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DIGITAL DIPLOMACY: THE USE OF SPACE TECHNOLOGIES IN ENHANCING COMPLIANCE
TO INTERNATIONAL REGIMES

Abstract

In an era when commercial space data becomes increasingly accessible and affordable, the international community has gradually turned to satellite technologies for a wide array of global monitoring and verification activities. In the domain of risk reduction and security, satellite imaging has long been recognized as essential in disaster management and providing early warning. In recent years, humanitarian agencies such as UNHCR and Amnesty International have all turned to satellite imaging in evaluating real-time situations in crisis-torn regions. Space technologies provide valuable information that could greatly facilitate the delivery of assistance to refugees and internally displaced persons. The international community has also witnessed increasing use of space technologies in ensuring compliance to international regimes. Consider the Decode Darfur initiative, where Amnesty International enlisted the assistance of volunteers to compare thousands of satellite images to monitor human rights (HR) violations in the region. In collaboration with academia, the international NGO is now looking into the development of computer algorithms which could interpret a large amount of space data efficiently. Such development, the combination of the use of narrow artificial intelligence and space data, is envisioned to significantly reduce the need for resources and volunteers' support in monitoring HR violations through satellite images. Has the development of commercial satellite technologies and big space data given non-State actors unprecedented competence in monitoring the activities of States? Are space technologies disrupting / reinforcing the long-held dominance of States in the international system? Can the use of space data (i.e. satellites images) contribute to ensuring compliance to international regimes? Focusing on recent practices in the international Human Rights regime, this paper seeks to identify the opportunities and disruptions that space data and technologies present to global governance.