

The TanDEM-X Mission Proposal

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Abstract: TanDEM-X is a mission, proposed in 2003 and now in Phase A (feasibility studies) by DLR and EADS Astrium. It is a SAR satellite formation built by the TerraSAR-X and another new TerraSAR-X like add-on satellite to enable single-pass SAR interferometry with variable baselines. The TanDEM-X mission has the goal of generating a global Digital Elevation Model (DEM) with an accuracy corresponding to the HRTI-3 specifications (12 m posting, 2 m relative height accuracy). This paper describes the mission concept and requirements, including several innovative aspects like operation modes, orbit selection and maintenance as well as PRF and phase synchronization. Results from detailed performance estimations show the achievable DEM accuracy. Finally, an overview of the potential of the TanDEM-X mission for several scientific applications is presented.

Keywords: Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR), Interferometry, Digital Elevation Model (DEM), Bi-static Radar, Moving Target Indication (MTI).

1. Introduction

Digital elevations models (DEMs) are of fundamental importance for a broad range of commercial and scientific applications. For example, many geoscience areas like hydrology, glaciology, forestry, geology, oceanography and land environment require precise and up-to-date information about the Earth's surface and its topography. Digital maps are also a prerequisite for reliable navigation, and improvements in their precision needs to keep step with the advances in global positioning systems, like GNSS and Galileo. In principle, DEMs can be derived from a variety of spaceborne sensors. However, the resulting mosaic of data from different sources with a multitude of horizontal and vertical data, accuracies, formats, map projections, time differences and resolutions is hardly a uniform and reliable data set. The Shuttle Radar Topography Mission (SRTM, [1][2]) had hence the challenging goal to meet the requirements for a homogeneous and reliable DEM fulfilling the DTED-2 specification (cf. third column of Table 1). However, many scientific and commercial applications require improved accuracy, corresponding to the emerging HRTI/DTED-3 standard (12 m posting and 2 m height accuracy, cf. right column of Table 1) and comparable to

DEMs generated by high-resolution airborne SAR systems.

The main goal of the TanDEM-X mission is the generation of world-wide, consistent, timely, and high-precision digital elevation models according to the HRTI/DTED-3 standard as the basis for a wide range of scientific research, as well as for operational, commercial DEM production [3][4]. This goal will be achieved by means of a second, TerraSAR-X like satellite TanDEM-X flying in a close orbit formation with TerraSAR-X. Both satellites will then act as a single-pass SAR interferometer with the opportunity for flexible baseline selection. This enables the acquisition of high-resolution interferograms without the inherent accuracy limitations of repeat-pass interferometry due to temporal decorrelation and atmospheric disturbances [5]. Besides the primary goal of the mission, several other secondary mission objectives based on along-track interferometry as well as new techniques with bi-static SAR have been defined which represent an important and innovative asset of the mission. The mission proposal for TanDEM-X [3] has been selected for a Phase A study within the scope of a "Call for Proposals for a Next German Earth Observation Mission" to be launched in 2008/2009.

The TanDEM-X satellite (TDX) will be designed for a nominal lifetime of 5 years and has a nominal overlap with TerraSAR-X (TSX-1) of 3 years. A prolongation of the mission overlap is possible by means of an extension of TSX-1 operation which is compatible with the TSX-1 consumables and resources.

Table 1: Comparison of DTED levels

| Requirement | Specification | DTED-2 | DTED-3 |
|------------------------------|--|--|--|
| Relative Vertical Accuracy | 90% linear point-to-point error over 1° x 1° | < 12 m (slope < 20%) < 15 m (slope > 20%) | < 2 m (slope < 20%) < 4 m (slope > 20%) |
| Absolute Vertical Accuracy | 90% linear error | < 18 m | < 10 m |
| Relative Horizontal Accuracy | 90% circular error | < 15 m | < 3 m |
| Absolute Horizontal Accuracy | 90% circular error | < 23 m | < 10 m |
| Spatial Resolution | independent pixels | 30 m (1 arc sec) | 12 m (1 arc sec) |

