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MO 5/21

Prime Minister 23rd April 1982

*MT*  
*Gen Chie,*

*I suggest the decision this  
with the (you tomorrow morning)*

*the  
23rd*

OPERATION CORPORATE: VULCAN SUPPORT

As I indicated to you this afternoon, following the Prime Minister's visit to Northwood and the briefing she received there, the Chief of Defence Staff is seeking a decision, by tomorrow evening, to allow the deployment of two Vulcan aircraft to Ascension. I attach a copy of the submission which he has now sent the Defence Secretary, and which reflects the outcome of discussion by the Chiefs of Staff Committee.

I have consulted Mr Nott on the outline of what is proposed. He would strongly support early deployment to Ascension of the two Vulcan aircraft both in order to provide the earliest possible option for neutralising the Port Stanley airfield and also for its general deterrent effect. He recognises however that since the deployment would become known its effect on the diplomatic scene needs to be taken into account, particularly if Mr Haig were to return to Buenos Aires.

The Defence Secretary has asked me to emphasise that authority to mount a sortie against Port Stanley airstrip is an entirely separate decision, which Mr Nott would wish to have discussed fully in OD(SA). This subject may well come up at Chequers on Sunday, and a detailed briefing on the Vulcan capability can be provided for Ministers should they wish it at Northwood later that afternoon.

I am copying this letter to Private Secretaries to the members of OD(SA) and Sir Robert Armstrong. Copies also go direct to Sir Michael Palliser, and Sir Ian Sinclair (FCO).

*Yours end,*  
*David Omand*  
(D B OMAND)

C A Whitmore Esq

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DEPLOYMENT OF VULCANS TO ASCENSION ISLAND

1. As you know the RAF have been working up a capability to attack Port Stanley airfield with conventional bombs from Vulcan aircraft launched from Ascension Island.

2. The Vulcan with air refuelling has a radius of action and bomb carrying capability to reach the Falkland Islands from Ascension Island which is 3,350 miles away. A force of 10 Victor tankers would be required to support a single Vulcan round trip from Ascension Island. There is enough fuel at Ascension to support this operation. The US Administration has today confirmed that there would be no objection to our deploying Vulcan aircraft to Ascension.

3. If a Vulcan aircraft attacked the Port Stanley runway with 21 1,000 lb bombs at low level there would be a 90% probability of causing one runway crater and a 75% probability of causing 2 runway craters. There would be considerable damage to the parking area, and any parked aircraft. The direction of attack would ensure that neither Port Stanley town nor its outskirts were within the predicted impact area. Vulcan aircraft have been modified for this operation, and crews have been training in air to air refuelling and conventional bombing in conditions similar to those they would encounter in the Falkland Islands.

4. So far as we know there are no Argentine Air Defence aircraft deployed to the Falkland Islands, and the distance from mainland bases should preclude interception by air defence aircraft, particularly at night. There are air defences around Port Stanley including anti-aircraft guns and surface-to-air missiles, and air defence radars but there is as yet no firm intelligence that these systems have an all weather and night time capability.

5. There is no doubt that an enforcement by our carrier task group of a total Exclusion Zone around the Falkland Islands would be easier to achieve if Port Stanley airfield were rendered inoperable. This can be done by bombing attacks by Vulcans or by Sea Harriers operated from the task group. The Chiefs-of-Staff believe that the sooner it is done the better. The



advantage of using Vulcans is that the attack can be mounted before the task group arrives and the reinforcement of the Argentine garrison would be inhibited two or three days earlier. Furthermore the Sea Harriers would be conserved for the air operations necessary to enforce the Exclusion Zone and protect our ships. The Chiefs-of-Staff are confident that such an operation is militarily feasible and stands a good chance of success.

6. The Vulcans are now ready to be deployed. The earliest time at which one of the aircraft could attack Port Stanley airfield depends on the timing of a decision to deploy aircraft forward to Ascension Island as follows:

Decision to be Deployed	Aircraft on Ascension Island	Attack on Port Stanley Airfield
Sat 24 Apr	Sun 25 Apr	Mon 26 Apr
Sun 25 Apr	Mon 26 Apr	Tue 27 Apr

The decision to deploy the Vulcans forward could be delayed beyond Sun 25 April with corresponding delay to the attack but it should be noted that a delay in the Vulcan operations beyond 28/29 April could lead to a clash of priorities with the requirement to fly reinforcement Harriers out to Ascension Island early in May.

7. We are clear on the military advantages of early use of Vulcans to put Port Stanley airfield out of action. This option will be available sooner if we have an early decision to deploy the two Vulcan aircraft to Ascension. I should stress that a decision in this sense will not commit you to authorise attacks by the Vulcans on Port Stanley airfield which you could decide upon separately. The deployment of the Vulcans to Ascension Island would itself have a deterrent value.

Approved by CDS  
and Signed in his Absence

23rd April 1982