

CHAPTER SIX

FROM RADICALIZATION TO DERADICALIZATION IN GAZA— RECOMMENDATIONS

The Gaza Strip constitutes an arena of deep and extensive radicalization that has developed over several decades, driven by underlying structural push factors, and has undergone a further significant intensification of radicalization processes under Hamas rule. Deradicalization in the Gaza Strip should not be conceived as an effort to “restore the status quo ante,” but rather as an objective of comprehensive institutional and cultural reengineering of the entire sphere of life in this area. This must be considered alongside the catastrophic condition of the Strip following the war: an unprecedented number of fatalities, near-total destruction of infrastructure, mass displacement, and pervasive collective trauma.

This constitutes an exceptionally difficult starting point for social reconstruction, perhaps even one that approaches the limits of feasibility. Yet, from another perspective, and in an effort to identify a potential ray of light within this reality, the scale of destruction may also be understood as a rare opportunity for fundamental change. The catastrophe vividly demonstrates to the public the costs of the “resistance” project and of Hamas’ monopoly of power, and may generate openness to a more moderate political and ideological alternative—provided that such an alternative is presented credibly, consistently, and with Arab and international support.

The Western model of deradicalization provides an important foundation of knowledge and insights regarding essential principles of action: the defeat of the adversary in order to enable the replacement of its institutional and ideological infrastructure; the initiation of broad economic and institutional reconstruction; the implementation of reforms across systems of governance and social life, including education, religion, and the media; and the promotion

of a legislative framework to combat extremism and to foster trust in the rule of law.

However, this model is limited in its applicability to Arab–Muslim societies, as suggested by its failures in Afghanistan and Iraq. Accordingly, in the Gazan context it is advisable to translate the core principles of deradicalization (security–reconstruction–reform–narrative) through local cultural and religious lenses and under credible Palestinian and Arab leadership. It is here that the Arab models of deradicalization become relevant.

From the comparative analysis of the various case studies in Arab states, three models emerge, two of which are relevant to the Gaza Strip. The first is a **restrictive containment model** that relies primarily on security measures (Egypt, Tunisia). The second is an **ambitious model of comprehensive social transformation** (the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia). The third, a monarchic–religious model (Morocco, Jordan), is grounded in the religious authority of the ruling dynasty, derived from its historical lineage to the Prophet Muhammad, and is therefore of more limited relevance to the Palestinian case.

In both of the relevant models, many of the lines of action are similar, albeit implemented with different emphases: the use of security measures of coercion, enforcement, and surveillance; the inculcation of a national narrative that elevates state identity and state law above all other identities and normative frameworks; the promotion of a form of “state orthodoxy” articulated as “moderate Islam” or “correct Islam” as an alternative to extremist Islam, which is framed as a deviation from religious truth; and the engineering of public consciousness across various spheres of social life, with the aim of undermining the extremist narrative and entrenching the regime’s preferred narrative.

However, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates conceive deradicalization as one component within a broader national vision aimed at transforming the state toward modernization and economic prosperity. In this context, the Gulf model treats deradicalization as a vehicle for reshaping

society through the inculcation of a new national ethos of religious tolerance as an integral element of disciplined citizenship. From a Western perspective, this model may appear paradoxical: an approach that seeks to produce religious tolerance through authoritarian, coercive, and non-tolerant means toward opposition.

The containment-oriented model enjoys the advantage of greater implementability, particularly under conditions of weakened governance, which ostensibly makes it appealing for application in the problematic circumstances of the Gaza Strip. However, its drawback lies in the superficial nature of the change it offers and in its limited capacity for impact. The expansive model is attractive due to its promise of a transformative reshaping of society, which is acutely needed in the Gazan context. Yet its limitation lies in the high threshold requirements for its implementation—vision, leadership, continuous and robust governance, and the capacity for long-term strategic planning and execution.

Against the backdrop of the dilemma between the two alternatives, it would be preferable to aspire to the implementation of the Gulf model under Emirati leadership. The preference for the United Arab Emirates stems from its generally proactive approach, and in the Gazan context in particular, as compared to Saudi Arabia—especially given the differing state of relations each maintains with Israel. If there is neither the capacity nor the willingness to meet the prerequisites of this model, an intermediate version may be pursued, based on the more limited model under Egyptian leadership, while gradually incorporating deeper components of the Gulf model. In any case, it is recommended that both the United Arab Emirates and Egypt be integrated as leading actors in the deradicalization process in the Gaza Strip.

