



FIREARMS AND THE FAITHFUL

APPROACHES TO ARMED SECURITY IN JEWISH COMMUNITIES

JANUARY 2020

“Across America, Jewish communities are on heightened alert and are wondering what role armed security should play in their security plans. Whatever the course of action, **introducing firearms into a facility is a decision to be made carefully and must be part of a broader security strategy.** There are countless considerations, and if organizations overlook them, they may put their congregants at risk.”

— MICHAEL MASTERS

NATIONAL DIRECTOR AND CEO,
SECURE COMMUNITY NETWORK

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Approaches to Armed Security in Jewish Communities

Houses of worship are meant to provide a refuge from the world outside. They are places to pray, learn, celebrate, mourn and serve others.

They are also the targets of violence.

Violent hatred has intruded into our synagogues, Jewish institutions, camps and schools—and the minds of far too many individuals. The expression of this hatred has increased, with a rise in anti-Semitic incidents and an increase in hate crimes.

Though long conditioned to be on alert to armed threats, many Jewish communities have found themselves grasping for answers about how to best protect themselves in the wake of more recent mass shootings, including those in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Poway, California—as well those in secular places, like the Pulse Nightclub in Orlando, Florida, or the Walmart in El Paso, Texas, that targeted specific groups of people.

Faced with the threat of armed intruders, many communities have sought to protect themselves with firearms of their own. Some communities coordinate with police departments to place uniformed on-duty or off-duty officers outside their doors. Others may work with off-duty officers directly, either individually or through private companies. Others wonder if they should encourage congregants to carry weapons or place firearms in the hands of private security contractors. That raises questions of what kind of standards or training these individuals have, or should have.



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As the official safety and security organization for the North American Jewish community, the Secure Community Network (SCN) is committed to offering the best, most-informed advice to those considering their security options. There is no one-size-fits-all answer when it comes to the issues surrounding firearms and security. Every community is different. But the questions are often the same, whether for a large urban congregation or a small rural one:

- Should we hire armed security? If so, whom?
- Who is qualified to offer armed protection?
- If we do choose to have armed security, how do we do so safely, legally and cost-effectively?
- Will the presence of firearms divide our community?
- What is our existing firearm policy and how will it need to change?
- Should we encourage congregants to arm themselves—or should we ban firearms?
- What do we do about congregants who may already carry firearms legally?

Congregations must approach these questions deliberately and ultimately answer them for themselves.

The considerations that SCN provides here offer a way to move forward. The insights are based on the input of top experts in the law enforcement and security fields, who convened at SCN's invitation to offer counsel to communities striving to protect themselves.

“There is no one-size-fits-all answer when it comes to the issues surrounding firearms and security. Every community is different.”

PRIMARY RECOMMENDATION

Each congregation is different and will need to weigh the numerous complicated factors detailed in this paper before making armed security part of its overall security plan. Congregations will need to identify their objectives and the factors unique to their situation.

If a congregation determines that armed security will be part of its plan, then this paper should help it reach the conclusion that employing a uniformed police officer is the option most likely to achieve its goals.

The recommended best practice for armed security is employing an on- or off-duty law enforcement officer or a recently retired officer who continues to maintain relevant certifications and training.

History and Mission of Secure Community Network

The Secure Community Network (SCN), a nonprofit 501(c)(3), is the official safety and security organization of the Jewish community in North America. Founded in 2004 under the auspices of The Jewish Federations of North America and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, SCN works on behalf of 146 federations, the 50 largest Jewish nonprofit organizations in North America and over 300 independent communities as well as with other partners in the public, private, nonprofit and academic sectors to ensure the safety, security and resiliency of the Jewish people.

SCN serves as the Jewish community's formal liaison with federal law enforcement and coordinates closely with federal, state and local law enforcement partners on safety and security issues related to the Jewish community; through the organization's Operations Center and Duty Desk, SCN analyzes intelligence and information, providing timely, credible threat and incident information to both law enforcement and community partners. SCN's team of law enforcement, homeland security, and military professionals proactively works with communities and partners across North America to develop and implement strategic frameworks that enhance the safety and security of the Jewish people. This includes developing best practice policies, emergency plans and procedures; undertaking threat and vulnerability assessments of facilities; providing critical, real-world training and exercises to prepare for threats and hazards; offering consultation on safety and security matters; and providing response as well as crisis management support during critical incidents.

