The Safety of Awareness

SECURITY STRATEGIES FOR SHULS

FOR JEWISH COMMUNITIES IN THE DIASPORA

We are facing serious times.

Welcome, like you, we are dedicated to safeguarding Jewish communities. In a time when antisemitic violence is escalating—from terror attacks in Washington, D.C. and Boulder, to assaults in Brooklyn, Athens, and San Antonio—our mission is urgent and clear: to inform, equip, and unite our communities in defense of our safety.

We are facing serious times.

This week alone, violent incidents surged to 11.4% of all recorded antisemitic cases globally, up from just 1.5% two weeks ago. From physical assaults to terror plots, the threats are real—and so is our resolve.

In this issue, we'll examine actionable strategies, spotlight security innovations, and hear from those on the front lines of Jewish protection. How can we protect our communities now?

Jewish institutions are facing extreme difficulties right now:

- decreased attendance to activities
- decreased jewish knowledge in traditions
- increased fear of attending services
- decreased funding and memberships to our shuls
- increase costs to meet security needs

We are here to find solutions together. Read on for strategies and to find the invite to an exclusive meeting for us working in Jewish communities.

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Together we will get through this and solutions are closer than we think. Hope for such trying times.

JEWS IN THE DIASPORA: INCIDENTS IN THE LAST MONTH

In the aftermath of the horrific terror attacks targeting Jews in Washington, D.C. and Boulder, antisemitic violence and threats continue globally and across the political spectrum.

Incidents documented in this week's Global Antisemitism Report include:

- Portugal: Far-left activists utilized a group chat to plot poisoning Israelis at an upcoming music festival.
- New York: A Jewish child in Brooklyn's Borough Park neighborhood was physically assaulted.
- Texas: A knife-wielding man verbally and physically assaulted a group of Jewish worshippers leaving a San Antonio synagogue.
- Greece: An Israeli tourist was attacked in Athens this week by a violent mob after he was heard speaking Hebrew in public.
- United Kingdom: Recent reports indicated that a man convicted last month of planning terrorism against mosques and synagogues was part of The British Movement, a neo-Nazi group.

Violence as a proportion of weekly incidents continues to trend upward. 11.4% of the incidents documented this week involved physical violence or threats – significantly higher than the 7.6% recorded last week and 1.5% the week prior.

Antisemitic Hate Crime: ‘Free Palestine’ Brick Hurled at Kosher Store Window in Massachusetts

June 15th 2025

Early Sunday morning, a kosher grocery store in Brookline, Massachusetts, was the target of an apparent hate crime. Vandals threw a brick — defaced with the slogan “Free Palestine” — through the front window of The Butcherie, a longstanding and prominent business in one of the most heavily Jewish neighborhoods in the state. Surveillance footage showed at least two masked individuals fleeing the scene after the attack. While no injuries were reported, the store sustained property damage and the psychological impact on the community has been profound.

Iran recruited Swedish minors for attacks on Israeli, Jewish targets – CNN

Iran is allegedly using criminal gangs in Sweden to target Israeli and Jewish interests, CNN reported on Monday.
According to Sweden's Security Service (SÄPO), at least four known attacks or attempted attacks were directed at the Israeli embassy in Stockholm in 2023 and 2024. These incidents include shootings and an attempted bombing, with several suspects under the age of 18. Swedish police and prosecutors say these youth are being manipulated by criminal gangs acting on behalf of Iranian intelligence units.

In one case, a 15-year-old boy from the city of Vasteras left his home in the middle of the night in May 2024, believing he had been hired for a minor errand. He was later arrested by Swedish police while in possession of a weapon. A day later, a 14-year-old boy fired a semi-automatic pistol near the Israeli embassy.

Sources: CNN and combatantisemitism.org

DIGITAL SAFETY

CYBERSECURITY AND DIGITAL SYSTEMS. BE AWARE.

