De-Hamasification of the Gaza Strip:
Learning from Western and Arab Models of Deradicalization

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INSTITUTE FOR NATIONAL SECURITY STUDIES

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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.

INTRODUCTION[1]

The Gaza Strip has today emerged—more than ever—as one of the world's most complex arenas with respect to the political and religious radicalization of its population. This radicalization has been shaped over decades of conflict with Israel, collective trauma, and a reality of external occupation and internal rivalries—from the 1950s, through decades of Israeli control over Gaza, and culminating in further intensification since Hamas' takeover of the Strip in 2007. Together, these dynamics have produced an extremist religious-nationalist environment that permeates all spheres of life and profoundly shapes public consciousness in Gaza.

Israel's war in the Gaza Strip following Hamas' brutal attack on October 7, led to the near-total destruction of civilian infrastructure, mass casualties, and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of residents. This reality—together with the deep frustration and desire for vengeance felt by Gaza's population in the war's aftermath—sharpens the question of how a new civic and political order can be rebuilt that will detach Gazan society from Hamas' violent ideology and anchor it instead within a more moderate socio-political framework.

The purpose of this study is to examine how processes of deradicalization—or, in the Gazan context, de-Hamasification—might be realized in the Gaza Strip, drawing on lessons from international and regional examples and comparing them with the local realities on the ground. The study presents a conceptual and operational framework designed to enable a deeper understanding of the conditions, tools, and mechanisms capable of generating profound societal change in Gaza, beyond the narrow security dimension of dismantling terrorist infrastructures.

The paper opens with a review of the theoretical literature on various models of radicalization and deradicalization, including studies from the fields of social psychology, political science, and international relations, and proceeds with a brief historical overview of the factors and processes that have driven the radicalization of the Gaza Strip since the mid-twentieth century. It then presents a qualitative comparative analysis of case studies from the Western world (Germany, Japan, Iraq, Afghanistan, Bosnia) and from the Arab and Muslim world (Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Morocco, Jordan, Egypt, Tunisia). This analysis makes it possible to identify recurring patterns, the necessary conditions for successful processes, and key points of failure. On this basis, the concluding section offers insights and recommendations regarding the feasibility of advancing de-Hamasification in the Gaza Strip and the various pathways for doing so.

The contribution of this study is twofold. On the theoretical level, it seeks to bridge Western models of deradicalization—largely grounded in post–World War II state-reconstruction paradigms—with contemporary Arab models that reflect lived experience in confronting Islamist and jihadist movements. On the applied level, it offers policymakers and scholars a conceptual framework and a possible plan of action for addressing the "day after" challenge in Gaza—one that requires the integration of security mechanisms, a political horizon, civilian reconstruction, religious legitimacy, psychosocial and economic rehabilitation processes, and coordinated regional leadership.

RADICALIZATION—CONCEPTS, DRIVERS, AND MECHANISMS

WHAT IS RADICALIZATION?

Radicalization is a process of "gradual change in beliefs, feelings, and behaviors that justify intergroup violence and demand sacrifice in defense of the in-group" (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008). While "radicalism" can be understood more broadly as support for profound social change of any kind, radicalization in the sense of extremism is inherently defined as anti-democratic and anti-pluralist (Schmid, 2013).

Radicalization can occur at the level of the individual, the group, or even an entire society, when extremist narratives succeed in penetrating the societal mainstream. Under conditions of rising structural grievances, perceived threats to collective identity, and the persuasive power of extremist narratives, entire publics may be drawn into and normalize extreme norms and worldviews.

PATHWAYS TO RADICALIZATION: DRIVERS AND STAGES IN THE PROCESS

Many scholars describe the radicalization process through two complementary pathways. Mechanistic theories explain how specific drivers (such as collective feelings of frustration or practices of cultural hegemony) foster the emergence of radicalization within human societies; and process models, by contrast, which depict radicalization as a multi-stage trajectory moving from experiences of grievance to violent action, and seek to explain *when* and *how* these shifts occur over time.

MECHANISMS OF ESCALATION: ADVERSITY, IDENTITY CRISES, AND IDEOLOGICAL MOBILIZATION

Research identifies several structural, emotional, and cognitive drivers that create the foundations for radicalization:

- **Perceived victimhood and moral outrage:** A profound sense of injustice and a perceived gap between expected living conditions and lived reality can generate moral anger. These feelings may stem from economic collapse, systemic discrimination, or the obstruction of political participation. This anger, in turn, is often channelled against an out-group, thereby legitimizing aggression (Gurr, 1970).

- **Collective (or "chosen") trauma:** Shared memories of violence—such as wars, massacres, and forced displacement—can become "chosen traumas," etched into collective identity as enduring historical pain and reinforcing calls for revenge. Extremist propaganda frequently reactivates these memories in order to sustain mobilization (Volkan, 1997).

- **Identity fusion:** Psychological research shows that when personal identity becomes fused with group identity, individuals are willing to go to extraordinary lengths to defend the group, even at the cost of self-sacrifice. Rituals, charismatic leadership, and dense social networks accelerate this process of fusion (Swann et al., 2009).

- **Adapting to the framework and emotional resonance:** Extremist narratives link personal experiences with collective grievances and a perceived moral obligation to act. Moral shocks, victimhood framing, and the demonization of the adversary are commonly employed to achieve this effect (Snow & Benford, 1998).

- **Sacralization of values:** Objectives become sacred and insulated from criticism or negotiation; violence is reframed as a moral duty. Individuals acting in the name of such values are willing to engage in self-sacrifice and violent action based not on cost–benefit calculations, but on a logic of absolute morality (Atran & Axelrod, 2008).

- **Deficient moral–emotional regulation:** Cognitive distortions (such as dichotomous or catastrophizing thinking) combined with unregulated anger increase susceptibility to extremist messaging. Accordingly, emotional–

behavioral training and critical thinking programs can help build psychological resilience against radicalization (Trip et al., 2019).

- **Institutional vacuum:** Weak or corrupt state institutions create a governance void that extremist non-state actors can fill. The "club model" explains how armed movements convert the provision of social services into ideological loyalty. When a single movement achieves a monopoly over schools, clinics, or charitable organizations, its worldview becomes normalized. Control over social services also strengthens in-group solidarity, filters out free riders, and deepens loyalty among group members (Berman & Laitin, 2008).

These mechanisms typically operate in parallel, mutually reinforcing and amplifying one another. Agents of radical ideology exploit this underlying infrastructure, weaving the various drivers of radicalization into a coherent and simplified narrative and worldview that provides the public with a sense of meaning, moral clarity, and practical purpose.

The most comprehensive framework for understanding the operation of ideological agents of radicalization is Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony. Ideological movements—including extremist ones—seek to secure broad social consent for their ideas by penetrating the institutions of civil society, such as schools, welfare organizations, the media, and religious institutions (Gramsci, 1971). Neo-Gramscian scholarship demonstrates that social hegemony is reproduced through the formation of "historical blocs"—movements that succeed in aggregating and mobilizing additional social groups and operate within the social sphere to disseminate their ideas. When such a "historical bloc" gains control over the key platforms of civil society, its worldview gradually becomes the default—and eventually the "natural order" of things—paving the way for the subsequent consolidation of political hegemony as well (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001).

PROCESS MODELS

Various scholars propose analytical frameworks that identify successive stages in the radicalization process. What these models share is the notion of a gradual narrowing of moral and behavioral options as individuals or groups move toward increasing extremism.

Model	Key Stages	Source
Cognitive Opening	Crisis → Religious/Ideological Search → Adapting to the Framework → Socialization and Commitment	Wiktorowicz, 2005
Staircase to Terrorism	Ground Floor (Perceived Injustice) → First Floor (Search for Alternatives) → Second Floor (Channelling Aggression) → Third Floor (Moral Identification with Terrorism) → Fourth Floor ("Us" versus "Them") → Fifth Floor (Terrorist Action)	Moghadam, 2005
Pyramid	Base (Mainstream Supporters) → Middle (Activists) → Apex (Violent Actors)	McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008

Process models function primarily as diagnostic tools. They do not in themselves prescribe mechanisms of deradicalization; rather, they help identify critical turning points at which preventive intervention is possible (for example, before moral justifications for violence become entrenched and translate into terrorist action).

Because the mechanisms of radicalization cut across the different stages of the escalation process, deradicalization efforts must involve **multidimensional interventions** (psychological, institutional, and narrative). For instance, incorporating a plurality of ideas into the education system can counter hegemonic domination, while cognitive–behavioral training can address identity fusion and moral anger.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A MULTI-LEVEL ANALYSIS OF RADICALIZATION

Processes of radicalization must be examined across different levels (Schmid, 2013), ranging from the individual level to the broader extremist environment—including social communities, online networks, and even state actors—within which extremism can flourish. Reciprocal radicalization between rival groups (for example, in the Palestinian context, between Hamas and Fatah, or between Palestinians and Israelis) can further escalate conflicts and render strategies of prevention, deradicalization, or disengagement more complex and difficult to implement.

