If you don't defeat the ideology, can you defeat terrorism?

This history of terrorism, according to the division made by David Rapoport can be divided into four main 'waves' throughout history. The first wave according to Rapoport consists of the anarchist phase whereby a wealth of written pamphlets and terrorism 'literature' was inherited from traditional revolutionaries. This first phase could be considered the founding of modern terrorism according to many. The high point of this first phase according to Rapoport was considered the 'Golden phase of assassination' in the 1890's whereby presidents, monarchs, and peoples of high status were shot and taken down one after another. Within the second wave of terrorism, a new language was utilized and the principle of national self-determination was applied to the defeated states of World War I. This phase had consisted of conflicts between non-state organizations involved in terrorism such as the extreme-right Zionist Lehi and Irgun groups, and their states.

The concept of 'freedom fighters' was brought into international literature as the scene was set for 'the fight against government terror'. A severe corruption of language makes this phase quite distinct. The third wave, on the other hand, had consisted of left-wing aspiring nationalist terrorist groups such as the PKK. The fourth wave of terrorism thus consists of not left-wing but religious terrorism coming about, such groups like Al-Qaida and ISIL. Within this sense, the last few years of the fourth-wave of terrorism has seen new paradigms coming about, and the utilization of hybrid warfare where by conventional warfare and tactics are integrated with asymmetric warfare such as the utilization of tanks by terrorist groups such as DAESH, and army vehicles used as Vehicle Borne IED's (VBIEDs). By looking at all the waves of terrorism, we can clearly see one consistent and common factor present among all of them, this being the presence of terrorist ideology.

Ideology is defined as 'a system of ideas and ideals, especially one that forms the basis of economic or political theory and policy' and 'the science of ideas; the study of their origin and nature'. It serves as a prism for which our thoughts, feelings and incoming information is filtered and understood. It also frames as to how we see the world, and the actions we take according to our internalized values and feelings which will be discussed a little later. So what actually does cause the average human to join a terrorist organization?.

Through research conducted by terrorism scholars previously, what can be seen is a non-correlation between economic factors and joining acts of terrorism. This does not, of course, rule out economic factors completely, but only forms part of the jigsaw puzzle leading to radicalization and violent extremism. To state briefly, in the initial phases of radicalization, psychological openings are formed whereby they are later filled with new violent extreme left-wing/religious ideologies. This then causes re-framing of one's perception whereby new meaning is given to the world and ones values around himself/herself. In this sense, the action is then taken according to these new values learned which then eventually leads to one joining a violent organization involved in terrorism activities. This cycle applies to all terrorist groups and its supporters.

Terrorists whether part of a group or acting as a lone-actor could be identified as 'devoted actors'. First coined by Scott Atran, devoted actors are deontic (duty-based) agents who mobilize for collective actions to protect their cherished values in ways that are dissociated from likely risks or rewards. They generally resist material compromises over their cherished values. When such values are fused with group identity, such as those found in terrorist organizations, devoted actors tend to protect morally important or sacred values through costly sacrifice and extreme conditions which can go to the extent of killing others or self-sacrifice through suicide bombing attempts or mobile IED's.

Rather than stating 'Who am I', the devoted actor shifts his/her perception to the 'imagined community' and evolves to 'Who we are'. Within this sense, religious or non-religious ideologies within terrorist groups tend to go through a three-fold evolution. Firstly, religious, transcendental beliefs or even those involving state-building among organizations involved in terrorism activities like the PKK tend to consolidate the ideology of being 'one' and a 'community' for a common cause, in this case, building a 'Kurdistan state'. In the second phase, this then causes binding to the terrorist organization of the devoted actor and finally becomes a form of 'unity motivation' who gives their lives for the group, the ideology and common cause which has been internalized.

Counter-terrorism efforts at the moment, especially within the Middle East could be said to be going well in

terms of eliminating extreme left wing- right wing terrorists, but the same cannot be said for rehabilitation/de-radicalisation programs to eliminate internalization of terrorist ideologies. The first criticism that can be brought to current radicalization programs is the fact that they are mostly if not all based upon ‘radical Islam’. These programs mostly do not cover other forms of terrorism ideology such as that of left-wing terrorism, and also extreme right-wing terrorism.

Narrowing programs down to just one ideology alone is not productive, and may, in fact, cause relative deprivation and leading to the social mobilization of communities. Secondly, severe human rights issues are also present among terrorist rehabilitation programs. In the year of 2016, the British Government rehabilitation initiative titled ‘PREVENT’ was put under severe scrutiny for human rights violations. According to media sources, there were instances of the PREVENT rehabilitation program where information and data were gathered regarding Muslim primary school children without their parents' consent.

A second violation recorded was the referral of innocent Muslims to the program as they were becoming ‘more religious’, but not extremist. A final violation of human rights was also seen as University conferences regarding Islamophobia were also canceled by the initiative. Human rights NGO, Rights Watch UK, has concluded the program ‘stifles free speech’. A United Nations (UN) special rapporteur has also warned of the program blocking healthy discussion and free speech.

By taking both theory and current practices into consideration, can the threat of terrorism be eliminated without countering its ideology? Secondly, does the marginalization rehabilitation programs to ‘radical Islam’ alone prevent the internalization and spreading of terrorism, or cause its influx? Finally, are rehabilitation programs itself being effective for de-radicalisation and disengagement?