Welcome to this week's edition of Defuse News

A weekly briefing for people whose profile attracts attention.

Is your intelligence report answering the right question?

👤 A man has been posting about your client for nine months. He comments beneath their public posts, discusses them on his own accounts, raises them where nobody asked. He has never made contact.

📊 You commission intelligence analysis.

- Posting volume over time
- Sentiment scoring
- A map of the accounts he interacts with

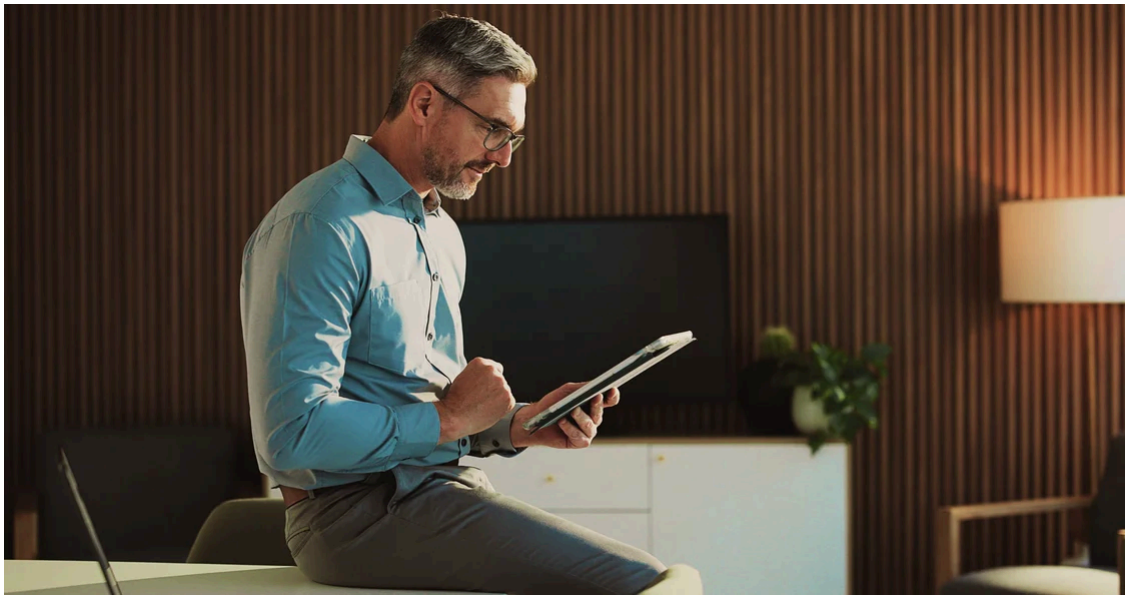
He is described as fixated, the risk assessed as moderate, and no threat made or approach attempted.

⚠️ Every word accurate. None of it answers the question you asked, which is whether this man is preparing to do something. That closing reassurance, offered in good faith, is the least useful sentence in it.

Fein and Vossekuil's Exceptional Case Study Project examined every person known to have attacked or approached to attack a prominent public figure in America between 1949 and 1996.

They rarely communicated a direct threat to the target or to law enforcement. Most communicated about the target to somebody else.

🔎 The absence of a threat tells you little, and the communication that matters is often addressed elsewhere.



Why capable people produce analysis like this

I want to be careful here. The people doing this work are usually very good, and are doing what they were trained to do.

Many of the intelligence analysts in the private sector in the UK came from policing or the military, and that training was built around networks:

- organised crime
- terrorism
- counter-insurgency

It teaches you to:

- map relationships
- aggregate volume
- find the node that matters

Targeted violence against an individual is not unstructured. There is no network to map, but there is a well-travelled path.

Calhoun and Weston set it out as a sequence:

grievance → ideation → research and planning → preparation → breach → attack

The question is where on it a person stands.

Adapted with kind permission from F.S. Calhoun and S.W. Weston

The behaviours that place him there have been catalogued. Reid Meloy and Paul Gill set out eighteen in the Journal of Threat Assessment and Management in 2016 as the TRAP-18. They sort into two kinds, and the sorting is the important part.

🟡 Distal characteristics

Distal characteristics are background conditions. They can sit in place for years without anything happening, and the response is to monitor.

🔴 Proximal warning behaviours

Proximal warning behaviours are the movement itself. They accelerate, and the response is to manage.

One says watch. The other says act.

None of which helps if the person reading the material has never met the framework. You cannot recognise a warning behaviour you have no name for, or weigh it against the others.

So what fills the gap is whatever the tools can measure.

- Volume.
- Sentiment.
- Reach.

You end up with a description of activity where you commissioned an assessment of intent.

The question a behavioural assessment asks

❓ The question is not whether someone is concerning. Plenty of people are. It is which direction they are moving.

