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Article

"Brazilian Foreign Policy, Multilateral Institutions and Power Relations: an Interview with Ambassador Rubens Ricupero"

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Abstract

This interview stems from the interest of four Brazilian scholars in contributing to the study of foreign policy through dialogue with practitioners. As the study about foreign policy becomes more reflexive and critical, we turned to a Brazilian diplomat, Rubens Ricupero, who based on his vast and often difficult experience, has written about his interactions with the international world and strived to establish a dialogue with the academic world. Between May and July 2021, Ambassador Ricupero shared with us his views on the difficulties and possibilities of dialogue regarding multilateral agreements and institutions, such as the GATT and the UNCTAD.

Keywords: Brazilian Foreign Policy; World Trade Organization - Uruguay Round; United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

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Introduction

This interview stems from the interest of four Brazilian scholars in contributing to the study of foreign policy through dialogue with practitioners and their historical experience. As the study and knowledge about foreign policy becomes more reflexive and critical, we turned to a Brazilian diplomat who is more reflexive and critical than most not only because of his vast and often difficult experience, but also because he has written about his interactions with the international world and strived to establish a dialogue with the academic world (Ricupero, 2017). Ambassador Ricupero has encountered the difficulties and possibilities of dialogue and conflict within multilateral institutions, and we sought to share this experience with the readers of this issue, that was gathered in eight hours of interview between May and July 2021. He is also able to point out the relations between a specific conversation and the structure of the international system in acute manner thus opening doors for our understanding of international relations and the role Brazil can or might play. His narrative about Brazilian foreign policy, about how multilateral institutions work, and the relations of power based on concepts and policies allow us to perceive the limits and options for agency of a country with limited resources as Brazil and perhaps gaze into the present crisis of international organizations.

During the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations, in the late 1980s, Ambassador Ricupero was a leading actor among developing countries representatives in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and a privileged observer of the highly intense North-South pressures which paved the way for the liberal economic governance of the 1990s embodied in the establishment of the World Trade Organization (WTO). His detailed account of the interests at stake and the role of coercion in areas such as intellectual property rights reveal how the understanding of these dimensions of asymmetric power relations remains crucial for contemporary debates on Brazilian foreign policy.

Coercion and asymmetric power relations were also the main obstacles the Ambassador had to face during his nine years tenure as Secretary-general of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), at a time when the organization´s relevance and even its very survival were under threat (Ricupero, 2004). His narrative stresses the strong pressures launched by developed countries – particularly the US government, whose general dislike of the institution had always been evident – to "downsize" UNCTAD, and how he coped with them by transforming the agency from a confrontational forum between North and South into a think tank that could provide Global South countries with intellectual and technical tools to better formulate and negotiate their own interests.

Ambassador Ricupero's testimony, given during four very pleasant and fulfilling meetings, will certainly help to fill several gaps in the general knowledge about the international performance of Brazil. Moreover, the content of this interview illustrates the relevance of diplomatic capabilities for a developing country like Brazil in the arduous task of seeking to circumvent the scarcity of resources towards the defense of interests, particularly in forums whose hallmark - as noted by ambassador's himself - is the omnipresence of power.

Interview

Good morning, Ambassador. It is a pleasure to have you here with us. Starting our conversation, we would like you to speak, in general lines, about your professional experience in international institutions, a hallmark of your career.

In the time I have been in multilateral economic functions, the omnipresence of power has always impressed me. Power in the true hard sense, not of what today is called soft power, is the power to impose one's will on other countries through threats of economic sanctions. I refer specially to sanctions of this nature and not so much to military sanctions, as we see in other domains of the multilateral such as in the political sphere. I have always been struck by this presence of power and the contrast between this strong presence and the complete absence of awareness of this issue on the part of economists writing about trade and trade liberalization. I don't remember finding a dissenting voice. They treat these issues as if they were a laboratory experiment, absolutely scientific. They never suspect that behind it there are economic interests, manifested by pressures from political power.

This dichotomy has always impressed me. Among diplomats, the awareness of the presence of power is so great that it does not deserve comment. For them, the dimension of the power asymmetry in negotiations is part of their daily life. But when economists write (and this was very visible in Brazil, in the campaign for trade liberalization), they treat it as if it were a scientific theorem, an imposition of the truth of the facts, as if it had nothing to do with the real pressure of economic interests.

I would like to give my testimony, showing how power has manifested itself on the occasions when I dealt with this problem in my four years as ambassador in Geneva, from 1987 to 1991, during the Uruguay Round, and when I returned to Geneva as secretary-general of UNCTAD for nine years, from 1995 to 2004.

