

The Risk of Radicalization and Terrorism in the Aftermath of the Gaza (2023) and Iran (2026) Conflicts: A Best-Fit Framework Synthesis

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ABSTRACT

The escalation of armed conflict in Gaza following the events of 7 October 2023, and the subsequent war between Israel, the United States and Iran that began on 28 February 2026 with Operations Roaring Lion and Epic Fury, have reconfigured the strategic and ideological landscape within which contemporary radicalization and terrorism unfold. While the empirical study of radicalization has produced a rich body of processual and phase-based models, these frameworks were largely developed prior to, and independently of, this specific conflict configuration, which simultaneously implicates Sunni jihadist mobilization, Iran-aligned militant networks, and reciprocal far-right and anti-minority extremism in Western states. This article applies a best-fit framework synthesis, adapted from De Coensel's (2018) eight-phase funnel meta-framework of radicalization into terrorism, to narratively map open-source intelligence assessments, international policy reports and academic literature published between October 2023 and August 2026 onto an integrated conceptual structure. Treating these sources as institutional assessments rather than settled findings, the analysis identifies structural grievances, precipitating events, competing identity narratives, propaganda ecosystems, network embeddedness, ideological justification, attack implementation and post-conflict second-order risks as interlocking phases through which the Gaza and Iran conflicts generate a cross-ideological radicalization dynamic. The article proposes, as a testable hypothesis rather than an established finding, an integrated "dual-track, multi-directional" meta-framework capturing reciprocal radicalization across ideological spectra, and discusses implications for conflict-sensitive counter-terrorism and prevention/countering violent extremism (P/CVE) policy. The article concludes by outlining the methodological limitations of synthesizing a rapidly evolving, open-source and disproportionately Western-sourced evidence base, and proposes directions for future empirical research, including quantitative testing of the proposed reciprocal dynamic.

Keywords: radicalization; terrorism; Gaza conflict; Iran conflict; best fit framework synthesis; violent extremism; reciprocal radicalization; counter-terrorism policy

INTRODUCTION

The attack carried out by Hamas against Israel on 7 October 2023 and the ensuing Israeli military campaign in the Gaza Strip constitute one of the most consequential turning points in the recent history of Middle Eastern conflict and, by extension, in the global landscape of radicalization and terrorism. The conflict rapidly expanded beyond the borders of Israel and Gaza, drawing in Iran-aligned militias in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Yemen, and culminating, following the collapse of the Assad regime in December 2024, in a direct war between the United States, Israel and Iran that began on 28 February 2026, when U.S. and Israeli forces launched coordinated strikes on Iranian military, nuclear and leadership targets under Operations Epic Fury and Roaring Lion, killing Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei in the opening hours. Iran's retaliation extended the conflict's geographic footprint across the Gulf within forty-eight hours and included the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, before a ceasefire agreed on 7 April 2026 brought major hostilities to a close by early May. The resulting "armed peace" has left the region in a state of unresolved strategic tension, compounded by continued institutional fragility in post-Assad Syria and by the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza.

These developments have not remained confined to the Middle East. International threat assessments converge in observing that transnational jihadist organizations, most notably the Islamic State and al-Qaeda, have sought to instrumentalize the destruction in Gaza and the wider regional escalation for propaganda and recruitment purposes, while Iran-aligned actors have simultaneously drawn on the conflict to reinforce a narrative of resistance. At the same time, the polarizing effect of the conflict has been associated with a documented rise in both Islamophobic and antisemitic hostility in Western societies, generating a reciprocal, cross-ideological radicalization dynamic that existing single-ideology models of radicalization are not well equipped to capture.

Contemporary radicalization research offers a substantial repertoire of processual and phase-based models describing the trajectory of individuals and groups toward political violence (Moghaddam, 2005; McCauley & Moskaleiko, 2008; Wiktorowicz, 2005; Sageman, 2004). De Coensel's (2018) best fit framework synthesis of these models produced an integrative, eight-phase "funnel" meta-framework spanning pre-radicalization, five radicalization phases *sensu stricto*, implementation and post-implementation. This meta-framework was, however, developed as a general, conflict-agnostic synthesis of the pre-2018 literature and has not previously been applied to the specific and evolving conflict configuration produced by the Gaza war and the Israel-Iran war.

