EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The radicalization of Palestinian society in the Gaza Strip has been driven by decades of collective trauma, which since the mid-twentieth century have created the conditions for the rise of extremist nationalist and religious ideologies. Hamas, under the leadership of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, began shaping public consciousness in the Strip toward its ideological doctrine already in its earlier incarnation as a social movement rooted in the Muslim Brotherhood (within the framework of al-Mujama‘ al-Islami). This process accelerated from the First Intifada onward and following the establishment of Hamas as an organized movement.

Since 2007, Hamas has leveraged its takeover of the Gaza Strip to embed its extremist, violent religious-nationalist ideology across the institutions of governance and everyday life—education, religious establishments, welfare provision, the public sector, the media, public ceremonies and rituals, and more. Over these years, Palestinian society in the Strip has undergone a **process of "Hamasification"**: a radicalization of their worldview vis-à-vis Israel and the entrenchment of the belief that resolving the conflict requires Israel's total destruction through violent means.

Today, for many Gazans, what began as the experience of displacement in the wake of the 1948 "Nakba"—which helped forge the Gaza Strip as a symbol of the Palestinian struggle—has reached its culmination in the **Strip's devastation**. The war that erupted following the October 7 massacre has produced unprecedented numbers of fatalities, wounded, and permanently injured, alongside mass displacement and extensive destruction of the territory and its infrastructure.

From such a starting point, it is difficult to envision a reconstruction process that would lead to a more moderate political and ideological reality in the Gaza Strip as part of broader efforts at stabilization and recovery. Yet **there is no alternative but to attempt to imagine—and pursue—such a future**. At

the end of the war, the simple reality is that Palestinians remain in the Strip, burdened by profound feelings of frustration and vengeance, while Hamas continues to be a dominant political actor within it.

Reconstructing the Gaza Strip is therefore a vital interest of the State of Israel, insofar as it seeks to achieve security and civilian stability in Gaza that would reduce the threat it poses to Israel and its citizens. Leaving the Strip in ruins would constitute a near-certain recipe for the emergence of the next generation of uncompromising extremism in the struggle against Israel. **Sustainable reconstruction requires rebuilding not only Gaza's physical infrastructure but also its human and social foundations**, with the aim of steering them away from the Hamas worldview toward a more moderate political-ideational framework for managing the Palestinian national struggle.

Moreover, in the emerging strategic reality in Gaza in the aftermath of the war, reconstruction no longer appears to be a matter of choice lying solely in Israel's hands. In the foreseeable future, decision-making regarding the Strip's future seems likely to shift—at least in part—away from Israel and become an international issue, with the United States, alongside Qatar, Turkey, and Egypt, playing significant roles. **In the plans being formulated for Gaza, deradicalization of the population features as a key objective**, alongside the disarmament of Hamas, the demilitarization of the Strip as a whole, and its civilian reconstruction.

The present study offers a conceptual framework and an integrative action plan for "de-Hamasification"—**that is, rolling back Hamas' ideological and institutional hegemony and replacing it with a non-violent civic–religious configuration**. The use of the term de-Hamasification is intended, in part, to clarify the distinction between uprooting a worldview that advocates an uncompromising struggle aimed at the destruction of the State of Israel and **preserving legitimacy for non-violent Palestinian political struggle** for their

rights. Any attempt to deny the very right to political struggle as such would be neither credible nor viable.

For the purposes of this discussion, radicalization is defined as a socio-psychological process that leads to the intensification of beliefs and behaviors that justify intergroup violence, while deradicalization is defined as a shift toward non-violent means for achieving political and ideological objectives. The scholarly literature highlights three interrelated levels of action: the **micro level** (changes in identity, attitudes, and emotions at the individual level), the **meso level** (family, community, and faith-based networks), and the **macro level** (institutions of governance, education, religion, and the economy). In addition, it is important to distinguish between **push factors** that drive individuals out of extremist ideological and organizational frameworks (for example, as a result of military defeat or ideological fractures) and **pull factors** that draw them toward more moderate orientations (such as the provision of political and economic hope and the cultivation of moderate civic and religious norms).