CONCLUSION

Societal radicalization emerges from a complex web of grievances and frustrations, identity dynamics, and the hegemonic control exercised by extremist actors over everyday institutions. Reversing this trajectory requires systemic change: reducing structural injustices, offering alternative identities, building cognitive and emotional resilience, and opening the civic space to diverse viewpoints. Only under such conditions can counter-narratives gain the legitimacy and reach necessary to compete effectively with entrenched extremist worldviews.

RADICALIZATION AND "HAMASIFICATION" IN THE GAZA STRIP

Radicalization in Gaza predates Hamas' takeover in 2007, with roots reaching back to the mid-twentieth century and decades marked by national trauma, accumulating grievances, political exclusion, economic decline, and recurring cycles of violent confrontation. The harsh realities of life in the Gaza Strip, of course, are also embedded within the broader framework of the Palestinian national struggle and the Muslim Brotherhood's vision of reshaping the region under religious rule.

Following its seizure of power in the Gaza Strip in 2007, Hamas transformed the territory into both a local–national battlefield and a strategic outpost serving a transnational agenda. The confrontation with Israel, the reality of economic blockade, and internal Palestinian fragmentation enabled Hamas to present itself simultaneously as a resistance movement and as a governing authority. Under these conditions, Hamas reshaped and subsumed Gaza's local identity within the movement's extremist ideological framework, embedding it across the various systems of governance and everyday life (Guterman, 2020).

THE ROOTS OF RADICALIZATION IN THE GAZA STRIP

The Gaza Strip took shape as a symbol of the Palestinian national struggle as early as 1948, with the influx of large numbers of Palestinian refugees during the war. In the Palestinian collective consciousness, the refugee camps in the Gaza Strip—located adjacent to the State of Israel—serve as living testimony to the injustice inflicted upon them in the context of the "Nakba," and as a symbol of the uncompromising determination to return to lands perceived as having been taken from them.

The radicalization of Gazan society cannot be understood without reference to prolonged exposure to trauma, displacement, and structural isolation. The majority of Gaza's residents (approximately three quarters) are refugees or descendants of refugees who have grown up under conditions of overcrowding, economic dependency, and limited mobility; as a result, a refugee consciousness is deeply embedded in the local experience. Recurrent military confrontations have inflicted severe human and material losses, and most residents of the Strip have experienced the death or injury of one or more family members, embedding the experience of violence in nearly every household.

Even prior to Hamas' takeover of the Strip in 2007, the population experienced decades of marginalization, political violence, and economic dependence on external sources. Under the Israeli military government and civil administration that preceded the Oslo process, Palestinians in Gaza were not regarded as full political subjects, and local economic development was subject to heavy constraints. Although many found employment in Israel, industrial and agricultural growth within Gaza itself remained limited due to restrictions on land use, trade, and infrastructure.

More importantly, the experience of life under Israeli rule intensified antagonism toward Israel, while the strong religious component of Gazan identity created fertile ground for the penetration of radical Islamist ideas. On this basis, and through exposure to Muslim Brotherhood ideology via ties to Egypt, Ahmed Yassin founded al-Mujamaʿ al-Islami in the 1970s. Operating under the watch of—and at times with the encouragement of—the Israeli authorities, the organization established a network of religious and social institutions throughout the Strip. Through these *daʿwa* institutions, al-Mujamaʿ al-Islami propagated the Islamist worldview of the Muslim Brotherhood and laid the human and ideological foundations for the establishment of Hamas with the outbreak of the First Intifada.

The Oslo Accords granted Gaza's residents only limited sovereignty and autonomy under the Palestinian Authority. Key levers of control—borders, airspace, movement, and the population registry—remained in Israel's hands. While the agreements initially generated hopes for self-determination, they ultimately institutionalized a hybrid system of governance that disappointed many Palestinians. Over time, corruption, inefficiency, and the Authority's dependence on foreign donors eroded its legitimacy, playing into Hamas' hands.

Hamas capitalized on this sense of disillusionment and continued to build a parallel network of mosques, schools, charitable organizations, and clinics. These *daʿwa* networks provided both tangible assistance and ideological guidance, presenting Hamas as a grassroots alternative to an elite-dominated Authority. In marginalized neighborhoods and refugee camps, Hamas offered a sense of purpose, responsibility, and identity—elements that the Palestinian Authority increasingly failed to provide (International Crisis Group, 2003; Levitt, 2006).

Israel's disengagement from the Gaza Strip in 2005, intended to unilaterally end the occupation, was widely perceived as a liberation achieved through *muqāwama*—the armed resistance of Palestinian factions, led by Hamas. The prevailing belief was that terrorism, rather than diplomacy, had compelled Israel to withdraw. This narrative shaped the political climate ahead of the 2006 elections and directly contributed to Hamas' victory.

However, the sense of victory was short-lived. Following Hamas' electoral victory in 2006, its violent military coup in the Gaza Strip in 2007, and the subsequent rocket fire toward Israel, Israel and Egypt imposed a comprehensive land, sea, and air blockade aimed at containing Hamas. The initial feeling of liberation was quickly replaced by a reality of siege and isolation. The blockade had devastating economic and humanitarian consequences for the broader population. Gaza's already modest productive base collapsed: by 2010, more than 90 percent of factories had closed, exports had fallen by over 95 percent, and unemployment had soared. The blockade also severely disrupted access

to essential goods and services, including medical equipment, fuel, and construction materials (European Council on Foreign Relations, n.d).

As 80 percent of Gaza's residents came to rely on humanitarian assistance and 60 percent faced food insecurity (Tannira, 2021), Hamas' provision of services through its charitable arms became a lifeline for many. Its ability to deliver education, healthcare, financial assistance and security amid systemic crisis, strengthened its local credibility and further entrenched its ideological authority at the core of everyday survival (International Crisis Group, 2008).

This reversal—from a sense of victory to subjugation under siege—deepened a pervasive feeling of ongoing military, political, and economic loss, and shaped a worldview in which violence came to be seen as legitimate, moral, and even sacred. For many, "resistance" is not merely a political act but an existential one, rooted in inherited suffering and the belief that powerlessness justifies extraordinary responses. As trauma becomes intergenerational, the struggle itself is increasingly internalized by the broader public as a defining element of collective identity.

HAMASIFICATION: THE RADICALIZATION OF THE GAZA STRIP UNDER HAMAS RULE

Hamas' electoral victory in 2006 and its violent takeover of Gaza in 2007 dismantled the Palestinian Authority's already fragile institutional framework. After a week of armed and violent clashes, Hamas expelled Fatah-affiliated officials—some of whom were killed—disbanded the Authority's security forces, and unilaterally seized control of the Strip. In the institutional vacuum that emerged, Hamas rapidly constructed a new system of governance that blurred the boundaries between state-like administration and ideological enforcement. This new model combined bureaucratic control with loyalty-based appointments, enabling Hamas to entrench its authority and worldview across all sectors of public life:

- **Civil administration and security:** Hamas established a new administrative structure, created government ministries and public agencies, and staffed

them with loyalists. The Ministry of Interior became a central instrument of control, responsible for monitoring protests, surveilling the population, and maintaining internal stability. Internal security forces were empowered to track critics, deter opposition, and suppress demonstrations, thereby serving the movement's political hegemony (International Crisis Group, 2008).

- **Judicial and legal system:** A parallel judicial system was developed, incorporating Sharia courts alongside civil institutions. Appointments were made on the basis of ideological affiliation rather than independence or professional merit, ensuring that judicial rulings reinforced the movement's agenda and insulated its leadership from judicial oversight and accountability (International Crisis Group, 2003).

- **Revenue generation and a parallel economy:** Under conditions of blockade and restrictions on external aid, Hamas established an autonomous financial ecosystem based on taxation of smuggled goods, levies on fuel, businesses, and humanitarian assistance, and centralized control over charitable funds (*zakat*). This parallel economy financed Hamas' governing apparatus and deepened public dependence on services operated by the movement (International Crisis Group, 2008).

- **Institutionalized indoctrination in the education system and religious institutions:** Hamas formally took control of the ministries of education and religious affairs and reshaped curricula to emphasize themes of resistance, steadfastness, jihad, martyrdom, and other extremist Islamist values, while removing references to peace agreements or coexistence (Impact-SE, 2009). Resistance as articulated by Hamas was framed as both a national and religious duty, with the aim of shaping future generations around ideological commitment to a narrative of perpetual confrontation. Control over the Ministry of Religious Affairs enabled the vetting of clerics, the standardization of Friday sermons, and the steering of community events to ensure alignment between religious messaging and political objectives.

- **Welfare, *daʿwa*, and social networks:** Hamas' *daʿwa* infrastructure was expanded into a quasi-state welfare system. Food distribution, healthcare services, scholarships, and emergency assistance were delivered through Hamas-affiliated charitable networks that also functioned as instruments of political influence. Beneficiaries of these services were at times subject to ideological screening, reinforcing patterns of clientelism and deepening dependence on Hamas (International Crisis Group, 2008).

- **Media, public ceremonies, and children's programming:** Al-Aqsa TV functioned as a key instrument of early-age indoctrination. Various programs (such as *Farfur* and *Tomorrow's Pioneers*) promoted models of resistance, religious loyalty, and the glorification of martyrdom as an honorable sacrifice rewarded by divine favor (Margolin & Levitt, 2023). In parallel, funerals, mass rallies, and annual commemorative events fused religious symbolism with political messaging, elevated *shahids* as role models, and projected a sense of collective unity (Reuters, 2017).

