Texas hostage crisis renews fears of increasing antisemitism in US

January 17, 2022

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The Guardian

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/jan/17/texas-hostage-crisis-antisemitism-fears-us>

The hostage-taking attack on a [Texas](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/texas) synagogue has renewed fears of increasing antisemitism in the US. The incident, which Joe Biden called “an act of terror”, comes as organizations tracking antisemitic violence say it is increasing across the US.

“Assault, harassment and vandalism against Jews remain at near-historic levels in the US,” said the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) in its most recent [Audit of Antisemitic Incidents](https://www.adl.org/what-we-do/anti-semitism/antisemitism-in-the-us). According to the group, there were more than 2,100 acts of assault, vandalism and harassment last year, an increase of 12% over the previous year.

Following the hostage crisis at the synagogue in the Fort Worth suburb of Colleyville, the anti-hate group ADL called on the US Congress to increase funding for non-profit Jewish organizations, including schools and houses of worship, for assistance in bolstering their security.

“With threats against synagogues and other Jewish institutions arguably at an all-time high, it is imperative that the federal government provides appropriate levels of funding to mitigate the threat,” said Jonathan Greenblatt, the ADL’s CEO.

The ADL also urged legislators in the Senate to confirm Dr Deborah Lipstadt as the state department’s special envoy to monitor and combat antisemitism.

The incident in Texasended around 9pm Saturday when the last hostages ran out of the synagogue and an FBI Swat team entered and killed their captor, Briton Malik Faisal Akram. It came despite the congregation receiving security training from local authorities and the Secure Community Network, which was founded in 2004 by a coalition of Jewish organizations.

“In the last hour of our hostage crisis, the gunman became increasingly belligerent and threatening,” the congregation’s Rabbi Charlie Cytron-Walker said in a statement. “Without the instruction we received, we would not have been prepared to act and flee when the situation presented itself.”

The standoff has led US law enforcement agencies to tighten security at potential Jewish targets across America, including New York City, where police said that they increased their presence “at key Jewish institutions” out of an abundance of caution.

Sunday’s incident comes after a 2018 attack on the the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where 11 worshippers were killed, and a deadly antisemitic attack on a congregation in Poway, California, the following year.

Ronald Lauder, president of the World Jewish Congress, [said in a statement](https://mailtrack.io/trace/link/4024af26277af95318301b3d82e885e31e882733?url=https%3A%2F%2Fnam02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com%2F%3Furl%3Dhttp%253A%252F%252Femail.mail.worldjewishcongress.org%252Fc%252FeJx1j81uxCAMhJ8muRFhls3CgUMvfQ9-zIaIQAW0aN--XvVcyRpZ49E3cjARQlyTEVwIDrBzWrjenLwpUFpbBCVBuUXyy6a8zdpyOHGmfvhang1732p7rodRbteae-ldiB73ewSQeMeHCD5qeOCazTHGV19uH4v4pJlz_oejKxaSgrO_k6dnfdgSOkuF9ZpTsC2NF5tpHMzXnPH1k0jZH4qs6_oulFibOa2vbotkX7bQGwR7V_wCnpZUUQ%26data%3D04%257C01%257Cjacob.fishman%2540wjc.org%257C8f0913701b6e4a844d1b08d9d8943491%257C19115f6b6b8e4f058783dd3dde1d3af3%257C0%257C0%257C637778953323581254%257CUnknown%257CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%253D%257C3000%26sdata%3DZ4ymbBVn%252FUVjP2hMbkPlgeBE8FxPT%252FkAY191tjwjhZY%253D%26reserved%3D0&userId=7570845&signature=9e46e7b3892f756b)that the attack had shown the Jewish communities around the world “are living in dangerous times”.

“Just as when the target of a violent antisemitic attack was the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, or the synagogue in Halle, Germany, or the Chabad of Poway synagogue in California, the attack on Congregation Beth Israel is an attack on all of us.

”We must continue to tackle this age-old hatred head on,” Lauder added.

The FBI issued a statement calling the ordeal “a terrorism-related matter, in which the Jewish community was targeted”. The agency said the joint terrorism task force is investigating.

Akram was specifically focused on demanding the release of Aafia Siddiqui, a Pakistani neuroscientist suspected of having ties to al-Qaida who was convicted of trying to kill US army officers in Afghanistan and is serving an 86-year sentence in nearby Fort Worth.

In a statement, the ADL said Siddiqui’s release has been a focus for non-extremist groups, as well, who allege mistreatment and fabricated charges.

The group warned that rightwing and other extremists would attempt to exploit the Colleyville crisis to advance their own ideologies – “a clear indication that acts of antisemitism tend to inspire further expressions of antisemitism”.