In recent years, Iran has become one of the world's most active and dangerous state sponsors of terrorism and cyberwarfare. The Iranian regime funds and directs groups like Hezbollah, Hamas, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad — organizations explicitly committed to the destruction of Israel and the spread of antisemitic ideology. Beyond the battlefield, Iran increasingly uses digital tools and online propaganda as weapons against Jews, Israel, and democratic societies.

Iranian cyber units and their affiliates have been known to target Jewish institutions, including synagogues, Jewish schools, and nonprofit organizations, both in Israel and the diaspora. Their tactics range from phishing attacks and data breaches to spreading disinformation and hate speech on social media. This cyberwar is not just about disrupting infrastructure — it is also about intimidating, isolating, and demoralizing Jewish communities around the world.
In the face of this threat, Jewish institutions must treat digital security as a frontline defense against antisemitism. Below are 10 essential steps you can take to strengthen your synagogue's digital resilience and protect your community.

1. Do Not Email Sensitive Information Outside Your Organization
Avoid sending membership lists, donor databases, registration forms, or personal details via regular email — especially to external contacts. Email is inherently insecure and can be intercepted, misrouted, or forwarded without your knowledge. Instead, use secure file-sharing platforms with access controls, such as encrypted Google Drive folders (with restricted sharing) or secure collaboration platforms built for nonprofits.

2. Use Trusted, Secure Digital Tools
Rely on modern, reputable tools with built-in security. For example:

- Google Workspace (G Suite) with two-factor authentication (2FA) provides secure email, documents, and cloud storage.
- Stripe is a secure and trusted platform for handling payments and donations — avoid using less-known or outdated payment methods.
- Always ensure tools are up to date and have security settings properly configured. Don't rely on outdated software or free tools without encryption.

3. Obscure Member Data in Public or Shared Spaces
If you must store member information online — such as in cloud platforms like Google Cloud or Sheets — mask or anonymize the data to protect privacy. For example:

- Use first names only, or initials instead of full names.
- Mask part of phone numbers (e.g., 555-***-1234).
- Avoid posting addresses, emails, or donation amounts.
- Even seemingly minor data can be exploited by malicious actors to build profiles or carry out phishing campaigns.

4. Never Share Your Passwords — Even With Trusted People
Do not share your login credentials, even with friends, colleagues, or fellow volunteers. While you may trust the person, the method you use to send that password (e.g., text, email, WhatsApp) may not be secure and could be intercepted. Instead:

- Use platforms that allow delegated access or create separate user accounts with limited permissions.
- If access must be shared, use a secure password manager with shared vaults instead of sending the password directly.

5. Stay Connected and Use Encrypted Communication
Form a Signal group with trusted colleagues and community members involved in synagogue security or leadership. Signal provides end-to-end encrypted messaging, making it safer for sharing sensitive updates about threats, suspicious behavior, or security protocol changes. Use the group to quickly relay urgent information without exposing it to potential outside surveillance.

6. Avoid Using Public Platforms for Event Registrations
Do not use platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, or open Google Forms to collect RSVPs for synagogue events. These tools are not secure, and bad actors can easily join under false identities. Instead, use verified email lists, password-protected forms, or synagogue-managed platforms that require vetting before granting access.

7. Maintain Clear and Consistent Records
Keep detailed and up-to-date records of all attendees, volunteers, vendors, and new community members. This helps ensure that no one is wrongly flagged as a threat and also allows for more accurate monitoring of unfamiliar or concerning individuals. Assign someone to regularly review and reconcile these lists for accuracy and consistency.

8. **Screen New Members and Visitors Thoughtfully**
Always conduct a basic security check when a new person requests to join the community, attend an event, or gain access to facilities. This can include a quick phone call, reference from a current member, or an ID check. It's not about exclusion — it's about protecting the community through reasonable and respectful vetting.

