

The Attempt to Hoodwink the U.S. Into a Cold War With Russia

For years conservative movement figures have [engaged in “value talk,”](#) a rhetorical means of winning acceptance for pet causes that often have little to do with conservatism or traditional morality. Such value talk has often been used as a way of prodding Washington into foreign entanglements.

Leon Aron’s recent article for *The Dispatch*, “Welcome to the new Cold War” is a case in point. An “incompatibility of values” between the Biden administration and Russian President Vladimir Putin’s regime has transformed Russia into a greater security threat to the United States than was the former Soviet Union, Aron writes. Aron, a Senior Fellow at the center-right think tank American Enterprise Institute, does not mince words. “The ideology of the Putin regime,” the subheadline of his piece reads, “is hardly less toxic and is perhaps more incendiary than communist totalitarianism.”

This version of anti-Russian saber-rattling might have made a bit of sense during tense moments in the real Cold War, such as in the harsh exchanges between Washington and Moscow over the Soviet downing of [Korean Air Lines Flight 007](#) in 1983. But in 2021, Aron’s analysis of U.S.-Russian relations has all the signs of an establishment conservative’s clumsy attempt to build bridges with the Biden administration and the globalist left.

These signs are seen throughout Aron’s article. While Cold War conservatives talked about a missile gap between the Soviet Union and the United States, Aron, by contrast, refers to “the normative gap between the liberal democracies and the system that Putin assiduously forged.”

Aron also maintains that Putin is not to be trusted. His sinister talent lies in his “ability to bend to his will millions of his compatriots.” Foremost among Putin’s crimes, according to Aron, is his success at convincing millions of Russians that “Russia’s national identity” is based on her military victories, notably in World War II. Putin’s “militarized patriotism in peacetime,” in other words, stands in stark contrast to America’s “democratic” values.

While Aron is quite specific about Putin’s supposed values, his vagueness about America’s democratic values is curious, to say the least. Do American values include gay marriage? Transgenderism? Black Lives Matter? Who knows? The ambiguity surrounding Aron’s definition of American “values” suggests a familiar ploy on the part of movement conservatives: hiding bellicose foreign policy objectives behind rhetoric about American obligations to defend what Aron calls the “Democratic West.”

Recent events give us a clue as to Aron’s intentions. He surely knows that at least since 2016, America’s elites in the mainstream media, intelligence agencies, entertainment industries, and universities have been chattering about Putin’s alleged meddling in U.S. national politics, his clampdown on dissent, and his aggressive foreign policy in places like Ukraine and Syria. In 2019, Hillary Clinton seriously claimed that Putin was “[grooming](#)” fellow Democrat Tulsi Gabbard for a third-party run for the presidency. Joe Biden called Putin “[a killer](#)” last March, which is only marginally worse than Aron’s description of Putin as “a diminutive hooligan from the slums of post-war Leningrad.”

It’s not just the Biden Democrats who find themselves in a stand-off with Putin. Russia’s Foreign Ministry announced in April 2021 that it would “bring to an end” the activities of U.S.-funded foundations and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) within Russia. One month later, [Russia declared New York’s Bard College](#) an “undesirable” organization “threatening

Russia's constitutional order and security." Russia's step means Bard must cease all activities in Russia, notably its relationship with St. Petersburg State University.

Bard College President Leon Botstein [said he was](#) "heartbroken" about what he called a "blacklisting." But recent events suggest that Botstein, who sits with George Soros on the [Open Society Foundations Global Board of advisors](#), could hardly be surprised by Russia's decision. Soros, the billionaire international financier and founder of Open Society Foundations—[banned in Russia in 2015](#) as an "undesirable" NGO—has been a generous Bard donor for some time. Indeed, shortly before Russia's banning of Bard, the college announced it had received a Soros [endowment pledge of \\$500 million](#).

From the standpoint of 2021, then, Aron's thesis that America and Russia are in a new cold war pitting democracy against the militarist Putin is sure to find receptive ears not just in the Biden White House, but also among the globalist, Soros-funded forces that view the Russian president as a dire threat to the Western left's definition of democratic governance and human rights.

Last but not least, Aron's charge that Putinism is "perhaps more incendiary than communist totalitarianism" is strange coming from someone touted to be an expert [on all things Russian](#). Few would deny that Putin's regime resembles a "corrupt autocracy founded on propaganda, political manipulation, and repression." Or that Putin pursues geopolitical objectives in eastern Europe, Central Asia, the Middle East, and the Far East. So what else is new in Russian history? These were prominent features of the Czarist era Russian rulers as well.

No scholar would deny that corruption, political manipulation, and repression were hallmark features of Soviet communism. Thus it is hard to take Aron seriously when he asserts that Putin's propaganda is more toxic than the Soviet version,

which used to highlight the inevitability of communism's triumph. Aron seems to have forgotten that countless fellow-travelers and secret communists once propagandized Soviet doctrines on American soil during the Cold War.

Aron's rhetoric about a "new Cold War" with Russia may seduce some in the conservative movement, but they shouldn't fall for it. Aron likely has a different audience in mind, one that includes Joe Biden's National Security Council, the likes of Elizabeth Warren and Nancy Pelosi, and the host of NGOs which seek to operate on Russian soil in the name of "human rights." And Aron's target audience certainly doesn't include Trump voters.

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