SCN is dedicated to ensuring that Jewish organizations and communities, as well as life and culture, can not only exist safely and securely, but flourish.



An Urgent Conversation Demands a Consistent Approach

Congregations are searching for answers. As SCN has expanded its outreach efforts over the last two years to communities around the country, it has become clear that there is a need for a consistent, best-practice approach to issues related to armed security in synagogues and other facilities.

In response to that need and to promote an informed discussion, SCN convened a group of law enforcement and security experts in August 2019 to identify key considerations for Jewish institutions deciding how to make armed security a component of their broader security plans.

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Senior Expert on Global Threats, Argonne National Laboratory
Former Acting Under-Secretary for Intelligence and Analysis (I&A) and
Counterterrorism Coordinator for the United States Department
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Regional Security Director, Secure Community Network

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Moderators:

Michael Masters

National Director and CEO, Secure Community Network

Patrick Daly

Principal Deputy Director & COO, Secure Community Network

BY THE NUMBERS:

27 active shooter attacks in the U.S. in 2018

85 people killed in the attacks including two law enforcement officers and one unarmed security officer

128 people wounded in the attacks, including six law enforcement officers

9 incidents that ended with exchange of gunfire between shooters and law enforcement

Source: FBI, "Active Shooter Incidents in the United States in 2018"²

The Growing Threat

Mass shootings and violence are, regrettably, not new for Jewish communities or other communities of faith in the United States, but defending against them has taken on a new urgency as the frequency and lethality of attacks has seemingly increased.

According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's most recent hate crimes report, of the 1,550 reported hate crime offenses motivated by religious bias in 2018, 57.8 percent were motivated by the offenders' anti-Jewish bias—three times as high as the number of hate crimes facing the next group. The FBI also reported that 15.4 percent of religious bias hate crime incidents occurred in houses of worship (churches, synagogues, temples, mosques, etc.). The country continued to witness alarming levels of such violence in 2019.

FBI HATE CRIME DATA

YEAR	OFFENSES MOTIVATED BY RELIGIOUS BIAS	PERCENT MOTIVATED BY ANTI-JEWISH BIAS*	PERCENT OCCURRING AT HOW**
2018	1,550	57.8%	15.4%
2017	1,679	58.1%	15.0%
2016	1,538	54.2%	15.2%
2015	1,354	51.3%	16.0%
2014	1,092	58.2%	15.6%

* Represents the percentage of offenses classified as Motivated by Religious Bias that were subcategorized as Motivated by Anti-Jewish Bias

** HOW = Houses of worship – includes churches, synagogues, temples, mosques, etc.

In 2018, Americans witnessed the "deadliest attack on Jews in the history of the U.S." at the building in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, that housed the Tree of Life, D'or Hadash and Or L'Simcha congregations.¹

ACTIVE SHOOTER INCIDENTS



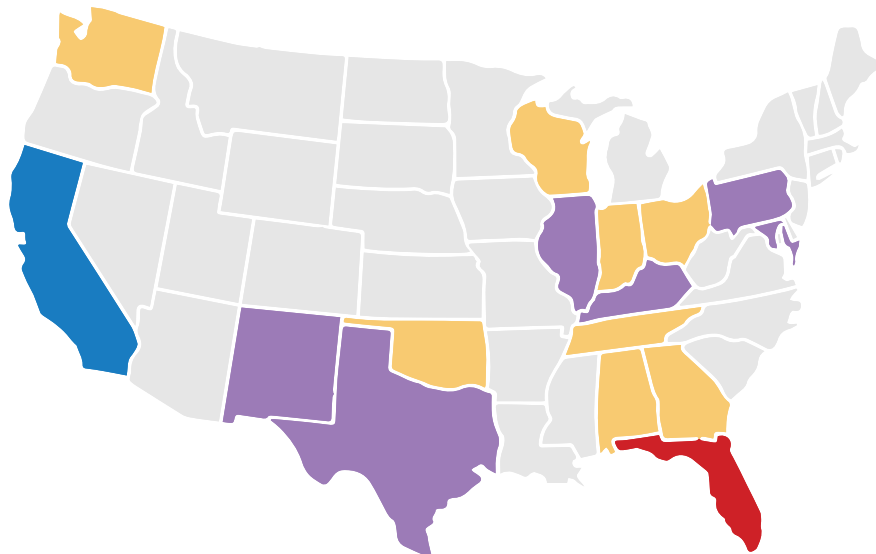
FBI Map (2018)²

From 2016–2018, the FBI designated 77 shootings as active shooter incidents. The FBI defines an active shooter as one or more individuals actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a populated area.

