

Peru's Humala is Washington's Next "Worst Nightmare"

By Ronald Bruce St John | April 25, 2006

Bolivian President Evo Morales, during his recent successful campaign, repeatedly described himself as Washington's "worst nightmare." Ollanta Humala Tasso, the front-runner at the end of the first round of the Peruvian presidential race, could well be Washington's next "worst nightmare." Sharing a political philosophy with Bolivia's Morales and Venezuela's Hugo Chávez, Humala promises to move Peru in a very different direction than that followed by outgoing President Alejandro Toledo Manrique.

Nationalist Presidential Hopeful

Short, compact, and charismatic, Ollanta Humala Tasso's campaign strategy was characterized in the final stages of the first round by increasingly radical policy statements. Reminiscent of the policies proposed by Evo Morales, Humala Tasso called during the campaign for Peru to reject the free trade agreement negotiated in December 2005 with the United States, reserving the right to "revise" the treaty before submitting it to congress for ratification. Peru and the United States later signed the agreement on April 12, 2006 as the first round votes of the Peruvian election were still being counted. It remains unclear when the agreement will be submitted to the Peruvian congress for approval. Other components of Humala's still hazy economic policy include state participation in "strategic sectors" of the economy, the renegotiation of multinational contracts, and a windfall profits tax on foreign mining companies. Humala Tasso has also criticized the Camisea natural gas line, a centerpiece project of the Toledo administration, calling for a revision of the contract and higher royalties for the government.

Given these policy pronouncements, Humala Tasso's admiration for the 1968-75 socialist dictatorship of General Juan Velasco Alvarado has been doubly concerning for many Peruvians. Velasco brought socioeconomic ruin to Peru in the form of disastrous macroeconomic policies, failed agrarian reform, and the nationalization of inefficient industries. In consequence, Humala Tasso's economic prescriptions understandably have sent shock waves through the Lima stock exchange and dried up foreign investment.

Humala Tasso also remains a self-confessed admirer and ideological soulmate of Venezuelan President Chávez.

When Chávez visited the former Inca capital of Cuzco in December 2004, he eulogized the regime of General



Alan García Pérez, Lourdes Flores Nano, or Ollanta Humala Tasso: Who will be the next president of Peru? Photo courtesy of <http://blogs.ya.com/juandiegonusa/>.



Velasco in a political diatribe acclaimed by Humala's supporters. The Velasco Alvarado regime did not appeal to ethnic nationalism, but it did declare Túpac Amaru the icon of the so-called "Peruvian revolution" and made Quechua an official language. In January 2005, when Humala Tasso met Chávez in Caracas, sharing the stage with Evo Morales, the Venezuelan chief executive publicly endorsed the nationalist Peruvian presidential hopeful, decrying then front-runner, Lourdes Flores Nano, as the candidate of the oligarchy.

Responding to this unwelcome intervention in Peruvian domestic politics, the Toledo administration for a time withdrew its ambassador from Caracas. This did not deter Chávez, who again declared, as the first round votes were being tabulated, that he wanted Humala to win. During a private interview in the Palacio del Gobierno in Lima last week, President Toledo dismissed the clumsy attempts of his Venezuelan counterpart to influence the presidential race in Peru. "There are some people who think, just because they have money, they have the right to intervene in the democratic process," he said. Foreign Minister Oscar Maúrtua de Romaña had condemned Venezuela's intervention in the domestic affairs of Peru in much stronger terms in an earlier interview in his offices at the Palacio de Torre Tagle. Humala Tasso, like Morales, has denied receiving financial support from Chávez.

In a country which has achieved only limited success in the war on drugs, Humala Tasso opposes the compulsory eradication of coca, the official policy of the Peruvian government for 15 years, proposing instead what he calls the "industrialization" of coca. In a mid-March 2006 visit to Quimbiri, in the Valle del Río Apruímac, he told coca growers

that he supported the legal expansion of coca cultivation and opposed the forced eradication of illegal coca production. His comments here were especially significant in that much of the coca cultivation in the Río Apruímac Valley is thought to be destined for cocaine production. When speaking in Quimbiri, Humala Tasso also stated that he saw no link between narcotics and domestic terrorism when he was standing only a few miles from the anti-drug base at Palmapampa where the *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path) terrorist group killed five policemen last December.

Pledging to bring Peru into the "family" of liberal, left-wing Latin American governments, Humala Tasso has criticized the recent arms buildup in Chile and the 1998 border settlement with Ecuador which ceded Tiwinza, formerly Peruvian territory, to Ecuador. He has also suggested Peru and Bolivia unite, politically and socially, as well as economically. Harshly critical of the Toledo administration, he has suggested President Toledo and his congressional allies remain in Peru after the presidential election so they can be investigated for corruption.

