

1 Year After Oct. 7 Terror Attacks: This Is 'Normal Life' in Israel

Over the decades, "normal life" in Israel has looked very different than normal life in most every other country in the rest of the world. That's because Israel has been surrounded by mortal enemies who want nothing less than the nation's destruction, because Israel's very existence is constantly being threatened, because Israel must live in a state of constant vigilance. And what happens when the nation lets down its guard and its security systems fail? Oct. 7 happens.

Some of the most revealing accounts from the massacre came from non-Israeli young people attending the Nova Music Festival. On the morning of Oct. 7, as the sound of rocket blasts was heard, these non-Israelis were alarmed. "Are we under attack?" they wondered. But their Israeli friends danced and partied on. "Nothing to be worried about! We get bombed all the time."

Little did any of them realize that this day would be different than the rest. But until the full reality hit, this was just another day in the life of an Israeli.

For more than a decade now, many Israelis install apps on their cell phones notifying them of missile attacks in their area, sounding red alerts. Can you imagine having an app like that on your phone?

A few years ago, while attending a conference in Pennsylvania, an Israeli friend casually showed me her cell phone as missile warnings came flooding in. No big deal!

Every home must have a safe room, designed to be more protective in the case of bombing, while every building has a

built-in or nearby bomb shelter. And in some parts of the country, such as Sederot, near the Gaza border, residents can never be more than 15 seconds from a bomb shelter.

Welcome to normal life in Israel.

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After high school, male Israelis are required to serve three years in the army while females serve for two years. This is mandatory for everyone, with the only exemptions being for ultra-Orthodox Jews, although that is currently being challenged. Many of these young people may find themselves on the front lines of hellish battles while still in their teens.

Life in Israel is quite sobering, to say the least.

And military service doesn't end with the mandatory time after high school. Israeli men can still be called back to service until they are 40 (for noncommissioned soldiers) or even 45 (for officers). In fact, in the midst of the current war in Gaza, those numbers have been upped to 41 and 46, respectively.

Last June, when I was speaking at a conference in Jerusalem, a young Israeli man came into the meeting. He was dressed casually, in shorts and a T-shirt, but he was carrying his gun over his shoulder. As a soldier, he was required to have his weapon with him at all times, even though he had just returned from active service. This is a common sight throughout the country.

To give a random example from Feb. 22, 2016, "Israel Defense Forces Chief of Staff Gadi Eisenkot ordered that all off-duty IDF combat soldiers must carry their personal weapons in response to the recent violence, specifically following last week's terror attack at a West Bank supermarket."

An off-duty Israeli soldier who had deposited his gun in the weapons armory, as per protocol, had tried to thwart a terrorist attack and was stabbed to death. From here on, said the IDF chief of staff, even off-duty soldiers—in this case one who was on vacation—must carry their personal weapons.

As for other aspects of “normal life” in Israel, if you walk into a shopping mall carrying a pocketbook, it could well be searched. And don’t think you’ll just go strolling in with a big knapsack on your back.

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As for enjoying a meal at a nice outdoor restaurant in your favorite city, you can expect to see armed security present as well. Vigilance is always required.

During a wave of terrorist attacks some years ago, I heard from friends in Israel who were married with kids. Both parents would never be out without their kids lest they be killed and the children orphaned. One parent would stay home while the other shopped or worked. Who could even imagine thinking like that in a country like the United States?

As for El Al, the national airline, you have not discovered the meaning of “security check” until you fly El Al. I have personally been held up for well over an hour on more than occasion because my travel route seemed odd or something else flagged their attention. And should they have real cause for concern, security agents will actually cut open your luggage in search of explosives or dangerous devices.

Be assured that this is not paranoia. This is what Israel must do to live in safety.

Israel lives with the reality of Hamas leaders vowing to repeat Oct. 7 again and again until there is no more Israel.

Of Iran calling for the extermination of Israel and now launching direct missile attacks on the Jewish state. Of the Houthis proclaiming, "Death to Israel." And of Hezbollah armed with more than 150,000 missiles and rockets.

All the more reason should Christians pray for the protection of Israel and remind God of His promises in Psalm 121.

This is also why Israelis are so tough. They have no other choice.

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