27 INCIDENTS IN 16 STATES

213 CASUALTIES

- Six incidents
- Five incidents
- Four incidents
- Three incidents
- Two incidents
- One incident

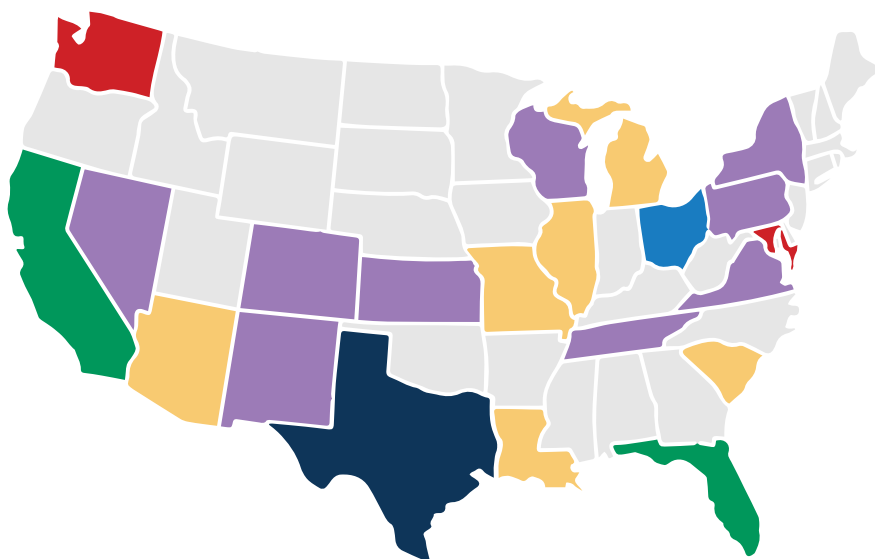


FBI Map (2016–2017)³

50 INCIDENTS IN 21 STATES

943 CASUALTIES

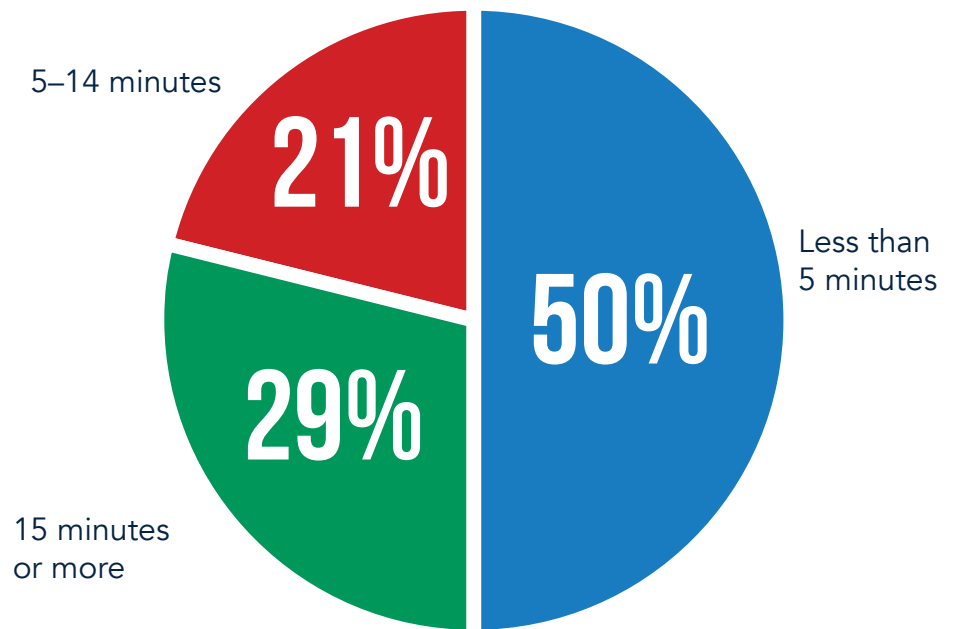
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DURATION OF THE ATTACKS



Secret Service
Mass Attacks in Public Spaces (2017)⁴



Vox

"Exactly six months apart, two different shooters went into American synagogues during services with an intent to kill Jews. The Pittsburgh shooting on October 27 claimed 11 lives, the worst act of anti-Semitic violence in American history. The Poway shooting on April 27—the last day of Passover—claimed one, a woman named Lori Gilbert Kaye, who threw herself in front of the synagogue's rabbi and saved his life."

