ACTION: Amembassy TEL AVIV

STATE

SUBJECT: TWA Hijacking

REF:
A. TEL AVIV 3588
B. STATE 159327

1. We share Embassy Tel Aviv's concern that Israeli patience
   with our efforts to obtain release of two Israeli passengers may be
   running out (Ref A). Dept. officer received same impression from
   Israeli Counselor Raviv in September 18 conversation (para 4, Ref. B).
   Following is recapitulation our thinking.

2. We share Israeli outrage at continued illegal detention of two
   passengers. GOI has been fully informed of various measures we
   have employed in effort obtain their release. In employing these
   measures we have sought to avoid any appearance of coercion since it
   our considered opinion that this would be counterproductive. Syrian
   regime cannot afford publicly to appear to be submitting to American
2. 

ACTION: 

or Israeli pressures.

3. In any case, USG has little leverage at its disposal for use against Syrians. We do not rpt not know what Embassy has in mind when it advocates "hardhitting campaign" and "strong action against Syria in every way possible regardless of consequences". Even if such action were feasible, we question whether it would have desired results.

4. Proposal we do something prevent Syrian election to Security Council is non-starter. Given fact that elections to SC are by secret ballot, that UN membership normally accepts regional choice, that Syria has Asian group endorsement, and that there are no rival candidates for seat Syria seeks, we see no way to prevent Syria's election or to use Syrian candidacy as bargaining counter in connection release of TWA passengers.

5. We understand that Syrians are embarrassed by presence of Israelis who thrust on them by PFLP and disapprove of hijacking.
But Syrian regime is shaky and evidently fears domestic—particularly Palestinian—repercussions if it relinquishes passengers without face-saving quid pro quo.

6. With above in mind, we have come to reluctant conclusion that the most promising method of getting the two passengers released would be via an Israeli offer of some quid pro quo. Experienced observers such as ICRC reps/Italian and other third party diplomats—all of whom have been in close touch with responsible Syrian officials—concur this FYI. IATA DirGen also concurs. End FYI assessment. We trust Israelis will give further thought to this possibility.

7. Meanwhile, we are continuing our efforts. We have again broached matter to Soviets, and we are considering a quiet but direct initiative with Syrian representative in New York next week. Precipitate Israeli action would almost certainly damage prospects for success.