

A reply to Louis Proyect's attack on the WSWS

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On Friday, Louis Proyect, the publisher of the “Unrepentant Marxist” blog, posted a slanderous and foul-mouthed denunciation of a WSWS article, written by Niles Williamson, entitled, “US officials consider nuclear strikes against Russia.”

Proyect claims that the WSWS used a quotation fabricated by a well-known Associated Press correspondent, Robert Burns, that misrepresents the nuclear policies of the Obama administration.

In the AP article cited by the WSWS, Burns reported that Assistant Defense Secretary Robert Scher testified this past April 15 before the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Strategic Forces that “counterforce” measures developed by the United States would mean “we could go about and actually attack that missile where it is in Russia.”

Reacting to the WSWS’s citation of Scher’s extraordinarily menacing statement, Proyect writes: “Any normal person looking in on the latest World Socialist Web Site would pee in their pants. US officials consider nuclear strikes against Russia? Holy shit, this is serious business.”

Proyect continues: “The question, of course, is whether the WSWS.org can be taken at face value.”

Proyect then proceeds to assert that the WSWS report is based on false information. Leaping to the defense of the Obama administration, Proyect brazenly claims that the statement attributed to Scher was never made. The quote that appeared in Burns’ article, declares Proyect, “cannot be found in [Scher’s] testimony, nor can it be found in Nexis, an authoritative database of newspaper articles I continue to have access to as a Columbia University retiree...”

“In other words, Burns was making an allegation about what Scher said that is not supported by the Congressional record.”

In a wild eruption of filthy-mouthed malice, Proyect writes: “My understanding is that the *World Socialist Web Site* is staffed by a dozen or so people who do nothing to build the fucking mass movement but see their job as writing this kind of sloppy bullshit that is badly in the need of a fact-checker.”

It is Proyect who is in need of a fact-checker, not to mention a bar of soap in his mouth.

The plain truth is that Robert Scher did make the statement attributed to him by the AP correspondent. However, the critical phrase (“we could go about and actually attack that

missile where it is in Russia.”) does not appear in the *written* statement prepared by Scher in advance of the hearing. His opening statement, as is usually the case in congressional hearings, was not actually read by Scher. It was formally accepted and included in the record.

The real work of the subcommittee consisted of a 50-minute hearing at which Scher and several other witnesses answered questions put to them by congressmen. It was during the question and answer period that the statement relating to the Obama administration’s nuclear policy toward Russia was made.

The full video of the hearing is available on the *YouTube* channel of the House Armed Services Committee. Whether from laziness, dishonesty, or—most likely—a combination of the two, Proyect did not bother to consult the video record of the hearing.

In the course of appearance before the subcommittee, Scher is asked (at 16:58 in the video) by Republican Representative from Alabama Mo Brooks: “What action is the United States taking as a result of Russia’s violation of the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty?”

Scher replies by stating that the US is “working on trying to convince the Russians to come back into compliance.” He reviews three categories of military action (beginning at 17:50) that the US is considering if this does not happen. He then says:

One is active defense, what we can do to defend the places in Europe, the locations that the INF treaty-violating missile could reach. *Another one is taking a look at how we could go about and actually [word deleted] that missile where it is in Russia.* And then subsequently a third part is looking at understanding that it is not simply attacking that capability, but that we can look at what things we can hold at risk within Russia itself. We are still looking at all of those possibilities, narrowing down what we think would be most effective... [emphasis added]

For reasons that are not clear, just one word is cut from the

recording. At precisely 18:11 of the video, there is a peculiar momentary break in the recording. As a consequence, the word “attack” is missing from the sentence. We do not know whether this was the result of a sudden technical glitch or post-hearing editing. The latter possibility cannot be ruled out, as Scher’s statement has far-reaching implications.

In any event, the phrase (minus the word “attack”)—which Proyect claimed was fabricated—can be heard on the video. And there is no doubt that AP correspondent Robert Burns accurately reported Scher’s critical sentence in its entirety.

A few additional points should be made in relation to this exchange. First, Scher’s statement, as with much of the testimony at the hearing, is stated in general terms. Both the congressmen and Scher repeatedly refer to a future closed-door session where more details—including on the US response to allegations of INF violations on the part of Russia—will be provided in a forum that is completely hidden from the American people.

Second, Scher threatens not only to launch attacks against the alleged missiles, but also other targets throughout Russia. This is what is meant by the statement that the military must understand that “it is not simply about attacking that capability, but that we can look at what things we can hold at risk within Russia itself...”

Third, the entire exchange occurs within the context of a review of nuclear weapons policy, making clear that the US is considering utilizing nuclear weapons in carrying out such an attack. As Burns states in his article (quoted by the WSWS but not cited by Proyect): “The options go so far as one implied—but not stated explicitly—that would improve the ability of US nuclear weapons to destroy military targets on Russian territory.”

Finally, Proyect’s claim that Burns’ analysis “is based totally on the testimony” of Scher is another lie. In fact, the Obama administration and military planners have been working out a strategy for the past several months to utilize allegations of INF Treaty violations to justify an intensification of its military provocations, including a first-strike nuclear weapons policy.

In testimony in February before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Defense Secretary Ashton Carter outlined this policy along the same lines described by Scher, but employing the “counterforce” language cited by Burns. In response to INF violations, Carter said:

The range of options we should look at from the Defense Department could include active defenses to counter intermediate-range ground-launched cruise missiles; counterforce capabilities to prevent intermediate-range ground-launched cruise missile attacks; and countervailing strike capabilities to enhance US or allied forces.

In this clearly prepared and carefully considered statement, Carter explicitly refers to “preventive” strikes against cruise missiles in Russia—i.e., before any attack is launched against the US. Moreover, he uses language that has long been associated with nuclear weapons policy. As an analysis posted by the Federation of American Scientists explains, “Counterforce is a strategy that focuses on holding at risk enemy military forces. Using it to ‘prevent’ attack implies drawing up plans to use conventional or nuclear forces to destroy the GLCM *before* it could be used...”

This is not the first time that Proyect has attacked the WSWS. He is obsessed with the substantial readership of the *World Socialist Web Site*. Even in this latest blog, Proyect writes: “Some radicals of my acquaintance do take it at face value. A FB friend and Marxmail subscriber who is a professor of sociology frequently links to their articles. Another professor who was a houseguest for a few days told me that he prefers checking WSWS every day because it is more reliable than the NY Times. The site is also popular with college students who like to cite it in essays, according to my wife who works in the CUNY system.”

It can be surmised that Proyect is particularly enraged by the article on the testimony of Robert Scher because the WSWS’s coverage of the reckless militarism of the Obama administration is finding a substantial hearing, and, therefore, cutting across his own activities as a crude propagandist for the Obama administration’s imperialist operations. He has been a virulent supporter of the “Green Revolution” in Iran, the NATO-led war in Libya, the CIA-stoked civil war in Syria and the US-backed coup in Ukraine.

Proyect’s blog—or should we call it blather—lacks all credibility. In his dishonesty, cynicism, and debased vulgarity he epitomizes all that is politically diseased in the milieu of American pseudo-left politics.

His attack on the WSWS is the work of a man who has absolutely nothing to do with the politics, principles and culture of the Marxist movement. His blog, were it correctly named, would be called “The Unrepentant Liar.”



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