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Memo: CRISIS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

U.S. flight to Israel carries intrepid travelers, despite turmoil

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With CNN blaring the latest from the Mideast in the background, an assortment of passengers boarded Continental Airlines Newark-to-Tel Aviv Flight 84 on Sunday, some despite the turmoil, others because of it - and very few, if any, because they thought Israel was a great vacation destination these days.

There was Jim Guido, headed to a meeting that had been in the planning stages for three years at RAD Data Communications, the Israeli parent company of Radwin, the American subsidiary where Guido, 60, is vice president of sales. Failure to attend, he worried, would jeopardize his chance for the top job at Radwin, in Mahwah, N.J.

"What if I didn't go? What would they say?" wondered Guido of Far Hills, N.J. "I want to be promoted to president and retire in five years."

His wife was furious about the trip.

"She was so mad she wouldn't say good-bye to me. She said, 'You love your job more than you love me.' " He shrugged - not because she was right but because she didn't understand.

Others aboard Flight 84 were almost nonchalant, both about flying into a region that seems perilously close to spinning out of control and about relatives who wish they were not making the trip.

Ilana Krop **Wilensik**, 48, of Blue Bell was on a mission and, despite her anxious parents, she was excited. As executive director of the Philadelphia chapter of the American Jewish Committee, she was joining a "delegation of the undaunted" in a gesture of solidarity.

"The AJC has a history of showing its support for Israel in tough times," **Wilensik** said. "It's easy to do in good times."

The group of about three dozen, convening from all over the world under AJC auspices, will go north to one of the towns that have been targeted by Hezbollah and will visit the parents of Gilad Shalit, the soldier kidnapped in Gaza on June 25.

"We are here to show the Israelis are not forgotten," **Wilensik** said. "It's a mitzvah for me."

Most of the passengers were Israelis, and for them there was no discussion about returning.

"This is no big deal," said an Israeli businessman who said he would not give his name because he is a corporate officer of a global company. "It's bad in the north, but we have been through

this before. Everything will be all right."

Flight 84 is popular and usually goes out full. This one had empty seats; a business cabin was virtually empty.

Today's flight from Tel Aviv to Newark with the same crew is expected to be packed. "I understand there isn't a seat available," said Continental flight attendant Eileen Dawkins.

She confessed that her husband was not pleased that she was anywhere near the Mideast.

"He watches the news 24/7, and this has him upset," she said. "He's OK when I get home, but when it gets near the time where I have to go again, it bothers him."

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