

WHAT ESCALATION LOOKS LIKE IN REAL TIME

A Direct Alignment Between Behavior and Action

The White House Correspondents Dinner Incident — April 25, 2026



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The Incident and a History Comparison

First the History

Before getting into the article, I want to share one observation that may bring additional perspective to those old enough to remember the original incident that occurred at this same venue.

President Ronald Reagan was shot on March 30, 1981. The assassination attempt occurred outside the Washington Hilton at the T Street entrance. If you are of an age to recall this incident, I would ask you to reach back to those memories and the feelings you had when you first learned that the President had been shot.

If your recollection is like mine, it was not a memory of politics. It was a memory of an attack on one of our most valued institutions, the Office of the President of the United States. Collectively, we mourned the incident and felt the gravity of the fact that someone who had dedicated his life to that office nearly lost his own.

That moment in time provides a point of reference.

It offers a contrast between the behaviors then and the behaviors we are seeing today that no explanation alone can fully capture. As you read through what follows, make those comparisons for yourself, especially when it comes to how the public responded after the incident.

The Article and Recent Incident

On April 27, 2026, I released my article “When Reaction Replaces Reflection: The Shift in How We Treat One Another.” This article was written the week before the White House Correspondents’ Dinner incident, and, as I outlined in this article, the shift in our culture acts much faster in today’s society, so I thought I would share the alignment between what appeared in this article and the WHCD incident.

How the Manifesto Aligns with the Article

I will first demonstrate how the behaviors described in the original article appear in the assailant’s manifesto from the White House Correspondence Dinner incident.

The purpose of this comparison is to demonstrate how recognizable behavioral patterns can move from words and beliefs into real-world action.

The behaviors outlined in the article are not fictional; they provide a blueprint for how behaviors are observable, and later, we will discuss how they were measurable using our PAAD “Pathway to Violence” guide for preventing, recognizing, and responding to planned violent attacks.

Opinion is Stated as Fact

Article

In the article, I stated that opinions are often treated as facts before the truth is fully known, and they can form quickly, especially in emotionally charged environments. Once that certainty takes hold, it can drive decisions and actions without verification.

Manifesto

The author repeatedly asserts criminal accusations as settled truth and uses those assertions as the foundation for action. At this point, we have evidence that he questions the information, seeks confirmation, or expresses uncertainty. The belief is presented as an established fact and becomes the justification for violence.

You may question how we know this. We are not aware of the names and circumstances of all 2,000-plus attendees, but there are no known charges pending or in progress, as stated in the manifesto against the “representatives” present at the event.

“I am a citizen of the United States of America.

What my representatives do reflects on me.

And I am no longer willing to permit a pedophile, rapist, and traitor to coat my hands with his crimes.”

Patience Is Thinning, and Reactions Are Happening Faster

Article

Across communities, patience is thinning, and reactions are happening more quickly. Frustration and urgency can shorten the distance between emotion and action.

Escalation is not always sudden but is often built without immediate recognition until reaction becomes immediate.

Manifesto

The writer frames the act as a necessary response to perceived wrongdoing and portrays violence as the logical next step. The emotional intensity is high, and the decision to act appears immediate and decisive, indicating a shortened pause between grievance and action.

Online Behavior Can Spill Into Real-World Settings

Article

Online conversations and repeated narratives can shape how people interpret events and respond to them. Over time, ideas reinforced in digital spaces can move beyond discussion and influence behavior in real-world settings.

Narratives do not remain confined to private conversations; they spread quickly across digital media and build momentum that shapes others' behavior.

Manifesto

The writer advances beliefs and accusations that closely mirror widely circulated public and online narratives. These ideas are not presented as questions or opinions but as established truths that demand action. The shift from repeated narrative to real-world behavior reflects the spillover described in the article, in which conversations and beliefs formed in one environment begin to influence decisions in another.

Bystanders Can Unintentionally Reinforce Aggressive Individuals

Article

When people participate in conversations without verifying information, they can unintentionally reinforce aggressive behavior. Agreement, silence, or participation can strengthen belief and increase the confidence of the individual driving the narrative.