Table 2: TanDEM-X mission and system requirements

| Mission Requirements | Preliminary System Requirements |
|---|--|
| Digital Elevation Models (DTED-3) | Orbit, Constellation & Bus: |
| Vertical Accuracy: 2-4 m (rel.) 10 m (abs.) | Cross-Track Baseline: 300 m – 2 km (adjustable) |
| Horizontal Accuracy: 10 m | Along-Track Baseline: < 2 km (for bistatic InSAR) |
| DEM Post Spacing: 12 m | 200 m – 2 km (adjustable for ATI) |
| Along-Track Interferometry (ATI) | Baseline Measurement: 2-4 mm (without tie points) |
| Accuracy: 0.01 m/s (sea ice drift) | Orbit: polar ($i = 97.4^\circ$, $h = 514$ km) |
| 0.1 m/s (ocean currents) | Constellation Design: reconfigurable (low fuel demand), stable baselines, close formation control, collision avoidance concept (compatible with TSX-1) |
| 1 m/s (traffic monitoring) | System Lifetime: > 5 years |
| Observation & Operation | Instrument & TTC: |
| Coverage: global | SAR modes: Strip-Map, ScanSAR as a min. (support of TSX-1 mission goals) |
| Scenario: mapping of 500 000 km ² within: | Wavelength: X-Band (9.5 - 9.8 GHz) |
| a) 60 days (DTED-3) | Incident Angles: 25°-50° |
| b) 30 days (DTED-2) | Radiometric Perf.: NESZ ≤ -19 dB (@ 100 MHz) |
| Throughput: 1*10 ⁵ km ² /day (avg.) | Temporal Correlation: > 0.9 (e.g. via bistatic InSAR) |
| 2*10 ⁵ km ² /day (peak) | RF Phase Knowledge: < 20° |
| Calibration: avoid reference points in target area | Resolution (Rg. & Az.): < 6 m (for 4 interferometric looks) |
| Duration: > 5 years | Pixel Localisation: < 5 m |
| | Swath Width: ≥ 30 km |
| | Phase Centres: 4 (to resolve ATI ambiguities) |
| | Downlink Capacity: 2 x 500 Gbit/day (e.g. via second ground station) |
| | Data Comp. (BAQ): 2, 3 or 4 bit (or reduced BW) |
| | PRF: synchronised (for bistatic mode) |

2. Mission Concept and Requirements

TDX has SAR system parameters which are fully compatible with TSX-1 [6], allowing not only an independent operation from TSX-1 in mono-static mode, but also a synchronized operation. Since TDX is based on TSX-1 technology and linked with the TSX mission, the starting point of the mission requirements is the TSX-1 Space and Ground Segment Requirements [7]. With the user/data product requirements that have been derived from a questionnaire addressed to the science team of the TanDEM-X mission proposal, the mission specifications and the preliminary system requirements have been derived (see Table 2).

The TSX-1 satellite, as a basis for TanDEM-X, is not only a high performance SAR system with respect to SAR image and operational features, but it is already built for repeat-pass interferometry. It provides several essential features for the TanDEM-X mission, like precise orbit control, dual frequency GPS for best localization knowledge, and very good RF phase stability. In the following, some of the required specifications for the mission realization will be described in more detail.

2.1 Spacecraft and Launch Vehicle

Following the overall TanDEM-X concept, the spacecraft will be as much as possible a rebuild of TSX-1, i.e. the necessary modifications will already be implemented on TSX-1. This guarantees low development risks, the possibility to share operational functions and thus an inherent redundancy. The TSX-1 instrument is an advanced high resolution X-Band synthetic aperture radar based on active phased array technology which can be operated in Spotlight, Stripmap and ScanSAR mode with full polarization capability [6]. The TSX-1 instrument is operated at 9.65 GHz with a selectable SAR chirp

bandwidth of up to 300 MHz. The active phased array antenna is fixed mounted to the spacecraft body and incorporates 12 tiles with 32 dual-pole waveguide sub-arrays each. The overall antenna aperture area is 4.8 m x 0.7 m, the overall instrument mass is less than 500 kg. The TSX-1 rebuilt has a total mass of 1200 kg and an average/peak power consumption of 800/5300 W. The launch vehicle foreseen for the TDX satellite is either Rokot or DNEPR-1. The lift-off capability into TSX orbit is about 1350 kg. Launch site is Plesetzsk in Siberia or Baikonur in Kazakhstan.