Humala Tasso himself is facing accusations that he committed human rights violations in the 1990s while serving as an army officer in the dirty war against the Sendero Luminoso. He has dismissed all such charges, calling them politically motivated; but they are unlikely to go away. During the first round presidential balloting, the only incident of any importance occurred when opponents trapped Humala and his wife, Nadine Heredia, at their polling place for a brief period, taunting him with shouts of "assassin" and "murderer." On the other hand, it should be recognized that many Peruvians believe human rights violations were inevitable in the war against the Sendero Luminoso and view

Humala Tasso as a patriotic officer dutifully following orders.

In any case, the key factor boosting Ollanta Humala's political campaign is neither his personality nor his program. The front runner has successfully depicted himself as an outsider in a country in which the unofficial political motto for the last two decades has been, "watch the outsider." The last two elected presidents, Alberto Fujimori and Alejandro Toledo, were underdogs and owe their eventual election largely to their outsider status, a role Humala assiduously cultivates daily.

In a country in which around half the population lives below the poverty line, a March 2006 survey by the Lima office of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) suggested 71% of Peruvians thought democracy existed in Peru but was not working well while another 24% said it simply didn't exist in Peru. Only 5% of Peruvians responded that democracy both existed and worked well. A resounding 90% of respondents blamed "politicians" for the shortcomings of democracy, and nearly 75% thought Peru needed an "authoritarian" government. In this political culture, an anti-system outsider, especially a tough military man, can become a very attractive candidate.

Ethnocacerismo

Isaac Humala Núñez, self-described descendent of Inca royalty and father of Ollanta Humala Tasso, is a well-known philosopher and teacher in Peru. He is the founder and long-time proponent of *ethnocacerismo*, a political philosophy that inspired in Peru a political movement of extreme ethnic nationalists. The term *ethnocacerismo* embodies two concepts. The first part, *ethno*, evokes Peru's ethnic identity, specifically its Inca origins. The second

part, *cacerismo*, venerates the 19th-century president, Andrés Avelino Cáceres, a war hero who led a guerrilla campaign of peasant militias against occupying Chilean troops during the War of the Pacific (1879-83).

The aims of the *Movimiento Ethnocacerista* (Ethnocacerist Movement) center on the restoration of the Inca heritage of Peru, reasserting the role of marginalized indigenous masses in contemporary Peruvian society. It is opposed to what it perceives to be foreign control of the economy, most especially from traditional rival Chile, and supports a return to state control of key economic sectors. The movement also supports the legalization of coca cultivation and a return to the death penalty.

Active support for the Ethnocacerist Movement has been strongest among reservist military officers, including veterans of the struggles against domestic terrorism in the form of the Sendero Luminoso and the Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement, as well as the 1995 war with Ecuador. While on active duty in the Peruvian army, Ollanta Humala, and his brother, Antauro, were the leaders of the Ethnocacerist Movement. Six years ago, the brothers Humala led a failed military uprising against the regime of then President Alberto Fujimori. Imprisoned for a short time, Humala Tasso eventually returned to active duty after being pardoned by President Valentín Paniagua. After being passed over for promotion, the Toledo administration forced him into retirement at the end of 2004.

Friends and Family

Antauro Humala, who retired from the army after the failed *golpe del estado* in 2000, led a paramilitary revolt against the Toledo government in January 2005, attacking a police station in

Andahuaylas and killing several police officers before being arrested. At a time when President Toledo's approval ratings were hovering around 10%, Antauro Humala called for the resignation of Toledo, charging that his administration was a corrupt sellout to foreign investors. In a BBC interview taped before Antauro surrendered to authorities, Ollanta Humala deplored the bloodshed at Andahuaylas but reiterated his support for the *Movimiento Etnocacerista*, stating it was the right and duty of all Peruvians to take whatever action was necessary to restore popular sovereignty.

Currently imprisoned, Antauro Humala was a candidate for congress in the April 2006 elections. While few have called for his release, suggesting his political orphanhood, Antauro Humala's philosophy and actions reflect the social tensions boiling below the surface in Peru. A third brother, Ulises Humala, was the presidential candidate for the Avanza País party in the current elections. His racist platform, advocating second-class status for the light-skinned elite of Peru, drew little support, winning well under 1% of the vote.

The Ethnocacerist Movement, also called the *Movimiento Nacionalista* or Nationalist Movement, has much in common with similar ethnic groupings elsewhere in the Andean region in that they all promote increased economic, political, and territorial autonomy for indigenous peoples. Related examples include the *Movimiento al Socialismo* (Movement toward Socialism or MAS) led by Bolivian President Morales, the *Movimiento Indigenista Pachacutik* (Pachacutik Indigenist Movement) led by the Bolivian Aymara Indian Felipe Quispe, and the *Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas* (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities or Conaie) in Ecuador. In Venezuela, elements of national-ethnic-populism

characterize the "Bolivarian" process championed by Hugo Chávez.

