

# *Lebanese Family Members of Synagogue Attacker Died in Airstrike*

The man was identified as a U.S. citizen born in Lebanon, who lived and worked outside of Detroit. The attack on Temple Israel left Jewish communities across America rattled.



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**By Jacey Fortin, Hwaida Saad, Neal E. Boudette and Kurt Streeter**

Hwaida Saad reported from Beirut, Lebanon, and Neal E. Boudette from West Bloomfield, Mich.

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The man who rammed his truck into a Michigan synagogue on Thursday lost four family members in an airstrike in Lebanon the week before, according to an imam in Dearborn Heights, Mich., and a Lebanese official who said he knew the man and his family.

The attacker was identified by federal officials as Ayman Mohamad Ghazali, a 41-year-old naturalized U.S. citizen who was born in Lebanon. He lived outside Detroit, where a mosque held a memorial for his slain family members this week, according to the imam, Hassan Qazwini of the Islamic Institute of America, who performed the service but did not know Mr. Ghazali, he said.

Mr. Ghazali was killed on Thursday after driving through the temple doors and down the hallway of Temple Israel in West Bloomfield Township, Mich. He exchanged gunfire with security guards, officials said, though they added on Thursday that his cause of death was not yet clear.

No one else was killed in the attack, which set the building on fire and sent some 30 police officers to the hospital to be treated for smoke inhalation. One security guard was hit by the vehicle and injured. He is expected to recover.

The episode heightened fears among Jews in Michigan and across the United States. A wave of rising antisemitism in America has been exacerbated by the U.S.-Israeli war on Iran, which has extended into attacks by Israel on Lebanon in an attempt to root out the Iran-backed militant group Hezbollah.

It also prompted anxiety for members of the area's large Arab community, who braced for extra scrutiny after they learned that the attacker was from Lebanon. "This tragedy comes at a time when communities everywhere are confronting rising hate and senseless violence," said Mayor Mo Baydoun of Dearborn Heights, Mich., where the attacker worked at a local restaurant.



The attack set the building on fire and sent some 30 police officers to the hospital to be treated for smoke inhalation. Sarah Rice for The New York Times

Mayor Baydoun said in a statement late Thursday that Mr. Ghazali had lost several members of his own family, including his niece and nephew, in an Israeli attack this month, though the source of his information was unclear. But it matched what an official in Lebanon and Imam Qazwini told The New York Times on Friday.

The Lebanese official, speaking on condition of anonymity because he feared reprisals, said Mr. Ghazali's brother, Ibrahim, and his two children, as well as another brother, Qassem, were killed in a strike on their three-story building.

Ibrahim's wife was seriously wounded and is in a hospital, the official said, adding that Mr. Ghazali's family members were not members of Hezbollah. Lebanon's health ministry said that an Israeli airstrike had killed four people and injured a woman in the eastern town of Mashgharah on March 5, according to reports by The Associated Press.

Though investigators in Michigan said they had not determined a motive for the synagogue attack, officials described it as a clear indication of rising antisemitism. Temple Israel is one of the country's largest Reform houses of worship and the largest in metropolitan Detroit.

"It was hate, plain and simple," Gov. Gretchen Whitmer of Michigan said on Friday. "We will fight this ancient and rampant evil. We will stand together as we do it, and we will call it out."

Temple Israel includes a nursery school and a religious school for children in prekindergarten to 12th grade. About 140 children were inside when the vehicle rammed the building shortly after noon. All of them were evacuated from the building without injury.



Cassi Cohen, a director at Temple Israel, was in the synagogue's administrative offices during the attack. Nick Hagen for The New York Times

Cassi Cohen, 50, a director at Temple Israel, was in the synagogue's administrative offices during the attack. "We heard a really loud crash," she said. "We saw debris flying everywhere, and heard a bang. We knew we had to get out of there."

Mr. Ghazali came to the United States in 2011 on a visa for foreign-born spouses of U.S. citizens, the Department of Homeland Security said. He became a citizen in 2016. Residents in Dearborn Heights, a Detroit suburb with a large Lebanese community, said that Mr. Ghazali had worked at a popular restaurant known for its Mediterranean food.

Chadi Zreik, 32, a neighbor of Mr. Ghazali, said that news of the attack spread quickly, appalling residents of Dearborn Heights. "And now there's going to be blowback on our community," he said. "Anytime anything happens in this community, it's under a microscope."

Mayor Baydoun said in his statement that “everyone deserves to worship in peace, and we must unequivocally condemn any attack on a house of worship or the people within it.” He added, “The tensions we see across the world too often find their way into our own neighborhoods, reminding us how deeply connected our shared safety is.”

**Jacey Fortin** covers a wide range of subjects for The Times, including extreme weather, court cases and state politics across the country.

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