

NBC journalist resigns, blasting media as “defender of Washington and the system”

By Bill Van Auken
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William Arkin, a veteran reporter and security consultant for NBC News, resigned last week with a scathing and lengthy email exposing the role of the network and the broader corporate media as a stenographer and apologist for Washington’s vast military and intelligence apparatus under conditions of endless war.

Describing himself as “completely out of sync with the network, being neither a day-to-day reporter nor interested in the Trump circus,” Arkin said, “I also found myself the lone voice that was anti-nuclear and anti-military.”

He clarified that anti-military for him meant “opinionated but also highly knowledgeable, somewhat akin to a movie critic, loving my subject but also not shy about making judgements regarding the flops and the losers.”

Arkin recounts that he had “argued endlessly with MSNBC about all things national security for years.” He is a military veteran who served in US Army intelligence in the 1970s and went on to become a military consultant for both Greenpeace International and Human Rights Watch. He also worked as a lecturer at the School of Advanced Air and Space Studies for US Air Force officers and advised the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the CIA, the Defense Intelligence Agency and other military and intelligence agencies.

In the early 1980s he authored a book titled *Nuclear Battlefields* revealing the locations where US and Soviet missiles were deployed, leading the Reagan administration to seek its suppression on secrecy grounds.

In 2003, working for NBC and the *Los Angeles Times*, Arkin exposed the bigoted anti-Muslim remarks made by a top military intelligence commander, General William “Jerry” Boykin, who publicly cast the

“war on terrorism” as a religious war between Christianity and a “Satanic” Islam.

In 2012, he co-authored with Dana Priest of the *Washington Post* a series titled “Top Secret America,” an investigative report into the massive growth of a police-state domestic intelligence apparatus in the wake of the 9/11 attacks.

In his resignation letter, Arkin says that at NBC he found himself in the “peculiar position of being a mere civilian among THE GENERALS,” the ex-military commanders that it and all of the broadcast and cable networks hired as their talking heads to spout out the official position on multiple US wars. He may well have added that the other prominent “civilian” employed as an expert commentator by NBC was the former director of the CIA, John Brennan.

Expressing barely concealed contempt for the military command and the generals venerated as indisputable experts and heroes on national television, he wrote:

“Despite being at ‘war,’ no great wartime leaders or visionaries are emerging. There is not a soul in Washington who can say that they have won or stopped any conflict. And though there might be the beloved perfumed princes in the form of the Petraeus’ and Wes Clarks’, or the so-called warrior monks like Mattis and McMaster, we’ve had more than a generation of national security leaders who sadly and fraudulently [have] done little of consequence. And yet we (and others) embrace them, even the highly partisan formers who masquerade as ‘analysts.’ We do so ignoring the empirical truth of what they have wrought: There is not one country in the Middle East that is safer today than it was 18 years ago. Indeed the world becomes ever more polarized and dangerous.”

He continued: “I find it disheartening that we do not

report the failures of the generals and national security leaders. I find it shocking that we essentially condone continued American bumbling in the Middle East and now Africa through our ho-hum reporting.”

Reflecting on his years at NBC, “poking at the conventional wisdom,” Arkin acknowledged, “I feel like I’ve failed to convey this larger truth about the hopelessness of our way of doing things, especially disheartened to watch NBC and much of the rest of the news media somehow become a defender of Washington and the system.”

Particularly incisive in the email is Arkin’s critique of the role played by NBC and the rest of the corporate media after the election of Donald Trump: expressing outrage at the semi-criminal real estate speculator turned president’s outrageous tweets, while either ignoring or justifying the real crimes of American imperialism.

Instead of conducting independent reporting and investigations, he writes, it “got sucked into the tweeting vortex, increasingly lost in a directionless adrenaline rush, the national security and political version of leading the broadcast with every snow storm. And I would assert that in many ways NBC just began emulating the national security state itself—busy and profitable. No wars won but the ball is kept in play.”

While no admirer of Trump, whom he describes as “an ignorant and incompetent imposter,” Arkin makes the case that the criticism of the president—like the supposed opposition of the Democratic Party—has been that of a “defender of the government against Trump.” As a result, he argues, “the national security establishment not only hasn’t missed a beat but indeed has gained dangerous strength. Now it is ever more autonomous and practically impervious to criticism.”

Arkin pointed to the media’s denunciations of “Trump’s various bumbling intuitions: his desire to improve relations with Russia, to denuclearize North Korea, to get out of the Middle East, to question why we are fighting in Africa, even in his attacks on the intelligence community and the FBI.”

The reaction of NBC, he charged, was to “mechanically argue the contrary, to be in favor of policies that just spell more conflict and more war.”

“Really?” he continued. “We shouldn’t get out of Syria? We shouldn’t go for the bold move of

denuclearizing the Korean peninsula? Even on Russia, though we should be concerned about the brittleness of our democracy that it is so vulnerable to manipulation, do we really [y]earn for the Cold War? And don’t even get me started with the FBI: What? We now lionize this historically destructive institution?”

Arkin’s resignation is one more milestone in the transformation of the media into a more-or-less open propaganda arm of the US military and intelligence complex. This is a process that has been accelerating over the past quarter century of uninterrupted US wars of aggression, which has seen corporate media’s driving out of journalists whose reporting has cut across the interests of the military and intelligence establishment.

These have included Peter Arnett, fired for a 1998 report exposing the US use of nerve gas during the Vietnam War; Dan Rather, driven off the air after 44 years at CBS for a report exposing George W. Bush’s privileged treatment by the Texas Air National Guard assuring his evasion of combat in Vietnam; and Phil Donohue, who was fired by MSNBC for opposing the invasion of Iraq. The “embedding” of journalists with the US military in the US war against Iraq set the standard for subsequent reporting, in which the corporate media is relied upon to function as an arm of the Pentagon and the CIA.

Arkin’s email provides a damning indictment of the present state of the US media, straight from the “horse’s mouth.” His anger and disgust over the practices of his employers no doubt express the sentiments of wider layers of journalists, artists and intellectuals, alienated by the lies and criminality that pervade American capitalist society.

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