

Acknowledgment Speech for the *Honoris Causa* Doctorate Granted by UNESP

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Abstract: Discussion on the interaction of thought and action through a review of the author's career merging a scholar's knowledge of international relations with his practical experience as Brazil's foreign minister.

Keywords: thought and action; international relations; Brazilian foreign policy; experience.

I

A I am deeply honored to receive the degree of Doctor Honoris Causa that the Board of the São Paulo State University (UNESP) has generously awarded me. UNESP is a large public university in São Paulo focused on teaching, research, and extension education activities. The decentralized efforts of its multiple units give UNESP a major role in disseminating and consolidating knowledge in our state. I have personal experience of those indisputable merits: during my many years at the São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP), I had the fortunate opportunity to work alongside and learn from UNESP's top-notch teaching staff.

The names of Professors Marcos Macari, Herman Voorwald, Maria José Soares Mendes Giannini, and Marilza Vieira Cunha Rudge come to mind. They were members of the Superior Council of our great research support agency, which contributed so much to make the state of São Paulo nationally and internationally known for its great contribution to knowledge. I can't fail to mention the late Professor José Arana Varela, who chaired FAPESP's Technical-Administrative Council from 2012 to 2016. UNESP housed the Institute of Economic and International Studies (IEEI), created and conceived by my dear friend, the late Gilberto Dupas.

Once again, I would like to say that the honor given me today is suffused with my intellectual esteem and personal appreciation for UNESP. I am grateful for the support I received from the University during the stimulating time when I chaired FAPESP and sought to emphasize its internationalization as an expression of science diplomacy.

II

I see the degree I receive today as a recognition of my dedication to international relations through my efforts to make them an institutionally organized academic area in our country, through my university career as a scholar in this field of knowledge and through the role I played in conducting our country's foreign policy. I shall now share some nuggets of my experience on how to mix thought with action.

Celso Lafer is a CEBRI founding member. He served as the Brazilian Minister of Foreign Affairs on two occasions (1992/2001-2002), as well as Minister of Development, Industry and Trade (1999). He was Brazil's ambassador to the UN and the WTO in Geneva. He is professor emeritus at University of São Paulo (USP), at its Institute of International Relations and its Faculty of Law. Until recently, he was president of the São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP) and is a member of Klabin's Administrative Board.

I will go down memory lane as a means to organize the narrative thread of my career in international relations. My interest in international relations came early, inspired by my own family – Horácio Lafer was Foreign Minister in the Kubitschek administration –, and stimulated by the atmosphere of the University of São Paulo (USP) School of Law, where I studied from 1960-1964, a time of heated debate on the country's destiny and on the direction of our foreign policy. These ingredients led me to pursue graduate work in the United States at Cornell University, where I earned my PhD in Political Science in 1970.

One of the textbooks for Cornell's International Relations program was a collection edited by James Rosenau. It contained an article by Henry Kissinger (1959) titled *The Policy Maker and the Intellectual*, the full version of which is included in his 1961 book *The Necessity of Choice*. Kissinger noted that intellectual analysis and government political action operate within different timeframes. The latter looks to the future and seeks to satisfy a demand that is time-constrained, for to govern is to choose; the former operates within the longer analytical timeframe, involves considering the myriad factors that affect international life, and seeks at a more leisurely pace to find the broader meaning of things (Kissinger 1961, 367).

In the first volume of his *Memoirs*, dealing with when he was a prominent player in U.S. foreign policy, Kissinger states that a period of high government responsibilities teaches us how to decide but not the substance of the decision. That substance is related to the perceptions, experiences, and prior knowledge of the person who assumes, in the urgency of time, the responsibilities of governing (Kissinger 2013, 27).

I tell you this because knowledge was a major factor that led me to take on diplomatic responsibilities. On the two occasions when I was Foreign Minister and

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Brazil's Ambassador to the World Trade Organization, in Geneva and the United Nations, the repertoire of my knowledge as a scholar of international relations was the backdrop to my decision-making process.

On the challenges of the relationship between theory and practice, I refer to two courses I taught, at the request and with the collaboration of Professor Pedro Dallari, at the University of São Paulo Institute of International Relations – which I helped create and organize. These courses revisited my diplomatic post *vita activa* to assess what was pertinent and what was not for the performance, as an intellectual, of my foreign policy activities.

