Hello. My name is Fathali Moghaddam. I'm a psychologist. And one of the topics I study is radicalization and terrorism.

Terrorism is at its basis a psychological phenomenon in the sense that the terrorist is attempting to bring about feelings of terror in an individual or entire populations. Let me begin by dispelling some common misunderstandings about terrorism.

Terrorists are not psychologically abnormal. They are not insane. If you look at the psychological evidence, there is very little to distinguish between terrorists and the ordinary population in terms of personality characteristics.

A second misunderstanding is about moral engagement. One of the assumptions has been that terrorists are morally disengaged. Of course, this is not true. They may be morally disengaged from the morality of mainstream society, but they are very much engaged in a morality that endorses terrorism.

Now terrorism is a phenomenon that psychologists are very interested in because it not only is of practical importance in the everyday world, but it is also of research importance. It goes back to the longstanding interest in psychology about the contribution of dispositional or within individual factors versus the contributions of situational or social factors in determining behavior.

I'm going to argue that in explaining terrorism the context or the situation is far more important. I'm going to do this by introducing a staircase metaphor. The staircase metaphor helps us to understand how context creates terrorism. And that if we only focus on getting rid of individual terrorists, we will not end terrorism, but simply replace one terrorist with another.