

Rising From Ashes to Hope: Israel's Dark Anniversary

Over recent decades, official visitors to Israel felt obligated to make a pilgrimage to Sderot, near Gaza, to view the rusting heaps of Hamas rockets displayed behind the town's police station. Even presidential candidate Barack Obama stood there in 2008, insisting he would never tolerate his daughters living under the constant rocket threat faced by Israelis in the western Negev.

Today, that police station no longer exists. Hamas terrorists overran it during their mass invasion last Oct. 7. As the one-year anniversary of that dark day approaches, a memorial is being hastily erected on the leveled station to honor the 20 heroic police officers who fell defending their city.

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Now, visitors are instead drawn to new pilgrimage sites, such as the "car graveyard" near Tekumah, where the crushed remains of 1,500 burned-out vehicles collected from surrounding roadsides after the Oct. 7 massacre are stacked 30 feet high—each rusted frame testifying to the many innocent lives lost that day. A few miles away at the Nova Music Festival site, a haunting silence still lingers here where 364 civilians were slaughtered and 40 taken hostage by Hamas on that "Black Shabbat."

One year ago, as Israelis rested on the holy day of *Simchat Torah*, some 6,000 Hamas and Islamic Jihad militiamen breached the Gaza security fence and poured into Israel to maim, murder and take hostages. The so-called "al-Aqsa Storm" was more successful than even Hamas expected. Over 1,200 Israelis were killed, while 251 were abducted back into the terror tunnels

of Gaza. It took three days for the IDF to secure the border area. The mass atrocities shook all of Israel, leaving everyone terrified of home invasions by armed jihadists and an even greater assault from Hizbullah in Lebanon.

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The shocking carnage last Oct. 7 marked the worst pogrom against the Jewish people since the Holocaust. Children were shot as their parents watched, and parents as their children watched. Entire families were burned alive. Women were gang raped. Frail elderly Holocaust survivors were brutally executed at point-blank range. Babies were bludgeoned and beheaded.

Even so, the resulting death toll could have been worse, as the great secrecy by Hamas over its operation also shocked Hizbullah, which was not ready for all-out war. But by the next day, Hizbullah joined the fray with relentless rocket barrages across the border, and other Iranian proxy militias soon followed. This left Israel facing a seven-front war—with the threat of missile, drone and terror attacks emanating from Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Iran itself.

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