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Why Progressives Love the New Cold War

By Justin Raimondo
October 23, 2016

The Clinton campaign’s full-scale effort to turn this election into a referendum on Vladimir Putin is causing liberals like Katrina vanden Heuvel, editor of *The Nation*, and Glenn Greenwald, the energizing force behind *The Intercept*, much heartburn. Here is Ms. van den Heuvel wondering what the heck is going on:

“How does new Cold War – which ends space for dissent, hurts women & children, may lead to nuclear war – help what Clinton claims she is for?”

According to both vanden Heuvel and Greenwald, the Clintonian assault on Russia – the crude, J. Edgar-Hooverish smear campaign conducted against WikiLeaks, Julian Assange, and especially Donald Trump – is an opportunistic deviation from “true” progressive values. It’s a corruption of American liberalism that has nothing to do with ideology and everything to do with winning the election. As Greenwald puts it, in answer to vanden Heuvel’s question:

“Exploiting Cold War rhetoric & tactics has helped her win the election. I guess the idea is: deal with the aftermath and fallout later.”

Yet this evades what Mrs. Clinton and her supporters have clearly stated about the alleged immediacy and seriousness of the “threat” represented by Russia under Putin.

Clinton has likened Putin to Hitler – and hasn't that always been the prologue to a regime change operation by the United States? Remember that Saddam Hussein was supposed to be the Iraqi incarnation of Hitler. Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic was also another "Hitler." If we go back far enough, we can recall how George Herbert Walker Bush said that Manuel Noriega was "worse than Hitler."

The ideological underpinning of this nonsense is part and parcel of the American liberal canon, which valorizes World War II as the "good war" – a heroic struggle against fascism by the forces of progressivism and Goodness – which was only opposed by anti-Semitic cretins and Hitler apologists (a.k.a. "isolationist" conservatives). And it goes deeper than that, for progressivism is an ideology that seeks universal moral "uplift" – not only on the home front, but on a global scale.

Woodrow Wilson's argument for getting us into World War I – arguably the most futile and unjustifiable conflict ever to be engaged in by the United States – was that it was a "war to end all wars," a struggle to bring the benefits of democracy and national self-determination to the long-suffering peoples of the world. And this was echoed by the collectivist intellectuals who provided the amen corner for Wilson's war. One such cheerleader was the philosopher John Dewey, who hailed the war as the beginning of the end of laissez-faire because "private property had already lost its sanctity" and "industrial democracy is on the way." The revered avatar of American liberalism, Walter Lippmann, in a speech uttered as America was entering the war, enthused:

"We who have gone to war to insure democracy in the world will have raised an aspiration here that will not end with the overthrow of the Prussian autocracy. We shall turn with fresh interests to our own tyrannies — to our Colorado mines, our autocratic steel industries, sweatshops, and our slums. A force is loose in America. Our own reactionaries will not assuage it. We shall know how to deal with them."

Tied in to the campaign for progressive "reform" was a religious factor: the postmillennial pietist movement that swept the country in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Stamping out "sin" and stamping out the alleged evils of capitalism were sentiments inextricably intertwined: thus we saw the advent of the "Social Gospel." The Prohibitionist movement was a key source of the early progressive movement. Yet as the educated classes – the political class – shed the remnants of religious belief, their determination to stamp out "sin" was hardly extinguished: it just took on new, secularized forms.

The modern definition of "vice" was shifted to conform to the new religion of political correctness: instead of drunkenness, prostitution, and other avenues of self-gratification, the new vices have been redefined as "racism," "homophobia," "xenophobia," and all the rest of the "phobias" and "isms" denounced by Hillary Clinton in her infamous "basket of deplorables" speech. Indeed, her condemnation of Trump supporters as "irredeemable" is couched in the very language used by the old-time religionists who saw their political and social enemies as instruments of Satan headed straight for the lowest rungs of Hell.

