



**Homeland  
Security**

January 5, 2024

MEMORANDUM FOR: Kiran Kaur Gill  
Chair, Faith-Based Security Advisory Council

FROM: Alejandro N. Mayorkas  
Secretary

SUBJECT: **New Faith-Based Security Advisory Council Subcommittees  
and Taskings**

---

I respectfully request that the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Faith-Based Security Advisory Council (FBSAC) form two subcommittees to provide findings and recommendations in these critical areas of the Department's work:

1. Develop a DHS strategy to protect faith-based community stakeholders from incidents of transnational repression (TNR), consistent with DHS authorities. This effort will focus on how faith-based leaders and security professionals can amplify DHS information on TNR threats, encourage reporting of incidents to appropriate authorities, and provide feedback on the effectiveness of existing safety and security resources.
2. Survey existing multi-faith initiatives nationwide to establish a "best practices toolkit" on how faith-based organizations and institutions can build resiliency against threats of targeted violence and terrorism.

These subjects are described in greater detail below.

I request that the FBSAC submit its findings and key recommendations to me no later than 120 days from the date of this memorandum, consistent with applicable rules and regulations.

Thank you for your work on these important matters, your service on the FBSAC, and your dedication to securing our homeland.

### **Countering Transnational Repression**

Transnational repression (TNR) occurs when foreign repressive governments stalk, intimidate, or assault individuals beyond their borders, including within the United States. Foreign governments have targeted individuals specifically because of their faith community affiliation. The objectives of foreign repressive governments that engage in this activity beyond their borders are typically to silence dissent, obtain information, intimidate community advocates, or

coerce individuals to return to their countries of origin. When foreign repressive governments are unable to threaten an individual in the United States, they may resort to targeting that individual's family members overseas. TNR activities are intended to have a chilling impact that extends beyond specific targeted individuals, and many TNR tactics are illegal. It will require a comprehensive and coordinated approach to effectively counter TNR in the homeland.

The U.S. Government is taking a whole-of-government approach to deter foreign repressive governments from engaging in TNR, promote accountability for those that engage in it, and increase measures to protect victims against it. To these ends, DHS is working to heighten domestic awareness of this threat and develop tools to counter all forms of TNR.

Faith-based organizations and institutions have unique insights into the security challenges faced by their memberships. This can include any form of targeting of communities and individuals on the basis of their faith or belief. Countering TNR will require a process to report potential TNR incidents, no matter how small. Federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial authorities, including law enforcement, can then coordinate to investigate and respond as appropriate.

The FBSAC is tasked to form a subcommittee to develop the DHS strategy to protect faith-based community stakeholders from incidents of TNR, consistent with the Department's authorities. The questions to consider for this tasking include, but are not limited to:

1. What is a process that faith-based leaders and security professionals can implement to inform faith-based communities about ongoing TNR threats and relevant resources?
2. What is an effective way to encourage faith-based communities to report TNR threats they have experienced?
3. How can faith-based leaders and security professionals assess how well safety and security resources are working, both in terms of communities utilizing them and their effectiveness in mitigating TNR incidents?

### **Countering and Responding to Targeted Violence and Terrorism**

In response to the hostage situation at the Congregation Beth Israel synagogue in Colleyville, Texas, on January 15, 2022, law enforcement and local faith leaders came together quickly to assess and respond to the situation. A gunman entered the synagogue and took four worshippers hostage, including their rabbi, for 11 hours. As the world watched along in real time, DHS reached out to faith leaders on the scene to ask how we could be of support. We spoke with an imam and a pastor, who were across the street at a Catholic church, comforting the Jewish community, including the wife of Rabbi Charlie Cytron-Walker. In the end, all of the hostages escaped safely, and Rabbi Cytron-Walker credited his active shooter training with saving their lives.

Similarly, the survivors of the shooting at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, PA in October 2018 credit the cohesiveness of their community and relationships with local law enforcement prior to that attack with their ability to remain resilient and recover in its aftermath.

While we never want a situation of those sorts to happen again, the reality is that they happen all too often. Domestic violent extremists prey on target-rich, resource-poor environments, including the communities that many places of worship serve. What we do want to see going forward is the type of coordinated and effective response we saw in Colleyville and the community resilience that was witnessed in Pittsburgh. The faith leader in Colleyville had the requisite training and resources to keep his congregants safe, and law enforcement responded efficiently and effectively. Both there and in Pittsburgh, the entire faith community came together to support their affected community members and keep DHS informed about their needs.

To that end, DHS is looking to solicit insights from faith-community leaders and professionals to see how the successes of the Colleyville response and Pittsburgh recovery can be scaled and made into a process that others can follow.

The FBSAC is tasked to form a subcommittee to survey existing multi-faith initiatives nationwide to establish a “best practices toolkit” on how faith-based organizations and institutions can build resiliency against threats of targeted violence and terrorism. The questions to consider for this tasking include, but are not limited to:

1. Are there examples of faith-based entities that have worked towards preventing an incident of targeted violence or terrorism by utilizing DHS safety and security resources? What are some best practices from those examples that other faith communities can adopt?
2. What are some examples of how faith communities have utilized federal government resources in the immediate aftermath and in the long-term following an incident of targeted violence or terrorism?
3. How can DHS assist with community building to increase resilience across faith groups in the event of an act of targeted violence?

Thank you very much.

cc: Julie Schonfeld, Vice Chair, Faith-Based Security Council