When people are grouped into a narrative, responsibility shifts and restraint weakens.

Manifesto

The writer describes others as complicit merely for attending the event and expresses a willingness to harm them if necessary to reach the intended target. This reflects a mindset in which support or presence is interpreted as endorsement, reinforcing the belief that action is justified.

Frustration, Fear, or Urgency Can Drive Behavior More Than Facts or Understanding

Article

Strong emotions can narrow judgment and speed decision-making. When frustration, fear, or urgency take hold, behavior may be driven more by emotion than by facts or understanding, and the pressure can shorten the distance between emotion and action.

Manifesto

The writer describes intense emotional reactions, including rage, distress, and urgency, while continuing the act. The emotional state is acknowledged but does not interrupt the decision to proceed, indicating that emotion has become the primary driver of behavior.

The Willingness to Pause Before Reacting Is What Stabilizes Communities

Article

Communities remain stable when individuals are willing to pause, reflect, and verify information before reacting. That pause allows reason and judgment to guide behavior.

Manifesto

The writer acknowledges the potential harm and the consequences of his actions but proceeds anyway. Reflection is present, yet it does not stop the behavior. The absence of a meaningful pause between thought and action reflects the very condition described in the article, where reaction replaces reflection.

Perceived Harm Without Direct Involvement

Article

Individuals can become emotionally invested in events that do not directly involve them. Over time, repeated exposure to powerful narratives can foster a sense of personal responsibility or injury, even when the individual has no direct role in the situation and is not personally affected by the outcome.

When this occurs, the line between observation and ownership blurs, and the individual no longer sees the issue as something happening to others. They begin to see it as something

happening to them. This behavioral transition takes the person from an observer to a participant and the self-appointed responder.

Manifesto

The writer states that others' actions reflect directly on him and that he is no longer willing to let them affect him. He describes crimes allegedly committed by others as placing personal responsibility on him, despite having no direct involvement in those events.

By framing those actions as personal harm, the writer transforms distant events into a personal grievance. This shift allows the individual to justify action as a response to a perceived injury rather than as interference in matters that do not directly involve him.

The Pathway to Violence: Where Behavior Brought the Alleged Assailant

When examining the reported actions of Cole Thomas Allen, the alleged assailant in the attack at the White House Correspondents' Dinner on April 25, 2026, it is important to interpret behavior with discipline.

The facts are still under investigation, so much of the early behavior that may have led the individual to that point remains unknown to the public. However, what can be examined is how the behavior described in the manifesto and in publicly reported actions may align with the established stages of the P.A.A.D. pathway to violence.

This model does not assume motive, so it is not a profiling tool. It identifies patterns of movement because violence is rarely spontaneous. It develops through recognizable stages of commitment.

Stage 1: Early Fixation and Hardening

Movement along the pathway often begins with a growing fixation on a grievance, an issue, an institution, or a perceived injustice. A person's thinking becomes less flexible. The individual begins rejecting information that challenges the belief they are forming.

At this stage, the individual is beginning to form opinions and interpretations regarding a grievance or issue. Behavior is still developing, and commitment has not yet formed.

In the manifesto, the writer begins by expressing concern about perceived wrongdoing and forms opinions about the issue. The language reflects growing attention to the grievance, but conclusions are still taking shape.

Stage 2: Tunnel Vision

As the belief strengthens, the grievance begins to dominate the individual's thinking. Attention narrows. Other concerns become secondary. The issue moves from one concern among many to the central focus of the person's attention. Behaviorally, this is where balance begins to disappear.

In the manifesto, the language reflects conviction rather than inquiry. Statements are presented as settled facts. Disagreement is treated as evidence of wrongdoing rather than as a difference of opinion. This shift reflects a narrowing of perspective, where the grievance becomes central to the individual's thinking. At this stage, the grievance is no longer a topic. It becomes the lens through which the individual interprets events.