The eight proximal behaviours came first, in a 2012 paper by Meloy, who joined me on the Defuse Podcast, with Hoffmann, Guldimann and James. In practice they read as questions.

- Has he moved from grievance into preparation?
- Has he told somebody else what he intends, as a great many do?
- Is there a burst of activity after a long quiet period?

Each has a name, a literature behind it, and a weight relative to the others. None is obvious to someone who has not been taught to look, which is rather the point. And in most cases you are looking for a change. A deviation from what this person has done for two years.

- He posted twice a month and now posts daily.
- He argued in public and has gone quiet.
- He wrote about grievance and has started writing about duty.

Change rarely happens for no reason. It tends to follow something:

- a court ruling
- a refusal
- a redundancy
- a public humiliation
- an anniversary

The trigger is often invisible to you and enormous to him.

A background characteristic tells you who someone is. A warning behaviour tells you where they are on the path.

Why volume misleads

Calhoun and Weston's distinction between howlers and hunters illustrates the problem.

📣 Howlers

Howlers communicate, sometimes relentlessly and for years. What they want is a reaction rather than an outcome.

🎯 Hunters

Hunters research, plan and prepare, and frequently say nothing to the target at all. Calhoun and Weston are careful about how that is used.

These are not two types of person to be sorted into boxes and left there. The question is whether this subject is behaving like a hunter or a howler now.

⚠️ Someone who has howled for years and begins to hunt is no longer a howler. A hostile inbox produces a legible graph. The man quietly working out where your client will be on the fourteenth produces almost nothing.

Weight your analysis towards what can be counted and it will point you at the wrong man, with a chart.

What the evidence keeps showing

📄 The FBI published its 2025 active shooter report recently.

Of the 34 attackers:

- 23 showed predatory behaviour: they considered, planned and prepared, and the preparation was preceded by observable warning behaviours.

- Those 23 incidents accounted for 76 per cent of all casualties that year, and every casualty among security personnel.

It also carries a section on attacks that did not happen.

- A student told a school administrator.
- A family called the police.
- Officers stopped a car after hours and found a notebook with a plan and a building layout.

None was stopped by a barrier, a camera or a guard.

Each was stopped because somebody recognised a behaviour and told somebody who knew what they were looking at.

What to do about it

1️⃣

Three things, none of which require changing your provider. First, ask two questions of whoever supplies your intelligence.

- Which structured framework are you using here?
- And what would you need to see before you could tell me he has moved from grievance to preparation?

Neither is a test, and a good analyst will welcome both.

2️⃣

Second, know what a proper assessment produces.

- What this person appears to want
- what he has done rather than said
- which warning behaviours are present and which absent
- and what should happen now

🚦 If it ends with a colour instead of a decision, it has not finished the job.

3️⃣

Third, keep a record.