2.2 TanDEM-X Operation Mode

Operational DEM generation will be performed using bistatic InSAR. Its principle, sketched in Fig. 1.a, is characterized by the simultaneous measurement of the same scene and identical Doppler spectrum with 2 receivers, thereby avoiding temporal decorrelation. To provide sufficient overlap of the Doppler spectra, along-track baselines < 2 km are required while the across-track baselines for high resolution DEMs have to be in the order of 300 m to 1 km. PRF synchronization and relative phase referencing between the satellites are mandatory. An alternating transmission mode (ping-pong mode) is also foreseen which allows the simultaneous generation of interferograms with single and double baseline as well as a direct phase synchronization of the radar systems (cf. [8]).

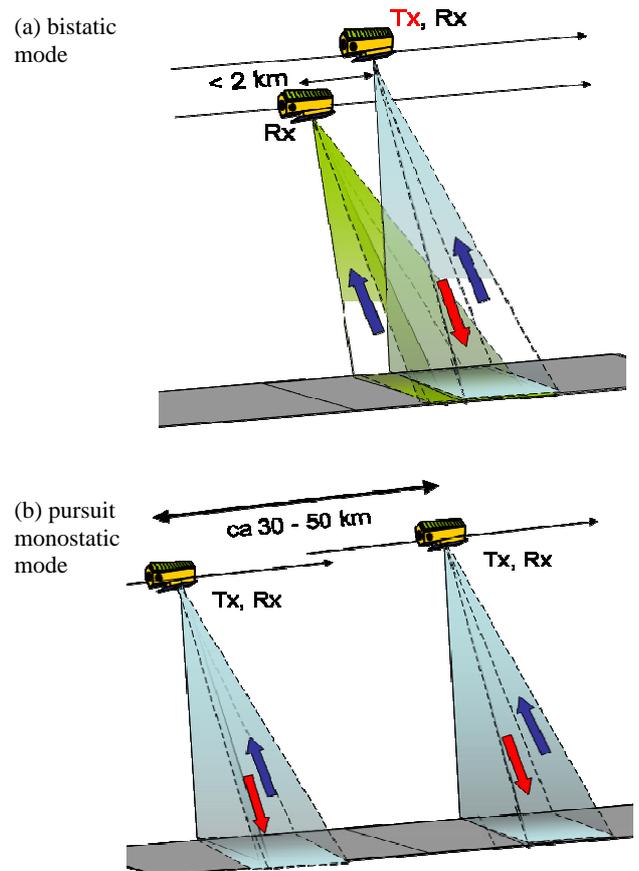


Figure 1: InSAR measurement configurations for TanDEM-X.

A secondary DEM generation mode is the pursuit mono-static InSAR mode (cf. Fig. 1.b), where two satellites are operated independently, avoiding the need for synchronization. The along-track distance is 30-50 km to exclude any interference between the radar instruments. The temporal decorrelation is still small for most terrain types except for water and vegetation at moderate to high wind speeds. The interferometric height sensitivity is doubled with respect to bi-static operation, meaning that the baseline determination has to be more accurate.

2.3 Orbit Configuration and Formation Flying

The TanDEM-X operational scenarios require a coordinated operation of two satellites flying in close formation. The adjustment parameters for the formation are the orbits node line angle, the angle between the perigees, the orbit eccentricities and the phasing between the satellites. With these parameters, several stable orbit configurations have been identified to provide the required baselines at dedicated geographical locations [9]. Fig. 2 shows an example which combines a horizontal cross-track displacement (e.g. by different ascending nodes) with a small vertical (radial) satellite separation (e.g. by slightly different eccentricities). Such a formation has the advantage that the satellite trajectories will never cross, thereby enabling a safe operation which minimizes the collision risk. The satellites may furthermore be shifted arbitrarily along their individual orbits. This enables an optimisation of the along-track displacement for different applications. Cross-track interferometry will aim at along-track baselines which are as short as possible to ensure an optimum overlap of the Doppler spectra and to avoid temporal decorrelation in vegetated areas, while other applications like along-track interferometry or super-resolution will require selectable along-track baselines in the range from several hundred metres to several kilometres.

