Hot Geospatial Intelligence from a Cold War

The Soviet Military Mapping of Towns and Cities

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Context

- Produced by the **VTU** (military topographic directorate of the Soviet Union) from WWII onwards, in parallel with the Soviet military topographic map series at six scales (from 1:25,000 to 1:1,000,000)

- Became available in the West, via **Latvia**, at ICC Köln, 1993

- Over **2,000** cities in **130** countries mapped at scales from 1:5,000 to 1:25,000 (mostly 1:10,000 or 1:25,000)

- Standard **projection**, **ellipsoid**, **datum** and **symbology**, and usually printed on sheets larger than A0
• At least 91 towns and cities mapped, at least once, from 1950 on

• Three scales (1:5,000, 1:10,000 and 1:25,000)
Pembroke, 1950 (VTU, 1:10,000)

Pembroke, 1953 (OS, 1:10,560)
Observations

• Comprehensive topographic detail, with strategic buildings/objects delineated, identified and classified

• Production quality is consistently high

• Local maps and directories used less, with greater reliance on satellite imagery (e.g. Zenit program of ‘cartographic’ satellites) from the early 1970s

• Some data also gathered by field observation (e.g. the clearance height under bridges over rivers)
San Diego, 1980 (4 sheets, 1:25,000)
Chatham, 1984 (2 sheets, 1:10,000)
Some Avenues for Future Research

• How accurate are the plans, in terms of both spatial positioning and completeness/classification?

• How do the Soviet plans compare with contemporary military plans produced by other countries?

• Can the design of the Soviet plans provide useful lessons when creating new maps, particularly in presenting a high amount of geographical information?
Thank you!


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