Stage 3: The Silent Wall

As the individual moves along the pathway, they may begin to withdraw from normal conversation and reduce engagement with people who question or challenge their views. Communication becomes more selective. The person may appear more guarded, less open to discussion, and increasingly focused on defending their position.

At this stage, behavior often becomes less visible to others. The individual may spend more time reflecting on the grievance and less time testing their views in open conversation. Opportunities for correction or perspective begin to diminish.

In the manifesto, the tone reflects increasing certainty and less openness to opposing viewpoints. The language suggests a growing separation from alternative perspectives, reinforcing the individual's belief that their interpretation is correct and that disagreement reflects misunderstanding or wrongdoing.

Stage 4: Seeds of Discord

At this stage, the grievance becomes more openly expressed in conversations or written communication. Frustration and blame become more apparent. The individual may begin to express accusations, criticism, or hostility toward people, institutions, or systems they believe are responsible for the perceived harm.

The shift is noticeable because the behavior moves from internal focus to outward expression. The person is no longer simply holding a belief. They are communicating it in a way that introduces tension into interactions with others.

In the manifesto, the language is direct, with clear statements of wrongdoing and responsibility. The tone becomes more assertive, and the message is delivered with increasing confidence. This stage marks the transition from private belief to public expression of grievance.

Stage 5: Public Defamation Strike

As the grievance becomes fully formed, the individual may begin to broadcast their accusations or claims more broadly. Statements may be repeated, shared publicly, or directed to a wider audience. The behavior reflects an effort to influence others, gain validation, or apply pressure to those perceived as responsible.

At this stage, the narrative becomes more structured and persistent. Repetition reinforces certainty, and public communication increases the individual's commitment to the position they have taken.

In the manifesto, the accusations are presented as established truth and used to assign responsibility and demand accountability. The message is no longer exploratory. It is declarative.

Stage 6: The Line in the Sand

Movement along the pathway becomes more decisive at this stage. The individual begins to see action as necessary to resolve the grievance. The issue is no longer framed as a matter for debate. It becomes something that must be addressed.

Behaviorally, this stage marks a shift from belief to commitment. The person begins to view the intervention as justified or necessary. Statements may reflect urgency, responsibility, or the need to correct perceived wrongdoing.

In the manifesto, the language suggests a growing sense of obligation to act. The tone reflects determination rather than hesitation. This stage marks the point at which the individual moves from conviction to readiness.

Stage 7: Precision Assault Blueprint

At this stage, behavior begins to reflect preparation and operational positioning. The individual may start organizing actions around a specific objective. This may include gathering resources, arranging travel, selecting locations, or positioning themselves closer to the perceived source of the grievance.

Preparation does not always begin at the same time. Some actions may occur months or years earlier, without clear intent at the time. What matters behaviorally is when those earlier actions become connected to a developing plan.

Public reporting indicates that the alleged assailant legally purchased firearms in October 2023 and again in August 2025, several months to years before the incident. Those same weapons were later recovered at the scene. By themselves, these purchases do not establish planning. Many individuals lawfully purchase firearms without any connection to criminal intent. However, once an individual progresses along the pathway and moves toward action, previously acquired resources can become part of the preparation process.

Public reporting also indicates that the alleged assailant made a hotel reservation weeks in advance, traveled by train across multiple states, and arrived at the venue the day before the incident. If confirmed, these actions would be consistent with movement toward preparation and operational positioning, including surveillance of a target. The mode of transportation is also part of the earlier planning indicators, reflecting an effort to avoid traveling with firearms across state lines.

Preparation is one of the clearest indicators of a strengthened commitment, as it reflects a shift from belief to readiness and to a locked-in commitment. The individual is no longer focused solely on the grievance. They are beginning to organize their behavior around the objective.

Stage 8: The Attack

This stage marks the moment when the individual attempts to carry out the act or disruption. Although pre-surveillance operations can be observed during the planning stage, it is here that the behavior becomes physical and observable, as the individual has reached the point of no return. The individual moves from preparation to execution.

