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18 January 1982

Dear Robin

Last September we were advised by our Defence Attache in Buenos Aires that the Argentine Air Force was showing some interest in ex-RAF Vulcan bombers. At the time you had no political objections to the sale but some confusion seems to have arisen over whether we were seeking clearance for one single aircraft or a force large enough to have a real operational capability. In fact, I understand the minimum requirement would be for six aircraft.

During November I was told that your Department required more information on the reasons for the Argentine interest and we therefore took no action until I had a chance to talk to our DA in Buenos Aires at the beginning of December. He has been unable to identify a specific role for these aircraft but is convinced that they would be inappropriate for use in any adventure against the Falkland Islands. We can only assume, therefore, that the Vulcan would be purchased either as a pure deterrent or for operations to the West.

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Support for these aircraft will become increasingly difficult but sufficient spares and test equipment to support the sale of six or twelve aircraft is likely to be available given that the Air Force has until recently operated some 48 of the type. Our DA will shortly be making further enquiries about whether the Argentine Air Force interest is genuine. If it is we would propose to invite an evaluation team to the UK to look at the aircraft and gain some understanding of its complexity of operation and of engineering support. Assuming continuing Argentine interest we would then ask British Aerospace, in conjunction with Rolls Royce, to look more closely at the question of the practicability of providing adequate support for say ten years.

All this presupposes, of course, that you would have no political objection to the sale. I would be grateful for your confirmation that the clearance given on 5 October 81 relates to up to a full squadron of twelve aircraft.

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*cc Miss VJ Evans, DS 13 B MOD
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