This article addresses that gap by asking: (1) how do the structural, precipitating, cognitive, network-related and ideological drivers documented in the post-2023 open-source and academic literature map onto an integrated processual model of radicalization; and (2) what does this mapping suggest about the distinctive, cross-ideological character of the radicalization risk generated by the Gaza and Iran conflicts. In pursuing these questions, the article contributes, first, a systematic, theory-informed synthesis of a rapidly growing and dispersed body of threat assessments and policy literature; and second, an adapted meta-framework that extends De Coensel's (2018) funnel model to account for reciprocal radicalization across ideological spectra. The remainder of the article proceeds as follows. Section 2 outlines the theoretical and conceptual background. Section 3 details the best fit framework synthesis methodology. Section 4 provides contextual background on the Gaza and Iran conflicts. Section 5 presents the thematic findings mapped onto the radicalization funnel. Section 6 proposes an integrated meta-framework. Section 7 discusses policy implications, and Section 8 outlines limitations and directions for future research, before the article concludes in Section 9.

Theoretical and Conceptual Background

Radicalization remains a contested concept in the academic literature, variously defined as a change in beliefs, feelings and behaviours in directions that increasingly justify intergroup violence (McCauley & Moskaleiko, 2008), or, more narrowly, as the behavioural endpoint of a cognitive process (Neumann, 2013). Schmid (2013) similarly notes the definitional ambiguity surrounding the term and the need to distinguish cognitive radicalization (the adoption of extremist beliefs) from behavioural radicalization (engagement in violence), a distinction that is analytically important given that only a small minority of cognitively radicalized individuals ultimately engage in violent action.

A substantial strand of the literature has sought to model radicalization as a sequential or staged process. Moghaddam's (2005) staircase metaphor conceives of radicalization as a narrowing set of floors, from a ground floor of shared grievance to increasingly restrictive floors culminating in the categorical legitimization of violence. Wiktorowicz (2005) proposes a four-stage model comprising cognitive opening, religious seeking, framing alignment and socialization, based on ethnographic research with a UK-based radical group. Sageman's (2004, 2008) network-based account emphasizes the role of social bonds, kinship and online connectivity over formal ideological indoctrination, while McCauley and Moskaleiko's (2017) two-pyramids model distinguishes the pyramid of opinion from the pyramid of action, cautioning against conflating radical beliefs with a propensity for violence. This distinction resonates with Bartlett, Birdwell and King's (2010) "edge of violence" framework, which similarly cautions against treating the holding of radical beliefs and a willingness to use violence as points on a single continuum, and with Horgan's (2008) broader critique of static, trait-based "profiles" of the terrorist, which argues for a shift toward dynamic "pathways" and "routes" into terrorism, a processual turn from which De Coensel's (2018) synthesis, and the present article, both proceed. Kruglanski et al. (2014) advance a significance quest theory in which the pursuit of personal significance, activated by grievance or humiliation, channelled through an ideological narrative and consolidated through group networks, provides a unifying

psychological mechanism across these models; Doosje et al. (2016) offer a complementary review situating these individual-level mechanisms within a broader account of radicalization and de-radicalization as a two-way process.

De Coensel's (2018) contribution to this body of work was methodological as much as substantive: rather than proposing a further, isolated model, she conducted a best fit framework synthesis of existing processual and phase models of radicalization, systematically comparing their thematic content in order to construct an integrative meta-framework. The resulting model is represented as a horizontal, eight-phased funnel spanning a pre-radicalization phase, five radicalization phases addressing grievance, cognitive and identity change, group involvement, ideological commitment and the justification of violence, an implementation phase corresponding to attack planning and execution, and a post-implementation phase concerned with the aftermath of engagement in violence, including disengagement, detention and reintegration. This meta-framework is particularly well suited to the present study because its integrative character allows heterogeneous, conflict- and ideology-specific findings from the post-2023 literature to be located within a common analytical structure, rather than requiring the adoption of any single, ideology-bound model.