- **Community mobilization and takeover of civil society:** Youth camps, women's organizations, and charitable associations expanded the movement's penetration into private and communal life. These institutions provided services while simultaneously reinforcing ideological messages, crowding out independent civil society organizations and deepening dependence on Hamas-controlled structures (International Crisis Group, 2007).

- **Leadership messaging:** Over the years, senior Hamas leaders have consistently framed the ongoing hardships—including those experienced under their own rule—as an integral component of a sacred national struggle. They have employed religious language to promote messages of resilience, to legitimize sustained violence, and to preserve political loyalty to Hamas as the standard-bearer of Palestinian interests and divine purpose (European Council, n.d).

- **Enforcement and surveillance:** Internal security services monitored public behavior and expressions of opinion in online discourse, while informal social networks within everyday social circles (extended families, neighborhoods, and the like) enforced conformity. Surveillance, intimidation, and targeted harassment created an environment in which deviation from the movement's norms exposed individuals to the risk of social ostracism and even physical harm (Human Rights Watch, 2008).

The capture of Gazan public consciousness unfolded in parallel with the construction of Hamas' military capabilities. The subordination of collective resources to the vision of armed resistance, together with the glorification of military power, further contributed to shaping the collective ethos in line with Hamas' extremist and uncompromising worldview.

Thus, through coordinated control over administrative, judicial, religious, and social institutions, Hamas built its regime in the Gaza Strip around an organizing principle of **ideological loyalty**. The outcome was not merely authoritarian control, but the deep embedding of extremist ideology into the functioning of governance systems and everyday life. The combined mechanisms—spanning education and religion, welfare and media, and extending to security and the legal system—produced a deeply **entrenched system of identity formation**.

It is important to emphasize that Hamas' grip has rested not only on institutional control but also on the mobilization of a deeply entrenched ethos of struggle against Israel that predated the movement and served as a readily available normative foundation. Decades of war, blockade, and political exclusion reinforced existing beliefs and values: the justification of maximalist Palestinian claims alongside the delegitimization of Israel; profound feelings of victimhood and insecurity coupled with a self-image of moral righteousness and courage; and patriotism and unity under a shared threat. These perceptions and values were "injected" into Gaza's population through the systems under Hamas' control. As a result, personal and collective

identities in the Strip became fused around a worldview that frames the conflict with Israel as an existential imperative, renders compromise with it illegitimate, and casts the uncompromising struggle for its destruction as both the sole path to realizing Palestinian rights and a divine commandment.

CONCLUSION: STRUCTURAL CRISIS AS A DRIVER OF RADICALIZATION

Radicalization in Gaza is the long-term product of the realities of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, experiences of displacement and occupation, and decades of political exclusion, economic decline, and institutional erosion. Together, these factors have created fertile conditions for the emergence and consolidation of extremist nationalist and religious ideologies.

Hamas exploited these conditions effectively. Through targeted social engineering, implemented via the systems under its control, it embedded its ideology and shaped public consciousness around a narrative of resistance and confrontation. Over time, radicalization was normalized and woven into Gaza's social fabric. The result is a deeply entrenched ideological ecosystem. After nearly two decades of Hamas rule, radicalization is no longer confined to political elites or militant networks; it is present in schools, religious life, the media, and the everyday social structures of Gazan society.

To the extent that one can rely on survey data and the assessments of various actors familiar with the Gazan arena, the Islamist agenda that has driven this system is not shared by all residents of the Strip. Yet it retains considerable persuasive power, rooted in the centrality of Islam within the Palestinian historical narrative and framing "resistance" as a sacred obligation. Accordingly, this ideological foundation cannot be erased overnight; it must be challenged and reshaped consistently, its influence contained, and alternative visions advanced—visions that resonate with prevailing cultural narratives and with the national ethos of the Palestinians and of the broader Arab and Muslim community to which they belong.

DE-HAMASIFICATION AS AN OVERARCHING FRAMEWORK FOR DERADICALIZATION IN THE GAZA STRIP

DERADICALIZATION AND DE-HAMASIFICATION: CONCEPTUAL DISTINCTIONS

The literature offers varying definitions of deradicalization. Schmid (2013) defines it as "an ideological distancing from violent extremism, involving a cognitive and emotional disengagement from beliefs that justify violence." Demant et al. (2008) describe it as "the cessation of violent behavior accompanied by a renewed commitment to democratic values and social integration." Rabasa et al. (2010) view it as "a process of abandoning extremist worldviews and accepting gradual change within a pluralistic framework."

It is evident that some of these definitions position a democratic and pluralistic value system as the alternative to extremist beliefs and norms. Given that the Gaza Strip lacks a democratic and pluralistic political legacy, it is more appropriate to articulate a more neutral objective regarding the alternative value framework. Moreover, under Gaza's unique circumstances—as part of a Palestinian polity still deeply embedded in an intense national conflict with religious and ethnic dimensions—it is not feasible to ignore the need to preserve space for political action and political struggle, even within a deradicalization context.

Accordingly, for the purposes of the present study we adopt the following definition: **Deradicalization is a process through which individuals and societies abandon extremist beliefs and ideologies that justify violence, involving a cognitive and emotional disengagement from extremist worldviews and the adoption of non-violent approaches to pursuing political and ideological objectives.**

It is important to distinguish deradicalization from related concepts:

- Anti-radicalization: A preventive, society-wide process aimed at "immunizing" populations against extremist worldviews before such ideas gain traction.

- Counter-radicalization: Targeted interventions directed at individuals or groups that already display tendencies toward extremism, prior to their transition to violence.

- Disengagement: Behavioral withdrawal from violence without a corresponding change in belief systems.

- Rehabilitation: Psychosocial and vocational assistance that enables a return to civilian life, even in the absence of ideological change.

- DDR (Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration): A conflict-resolution strategy focused on dismantling armed forces and reintegrating combatants. In its conventional formulations, DDR seeks to return extremist fighters to a "normal" society. In the Gazan case, however, society as a whole has undergone processes of radicalization and therefore requires broader ideological rehabilitation. Nevertheless, the disarmament of Hamas and other armed groups in the Gaza Strip should be understood as a fundamental security prerequisite for societal deradicalization, and as a vital component of the overall deradicalization process in Gaza.

In this study, we deliberately refrain from using the generic term "deradicalization" and instead adopt the term "de-Hamasification" in order to underscore the unique nature of the challenge in Gaza. The task at hand is the dismantling of a deeply entrenched extremist Islamist order and the erosion of its social legitimacy—without negating the Palestinians' legitimate national aspirations or their right to pursue those aspirations through non-violent struggle. Rejecting the very right to non-violent national political action would render the de-radicalization effort itself illegitimate and lacking credibility.

THREE LEVELS OF ACTION: MICRO, MESO, AND MACRO

The literature distinguishes between two—and in some cases three—levels of action in de-radicalization processes (Doosje et al., 2016):

- **Micro level:** Psychological and personal processes at the individual level—such as crises, cognitive dissonance, and identity shifts (for example, marriage, parenthood, or trauma)—that can create "cognitive openings" for exiting pathways of extremism.

- **Meso level:** Community-level processes (family, peers, religious figures, social networks, and peer groups). Many of the dynamics of extremist socialization and de-socialization occur at this level.

- **Macro level:** Structural and governance-level processes (institutions of governance, education systems, legal frameworks, the economy, and the broader public sphere). This level defines the background conditions and context, the sources of broad legitimacy, and the range of available ideological alternatives.

The success of deradicalization programs depends on the ability to integrate all three levels, such that individuals can undergo identity change, communities can support the process, and institutions can provide a credible alternative environment.

PUSH AND PULL DYNAMICS

The literature distinguishes between **push factors** and **pull factors** in processes of deradicalization:

- **Push factors** are negative experiences that undermine commitment to extremism, such as corruption, repression, ideological contradictions, and internal fragmentation. They generate disappointment and frustration with extremist organizations. In the Gazan context, Hamas' military defeat—and the destruction and devastation it has brought upon the Strip and its

population—may serve as a significant push factor, shattering the movement's image of efficacy and its promise of success in the eyes of the public.

- **Pull factors** are alternatives that offer hope and a sense of belonging to positive ideologies and sources of identification, such as reformed education, moderate religious interpretation, political inclusion, and a shared civic identity. In the Gazan context, the establishment of a credible political and economic horizon—through a political process and civilian reconstruction—constitutes a central pull factor.