The selection of optimised orbits is furthermore closely related to requirements on the operational flexibility regarding the derivation of data products from different regions on the Earth within a specified time-interval. For example, interferometric phase ambiguities in mountainous terrain and steep slopes may require multiple passes with a slightly reconfigured satellite formation to achieve the HRTI/DTED level 3 height accuracy. Several user scenarios have been defined and the major consequences of each of them on the orbit/formation selection are currently being analysed. This investigation includes a detailed coverage analysis for the different mission scenarios in combination with the identification of appropriate data acquisition strategies.

Coarse orbit control and maintenance of the tandem configuration will be done as part of the regular maintenance manoeuvres using thrusters. Several options for fine tuning the along-track displacement are being investigated in the current Phase A study. The close formation flying requires also a well defined collision avoidance concept working autonomously within 24 hours. An active S-Band inter-satellite link based systems

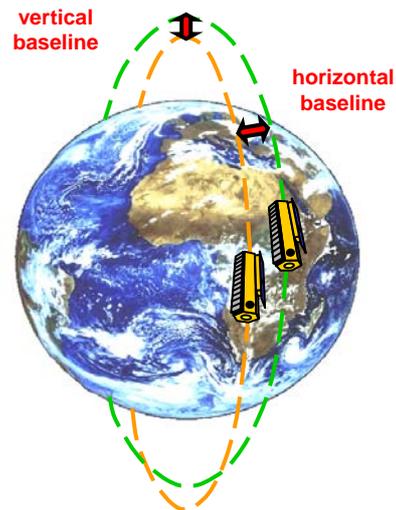


Figure 2: Orbits for TanDEM-X

is foreseen to provide TSX positions measured by GPS to the TDX satellite.

2.4 Cross Referencing of On-board Time and Local Oscillator Phases

Knowledge of the RF oscillator phase drift between the two tandem satellites is mandatory to meet the absolute height accuracy requirements without tie points. Direct transmission and reception of radar pulses is foreseen on both the TSX-1 and the TDX satellite. This will enable a new technique for precise phase referencing.

2.5 PRF Synchronization

PRF synchronization is best achieved through GPS based commanding of the start of the measurement. An alternative is the implementation of a triggering function for the receiving window.

2.6 Baseline Vector Determination

The envisaged concept for precise interferometric baseline vector determination is based on dual frequency GPS data provided by the TOR (Tracking, Occultation and Ranging) instrument on TSX-1 and TDX. In case of close formations, the required accuracy can be provided by a direct evaluation of GPS carrier phase observations [10]. An analysis performed with GRACE data shows the feasibility of such a concept [11]. The result was that a relative position knowledge of 1-2 mm can be achieved in most cases.

3. Performance Analysis

The DTED specification in Table 1 differentiates between relative and absolute height errors. The emerging HRTI/DTED-3 standard will require a relative height

accuracy of 2 m and an independent horizontal post-spacing of 12 m. Major factors which affect the relative height accuracy are the radiometric sensitivity of each SAR instrument, range and azimuth ambiguities, quantization noise, processing and co-registration errors as well as surface and volume decorrelation, scaled by the baseline length [12].

