



## Alert Follow-Up

VFC Shield Members,

On January 16, 2022, the Virginia Fusion Center issued an alert for a **hostage situation at Congregation Beth Israel in Colleyville, Texas**. The below product, produced in collaboration with Hanover County Shield, serves as an alert follow up giving further details on the incident.



### **Congregation Beth Israel Hostage Situation - Colleyville, Texas**

Date of Incident - January 16, 2022



#### **Summary Statement**

On January 16, 2022, at approximately 10:45 a.m. CST, a male subject entered Beth Israel Congregation synagogue in Colleyville, Texas, and took four people hostage. The hostage situation spanned twelve hours, ending with the suspect deceased and the hostages rescued.

#### **Attack Overview**

At approximately 10:41 a.m. CST, Colleyville police were dispatched to the Congregation Beth Israel synagogue that was actively conducting a live-streamed service. During the live stream, a man could be heard shouting about dying and demanding to get a woman he said was his sister on the phone. After local police arrived on-scene, the immediate area was evacuated. According to open-source reports, the armed subject later identified as Malik Faisal Akram, claimed to possess bombs hidden in unknown locations inside the building.

Over the next 12 hours, roughly 200 local, state, and federal law enforcement officers converged on the synagogue, to include a team of F.B.I. agents and hostage negotiators who flew in from Quantico, Virginia. Local and FBI negotiators worked in tandem speaking with the suspect in an attempt to resolve the situation peacefully.

Around 5:00 p.m, one male hostage was released unharmed. Rabbi Charlie Cytron-Walker, who was one of the three remaining hostages, later said the hostage-taker “became increasingly belligerent and threatening”. By 9:30 p.m. the decision was made to activate the F.B.I.'s Hostage Rescue Team. The team breached the synagogue and rescued the three remaining hostages. Colleyville Police Chief Michael C. Miller and FBI Dallas Special Agent in Charge Matt DeSarno confirmed the suspect was dead in a "shooting incident," but did not provide specifics.

According to a spokesperson for the ATF, crime scene investigators recovered one firearm they believe belonged to Akram. No explosives were found inside the building.

### **Suspect**

The FBI identified the suspect as Malik Faisal Akram, a 44-year-old British national who arrived in the United States in December 2021.

Akram spent three nights at Union Gospel Mission Dallas, a homeless shelter, in the week prior to the incident, according to shelter CEO Bruce Butler. Butler said Akram initially checked in to the shelter on January 6, before checking out and checking back in multiple times over the course of a week.

Butler advised he left the facility for the final time on January 13, approximately 48 hours before taking four people hostage inside the synagogue roughly 22 miles away.

### **Motive**

Law enforcement officials believe Akram was motivated by a desire to release, who he called “his sister”, Aafia Siddiqui. Siddiqui is serving an 86-year sentence at a federal facility in Texas. She was convicted in 2010 on seven terrorism-related charges, including attempted murder and armed assault on US officers in Afghanistan.

It is not currently clear why Akram specifically targeted Congregation Beth Israel in his attempt to get his demands met.

Officials said there is no evidence this was part of a larger plot, but police are investigating the connections of the suspect.

### **Additional Details**

UK Counter-Terrorism Police for Greater Manchester announced on Sunday the detention of two teenagers in connection with the hostage incident. Both individuals, who were arrested in South Manchester, are still in custody for questioning.

### **Threat Assessment/Aftermath**

- **Police Response Nationwide**

- Police departments across the country are increasing patrols at synagogues and other locations associated with the Jewish community out of an abundance of caution.
- **Recommendation from VFC Shield**
  - VFC Shield urges our faith-based members to have their facilities assessed for vulnerabilities via a complete security assessment by a competent professional. This can be accomplished by local, **state, federal** or by a private security firm. Such assessments provide key insights and often reveal overlooked vulnerabilities that can then be mitigated.
  - Though no further specific threats have been identified, given recent events, VFC Shield encourages our partners to maintain strong operational security and situational awareness on events that could be exploited by violent extremists to further their ideological causes and to evaluate your security posture for mass gathering events and at houses of worship. We recommend enhanced vigilance and the immediate reporting of potential indicators of violence, such as online discussions inciting violence, plans to bring weapons to organized events, references to conspiracy theories that have incited violent action, or other calls for violence associated with the incident in Colleyville, Texas.
- **National Outlook**
  - Recently there has been a 13% increase in hate crimes year after year. Statistically, African Americans are most frequently targeted.
  - Anti-Jewish bias is 63% of anti-religious attacks.
  - Faith-based communities have and will likely continue to be targets of violence by both domestic violent extremists and those inspired by foreign terrorists. Conspiracy theories exist about the COVID-19 pandemic, the outcome of the 2020 General election, and the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan and resettlement of Afghans to the United States. Open source online content have referenced Jewish targets in relation to some of these theories. Foreign influence actors have also promoted narratives online intended to sow discord in the U.S. and foreign terrorist groups continue to encourage followers to conduct attacks and use social media to incite violence.
  - On several occasions, jihadist groups have used Siddiqui as a rallying cry and have attempted to swap hostages or captives for her release. Her name surfaced in negotiations with the Taliban and Haqqani Network over the proposed exchange for U.S. Army Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl, who went missing after being abducted by militants in 2009. The Islamic State allegedly demanded Siddiqui's release in exchange for American hostages, who ISIS later killed in gruesome videos. Siddiqui is one of the few individuals to transcend the al-Qaeda-Islamic State divide and remains an iconic figure for jihadists and their followers. It is unlikely that the Colleyville incident will be the last demanding her release and using her "celebrity status" to promote jihadist ideology.

## **Application**

Rabbi Charlie Cytron-Walker said in a statement that he and the three congregants are alive because of the security education they received. He also urged other congregations, religious groups, and schools to take part in similar active-shooter and security courses.

"Over the years, my congregation and I have participated in multiple security courses from the Colleyville Police Department, the FBI, the Anti-Defamation League, and the Secure Community Network," Cytron-Walker said in the statement provided to The Hill through a spokesperson. "We are alive today because of that education."

**VFC Shield stresses the importance of information sharing, training, and vigilance. Information sharing and prompt reporting of suspicious behavior indicators between the public, private-sector security personnel, and law enforcement are vital to the deterrence, detection, and disruption of terrorist activity and the prevention of attacks.**



## Sources

- 'Grateful to Be Alive': What We Know About the Synagogue Hostage Rescue
- Hostage situation at TX synagogue ends with all congregants safe, suspect dead; UK detains 2 teens
- Colleyville synagogue hostage situation: Hostages rescued, suspect dead
- 'Prayers answered' after synagogue hostages rescued, suspect dead in Colleyville, Texas
- FBI identifies hostage-taker at Texas synagogue
- Texas Synagogue Hostage Incident Demonstrates Endurance of Transnational Terror Networks
- Jewish communities across the US are on heightened alert after the Texas standoff

## - Tools and Resources -



## Threats Against Religious Facilities and Adherents Highlight Importance of Religious Community Outreach

This product raises awareness of potential threats to religiously affiliated facilities and groups regardless of type, sect, or denomination; provides examples of tactics used in attacks; and promotes best practices for engaging with religious communities.

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Resource | [ready.gov](http://ready.gov)

### Attack In Public Places

While the threat of mass attacks is real, we can take steps to prepare, protect ourselves and help others.

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Resource | [Virginia Fusion Center](#)

### Active Shooter Resources

An Active Shooter is an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area; in most cases, active shooters use firearms(s) and there is no pattern or method to their selection of victims.

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