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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

January 19, 2022

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary
Department of Homeland Security

The Honorable Christopher A. Wray
Director
Federal Bureau of Investigation

Dear Secretary Mayorkas and Director Wray:

I write to request information on Malik Faisal Akram, the terrorist who, on January 15, 2022, entered a synagogue in Colleyville, Texas and took four people hostage.¹ During the attack, Akram reportedly threatened to kill the four hostages if a convicted terrorist and al-Qaida supporter was not released from prison.² Over the course of the 11-hour standoff, one hostage was released and the other three escaped as a Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Hostage Rescue Team entered the synagogue and shot and killed Akram.³ I commend the actions of the law enforcement officers who successfully worked to ensure the safety of all the hostages.

In the aftermath of the attack, information on Akram's background and criminal history has come to light. Akram was a British citizen whose criminal record apparently dated back several decades.⁴ In September 2001, Akram was reportedly banned from a British court after making disturbing statements that referenced the 9/11 terrorist attacks.⁵ Akram's most recent conviction of theft and harassment occurred in 2012.⁶ In 2020, British intelligence put Akram on a watch list, identifying him as a "subject of interest."⁷ However, British intelligence closed its investigation into Akram after it reportedly found that, "there was no indication of any terrorist threat at that time."⁸ The specific reasons why British intelligence added Akram to a watch list are not clear.

¹ Bill Hutchinson, Aaron Katersky, Josh Margolin, and Mike Levine, *Timeline of synagogue hostage standoff sheds light on suspect's travel in US*, ABC News, Jan. 17, 2022, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/timeline-synagogue-hostage-standoff-sheds-light-suspects-travel/story?id=82312197>.

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

⁴ Danielle Wallace, *Texas synagogue hostage suspect timeline: Malik Faisal Akram's criminal record and when he entered US*, Fox News, Jan. 19, 2022, <https://www.foxnews.com/us/texas-synagogue-malik-faisal-akram-criminal-record>, (reporting that Akram had been appearing at the court building for months to harass staff prior to this incident).

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ Megan Specia and Eileen Sullivan, *Texas Hostage Taker Was Known to British Intelligence*, NY Times, Jan. 18, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/18/world/europe/texas-synagogue-hostage-mi5-intelligence.html>.

⁸ *Id.*

According to reports, when Akram entered the U.S. on a tourist visa on December 29, 2021—about two weeks before the attack—he was “not on any [U.S.] watch lists.”⁹ Yet, given Akram’s prior placement on a British intelligence watch list, it is concerning that he was able to enter the country without triggering any alarms. In order to better understand why your agencies failed to detect Akram and stop him from entering the country, please provide the following information:

1. Was Akram ever included in the Terrorist Screening Database? If not, why?
2. Did the FBI or the Department of Homeland Security have any information on or awareness of Akram prior to the January 15, 2022 attack? If so, please provide this information.
3. When did Akram obtain a tourist visa? Did he indicate how long he was going to be in the U.S. or whether he intended to visit anyone in the country?
4. The FBI claims that it has “deployed [its] full investigative resources and [is] working closely with [its] federal, state, and local partners to aggressively pursue those involved in these criminal activities” relating to the January 6, 2021 U.S. Capitol breach.¹⁰
 - a. To what extent has the FBI’s decision to deploy its *full* investigative resources into the January 6th Capitol breach hindered its ability to detect and investigate terrorists like Akram?

Please provide this information as soon as possible but no later than February 2, 2022. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Ron Johnson
Ranking Member
Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations

⁹ Bill Hutchinson, Aaron Katersky, Josh Margolin, and Mike Levine, *Timeline of synagogue hostage standoff sheds light on suspect's travel in US*, ABC News, Jan. 17, 2022, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/timeline-synagogue-hostage-standoff-sheds-light-suspects-travel/story?id=82312197>; Michael Balsamo, Jake Bleiberg, and Eric Tucker, *White House: Texas hostage-taker had raised no red flags*, Associated Press, Jan. 18, 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/texas-synagogue-hostage-taker-f2b96edefda5b51813e66e743d2edf62>.

¹⁰ Press release, *U.S. Capitol Violence*, Federal Bureau of Investigation, accessed Jan. 19, 2022, <https://www.fbi.gov/wanted/capitol-violence>.