The pressures on Brazil were older and dated back from the early 1980s. The clash with the United States about the Informatics Law began when I was an advisor to the Sarney government between 1985 and 1987. We had a serious dispute with the United States at that time. Sarney was disappointed, because both he and Tancredo Neves, Brazilian politicians of the old regime, still looked to the United States as the country that would rescue us in the foreign debt crisis. They believed that, due to the delicate moment of the transition from the military regime to democracy, the Americans would show some political sensibility in face of the difficulties of the government party at the time, the PMDB and the Brazilian government in the negotiations with the banks.

It was a very rude awakening. I wrote about it in my book *Diário de Bordo* (Ricupero, 2010. I was present at the most critical meeting of Tancredo's travel abroad as president-elect. I mean the interview in the Madison Hotel, Washington, on February the 1st, 1985, between Secretary of State George Shultz and him. Shultz told him to lose all illusion he still harboured of taking office with the debt negotiation completed and behind him. The International Monetary Fund was ready to blow the whistle on the several letters of intent that Delfim Netto, the Minister of the Economy of the last military government, had signed but had not fulfilled. We were at the last days of the Figueiredo government at the end of the nearly 20 years of the military regime. After the interview, Tancredo even commented that it had been the hardest blow of the trip. I was the only note-taker and a kept one of the few copies that survived.

Tancredo replied to Shultz that he feared his party, the PMDB's reaction because there was a radical wing in the party that had been advocating the repudiation of the debt incurred by the military regime. He didn't rule out the possibility of Brazil suspending payments, although this was not his wish, because it would cause a shake-up in the financial system. As it is known, that ended up happening with Sarney afterward.

On September 7, 1985, Independence Day, in the first year of the New Republic, I went to the Presidential Planalto Palace to accompany Sarney to the military parade. At the time I had become the Special Advisor to the President, the position closest to the president after the Chief of the Presidential Staff. As I entered the President's Office, I found Sarney was extremely disturbed and indignant because the Americans had just announced that morning that they would start applying sanctions against Brazil on account of the informatics law and intellectual property rights. The fact that the official announcement of sanctions had been made as Brazil was commemorating its National Holiday showed that there was no sensitivity on their part for the moment Brazil was going through. Sarney had expected an attitude of understanding and assistance from the USA government that never materialized.

Since 1982, in the pre-negotiation of the Uruguay Round, the developed countries intended to include the so-called new issues in which intellectual property was fundamental. Could you talk about this specifically?

Brazil, together with India, was leading the resistance to the inclusion of the new issues. There were other countries in the coalition, the Argentineans, for instance, because their interest was exclusively concentrated on agriculture, resisted by the Europeans. They argued that they would only accept the new issues if agriculture was also included.

In order to understand our position, it is useful to remember that there were many important issues that had not been satisfactorily addressed during the negotiations of the Tokyo Round. They were called "the unfinished business of the Tokyo Round" and they included agriculture, tariff peaks, tariff escalation, the abuse of anti-dumping rules and some others. By the time the Tokyo Round ended in 1979, progress in reducing tariffs and quantitative barriers in traditional trade (in the so-called shallow integration, which is trade integration) had perhaps reached the maximum the industrialized nations were willing to go. Those reductions were practically confined to industrial goods. The developed nations didn't want to include in an eventual new round of trade negotiations the adoption of rules for agriculture, for which there were practically no rules despite being the oldest area of trade (there is nothing more traditional, even prehistoric, than the trade on wheat, on cattle). Agriculture was almost entirely outside the GATT. The same was the case with trade in textiles, because that area, formerly dominated by the West, had been migrating to low-wage countries in Asia. Since textile trade at the time was regulated by quantitative quotas, the advanced economies didn't want to liberalize textiles and several other sectors. One of them was the so-called tariff peaks, products heavily protected by high tariffs contrasting with average much lower tariffs in most other articles. Those were the so-called sensitive sectors connected to very strong interests. Another such chapter was that of tariff escalation, which referred to products that had zero tariff on raw materials but, once they became more elaborated with added value, were subjected to much higher tariffs.

Developing countries thought that the time had finally arrived to address the issues of our direct interest such as tariff peaks, tariff escalation, and issues that Americans do not want to discuss to this day, such as anti-dumping that they employ to protect their industries, as well as countervailing duties against the alleged subsidies given by other countries.

In Geneva, Brazil, India, Egypt, developing countries in general, were asking why we should enter new, difficult, and complex terrain such as services, intellectual property - for which there were no statistics or data - before the incomplete agenda of the Tokyo Round was resolved. These countries had varying degrees of opposition. The two strongest, firmest, with the most prepared negotiators were India and Brazil.