METHODOLOGY

A Narrative Best Fit Framework Synthesis

This article adapts the best fit framework synthesis methodology, originally developed in health services research (Carroll et al., 2013; Booth & Carroll, 2015) and subsequently applied to radicalization research by De Coensel (2018), to the specific empirical domain of post-2023 conflict-related radicalization. Best fit framework synthesis proceeds in three broad stages:

- (1) the identification of a pre-existing conceptual framework, or a small number of candidate frameworks, against which new evidence can be systematically mapped.
- (2) the thematic coding of newly identified evidence against the categories of that framework.
- (3) the refinement of the framework where the new evidence identifies themes, relationships or sequences not adequately captured by the original structure.

For the purposes of this study, De Coensel's (2018) eight-phase funnel served as the a priori framework. Evidence was drawn from three complementary bodies of open-source literature published between October 2023 and August 2026:

- (a) national and multilateral intelligence and threat assessments, including reporting by national intelligence services, the Institute for Economics and Peace's Global Terrorism Index, and specialist open-source intelligence providers.
- (b) Reports and policy analyses produced by counter-terrorism research institutes, including the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism.
- (c) The established academic literature on radicalization theory, used to interpret and contextualize the conflict-specific evidence. Sources were included where they addressed, directly or substantively, the relationship between the Gaza and/or Iran conflicts and radicalization or terrorism risk, in either Western or Middle Eastern contexts.

Sources were identified through targeted, purposive searches of the publication archives of national and multilateral intelligence and threat-assessment bodies, counter-terrorism research institutes and specialist open-source intelligence and homeland-security outlets, together with the Scopus and Google Scholar databases for the academic literature, using combinations of the search terms "Gaza," "Iran," "radicalization," "extremism" and "terrorism," and supplemented by citation snowballing from the reference lists of identified sources. Given the exploratory, framework-synthesis purpose of the study, the fast-moving character of the evidence base and the continued evolution of the conflicts examined through August 2026, no PRISMA-style systematic review

protocol with pre-registered search strings and documented counts of records identified, screened, included and excluded was applied. The search should accordingly be understood as a purposive, narrative identification of illustrative and thematically representative sources, in keeping with the qualitative, interpretive character of best fit framework synthesis as a method (Carroll et al., 2013), rather than as an exhaustive or independently reproducible systematic review; this constitutes an important limitation, discussed further in Section 8. Each included source was read in full, coded against the eight phases of the funnel model, with illustrative evidence extracted, and thematically grouped within each phase. Institutional threat assessments and consultancy reporting are treated throughout as assessments made by the originating body, subject to that body's own methodological choices, access to sources and potential institutional or national biases, rather than as independently verified findings; where possible, these are read alongside the peer-reviewed academic literature to contextualize their claims. Where the evidence suggested relationships, feedback loops or actor dynamics not fully captured by the original, single-track funnel structure, most notably the reciprocal mobilization of jihadist, Iran-aligned and far-right or anti-minority actors around the same conflict events, these were noted as candidate refinements to the framework, discussed in Section 6. It should also be acknowledged that this synthesis draws exclusively on secondary, open-source material rather than on primary interviews, court records or attack datasets of the kind De Coensel (2018) and her subsequent content analysis of Belgian court rulings (De Coensel, 2025) were able to draw upon in the Belgian judicial context; this constitutes a further important limitation, discussed in Section 8.

Contextual Background: The Gaza and Iran Conflicts, 2023–2026

The Hamas-led attack of 7 October 2023 killed over 1,300 people across more than thirty locations in southern Israel and precipitated a large-scale Israeli military campaign in the Gaza Strip. Over the following two years, the conflict produced extensive civilian casualties and infrastructural destruction, with open-source assessments indicating that approximately ninety-two percent of housing stock and more than half of hospitals and medical facilities in Gaza were partially or completely destroyed (ICCT, 2025). The conflict simultaneously drew in Iran-aligned actors across Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Yemen, and contributed, alongside the December 2024 collapse of the Assad regime in Syria, to a broader realignment of regional power (Etterretningstjenesten, 2025).