— Vox.com, May 2019⁵

Nearly every two weeks on average, we are confronted with headlines of mass violence in the United States—at faith-based institutions and beyond.

In August 2019, police in Ohio arrested a man for threatening to attack a Youngstown Jewish community center. The man had attended the white nationalist protests in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017.⁶

In September 2019, the FBI arrested a Florida man who threatened to attack a synagogue.⁷ The same month, police in Minnesota charged a man with arson in connection to a fire that destroyed a Duluth synagogue.⁸

**The
New York
Times**

Ohio Man Charged in Video Threatening Jewish Center, Officials Say

August 18, 2019⁹

THE JERUSALEM POST

Florida Man Jailed After Threatening to Shoot Up Local Synagogue

September 13, 2019¹⁰

Keys Goals and Course of Action

When an organization is evaluating what type of security personnel should be part of a security plan, SCN encourages it to begin by identifying the primary objectives.

For most organizations, these objectives are often threefold:

(1) Having situational awareness

It is valuable to have an individual or team who is focused on movements in and around a facility to identify potential threats and/or suspicious behavior.

(2) Providing a visible deterrent

Visible indications that someone on the property is an armed guard, trained officer or in possession of a weapon can make a would-be assailant think twice about attacking. That is not always the case; some attackers are prepared to die while carrying out their attacks. Others will be deterred by the possibility of being stopped by an armed individual.

(3) Immediately engaging a threat until law enforcement arrives

In most cases, a law enforcement response is required to neutralize a threat. But the ability to effectively engage an attacker/threat until law enforcement arrives may reduce casualties.



EIGHT FACTORS BEFORE YOU ARM

I. An Armed Guard Must Be Part of a Broader Plan

An armed guard or armed congregant is not a security strategy or plan on its own. Armed security can be part of a plan, but it is only that—a component. A true security plan includes many other layers and components, including, but not limited to:

- Undertaking a Threat, Vulnerability and Risk Assessment of the facility
- Having a security committee and/or identified security director or liaison to coordinate efforts
- Undertaking and/or implementing physical security efforts, such as limiting access to the facility
- Coordinating closely with law enforcement on preparedness, protection, prevention and response
- Providing training to members, staff and clergy, among others

... and much more.

Without these and other components in place, armed security will not be as effective. It could even create more confusion in the event of an incident and exacerbate a volatile situation.

For more information on formulating a holistic security plan, contact the SCN Duty Desk at dutydesk@securecommunitynetwork.org for SCN-approved materials and resources.

2. You Must Consult Broadly

The decision to have an armed individual present in or outside a facility is one that involves multiple decision-makers and stakeholders. These will vary from community to community but are likely to include rabbis, trustees, board members and staff members. Working in consultation with Jewish federation officials, including a security director (where and if one exists in the community) as well as SCN, is strongly recommended.

Decision-makers must be aware of the perception of firearms among community members. In some locations, the presence of firearms may be readily accepted, or even expected. In other places—or even in institutions within the same community—that may not be the case. One should not assume that the presence of firearms will be reassuring to all; some may find the presence of firearms distressing. Some may find the very notion that community leaders are considering the use of firearms in some manner to be concerning. If not communicated properly, this option could divide a congregation.

“Most campuses are ‘keys to the kingdom buildings.’ You’re in one door, you’re in them all.”

— **Stuart Frisch**
Regional Security Director,
SCN

Buildings or campuses of interconnected buildings and rooms pose a specific kind of security challenge. An intruder who gains access through one entrance in one building where proper security measures are not in place will then have access to every other building, room or facility on the campus. Communities are well-served to have locking doors throughout their campuses, ensuring that even if intruders gain access to one area, they cannot get easy access to others and congregants in other parts of the campus can remain secure.

3. You Must Know the Law

Before choosing to have an armed individual inside or outside a facility, a community must work through numerous considerations to minimize disruption, maximize effectiveness, avoid liability and ensure sustainability.

Having a person with a weapon present—other than a member of law enforcement—can have serious legal implications for an institution, and those implications vary greatly from state to state. Communities should understand what licenses will need to be acquired for legal compliance and who shoulders liability in the event that someone is harmed by an armed security officer, staff member or congregant.