In any case, the analysis yields several key insights regarding the conditions required to advance a deradicalization process, as well as recommendations concerning the modalities for its implementation:

1. Deradicalization as an integral component of Hamas’ defeat.

Deradicalization should not be understood as a subsequent phase following the military defeat of Hamas or the completion of its disarmament (particularly given the uncertain prospects of success of such processes). As long as the Israeli approach toward Hamas continues to treat the military dimension as the primary and preparatory stage for addressing the problem, it will forfeit the ability to achieve the broader objective. This is because the capacity for the sustained strategic weakening of Hamas—including detaching Palestinians from dependence on the organization and from identification with it—rests on the ability to present a moderate governing and ideological alternative. In the absence of such an alternative, the default option for Palestinians will continue to be the paradigm of armed resistance, with Hamas as its representative.

2. Sustained security suppression of Hamas under overriding Israeli security responsibility.

Efforts to demilitarize the Gaza Strip, disarm Hamas and other terrorist organizations, maintain Israel’s ongoing security control, and employ force to degrade capabilities, remove threats, and thwart terrorism must be continuous. The security–military suppression of Hamas and other extremist organizations in the Strip is a prerequisite for the success of deradicalization processes, while simultaneously serving as a security backstop in the event that deradicalization efforts and the civilian stabilization of Gaza fail.

3. Rapid civilian reconstruction.

The continued dismantling of Hamas’ military capabilities and the demilitarization of the Strip are necessary but insufficient conditions. In parallel, there must be an accelerated establishment of civilian infrastructure, governance institutions, and education and economic systems as pull factors toward a more moderate cognitive and social

framework. Without the reconstruction of infrastructure and employment, alongside psychosocial support and graduated incentives, any achievements will quickly dissipate. In a reality in which Hamas refuses to disarm and to permit demilitarization processes, consideration should be given to **implementing reconstruction only in areas de-militarized and cleared of Hamas control.**

4. Rapid civilian reconstruction and its integration into a transformative narrative.

There is a tension regarding the appropriate timing for initiating civilian reconstruction processes in the Gaza Strip, with Israel insisting on conditioning reconstruction on the completion of demilitarization. However, prolonged delays in civilian reconstruction will undermine the prospects for deradicalization, as reconstruction constitutes a key condition for creating a positive horizon for the population and for drawing it away from Hamas toward a more moderate and civilian alternative. The involvement of Gaza’s residents in reconstruction projects can also channel individuals’ need for meaning toward civic and communal directions of recovery from destruction. Conversely, initiating reconstruction in areas under Hamas control would credit Hamas with civilian development; therefore, **reconstruction should be launched only in areas cleared of Hamas control.**

5. A credible political horizon.

The establishment of a horizon of gradual progress toward a political settlement, Palestinian independence, and sovereignty—even if limited over time due to Israel’s security requirements—is critical to the success of the de-Hamasification of Palestinian society. In the absence of a credible political horizon, the narrative of armed resistance will continue to be perceived as legitimate, as no viable political alternative stands to replace

it. Moreover, the comparative analysis of deradicalization processes in Arab states demonstrates that regimes rely on a form of “state orthodoxy” of “moderate and correct Islam” as a counter-narrative to extremist Islam, and on positioning the state and its laws as the primary sources of identity and legitimacy, superseding religious authority and religious law. Accordingly, Arab models of deradicalization cannot be applied to the Palestinian case without a credible and sustainable national political-ideational alternative.

6. Engaging Arab states.

The analysis presented here indicates the limited relevance of the Western deradicalization model to the case of the Gaza Strip, and conversely the greater relevance of Arab models. In other words, the successful implementation of de-Hamasization in the Gaza Strip requires deep involvement—and in practice leadership—by Arab states. These states condition any involvement in Gaza’s material and social reconstruction on political concessions by Israel in the Palestinian arena. In any case, as noted, such concessions are essential to the internal logic of the deradicalization process, even if Arab states were not involved in it.

