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Hamas Isn't the First to Use Anticolonialism to Mask Authoritarianism

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As the Israel-Hamas War drags on into its fourth month, many on the left in the U.S. and Europe have inveighed against the Israeli military offensive. That position in some cases overlaps with acceptance of Hamas' framing of its campaign of violence as an anticolonial liberation struggle waged against what Hamas itself calls the "racist, anti-human and colonial Zionist project." Accepting this claim enables champions of the Palestinian cause and opponents of Israel, who otherwise would have abhorred Hamas's violent tactics and tyrannical rule of the Gazan people, to turn a blind eye.

This dynamic mimics the tactics that Japan's authoritarian regime deployed to devastating effect during WWII—a historical parallel that reveals the potential harm inflicted by an authoritarian regime cloaking its actions under the guise of a liberation struggle. But this history also provides reason for hope: the recovery and success of Japan's post-war regime underscore the transformative possibilities that can emerge with a leadership change that ushers to power those committed to prosperity over martyrdom.