This trajectory culminated in a direct war between the United States, Israel and Iran that erupted on 28 February 2026, when coordinated U.S. and Israeli strikes under Operations Epic Fury and Roaring Lion targeted Iranian military installations, nuclear enrichment facilities and senior leadership, killing Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei in the opening hours (Britannica, 2026). Iran responded under Operation True Promise IV, extending missile and drone strikes to seven regional states within forty-eight hours and closing the Strait of Hormuz on 4 March 2026, through which roughly one-fifth of global oil supply transits, precipitating a sharp rise in global energy prices (Britannica, 2026). Despite substantial degradation of Hezbollah's fighting capacity during the 2024 Lebanon campaign, open-source reporting indicates that the organization retained a significant proportion of its pre-war capability and continued to receive Iranian financial support, while the Islamic State exploited institutional fragility in post-Assad Syria to establish a renewed operational presence (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2026). A ceasefire agreed on 7 April 2026 was progressively extended, with major hostilities concluding by early May 2026 (Britannica, 2026), though the analysis presented in this article draws on evidence published through August 2026, reflecting the continuation of proxy activity, revenge-motivated plotting and information operations well beyond the formal end of hostilities. This distinct, state-to-state and considerably more destructive conflict, described in subsequent policy analysis as a turning point that fundamentally altered the strategic landscape of the Middle East (SpecialEurasia, 2025), is treated in this article as analytically separate from, if closely entangled with, the Gaza war: whereas the Gaza conflict is characterized primarily by an asymmetric confrontation between a state and a non-state armed group and by mass civilian displacement, the Iran war generated an interstate confrontation involving the direct killing of a head of state, large-scale interstate missile exchange, and disruption to global energy markets, with correspondingly distinct radicalization pathways discussed further in Sections 5 and 6. The cumulative effect of these two conflicts has been to sustain a heightened, multi-actor conflict environment across the Middle East, while simultaneously generating a polarizing information environment in Western states in which the conflicts are invoked, from opposing directions, both by transnational jihadist propagandists and by anti-Muslim and far-right actors (Recorded Future, 2026).

FINDINGS

Mapping Radicalization Risk onto the Funnel Model

This section presents the thematic findings of the synthesis, organized according to the eight phases of the adapted funnel model. A summary is presented in Table 1.

Pre-radicalization and structural grievance

Consistent with the grievance-based logic of existing phase models (Moghaddam, 2005; Borum, 2011), the scale of civilian death, displacement and infrastructural destruction in Gaza constitutes a potent structural grievance that open-source threat assessments explicitly identify as fuel for extremist narratives across ideological currents. The Norwegian Intelligence Service's 2025 threat assessment, for example, identifies the Gaza conflict's polarizing effect and its capacity to fuel anti-Western sentiment as a structural condition exploited by both the Islamic State and al-Qaeda for recruitment purposes (Etterretningstjenesten, 2025).

Precipitating and triggering events

Phase models of radicalization typically identify a triggering or precipitating event that converts latent grievance into active mobilization (Wiktorowicz, 2005; Silke, 2008). The 7 October 2023 attack, the subsequent Gaza campaign and the February-2026 Israel-Iran war, and in particular the killing of Khamenei in its opening hours, each function as such triggering events at a mass scale, generating sudden and widely shared moral shocks that threat assessments link to subsequent surges in radicalization activity across ideological spectra, including within domestic extremist milieus in Western states not directly party to the conflict (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2026).

Cognitive opening and identity-based framing

Consistent with Wiktorowicz's (2005) concept of cognitive opening and Kruglanski et al.'s (2014) significance quest theory, the conflict has generated competing identity-based master narratives. Policy analysis has cautioned that the visibility of civilian destruction in Gaza has in parts of global public opinion. Contributed to a perception of the conflict as a broader confrontation between the West and Islam, a framing that transnational jihadist propaganda has actively sought to reinforce, while reciprocal narratives framing the conflict in existential civilizational terms have been observed within far-right and anti-Muslim milieus in Western states (Recorded Future, 2026).

Propaganda and online mobilization

Consistent with the centrality of framing and socialization processes in existing models (Wiktorowicz, 2005; Sageman, 2008), open-source threat reporting documents the deliberate exploitation of Gaza-related imagery and narratives in Islamic State and al-Qaeda propaganda output, alongside efforts to translate regional developments into recruitment messaging targeted at new, often online-radicalized, audiences (Etterretningstjenesten, 2025; Recorded Future, 2026).