A detailed sensitivity and performance analysis has been conducted for TanDEM-X. Table 3 shows the main instrument, orbit, and processing parameters. The predicted relative height accuracy in bistatic mode is illustrated in Figure 3 where the height errors are shown as a function of the incident angle. This example is based on a height of ambiguity of 35 m, which corresponds to effective baselines of 260 m and 440 m for incident angles of 30° and 45°, respectively. The upper red curve shows height accuracy estimates of point-to-point errors for a 90% confidence interval and the lower blue curve shows estimates for the standard deviation. It is evident, that the TanDEM-X performance is better than the required HRTI/DTED-3 specification for a broad range of incident angles. The height accuracy may be further improved by an appropriate increase of the interferometric baselines and by a combination of multiple interferograms (e.g. different incident angles and/or ascending and descending orbits and/or different baselines). Note that large baselines may cause ambiguities in the phase to height conversion process. Hence, appropriate a priori information from a coarse DEM and/or multiple acquisitions with different interferometric baselines will be required for reliable phase unwrapping in case of using large interferometric baselines [13].

Table 3: TanDEM-X system parameters for performance analysis

| Parameter | Value |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Wavelength | 0.031 m |
| Chirp Bandwidth | 100 MHz |
| Peak Transmit Power | 2260 W |
| Duty Cycle | 18 % |
| Noise Figure | 4.3 dB |
| Losses (atm. degrad., proc., ...) | 4.1 dB |
| Antenna Size (Tx , Rx) | 4.8 m x 0.7 m |
| Processed Bandwidth | 2266 Hz |
| Co-Registration Accuracy | 1/10 pixel |
| Quantisation | 4 bit (BAQ) |
| Sigma Nought Model (90%) | Ulaby (HH, Soil & Rock) |
| Along-Track Displacement | < 1 km |
| Nominal Swath Width | 30 km |
| Post Spacing | 12 m x 12 m |

The sensitivity analysis in Figure 3 neglects errors due to the finite accuracy of relative baseline estimation and relative RF phase knowledge. Such errors will mainly cause a low frequency modulation of the DEM, thereby contributing primarily to absolute height errors. For the latter, the HRTI/DTED-3 standard is much less stringent and requires an accuracy of 10 m at a 90% confidence level.

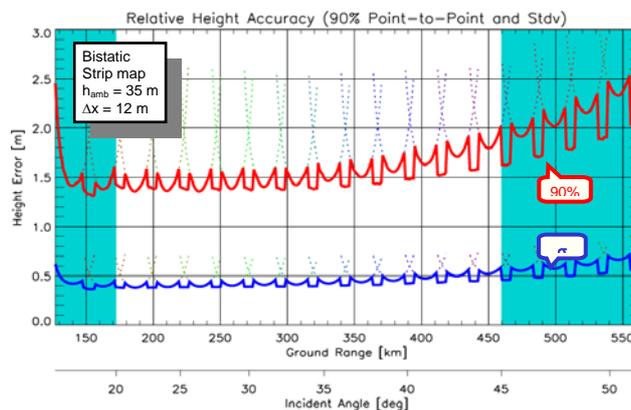


Figure 3: Predicted TanDEM-X height accuracy (for 12 m posting and a height of ambiguity of 35 m).

Any in depth analysis of such low frequency errors will require a detailed specification of the baseline estimation and phase synchronization technique. Table 4 summarises the sensitivity to baseline estimation and residual RF phase errors assuming a height of ambiguity of 35 m. It is expected, that the requirements will be refined during the current Phase A study, as soon as detailed models are available for the individual error sources. The acceptable errors will of course also depend on the final calibration plan. Note that the predicted GPS based baseline measurement accuracy of ~1 mm (cf. Section 2.6) is already compliant with Table 4, thereby allowing for a calibration of the DEM using a sparse net of calibration targets.

Table 4: Required accuracies of the interferometric phase and relative satellite position for a height error of ± 1 m assuming a height of ambiguity of 35 m.

| Incident Angle | Phase Error (for ± 1 m height error) | Required 3-D Baseline Accuracy (for ± 1 m height error) | | |
|----------------|--------------------------------------|---|---------------|-------------------------|
| | | without tie points | one tie point | two tie points (Δh=3km) |
| 30° | ± 10.3 ° | ±0.9 mm | ±8.7 mm | ±8.8 cm |
| 45° | | | ±1.5 cm | ±14.9 cm |

