

The Soviet Military City Plans of Canada: An Introduction

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Abstract:

Several Canadian cities were mapped in detail by the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Parallel to the systematic Soviet topographic mapping of Canada at scales of 1:100,000 and smaller from at least the early 1960s, the fall of the USSR in 1991 brought the emergence of several plans of Canadian cities. Geographically focused studies of Soviet military mapping have been undertaken in recent years, e.g., of Ireland (Travers, 2008), Poland (Kent et al., 2019), Malta (Kent and Davies, 2020), Denmark (Svenningsen and Perner, 2020), Israel (Schaffer and Svenningsen, 2022), China (Aylmer, 2021) and Laos (Whyte, 2022), although that of Canada remains an unexplored topic. Together, these studies offer useful information regarding the content and coverage of Soviet mapping of territories outside the USSR, and each contribute towards understanding how varied and foreign environments were mapped. In turn, this may indicate solutions for cartographic representation and symbolisation as well as design and communication. Soviet maps, especially military city plans, also present us with ‘ways of seeing’ unlike that of Western maps, with their striking colour and typography, and portrayal of homeland strategic objects for use by a potentially hostile state.

This paper gives a brief overview of the Soviet mapping of Canada before discussing the style and content of a selection of 1:25,000 military city plans. These include Toronto (1973; figure 1), Calgary (1974), Halifax/Dartmouth (1974), Edmonton (1981), Montreal (1986), and, latterly, Vancouver (2003). This reveals the importance of transportation and industrial infrastructure, as well as terrain and hydrography. A closer inspection of the nature and quantity of symbology used on the plan of Halifax/Dartmouth then provides the basis for a detailed comparison with contemporaneous Canadian mapping, leading to insights into the foci of the cartographers and the possible source materials they used.



Figure 1. Toronto Harbour, shown on the 1973 Soviet military plan of Toronto at 1:25,000
(Source: <https://redatlasbook.com/cityplansus>)

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