

Christian Coalition leader Pat Robertson calls for assassination of Venezuelan president

John Levine, David Walsh
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Pat Robertson, the Christian fundamentalist politician and broadcaster with close ties to the Bush administration, has publicly called for the assassination of the president of Venezuela, Hugo Chavez.

Robertson issued his Mafia-like appeal for the US government to “take out” Chavez on his television show “The 700 Club,” broadcast to over one million viewers on his own Christian Broadcast Network and Disney’s ABC Family Network. After a ten-minute news clip aimed at portraying Chavez’s Venezuela as a major threat to the United States, Robertson proceeded to make the case for assassination:

“He has destroyed the Venezuelan economy, and he’s going to make that a launching pad for communist infiltration and Muslim extremism all over the continent.

“You know, I don’t know about this doctrine of assassination, but if he thinks we’re trying to assassinate him, I think that we really ought to go ahead and do it. It’s a whole lot cheaper than starting a war... and I don’t think any oil shipments will stop. This man is a terrific danger, and this is in our sphere of influence.”

He continued, “[W]ithout question, this is a dangerous enemy to our south, controlling a huge pool of oil, that could hurt us very badly. We have the ability to take him out, and I think the time has come that we exercise that ability. We don’t need another \$200 billion war to get rid of one, you know, strong-arm dictator. It’s a whole lot easier to have some of the covert operatives do the job and then get it over with.”

Robertson is not simply a crackpot. He was a candidate for the Republican presidential nomination in 1988 and is a major force within the Republican Party. Robertson and his ilk on the fundamentalist right, like James Dobson of Focus on the Family and Tony Perkins of the Family Research Council, hold de facto veto power over the Bush administration’s policy decisions, such as which individual to nominate for the Supreme Court.

The Venezuelan government denounced Robertson’s comments, describing them as “terrorist.” Venezuelan Vice President Jose Vicente Rangel told a news conference in Caracas, “It’s the height of hypocrisy for the US to continue talking about the war against terrorism when at the same time you have someone making obvious terrorist declarations in the

heart of the country.”

Rangel continued, “This type of statement justifies the Venezuelan government’s worry about preserving the life of its president... President Bush said yesterday that his government rejects all forms of terrorism. The reaction of the US to this presumably religious man will put to the test US rhetoric.”

Chavez told reporters before boarding an airplane in Havana, where he met with Cuban President Fidel Castro, “I don’t know who that person is. I don’t care what he said. I prefer to talk about life, about the things we’ve been working on.” Castro, standing beside Chavez, commented, “I think only God can punish crimes of such magnitude.”

In June, Chavez asserted that the Venezuelan government had “a lot of evidence, not just rumors, that there are people [referring to the US] who think the only solution is to kill Hugo Chavez. We’ve increased our security and intelligence a lot. If that madness happens, they will regret it.”

Such an action by the US military or intelligence apparatus would violate an assassination ban instituted by President Gerald Ford in 1976.

Since Chavez was first elected in 1998, Washington has repeatedly sought to undermine and topple his government. A mass outpouring of popular support allowed the Venezuelan president to survive a US-backed coup attempt in 2002. After numerous attempts to unseat him through a presidential referendum, a vote was held in August 2004, with Chavez winning a landslide victory that was certified by international inspectors, including former US president Jimmy Carter.

According to polls, Chavez’s popularity has soared in recent months, buoyed in part by a rally in the price of oil that has allowed him to increase government spending. The percentage of Venezuelans saying they back Chavez rose to 71.2 percent in May from 67 percent in April, according to the latest poll by Caracas-based pollster Datanalisis.

Washington is hostile to the left-nationalist government of Chavez because it has become an obstacle to the drive to privatize Venezuela’s considerable oil resources as a step towards their takeover by American-based energy conglomerates.

In response to Robertson’s appeal, a US State Department spokesman, Sean McCormack, blandly told a press conference

in Washington that the incendiary remarks “do not represent the policy of the United States.” He continued, “Any allegations that we are planning to take hostile action against the Venezuelan government are completely baseless and without fact.”

The White House remained silent, refusing to condemn Robertson. While certain evangelical groups criticized Robertson, noted the *New York Times*, “other conservative Christian organizations remained silent, with leaders at the Traditional Values Coalition, the Family Research Council and the Christian Coalition saying through spokesmen that they were too busy to comment.”

US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, who has been at the center of provocations against Chavez, told a press conference that the government cannot control what Americans say. Robertson “is a private citizen,” he added, “Private citizens say all kinds of things all the time.”

This is the sheerest hypocrisy. If Robertson had been an Islamic cleric calling for the assassination of a Western political leader, he would have been quickly indicted or seized and placed in military detention. Only a month ago, Dr. Ali Al-Timimi, a scientist and Islamic fundamentalist preacher, was sentenced to life in prison without parole plus 70 years in Virginia on charges that he urged Muslim followers to leave the US and support Islamic military efforts in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Palestine, Indonesia and Russia.

Yet Robertson faced only a mild rebuke following his comments. No prominent Democrats came forward to denounce his statements or his influence within the Republican Party and the Bush administration.

Minnesota Republican Senator Norm Coleman, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee on the Western hemisphere, told reporters that Robertson’s statement was “incredibly stupid” and “has no reflection on reality.”

On the contrary, the comments have a definite bearing on reality. What irks Coleman is that Robertson has blurted out what Bush administration officials would prefer to discuss and plan behind closed doors. The call for Chavez’s murder, delivered in the language of a gangland boss, has brought into the open the criminal mindset of a large section of the American ruling elite.

With a net worth of hundreds of millions of dollars, obtained in part from a diamond mining empire in Africa, and control over a number of media and political institutions, most notably the Christian Broadcasting Network, Robertson exercises considerable influence on American politics. His activities “pass under the radar” because the media and the Democratic Party have given him political amnesty, letting previous comments of a similar character to his call for a “hit” on Chavez go by without a response.

During the conflict between the White House and State Department in the lead-up to the war in Iraq, Robertson on two occasions suggested someone “nuke” the State Department. He

once described feminism as a “socialist, anti-family political movement that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism and become lesbians.”

During the 2000 election campaign, Arizona Republican Senator John McCain quite rightly labeled Bush a “Pat Robertson Republican.” Robertson’s Christian Coalition contributed heavily to Bush’s election and to placing religious fundamentalist policies at the forefront of Republican congressional initiatives.

Robertson himself ran in the 1988 Republican primaries, winning the Washington primary, and seemed on course to a possible victory. He pulled out of the race after a number of scandals, urging his supporters to rally behind George H.W. Bush. The resources and organization of his 1988 campaign formed the basis for the creation of the Christian Coalition.

According to Robertson’s website, “In 1992, Robertson was selected by *Newsweek* magazine as one of America’s 100 Cultural Elite... In July 2002, Robertson was presented with The State of Israel Friendship Award by the Chicago chapter of the Zionist Organization of America.”

His books and sermons, combining extreme right-wing politics and apocalyptic theology, have contributed to the political atmosphere which nurtures right-wing terrorist elements and actions such as the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing and attacks on abortion clinics.

The call for Chavez’s assassination is a serious threat coming from a leading Republican and close ally of the Bush administration. It is in line with the previous attempts of the Bush administrations to destabilize and unseat the Venezuelan government. As is evident in Robertson’s comments, the main issue for the US ruling elite is not tyranny or terrorism, but Venezuela’s oil and the preservation by any and all means of the US sphere of influence in Latin America.



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