- Dates
- times
- screenshots
- who reported what to whom

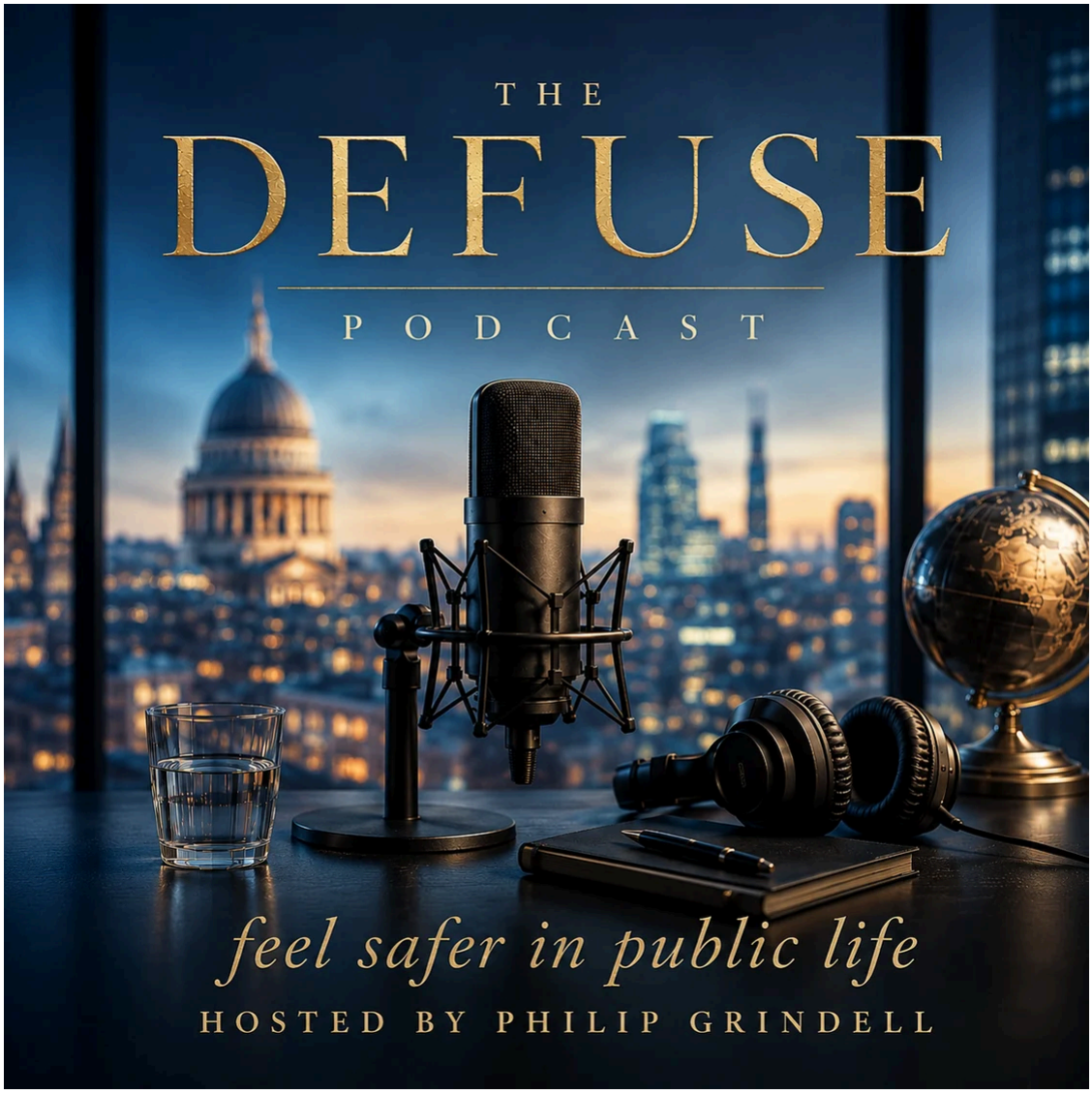
Behavioural assessment depends on sequence, and sequence is the first thing lost when nobody wrote anything down. It is also what any application to a court will stand or fall on.

📘 I set all of this out at length in Personal Threat Management. This is the short version.

Find the book here

None of this argues against protective security. It argues that protective security deserves analysis capable of answering the question it was commissioned to answer.

💬 If you are reading something now and cannot tell which way it is moving, that is the point at which it is worth a conversation.



Coming this August

Stop Waiting for the Threat, with Chuck Tobin

Philip is joined by a good friend. Chuck Tobin, President of AT-RISK International, is one of the most influential figures in protective security worldwide: a past President of the Association of Threat Assessment Professionals, current President of the International Protective Security Board, and the man who chaired the ASIS council that published the industry's first standard in executive protection. He is also someone Philip counts as a friend and a mentor, so what follows is two colleagues comparing notes, not an interview with a stranger, on a profession they both want to make better.

Together they take apart some of the industry's most persistent myths. Why 'threat assessment' is framed wrong from the start, teaching people to wait for a threat when the behavioural warning signs appear far earlier. Why the gun is not the answer: almost no attacks on principals have been stopped by a protector drawing a

weapon, and with AI now compressing months of hostile surveillance into a targeting package built in minutes, surveillance detection has overtaken presence as the critical protective effort.

They also get practical, and uncomfortable. The executive with cameras and gates but no plan for the five minutes between calling the police and the police arriving.

The expensive safe room that fails in the first five minutes. The phone that holds your entire life, including the backup codes a thief now controls. And the question almost nobody asks: what harm are you actually exposed to, when reputational, psychological and financial damage are far more likely than physical attack?

A conversation about selling people what they need, rather than what the industry wants to sell them.

Chuck Tobin

Chuck Tobin has served as President of AT-RISK International since 2003, bringing over 35 years of experience protecting people, property and operations for clients worldwide. He leads complex threat investigations and executive protection risk assessments, and chaired Standards and Guidelines on the ASIS Executive Protection Council, publishing the industry's first standard in executive protection.

He is the current President of the International Protective Security Board, served as President of the Association of Threat Assessment Professionals from 2013 to 2017, and has been a volunteer leader for ATAP since 1999. He is a recipient of the Florida Department of Law Enforcement Commissioner's Medal for his work advancing threat assessment.

📩 Know someone who would benefit from this newsletter?

Please send it to them.

Most people receive their first warning sign long before they receive any advice on what to do about it.

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Philip Grindell MSc CSyP

Founder & CEO, Defuse Global

Author of **Personal Threat Management: The Practitioner's Guide to Keeping Clients Safer**

If anything in this newsletter has caused you to think, you may benefit from our help. Contact us at info@defuseglobal.com