It is essential to integrate both push and pull factors, as reliance on push efforts alone—forcing individuals out of an extremist framework without a credible alternative—may lead to despair or apathy. Conversely, offering pull factors toward more moderate political and ideological alternatives will be perceived as unconvincing as long as the extremist framework retains its power. **Only when disillusionment with the existing extremist order is combined with the provision of concrete hope does a genuine exit route become possible.**

	Micro (Individual)	Meso (Community)	Macro (Governance)	Examples
Anti-Radicalization (Prevention)	Critical thinking education; rational–emotive skills training (Trip et al., 2019)	Youth mentoring; strengthening pluralistic civil society	Institutional pluralism; equitable service provision; inclusive labor markets; transparent governance	Indonesia after 2005: Pluralistic Islamic education combined with economic growth → decline in support for Jamaah Islamiyah (Fealy & White, 2008)
Counter-Radicalization (Targeted Intervention)	Exit programs and counselling; focused psychosocial support	Dialogue with credible intermediaries; countering online extremist content; family support mechanisms	Community policing reforms; credible grievance-redress mechanisms; anti-corruption measures	Germany – Kronos Program: Mentorship by former extremists for at-risk youth → reduced propensity for violence (Bjørgo & van Donselaar, 2009; Koehler, 2017)
Deradicalization (Rehabilitation and Identity Transformation)	Identity- and belief-oriented therapy; value reframing; trauma processing	Religious re-legitimation by moderate clerics (Wiktorowicz, 2005; Atran & Axelrod, 2008)	Legal and governance reforms; curriculum reform; employment rehabilitation	Egypt, 2007: Sayyid Imam al-Sharif's renunciation of jihadism and provision of a religious framework for abandoning violence (Brachman, 2007)

CORE MECHANISMS

The central building blocks of deradicalization processes are security, institutional reform, and a counter-narrative. More specifically:

- **Security and military stabilization**: In the Gazan context, this entails the military defeat of Hamas, a process of demilitarization of the Strip, the disarmament of armed groups, and the establishment of robust monitoring and enforcement mechanisms.

- **Educational reform**: Replacing politicized or factional curricula with pluralistic education, including the teaching of critical thinking and media literacy. However, in the absence of trust in governing authorities, such reforms are likely to be perceived as propaganda rather than genuine transformation (Balla, 2022).

- **Religious re-legitimation**: Promoting moderate religious interpretations through credible religious authorities. In Egypt, this approach also included the public renunciation of terrorism by former jihadist leaders, lending religious legitimacy to the abandonment of violence.

- **Judicial and governance reform**: De-Hamasification will require dismantling Hamas' parallel institutions and rebuilding an independent, transparent judicial system. In Bosnia, efforts to establish such a system encountered significant difficulties due to inconsistency and weak enforcement (Simović & Adžajlić-Dedović, 2023).

- **An alternative horizon—narrative and counter-narrative**: Deradicalization programs cannot rely solely on negating extremist narratives. They must offer a meaningful positive alternative ethos, grounded in local moral values and perspectives, that presents a credible moderate alternative to extremist ideology. In the Gazan and Palestinian context, it is difficult to envision an attractive ethos that is not linked in some form to the demand for national political independence.

- **Socioeconomic incentives and civic–employment integration**: Disarmament and demilitarization are necessary security conditions but are insufficient on their own. Connecting former activists to the labor market, integrating them into community roles, and placing them on pathways toward normative civilian life can reduce the risk of recidivism and a return to cycles of violence.

CONCLUSION

Out of the deradicalization theory and the historical case studies on which it draws, several key insights emerge:

- **Priorities:** Prevention is less costly than intervention, and intervention is less costly than rehabilitation.

- **Respect for local values:** Messaging must resonate with local culture and identity rather than rely on abstract values perceived as foreign.

- **Local leadership partnership:** International experience shows that without cooperation from within the specific society and credible local leaders and influencers, such processes are unlikely to succeed.

- **Institutional pluralism:** A diversity of schools, religious institutions, and welfare providers matters, provided there is effective oversight to ensure they convey appropriate narratives and are not penetrated by extremist messaging.

- **Measurement:** Programs should track attitudinal change, institutional diversification, and reduced rates of recidivism into extremist activity. Multi-source monitoring enables a clearer picture and course correction during implementation.

- **Coalitions:** Success requires coordination across civil society, mental health, technology, and security actors. Fragmented action creates gaps that extremist actors can exploit.

WESTERN MODELS OF DERADICALIZATION

This chapter reviews five case studies that recur as the principal historical examples of deradicalization processes in the modern era: Germany, Japan, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Bosnia. These cases—and the lessons derived from them—have underpinned many of the proposals advanced for the "day after" in the Gaza Strip, formulated in the period immediately following October 7. In all of these cases, deradicalization processes were constructed around externally driven ideological change led by outside actors (the occupying powers) and included extensive institutional reform and security stabilization. Collectively, these cases exemplify a Western model of deradicalization, in the sense that the states that designed and implemented them were Western (most notably the United States).

GERMANY: COLLAPSE AND REPROGRAMMING OF POLITICAL CULTURE[2]

Period: Post–World War II (1945–1950s)

Context: Germany's unconditional surrender created an opportunity for a comprehensive "reprogramming" of both society and the state. The Nazi regime was dismantled, and the Allied occupation enabled external control over the reconstruction of Germany's political and ideological systems.

Key Processes:

- **Education:** Teachers identified with the Nazi regime were removed, and tens of thousands were rapidly trained in pedagogy aligned with democratic norms. As early as 1945, thousands of new teachers were trained to fill the gaps left by the denazification process. Curricula emphasized civic

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2   Germany's test-case is based on: Orbach et al. (2024), Armelin (2024), GHDI (1945), Kater (1987), Koehler (2017), Taylor (2011).

responsibility, historical reckoning, and critical thinking, including Holocaust education and the rejection of racial ideology.

- **Media:** A supervised media system was established to replace Nazi propaganda. Press and radio licenses were granted to individuals not identified with the Nazi regime, and content was oriented toward fostering democratic discourse, freedom of expression, and tolerance—helping pave the way for postwar demilitarization.

- **Judicial and administrative system:** Senior Nazi officials were prosecuted at Nuremberg, while at lower levels portions of the civil service were selectively retained to preserve administrative functionality. Courts and government ministries were restaffed under Allied supervision, and the legal framework was reshaped to align with new democratic norms.

- **Economic reconstruction:** The Marshall Plan made it possible to stabilize basic public services and rebuild institutions, thereby mitigating the social conditions that had previously fuelled extremism. Economic recovery, in turn, strengthened the legitimacy of the reconstituted state.

JAPAN: INSTITUTIONAL CONTINUITY ALONGSIDE IDEOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION[3]

Period: 1945–1952

Context: As in the German case, Japan's surrender was unconditional. Unlike Germany, however, the core governing structure—the imperial institution—was preserved. This symbolic continuity was leveraged by the occupying authorities, under the leadership of General Douglas MacArthur, as a catalyst for far-reaching ideological and institutional reform.

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3   Japan's test-case is based on: Orbach et al. (2024), Sumimoto (2000), Truman (1945), Thomas (2014), Breen & Teeuwen (2010).

Key processes:

- **Constitutional reform:** A new constitution (1947) enshrined principles of pacifism (Article 9), civil liberties, and parliamentary governance, and redefined the emperor's powers so as to render the position purely symbolic. At the same time, the preservation of the imperial institution helped Japanese society accept these changes.

- **Religious reform:** The new constitution declared freedom of religion and abolished State Shinto as the official religion, thereby helping to dismantle the fusion between religion and the state.

- **Demilitarization and civic education:** Militarist content was removed from school curricula, former military personnel were barred from teaching positions, and civics education programs were rewritten in line with democratic norms.

- **Judicial and governance systems:** Japanese institutions—ministries, courts, and the civil service—were structurally preserved and operated under the authority of the occupation administration. This approach maintained state functionality, which was gradually "realigned" with the new constitutional order.

IRAQ: EXCLUSION AND BACKLASH[4]

Period: Post-2003

Context: Following the US-led invasion, the coalition dismantled the Ba'athist regime without establishing a transitional framework capable of preserving institutional continuity or conferring legitimacy on the changes. The de-Ba'athification process removed tens of thousands of civil servants and military personnel, creating a profound governance vacuum.

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4   Iraq's test-case is based on: Orbach et al. (2024), Armelin (2024), DAI (n.d), Glazzard (2023).

Key processes:

- **Public administration and security:** The Iraqi army was dissolved, and state institutions were purged of Ba'ath Party members without professional vetting or rehabilitation. This created a severe security vacuum, intensified sectarian polarization, and facilitated the rise of militias.

- **Governance reform:** Late and poorly coordinated decentralization efforts left local authorities weak and produced a central government perceived as sectarian and ineffective. Corruption and ambiguous authorities undermined basic service provision and eroded public trust.

- **Religious and sectarian institutions:** Intensifying polarization and the absence of a moderate religious authority created fertile ground for the penetration of extremist narratives, including transnational global jihadist ideologies.

- **Education and civil society:** Efforts at civic education were fragmented and limited; there was no nationwide curricular reform comparable to those implemented in Germany and Japan. Civil society organizations operated unevenly and lacked the capacity to bridge the crisis of legitimacy.

AFGHANISTAN: FRAGMENTATION WITHOUT TRANSFORMATION[5]

Period: Post-2001

Context: Following the overthrow of the Taliban, a broad state-building effort was launched and components of DDR were implemented, but no comprehensive deradicalization strategy was introduced. These processes also failed due to Afghanistan's complex and internally divided tribal structure and the lack of legitimacy of the US-backed government.