Group embeddedness and network dynamics

Group involvement and social network embeddedness constitute a well-established phase in processual models (Sageman, 2004; De Coensel, 2018). In the present conflict configuration, this phase manifests in the continued financing and rearmament of Hezbollah notwithstanding substantial 2024 losses. In the Islamic State's exploitation of governance gaps in the Syrian Badia region following the collapse of the Assad regime, and in diaspora and homegrown network dynamics linking regional escalation to radicalization trajectories in Western states (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2026; SpecialEurasia, 2025).

Ideological hardening and justification of violence

The justification of violence, typically the final cognitive threshold in phase models prior to implementation (Moghaddam, 2005; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017), is evident in revenge-oriented narratives associated with the killing of Khamenei and other senior Iranian officials in February 2026. Threat analysis has documented Iranian and Iran-aligned messaging invoking the Twelver Shi'a doctrine of sacred vengeance to frame retaliation as a religious obligation, and has linked this narrative to subsequent threats against senior Israeli, Iranian-opposition and U.S. political figures (Botobekov, 2026).

Implementation

The implementation phase, corresponding to attack planning and execution (De Coensel, 2018), is illustrated in post-2025 threat reporting by self-radicalized, lone-actor and small-cell attacks in Western states explicitly linked in official assessments to the broader Iran war and its second-order narrative effects, alongside sustained conventional and proxy military operations within the region itself (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2026).

Post-implementation and second-order risk

Finally, the post-implementation phase, concerned with the aftermath of violent engagement, including detention, disengagement and reintegration (De Coensel, 2018), is illustrated by comparative analysis of the risks associated with humanitarian and displacement camps in post-war Gaza. Drawing explicit parallels with the radicalization risks documented in post-Islamic State internment camps in Syria, this literature highlights the danger that unresolved grievance, statelessness, weak rehabilitation provision and prolonged displacement may themselves function as a further structural driver of radicalization, closing the funnel back upon itself in a self-reinforcing cycle (ICCT, 2025).

A reciprocal, cross-ideological dynamic

A theme that recurs across the sources reviewed, but that is not adequately captured by any single-ideology processual model, is the reciprocal or cumulative character of the radicalization dynamic generated by the Gaza and Iran conflicts. This reading is consistent with the concept of cumulative extremism, understood as a process whereby the activity of one extremist movement serves to reinforce and legitimize the activity of an ideologically opposed movement (Eatwell, 2006), although Eatwell's original formulation was developed to describe reciprocal radicalization between Islamist and far-right movements within a single Western national context, and its extension here to a transnational, three-way dynamic spanning jihadist, Iran-aligned and far-right currents is an interpretive extension rather than a directly tested application. The sources reviewed offer illustrative, incident-level support for such a dynamic rather than systematic verification: within a matter of weeks of the February-2026 war, open-source reporting documented a jihadist-claimed attack on a Hanukkah gathering in Bondi Beach, Australia; a series of synagogue shootings and an attack on a U.S. diplomatic facility in the Toronto area; an antisemitic arson attack in Antwerp, Belgium, claimed by a self-styled jihadist group; and Iran-linked or Iran-inspired attacks on a bar in Austin, Texas, and a synagogue in Michigan, alongside explicit far-right and anti-Muslim framing of the conflict in Western online spaces (Botobekov, 2026; Institute for Economics and Peace, 2026; Recorded Future, 2026). Taken together, these incidents suggest a mutually reinforcing dynamic between transnational jihadist mobilization, Iran-aligned militancy, and anti-Muslim, antisemitic and far-right extremism in Western states, each potentially drawing legitimizing material from the visible actions and rhetoric of the others. This should, however, be read as a hypothesis generated by the synthesis rather than as an established finding: the sources reviewed here provide neither systematic hate-crime statistics nor a temporal sequence analysis capable of establishing that attacks or hostility attributed to one ideological current actually increased in frequency following, and because of, events attributed to an opposing current, and the possibility that these episodes reflect independent, conflict-triggered radicalization along parallel rather than genuinely interacting tracks cannot be excluded on the present evidence. Section 8 identifies quantitative, event-sequence testing of this hypothesis as a priority for future research.

