

Security Training Helped Hostages Escape Gunman in Synagogue Standoff

The rabbi of a Texas synagogue where a gunman took hostages during livestreamed services said Monday that he threw a chair at his captor before escaping with two others after an hours-long standoff, crediting past security training for getting himself and his congregants out safely.

Rabbi Charlie Cytron-Walker told *CBS Mornings* that he let the gunman inside the suburban Fort Worth synagogue Saturday because he appeared to need shelter. He said the man was not threatening or suspicious at first. But, later, he heard a gun click as he was praying.

Another man held hostage, Jeffrey R. Cohen, described the ordeal on Facebook on Monday.

"First of all, we escaped. We weren't released or freed," said Cohen, who was one of four people in the synagogue for services that many other Congregation Beth Israel members were watching online.

Cohen said the men worked to keep the gunman engaged. They talked to the gunman, and he lectured them. At one point, as the situation devolved, Cohen said the gunman told them to get on their knees. Cohen recalled rearing up in his chair and slowly moving his head and mouthing, "no." As the gunman moved to sit back down, Cohen said Cytron-Walker yelled to run.

"The exit wasn't too far away," Cytron-Walker said. "I told them to go. I threw a chair at the gunman, and I headed for the door. And all three of us were able to get out without even a shot being fired."

Authorities identified the hostage-taker as 44-year-old British national Malik Faisal Akram, who was killed Saturday night after the last three hostages ran out of the synagogue in Colleyville around 9 p.m. The first hostage was released shortly after 5 p.m.

The FBI on Sunday night issued a statement calling the ordeal “a terrorism-related matter, in which the Jewish community was targeted” and said the Joint Terrorism Task Force is investigating. The agency noted that Akram spoke repeatedly during negotiations about a prisoner who is serving an 86-year sentence in the U.S. The statement followed comments Saturday from the special agent in charge of the FBI’s Dallas field office that the hostage-taker was focused on an issue “not specifically related to the Jewish community.”

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