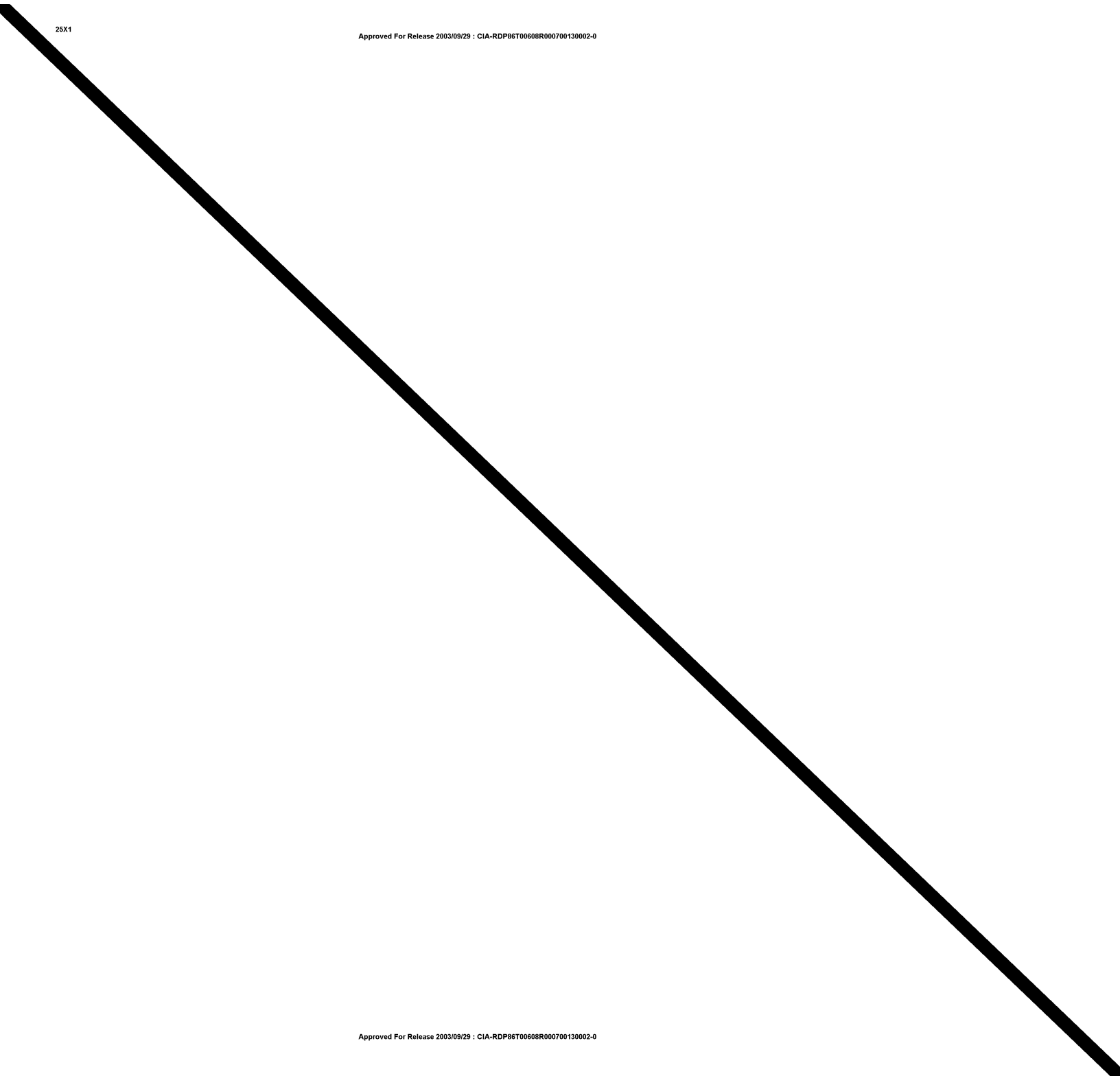

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MEMORANDUM

Tactical Air Potential of
Kiev Class Aircraft Carriers

1. The Soviets are building two Kiev class ASW aircraft carriers which will have a limited potential for tactical air operations. There is no evidence, however, that the Soviets have any intention of developing a carrier-based tactical aviation force comparable to that of the US Navy.

