

SOVIET MAP DISTORTION POLICY

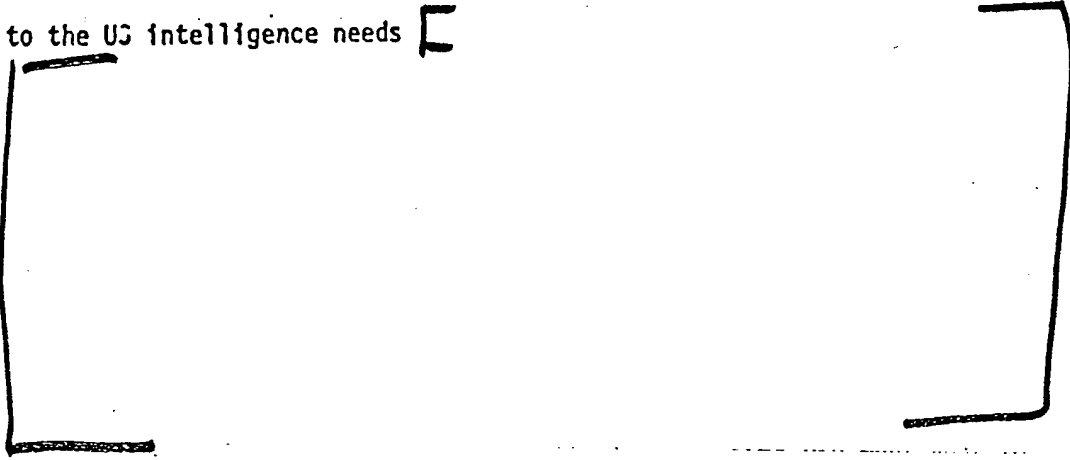
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The Soviet Union in 1958 began a systematic program of thinning out and distorting detail on their unclassified maps and in 1965 began to shift the geographic coordinate lines on all maps they released. This policy has continued to the present time.

The utility of these maps in research has been diminished since the information they contain -- place names and settlement locations, roads and railroads, internal political and economic region boundaries, and rivers and other water bodies -- must now be checked against other sources. On the other hand, the distortion program poses no critical loss to the US intelligence needs



Ironically, in 1958 the Soviets released a 16-sheet physical map of the USSR at a scale of 1:2.5 million that was highly accurate.



The accompanying graphs illustrate the distortion by comparing an area on the 1958 physical map with the same area on a recently produced Soviet map at the same scale.

We reported these distortion practices in a SECRET 1969 study, the main elements of which were released to the press at that time; we concluded then, and still believe, that the map changes were imposed

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by the Soviet intelligence services in an effort consistent with the general Soviet practices of deception and of withholding information that would be useful to foreign analysts and planners. The timing of the changes (1958-1964) indicates that the map distortion decisions

were made in the era of the L-2 and the Penkovskiy case [ ]  
[ ] , during which period  
the Soviet security establishment was shaken and very active.

The expense of compiling and drafting erroneous plates and the impact on the morale of the cartographic community have made the program doubly costly to the USSR. Since 1969 [ ] several statements by Soviet officials with intimate knowledge of the mapping establishment that confirm this suspicion. One stated,

"Of course, any child or idiot can clearly see such distortions, but things like that do happen when higher-ups fail to consult with the experts and then you have to blush every time you meet your foreign colleagues."