Toward an Integrated Meta-Framework

Table 1 summarizes the mapping of the reviewed evidence onto the adapted eight-phase funnel model.

Phase (adapted from De Coensel, 2018)	Manifestation in the Gaza/Iran conflict nexus	Illustrative indicators / open-source evidence
1. Pre-radicalization / structural context	Chronic occupation- and blockade-related grievances; mass civilian casualties and infrastructural destruction in Gaza; perceived Western double standards.	Approximately 92% of Gaza housing stock and over half of hospitals reported damaged or destroyed; widespread displacement.
2. Triggering / precipitating events	The 7 October 2023 attack and subsequent Gaza offensive; the February-2026 Israel-U.S.-Iran war (Operations Epic Fury/Roaring Lion); killing of Khamenei and strikes on senior Iranian and proxy figures.	Sudden escalation from interstate deterrence to open kinetic conflict; contested casualty narratives amplified across media platforms.
3. Cognitive opening / identity framing	Competing master narratives — a 'war on Islam' frame exploited by jihadist actors, and an 'existential war' frame invoked by Iran-aligned and, reciprocally, by far-right and anti-Muslim actors in the West.	Sharp shifts in public opinion; documented rise in both Islamophobic and antisemitic hate-crime reporting in Western states.
4. Propaganda and online mobilization	Islamic State and al-Qaeda propaganda foregrounding Gaza imagery; Iran-aligned information operations; reciprocal far-right online mobilization.	Threat assessments note deliberate exploitation of Gaza-related imagery for recruitment framing by transnational jihadist organizations.
5. Group embeddedness / networks	Continued financing and rearmament of Hezbollah despite heavy 2024 losses; Islamic State's use of governance gaps in the Syrian Badia; diaspora and homegrown networks in Western states.	Reported continued large-scale Iranian financial transfers to Hezbollah; documented Islamic State operational bases exploiting post-Assad institutional fragility.
6. Ideological hardening / justification	Framing of violence as defensive, retaliatory or religiously obligatory across multiple, mutually reinforcing ideological currents.	Revenge narratives associated with high-profile Iranian losses invoked to legitimize plots against Israeli and Western targets.
7. Implementation	Self-radicalized lone-actor and small-cell attacks in Western states; continued rocket, drone and proxy operations in the region.	Post-2025 attacks attributed in threat reporting to conflict-linked radicalization; sustained cross-border militia activity.
8. Post-implementation / second-order risk	Radicalization risk within displacement and detention settings in post-war Gaza; returnee and reintegration challenges; strain on de-radicalization infrastructure.	Comparative analysis with post-ISIS internment camps highlights risks of statelessness, unresolved grievance and weak rehabilitation provision.

The evidence reviewed in Section 5 suggests that De Coensel's (2018) original funnel model, while providing a robust integrative scaffold, requires two principal refinements in order to accommodate the specific conflict configuration examined here. First, the funnel should be understood as operating along multiple, parallel ideological tracks (transnational jihadist, Iran-aligned militant, and far-right/anti-minority) rather than a single, ideology-neutral pathway. Second, these parallel tracks should be understood as interacting through feedback loops rather than proceeding independently: propaganda, attacks and hostile rhetoric generated within one-track

function, per the logic of cumulative extremism (Eatwell, 2006), as precipitating or cognitive-opening material for radicalization within the other tracks. The resulting "dual-track, multi-directional" meta-framework retains the eight sequential phases identified by De Coensel (2018) as the vertical structure of each track, while adding a horizontal dimension of cross-track reinforcement. Three specific cross-track mechanisms are proposed, corresponding to the three points in the funnel at which the evidence in Section 5 most clearly documents interaction between tracks. An event-triggering mechanism operates at Phase 2, whereby a single precipitating event, such as the 7 October 2023 attack or the killing of Khamenei and other senior Iranian officials in February 2026, simultaneously initiates active mobilization on more than one ideological track. A framing-recycling mechanism operates at Phases 3 and 4, whereby propaganda and identity-based framing material generated within one track is invoked by antagonist tracks as confirmatory evidence for their own master narrative, for example where jihadist propaganda's "war on Islam" framing and reciprocal far-right "existential war" framing each cite the other's rhetoric and attacks as evidence of the threat they describe. A grievance-recycling mechanism operates at Phase 8, whereby unresolved grievance among displaced, detained or bereaved populations on one track feeds back into the structural grievance conditions of Phase 1, both for that track and, where such grievance is publicized, for the framing material available to opposing tracks. Figure 1 represents this structure schematically, showing the three ideological tracks as parallel eight-phase funnels connected by the three cross-track mechanisms described above. As Section 5.9 makes clear, the empirical evidence for these mechanisms remains illustrative rather than systematically verified, and the meta-framework is accordingly presented as a conceptual proposal to guide future empirical testing rather than as a demonstrated model.

