



How Flashpoint Helped the Community Security Initiative (NY) Stop a Potential Synagogue Shooting

About CSI NY

The greater New York City Jewish community is home to approximately 1.6 million Jews and 2,400 Jewish institutions. In December 2019, UJA Federation NY and JCRC-NY announced the creation of the “Community Security Initiative (CSI)” — a comprehensive program to protect and enhance the security for the Jewish communities and institutions of New York City, Long Island, and Westchester (recently expanded to Rockland County).

Led by Mitch Silber, the former director of intelligence for the NYPD, the 12-person CSI team distributes security alerts, timely security and cyber security information, and security grant announcements. It also provides vulnerability threat assessments as well as application assistance to Jewish communal institutions seeking to harden the security posture of their physical locations via state and federal grants.

The Challenge: Protecting New York’s Jewish community

Rising antisemitism

CSI’s genesis came in the wake of a rising tempo of antisemitism in the U.S., including the deadly attacks against the Tree of Life synagogue in 2018 and in Poway in 2019, as well the significant increase in documented attacks and threats directed at Jewish schools, synagogues, agencies, and individuals during 2019. These incidents included deadly attacks in Jersey City and Monsey as well as verbal harassment, anti-Jewish/anti-Israel graffiti, and hate speech.

“There’s a lot of chatter on the internet. One of the most difficult things is discerning what’s just talk and what’s likely to turn to action.”

— MITCH SILBER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF
THE COMMUNITY SECURITY INITIATIVE

According to the ADL, 2,717 incidents of assault, harassment, and vandalism were reported in 2021, [marking a new peak](#) in the US. The same ADL study shows that reported attacks rose by 106 percent at K-12 schools, by 21 percent on college campuses, and by 61 percent at Jewish community centers (JCCs) and synagogues.

More than 416 antisemitic incidents were reported in 2021 in New York, [the most](#) of any state. CSI’s AOR covers more than 2,000 Jewish institutions, including synagogues, schools, camps, and other Jewish facilities across New York’s five boroughs, Westchester, and Long Island.

Identifying threats online

Often, warning signs emerge online prior to a physical attack.

Hours before a gunman entered the Tree of Life synagogue, he posted a foreboding message laced with an antisemitic conspiracy theory on Gab.com: “hias [a Jewish nonprofit organization] likes to bring invaders in that kill our people. I can’t sit by and watch my people get slaughtered. Screw your optics, I’m going in.”

It was not the first time the perpetrator had posted hateful messages online. Nor is this the first time that [bigoted online activity](#) preceded or inspired a devastating physical attack on a specific religious group or demographic.

Speed, accuracy, and breadth

The online ecosystem in which threat actors operate, however, is incredibly vast, making it increasingly difficult to separate the signal from the noise. Compounding the expanding online threat ecosystem is a parallel increase in the rise of antisemitic incidents over the last four decades. In order to identify potentially credible threats to the Jewish community stemming from online sources, the CSI team approached Flashpoint. They required:

- Access to the most comprehensive coverage of threatening online activity
- Robust, lightning-fast alerting capabilities tied to threat-related keyword searches, helping analysts separate the signal from the noise in one centralized platform

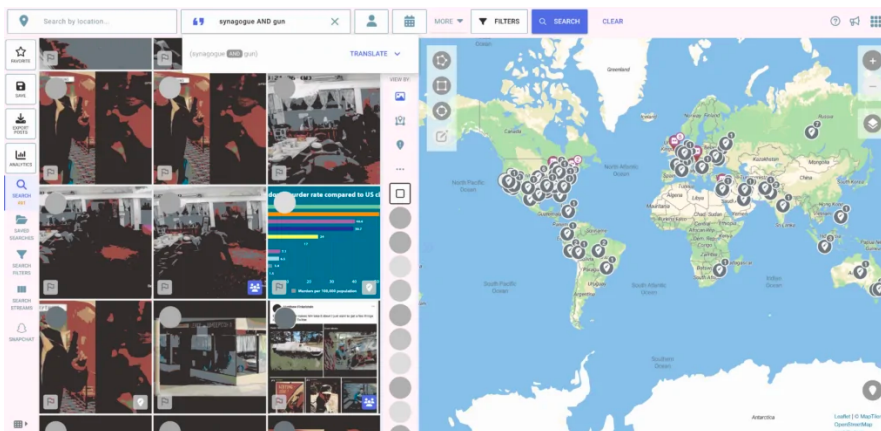
Just a couple months after the CSI team was formed, the Flashpoint-CSI partnership commenced.

The Solution: Flashpoint Physical Security Intelligence

In order to rapidly identify relevant threats, analysts on the CSI team leverage Flashpoint’s real-time social media intelligence tool, as well as Flashpoint’s collections comprising more than 575 million illicit forum posts, 3.6 billion chat services messages, and 350 million media assets—all which could surface images of weapons, a

manifesto, or another nefarious posting.