9. Treat Unsolicited Conversion Inquiries with Caution
Be especially wary of cold emails or messages from individuals claiming to want to convert or attend your synagogue, especially if their messages contain strange grammar, vague language, or inconsistencies. Do not respond immediately — instead, flag it for your security team or leadership. Some hostile actors use these inquiries as social engineering tactics to test your defenses or gain access

10. Use Unique and Strong Passwords
Passwords are your first line of defense — and one of the most common vulnerabilities exploited by state-sponsored hackers. Iranian-affiliated actors often scan for weak or reused credentials to break into email accounts, cloud storage, and synagogue systems.
Create passwords that are long, complex, and unique for each account. Use a combination of:

- Uppercase and lowercase letters
- Numbers and special characters
- Phrases not connected to personal information (avoid Jewish references or Hebrew words commonly used)

Use a password manager like 1Password, Bitwarden, or LastPass to securely store and generate these passwords. This ensures that even if one system is compromised, others remain protected.

5 STRATEGIES

SHULS IN THE DIASPORA ARE USING FOR PROTECTION

In response to rising antisemitic threats — including potential cyberattacks and physical intimidation, some linked to state-sponsored actors like Iran or violent extremist groups — synagogues across the U.S. and globally are implementing a combination of digital security, physical safety measures, and community coordination. Below are five effective strategies currently being used:

1. Confidential Service Locations & Vetting Attendees

Many synagogues have adopted a "need-to-know" model for sharing the time and location of services, especially for high-risk or high-profile events like Shabbat services, holidays, or Israel solidarity gatherings.

- Only verified, trusted members are informed of the time and place, often via secure communication tools like Signal or private email lists.
- This approach limits the risk of bad actors infiltrating community spaces under false pretenses.
- It also deters potential attackers from targeting large gatherings whose time and location are publicly posted.

This model mirrors the approach taken by Jewish communities in conflict zones and is increasingly becoming standard even in American cities where antisemitism is growing.

2. Using Digital Tools to Screen Incoming Emails

Email is a common vector for cyberattacks, including phishing attempts or malware sent by hostile actors, sometimes linked to extremist or state-sponsored groups.

Synagogues are implementing email screening tools and services that:

- Analyze the metadata of incoming emails — including when the account was created and from which IP address the message was sent.
- Flag messages from suspicious domains, sudden “conversion inquiries,” or messages with strange phrasing or links.
- Allow administrators to assess whether an email is safe to open or requires IT or security review.

This step is essential for defending against social engineering attacks designed to gain access to internal systems or sensitive member data.

3. Centralized Member Verification Systems

Synagogues are increasingly adopting digital platforms to streamline security administration and reduce human error in managing member data.

- These systems allow administrators to mark trusted members as “approved” and flag unfamiliar or unverified individuals.
- All relevant teams — from clergy to security staff — can access a consistent, up-to-date list, helping ensure that no one falls through the cracks.
- Integration with check-in systems or registration tools can further reduce the chance of an unauthorized person entering an event unnoticed.

This strategy supports real-time situational awareness and faster, more accurate decision-making during potential incidents.

4. Active Coordination with Local Police

Many synagogues now maintain a direct line of communication with local law enforcement, sharing schedules, high-risk event details, and updates on suspicious activity.

- Synagogues notify police ahead of major events and provide real-time updates if threats are identified.
- Police can increase patrols near the building, offer guidance on active threat response, and assist in training community volunteers or security teams.
- This partnership turns synagogues from soft targets into monitored, coordinated spaces, which can deter threats and allow for a quicker emergency response.

Some synagogues even invite local officers to tour the premises regularly, ensuring that they are familiar with the layout in case of an emergency.

5. Visible and Transparent On-Site Security Protocols

A growing number of synagogues are implementing clear, structured procedures for managing unsolicited guests or suspicious individuals.

EMERGENCY MEETING
WE NEED TO ACT.