In Gaza, "push" dynamics out of the extremist framework may emerge in light of the devastation of the Strip and Hamas' moral and practical failure. By contrast, "pull" toward more moderate orientations will require a credible political horizon, extensive reconstruction, and an alternative religious and social framework—mediated by trusted actors from within the local community and supported by broad involvement from Arab states.

This study is grounded in a review of theories of radicalization and deradicalization, an examination of well-known Western-led deradicalization case studies (primarily from the United States), and seeks to innovate particularly by introducing case studies of deradicalization from Arab states. The theories and cases are analyzed comparatively, with an effort to apply their lessons to the Gazan context in light of its distinct characteristics.

LESSONS FROM THE WESTERN MODEL

The cases of deradicalization in Germany and Japan following World War II highlight a successful formula **combining the defeat of the adversary, deep institutional reforms** in the education, legal, and media systems, **and rapid economic reconstruction**. In contrast, in Iraq and Afghanistan, external intervention lacked a local religious anchor and struggled to generate sustainable change. These Muslim societies were characterized by the absence of a historical legacy of a modern state and suffered from fragile nationalism due to religious, ethnic, and tribal heterogeneity.

The Gaza Strip is indeed ethnically and religiously homogeneous—a condition generally conducive to deradicalization—but, like Iraq and Afghanistan, it lacks a national and democratic institutional legacy that can be restored. Its collective identity is deeply intertwined with the narrative of resistance, and suspicion toward external intervention is profound. Consequently, while the Western model provides **foundational principles**—security, institutional reform, and economic reconstruction—it does not offer a detailed or readily applicable blueprint unless it is translated and adapted through the religious culture and the institutional–political architecture of the Muslim-Arab context.

ARAB–MUSLIM MODELS

A number of regimes across the Middle East have advanced—and continue to advance—processes of deradicalization within their societies over recent decades. These cases represent **contemporary applications of deradicalization in contexts rooted in the Muslim–Arab world**. **Critical junctures**—such as major terrorist attacks or political upheavals—**served as catalysts for policy shifts**, and in all cases there is a pronounced effort to go beyond the control of physical territory to control the symbolic sphere (religion, identity, and nationhood). Within the broad spectrum of cases and policy instruments, two kinds of models stand out as particularly relevant to Gaza (a third model, applied primarily in Morocco, derives authority from the religious–monarchical

lineage of the ruling dynasty and is therefore of more limited relevance to the Gazan case):

1. **The Security–Repressive Model (Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia):**
   This model pursues relatively modest objectives, focusing primarily on containing the Islamist threat through the **suppression** of extremist organizational infrastructures by security and legal means (with limited or negligible emphasis on the rehabilitation of radical activists). It is accompanied by the **centralization of religious authority and tight control over religious, educational, and media institutions**, aimed at inculcating a **consciousness of "good citizenship" and obedience to the state and its laws as the supreme moral value**. In parallel, these regimes have sought to project a more explicitly Islamic character, with the support of religious institutions, branding a **"moderate Islam" as a counter-narrative** of "correct Islam" in opposition to the extremist Islamist narrative.
2. **The Civic–Transformative Model:**
   For over a decade, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia have advanced a model that incorporates all the components of the more limited security–repressive approach, yet goes significantly beyond it. The Gulf model represents an effort tantamount to **re-educating society as a whole toward religious and interreligious tolerance as a binding national ethos, embedded within a comprehensive national vision of modernization and economic prosperity**. It advances a paradox of **"authoritarian tolerance"**: the cultivation of a tolerance ethos through an intolerant stance toward opposition to that very ethos. While this ambitious model is attractive in its promise of societal transformation, the conditions for its success are far more demanding. **Where governance is strong, consistent, and endowed with vision and the capacity for implementation, extremist ideologies can be marginalized and a new civic–religious identity can be offered; in its absence, the model has little prospect of success.**

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

In assessing what can be learned from various deradicalization case studies in the Middle East and beyond for the advancement of processes in the Gaza Strip, it is essential to recognize the distinctiveness of the Gazan case. In all of the cases examined, deradicalization processes were undertaken within societies embedded in a state framework; in the Middle Eastern cases, these were societies and states operating in post-colonial contexts. By contrast, the Palestinian case—and Gaza in particular—involves a non-state entity, geographically fragmented and politically and administratively divided, whose society remains engaged in an active national struggle.