Ironically, given the close ties between the Ethnocacerist Movement and the Humala family, the latter has proved a distraction in the presidential campaign. Patriarch Isaac Humala, who has described achieving power in Peru as a "family project," has stated that he prepared his seven children from a young age to be revolutionaries. Issac Humala called recently for all imprisoned members of the Sendero Luminoso and Túpac Amaru revolutionary movements to be freed, a very unpopular idea in Peru which Ollanta Humala immediately disavowed. And Elena Tasso, Isaac Humala's wife and Ollanta Humala Tasso's mother, recently suggested that shooting a couple of homosexuals would result in much less immortality on the streets of Peru. Humala Tasso has projected an air of independence from the radical views of family members, disassociating himself from their declarations while demonstrating a growing annoyance with questions about his family. But many Peruvians remain skeptical. His long-term association with the *Movimiento Etnocacerista* continues to raise questions and concerns as to the level of influence the Humala clan might have if Humala Tasso becomes the president of Peru.

Older but Wiser

Former President Alan García Pérez was in second place at the end of the first round of elections, narrowly edging out Lourdes Flores Nano. Three months ago, García Pérez trailed badly in the polls, garnering only 16% support compared to 38% for Flores Nano and 23% for Humala Tasso. Depicting himself as an elder statesman who learned from his mistakes, he gained favor with voters when he targeted his message at younger Peruvians with no

memory of his disastrous 1985-90 administration. During his first term in office, inflation spun out of control, reaching 7,000% per year, while domestic terrorism, especially the Sendero Luminoso and the Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement, threatened the very survival of the state. García Pérez left office with his approval rating at 5%, the lowest in Peruvian history, and spent much of the 1990s in self-imposed exile in Europe.

García Pérez admits that his free-spending policies and refusal to repay Peru's foreign debt while president were major mistakes. A gifted orator and skilled political tactician, he now paints himself as a moderate leftist not hostile to Washington. In a recent conversation in Lima, the reinvention of García Pérez was summed up by a forgiving supporter who freely recognized the former president had made mistakes when at age 35 he was the youngest president in the region. However, the supporter felt García Pérez had matured and now deserved a second chance.

In contrast to Humala Tasso, who tends to emphasize the problems faced by Peru along with broad ideas for change, García Pérez is more doctrinaire and policy specific, although some of his positions resemble those of Humala. He promises to maintain macroeconomic stability, promote worker rights, rewrite Peru's contracts with its private utilities, and levy a windfall profit tax on mining companies. In a jab at Humala, García Pérez argues he is the only candidate prepared to represent the poor without a takeover of private property, something Humala is unlikely to do. García Pérez has also reserved harsh words for the Toledo administration, especially its management of the Camisea natural gas project. The strong national organization of the *Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana* (American Popular Revolutionary Alliance), Peru's

oldest political party, was probably decisive in García Pérez's come-from-behind win over Lourdes Flores. It could also prove an important factor in the second round of elections.

What's Not to Dislike

In many ways, the presidency of Alejandro Toledo Manrique has been a success. His personal popularity has remained low, pulled down by charges of incompetence and petty corruption; however, his administration boasts a positive macroeconomic record and a generally stable democratic climate. Reflecting President Toledo's strong personal commitment to poverty reduction, the overall poverty level in Peru is down six points to below 50% with the number of rural Peruvians below the poverty line down nine points. A strong supporter of the war on terror and an active participant in the war on drugs, the Toledo administration has enjoyed a cozy relationship with that of George W. Bush. President Toledo has been a guest at the White House on more than one occasion, including a recent farewell tour, and President Bush has visited Peru. At the same time, President Toledo, who considers himself a "soldier of democracy," is quick to point out, and rightly so, that the Peruvian relationship with the United States is an "equal relationship, not a subordinate one."

Much of this will surely change if Ollanta Humala Tasso is elected president of Peru. After erring badly in condemning the ascension of Evo Morales in Bolivia, the White House is trying to put a positive face on the success to date of Humala Tasso, indicating it will work with whomever the Peruvian people elect. Commenting on the first round of elections, the State Department noted the important thing was for the Peruvian elections to be free and fair. That said, the White House has to be

concerned about the potential election of another Latin American government allied to the likes of Hugo Chávez and Evo Morales, overtly challenging the flagging war on drugs, and highly critical of neoliberal, free market economic policies. The current front runner in Peru would appear to be wary of or opposed to virtually every policy advocated by the Bush administration. Eying the runoff against Alan García Pérez, Ollanta Humala Tasso has softened his rhetoric in recent days; but to be

successful in the May round of elections, he must retain the support of the core constituency that propelled him to victory in April.

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