Bab al-Amud Massacre 1947: Irgun Bombs at the Gate of Jerusalem

On 29 December 1947 gunmen of the Zionist Irgun threw a bomb from a speeding taxi at Palestinians gathered at Bab al-Amud (Damascus Gate) in Jerusalem, killing between 11 and 14 Arabs and wounding between 27 and 32; two British policemen were also killed. [1] [2]

The massacre was the climax of a wave of bombs the Irgun threw at the same gate within a single month after the partition of Palestine, and it is one of the Zionist massacres against the Palestinian people. [3] [1]

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The Bab al-Amud massacre at a glance

Item	Details
Date	29 December 1947 [1] [2]
Place	Bab al-Amud (Damascus Gate), the main entrance to the Old City of Jerusalem [2]
Perpetrator	The Zionist Irgun (Etzel) [1] [2] [4]

Item	Details
Method	A bomb (an explosive barrel, in Arab accounts) thrown from a speeding taxi into the crowd [1] [2] [4]
Killed	11 Arabs according to the UN, 14 according to Arab accounts; two British policemen were also killed [1] [2] [5]
Wounded	27 to 32 [2] [1]
Context	A wave of Irgun bombings at Damascus Gate after the partition resolution, including the attacks of 12 and 13 December 1947 [3] [1]

Bab al-Amud: the gate of Jerusalem

Bab al-Amud is the main entrance to the Old City of Jerusalem, leading to Al-Aqsa Mosque, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the city's markets. [2] Next to it lay an Arab marketplace crowded with civilians. [1]

December 1947: the Irgun at the gate

After the UN General Assembly resolution to partition Palestine on 29 November 1947, Zionist gangs escalated their attacks on Palestinian gatherings. On 12 December 1947 the Irgun detonated a barrel bomb at Damascus Gate, killing 20 Arabs. [3]

The next day, 13 December, it threw two bombs into the Arab marketplace at Damascus Gate, killing 5 and wounding 47, [3] as part of simultaneous attacks in Jerusalem, Jaffa and Lydda that killed 18 Arabs and wounded nearly 60. [1]

The massacre: 29 December 1947

On 29 December 1947 a speeding taxi passed Damascus Gate, and Irgun gunmen threw a bomb from it into the crowd. [1] [4] Arab accounts describe the bomb as a barrel packed with explosives. [2] [5]

The blast killed 11 Arabs and wounded 32 according to the UN document, and two

British policemen were also killed. [1] Arab accounts give 14 killed and 27 wounded. [2] [4] [5]

A week later, on 5 January 1948, the Haganah blew up the Semiramis Hotel in Jerusalem, killing 26 civilians. [6] the Semiramis Hotel massacre

The toll and the accounts

Source	Date	Method	Toll
UN document A/9801	29 December 1947	Bomb thrown from a taxi	11 Arabs and two British constables killed, 32 wounded [1]
Shafaqna, Al-Bawaba News, Baheth Center	29 December 1947	Explosive barrel	14 killed, 27 wounded [2] [4] [5]
Shafaqna, Al-Bawaba News, Baheth Center	30 December 1947 (“the next day”)	Bomb from a speeding car	11 Arabs and two Britons killed [2] [4] [5]

The circulating Arab accounts mention two attacks: the first on 29 December, and the second “the next day, in the same way and at the same place,” killing 11 Arabs and two Britons. [5] [2] Yet this same toll, with its details (11 Arabs, two British constables, a bomb from a car), is placed by the UN document on 29 December. [1] We found nothing documenting a second attack on 30 December; the two accounts most likely describe a single attack with two different tolls.

This event should not be confused with the Jerusalem vegetable market massacre of 1938, which some lists also place near Damascus Gate.

Conclusion

The Irgun chose Bab al-Amud, the Jerusalem gate most crowded with Palestinians, and returned to it with bombs again and again in the month after the partition resolution. The massacre of 29 December 1947 was one link in a chain of terror that targeted markets, hotels and civilian gatherings in Jerusalem, Jaffa and Haifa,

and paved the way for the expulsion of Palestinians in the Nakba. Among the massacres of the same week was the Jaffa Saraya massacre.

Frequently asked questions about the Bab al-Amud massacre

When did the Bab al-Amud massacre take place?

It took place on 29 December 1947.

Who carried out the Bab al-Amud massacre?

It was carried out by the Zionist Irgun (Etzel).

How many people were killed in the Bab al-Amud massacre?

11 Arabs killed and 32 wounded according to the UN, or 14 killed and 27 wounded according to Arab accounts; two British policemen were also killed.

Was there a second attack the next day?

Circulating accounts mention one, but its toll matches what the UN places on 29 December, so it is most likely the same attack.

Had the Irgun targeted Damascus Gate before?

Yes: on 12 December 1947 with a barrel bomb that killed 20 Arabs, and on 13 December with two bombs that killed 5 and wounded 47.

Sources and references

Arabic-language sources are listed with translated titles.

1. United Nations General Assembly, document A/9801, annex “Zionist/Israeli acts of terrorism 1939–1974,” 1974.
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3. "December 13: Irgun-Style Terrorism," Jewish Currents.
4. Khaled El-Tawab, "Hitler's Planes Bomb the British Parliament… and the 'Bab al-Amud Massacre' in Jerusalem" (On this day), Al-Bawaba News, 29 December 2023.
5. "Lest We Forget: Crimes Time Will Never Erase," Baheth Center for Studies.
6. "The Semiramis Hotel Bombing Massacre in Jerusalem, 1948," Al Jazeera Encyclopedia, 7 October 2024.