In summary, much was useful and much not because general conclusions obtained in the theoretical sphere within the analytical timeframe do not automatically adjust to the complexities of specific circumstances. One needs what Isaiah Berlin (1996) called “the sense of reality,” which benefits from theoretical knowledge but also requires the ability to identify what may or may not work in the urgencies of policy time. Hence the epistemological peculiarity of diplomatic judgment as a reflexive, Arendtian judgment, committed to extracting its wider meaning from concrete circumstances and focused on enhancing Brazil's international role and on the foreign policy task of translating internal needs into external possibilities.

III

Norberto Bobbio (1993) in *Doubt and Choice: Intellectuals and power in contemporary society* – whose Brazilian edition was published by UNESP – notes that modern secular and democratic societies give intellectuals a specific role in political life. Given the complexities of the contemporary world, intellectuals may be tasked with finding paths and principles to tackle the uncertainties of transformation or to provide technology and knowledge – indispensable means to implement guidelines. Both roles are necessary for political action, for government action, and to overcome the inertia of routine. These intellectuals interested in public life can play different roles, such as criticizing power, legitimizing it, influencing it, advising it – and, what is rarer, taking responsibilities in exercising power. In my own way and with my limitations, I have played all those roles.

As an international relations scholar, I have dedicated myself both to finding directions for our foreign policy and researching knowledge – both necessary to implement diplomatic guidelines. I refer to my 1973 book in cooperation with Felix Peña, *Argentina and Brazil in the International Relations System*, where I explained the importance of a strategic partnership with Argentina and its significance for our standing in Latin America. I also refer to an essay included in my 1982 book

Paradoxes and Possibilities, in which I reviewed the gap between order and power in international life and described how that gap opened the door for Brazil, which is not a major power, to go beyond the defense of its specific interests and to earn a voice in shaping the world order with an eye on its general interests.

I further refer to the idea, also from the 1980s, included in my book on peace/war in the contemporary world, *Brazil and global crisis* (1984), that peace should be the governing idea (*vis directiva*) amid the growing risks and destructiveness of nuclear weapons. Hence the importance of an actively pacifist diplomacy geared, *inter alia*, toward peaceful dispute resolution and feasible disarmament negotiations that could contain the arms race. These are examples of analyses that contributed to my diplomatic judgment when I had responsibilities in conducting Brazil's foreign policy.

In my work dedicated to the academic institutionalization of international relations study in our country, I noted the importance of multidisciplinary interaction between different fields of knowledge and that one should be attentive to the contributions of our contemporaries without neglecting the lessons of the classics. I emphasized the role of Law in my analysis of multidisciplinary and its transversality. Law, which I taught for forty years at the USP School of Law, was the discipline that encouraged me to develop the knowledge-means I used to enhance the effectiveness of my diplomatic action.

I refer to my studies on the role of reciprocity in International Economic Law, the dynamics of mutual collaboration rules at the international and regional levels, and how they can contribute to settling disputes when not affected by the tensions of conceptual conflicts in the organization of world affairs. I addressed that, *inter alia*, in my 1977 book on Public International Law presented at the USP School

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of Law (*livre-docência*), which described the role of International Law as an integral part of the field of knowledge of international relations. Mastery of that repertoire proved very useful in my activities as Brazil's ambassador in Geneva, especially as Brazil's ambassador to the World Trade Organization.

In response to the extremes of totalitarianism, the Charter of the United Nations enshrined normative aspirations that resulted in the development of International Human Rights Law, which our 1988 Constitution affirmed as one of the key principles that govern Brazil's international relations. The ideas I developed in my thesis in Philosophy of Law submitted to the USP Law School in 1988 were of great value to me in operationalizing Brazil's Human Rights diplomacy. I revisited Hannah Arendt's work and her idea of the "right to have rights" to discuss the internal and external reconstruction of human rights in the contemporary world (Lafer 2020).

My contact with Brazil's top-notch diplomatic staff, for which I have the highest esteem and respect, was intellectually stimulating and proved very significant in the course of my studies on international relations, both before and after my two times as Foreign Minister. The texts I elaborated on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and many of its leading figures, included in my 2018 book *International Relations, Foreign Policy, and Brazilian Diplomacy*, bear witness to that.

IV

Brazil's foreign policy naturally is the expression of a point of view on the world and how it works. In Brazil's case, that point of view has been consistent, and its persistence is associated with what Renouvin and Duroselle call "deep forces." Among them: the geographical fact that we are in South America, our continental size, the fact that Brazil is involved in no territorial dispute and that its borders are settled and consolidated, our peaceful relationship with our many neighboring countries, our linguistic unity, our distance, since independence in 1822, from international tension points, the issue of world stratification and the challenges of development.