For example:

- If a person is injured while “representing” the facility and acting in an official capacity, is workers’ compensation an issue?
- Does the facility carry the necessary amount of liability insurance to cover this specific security function?
- Does current insurance coverage even allow armed security guards? What if the on- or off-duty law enforcement officers are insured by their agency? Also, if the police department is protected by sovereign immunity, does liability fall solely on the congregation?
- What if someone has a stress-induced medical emergency due to a weapon being introduced, or someone alleges the same?
- What are the liability ramifications and enterprise risk-management options involved if a shooting is determined to be unjustified, unwarranted or even negligent?
- How does the presence of a volunteer or de facto security team affect insurance or legal liability?
- If a facility has NO FIREARMS ALLOWED signage, does the person carrying the firearm need an official invitation and permission to avoid any criminal charges in the event the firearm is used?

The above are just some of the most common questions that SCN encourages institutions to examine; full consultation is usually recommended with an institution’s legal counsel and insurance company.



4. What Level of Training Will You Require?

Communities should recognize that the ability to carry a weapon legally differs greatly from the ability to effectively engage an armed, moving target. Congregations will have to determine what level of training they will expect from those carrying weapons on their premises.

- What type of training program will be put in place for firearm carriers? Is the training certified by any recognized agency or licensure body?
- Is there a required course of certification and training by the state? Recurring or annual recertification requirements?
- Will realistic active threat/shooter training be mandated?
- Is any training—short of that required of a law enforcement officer—sufficient for engaging an armed attacker?
- If individuals are allowed to be armed and are serving as a de facto security team, will the organization develop appropriate and court-defensible curriculum, create policies and procedures, and maintain accurate training records?
- Who will be responsible for securing the needed training resources, including safety equipment and access to a firing range?
- Who will be responsible for maintaining training records?
- What are the costs involved?



“If a congregant attempts to restrain someone perceived as a threat, they could actually be looking at kidnapping charges in some states. If they inflict bodily harm on that person, that’s a whole other set of liability issues.”

— **Stuart Frisch**
Regional Security Director,
SCN

5. Are You Sure You’re Okay With the Use of Force?

By designating someone as an armed security officer, the congregation is setting the expectation that force will be used. If individuals are acting in a security function, will they have a range of force options available other than deadly force?

The use of various nonlethal weapons (pepper spray or foam, expandable batons, and electronic control devices) comes with additional legal, training and equipment accountability issues. Each force option should be vetted both with counsel and law enforcement, trained, tested and drilled regularly.

Use of force may include the restriction of other people’s freedom of movement and the use of restraint devices. In many states the use of restraint devices (handcuffs, flexicuffs, etc.) is governed by law, and an unlawful restriction of a person’s freedom of movement may constitute a felony criminal kidnapping charge. Facilities should consult with their counsel as well as local law enforcement as to the legalities of these devices and their use.



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6. Let Local Law Enforcement Know

Armed security decisions should be made with the awareness of local law enforcement. Community leaders should work with law enforcement and know in advance how an individual with a firearm will coordinate with law enforcement during an incident.

- How will an individual with a firearm, working on behalf of the organization, identify themselves to responding law enforcement in the event the police are called to an incident?
- How will you ensure an armed individual without a uniform is not mistaken by police for an attacker or intruder?



November 11, 2018—A police officer responding to reports of a shooting at a bar arrived on the scene and shot and killed an armed security guard.¹¹ The police officer reported he only saw a man with a gun. The chances of a miscommunication or misunderstanding are higher when employing armed security other than a uniformed officer—and that miscommunication can have deadly consequences.

7. Can You Afford It?

Long-term costs of armed security should be considered in advance. If it is to be part of a comprehensive security plan, it must be a core part of the operations budget. It cannot be treated as a "special expense." If the source of the funding runs out, the congregation will be confronted with difficult decisions. If the funding for the armed security comes from one individual or group of individuals, they are likely to feel empowered to set the terms of how the security is provided and what the employed individuals are required to do, creating a potential source of conflict.

If communities do not have the budget to have security available all of the time, they must carefully determine which events or times of day warrant the presence of armed security and which do not.

"Security budgets are important. They are like utility costs. They are long term. It can't be a surprise every year that you have no money left for it."

— **Jeremy Yamin**
Associate Vice President,
Director of Security &
Operations Combined
Jewish Philanthropies –
Boston

“Police officers who know leaders and congregants are best equipped to keep the community safe.”