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5   Afghanistan's test-case is based on: Orbach et al. (2024), Auld (2015), Sahar & Kaunert (2022).

Key processes:

- **DDR:** Financial incentives were offered to encourage fighters to disengage from militant frameworks, but without tools for ideological change or long-term pathways for integration into normative civilian life.
- **Education:** Most madrasas operated outside effective oversight; state schools suffered from shortages of teachers and pedagogical guidance; and religious content continued to reflect problematic ideological orientations.
- **Religious institutions**: The state exercised limited control over mosque networks and the appointment of imams, while conservative Islamist organizations expanded their influence on campuses and within society.
- **Governance and justice**: Corruption and state weakness enhanced the legitimacy of Taliban non-state courts, which were perceived as more accessible and fair than formal state institutions.
- **Civil society and media:** NGOs and media outlets promoting new norms operated primarily in urban centers. In rural areas, non-state actors filled the vacuum, provided services, and shaped local identities largely beyond the reach of the state.

BOSNIA: PRESERVATION OF EXISTING NARRATIVES AND ETHNIC SEGREGATION[6]

Period: Since the Dayton Accords (1995 onward)

Context: The Accords brought an end to the war but institutionalized deep ethnic division through territorial and group-based power-sharing mechanisms.

Key processes:

- **Institutional design:** Under the supervision of the Office of the High Representative and the European Union, a new institutional infrastructure

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6   Bosnia's test-case is based on: Armelin (2024), Belloni (2001) Jeremic & Jayasundara-Smits (2022), Kappler & Richmond (2011), OSCE (2009), Simović & Adžajlić-Dedović (2023).

was established (a rotating presidency, a central bank, and a constitutional court). However, power-sharing mechanisms preserved entrenched elites and limited intercommunal integration.

- **Education**: Schools remained segregated; divergent curricula embedded competing historical narratives; and integration initiatives were largely donor-funded and fragmented.

- **Justice and governance**: Formal reforms were widely perceived as externally imposed, and public trust in them remained low.

- **Civil society and culture**: Civil society organizations largely operated within the same ethno-sectarian frameworks that structured formal politics. Initiatives such as testimony-telling and truth-sharing projects achieved only limited success in bridging societal divides.

THE WESTERN MODEL AS INSPIRATION FOR DERADICALIZATION INITIATIVES IN THE GAZA STRIP

In the aftermath of October 7, a number of proposals and initiatives for the deradicalization of Palestinian society were published (by INSS, FDD, JINSA, Mitvim, Dayan center, among others). These proposals draw directly on the Western case studies discussed above, and they share many similarities with respect to their core operational principles:

- **The dismantling of Hamas's governing authority, the disarmament of Hamas and other terrorist organizations, and the demilitarization of the Strip** are intended to demonstrate the failure of the violent option and to create the conditions necessary for the emergence of a governing and ideological alternative to Hamas.

- At the same time, these proposals emphasize **maintaining administrative continuity** through a temporary Palestinian technocratic administration operating under the supervision and assistance of external actors other than the United Nations, including, of course, Israel.

- Emphasis on **structural reforms within systems of governance**, with particular emphasis on the education, media, and judicial sectors.

- Simultaneous investment in the **training and development of local leadership**, oriented toward norms and values of political moderation.

- **Articulation of a positive political horizon** as an essential national-level incentive for political and societal rehabilitation. The various initiatives diverge regarding the envisioned end state of this political horizon, ranging from proposals advocating the establishment of a Palestinian state "at the end of the road" to those favoring more limited forms of sovereignty ("autonomy") on security grounds.

- Rapid action, based on the assumption that the window of opportunity for meaningful change is narrow.

- However at the same time, making civilian reconstruction and the transfer of authority to local governance structures contingent upon meeting de-radicalization benchmarks and indicators, rather than predetermined timelines.

LIMITS OF THE WESTERN MODEL

The Western model serves as a source of inspiration—and in some cases a foundational reference—for various deradicalization initiatives proposed for the Gaza Strip, for several reasons: the availability and accessibility of information about it; its historical successes (most notably in Germany and Japan, and to a more limited extent in Bosnia); normative affinity with the values underpinning it (legal frameworks, structural reforms, and democratic norms); and the systematic manner in which it has been implemented (through structured work plans and measurable benchmarks).

However, the cases of success occurred in states with political and cultural backgrounds markedly different from that of the Gaza Strip. Germany had a prior democratic tradition, and both Germany and Japan possessed strong

state institutions that could be "repaired" rather than built from scratch. In these cases, extremist ideology could be replaced without negating national identity—unlike the Palestinian case, in which national identity is deeply intertwined with the ethos of struggle and resistance against Israel.

It is also important to note that the two Muslim-majority case studies examined reflect failures of deradicalization processes. In both Iraq and Afghanistan, alienation toward a non-Muslim occupying power, deeply rooted religious ethoses, and strong local identities competed with the narrative underpinning deradicalization efforts.

BEYOND THE WESTERN MODEL

In these respects, the Gaza Strip more closely resembles Iraq and Afghanistan (the unsuccessful cases) than Germany and Japan, the successful ones. Gaza lacks a legacy of modern democratic institutions that can be restored, and like Iraq and Afghanistan it is embedded in a Middle Eastern Muslim cultural context characterized by deep suspicion toward external intervention. At the same time, Gaza does not suffer from the tribal and ethnic rivalries present in those two cases, which further complicated efforts to promote moderation and deradicalization.

This assessment points to the need for a different paradigm, one that relies on Arab–Muslim intermediaries perceived as credible, the construction of governance mechanisms deeply embedded in the local cultural context, and ideological reform anchored in Islam itself. The next chapter therefore examines deradicalization models implemented by various regimes across the Arab world, which leverage religious authority and mechanisms of social control—approaches that offer potentially relevant directions for application to the Gazan context.

DERADICALIZATION IN ARAB STATES—MODELS AND CASE STUDIES

Against the backdrop of escalating jihadist violence across the Arab world in the early 2000s—including major attacks in Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Egypt, Jordan, and Tunisia—regimes in the region implemented a range of deradicalization strategies aimed at suppressing violent extremism and reshaping the ideological space in which it had flourished.

These efforts evolved differently in each country, shaped by distinct political, religious, and institutional contexts, and produced a spectrum of approaches. The common denominator across all cases is the attempt to exert **control over the ideological ecosystem** within which jihadist movements operate. In each case, **jihadist Islam is framed as a deviation from "authentic" and "correct" Islam, while the state and its laws are positioned as a normative counterweight.**

In some cases—most notably in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates—deradicalization is embedded within far more ambitious projects aimed at **constructing a national ethos of religious and interreligious tolerance as part of a broader vision of modernization, growth, and prosperity.**

The differences among these cases stem from the source and strength of the legitimacy upon which each regime could draw as a basis of authority for reshaping behavior and in some instances, even beliefs.

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES[7]

In the aftermath of the 2011 "Arab Spring," the Emirati regime intensified its coercive campaign against political Islam within the federation. In 2013, dozens of citizens were convicted of membership of al-Islah, which was designated as an affiliate of the Muslim Brotherhood (the *UAE94* case). Some of those convicted remain imprisoned to this day, formally within "rehabilitation" (*munāṣaḥa*—counseling) frameworks, though in practice with little transparency regarding their actual conditions of detention. In parallel, teachers were dismissed, clerics were replaced, and educational, religious, and charitable institutions—as well as media outlets—were closed. Jihadists returning from Syria were prosecuted and brought to trial.

The regime placed very strong emphasis on obedience to state law as part of reshaping citizens' moral and ideological consciousness. **Compliance with state law (*qanun*)** is presented as the supreme moral framework, **overriding tribal, sectarian, and religious loyalties.** Civic duty is defined as loyalty to the state and has been embedded in curricula, media content, and state-supervised sermons.

Beginning in 2016, an **education reform** was introduced in which Islamic and Arabic studies were reduced, "problematic" teachers were dismissed, and curricular content increasingly emphasized **pluralism and interreligious dialogue**.

As part of a **religious reform**, the UAE established a national Fatwa Council to centralize the licensing of preachers and the issuance of religious rulings. Binding guidelines were introduced for weekly sermons, mandating messages of compassion, coexistence, and obedience to the state, while explicitly denouncing jihadism as a deviation from "true" Islam.

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7   The UAE's test-case is based on: Amnesty International (2013); Balla (2022); Boghardt (2013); Human Rights Watch (2023); Mazzucco et al. (2023); MENA Rights Group (2020); U.S. Department of State (2021, n.d.).

Alongside these measures, the regime has pursued a broad public-facing effort to embed **messages, narratives, and symbols of religious and interreligious tolerance.** Thus, for example, 2019 was declared the "Year of Tolerance"; a Ministry of Tolerance was established; and initiatives such as the Abrahamic Family House (a complex of worship spaces for the three monotheistic religions, built in Abu Dhabi), museums, commemorative stamps, and public remembrance events were launched to anchor coexistence as a national ethos. Influential religious figures justified the Abraham Accords with Israel through religious and national principles of conflict resolution (*muṣālaḥa*) and national security. Popular Ramadan television series, meanwhile, portrayed terrorists as hypocrites and glorified state security forces.

