

So, from the beginning, from 1990-91 at the end of the Cold War, we began to do a lot of mistakes, and step-by-step, year-by-year, we have been digging and digging the number of mistakes—by “us,” I mean the French, the Europeans, and Americans have been doing regarding Russia. It’s a pity, because as a former intelligence officer of the Cold War, I don’t have any love or hate about Russia, but I have to confess that a lot

of mistakes we’ve been doing is the real reason of the war we are living today.

Speed: Thank you. And thank you very much for joining us today. We understand you have a limited amount of time, but you handled the question as well as you could have, and we thank you for your remarks.

Ray McGovern

Why Not a Win-Win Situation?

This is an edited transcript of Ray McGovern’s address to the May 26, 2022 Schiller Institute Conference, “U.S. and Military Experts Warn: The Insanity of Politicians Threatens Thermonuclear War.” Mr. McGovern is a retired analyst for the Central Intelligence Agency and a founding member of the Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS). The video of the entire conference is available [here](#).



Schiller Institute

Ray McGovern

I’m going to start on a different note, keeping in tune with the French aspect of this. I’m going to quote from World War II French war hero Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, who wrote this little novella, *Le Petit Prince*, (*The Little Prince*). I don’t want to misquote him, so I’m going to read the meaning of what he said, how he presented it. He said:

The main theme of *The Little Prince* is the importance of looking beneath the surface to find the real truth and the real meaning of a thing. It is the fox who teaches the prince to see with one’s heart instead of just with one’s eyes.

“Unfortunately,” says the author, “most adults have trouble doing this.”

Well, we’ll talk a little bit about insanity here, right? Colonel Black asked, “Have we all gone mad?” A very legitimate question given the nuclear aspect of all this stuff. Let me just address that very briefly, by saying that Colonel Black was one of the main signers—one of

21—who signed our Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity [memorandum](#) to President Biden on May 1st.

What we said was mirrored just one week later by the head of the CIA and by the National Intelligence Director before the Senate Armed Services Committee. Avril Haines, the Director of National Intelligence, said to Senator Warner from Virginia. She said, now, “Senator, we don’t want nuclear war. We think that one of the main things that might prompt nuclear war is if Putin feels that he is about to be defeated in Ukraine.”

Now, she’s an intelligence director; she doesn’t make the policy, but the policy clearly should be, “Hello! Let’s not make Putin perceive that he’s going to be defeated in Ukraine. Otherwise, he may use nuclear weapons.” But the policy is different, isn’t it? Nancy Pelosi took Chuck Schumer and many other politicians [to Ukraine] asserting that we want total victory; we want total defeat for Putin. Doesn’t make any sense; the author is right in saying that adults really have difficulty understanding what this all means beneath the surface.

I keep asking myself, “Why it is that President Biden felt it necessary about six weeks after he took office to address the Chinese challenge?” What he said was something equivalent to “China’s trying to become the most powerful country in the world economically and militarily. That’s not going to happen on my watch.” Why not? Are the Chinese aggressively oriented? Not if you know anything about Chinese civilization for the last several millennia. Do they have a lot of work to do

right in their own country? They sure do, and they're doing it well. So, the Chinese have this bizarre concept that you can have a win-win situation, like both sides, like we used to say, "Can't we just get along?"

The Sin of Exceptionalism

Well, there's a long story behind that, of course. We need an enemy if we want to feed the defense contractors and have them feed our politicians and have them appropriate more money—you know that story. In any case, if you look deeper, if you look under the surface, why not? Why not a win-win situation?

Now, Vladimir Putin put it a little differently. Some of you may remember, because it was just nine years ago, that we were on the verge of war against Syria—open war. Tomahawk missiles and that kind of thing. Who bailed Obama out? Well, the fellow's name happened to be Vladimir Putin. What did he say? He said, [in essence] "We know you guys are accusing President Bashar al-Assad of Syria of launching a chemical attack outside Damascus. We don't think that's right, we think you've been mouse-trapped. But nevertheless, we've done a deal with the Syrians. We've agreed with them to load up all their chemical weapons under UN supervision and have them destroyed, if you'll allow it, on one of your warships, specifically outfitted to destroy chemical weapons." Obama said, "Really?" Because [Secretary of State John] Kerry didn't tell him about that. But they were working on it. The reason I mention that is because that was the zenith; that was the high point of relations between the United States of America and Russia over recent decades.

What happened? Putin wrote a—my God! Did he actually write? Yeah, he actually wrote an op-ed in the *New York Times*. The date was 12 September, 2013, print edition. What did he say? He addressed this win-win, he addressed this "Why can't we get along?" Because he saw what was coming because of what Obama had just said in a major speech. Here's Putin [writing](#) in the *New York Times*:

We can avoid force against Syria, and this will improve the atmosphere in international affairs and strengthen mutual trust. ...

My working and personal relationship with President Obama is marked by growing trust. I appreciate this. I would rather disagree with a case he made on American exceptionalism, stating that United States' policy is "what makes

America different. It makes us exceptional." It is extremely dangerous to encourage people to see themselves as exceptional, whatever the motivation. There are big countries and small countries, rich and poor, those with long democratic traditions and those still finding their way to democracy. Their policies differ, too. We are all different, but when we ask for the Lord's blessings, we must not forget that God created us equal.

