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PA/HO, Department of State
E.O. 12958, as amended
June 22, 2004
DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Washington, D.C. 20520

RS/R FILES

Attention Mrs. Mullett
Keep this study together.

October 21, 1969

SECRET/LIMDIS

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. HENRY A. KISSINGER
THE WHITE HOUSE

Subject: Status Report on Hijacked TWA Aircraft

In spite of continuous pressure from a number of sources, the Syrian Government still persists in holding the two Israeli passengers of the TWA aircraft. We understand that the passengers have been visited by ICRC representatives who report they are well. Also, Washington Post correspondent Jesse Lewis, who interviewed the passengers on October 1, has reported to our Embassy in Beirut that the Syrian Government seemed to be anxious that his interview with the detainees be as free as possible. Lewis' impression was that the Syrians were anxious to find a face-saving means of divesting themselves of the two passengers.

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The Italian Embassy in Damascus has reported that it delivered the Secretary's message to Syrian President Atassi to the Secretary General of the Syrian Foreign Ministry, who in turn undertook to deliver it to Atassi upon the latter's return from North Korea. Although Atassi has returned from North Korea, we have not yet received a reply to the Secretary's letter.

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The wives of the two detained Israelis have come to the United States to press their appeal for action to secure the release of their husbands. They went first to New Orleans and then to Washington where they called on Deputy Assistant Secretary Davies on October 16. They were informed of actions we have taken to date, and they were assured that we will continue our efforts until the release of the two men is secured.

The Secretary General of International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) sent a follow-up message to the Syrian Government regarding the two passengers. The Syrian reply was unsatisfactory, inasmuch as it did not address itself to the question of the two passengers. Our representative in ICAO is taking the matter up with the ICAO Council again very soon.

We have learned that the Syrian Government has been most cooperative with TWA in preparations for the repair and repatriation of the aircraft. TWA plans to send about 45 technicians to Damascus on October 26 with a new nose section for the aircraft. The repair period is estimated at from five to six weeks.

We have confirmed reports that the Syrian Government has indeed released the two hijackers, and they are apparently now in Jordan. The Italian Embassy in Damascus is of the view that they were released in response to critical propaganda from Iraq. In any event, we find it deplorable that the Syrian Government would release them rather than bring them to trial, and have so stated publicly.

Our Embassy in Beirut was informed on October 15 that the Director of Syrian Arab Airlines told the TWA representative in Damascus that outside mediation is needed to bring about the release of the two passengers. The Director suggested three possible mediators: IATA, UN and the United States Government. The Director recognized that the two

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Israelis should be released, but he said there was strong political opposition to releasing them. In this connection, an official of the Italian Embassy has reported that Syrian Government efforts to resolve their internal differences over releasing the two Israelis have become deadlocked.

Israeli Permanent Representative to the UN Tekoah informed our UN Mission on October 15 that he had discussed the situation with U Thant. U Thant told Tekoah that he was continuing his efforts but refused to disclose details for fear of a leak. U Thant was mildly optimistic.

Theodore L. Eliot, Jr.

Theodore L. Eliot, Jr.
Executive Secretary

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Clearances:NEA/ARN - Mr. Seelye

NEA - Mr. Davies *[Signature]*

NEA - Mr. Sisco *[Signature]*

E/TT/AN - Mrs. Gravatt *[Signature]*