Establishing Supporting Institutions: A significant component of the UAE's capacity to implement its de-radicalization agenda and the societal "re-education" toward an ethos of tolerance lies in its deliberate establishment of a network of professional institutions that generate ideological, civic, and international infrastructure—while also reinforcing internal control. These include the Hedayah Center (the International Center of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism), which focuses on training, research, and policy development in the field of CVE (Countering Violent Extremism); the Sawab Center, a platform dedicated to countering online radicalization through campaigns that promote moderate narratives and rebut extremist content; and the Al-Mesbar Studies & Research Center, an independent research institute analyzing trends in political Islam, disseminating research, and supporting policy formulation in the UAE and across the Arab world.

The Emirati model has served as a source of inspiration for the Saudi approach and, to date, appears to be a success; however, only the passage of time will ultimately determine the depth and durability of the change. It is also important to acknowledge that the processes undertaken in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates benefit from the vast resources available to the local authorities.

SAUDI ARABIA[8]

Saudi Arabia operates the most comprehensive and institutionalized deradicalization program in the Arab world, shaped by the problematic legacy of extremist Wahhabism and by the involvement of Saudi actors in the rise of terrorist organizations—most notably al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden, who orchestrated the 9/11 attacks. As such, the Saudi case illustrates both the capabilities and the limitations of a state-led authoritarian approach to deradicalization. The Saudi strategy evolved in two main phases: first, a targeted rehabilitation program under Mohammed bin Nayef, followed by a broad, systemic campaign of ideological rebranding under Mohammed bin Salman (MBS).

Phase I: Mohammed bin Nayef's Rehabilitation Program (2003–2015)
In the wake of the al-Qaeda attacks in Riyadh in 2003, the Ministry of Interior launched a strategy that combined robust security repression with the rehabilitation of members of Islamist groups. On the security front, internal security services dismantled jihadist networks within the kingdom while simultaneously purging state institutions of Muslim Brotherhood influence, including the education system, religious establishments, and civil society organizations. Teachers affiliated with the Brotherhood were removed, clerics associated with it were dismissed, and the powers of the religious police (the "Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice") were significantly curtailed.

The flagship program for rehabilitating Islamist detainees operated through the Mohammed bin Nayef Counseling and Care Centers. Implemented on a limited scale involving several hundred detainees, the program sought to achieve behavioral disengagement from extremist groups and reintegration

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8   The Saudi Arabia's test case is based on: Guzansky & Perlov (2014); Braude (2014a,b, 2017); El-Said (2017); Rabasa et al. (2010); Regional Cooperation Council (2019).

into society through material incentives (similar to the *demobilization* and *reintegration* components of DDR). Key elements of the program included:

- Religious re-education through dialogue with clerics trained to engage theologically with extremist (takfiri) doctrines;
- Psychological counseling and trauma treatment, particularly for returnees from Afghanistan and Iraq;
- Vocational training and employment placement support;
- Family involvement as guarantors of post-release stability;
- Material incentives, including housing, living stipends, and marriage assistance;
- Post-release monitoring, including mentorship, home visits, and security supervision.

Phase II: Mohammed bin Salman's State-Led Campaign (2015–Present)
From 2015 onward, the focus of deradicalization efforts in Saudi Arabia **shifted from the rehabilitation of extremists to a broader project of "ideological reengineering"** and national rebranding. Deradicalization became an integral component of a far more expansive vision, aimed both at consolidating domestic authority and at reshaping the Kingdom's image on the global stage.

A central pillar of Mohammed bin Salman's new strategy was the **branding of "moderate Islam"**—a revised religious vision aligned with Saudi Arabia's modernization agenda, including expanded women's rights, the promotion of tourism, the attraction of foreign investment, and related initiatives. Accordingly, the religious establishment underwent a broad reorganization, including purges of clerics who were arrested, dismissed, or compelled to fall in line with the new orientation. In parallel, preachers loyal to the regime and identified with more moderate religious approaches were promoted.

The online sphere has become another central arena of contestation, given its extensive use by extremist clerics and jihadist actors to disseminate their

messages. To alter this dynamic, pro-regime commentators were mobilized, often launching forceful attacks on radical Islam. In addition, the government initiated the *Sakina* campaign, under which regime-affiliated clerics engaged directly—via social media dialogues—with individuals identifying with extremist Islamist ideas, seeking to persuade them to reconsider their positions through religious, psychological, and communication-based arguments.

Beyond direct action against extremists, the state advanced a range of initiatives aimed at **delegitimizing extremist narratives among the broader public**. These included amplifying testimonies of former jihadists who publicly renounced violence (the *Humumna* project), supporting comedic programs that satirized extremist clerical figures and jihadist narratives, and sponsoring interreligious dialogue initiatives such as KAICIID (the *King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue*).

Additional reforms led by MBS, while not directly tied to deradicalization, have contributed to it indirectly by **encouraging more pluralistic value orientations** within Saudi society—for example, granting women the right to drive (the *Women2Drive* initiative).

In terms of outcomes, Saudi Arabia has thus far continued to enjoy internal stability, and at least on the surface, no significant threats from extremist Islam are apparent. At the same time, alongside the far-reaching measures and the ambitious vision underpinning them, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations of—and the open questions surrounding—the Kingdom's deradicalization processes. These include the extent to which the regime's messaging of "correct" or "moderate" Islam has genuinely taken root in public consciousness, as opposed to being perceived as unconvincing state propaganda; whether, and to what degree, extremist and subversive ideas continue to simmer beneath the surface; and whether the liberalizing reforms promoted by Mohammed bin Salman—while potentially moving Saudi society toward more modern forms of consciousness and social practice—will ultimately

succeed, or instead erode key pillars of authoritarian stability in ways that could be exploited by extremist currents and lead to renewed instability.

EGYPT[9]

Egypt was among the first Arab states to suffer the challenge posed by extremist Islam. The struggle against the Muslim Brotherhood—whose origins lie in Egypt—has accompanied the Free Officers' regime since its earliest years in the 1950s, under the leadership of Gamal Abdel Nasser, who confronted the movement with force and ordered the execution of Sayyid Qutb in 1966. Terrorist organizations that emerged ideologically from the Muslim Brotherhood were, as is well known, responsible for the assassination of President Anwar Sadat. More recently, the Muslim Brotherhood briefly rose to power during the Arab Spring, under President Mohamed Morsi (2012–2013).

Part of the regime's response to the Islamist threat has involved **weaving the religious dimension into the national ethos** cultivated by what was originally a secular state. Anwar Sadat promoted the image of himself as the "believing president," Hosni Mubarak framed state stability as a religious imperative, and President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi has likewise sought to fuse religious identity into an overarching national ethos, in part to neutralize Islamist criticism.

The Egyptian state, **drawing on the religious legitimacy conferred by the al-Azhar institution**, has over decades constructed a narrative of moderate Islam as the authentic expression of the faith, and has used this framing to justify a comprehensive campaign of repression against the Muslim Brotherhood, portrayed as representatives of an extremist deviation from the "correct" path of Islam. The regime has actively disseminated this narrative through various instruments of public consciousness formation, including popular cinema

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9   The Egyptian test-case is based on: Winter (2024), Al-Anani (2009); Brachman (2007); Brzuszkiewicz (2017); El-Said (2017); International Peace Institute (2010); Ismail (2023).

that mocked Islamist figures and depicted their ideology as catastrophic for the state and its citizens.

The regime's approach produced a notable and widely publicized success in the form of a series of public *recantation statements* issued by imprisoned members of the two major terrorist organizations active in Egypt during the 1990s and early 2000s—al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya and Egyptian Islamic Jihad. In these texts, the authors explicitly renounced violence and grounded their ideological reversal in core Islamic jurisprudential principles. The critical turning point that catalyzed this process was the 1997 Luxor massacre, which generated profound public shock and outrage and, in turn, created significant internal and external pressure on these organizations to reassess their strategic and moral course.

The state facilitated this process in several ways, including easing prison conditions, providing access to "correct" religious study materials, and allowing family visits. However, the initiative was never institutionalized as a comprehensive program: no systematic rehabilitation mechanisms were established, no meaningful risk-based screening of prisoners was conducted, and no clear distinction was maintained between those who genuinely renounced violence and those who remained committed to it. As a result, while some released prisoners went on to act as relatively moderate public figures, others gradually reverted to extremist patterns of thought and behavior.

The removal of President Morsi and Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's rise to power ushered in a new and uncompromising wave of repression against the Muslim Brotherhood, coupled with an effort to dismantle its influence over society. The Brotherhood was designated a terrorist organization, outlawed, and its members were subjected to mass trials and, in some cases, executions. In parallel, the regime invested heavily in rewriting school curricula, re-centralizing control over Friday sermons, and shaping public consciousness through media and cultural institutions that framed loyalty to the state as a religious imperative.

At the same time, at the outset of his presidency el-Sisi introduced the notion of *renewing religious discourse* (*tajdīd al-khiṭāb al-dīnī*) as a central slogan, reflecting his ambition to reform the religious messaging led by al-Azhar. In el-Sisi's view, al-Azhar's discourse was overly rigid, insufficiently pragmatic, and poorly adapted to the needs of the state and society in confronting contemporary global challenges. In pursuit of this goal, the president even sought to elevate the Ministry of Religious Endowments as an alternative religious authority to al-Azhar.