In the reported incident, law enforcement intervened before the act could be completed. That intervention interrupted the behavior's progression and prevented the situation from worsening.

From a behavioral standpoint, this stage confirms that the individual has moved beyond planning and into action.

Stage 9: The Final Gambit

The final stage is defined by resolution. The individual proceeds despite the possibility of consequences, and personal safety is no longer the primary influence on behavior.

Statements in the manifesto indicate that the writer understood he could be killed or injured as a result of his actions. That acknowledgment reflects awareness of risk and a decision to proceed despite it.

Behaviorally, this is the defining feature of the pathway's final stage: the individual has accepted the risk and is moving forward.

What This Means for Prevention

The most important lesson from incidents like this is not found at the final stage. It is found in the preceding stages. Each stage represents an opportunity for recognition and intervention, and each stage reflects increasing commitment.

Understanding movement along the pathway enables families, workplaces, communities, and professionals to identify risk before violence occurs. This is vital because once an individual reaches stage 4, they are disconnected, and the window for safely preventing or intervening has already begun to close.

Aftermath: When the Narrative Continues After the Incident

What followed the attack did not introduce new behaviors; it revealed the same ones already described in the original article.

Certainty Appeared Before the Facts

Within hours of the incident, claims began circulating that the attack was staged, that it was carried out for political purposes, and that hidden motives were already known. These statements were delivered with confidence, even though investigators had just begun collecting the full facts.

Excerpt from the original article:

Statements are delivered with certainty even though the facts have not yet been verified. The language shifts from questions to conclusions, and from concern to declaration.

That shift showed quickly, and once it began, the tone of the conversation changed.

False Narratives Filled the Information Gap

As details remained scarce, people began filling the gaps with their own explanations. Some insisted the attack was a hoax. Others drew connections between individuals or groups with no confirmed involvement. The narrative moved faster than the investigation.

Excerpt from the original article:

Humans are uncomfortable with uncertainty, so people fill the gap with theories, opinions, or blame.

Not unusual, but it is dangerous when repetition turns speculation into perceived truth.

The Sniper Pattern Became Visible

Individuals made strong judgments about the event despite lacking firsthand knowledge of its consequences. Some mocked the situation, while others downplayed the attack's seriousness. A small but notable number expressed disappointment that the attack had not been successful.

They reflect a level of detachment that lowers restraint and weakens the natural barriers that normally prevent people from endorsing harm.

Excerpt from the original article:

There is no immediate feedback, no visible reaction from the person affected, and no social cost that feels personal or direct.

Being removed from the incident makes escalation easier.

People Were Inserted Into the Story Without Evidence

Names, groups, and motives entered the public conversation before investigators confirmed any connection. Individuals who were not part of the incident became part of the narrative.

This expands the circle of blame and increases tension across the community.

Excerpt from the original article:

When many people participate in the same conversation or pile onto the same narrative, responsibility becomes spread across the group.

The result is confusion, frustration, and rising conflict.

Reaction Began to Normalize Violence

Disagreement and debate are normal, but accepting harm is not. This is not conjecture; it is blatantly stated by many online.

When people express disappointment that an attack failed, they move beyond commentary. They were not hinting at violence. They were openly stating they were comfortable with it. Even when framed as sarcasm or frustration, those statements shift the boundaries of what feels permissible.

Excerpt from the original article:

Every reaction can either stabilize a situation or add pressure to it.

Most reactions create additional pressure, while other responses remove restraint altogether.

What This Shows

The behavior path that led to the attack itself elicited a violent response, but the behavioral patterns persist and create a feedback loop, as I originally stated in the article.

The aftermath demonstrated exactly what the original article described:
how quickly speculation can replace reflection,
how repetition can make false claims feel true,
and how distance can make harmful statements easier to express.

Violence is not only shaped by the person who acts.
It is shaped by the environment that responds.

That environment is built one comment, one post, and one reaction at a time.

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