas. The resulting broad-area crop assessments would have been impractical by other means and were key inputs in the development of long-term strategies during the Cold War.

Later, commercial imagery-based maps were developed as interim, quickresponse products for regions where little or no geospatial information existed. This was particularly the case in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Andean region of South America. With changes in policy and the advent of high-resolution commercial imagery, image-based geospatial products have become a staple in military, national and civilian planning and operations.

Beyond Filling Niches

Most recently, Operation Iraqi Freedom has seen commercial imagery go beyond filling niches within the Agency's overall use of imagery to having a status as another, reliable and robust collector for satisfying imagery needs. The combatant command, allies and Intelligence Community used commercial imagery for a variety of planning and operational purposes in a federated environment.

In addition to providing unclassified imagery to support diplomacy, humanitarian relief and reconstruction efforts, commercial imagery supplemented national sources and provided data not otherwise available. Commercial imagery aided in defining deployment locations for Patriot missile and air defense batteries, assisted in mission planning for the seizure of Kirkuk in northern Iraq, and helped locate and characterize minefields along the Iraq/Iran border zone. It helped demonstrate that the Baghdad oil fires were not the result of U.S. and allied bombing and also provided context for strike/no-strike decisions on Iraqi industrial sites.

The way NIMA acquires commercial imagery has evolved as well. The majority of the commercial imagery purchased by NIMA is now done through the ClearView contract. The ClearView contract demonstrates a long-term commitment to the industry by guaranteeing a minimum amount of purchases to the providers of high-resolution imagery for three years, with two additional one-year options.

ClearView is a significant improvement over previous purchase arrangements. Cumbersome multi-tier licensing structures have been replaced by a single license allowing NIMA to share imagery with all potential partners (military, intelligence, diplomatic, allied nations and coalition partners, federal civil agencies, law enforcement and first-responders).

ClearView also provides more favorable access and priority for the government. Leveraging the ClearView contract, the NIMA Production and Analysis Directorate and Source Operations and Management Directorate are collaborating to build comprehensive, global, multi-year production

programs. ClearView encourages more efficient area collection and in conjunction with multi-year programming, it helps reduce uncertainty in the U.S. commercial remote sensing industry. This aligns well with the direction provided by the Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) in his June 7, 2002, letter to NIMA, where he stated, "... use U.S. commercial space imagery to the greatest extent possible ..." and "... commercial satellite imagery [will] be the primary source of data used for government mapping." What was once a strictly ad hoc tasking and collection process is now closely linked with production and analysis programs and requirements for geospatial intelligence.

Presidential Directive

Additional direction and guidance were finalized on April 25, 2003, when the president issued the National Security Presidential Directive (NSPD) *U.S. Commercial Remote-Sensing Space Policy*. The new policy has as its fundamental goal the advancement and protection of national security and foreign policy interests by maintaining leadership in remote-sensing space activities. It directs the federal government to rely, to the maximum practical extent, on U.S. commercial remote sensing space capabilities for filling the imagery and geospatial needs of military, intelligence, foreign policy, homeland security and civil users. National Technical Means (NTM) remote-sensing space systems are to focus on meeting needs that cannot be effectively, affordably and reliably satisfied by commercial providers.

The development of a long-term, sustainable relationship between the federal government and the U.S. commercial remote-sensing space industry will enable the industry to compete successfully as a provider of remote sensing capabilities for foreign governments and foreign commercial users. Sustaining and enhancing the U.S. commercial remote-sensing industry will foster economic growth, contribute to environmental stewardship, and enable scientific and technological excellence.

Under the NSPD, the DCI and Secretary of Defense are to implement appropriate measures to protect national security and foreign policy interests. Along with NASA and the Departments of Commerce, Interior and State, they are also directed to provide a timely and responsive regulatory environment for licensing the operations and exports of commercial remote-sensing systems. For all national security requirements, the NSPD specifies that NIMA is to serve as the agency of primary responsibility for acquiring and disseminating commercial remote-sensing space products and services. NIMA also has primary responsibility, in consultation with the Secretary of State, for all foreign policy requirements.

NextView

The Community Management Staff (CMS) recognized that in order to implement the DCI's guidance—and the intent of the new presidential directive—additional investment would be required. This foresight led to the establishment of a new funding line that will allow NIMA early participation in the next generation of commercial imaging capabilities.

These additional funds are being applied to a new acquisition initiative: NextView. NextView moves beyond the commodity-based approach of commercial imagery acquisition and seeks to assure access, priority tasking rights, volume (area coverage) and broad licensing terms from the next series of high-resolution U.S. commercial imagery satellites.

NIMA's new Commercial Imagery Program Manager, Sandy Jacks, is conducting the NextView acquisition in two phases. In Phase I—a Request for Information (RFI)—NIMA solicited industry input at a bidders conference March 21. Noting the importance of proceeding with the conference in the middle of a war, NIMA Director retired Air Force Lt. Gen. James R. Clapper Jr., in opening remarks, cited the huge demands for geospatial intelligence. There is "no way the NTM

constellation can meet these demands on its own,” he said. “NIMA is seeking imaging capacity, a synchronized admixture of both NTM and commercial.”

Clapper said NIMA is looking for innovative and creative ideas from, and partnerships with, the U.S. commercial remote-sensing industry. Continuing the theme, contracting officers encouraged teaming among companies with complementary strengths to meet the required and desired capabilities.

NextView is not just an extension of the ClearView contract, said NIMA Technical Director Roberta Lenczowski in closing remarks. “The RFI outlines an end-to-end approach; we want industry to take a holistic view, looking at all aspects of tasking, posting and processing.” Phase I provides “an opportunity for those in this community to talk about how you take this holistic view.” Noting that “NIMA is not buying or building a satellite—we buy and use imagery,” Lenczowski said, “We want optimal solutions for our needs. We are talking about capabilities and capacity that are beyond what is currently available.”

What’s Next

Phase II began with the recent release of a Request for Proposals (RFP). NextView is not only about imaging capacity; it’s also about fostering a closer partnership with the commercial imagery industry and integrating commercial and national imagery into a common “acquisitional” picture that facilitates asset management and requirements fulfillment.

Between now and the time NextView capabilities are expected to be fully realized (fiscal 2006), expect to hear more about accomplishments in integrating commercial imagery into the archiving and dissemination portions of the NIMA System for Geospatial Intelligence (NSGI). NIMA’s GeoScout contract is the principal vehicle for delivering transformed NIMA mission and corporate capabilities. This innovative contract will take on the responsibility of defining, designing and integrating the infrastructure and data standards to make commercial imagery an integral part of the NSGI.

About the Author

Rick Akers is the Senior Executive Officer for the NIMA Technical Executive. Over the last 19 years, he has had a variety of duties at NIMA and predecessor agencies. These include precision targeting, overseas assignments managing co-production and airborne collection, imaging science and replication, leadership and management positions in production and analysis, command liaison and, most recently, assignment at NIMA’s CentralImagery Tasking Office, now the Source Operations and Management Directorate.