As in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, Egypt's de-radicalization measures combine coercive security actions against Islamist actors with efforts to dismantle their presence and influence across key spheres of social life, alongside the construction of a narrative that elevates loyalty to the state and its laws to the status of a supreme moral value. At the same time, the Egyptian model places more limited emphasis on the rehabilitation of individuals drawn into extremism. Unlike the Gulf models reviewed above, it does not advance a comprehensive counter-vision of religious and interreligious tolerance as a new national ethos—certainly not with the same level of ambition or systematic investment in societal internalization. This may help explain Egypt's more limited success in curbing extremism, alongside other factors related to the nature of the regime (non-monarchical) and the acute socio-economic hardships facing large segments of the Egyptian population.

MOROCCO[10]

The Moroccan approach to deradicalization combines top-down, monarchy-led religious reform, selective reintegration of former extremists who have renounced violence, and a limited degree of civil society involvement. Following the 2003 Casablanca bombings, the monarchy reinforced its position as the supreme religious authority by restructuring the Supreme Council of Religious

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10   The Moroccan test case is based on: Abu Dalhoum et al., (2020); Bastani & Gazzotti (2021); Brzuszkiewicz (2017); Fakoussa-Behrens & Kabis-Kechrid (2020); Masbah (2017).

Scholars (ʿulamāʾ), tightly regulating mosque sermons, and promoting a religious framework grounded in the ruling dynasty's lineage—traced back to the Prophet Muhammad since the seventeenth century—as a key source of legitimacy. The emphasis is less on direct coercion and more on religious re-education and cultural engineering, such that deradicalization processes are woven into everyday religious and social practices.

Religious and educational reforms: The state invested heavily in reshaping the religious–social sphere. Imam-training institutes and the *Murshidat* program (female religious guides) disseminated the idea of "moderate Islam" within communities, schools, and families. The guides' role extended beyond formal instruction to include counseling, mediation, and community accompaniment, thereby embedding norms of moderation into everyday life. This strategy was designed to entrench loyalty to the king as *Amir al-Mu'minin* ("Commander of the Faithful") and to reinforce his status as the supreme religious–political authority.

The "Musalaha" (Reconciliation) program: In 2017, Morocco institutionalized a program focused on the rehabilitation of prisoners. The program combined religious re-education, psychological treatment, and legal rehabilitation, administered jointly by the prison administration, the League of Muslim Scholars, and the Council of Religious Scholars. Prisoners were assessed and classified according to their level of radicalization and offered tailored educational and vocational tracks. Prison thus served not only as a security instrument but also as a site for ideological disengagement. At the same time, the program has been criticized for limited transparency in participant selection, unequal access to resources, and the risk of public backlash surrounding the granting of pardons.

Program graduates faced significant challenges, including unemployment, social stigma, and the absence of a robust post-release support framework. Psychological services—both during incarceration and after release—were limited, undermining the stability of the rehabilitation process. Civil society

organizations were scarcely integrated into the later stages of reintegration, preventing the development of a comprehensive rehabilitation model. Moreover, state efforts to advance a counter-narrative to extremist Islam relied primarily on rational and theological arguments, which have struggled to compete with the emotional and identity-based appeal wielded by extremist recruiters.

Selective integration of former extremists: Morocco has cautiously integrated former Salafi-jihadists who renounced violence into prisoner rehabilitation programs and, to a limited extent, into the public discourse, positioning them as intermediaries between the state and at-risk youth. This approach is grounded in the use of "local voices" with social credibility to convey state-sanctioned messages, albeit under close governmental supervision.

Civil society as a limited partner: Civil society organizations—such as youth groups, religious associations, and various NGOs—have been incorporated into prevention and awareness initiatives. In most cases, however, these organizations function effectively as extensions of the state, reliant on government or external funding and subject to close oversight. While this controlled use of civil society allows the regime to expand its reach, the lack of genuine independence means that these actors are often perceived as part of the state apparatus, limiting public trust in them.

The Moroccan case illustrates how religious lineage can be leveraged as a source of political legitimacy. Particularly noteworthy as sources of inspiration are the integration of rehabilitated extremists into deradicalization efforts throughout society, and the use of local civil society actors as intermediaries (even though tight state control and oversight undermine their public credibility). At the same time, the relevance of this model to the Gazan case is limited, given the absence in Palestinian society of a monarchical regime or a ruling dynasty endowed with comparable religious lineage.

JORDAN[11]

Jordan's effort to de-radicalize society took shape in the aftermath of the 2005 Amman bombings, carried out by jihadist networks affiliated with Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. The Kingdom's central response was the Amman Message (2004)—a **religious–political declaration that delineated clear jurisprudential boundaries and rejected *takfiri* interpretations that excommunicate other Muslims.** To further consolidate control, the **Fatwa Law** (2006) was enacted, transferring the authority to issue religious rulings to clerics appointed and approved by the state. Together, these measures signaled the Kingdom's attempt to articulate a "state Islam" aligned with political leadership.

The king and state authorities have also drawn legitimacy from the Hashemite lineage, as descendants of the Prophet Muhammad and custodians of the holy sites in Jerusalem. This lineage has been used not only to underpin the struggle against extremism, but also to justify the peace treaty with Israel (1994). Official discourse framed peace not as a political compromise, but as a religious and moral imperative, emphasizing the "shared lineage" of Jordanians and Israelis as Abrahamic peoples.

At the institutional level, **the Ministry of Waqf became a central instrument of control**. All imams are required to consult the official journal, *Hādī al-Islām*, which provides theological and political guidelines. In addition, they receive weekly, state-prescribed talking points for Friday sermons. Their salaries and housing are subsidized by the state, and compliance is enforced through "mosque informants"—security-affiliated monitors who observe sermons and report deviations from the approved line.

At the same time, the **media sphere was restructured**: stringent legislation, fines, and censorship mechanisms were employed to ensure conformity with official discourse. Islamist media outlets that dared to criticize the state or

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11   The Jordanian test case is based on: Winter (2024); Abu Dalhoum et al., (2020); El-Said (2017); International Peace Institute (2010); Svetlova (2025).

oppose normalization with Israel were shut down or subjected to sustained harassment.

In the realm of incarceration and prisoner treatment, the Hiwar ("Dialogue") program was launched in 2015 by the Ministry of Interior in cooperation with the Community Peace Center. Its aim was to **engage extremist prisoners in structured dialogue with regime-approved clerics**. Prisoners were classified according to their level of radicalization and separated from the general prison population. However, the program suffered from several limitations: it did not provide psychological or vocational services, lacked a structured post-release reintegration plan, and relied almost entirely on the subjective assessments of clerics. As a result, cases of recidivism—and even further radicalization within prison—were reported.

At the legal level, **amendments to counterterrorism legislation** expanded the definition of terrorism to encompass online activity—including "likes" or the sharing of posts on social media—and attached severe penalties to such actions. These measures, however, deepened perceptions of repression, increased the prison population, and in some cases generated new hostility toward the regime.

In April 2025, the regime designated the **Muslim Brotherhood as an illegal organization**, outlawed all of its activities (including its parliamentary presence through the "Islamic Action Front party") and ruled that its offices would be closed, its assets confiscated, and any publication or promotion of ideology associated with it would constitute a criminal offense.

Alongside these measures, **the regime sought to cultivate a social consciousness of a "warm peace."** Sermons in mosques, official speeches, and programs on state media framed coexistence as both a religious and national value. At the same time, the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist movements advanced a counter-narrative portraying peace as betrayal and the regime as subservient to the West. The tension between these narratives

underscored the **credibility problem facing official discourse**, which was often perceived as reflecting regime interests rather than authentic religious truth.

Jordan's deeper challenge lies in a deficit of legitimacy. State-appointed imams are widely perceived as lacking independence, while civil society organizations and former militants are almost entirely excluded from the system. Even after release from prison, former inmates receive little to no assistance or rehabilitation—there is no psychological support, no structured employment pathways, and no institutionalized family assistance. This reality leaves many trapped in cycles of stigma, unemployment, and potential relapse into extremism.

In sum, the Jordanian model reflects broad but shallow institutional control. The state exercises extensive authority over mosques, the media, and the prison system, yet excludes authentic actors who are not affiliated with the regime, thereby undermining its own credibility. In other words, while the Kingdom benefits from an image of stability, it has not succeeded in building sustainable societal resilience against radicalization.

TUNISIA[12]

Tunisia represents an unusual case in the Arab world: the only state to undergo a democratic transition after the Arab Spring, yet simultaneously one of the leading exporters of foreign fighters to jihadist organizations. Between 2011 and 2015, thousands of Tunisians traveled to fight in Syria, Iraq, and Libya. By 2017, hundreds had returned, but most were neither prosecuted nor placed in rehabilitation programs, due to institutional weakness and the absence of reintegration infrastructure. The combination of political openness, weak governance, and socio-economic marginalization turned Tunisia into a hub of radicalization and a particularly challenging arena for countering extremism.

