

Geographic Handbook of the CIA (Geograficheskiy Spravochnik TsRU)

Intelligence in Recent Public Literature

Yekaterinburg, Russia: Yekaterinburg U-Factoriya, 2004). 697 pages.

Reviewed by Joseph A. Baclawski

A Russian publishing company has translated the CIA's 2002 *World Factbook* as a basic handbook and positioned it as a best seller. Having been both a contributor to and a user of *Factbook* data, I could not resist a further examination after my first glimpse of the Russian version.[1] A half-century of experience with Soviet and Russian publications did not prepare me for this book's two surprises:

- The pejorative adjectives that decades of Soviet publications customarily attached to references to the CIA were absent. Even more surprising were the extremely positive comments about this CIA product prominently printed all over the book's covers.
- The physical appearance of the Russian book was outstanding. In contrast to the soft covers of the US original, the Russian translation is bound between attractive, colorful, hard covers. The high quality of the paper and graphics is virtually unique among Russian publications.

The external appearance of the book, with its outlined world map as a background, is clearly designed to catch the eye of browsers. The front

cover indicates the first two words of the title in exceptionally large letters —with the acronym “TsRU” letters six times larger! The similar lettering pattern on the book's spine also effectively attracts attention.

On the front cover, an annotation at the top emphasizes that the book is a “First!” with unique country rankings on 27 social-demographic and economic parameters. In the center, a statement indicates that the book provides “the newest information on all the countries and territories of the world.” The annotation at the bottom highlights the fact that the book contains information on government structure, age structure of the population, family income, telecommunications, military expenditures, and international problems of all the countries of the world.

The back cover informs the Russian reader that:

- *The Geographic Handbook of the CIA is a veritable encyclopedia of the world's political geography, economy, and international relationships.*
- *A global approach to the collection and exposition of a large volume of quality, multi-faceted information is outlined.*
- *The Handbook permits the reader to view the globe as a totality of mankind's common problems and their associated tasks.*
- *The book contains a prognosis of the direction of development of the political system and economy of various countries.*
- *The reader of the Handbook is given a rare opportunity to look at the world through the eyes of CIA analysts.*

The cover also assures potential purchasers that “The information is provided and checked by authoritative government agencies of the USA: the State Department, Department of the Interior, Department of Defense, Bureau of the Census, Committee (Board) on Geographic Names, and others.” And at the bottom, in large letters, it emphasizes that “EVERYTHING THAT USA INTELLIGENCE KNOWS ABOUT THE WORLD, YOU ALSO KNOW NOW.” Then, in smaller lettering, it concludes with a Russian idiomatic expression that “Accurate information is a strategy for survival.”

Between these two covers is an impressive product. Its publication required a major investment of skilled human and technical resources. The production team undoubtedly included linguistic, geographic, cartographic, editorial, publishing, and probably data-processing skills. Turning the

English-language Factbook into almost 700 pages of Russian text was a challenging, time-consuming task. To some degree, the translators' task was facilitated by having standardized topics for each country. It is likely that such a massive effort involving repetitive standardized vocabulary would have had computerized support.

I checked two samples of the text for accuracy against the English-language original. In the entry on Austria, several words in the post-World War II political chronology were omitted, but their deletion could be justified editorially because they described a transitional detail of no longterm consequence. The accompanying outline map of Austria was slightly modified to provide additional information. In this instance, the Russian cartographer doubled the map scale and added two city names: Gmuend (Russian Gmyund) was probably included because of its importance for controlling border traffic with Czechoslovakia; Krems, on the Danube River west of Vienna, was also inserted.

The second spot check was of the “Brief History of Basic Intelligence and *The World Factbook*.” This section had been inserted into recent CIA *Factbook* editions to outline the six decades of continuous basic intelligence support to the US government provided by the *Factbook* and its two predecessors. There was no editorializing in the Russian translation to satisfy political ideology. The translation was basically accurate, with only two exceptions: In one case, the production of US gazetteers was erroneously attributed to the State Department rather than the Department of the Interior; in the second case, an inconsistency in the last two sentences clearly stemmed from carrying over text translated from a 2000 edition of the *Factbook*, rather than the 2002 edition.

In general, the *Handbook* proofreaders deserve high praise for their work on this massive translation and restructuring task. I encountered only one other minor uncorrected proofreading glitch: On page 633 of the “Appendix on International Organizations and Groups,” a Russian word inadvertently slipped into the English language title of the “Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe” (OSCE). An errata list would be an appropriate remedy for such minor problems, including the correction of a minor style error on page 3 in the “Brief History” section, so that both of the Russian words *dannyye razvedki* that are used to translate the English noun for “intelligence” are put in bold type.

There was one notable deviance from the otherwise rigorous policy of literal translation from English to Russian: the title change from *The World*

Factbook to *Geographic Handbook*. This appears to have been done to better describe the scope and substantive content of the book for the average Russian reader.

The entire set of reference maps that were extensively redesigned in recent CIA *Factbook* editions were reproduced in the Russian *Handbook*. The reproductions are of high quality, in color, with the only changes being replacing the geographic names with their Russian Cyrillic equivalents. The *Factbook* includes the national flag in color as a part of each country's article. To reduce printing costs, the Russian *Handbook* runs a black and white version of the flag with the country text, then adds five color plates of all the national flags at the back of the book.

In the *Factbook*, data are organized according to the sequence of letters in the English alphabet. To meet the needs of Russian users, the *Handbook* restructures the data according to the spelling of the Russian geographic names and the sequence of letters in the Cyrillic alphabet.

In view of the magnitude and importance of the product, it is surprising that the *Handbook* was printed in the Urals, rather than in Moscow. A question arises as to whether this action was part of a national policy to build up the economy of regions outside Moscow, thereby also incurring lower production costs, or just a local initiative.

I venture a forecast that there will be a steadily increasing Russian demand for this *Geographic Handbook*. The publishing instructions indicate that 10,000 copies are authorized, but only 3,000 copies were initially printed.

For individuals with a Russian language capability, this hard-copy version—which I obtained from Russia On Line, Inc., in Kensington, Maryland (www.russia-on-line.com)—is certainly a bargain at \$34.95. A comparable soft copy *Factbook* from the US Government Printing Office costs \$90.00; however, the \$90 buys you the most recent edition, whereas the *Handbook* provides data from the 2002 edition.

The production of the Russian translation of *The World Factbook* for domestic sale, accompanied by strongly positive statements about the usefulness of its data, warrants one final comment: This action may be a small indicator of a move by Moscow toward basing foreign affairs interactions more on facts and geopolitical realities, and less on ideology. The long term impact of this seemingly positive trend is of course impossible to forecast.

Footnote:

[1] *The World Factbook* was developed as part of a larger program to meet the information needs of US government personnel after World War II. The obvious value of the *Factbook's* basic information to the academic community, the media, and the general public led to its sale through the Government Printing Office, beginning in 1975. The number of *Factbook* users has steadily expanded not only in the United States, but also worldwide, especially after it began to be posted on the Internet: <https://www.cia.gov/publications/factbook/index.html>.

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