For Synagogues Across New Jersey:
While we may be individual shuls, we face the same threats—and share the same concerns. One of our greatest strengths is the support we can offer each other. Join this important meeting as we come together to discuss how to approach the upcoming fall holiday season with the highest level of safety, preparation, and unity.

MONDAY JUNE 26TH
1:30 PM

CLICK THE LINK TO REGISTER.

Yahrziet

FOR DIGITAL SECURITY AND ADMINISTRATION:
YAHRZIET.COM

OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO OUR COMMUNITIES

We carry a tremendous responsibility in our communities — and it's only getting harder.

Budgets are shrinking, fewer people are paying membership dues, and while the number of children preparing for b'nei mitzvah remains the same, there are fewer resources to support staff. On top of it all, we face growing security threats that add another layer of pressure to our already full plates.

It's overwhelming at times, especially when we consider the weight of 5,000 years of Jewish tradition that we are entrusted to uphold. But it's that very responsibility that gives our work such deep meaning. Today, hundreds of people are counting on us — not just to lead, but to protect, to preserve, and to carry forward something much greater than ourselves.

The impact of our efforts reaches far beyond the present moment. The choices we make now will help shape the Jewish future for generations to come. Every person deserves to attend religious services free of fear, free of harassment, and surrounded by a sense of safety. That's part of our role, too: providing that safety and peace of mind for our community.

We don't have to do it alone. With the right tools and by sharing knowledge, the burden becomes lighter — and the path forward clearer.

That's why we invite you to join the emergency meeting. You'll connect with others from the New Jersey region, exchange strategies, and collaborate on real solutions. Together, we can be smarter, stronger, and more prepared. Yes, the responsibility is great — but we're stronger when we carry it together.

AM ISRAEL CHAI

In these challenging times, when the skies over Israel are darkened by war and the hearts of Jews across the world are heavy with fear, one truth shines through with unwavering clarity: we need Israel now more than ever. Not just as a country, but as a home – the spiritual and historical homeland of the Jewish people.

Since the moment of its rebirth in 1948, Israel has represented far more than geography. It is the embodiment of survival, renewal, and hope. It is the place where Jewish dreams, once silenced by centuries of exile and persecution, found voice again. It is a living answer to a question Jews have asked through every pogrom, every displacement, every burning synagogue: "Where can we be safe?"

Israel is that answer. And in this moment of crisis – as the Jewish state endures rocket fire, threats from Iran and its terror proxies, and ongoing trauma from the brutal October 7th Hamas attacks – the connection between Israel and the diaspora must only grow stronger. This is not a time to look away or feel helpless. This is a time to stand up, to reach out, to remember: we are one people, one fate, one future.

Jews around the world need Israel. We need her strength. We need her spirit. We need her very existence as a beacon of continuity in a fractured world. No matter where we live – whether in New York, Johannesburg, Paris, Buenos Aires, or Sydney – the promise of Israel is woven into our collective identity. It's the place we look to in times of pride and in times of pain. It's where Jewish children speak Hebrew, Jewish history lives in stone and soil, and Jewish safety is not an afterthought, but a national priority. And make no mistake: Israel needs us, too.

Yes, the war with Iran and its proxies is terrifying. It is unlike anything we have faced before. This is not simply a military conflict – it is an ideological battle, one that weaponizes antisemitism and darkness in an attempt to erase the light we have carried for generations.

And no, we are not through with Hamas. The horrors inflicted on our brothers and sisters – in homes, in kibbutzim, at music festivals – remain etched in our collective memory. They are not statistics. They are people. Our people.

Let us carry this flame forward – not in fear, but in faith. Let our synagogues be safe. Let our communities be vigilant but never silent. Let our traditions continue with joy and commitment. And let our children grow up knowing that no matter what storm may come, the Jewish people endure.

Because we always have. Because we always will.

And because – now more than ever – we have Israel. And Israel has us.

AM ISRAEL CHAI

Yahrziet

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