And this messianic impulse to cleanse humanity of “sin” wasn’t limited to a single country, the United States: if the human race was going to be made ready for the Second Coming it first – according to the postmillennial pietists – had to undergo the reign of virtue for a thousand years. The Kingdom of God on earth – the *entire* earth – had to be established: then and only then would the redeemed be saved and ushered into Eternity, whilst the “irredeemables” would burn in hellfire forevermore.

Russia has long been in the crosshairs of the PC set: “homophobia,” “racism,” “nationalism,” i.e. all the “sins” as defined by the paladins of modernity are attributed to the Russian bear. Indeed, this longstanding liberal meme was formalized by Hillary Clinton in her infamous “alt right” speech, in which, after smearing Trump as the avatar of a neo-Nazi revival, she opined:

“The godfather of this global brand of extreme nationalism is Russian President Vladimir Putin. In fact,[UKIP leader and Brexit advocate Nigel] Farage has appeared regularly on Russian propaganda programs. Now he’s standing on the same stage as the Republican nominee.

“Trump himself heaps praise on Putin and embrace pro-Russian policies.

“He talks casually of abandoning our NATO allies, recognizing Russia’s annexation of Crimea, and of giving the Kremlin a free hand in Eastern Europe more generally.

“American presidents from Truman to Reagan have rejected the kind of approach Trump is taking on Russia. We should, too.

“All of this adds up to something we’ve never seen before. Of course there’s always been a paranoid fringe in our politics, steeped in racial resentment. But it’s never had the nominee of a major party stoking it, encouraging it, and giving it a national megaphone. Until now.”

Clinton’s speech outlines a unified field theory of messianic liberalism in the twenty-first century: the forces of homophobia-racism-xenophobia are broadly defined as “nationalism,” which is, in the liberal lexicon, a synonym for Evil. According to the Clintonian theology, the epicenter of this Vast Right-Wing Conspiracy is located in the Kremlin. Putin is Satan with a sword. It’s all very neatly packaged and readily marketable to the liberal college professors, the single women with half a dozen cats, the editorial page editors, and the clueless millennials who can barely read and write but know for a fact that the Founding Fathers were evil racists.

Identity politics have long since trumped – if you’ll pardon the expression – the traditional liberal pieties of opposition to unnecessary wars and mindless militarism. The smug self-righteousness of “humanitarian interventionism” having displaced “We ain’t gonna study war no more,” there are no effective obstacles to Hillary Clinton’s war plans within the precincts of American liberalism. And she has history – the history of progressivism as secularized moral uplift – on her side.

So let us answer Ms. vanden Heuvel’s question: “How does [a] new Cold War – which ends space for dissent, hurts women & children, may lead to nuclear war – help what Clinton claims she is for?”

To begin with, it enables the ongoing legislative tradeoff that has sustained the Welfare-Warfare State for the entirety of its existence. It's a classic case of what we call log-rolling, or "you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours." In return for not putting up much of a fight over the liberal demand for more "social spending," conservatives get the vast expansion of the military that is their stock-in-trade – military spending which, after all, is "needed" in order to "stand up to Vladimir Putin."

As for the women-and-children angle: what about the poor women and children of Ukraine, who are supposedly about to be rolled over by Russian tanks? We can't have any of this "America First" nationalism pushed by the likes of Trump – our concern for women and children has to be *global*.

And what's this about "space for dissent"? Has Katrina vanden Heuvel been on a college campus lately? And you'll remember the last time a great progressive leader led America into a world war – that was Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who demanded that his Attorney General initiate a sedition trial against war opponents and who signed an executive order putting hundreds of thousands of Japanese-Americans (and Italians) into concentration camps.

"Space for dissent"? Don't make me laugh!

Rather than confront the ideological canons of what passes for American liberalism today, both Karina vanden Heuvel and Glenn Greenwald stand in agonized awe of the dawning of the new cold war that could quickly turn hot. What, they ask, is going on? To which one can only reply: *Brother, you asked for it!*