

Talk show host Bill Maher: Intelligence agencies “our last line of defense”

By David Walsh
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In an extraordinarily foul outburst February 17, Bill Maher, the host of HBO’s “Real Time with Bill Maher,” termed American intelligence agencies “our last line of defense” against the allegedly pro-Russian Donald Trump and referred approvingly to Egypt and Turkey as countries where similar agencies had intervened against a “crazy” dictator.

Maher has been pathological on the subject of supposed Russian interference in the US elections since the issue first arose. On July 27, 2016, in response to the hacking of the Democratic National Committee’s emails and unsubstantiated claims that Russian agents seeking to tip the election in Trump’s favor were behind the action, Maher described Trump (who was semi-jokingly urging that Russian secret services hack Hillary Clinton’s missing emails) as “the voice of treason.”

Maher went on last July: “He’s always taking Russia’s side. Plainly, Trump is a Russian agent. I mean, I don’t know it for a fact, but *a lot of people are saying it*. ... Oh yes, Donald Trump: the spy who loved himself.”

One month ago, on Inauguration Day, in his opening monologue, Maher observed, “It really happened, we Americans have a new leader ... Vladimir Putin—and also this guy Trump took an oath today.”

One of his guests January 20, Keith Olbermann, asserted, “We were invaded, is what it boils down to. Just because there was not blood on the streets. If the Russians had come in with Cossacks and put him [Trump] in, I think we would have had a different kind of reaction. ... And we’re now only debating at this point, after the story in the *New York Times*, how much the Russians decided our election.”

Maher, who built a reputation for himself as an iconoclast during the Bill Clinton-Monica Lewinsky

scandal and subsequently under George W. Bush, has claimed at various times to be a “liberal,” a “libertarian” and a “progressive, a sane person.” As we have noted previously: “His sneering, cynical, ‘anti-establishment’ posturing is aimed at taking in a certain section of those, especially among the young, disaffected with official politics and orienting them in quite a reactionary direction. His ‘iconoclasm’ has never gone farther than skin deep.”

Maher opened his February 17 program by asserting, in his monologue, that there was an “unprecedented state of crisis in this country” and that the resignation of Michael T. Flynn as national security adviser, because of discussions with Russian officials, was “the most serious political scandal we’ve ever had in the United States.” He described Donald Trump as a “mental patient who thinks he’s Hitler.”

In the panel discussion portion of the program, Maher argued that “our country’s hanging by a thread” and that Trump was guilty of “the crime of treason, the crime is colluding with Russia to fix an American election.”

One of his guests, Malcolm Nance, who described himself as having formerly worked for US Naval Intelligence and the NSA, as well as having been “loaned to other people” (presumably, the CIA), claimed that the 2016 was “the first time that a president was elected with the assistance of a foreign intelligence agency [i.e., Russia’s].” Nance did not provide the slightest evidence for his allegation, and, indeed, some time later, Maher was obliged to admit, “We don’t have the proof of that” [Russian involvement], but that did not prevent either man from making the wildest statements.

Maher went on to suggest that “the [US] intelligence agencies are crying out, ‘We don’t want to do a coup

...” In the most startling part of his comments, Maher argued that President John F. Kennedy had been killed in 1963 by US intelligence, or at least “that was one theory,” because of his philandering. He was having sex with “East German spies and mafia couriers” and the intelligence outfits “couldn’t trust him ... [They said to themselves] ‘He is too much of a danger to America.’”

Maheer must rank as one of the first “progressives” to put a positive spin on the alleged CIA involvement in Kennedy’s assassination!

He continued, “I feel like that’s where the intelligence agencies are now [in relation to Trump] ... Now, they should not be violent, don’t get me wrong. But they are saying through these leaks, ‘This man cannot be president.’”

Nance, a fanatical anticommunist and the author of *The Plot to Hack America: How Putin’s Cyberspies and WikiLeaks Tried to Steal the 2016 Election*, then chimed in: “And you know why they’re saying that? Because what we have is a situation here where the person they would have to report to, the absolute pinnacle, the commander-in-chief, is a person who himself cannot be reported to. What they’re doing is they’re reporting and they’re taking it above his head to the ultimate commander-in-chief, which is the American people. This is an act of patriotism.”

Maheer went on: “America is now in this place where we have watched other countries [which] we have had our nose up about—Egypt and Turkey—places where we thought, ‘Oh, you know, the dictator is crazy, so the intelligence services, that’s not really the best option ... oh, wait, it *is* the best option.’ They’re like our last line of defense now.”

The HBO talk show host was presumably referring to the 2013 military takeover in Egypt, which brought to power the brutal and hated dictatorship of General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, and the failed, US-backed coup in Turkey in 2016 against the regime of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Maheer is identifying himself with murderous, right-wing forces.

Maheer then noted that Trump was planning to appoint Steven Feinberg “to oversee the intelligence. It looks like a purge in the making so that he can take over. ... Can Trump put his people in charge of the intelligence agencies? Because then we have no line of defense between the total coup.” The host plaintively asked

later, “Where are the patriots?” apparently suggesting that such “patriots” should somehow or other deal with Trump.

Maheer’s demented ranting points to several interrelated processes. First of all, there is the sharp turn to the right by all sections of the American political and media establishment, including its “gadfly,” late-night comic contingent. The latter is made up of wealthy, conservative people committed to the defense of the existing social order. They do not have a single ounce of genuinely democratic sentiment among them and have only contempt for the mass of the American and global population. The notion of a CIA-military coup in the US, with its terrible consequences, does not disturb Maheer’s sleep in the least. On the contrary, he is actively promoting such an operation. He obviously does not expect to lose his job or his income under a CIA-run junta.

Concretely, figures such as Maheer are frightened by the growth of social opposition to capitalism, accelerated by Trump’s right-wing policies, and are desperately seeking to divert it along reactionary lines, in this case the drive for a confrontation with Russia. Maheer, an anticommunist and Islamophobe himself, helped create the atmosphere that made Trump’s election possible. Despite his violent, abusive rhetoric, the comic’s differences with the new president—like those of the entire Democratic Party orbit—are purely tactical.

That the talk show host is promoting the American intelligence apparatus, the perpetrator of countless crimes against various populations around the world, resulting in the deaths of millions, to an audience of primarily young people is an unpardonable political and ideological crime. In this manner, Maheer is acting as a facilitator of authoritarianism and dictatorship.

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