— **Robert Wasserman**
Chairman, Strategic Policy
Partnership, LLC

8. Beware: Things Can Go Wrong

Communities, especially those located in busy urban settings, may encounter a range of violent or potentially violent threats other than active threats, as well as other issues, including emotionally disturbed persons. These may not be from individuals targeting the community because of its status as a Jewish institution. Armed congregants as well as many private safety personnel/security officers, unlike trained officers, are less likely to be trained to handle such situations, which raises important questions.

- How would an armed congregant deal with a violent but unarmed intruder?
- How would an armed congregant determine whether a belligerent passerby, including someone with a mental health issue, is actually a security threat?
- What happens if an untrained armed congregant overreacts in such a situation?

Los Angeles Times

How a popular YouTube activist got shot outside an L.A. synagogue

Los Angeles, California

February 14, 2019—An armed security guard shot a “First Amendment auditor” in the leg outside the gates of a Los Angeles synagogue and school, after he reportedly grew angry at her provocations and refusal to stop videoing with her iPhone.¹² The guard was arrested. Post-incident evaluations indicate that an individual with de-escalation training may have been less likely to resort to using a deadly weapon. Under federal law, videotaping police officers is not a crime, but videotaping a private institution can be considered suspicious activity.

Communities face complex and unpredictable situations, and knowing when not to use a firearm is just as important as knowing how to use one. Crisis intervention training and de-escalation training are increasingly recognized as vital parts of law enforcement training. They can be especially important when dealing with a mentally disturbed person, for example.

Communities are best served by security personnel who are trained for the full spectrum of responses to a range of threats.

CASE STUDY:

Tree of Life Congregation

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

October 27, 2018

The October 27, 2018, attack on the Tree of Life building in Pittsburgh was the deadliest such attack in U.S. history. In the year prior to the attack, the Jewish community in Pittsburgh, recognizing the potential threats, took steps to improve security capabilities. These steps likely saved lives and prevented the massacre from being even worse.

- **Security Assessment and Emergency Exits:** A full security assessment of the facility and its vulnerabilities had been conducted, leading the congregations to take preventive measures like clearing emergency exits.
- **Communication Devices:** The rabbi had been convinced to carry a cellphone, despite the usual Shabbat proscription against doing so. This allowed for faster contact with law enforcement, who were in the building within 90 seconds.
- **Law Enforcement Engagement:** Members of local law enforcement were familiar with the facility and had previously walked the building, making their response more effective.
- **Training:** Members and clergy of the three congregations in the Tree of Life building participated in an active threat training in the very room where the attack occurred.

The experience in Pittsburgh demonstrates the importance of a holistic approach to security, one that includes training exercises, coordination with law enforcement and an assessment of vulnerabilities. An armed individual may have been able to engage with the shooter in the 90 seconds before police arrived, but an individual that lacked extensive training may also have added to the chaos.

On April 27, 2019, a gunman, armed with what witnesses described as an AR-style weapon and allegedly wearing a tactical and/or bulletproof vest and helmet, entered the Chabad of Poway in Poway, California, and opened fire on individuals gathered for a Passover celebration. An army veteran charged the gunman, who had a weapon malfunction. An off-duty Border Patrol officer engaged the gunman, shooting at him as he fled. The alleged gunman was later taken into custody.

Prior to the incident, the Poway Chabad had taken steps to enhance the security of their building. It had received a grant from the Department of Homeland Security four weeks earlier, which was to be used to make its entrance more secure. It had not yet been able to make those changes. Before the incident, interactions with local law enforcement had been more limited.

CASE STUDY:

Chabad of Poway

Poway, California

April 27, 2019

“A marked car outside with a police officer can be a big deterrent.”

Daniel Wagner

Deputy Superintendent,
Cambridge Police
Department,
Cambridge, Massachusetts

BREAKING DOWN THE SIX OPTIONS

Communities have considered various ways to have an armed presence in or outside their facilities.

These include:

- Uniformed, on-duty police officer
- Plainclothes, on-duty officer
- Off-duty or retired officer
- Current or former member of the military
- Security contractor
- Volunteer armed congregants

Each has advantages and disadvantages that communities should carefully consider.