Oscillator noise may cause errors in both the interferometric phase and bistatic focusing. Such errors can be estimated from a linear systems model that weights the power spectral density of the oscillator phase noise. For example, errors from bistatic SAR focusing are modelled by an appropriate bandpass filter which accounts for the integration of the oscillator noise within the synthetic aperture time. A first evaluation yields an ISLR below -20 dB for coherent integration times of up to 5 s, a value which fits also quite well to the results from a joint DLR/ONERA bistatic airborne radar experiment. The stringent requirements for interferometric phase stability in the bistatic mode will require an appropriate relative phase referencing (Sect. 2.4) or an operation in the ping-pong alternating transmission mode (Sect. 2.2).

4. Scientific Applications

TanDEM-X has been designed to provide high quality data for commercial and scientific applications. As far as the scientific applications and corresponding geo-physical products are concerned, they have been endorsed with a questionnaire distributed to a large number of scientists. Many of the scientists represent end-users and have a long experience with the SRTM, SIR-C/X-SAR as well as ERS-1/2 data evaluation. The scientific applications can be summarized in three groups:

4.1 Across-Track Interferometry

A consistent and reliable DEM data set with global coverage and HRTI/DTED-3 standard provides important information for a variety of on-going research areas and will allow new scientific applications to be developed. Examples are:

- *Hydrology* (ice and snow, wetlands, morphology and flooding),
- *Geology* (geological mapping, tectonics, volcanoes and land-slides),
- *Land Environment* (cartography, urban areas, disaster and crisis management, navigation, archaeology and change detection),
- *Renewable Resources* (land use mapping, agriculture, forestry and grassland),
- *Oceanography* (wind and waves, ocean dynamics, sea-ice, ship detection, oil slicks and bathymetry). Some of these applications foresee the combined use of along- and across-track interferometry as well as polarimetry to enhance current products.

4.2 Along-Track Interferometry

Along-track interferometry will allow innovative applications to be explored. Along-track interferometry can be performed by the so-called dual-receive antenna mode in each of the two tandem satellites (ca. 2.4 m along-track baseline, cf. [14]) and/or by adjusting the along-track distance between TSX-1 and TDX to the desired value. The combination of both modes will provide a highly capable along-track interferometer with four phase centers. As outlined in Section 2.3, the along-track component can be adjusted from 0 to several kilometers. The combination of the different along-track baselines will e.g. be used for improved detection, localisation and ambiguity resolution in ground moving target indication (GMTI) and traffic monitoring applications. The following sub-groups have been defined for along-track interferometry:

- *Oceanography* (Ocean currents maps, ocean wave spectra),
- *Moving Target Detection* (Traffic flow monitoring maps, see also moving target techniques in application area 4.3),
- *Glaciology* (Ice drift and Ice flow monitoring maps).

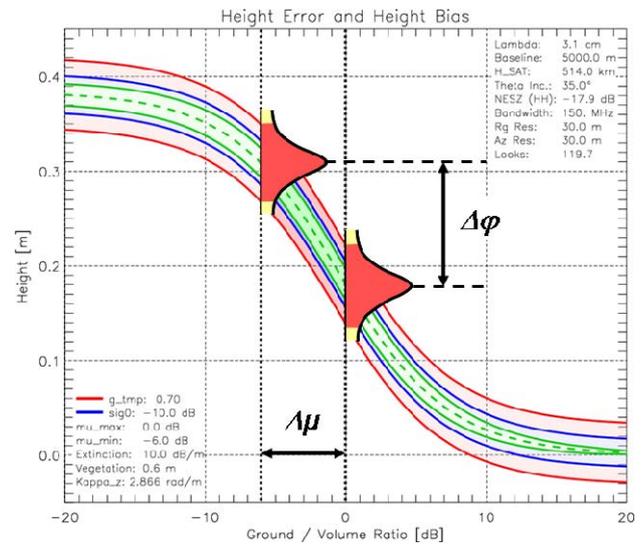


Figure 4: Vertical separation of interferometric phase centres in TanDEM-X as a function of the ground-to-volume scattering ratios μ .