Thanks to that persistence, Brazil has accumulated a very coherent and consistent diplomatic capital as Brazil faced the challenges History has thrown its way. In a 2001 book, later expanded, I noted that persistence is one of the ingredients of Brazil's international identity. The adequate and consistent execution of Brazilian foreign policy demands safeguarding that diplomatic capital and its repertoire, with the adjustments required by changing internal and external circumstances.

V

The responsibility of conducting foreign policy, as a public policy focused on the task of translating internal needs into external possibilities, presupposes an appropriate assessment of the world's mechanics dynamics operation and its transformations. Indeed, conflicting and associative patterns coexist simultaneously in the international arena, with more or less emphasis.

Brazil's diplomacy must be able to, in light of Brazil's perspectives in a heterogeneous international system, pick from among the peculiarities of specific circumstances and interests that are common and that can be shared when facing the asymmetries of power and to reconcile the differences in values in the contemporary Tower of Babel. I shall give examples based on my experiences from 1992 and 2001 to 2002.

The end of the Cold War and its polarities triggered widespread diplomatic repositioning and created an international scenario conducive to cooperation. That was the environment in which I was appointed Foreign Minister for the first time in 1992, during the Collor administration (1990-1992), and I was able to act in the great United Nations Conference on Environment and Development: the 1992 Earth Summit.

The Earth Summit was a solar moment for Brazilian diplomacy. It expanded Brazil's international credibility and opened up space for Brazil to creatively address a persistent global issue. The Earth Summit consolidated the environment and its interconnection with sustainable development on the international agenda and managed to overcome the North/South polarity problems that limited the reach of the 1972 Stockholm Conference.

A diplomacy of knowledge, attentive to science's role in explaining the challenges of the environment, guided Brazil in preparing for the Earth Summit. Brazil operated as a force for diplomatic balance by helping solve pending problems in the larger construction of consensus on key environmental and development issues.

The more Grotian world circumstances of that time allowed me, in the capacity of Brazil's Foreign Minister and acting as ex-officio Vice-President of the Summit with the collaboration of an exceptional team of experienced and qualified diplomats, to find ways and solutions that ultimately helped increase our country's diplomatic capital.

In my second time as Foreign Minister – 2001-2002 – I witnessed the unexpected shift in the diplomatic tectonic plates caused by the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States. They marked the appearance on the interna-

tional arena of a revolt of particularisms and showed the limited but no less cruel potential for violence of terrorism as an expression of fanaticism and despair, with its consequences on the international security agenda. They made international cooperation at the world level more elusive, in contrast with 1992, and made it more difficult to operationalize the constitutional principles that govern Brazil's international relations in alignment with Brazilian diplomatic tradition.

The nature of Brazil's international engagement led the Fernando Henrique Cardoso administration (1995-2002) to, since its inception, raise the level of our country's presence in the world based on consistency between "internal" and "external" issues and seek greater autonomy through participation in international and regional organizations – to use the words of Gelson Fonseca Jr. I participated in that effort as Ambassador in Geneva from 1995 to 1998, an experience I reported in my 1999 book *Trade, Disarmament and Human Rights*.

As the second Cardoso administration (1999-2002) drew to a close, I contributed as Foreign Minister by shifting our diplomatic focus to increasing Brazil's diplomatic capital in alignment with the efforts made during the Cardoso presidency. Hence, *inter alia*, my activities in economic diplomacy in multilateral and regional negotiations and my efforts to provide the technical skills Brazil needed to tackle trade disputes and the challenges of our participation in an economically interdependent world; the attentive care I gave to MERCOSUR issues and cooperation with our neighbors; my commitment to help South American economic development; my attention to environmental challenges in the wake of the 1992 Earth Summit; the importance I gave to human rights on the international agenda; my defense of economic and political multilateralism; my search for new diplomatic partners for Brazil and my

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initiatives to enliven traditional diplomatic relations; my concern for peace and the possibility of disarmament.

VI

I shall conclude using Hannah Arendt's observation that knowledge can be within our reach through persistent and continuous dedication to study and research, but recognition cannot. It is something we can aspire to but that is not for us to claim. It is a gift, a prize given to us in the plurality of the human condition. I am deeply thankful for the Doctor *Honoris Causa* degree UNESP now awards me not only because of the recognition it entails but also because it is given within the context of the emotions of the autumn of my life.

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