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12 The Tunisian test-case is based on: Cragin (2021); Mattei & Domergue (2021); Strong Cities Network (2025); UNODC (2022); Watanabe & Merz (2017); Zelin (2020).

The deeper drivers of this dynamic were an institutional vacuum and social marginalization. The 2011 revolution opened the public sphere, but simultaneously weakened state control over religious institutions. Hundreds of mosques fell under the influence of radical preachers, and the organization *Ansar al-Sharia* succeeded in mobilizing supporters through charitable and community activities until it was outlawed in 2013. The Ministry of Religious Affairs, which had suffered a crisis of credibility after years of political control under the former regime, struggled to restore its legitimacy. On the political level, the Islamist Ennahda movement achieved significant electoral success in the post-revolutionary period.

Among young people, feelings of marginalization intensified due to chronic unemployment, center–periphery disparities, exclusion from the political system, and persistent police violence. These experiences created fertile ground for narratives of grievance and oppression, which extremist groups framed as evidence of the righteousness of their cause.

A series of severe attacks—including the 2015 assault on the Bardo National Museum and the attack in Sousse—prompted the state to harden its stance. A new counterterrorism law granted expanded powers of arrest and prosecution, a specialized terrorism court was established, travel by young people suspected of heading to conflict zones was blocked at the borders, and the number of detainees increased significantly.

In parallel, the authorities sought to reassert control over mosques. Hundreds were closed, radical preachers were dismissed, and imams were retrained through government programs—some of them in cooperation with Morocco, which exported its "moderate Islam" model. Media outlets suspected of disseminating extremist content were also shut down. Through these measures, Tunisia attempted to articulate a distinctly "moderate" and "Tunisian" religious identity, distancing itself from external influences. At the same time, these steps reinforced perceptions of the persistence of authoritarian governance patterns. Especially in high-unemployment areas,

identification systems in mosques and tight supervision of sermons generated a sense of coercive control rather than genuine partnership.

Since 2011, **civil society** has become an important actor in prevention efforts. Substantial funding from the United Nations, the European Union, and other international donors supported a wide range of NGOs; however, in many cases, locally rooted, family-based, or community initiatives proved more credible and effective. Programs that relied on respected religious figures or family networks were able to interrupt recruitment processes. Local authorities also began to engage in prevention efforts, including through the **Strong Cities Network** and **UNDP** projects. By working through schools, community centers, and social workers, early-warning mechanisms were established to identify signs of radicalization and to offer non-punitive alternatives. Nevertheless, despite the positive role of civil society actors, their involvement has remained limited in scale and insufficiently resourced.

In sum, despite sporadic attempts, Tunisia still lacks an institutionalized framework for the rehabilitation of returning fighters. Initiatives led by international organizations have provided psychosocial support or prison-based workshops, but these have remained small-scale pilot projects dependent on external funding. Women and children—a substantial share of "returnees"—have received little tailored attention. At the same time, continued violence by security forces, the absence of employment opportunities, and persistent social stigma have deepened feelings of alienation and increased the risk of renewed radicalization within society.

Attempts by the state to import moderate ideas from abroad or to engineer a religious identity from above have encountered significant challenges of trust and commitment. The gradual shift toward community-based prevention is noteworthy and promising; however, as long as large-scale rehabilitation and reintegration mechanisms are absent, and socio-economic living conditions remain unchanged, Tunisia's fragility will continue to provide fertile ground for the expansion of cycles of extremism.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ARAB CASE STUDIES AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR THE GAZA STRIP

Crisis events as catalysts for deradicalization: In all the countries examined, deradicalization processes did not emerge in a vacuum; the impetus for their implementation arose in the wake of crises, such as severe terrorist attacks (Riyadh 2003, Casablanca 2003, Amman 2005) or large-scale political upheavals (the "Arab Spring"), which in the Egyptian case even led to a change of regime. This yields a direct implication for Gaza: the war has resulted in the near-total destruction of civilian infrastructure in the Gaza Strip, widespread loss of life, mass displacement, and collective trauma. While this constitutes an extraordinarily difficult starting point for reconstruction processes, at the same time the magnitude of the disaster also creates a rare "window of opportunity" to reshape the population's political and ideological cognitive space.

State sovereignty versus religious authority: A common denominator among the countries examined is the **recognition that the use of force alone is insufficient to suppress extremist ideology** and the actors that promote it; control over the symbolic sphere is also required—collective identity, religious interpretation, and the national narrative. Many of these states have designated the state and its laws as the supreme normative identity, superseding alternative forms of affiliation, and have sought to anchor civic loyalty above factional (tribal or religious) loyalties. **Applied to the Palestinian case, so long as there is no (even incipient) credible movement toward a horizon of sovereignty and national independence, a serious question mark remains over the very feasibility of advancing deradicalization processes** within Palestinian society.

A theology of peace under conditions of conflict: Arab states have, over the years, grounded peace agreements in religious-legal justifications. In Gaza, **a theology of "just peace" is relevant only if it is tied to a tangible political horizon** of Palestinian independence and sovereignty; absent such a horizon, the message will be perceived as empty propaganda.

Credible religious intermediaries: It is important to mediate the new moderate ethos through a religious–social anchor that is as local as possible. However, given the absence of such an anchor in Gaza—due to Hamas' long-standing indoctrination processes—it should be reinforced through a consortium of moderate religious figures from Arab states. Owing to cultural proximity, Egypt could serve as a supporting pillar (via the al-Azhar institution), although Gulf states appear capable of contributing more moderate voices.

Modest models versus ambitious models: Egypt and Jordan are the closest to the Palestinians in terms of language, geography, and patterns of interaction; however, their approaches have largely remained **models of threat containment, relying primarily on coercive means** (security enforcement, control of sermons, centralization of religious authority), **with little to no engagement in the rehabilitation of activists** (stemming from the belief that extremists cannot be "reformed" and are better "broken"), and with relatively **limited social engineering of beliefs and identities**. By contrast, **Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates** offer a more comprehensive and ambitious model of re-educating society as a whole toward an ethos of religious tolerance and of creating a **"state orthodoxy" as a full alternative** to jihadist ideology, combining "hard power" with "soft power" (education, culture, and media). Thus far, **the ambitious Gulf models appear to be yielding greater achievements**, although they have also benefited from more favorable initial conditions. Adopting Gulf-style models **in the Gaza Strip would require demanding preconditions**: vision and leadership among all stakeholders, a political and economic horizon, and sustained long-term planning and implementation capacity.

The paradox of "authoritarian tolerance": The Saudi and Emirati models do indeed seek to cultivate a national ethos of religious tolerance and disciplined citizenship, but they do so through centralized mechanisms that are themselves intolerant of dissent. This constitutes a paradox; nevertheless, it is one that enables the marginalization of extremist ideologies and the articulation of

a new civic–religious identity under conditions in which the state operates in a unified, resolute, and effective manner. Applying this model to the Gaza context would require accepting its underlying authoritarian assumptions and ensuring robust implementation capacity and consistent rule of law; absent these, the model would be liable to collapse.

The Palestinian Authority as an insufficient but necessary anchor: The institutional base of the Palestinian Authority is far from sufficient, and the current functional capacities of the Authority and its leadership fall well short of what would be required to deliver the implementation capability and public legitimacy needed for deradicalization measures. Nevertheless, the PA provides a national "anchor" that, from the perspective of Palestinian society, is not replaceable—except by Hamas. From the standpoint of Arab states, which are vital to advancing deradicalization within Palestinian society, and of the international community as a potential source of financial support for such efforts, there is likewise no genuine alternative to the Palestinian Authority.

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 de-radicalization 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.

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The radicalization of Palestinian society in the Gaza Strip is not a new phenomenon, but the process has accelerated and deepened dramatically since Hamas' takeover of the territory in 2007. Under its rule, an extremist religious-nationalist ideology has been systematically embedded across all spheres of Gaza life—from education and religious institutions to welfare and the media—producing a profound "Hamasification" of public consciousness.

The war that erupted on October 7 brought unprecedented ruin to the Gaza Strip, both physically and institutionally, posing a monumental reconstruction challenge, but also a rare historic opportunity. This memorandum argues that military disarmament and physical rehabilitation alone will not ensure long-term security and stability, and that a far deeper process of "de-Hamasifcation" is required: dismantling Hamas' ideological and institutional hegemony and replacing it with a more moderate civic and normative infrastructure.

The study presents a comparative analysis of Western and Arab deradicalization models and finds that Western approaches—such as those implemented in Germany and Japan—struggle to provide an adequate response to Gaza's cultural and political context. Instead, we propose adopting operational principles drawn from contemporary Arab models, particularly the "civic-transformative" model applied in the Gulf states, which combines a firm crackdown on extremist actors with re-education toward religious tolerance and broad-based economic rehabilitation.

The paper outlines an integrative strategy encompassing sustained security demilitarization, the mobilization of an Arab coalition to provide religious and political legitimacy, and the establishment of a credible political horizon as a counterweight to the ethos of "resistance." Only the combination of these elements can generate a viable governing and ideological alternative to Hamas and lead to a more stable long-term security environment for the State of Israel.