

# Sean Penn's *Superpower*: War propaganda

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American actor-director (and former anti-war activist) Sean Penn has been entirely swept up by the anti-Russian propaganda campaign of the US and NATO governments. He has become one of the most fervent and unhinged supporters of the fascist-infested Ukrainian regime of Volodymyr Zelensky. Penn is doing everything in his limited power to see that a third world war takes place.

His *Superpower*, ostensibly a documentary about the Ukraine-Russia war, will be available online September 18.

It premiered at this year's Berlin film festival, where a screening was attended by Germany's Culture Minister Claudia Roth (Green Party) and Oleksii Makeiev, Ukraine's ambassador in Germany, along with Penn himself.

Appropriately, Zelensky is credited as the "writer" of *Superpower*, a work of reactionary imperialist fiction.

Penn's film, which he co-directed with Aaron Kaufman, is unadulterated war propaganda. In between numerous scenes of the damage to life, limb and property inflicted on ordinary Ukrainian citizens resulting from Russia's reactionary bombardment of the country's cities and infrastructure, the film charts Penn's visits to Ukraine and discussions, cigarette in hand and vodka or whiskey bottle not far away, with leading right-wing Ukrainian, Polish and US statesmen. The film lives up to Trotsky's comment during World War I about "hacks of all political shades" putting out "as many lies as has been seen since the creation of the world."

A brief, potted résumé of Ukraine's history in the past 10 years in the film leaves out the role played by the US and leading Western powers in systematically encircling Russia with military equipment and missiles. Film footage recalls the Washington-backed Maidan protests of 2014, but fails to make any mention of the role played by the US and NATO in the fomenting of

"colour revolutions" in Eastern Europe. Instead, we hear members of the nationalist opposition in Kiev shouting the slogan popularised by the far-right, anti-Semite Stepan Bandera, "Glory to Ukraine! Glory to the heroes!" The slogans are later roared again in the film by young Ukrainian soldiers being drilled for intervention in the war.

The thinking and motives behind *Superpower* are clearly stated by its co-director Kaufman, who explained why he and Penn made the film: "We got really invested. And I think we got invested because we knew it was right, but also because we drilled into an idealism that felt genuine. *Once you took it out of the context of the United States and you were no longer dealing with the right and the left—that whole paradigm—and you were looking at somebody else's culture. ... I think that was enchanting to us.*" [Emphasis added.] That is to say—leave out the role of the US and its bloody history of interventions in the Middle East, Central Asia, Latin America, Europe and throughout the world, and provide a version of events corresponding to the interests of far-right political forces—this is the bankrupt, mendacious ideology behind Penn and Kaufman's film.

Even an incomplete list of Penn's US interviewees in the film is revealing. Penn takes advice from right-wing military and state department figures such as former Director for European Affairs for the US National Security Council (NSC), Alexander Vindman, and former US National Security Adviser Robert O'Brien, who both favour increased armaments for Ukraine to defeat Russia. Another of Penn's talking heads is Congressman Eric Swalwell, Democrat from California, who seeks to up the foreign policy ante and declares that victory for Ukraine and the defeat of Russia is "the best deterrent against China invading Taiwan."

For some of the Ukrainian participants, World War

III is already underway. In his interview with Penn, Ukrainian central bank chief Andriy Pyshnyi, declares bluntly: “I think that World War III has already begun. And the front line is in Ukraine. War in Ukraine is just a start for the Russian Federation if it’s not stopped.” Taking up the same theme, Hollywood entertainment website *Deadline* concludes in its review of *Superpower* that the “documentary raises urgent questions, like whether we should acknowledge we have already entered World War III, and whether the Biden administration’s approach to supporting Ukraine—holding back advanced weaponry that could allow for a decisive victory—is prolonging the war and guaranteeing a stalemate that ultimately favors Russia.”

In another sequence in *Superpower*, we see Penn in discussion with a number of Ukrainian fighter pilots who argue that the country urgently needs advanced fighter jets with active radar missile systems. The film then cuts to a sequence in which the actor accompanies young Ukrainian recruits to a showing of the film *Top Gun: Maverick* in a cinema. This is followed by the news that Penn has arranged a video call with one of the film’s stars, Miles Teller, who in turn proclaims his admiration for the Ukrainian pilots. The message is clear and crude. America and the West must urgently send fighters to further escalate the war.

The point is reiterated by Zelensky at the end of *Superpower*. In the last of the three sycophantic interviews conducted by Penn, the Ukrainian leader complains he is unable to fly with only one wing. In order to fly properly, he implies, he needs Western fighter jets.

Penn returned to the theme of more weaponry for Ukraine at a press conference for *Superpower* at the Berlin film festival earlier this year. Drawing from the foreign policy playbook of the German Greens, Penn ludicrously claimed that fresh weapon supplies fulfilled humanitarian aims: “It’s a very odd time when the most significant humanitarian response that can happen right now is the delivery and supply of long-range precision missiles to a country under invasion.”

Directly addressing Germany, Penn declared: “We’ve seen that the German government has lately been, I think, a little clearer-minded in beginning to move support to Ukraine. ... As I said earlier today, we should all be supporting the supply of long-range precision

weapons. That’s a key priority for the Ukrainians.”

The exploitation of one of the world’s most popular film festivals for bloodthirsty militaristic propaganda against Russia in a conflict that could rapidly escalate into a world war threatening the survival of humanity is unprecedented in Germany’s postwar history. It represents a grievous assault on the principle of artistic independence and must serve as a grave warning to the international working class.



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