1. Uniformed, On-Duty Police Officer

Advantages

- An on-duty officer has a higher level of training and is prepared to engage with an armed individual.
- A uniform and a police car can serve as deterrents.
- An on-duty officer is trained in how to deal with various situations and often has the ability to quickly and effectively address multiple scenarios.
- Liability is more likely to be assumed by the police department.
- An on-duty officer may have access to a long gun in a squad car.
- An on-duty officer understands laws about duty to render aid to an injured attacker or perceived threat.
- An on-duty officer is likely to be able to use nonlethal force options if appropriate.
- An on-duty officer is able to quickly radio for backup and additional personnel response in the event of an incident.

Disadvantages

- An on-duty officer may not be available in all locations at all times.
- An on-duty officer's primary duty is often to the city or municipality, not the facility, and could be called away.



2. Plainclothes Police Officer

Advantages

- A plainclothes officer provides the same expertise and training advantages as a uniformed officer.
- A plainclothes officer may make some congregants feel less intimidated.

Disadvantages

- A plainclothes officer may not have the same deterrent effect.
- While some congregants may be more comfortable with a plainclothes officer, others may feel less secure without a visible uniformed officer.



3. Off-Duty or Retired Officer

Advantages

- An off-duty officer or retired officer who has maintained certification to carry a firearm under H.R. 218 has the same or similar training as an on-duty officer, and many of the same advantages.
- An off-duty or retired officer is less likely to be called away for another issue or emergency.
- A retired officer is more likely to have a flexible schedule and be able to work around the needs of the community or facility.
- An off-duty officer, in some cases, may be able to maintain a police radio during off-duty deployment and be able to quickly call for backup or additional personnel response in the event of an incident.
- An off-duty officer on a detail can still appear in uniform.

Disadvantages

- Liability issues may be less straightforward.
- Costs may be relatively higher for an off-duty officer on a paid detail, which is governed by internal policy agency rates.
- Not all retired officers will have taken the steps to retain their training qualifications.
- If an off-duty officer is not able to wear a uniform, he or she may not have the same visible deterrent effect.
- A retired officer that has not maintained H.R. 218 certifications will not be able to comply with the latest standards or have received the proper training.



4. Current or Former Member of the Military

Advantages

- A member of the military who has served or is serving as a military law enforcement officer and certified to carry a firearm under H.R. 218, may have similar training to an on-duty officer, and many of the same advantages.
- Members of the military may have specialized firearms training for engaging with an armed combatant or active threat.
- They are likely to be well trained in having situational awareness and responding to threats.

Disadvantages

- They are not necessarily trained in relevant local, state or federal laws.
- They will not necessarily have contacts with local law enforcement.
- They may not be able to provide the same visible deterrence as a uniformed police officer.
- With the exception of those who served in military law enforcement, members of the military generally only have specialized training in firearms, but not necessarily training in safety and security of civilian facilities or interacting with the public in the same way that police officers are; very few, if any—other than military police in some cases—are likely to receive training on dealing with emotionally disturbed persons, de-escalation or crisis intervention skills.

What about foreign militaries? Training varies greatly among foreign militaries and security services, but members of any military are still unlikely to have the specialized training needed to be effective in an armed security context and rarely have any training in local, state or federal US laws, an understanding of less lethal force options or training in such areas as de-escalation, recognizing mental illness, autism or other conditions and may not be aware of accepted US best practices.

What is H.R. 218?

H.R. 218, or the Law Enforcement Officers' Safety Act, was signed into law in 2004 and sets out regulations for the training and qualifications of active and retired law enforcement officers. Under this federal law, qualified active and retired officers are permitted to carry concealed weapons, including in jurisdictions that might otherwise prohibit it.

If employing an on-duty or off-duty officer is not an option, congregations can consider inviting local officers to use their parking lots as a place to wait while they complete paperwork or other on-the-jobs tasks. This visible presence can serve as a deterrent and ensures proximity of a trained individual.

A concealed carry license is a license to carry for personal defense, not for the defense of a large group or gathering.



5. Security Contractor

Advantages

- A security contractor can make multiple trained individuals available during the times specified by the congregation. There may be more flexibility in scheduling.
- A security contractor may have some level of training.
- A security contractor may be licensed and insured, which can lower or shield the institution from liability.
- Houses of Worship can set experience, training, and qualifications levels when hiring a security contractor.
- A security contractor may provide a centralized office with which a community can communicate and consult on options and best practices.

Disadvantages

- A security contractor's training will not be as holistic as a law enforcement officer's.
- Training is not standardized across the country or between companies operating in the same area.
- A security contractor may not provide the same visible deterrent as a uniformed police officer or police car.
- A security contractor may have fewer weapons options and a limited ability to communicate directly with law enforcement.
- A security contractor's training is often very limited and does not include other situations where a response may be required—de-escalation, for example.
- A security contractor will never have the same training as a police officer.



