

CO P.C.

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FCS/84/151

Prime Minister.

to be aware.

A.J.C. 22/5.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT

1. We spoke yesterday evening about the request from the President of the National Union of Seamen, that the FCO should issue instructions to British vessels not to go into the Gulf.

/ / I enclose a copy of his telex and of the interim reply sent to him on 20 May by agreement with your Department. The Government does not of course have the legal power to issue directions to British ships as to where they may or may not trade. Given that responsibility for the shipping industry rests with you, I think / it would be right for you to reply to Mr Slater. I enclose a draft.

2. We also need to consider the question of further advice to the General Council of British Shipping. Your Department issued the last bulletin on 16 May. Since then, the Panamanian registered ship, the Felicity, has been sunk. There is no sign of an end to the cycle of incidents in the Gulf. In the light of this, and the interest expressed by the NUS, and others, we agreed that we should now urgently consider laying more emphasis on the risk involved than on the caution which masters should exercise. I / enclose a form of words which I believe reflects the points we discussed. If you are content with it, may I leave it to you to arrange for copies to be given to the General Council of British shipping and the two Seamens Unions as soon as possible? I think it would also be helpful for the text to be included in Notices to Mariners. For our part we shall ensure that the text is passed to Dependent Territories and the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man to enable ships on those registers to be similarly advised.

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3. I am sending copies of this letter and its enclosure to the Prime Minister, the Secretaries of State for Defence, Energy, and Employment and Sir R Armstrong.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'G. Howe', written in a cursive style.

GEOFFREY HOWE

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

22 May, 1984

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DRAFT: minute/letter/teleletter/despatch/note

TYPE: Draft/Final I+

FROM: Secretary of State for Transport Reference

DEPARTMENT:

TEL. NO:

SECURITY CLASSIFICATION

- Top Secret
- Secret
- Confidential
- Restricted
- Unclassified

TO: J Slater Esq
President
National Union of Seamen

Your Reference

Copies to:

PRIVACY MARKING

.....In Confidence

CAVEAT.....

SUBJECT:

As I have responsibility within Government for shipping matters, the Foreign Secretary has passed to me your telex of 20 May in which you urge that British Masters be instructed not to proceed to the Gulf.

I fully appreciate the concern you express for the safety of your members. We have looked at the points you made very carefully. But the Government does not possess the legal powers to issue an instruction to British shipping of the kind you sought. I understand, however, that you have an agreement with the Ship Owners' Association which ensures that crew members are given the opportunity of leaving vessels before they enter a war risk area. In other words, British seamen are free agents to accept or decline to work on ships going to the zones of potential risk and there is consequently no possibility of your members having to enter such zones against their will.

Let me assure you that the Government continues to watch very carefully developments in the Iran/Iraq conflict, and we shall continue to issue advice to the shipping industry as appropriate. I shall make sure that you are sent a copy of any further advice as soon as it

Enclosures—flag(s).....

is issued.

Given public interest in the subject, I intend
to make the contents of this letter public.



ADVICE TO SHIPPING

1. The Iran/Iraq conflict continues to present a threat to shipping. A Panamanian vessel was sunk on 19 May, following an attack which took place near Kharg Island. This obviously underlines the heightened risks involved in operating in the Gulf. These risks are likely to persist. The Government therefore advise Masters and Owners to pay particular attention to this development before deciding to send their vessels into this area.