The Psychology of Terrorists: Policy Implications of the Staircase

We need to have long-term policies and short-term policies. So far, most governments have developed only short-term policies. That is, they have only developed policies for individuals who have reach the final staircases. That they have already gone beyond the level four and are about to strike or have already attacked.

These short term policies are against individuals who are already identified as terrorists. What we need are more long term policies that would prevent individuals from moving up from the ground floor, that would prevent them from moving beyond, certainly, the level three where they may be engaged with the morality that endorses terrorism, but never go beyond that.

The other important point to notice here is that I've been speaking about terrorists as if they are all one group. Of course, psychologically there are many different types of terrorists. I have identified at least 10 specializations within terrorist organizations.

And these specializations are scattered on the staircase at different levels. Some specializations go all the way up to the highest last floor while other specializations stay much lower on the staircase to terrorism. And our policies need to develop to be suitable for each specialist on each floor of the staircase.

These 10 specializations are scattered on the staircase to terrorism. We typically hear about two of these specializations. First one, I call source of inspiration. Someone like Osama bin Laden who everyone knows and serves as a source of inspiration for different radicals around the world.

The second one we all hear about is what I call fodder. Fodder is expendable individuals, individuals who are sent out by organizations to act as suicide terrorists. These are two specialists. However, apart from these, there are other types of specialists.

For example, there are networkers. And networkers are individuals who know how to guide radicals so that those radicals will become active terrorists. And networkers sometimes stay at the level of three. They seldom go up to four. Never to five. They simply act as individuals who know where the resources are, where radicals should go in order to carry out terrorist action.

For example, at the moment there are networkers who are guiding individual radicalized individuals from Western countries to go and fight in Syria. And we know there are thousands of Westerners now fighting in Syria. And we are aware that when they come back to the West, this is going to be a challenge.
Another type of specialist who often does not go above level three on the staircase to terrorism is the fundraiser, the individual who raises money in different ways, often through charities, and simply guides the money in the right way so that the resources will reach other individuals who will become terrorists. So when we look at the staircase to terrorism, what we find is that there are these individuals scattered on the staircase, not necessarily going all the way to the top.

For example, there are also technical experts, individuals who have some expertise in computing or explosives. They do not necessarily carry out the actions themselves, but they supply information and technical expertise so that others can carry out acts of terrorism. And again, these technical experts may never go above level three on the staircase to terrorism.

And the policies we put in place in relation to the different types of specializations on the staircase to terrorism need to be suitable for each person on each level.