2. The Kiev class is expected to carry a mix of V/STOL fighters and ASW helicopters. The fighter complement probably will be used primarily for air defense and reconnaissance missions in support of Soviet surface forces. The V/STOL fighter being developed for these ships would also have a light strike capability, but the Kiev class is expected to be used for ASW missions rather than for the projection of tactical air power.

3. The Kiev class lacks the catapults and arresting gear used on US carriers and can only handle V/STOL aircraft and helicopters (see attached drawings for a comparison of the Kiev and US carriers). The only Soviet tactical aircraft that could operate from the Kiev are a new Yakovlev V/STOL fighter and the earlier Freehand V/STOL prototype (which never became operational). The total aircraft complement of the Kiev will depend on the aircraft mix and the extent of deck storage, but will probably be on the order of some 35 aircraft. The most likely load is estimated to be about 12-15 V/STOL aircraft and 20 ASW helicopters. If the ship carried V/STOL fighters only--which is considered highly unlikely--it could accommodate about 20 to 25 in the hangar and perhaps another 10 or so on deck.

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4. The characteristics of the new Yakovlev fighter are not well-defined, but it is a subsonic aircraft with the payload/range limitations inherent to V/STOL operations. There is a difference of opinion as to whether the aircraft has a turbojet or turbofan engine, and this has a considerable impact on estimatesof range capabilities. Two sets of representative mission profiles (assuming optimum conditions) are as follows:

Mission and Payload	Maximum Combat Radius	
	Turbojet	Turbofan
Air defense mission with 4 ATOLL missiles (no external fuel)	415 nm	600 nm
Ground support mission with two 550-lb bombs and two external fuel tanks	480 nm	750 nm

The new Yakovlev V/STOL fighter is a relatively small aircraft and would have a limited capability to carry sophisticated avionics equipment. Thus it probably will not have a true "all-weather" capability. Night operations would be possible, but it is likely to be some time before the Soviets develop enough experience with carrier operations to operate extensively at night or in bad weather. The aircraft could be given a nuclear weapons delivery capability, but this seems rather unlikely in view of its most probable missions.

5. The new Yakovlev fighter is believed to have entered series production and is expected to become operational concurrently with the first Kiev class carrier. There is some evidence of preparations for the deployment of the aircraft to a naval air base, but operational crews probably have not yet begun flight training in the new fighter.

6. Soviet doctrine and tactics for the employment of carrier-based fighters can be expected to evolve over time as the Soviets gain a better

understanding of the capabilities and limitations of V/STOL aircraft operations at sea. At this point, the Soviets themselves probably have only a general idea of how the potential of V/STOL fighters will affect their fleet operations. The primary emphasis, at least initially, probably will be to develop practical procedures for operating V/STOL aircraft at sea and for integrating such operations with other elements of the fleet air defense and reconnaissance systems.

7. The command structure for Soviet naval V/STOL fighters probably will parallel that of the helicopters assigned to the Moskva class ASW cruisers. Operationally, V/STOL fighters probably would be under the direct control of the carrier commander, who would normally be the officer in tactical command of a deployed task force. Such a task force would normally be under the control of one of the four fleet commanders, but might be placed under direct control of Naval Headquarters in Moscow in some circumstances.

8. When not embarked on the carrier the navy's V/STOL fighters probably would be part of an independent unit within the regular naval aviation structure of the fleet concerned. Operations ashore probably would be primarily of a training and administrative nature, at least initially, although the aircraft might have a contingency mission of aiding in the defense of coastal areas. (At some later point it is conceivable that the Soviets would employ land-based V/STOL fighters in support of their naval infantry forces. Such a mission, if it evolves, would not necessarily be related to carrier-based-operations--aircraft used in this fashion might be subordinated to the Soviet Navy, but could equally well be part of Frontal Aviation if that force acquires V/STOL fighters for its own use.)

9. The first unit of the Kiev class probably will commence sea trials by the end of 1975 and become operational in 1976; the second probably will

enter service about 1978. For the first couple of years Kiev class operations probably will be confined to the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. When the second unit becomes available, one of the two ships might then be deployed to the Northern Fleet for operations in the Norwegian Sea and possibly occasional sorties into the North Atlantic. More distant operations are unlikely--although possible under special circumstances--until the Soviets have acquired considerable experience in carrier operations.