

# *Top Gun: Maverick*—War propaganda built to order for the United States military

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*Top Gun: Maverick*, the sequel to the *Top Gun* of 1986, is a repugnant, empty film commissioned by the United States military to revel wholeheartedly in its war machine. It is replete with bombastic action sequences, loving close-ups of fighter jets and other weaponry, empty bravado and little else.

The “blockbuster,” which stars Tom Cruise returning as Captain Pete “Maverick” Mitchell, picks up 36 years after the conclusion of the original film (directed by Tony Scott, produced by Jerry Bruckheimer and starring Cruise, Val Kilmer and Kelly McGillis) in which protagonist Mitchell becomes the star pilot of an elite military flight school (nicknamed “Top Gun”). He overcomes the loss of best friend/wingman “Goose” (played by Anthony Edwards) and excels in a bombing raid carried out against an unnamed enemy combatant.

In the sequel, directed by Joseph Kosinski and co-produced by Bruckheimer and Cruise, Mitchell has been demoted from a test flight program (in which the lead character pilots a hypersonic aircraft, donated for the scene courtesy of military contractor Lockheed Martin) to the role of instructor at the same Top Gun flight school from the first movie.

There, he must assemble a strike team of new recruits in order to carry out a dangerous mission against an enemy force secretly enriching uranium. Though not stated, it is hinted that the opponent is either Iran or Russia.

The new sequel has grossed hundreds of millions of dollars in ticket sales. Since its release on May 27 in the United States, *Top Gun: Maverick* has grossed more than \$292 million domestically and over \$557 million internationally as of this writing. “For the first time in his four-decade career, Tom Cruise, 59, has a movie that has a real shot at joining the billion-dollar club at the global box office,” crowes *Yahoo! Finance*.

Millions have turned out to see this film, perhaps drawn by the big name cast, the desire to be free of the ever-present COVID-19 pandemic in the first weeks of summer and increasingly unaffordable gas and food costs. The largely “apolitical” character of the movie’s conflict allows many to simply enjoy the high-G stunts of the pilots.

However, all of *Top Gun: Maverick*’s imagery is tailored to present sanitized and mythological images of war and combat. According to the *New Statesman*, Cruise was “initially reluctant” to participate in the picture until he was assured that the movie’s central theme was “about excellence” rather than a specific conflict.

“Similar to the original film,” the entertainment website *Indiewire* says, “‘Top Gun’ producers met with Pentagon military leaders ... the Pentagon had total veto power over the script in return for the production receiving access to advanced warfare weapons.”

According to *Fortune*, Paramount Pictures “paid as much as \$11,374 an hour to use the advanced fighter planes” while “Cruise ended up flying more than a dozen sorties for the new movie.” Glen Roberts, head of the Pentagon’s Entertainment Media Office, outlined the terms for Pentagon cooperation, telling the publication that a movie must “uphold the integrity of the military.”

“The Pentagon and CIA are equivalent to The Godfather,” states Roger Stahl, a professor of communications studies at the University of Georgia and director of documentaries on the subject, in comments cited by *Covert Action* magazine. According to the professor, “[t]hey, [the military and intelligence agencies] decide what films get made and what films get shelved, and buy off film-makers by promising them access to the Pentagon’s toys.

“From 1989 to 2018,” the publication continues, “the Pentagon’s Office on Entertainment ... worked closely with favored directors such as [*Top Gun* director/producer] Bruckheimer and Michael Bay, producer of *Transformers* (2007), and helped promote sci-fi films where superheroes saved civilization with military weapons in alliance with the U.S. military.”

Cruise himself acknowledged 30 years ago in an interview with *Playboy* that many criticized *Top Gun* as an “irresponsible ... right-wing film to promote the Navy.” Director Oliver Stone, in even harsher comments to the publication in 1988, said *Top Gun* “was essentially a fascist movie. It sold the idea that war is clean, war can be won ... nobody in the movie ever mentions that he just started World War Three!”

“The Navy certainly hopes it will get a public relations boost” from the movie, states the army website Task and Purpose. The website notes that “36 years after the U.S. Navy infamously set up recruitment booths at movie theaters as *Top Gun* screened, they’re back, in time for the sequel *Top Gun: Maverick*.” This time, however, “[i]nstead of Vietnam, the U.S. military is dealing with the legacy of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.”

The media has given the new movie rave reviews in the capitalist press from both the far right and the nominal “left.” The fascistic *Breitbart* called the film a “masculine, pro-American, stridently non-woke blockbuster.” *Vanity Fair* proclaims it to be “an exhilarating, beautifully produced military recruitment ad that favors neither Republican nor Democratic sensibilities. It manages to portray a conflict over nuclear weapons as downright fun!”

The *New York Times*’ review is absurd, proclaiming it “an earnest statement of the thesis that movies can and should be great.”

The *World Socialist Web Site* has written before about this sort of “‘embedded filmmaking’ of the most reprehensible and even sinister variety.” While the creators of such works may claim their film is “apolitical,” a definite political viewpoint is being presented which is favorable to US militarism, focusing instead on war “in the abstract.”

The reality of US militarism, however, is to be seen in the evidence of the systematic cover-up of civilian deaths in the overseas wars and occupations of the US. This emerges alongside the incidents of Post-Traumatic

Stress Disorder, injured and dead US troops, distraught and broken families, caused by troop participation in America’s foreign wars.

In the US Navy, an epidemic of suicide deaths aboard naval warships has revealed “unlivable” conditions, in which sailors stationed to live onboard “are semi-homeless,” forced to live near “bathrooms and hallways flooded with murky brown and black sewage water,” among other things.

The USS Theodore Roosevelt, the aircraft carrier from which Maverick’s team launched its air assaults, was at the center of a major COVID-19 outbreak in the military in 2020, when thousands of crew members tested positive, and several died while on active service.

This reality undermines the “integrity” of the US military as an institution, and so it must be forbidden from being seen. As the Biden administration continues to deepen the conflict with Russia in Eastern Europe while planning a simultaneous conflict with China, the US ruling class demands that the American public “rally around the troops,” with its spokespersons in the media and entertainment establishment dutifully playing their parts.



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