6. Volunteer Armed Congregants

Advantages

- Volunteers can serve as a possible "last resort" in case of attack.
- Volunteers will not need to be compensated.

Disadvantages

- Volunteers are unlikely to have experience dealing with high-stress situations and may be overwhelmed during an incident.
- Volunteers are unlikely to have comprehensive training about when not to use lethal force.
- Volunteers are unlikely to be trained in relevant local, state and federal laws.
- Volunteers are unlikely to have comprehensive training to deal with various situations, such as law enforcement, and to include addressing suspicious persons, emotionally disturbed persons or others, nor are they likely to have training in less-lethal force options, lawful apprehension, etc.
- Volunteers are unlikely to have experience coordinating with law enforcement.
- Volunteers are unlikely to have training that allows them to coordinate with each other in an active threat situation.
- Volunteers are unlikely to have optimal active threat training levels or for all volunteers to be at the same training level.

Strategy to Avoid:

Security Theater

Some groups encourage and even train congregants to behave as though they are armed in the face of armed threats. **This type of "security theater" is extremely risky and not considered a best practice by experienced security professionals.**

Disadvantages (continued)

- Volunteers are unlikely to present the same deterrent factor as other options.
- Volunteers are unlikely to be trained, exercised and equipped in a coordinated fashion, to include weapon and ammunition choices.
- Volunteers do not have a contractual obligation to perform security services.
- Volunteers may find themselves exposed to liability issues, depending on actions taken and applicable laws.

If a member of a congregation is a trained police officer, that presents a unique situation that combines the advantages and disadvantages of each situation.

RECOMMENDATION

A congregation should begin the process of considering armed security by evaluating its overall security plans, efforts and strategy. It must consider its objectives, which are often (1) having situational awareness, (2) providing a visible deterrent and (3) having the ability to engage a threat immediately until law enforcement arrives.

With these advantages and disadvantages in mind, it is the Task Force's view that **employing a uniformed police officer** is the option most likely to achieve the common goals identified.

More broadly, employing an on- or off-duty law enforcement officer or a recently retired officer who continues to maintain relevant certifications and training is the recommended best practice.

Other options may achieve some of these goals or achieve them in some circumstances. SCN also recognizes that in many cases and communities, having a uniformed law enforcement officer may not be possible for logistical, financial or other reasons.

Nevertheless, most will find that whenever possible, **armed security is a matter best left to the best-trained professionals.**

“It’s important to be explicit as to why you’re introducing firearms.”

— **Daniel Wagner**
Deputy Superintendent,
Cambridge, Massachusetts,
Police Department

ADDITIONAL STEPS

Regardless of what decisions are made, congregation leaders have a responsibility to take additional follow up steps:

Internal Communication

Communication is paramount if a community is going to introduce new security measures.

Enhanced security measures will allay the fears of some but also raise concerns for others. Because of the emotionally charged nature of the issues at hand, no community members should be made to feel like they have been intentionally kept out of the loop about something as consequential as deadly force.

Congregants must also understand what the protocol is in the event a threat is identified. For example, if a congregation hires a uniformed security officer, leaders may wish to communicate to those who are already legally carrying concealed weapons—with or without the consent of the community—that in the event of an attack it is best to let the armed officer, not congregants, engage with the attacker.

Regular Evaluations

If an armed security plan is implemented, community leaders should set a timetable for evaluating the plan regularly to identify emerging issues or concerns and areas for improvement.

Utilizing Other Resources

No congregation has to make these decisions or navigate these issues alone. Available resources include:

- SCN Leadership Safety Guide
- SCN Greeter/Usher Training Program
- SCN Community Guide for Working With Law Enforcement
- SCN Duty Desk

For these resources or more information, contact SCN at dutydesk@securecommunitynetwork.org.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE

A Guide for Developing High-Quality Emergency Operations Plans for Houses of Worship-FEMA

DISCLAIMERS

This document is a compilation of existing security best practices, considerations and information to provide congregations and related facilities with background information related to this subject matter. It is not intended to provide comprehensive, organization-specific advice or policy guidance on security matters, nor is it meant to replace the advice of a security professional or legal counsel. SCN specifically disclaims any and all responsibility for, and is not responsible for, any loss or damage arising out of the use, nonuse or misuse of this information.

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