

Why Oliver Stone's Latest Film on Ukraine Is Must-watch

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***Oliver Stone** is afraid. Afraid of war. That was the stark message conveyed by his latest film on the Ukraine crisis, 'Revealing Ukraine' which picked up the Grand Prix at the Taormina film festival in Italy last month. The documentary, directed by Igor Lopatonok, who also directed 'Ukraine on Fire' four years ago, takes us on a journey from the origins of the Ukraine conflict in 2014, to the more recent Kerch Strait incident last year where we witnessed a direct clash between Russian and Ukrainian vessels around Crimea.*

Centred around interviews with Ukrainian politician **Victor Medvedchuk** (former Chief of Staff under President Kuchma) and Russian **President Vladimir Putin**, the film tries to piece together what happened during the Maidan revolution of 2014 but more importantly the legacy of these events and where the country is headed now after being plunged into an abyss of economic uncertainty.

It opens with a pertinent question from Medvedchuk's wife - television presenter Oksana Marchenko who lost her job as a presenter of a hit Ukrainian TV show because of her relationship to Medvedchuk - 'Why are you interested in Ukraine?' It's a fair question given all the other global conflict hotspots Stone could have chosen to document. But his answer gives an indication of the seriousness with which he regards the ongoing Ukraine crisis; he says: 'I don't want war.'

And despite accusations of being a propagandist for Putin, Stone makes it clear in the film, and in subsequent media interviews, that his goal remains fixed: to discover the truth about what happened in this highly politicised, ideologically-motivated conflict. His initial decision to support such a film he explained, was rooted in an instinctive feeling that the version of events that happened during Maidan 2014 and since, provided by the western mainstream media was flawed.

And one cannot question his balanced approach when quizzing the main protagonists. By juxtaposing Putin and Medvedchuk's different perspectives he highlights that despite their consensus on Maidan, they are not in agreement on all issues. While Putin states that Ukrainians and Russians are 'one people', Medvedchuk is quite clear that they are two different separate nations and identities. And Stone doesn't make any attempt to conceal the relationship Medvedchuk has with President Putin - reminding the Russian leader directly that he is the godfather to Medvedchuk's daughter.

The interview with Medvedchuk is comprehensive and covers everything from the history of Ukraine to the role of George Soros in the Maidan movement. History is of course paramount to understanding the current crisis, and as Medvedchuk points out, were it not for the

various foreign empires which have controlled Ukrainian territory over the centuries - from the Lithuanians to the Ottoman Turks - there would not be so many different cultural influences over the nation.

The more recent Russian empire and USSR had the most profound effect on the country, which remains to this day divided culturally and ethnically. The fact that the west of Ukraine is culturally closer to Poland and Germany and the East was traditionally under Russian influence, contradicted the very essence of the Maidan movement which denounced everything that was Russian.

This approach, was and is not sustainable in a nation for which Russian is the native language for around a third of its inhabitants. And yet this cultural genocide was born at the time of Maidan, a movement which on the surface was promoted as a project which would provide a positive, European future for Ukraine, but which in reality was built upon fascist, Neo-Nazi policies which have seen the blood spilt of thousands of Ukrainians.

And of course the hand of the West in the conflict is never far away. From the US' Joe Biden - whose son sits on the board of Ukrainian energy company, Burisma holdings - to the infamous billionaire George Soros whose 'International Renaissance Foundation' is depicted in the film as playing a crucial role in financing and stirring up the conflict, the West was as usual meddling in a place it had no business being in, leading Ukraine on a road to perdition as it pursued its own interests.

The current quagmire the country is in as result is steeped in irony; a nation that before the conflict was the third-largest coal producer in Europe, that once produced 87% of coal for the Russian empire and 50% for the Soviet Union, is now having to import coal from the US, Russia and Canada. US imports alone (from Pennsylvania) in 2018 cost the country just over [\\$806 million](#).

The deindustrialisation of a nation which was the USSR's largest producer of automotives, has resulted in it being almost wholly reliant on western car imports. This was a nation, as the film explains, which at the break-up of the Soviet Union was included in the world's top ten most developed nations, which had a thriving aviation and space industry unrivalled by any other post-Soviet state. Now, since the shrinking of the economy began in 2014, the nation is ranked 60th place in the world by the UN in terms of GDP, even lower than the African nations of Sudan and Angola.

Victor Medvedchuk doesn't hesitate to agree when asked if he thinks it has been a deliberate strategy by the West to destroy Ukraine. Indeed there is no doubt that since Maidan began, Ukraine has proved incredibly useful for US geopolitical interests. Stone himself states that Ukraine is a button which can be pushed by the US to aggravate Russia. However the film goes into more detail about the role played by Ukraine in manipulating the US elections as consultant Paul Manafort, an advisor to the Trump campaign, was targeted over his work advising former Ukrainian President Victor Yanukovich.

Medvedchuk asks why it was that none of the other people investigated by Ukrainian authorities over corruption charges have been prosecuted, and Manafort alone was pursued. He suggests it was a targeted, politicised campaign against Manafort, and that instead of looking for Russian interference in the US elections, we should be looking at Ukrainian interference.

The most disturbing message of the film however is not regarding what has been, but what could be, if action is not taken to restore relations between Russia and Ukraine. And despite President Zelensky's assurances before his election that his priority was to put an end to the conflict in East Ukraine, so far we have seen nothing beyond rhetoric.

In the documentary, Putin candidly tells Stone that the Kerch strait incident last November was a provocation set up by former President Poroshenko to boost his ratings prior to the March 2019. But with reports of the seizure of a Russian vessel by Ukraine just last month, it's clear that the potential for escalation of the conflict is extremely high. And if one thing is for sure, neither the Russians nor the Ukrainians would be the beneficiaries of such a conflict.

Watch the official teaser below.

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