Figure 1. The dual-track, multi-directional meta-framework of radicalization

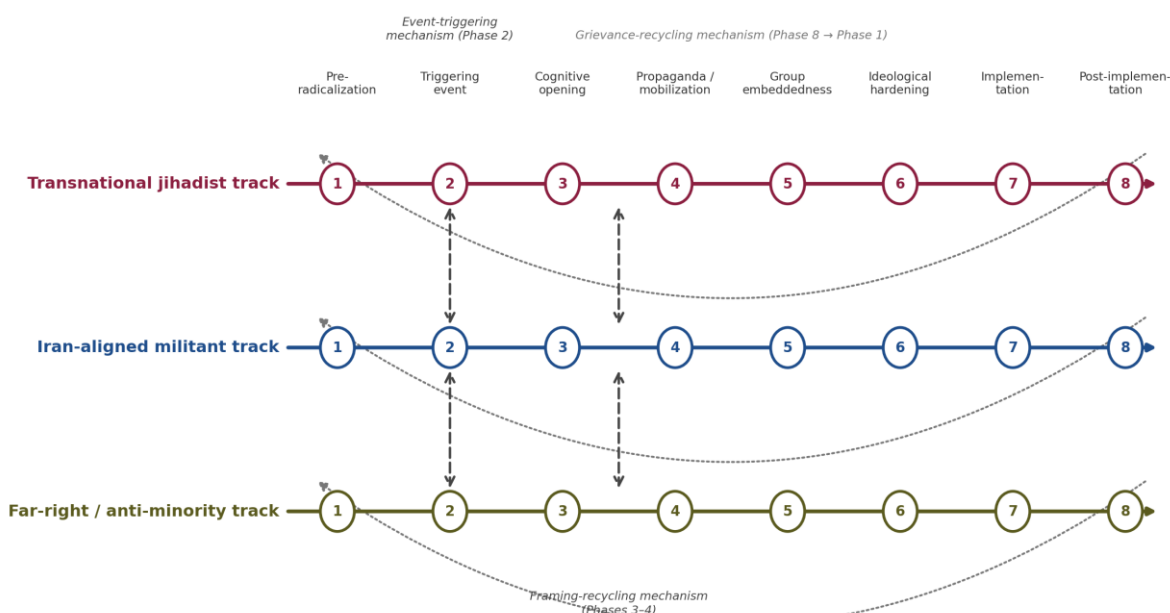


Figure 1. The dual-track, multi-directional meta-framework of radicalization (adapted from De Coensel, 2018). Solid arrows: the eight-phase funnel within each ideological track. Dashed arrows: proposed cross-track mechanisms.

Note. Solid lines represent the eight-phase funnel within each ideological track (adapted from De Coensel, 2018); dashed lines represent the three cross-track mechanisms proposed in Section 6. The framework is a conceptual proposal, not an empirically validated model (see Sections 5.9 and 8).