Taking this fundamental difference into account, the analysis of Arab case studies and their adaptation to the Gaza Strip yields several key insights and overarching recommendations regarding how de-Hamasification can and should be advanced:

1. **Sustained demilitarization and stringent security arrangements:** Under any scenario, **Israel must maintain extensive security responsibility**, and continue to disrupt and suppress Hamas and terrorist infrastructures in the Gaza Strip through military force (the intensity and modalities of action can vary according to the strategic and operational circumstances at any given time). The security dimension is essential both to the success of deradicalization processes and as a protective mechanism should such processes not be implemented or fail.

2. **A credible political horizon as a prerequisite:** A theology of peace ("moderate and correct Islam") is relevant only when paired with a genuine political horizon; otherwise, it will be perceived as unconvincing propaganda. There is no realistic prospect for deradicalization in the Gaza Strip without the articulation of an ideological and political alternative to Hamas at the **national level**. Such an alternative necessarily entails dialogue and a process leading toward **Palestinian independence**.

Palestinian independence and sovereignty would need to be constrained in the military–security domain and granted **in a gradual, conditional manner, contingent upon compliance with demilitarization and deradicalization** benchmarks. In the absence of such an alternative, the ethos of resistance will continue to be self-reinforcing.

3. **Mobilizing Arab states is essential for success:**
   Israel lacks both the expertise and the legitimacy to implement deradicalization processes within Palestinian society on its own. Advancing such efforts therefore requires an **Arab coalition**—primarily led by Egypt and the United Arab Emirates—that can provide resources, professional know-how, relevant cadres of religious figures, political legitimacy, and religious authority for such a sensitive and complex undertaking.

4. **A rehabilitated Palestinian Authority as a necessary anchor:**
   A technocratic interim administration is essential for stabilization, but the Palestinian Authority (PA) is the only framework capable of conferring legitimacy on such a process—both in the eyes of Palestinian society and vis-à-vis Arab states and the international community. At the same time, the PA in its current condition, and particularly under its present leadership, has not demonstrated the capacity to rise to the magnitude of the moment or to undertake the changes required of it. It should therefore be incorporated into the process, but only alongside firm demands for reform and under the support and oversight of Arab states and Israel.

5. **Consistent rule of law and its implementation:**
   The paradox of "authoritarian tolerance" requires strong institutional discipline, transparency, planning and implementation capacity, and policy continuity over many years; without these, any model will erode. This also implies a sustained Israeli commitment to such a project, as well as long-term support for cooperation with the Palestinian Authority

and Arab states in order to preserve the political–diplomatic framework within which deradicalization processes can take place.

6. **Rapid but phased 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 yet phased establishment of civilian infrastructure, governing institutions, and education and economic systems as "pull factors" toward a more moderate cognitive and ideological framework. Without the rebuilding of infrastructure and employment opportunities—alongside psychosocial support and graduated incentives—any achievements will quickly dissipate. In a situation in which Hamas refuses to disarm or allow demilitarization processes to proceed, consideration should be given to **implementing reconstruction only in areas cleared of Hamas control**.

De-Hamasification is not a measure reserved for the "day after" Hamas' defeat and disarmament, but rather an integral component of the mechanism through which it is defeated. Weakening Hamas can create the temporal and political space necessary for the emergence of a more moderate ideological and political competitor. In its absence, the reconstitution of Hamas—or the rise of another iteration of nationalist or religious extremism—will be only a matter of time. **Military demilitarization, a credible political horizon, economic reconstruction, and societal deradicalization** constitute four mutually reinforcing components. Together, they are essential for transforming the Gaza Strip from a breeding ground of hatred and terrorism into a militarily neutral territory with a stable civil society and a religious and national identity that does not rely on violence as a default or exclusive mode of action.

It must be acknowledged candidly that the prospects for successful deradicalization in the Gaza Strip—and for achieving any optimistic strategic outcome—do not appear high. Their realization would require leadership

endowed with vision, courage, and political as well as managerial capacity, among a range of stakeholders in Israel, within Palestinian society, across Arab states, and in the United States. Nonetheless, this alternative deserves to be presented for consideration by decision-makers and the broader public, in the hope that the requisite will and capabilities can be mobilized over time to explore and pursue new pathways for addressing the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.