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A MILITARY APPRECIATION OF THE USE OF VULCANS
FOR AN ATTACK ON STANLEY AIRFIELD

In accordance with the instructions (1) of the Chiefs of Staff the attached paper has been prepared by the Air Force Department. The paper will be tabled for consideration by the Chiefs of Staff at their meeting at 1130 on Friday 23 April 1982.

Note:

- 1. COS 25th Meeting/82, Item 5.

Attachment:

Military Appreciation (3 pages).

Distribution:

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PSO/CDS	ALQ 62/3 - 6 MAY 1982	1 -	2
Sec/CNS		3 -	17
MA/CGS		18 -	25
PS/CAS		26 -	35

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Copy to:

PS/S of S	36
PS/PUS	37
VCDS(P&L)	38
DCDS(I)	39 - 40
DUS(P)	41
ACDS(Pol)	42 - 43
ACDS(Ops)	44 - 46
AUS(D Staff)	47
DS 11	48
FCO (Def Dept)	49 - 50
Cabinet Office	51
COSSEC	61

22 April 1982

A MILITARY APPRECIATION OF THE USE OF VULCANS FOR AN ATTACK ON STANLEY AIRFIELD

1. Aim. The aim of this appreciation is to assess the option of denying the use of Stanley airfield to Argentine forces by conventional air attack at the earliest possible opportunity.
2. Assumptions. For the purposes of this appreciation, it is assumed that offensive air operations from Ascension Island will not be affected by the MOU. This point is being cleared as a matter of urgency by the Secretary of State FCO in Washington.
3. Air Capability. The Vulcan with air refuelling has the radius of action and bomb carrying capability to reach the Falkland Islands from the nearest available airfield at Ascension Island (3350 miles away). Aircraft modifications and crew training in air to air refuelling and conventional bombing have demonstrated that this is a feasible capability. A force of 10 Victors is required to support a single Vulcan round trip from Ascension. Enough fuel is available at Ascension to support this operation.
4. Accuracy. Attacking with 21 x 1000lb bombs and at low level there would be a 90% probability of causing one runway crater, and a 75% probability of causing two runway craters. Considerable damage could be expected to the parking area and to any parked aircraft. The direction of attack would ensure that neither Port Stanley town or its outskirts were within the predicted impact area.
5. Timing. Two Vulcans, one as reserve, could be deployed to Ascension on 25 April and fly the operation at earliest on the night of 26 April. To meet this timescale a deployment decision is required on 24 April.

6. Defences. There are no known deployments of air defence aircraft to the Islands and the distance from mainland bases should virtually preclude interception by air defence aircraft, particularly at night. In terms of air defence radars, AAA guns and SAMs, a detection and defensive capability is assessed to exist, mainly in visual conditions. Additionally, all-weather Roland SAM, and Super FLEDERMAUS AAA are believed to have been deployed to the Falklands but their operational status has not been confirmed. Action is in hand to enhance the Vulcan's ECM capability to counter this. The establishment of a maritime exclusion zone should preclude the existence of any defensive craft, with AAA or SAM, in the surrounding sea area. Surprise is an important factor and the timing of the mission must be kept secret: attack by night would have the greatest chance of success.

7. Resources. The use of Stanley Airfield can best be denied by conventional air attack by a Vulcan operating from Ascension or by Sea Harriers operating from the Task Group. The advantage of the Vulcan is that it would be available some 2-3 days before the Sea Harriers will be within range of Stanley Airfield. To keep the airfield out of use for a prolonged period, follow on attacks could be necessary to disrupt the enemy airfield damage repair capability. If this could be carried out by Sea Harriers once the Task Group has arrived, it would release the Victor Tankers for tasks which are essential to the success of other air operations. Moreover, a delay in the Vulcan operation beyond the 28/29 April will bring a clash of priorities with the requirement to ferry Sea Harriers and Harrier GR3 out to Ascension early in May.

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8. Conclusions. It is concluded that:

a. The earliest means of denying the use of Stanley Airfield to the Argentines is by conventional attack utilising a single Vulcan.

b. This option could be available from 26th April. Until 29th April it will be the only option available.

c. The Vulcan operation will make a heavy demand upon the Victor Tanker force. After 28/29 April it will not be possible to carry out both the Vulcan operation and ferry Harriers to Ascension, on the planned date.

d. In order to launch an attack on the night of 26th April a decision to send the Vulcans to Ascension will be required on 24th April.

4. The Chief of Defence Staff said that he proposed to discuss the Prime Minister this evening to invite her to consider, with colleagues a decision to deploy Vulcans to Ascension Island with the aim of subsequent action to immobilise Port Stanley Airport. He would point out the timing considerations in paragraph 5 of the paper, and added that he would ask the Prime Minister whether she was prepared to take the decision herself, or whether she would wish to consult her colleagues.

5. In spite of some scepticism from the civilians in the Ministry of Defence about the likely effectiveness of such attacks, the consensus of the Chiefs was that deployment of Vulcans as soon as possible was desirable, and was likely to be effective. Ministers will of course need to consider the implications of an attack against Port Stanley Airport, which Mr Haig may be in Buenos Aires in Buenos Aires.

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INDEX	PA	Action taken

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POSSIBLE USE OF VULCANS FOR AN ATTACK ON PORT STANLEY AIRFIELD

1. At the Chiefs of Staff meeting which I attended this evening, there was some discussion of the attached paper prepared by the Air Force Department on the use of Vulcans for an attack on Stanley airfield.
2. The Chief of Defence Staff opened the discussion by asking for our views on the need for an Air Exclusion Zone. Sir Frank Cooper explained the action in hand for the declaration of a Total Exclusion Zone (TEZ) which he said should be ready by close of play today. In theory therefore Ministers should be able to consider this question, if they so wished, at their meeting at Chequers on 25 April.
3. The Chief of Air Staff explained the timing considerations set out in paragraph 5 of the enclosure, pointing out that a decision on 25 April would allow for an operation to be mounted on 27 April, at the earliest. There was some discussion about the relative advantages of an earlier or later operation, but the conclusion of the meeting was that, if Vulcans were to be used, action should be taken as soon as possible, both to stop further reinforcement through the airfield and to gain extra surprise in advance of the arrival of the Task Force. The Chief of Defence Staff also pointed out that any delay beyond 28-29 April would clash with the Harrier requirement, although it would again be possible to use Vulcans on 4 May.
4. The Chief of Defence Staff said that he proposed to minute the Prime Minister this evening to invite her to consider with colleagues a decision to deploy Vulcans to Ascension Island, with the aim of subsequent action to immobilize Port Stanley Airport. He would point out the timing considerations in paragraph 5 of the paper and added that he might ask the Prime Minister whether she was prepared to take the decision herself, or whether she would wish to consult her colleagues.
5. In spite of some scepticism from the civilians in the Ministry of Defence about the likely effectiveness of Vulcan attacks, the consensus of the Chiefs was that deployment of the Vulcans as soon as possible was desirable, and was likely to be effective. Ministers will of course need to consider the implications of an attack against Port Stanley Airport at a time when Mr Haig may be in business again in Buenos Aires.

P R H Wright
E 122

23 April 1982

cc: Private Secretary
Mr Gillmore
Mr Weston

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