

156. Information Memorandum From the Director of the Bureau of Politico-Military Affairs (Burt) to Secretary of State Haig¹

Washington, April 20, 1982

SUBJECT

Possible UK Use of Vulcan Bombers in Falklands

There have been press reports alleging UK plans to use Vulcan bombers in Falkland operations,² USDAO London confirms planning for use of this aircraft. The attache was told bombers will *practice in Scotland this week*.

Vulcan is capable of conventional bomb deliveries with modifications, but the RAF has *not trained for such missions in eleven years*.³ The aircraft would need some reconfiguration, which could probably be done in a matter of hours per aircraft. Nonetheless, an RAF source said it would take "*some time*" before the Vulcans would have *operational, conventional bombing capability*. Vulcans would *require refueling* in each direction between the Falklands and Ascension. By reducing bomb capability the combat radius can be increased, but refueling would still be necessary. The UK does have the requisite tanker capability.

There are about fifty flyable aircraft in the UK inventory, of which 36 are *dedicated to SACEUR'S SSP*. Each bomber could carry as many as twenty-one, one thousand pound bombs, but the British could have a *major logistical problem* in getting an adequate supply of ordnance to Ascension. Bombers do not usually fly and land with a full bomb load.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Foreign Policy File, P880105-0941. Secret; Nodis. Drafted by T. Miller and M. Austin; cleared by Blackwill and T. Williams (INR). Blackwill initialed for Williams. Haig initialed the memorandum in the upper right-hand corner, indicating that he saw it. Haig also underlined numerous passages in the text of the memorandum. An attachment describing the Vulcan Aircraft is not printed.

² On April 18, the Embassy in London sent to the Department an analysis of an article that had appeared in the Sunday *Express* newspaper, which stated that Vulcan bombers had been deployed to the South Atlantic for operations against Argentina. In its comment, the Embassy noted: "MOD sources consistently have refused to discuss contingency plans for military operations in the Falklands area. However, the Royal Air Force (RAF) has not yet phased out its entire fleet of Vulcans and those that remain do have a long-range conventional bombing capability. Moreover, the recent additional task force augmentation of some twenty ground-attack Harriers cannot reach the Falklands area for several weeks. Against this background, it is possible that MOD planners have developed contingency plans for Vulcan deployment along the lines discussed" in the article. (Telegram 8372 from London, April 18; Department of State, Central Foreign Policy File, D820202-0597)

³ The Avro Vulcan bomber entered service in 1956 as part of the RAF's "V-bomber" force, designed originally to serve as a platform for the United Kingdom's nuclear deterrent.

They could either reduce the number of bombs carried, fly some in by transport aircraft, or, if they have seriously considered this option earlier, bombs may have been loaded aboard ships.

There is speculation as to whether this is merely public posturing, or a valid military option that HMG is considering. While this is a *theoretically feasible mission* for these aircraft, it would be *very difficult*. It would be dangerous for the aircraft, requiring good fortune with weather and timing. Given the conditions, it would be difficult to accurately place the bombs. DIA estimates they would have a good probability of penetrating air defenses at the Falklands, but would have much more of a problem on the mainland.