The CSI team has set up real-time alerts based on keyword combinations that could indicate an imminent threat. They are constantly adjusting their search profiles—and they receive hundreds of alerts every day.



[Flashpoint Physical Security Intelligence](#)

crawls a wide range of online sources including mainstream social media, discussion forums, decentralized networks, and messaging apps. Filtering tools, like the ones used by CSI, enables security and intelligence analysts to sift through the results quickly and easily—and identify relevant threats fast.

A viable threat

On Friday, November 18, 2022, at around 10:30 a.m. a member of the CSI team was going about their usual business—reviewing alerts and combing the internet for relevant threats to the Jewish community—when filters alerted him to an alarming social media post.

As *The New York Times* [reported](#):

In one post, the user warned: “Big moves being made on Friday.”

In another, the user wrote: “Gonna ask a Priest if I should become a husband or shoot up a synagogue and die.”

Another post (“This time I’m really gonna do it”) seemed to reinforce the threat of attack, which the user indicated could be carried out after 10 p.m. Friday night along with a willingness to “die by cop.”

The CSI team continued to investigate and drill down into the user. They soon found more online profiles that were apparently linked to the account behind the original social media posts, and those also mentioned threats.

Mr. Silber’s team escalated the information through the appropriate law enforcement agencies in Long Island and in New York City, a coordinated effort by law enforcement at the city, state, and federal levels ensued.



NYC agency detected synagogue threats on Twitter

The Results: Two arrests, and a thwarted attack

By 9:30 pm, the NYPD, in coordination with the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF), issued a BOLO intelligence alert with a picture of one of the suspects, to officers' cell phones, and a manhunt commenced.

Just before midnight, two "sharp-eyed" MTA officers arrested two men in their early twenties at Penn Station in Midtown Manhattan. Authorities would go on to seize a military-style knife, an illegal Glock 17

firearm with a 30-round magazine, a bulletproof vest, a swastika armband and a ski mask.

Both suspects were arrested on charges of conspiracy and weapons possession. One of them, who admitted to operating a white supremacist group on social media, was also indicted on felony terrorism and hate crime charges. Later, a third person was arrested on conspiracy weapon charges.

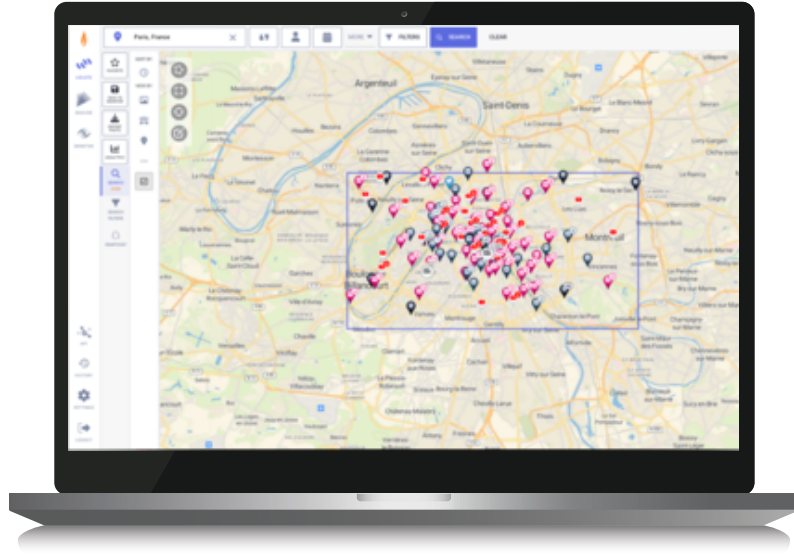


Mayor Eric Adams Discusses Coordinated Efforts That Stopped Potential Attack on Jewish Community

[Reported](#) the *New York Daily News*:

“The Police Department is looking at a full spectrum of threats from far left to far right, QAnon and everything in the middle. So oftentimes they do find this, as does the FBI,” said Silber, a former NYPD intelligence and terrorism expert.

“We have a narrower focus,” he continued. “Our focus is specifically on threats to the Jewish community of Greater New York, so we’re laser-focused on that. So we sometimes have a better shot at finding that particular needle in the haystack.”



The Locate view in Flashpoint Physical Security Intelligence gives users the ability to view and interact with geolocated social media in a map interface.

Protecting people, places, and assets

Flashpoint delivers real-time data from an extensive range of social media networks, online discussions, and illicit communities in which threat actors operate. Combined with intuitive functionality like geofencing, natural language processing, advanced filters, and one-click translation, our solution helps you find key information faster, improve situational awareness, monitor critical events, and better understand—and take action against—direct and indirect threats from across the ideological spectrum. [Learn more today.](https://www.flashpoint.io)