God created us equal. Does that ring any bells? In other words, what Putin is saying is: Look, you Mr. President, brag about being exceptional. You need to know, even in this very conciliatory, hopeful op-ed, *I don't agree. I think all nations are the same*, in terms of whether they're exceptional or not, and you should know that right off the bat.

Now, one little token of that comes to mind. That is, it's *de rigueur* after every speech to say, "God bless the United States of America." That's interesting, isn't it? There's nothing in Judeo-Christian biblical literature that allows anyone, even the President of the United States to use the imperative voice with God. "God, you bless the United States of America. The rest of the people, well, that's at your discretion, but you bless, hear it God, bless the United States." It's a little symptom of what we're up against.

'The Greatest Rule Is Love'

There is another way. I don't know if many of our viewers here knew Kurt Vonnegut, the novelist, but he was the supreme humanist, agnostic. And yet, he was very clear in pointing to a different way of doing things. You should know that Kurt Vonnegut was in the 106th Infantry Division during the Battle of the Bulge, was captured by the Germans, taken to Dresden, just before all those incendiary bombings that took place by the U.S. Air Force and Britain. And he hid out in a meat locker during those bombings with the other POWs, and when they could come out into the open, the task fell to them to disinter all the bodies, copious corpses, and then re-inter them if they could find a piece of grass beneath the rubble.

Why do I say all this? I say all this because Vonnegut knew humanity at its worst. He knew; he was there; he watched people do those kinds of things to other people. Years later, someone asked Vonnegut—and once again I would emphasize that he was a humanist, so that means an agnostic. He was asked, "Kurt, what

do you think of Jesus of Nazareth?” Again, I don’t want to misquote him, this is what he said:

I say of Jesus, as all humanists do, if what he said is good and so much of it is absolutely beautiful, what does it matter if he was God or not? If Jesus hadn’t delivered the Sermon on the Mount, with its message of mercy and pity, I wouldn’t want to be a human being. I’d just as soon be a cockroach.

Kurt Vonnegut, “I’d just as soon be a cockroach.” Well, he referred to the Sermon on the Mount here, and I looked that up again just this morning. I’d like to just cite four of the eight so-called beatitudes and expatiate on why they might not apply to this situation, and how far away American exceptionalism is in relation to these beatitudes.

“Blessed are the meek.” Hmm. “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice.” Justice; wow! Justice means everybody is equal, right? No exceptions and no exceptionalism, if I read that right. “Blessed are the peacemakers.” Get this one; this is the last one. “Blessed are you when people insult you, slander you, persecute you.” Be glad about that! You’re in good company; that’s exactly what they did to the earlier prophets.

That’s easier said than done, but I think we need to do that. We need to keep doing that. There’s a typical American trait that I’ve run into where people are reluctant to do something that they might not be successful in. In other words, who wants to be laughed at? Who wants to go out and do something on principle and then have people say, “Ray, what did you think you were doing by turning your back on a war-monger political figure?” There’s this natural reluctance not to do things that our heart underneath the surface would prompt us to do.

One of my prophets is Daniel Berrigan, who would have been 101 just last month. What he said was, after we did that action outside of Baltimore burning draft cards, we were in the only Federal office building in this small little town. It was a post office, and we’re sitting around and I’m thinking to myself, “Whoa! This was a big action. Was it worth doing? Were we crazy? That’s what everyone will say. Are we just trying to grab attention? Was it worth doing?” And then says Daniel Berrigan, “It occurred to me, ‘Look, Dan, the

good is worth doing because it’s good.’ Results are not unimportant, but they’re secondary to the goodness of the act. You gotta go ahead and do it.” Dan Berrigan was not only a courageous person; he was a poet. And he also had a great sense of humor.

I cite this because in doing this work, are you going to be disappointed? You’re going to need to have a good sense of humor. Dan relates what happened next after he had come to this insight in this little, small post office. There were about eight of them there, and his brother Phil was in his cleric’s Roman collar and all. As Dan expresses it, he says, “Well, just then portentously, the door swings open, and in comes a paradigm of an FBI inspector. He looks around the room and sees my brother Phil and says, ‘Ah, you again! I’m going to change my religion!’” Dan writes, “No higher compliment could come to my brother Phil.” So, you got to keep a light sense here during these tough times.

And you’ve got to remember that when we talk about “rules-based order,” some sort of substitute for the UN or Westphalia for God’s sake, the rules-based order. Well, there’s one rule that’s more important than all the others: “The greatest of these is love.” Helga mentioned this. We need to all remember that deep down underneath, we need to understand these other people. We need to try in a gentle way, as gently as we can, to [get them to] disabuse themselves of the notion that they are exceptional, and that they can rule the rest of the world. It’s not going to happen anyway, but the sooner we all realize that, the better. I’m talking about we Americans, of course.

I’d like to close with two things, and that is, a little quote from Teilhard de Chardin: “The day will come when, after harnessing the winds, the tides, and gravity, we shall harness the energies of love. And on that day, for the second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire.” This comes from his book *Fire of Love*.

And in finishing, I just simply need to cite Friedrich Schiller under whose name this institute exists. Some of you will recognize the words, because Beethoven decided he would steal them as well. They are: “*Alle Menschen werden Brüder*” und *Schwestern*. All men are brothers and sisters. We can get through this. We just have to remember that. And remember that of all the rules-based orders: The greatest of these is love.

Thank you very much.