DISCUSSION

Implications for Counter-Terrorism and P/CVE Policy

The findings carry several implications for counter-terrorism and prevention/countering violent extremism (P/CVE) policy. First, the cross-ideological character of the radicalization dynamic identified here suggests that policy responses framed narrowly around a single ideological threat, whether jihadist or far-right, risk overlooking the reinforcing relationship between them; conflict-sensitive P/CVE strategies should therefore explicitly monitor and address reciprocal dynamics rather than treating each ideological current in isolation. Second, the prominence of propaganda exploiting conflict imagery underscores the continued importance of

strategic communication and platform-level content moderation as complements to more traditional security measures, while also cautioning against counter-narratives that themselves reinforce civilizational framings. Third, the identification of humanitarian and displacement settings as a potential site of post-implementation radicalization risk (Section 5.8) points to the security relevance of humanitarian reconstruction, rehabilitation programming and the resolution of statelessness in post-war Gaza, and suggests that reconstruction assistance should be understood, in part, as a counter-radicalization investment rather than a purely humanitarian one. Finally, the securitized profiling risks associated with treating entire displaced or diaspora populations as suspect communities should be explicitly guarded against, given the well-documented risk. That indiscriminate, or discriminatory counter-terrorism measures themselves generate further grievance, and thereby feed back into Phase 1 of the funnel model.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study is subject to several limitations. First, sources were identified through a purposive, narrative search rather than a PRISMA-style systematic review with pre-registered search strings and documented inclusion and exclusion counts (Section 3); a fully documented, PRISMA-informed systematic search, ideally combined with primary or case-level data specific to the researcher's own institutional and national context, would strengthen any subsequent replication or extension of this synthesis. Second, the synthesis relies exclusively on secondary, open-source intelligence assessments, policy reports and academic literature, rather than on primary data such as interview material, court records or verified attack datasets, and treats institutional threat assessments as assessments rather than as independently verified findings (Section 3); the qualitative, illustrative evidence cited throughout Section 5 should accordingly be read as indicative of documented themes rather than as a statistically representative account of radicalization prevalence. Third, the conflict environment examined remains dynamic and, in the case of the Iran war's secondary effects, unresolved at the time of writing, meaning that the evidentiary base will continue to evolve; the funnel mapping presented here should be treated as a provisional synthesis to be revisited as further evidence, including judicial and prosecutorial data of the kind analyzed in De Coensel's (2025) content analysis of Belgian court rulings, becomes available. Fourth, the open-source literature reviewed is disproportionately produced by Western intelligence services, think tanks and media, introducing a potential bias in the framing and selection of evidence; future research would benefit from the systematic inclusion of Arabic-, Hebrew- and Persian-language sources and regional research institutions. Fifth, and most importantly for the central claim advanced in Sections 5.9 and 6, the reciprocal, cross-ideological dynamic proposed here rests on illustrative, incident-level evidence rather than on systematic hate-crime statistics or temporal-sequence analysis, and should be treated as a hypothesis rather than a demonstrated finding; future empirical research should accordingly pursue case-level analysis of specific plots, prosecutions and foreign fighter or returnee trajectories linked to the Gaza and Iran conflicts, and should test the reciprocal, cross-ideological dynamic proposed in Section 6 through quantitative event-sequence analysis of hate-crime and attack data or through social network analysis.

CONCLUSION

This article has applied a best-fit framework synthesis, adapted from De Coensel's (2018) integrative meta-framework of processual radicalization models, to the open-source and academic literature, read as a set of institutional assessments rather than settled findings, addressing radicalization and terrorism risk in the aftermath of the Gaza (2023) conflict and the Israel-U.S.-Iran war of February-May 2026. The synthesis indicates that the structural, precipitating, cognitive, network-related, ideological and post-conflict dimensions of these conflicts map coherently onto the established eight-phase funnel structure. It further suggests, through illustrative incident-level evidence rather than through systematic verification, a hypothesized reciprocal, cross-ideological dynamic linking transnational jihadist mobilization, Iran-aligned militancy and reactive far-right and anti-minority extremism, one that existing single-ideology models are not well equipped to capture but that the present synthesis has not tested against hate-crime statistics or temporal-sequence data. The resulting dual-track, multi-directional meta-framework should accordingly be read as a conceptual proposal for future empirical research, including the quantitative testing outlined in Section 8, and as a starting point, rather than a finished blueprint, for the design of conflict-sensitive counter-terrorism and P/CVE policy capable of addressing this evolving and interconnected threat landscape.

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Author contribution: As sole author, Fawaz Bil'as Khamees is responsible for the conceptualization, methodology, literature synthesis, writing (original draft), and writing (review and editing) of this article.

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