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PRIME MINISTERThe destruction of Pat Stanley Airfield

Ministers are to decide tomorrow whether to decide to deploy Vulcans to Ascension.

2. Discussions with MOD this afternoon made it clear a number of things:

1. It is not a matter of Vulcans or Harriers. Even if ~~the case~~ a Vulcan went in on Thursday night, Harriers would have to go in on Friday morning, to see what results had been achieved, and to 'strafe' the associated facilities and parked aircraft. And, if the airship was being repaired, Vulcans or Harriers would have to do a repeat operation. The force commander might even want to send in Harriers in the evening before a Vulcan went in, to try to trace out the radar.

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2. A Vulcan would drop a streak of 21 bombs diagonally across the strip, with high statistical probability of one or two falling on the strip. The strike would shudder about 2,000 feet (dropped from 400 feet). Windows would probably not be broken in Port Stanley, 2½ miles away.

4 Harriers dive bombing the strip could carry 8 bombs, with a high statistical probability of six hits on the runway.

3. It would be militarily acceptable to declare the T&Z but not to bomb the runway unless and until the Argentines used it. So far they have failed to challenge any of our warnings. They might decide not to challenge this.

3. I attach a list of questions which you might like to cover when this subject is discussed.

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PORT STANLEY AIRFIELD

MILITARY QUESTIONS

1. Why bomb it with a Vulcan?
2. What will bombing by a Vulcan achieve?
3. How could Vulcan bombing fail?
4. Statistically, what is the size of bomb pattern from a Vulcan and how far away from the target could bombs fall?
5. How many non-Argentiniens are there on, or near, the airfield?
6. What are the statistical risks of hitting other targets, for example, buildings or people in Port Stanley - or non-military activities elsewhere?
7. What are the risks of breaking windows or doing minor damage over a wide area - and how wide?
8. Is it possible that, if one or two bombs hit the runway, little else military might be hit?
9. What is the probability that the target could be missed altogether - or only the edge of it be hit?
10. How long will the Vulcan flight take?
11. How many in-flight refuellings will each Vulcan flight take and what would happen if one or more failed?
12. How easy is it to fill in a hole in the runway and how long will it take?

13. Do all Argentine aircraft need the full length of the runway?
14. Have the Argentinians got tarmac, earth moving and matting available on the Falklands?
15. When will the airfield need to be bombed by a Vulcan again and how frequently can bombings take place?

CRITICAL MILITARY QUESTIONS

16. What military threat does the airfield pose to the main task force? Is this threat acceptable, and for how long? How much fuel and ammunition is there for the Argentinians to operate from the airfield?
17. Is it not accepted practice that the best way of putting out an airfield is both to bomb it and attack it with guns, rockets, etc - in other words would we not need to use both Vulcans and Harriers?
18. Why not just use Harriers in the ground attack role to strike at aircraft, helicopters, stores, radars, guns, ammunition etc? Would this not be very effective? Are there not British pilots in the task force trained for attacks against targets on the ground?
19. How effective/risky would naval gunfire support be against aircraft, helicopters, stores, etc on the ground?
20. Will not the declaration of the TEZ stop the Argentinians using Port Stanley airfield? Why not wait and see - they backed off elsewhere?