7. Acceptance of the principle of “authoritarian tolerance.”

The Arab approach to de-radicalization, particularly in its expansive Gulf variant, promotes an ethos of religious tolerance and political nonviolence, but does so from an authoritarian conception of disciplined and compliant citizenship, achieved in part through centralized and coercive means. Accordingly, implementing the Arab model of deradicalization requires a conscious acceptance of the authoritarian assumptions that underpin it.

In addition, the analysis yields several further, more specific and tactical recommendations for the implementation of deradicalization processes in the Gaza Strip:

- **Synchronization across levels of action (micro-meso-macro):** Programs at the individual level (trauma treatment, rehabilitation, mentoring, family-based agreements), at the community level (schools, community centers, families and clans, mosques), and institutional reforms (education, religion, judiciary, welfare, media) must operate in coordination. Gaps between these levels hinder the achievement of cumulative effectiveness and facilitate individuals' entry into, or return to, cycles of extremism.
- **Effective intervention to achieve quick results:** The population must be presented with tangible outcomes, such as a functioning and secure community that provides services, employment opportunities, and infrastructure rehabilitation. Such experiences of success serve as an entry point for building trust in the process and for deepening it over time toward stages of identity and normative change. Protracted delays create a vacuum that, as demonstrated by comparable processes elsewhere, is quickly filled by extremist actors.
- **Multi-dimensional indicators of success:** It is important to define KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) and assess progress toward them using multiple methods, such as surveys and ethnographic research, in order to track changes over time in the level of public support among Gaza's population for political violence, to monitor incitement on social media, and to identify broader attitudinal and behavioral trends.
- **Creating institutional resilience against “re-Hamasification”:** Purging governance structures and key spheres of public life of Hamas operatives; establishing supportive legal frameworks for the process; defining transparency criteria for appointments; monitoring and removing extremist and inciting content from online platforms; and introducing alternative voices into digital and public spheres of discourse.
- **Religious legitimacy:** Both in terms of content and messaging and in institutional terms. This includes purging councils, mosques, and religious

bodies of extremist elements; instituting training and oversight; establishing a binding corpus of sermons and religious rulings that reject inciting and extremist messages and promote civic-religious obligations in the spirit of moderation (such as communal peace and the preservation of life). The involvement of moderate religious figures from Arab states is essential to reinforce and support the emergence of moderate religious circles and leadership within the Gaza Strip.

- **Rehabilitation and reintegration:** Establishing regional centers for trauma treatment and vocational training; conditional amnesty arrangements based on criteria defined by Israel; the creation of family- and community-level agreements to disengage from extremist frameworks; the provision of graduated incentives; and the development of dedicated tracks for women and youth.
- **Education, media, and culture:** Reforming curricula (critical thinking, civic literacy, civic-religious ethics); oversight of personnel within the education system; and the production of cultural content (articles, series, drama, satire across traditional and new media) that frames nonviolent resistance and respect for the rule of law as integral components of a modern Palestinian identity.

In sum, the de-Hamasification of the Gaza Strip requires far more than dismantling terrorist networks. It demands the creation, over time, of a credible institutional framework capable of replacing Hamas' ideological hegemony and providing Palestinians with a legitimate alternative both in the political-governance sphere and in the ideational-normative sphere.

In contrast to Arab states that have pursued deradicalization processes within an existing sovereign framework, Gaza presents a distinctive challenge: a contested territory—partly under Israeli control and partly under Hamas control that is to be transferred to an alternative governing authority (National Committee for the Administration of Gaza – NCAG) under an international

trusteeship regime (“Board of Peace”). Within this setting, it is necessary to rebuild governance institutions and inoculate them against renewed takeover by extremist actors, rehabilitate civilian infrastructure, and advance a persuasive and credible moderate narrative as an alternative to Hamas’ extremist one.

The magnitude of the challenge underscores the need to anchor deradicalization processes in internal Palestinian agency, grounded in a rehabilitated Palestinian Authority and in local leadership and influential actors within the Gaza Strip, alongside deep involvement by Arab states to provide resources, professional expertise, and political backing. These processes should be implemented gradually, in areas cleared of Hamas control, and expanded over time as the process begins to take hold, in parallel with efforts toward security stabilization and civilian reconstruction of the Strip.