4.3 New Techniques with Bi-Static SAR

The TanDEM-X mission will provide the remote sensing scientific community with a unique data set to exploit the capability of new bi-static radar techniques and to apply these innovative techniques for enhanced parameter retrieval. Examples are:

- *Super Resolution* (high resolution maps, micro-topography enhancement maps, feature extraction algorithms),
- *Bi-static SAR* (new bi-static SAR processing algorithms, multi-angle SAR, enhanced scene feature extraction, combination of mono-static and bi-static signatures),
- *Moving Target Detection* (detection of ground moving targets and the estimation of their velocity, moving target relocation, isolation and target focusing),
- *Polarimetric SAR Interferometry* (DEM optimization using polarization diversity, vegetation bias and structure maps, crop biomass). Figure 4 illustrates the achievable performance. This analysis is based on the Random Volume over Ground (RVoG) model [15] assuming a vegetation layer with a height of 0,6 m and an extinction coefficient of 10 dB/m. The dashed line indicates the height variation of the interferometric phase centre with different polarisations (corresponding to a variation of μ on the abscissa). The green tube shows the height errors due to volume decorrelation for an effective baseline of 5 km and an independent post-spacing of 30m x 30m. The blue tube shows additional errors due to the limited system accuracy and the red tube indicates potential errors in case of temporal decorrelation caused by a possible along-track separation between the two satellites (here: $\gamma_{mp} = 0.7$). The performance analysis predicts a sufficient phase centre separation to enable a successful retrieval of important vegetation parameters like volume height, extinction, etc.

5. Discussion

In order to comply with the HRTI/DTED-3 standard for DEM data, new technological skills are currently developed during the ongoing Phase A study. Examples are:

- close formation flying to ensure suitable baselines for interferometric processing,
- baseline determination capability down to few millimetres,
- frequency/phase and time synchronization of the tandem instrument configuration,
- global scale, operational DEM generation with HRTI/DTED-3 standard.

The experience gathered with the GRACE mission proves the feasibility and gives important background to adjust and maintain such a satellite formation. Furthermore, several strategies for failure recovery will be analyzed in phase A. As a fallback solution for the close distance formation flying, the pursuit mono-static mode can be used. In this case the two satellites acquire SAR data independently at an along-track displacement of several 10 km.

As far as the TSX-1 ground segment is concerned, it will be extended for TanDEM-X as follows: 1) to simultaneously operate two satellites in close formation (Mission Operations Segment, MOS), 2) to handle the increased data volume, to include a second receiving station and to adapt the processing chain for new data products (Payload Ground Segment, PGS), and 3) to calibrate and validate interferometric products (Instrument Operations and Calibration Segment, IOCS).

6. Acknowledgment

The authors would like to thank the TanDEM-X science team for their contributions, support and advises which constitute a major component of the TanDEM-X mission proposal.

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8. Glossary

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| <i>ATI</i> : | Along-Track Interferometry |
| <i>DEM</i> : | Digital Elevation Model |
| <i>DTED</i> : | Digital Terrain Elevation Data |
| <i>GFZ</i> : | Geo-Forschungs-Zentrum, Potsdam |
| <i>GMTI</i> : | Ground Moving Target Indication |
| <i>GRACE</i> : | Gravity Recovery and Climate Experiment |
| <i>HRTI</i> : | High Resolution Terrain Information (NIMA will probably use HRTI instead of DTED) |
| <i>InSAR</i> : | Interferometric SAR |
| <i>ISLR</i> : | Integrated Sidelobe Ratio |
| <i>NIMA</i> : | National Imagery and Mapping Agency, United States of America |
| <i>PollnSAR</i> : | Polarimetric SAR Interferometry |
| <i>PRF</i> : | Pulse Repetition Frequency |
| <i>RF</i> : | Radio Frequency |
| <i>SAR</i> : | Synthetic Aperture Radar |
| <i>SRTM</i> : | Shuttle Radar Topography Mission |
| <i>TSX-1</i> : | TerraSAR-X 1 Satellite |
| <i>TDX</i> : | TanDEM-X Satellite |