To what do you attribute the firmness of Brazil and India in maintaining their positions? In our case, would it have to do with the persistence, in Brazilian diplomacy, of a posture still deeply influenced by the ECLAC theses that identify international trade inequality as one of the drivers of underdevelopment?

It is a sum of factors. This firmness had to do with the economic model of nationalistic development in place in both Brazil and India. But the importance of the real interests should not be underestimated. At that time, little attention was paid to international trade. One of the few active sectors in Brazil was FIESP, a defence bastion of national industry, and first to be structured among industrial organizations. Although FIESP was from São Paulo, it represented, in practice, the whole of national industry, much more than the National Confederation of Industry (CNI). It had a technical body, prepared people. On a day-to-day basis, when Itamaraty needed to face economic negotiations, it formally consulted FIESP, which almost always opined against liberalization.

Brazil did not join the subsidy code at the Tokyo Round, and never joined the civilian aircraft code nor the government procurement code, codes that date back to 1979. It has joined the procurement code with the current government, with Paulo Guedes At the time of the military regime it adhered to the industrial subsidies code because of American pressure.

In what ways were these pressures exerted? What were the channels?

They were financial [channels]. The effective pressure was not on Itamaraty. Of course, they also put pressure on Itamaraty, but to no avail because the professional diplomats did not give in. The pressure was much stronger in the Ministry of Finance, in the Central Bank, in the Bank of Brazil, all of which had many financial interests in international financial markets and were particularly vulnerable at the time of the foreign debt crisis. In addition, even without pressure, these financial people had more or less similar mindsets. The Minister of Finance Ernane Galvêas, Carlos Langoni, who was then the Head of the Central Bank, all of them thought similarly to the Americans... The financialization of the economy made a gigantic leap in the last two or three decades. At that time, it was only in its infancy.

Would you going to the GATT have brought a more political view to the Brazilian negotiations?

In mid-1987, I was designated Brazil's representative to the United Nations organizations in Geneva and to the GATT. I reluctantly accepted, thinking I could devote most of my time to the political organization but I soon discovered that the recently started Uruguay Round negotiations at the GATT would take practically all my time. In that area, I was a stranger in the nest. The delegation in Geneva had a very technical work and most of the diplomats there had come from the trade negotiations divisions in Itamaraty, having accumulated personal experience with trade negotiations over many years. Despite my initial difficulties, I ended up having a positive experience. Aware of my lack of experience and specific knowledge in the area, I read all the books I could find on the GATT. I studied my predecessor, Ambassador Paulo Nogueira Batista's speeches and then tried to reproduce them from memory, to learn those formulas used in the negotiations. It was a serious effort of self-education.

When I arrived in Geneva, the predominant position on trade negotiations in Brasil was still derived from industrial interests, basically the protection of national industry. There were few agricultural sectors interested in the Round. In terms of economic interests in general, there were few sectors that would send representatives to Geneva to exert pressure on the negotiations. Besides FIESP, and to a lesser degree CNI, there were only three: the orange juice exporters affected by the protectionist measures of the American market; secondly, the Brazilian Soybean Oil Industry Association (only the oil; soybeans didn't appear yet). And, finally, the textile sector. At the time, Brazil benefited from quotas, which are an ambivalent measure: if on the one hand, they limit what can be exported, on the other hand, they give you an almost captive market. There was a textile industry group at FIESP, and two or three members always went to Geneva to negotiate quotas.

Between 1987 and 1989, the dominant sensation was that our interest in agricultural negotiations was more a pretext than something real and concrete. Although we had no studies, we suspected that, in terms of balance of gains and losses of the liberalization of the agricultural market, Brazil would lose more than it would gain. The real winners would be Argentineans, Uruguayans, Australians, New Zealanders. Accordingly, Paulo Nogueira's point of view was that it would be better for Brazil to ally itself with the Europeans and the Indians to block agriculture, and, in turn, they would help us block services and intellectual property. That was the position: if Brazil and India helped Europe to resist concessions in agricultural negotiations, especially what Europe feared most, the reduction or end of the subsidies to their domestic agriculture, it would, on the other hand, help us with the new issues.

I always found this idea out of reality. Although Europeans were interested in blocking agriculture as much as possible, the most dynamic sector in Europe was not agriculture, but industry and services. Europeans - especially the more industrialized Germans - were strongly inclined to include the new issues. I soon realized that we had to give much more importance to the agricultural issue than we had been doing so far.

I confess I used agriculture as an argument to block the new issues and further liberalization in industrial goods since, in the beginning, I didn't believe in the theme itself. In an organization like the GATT, whose culture is totally predicated on trade liberalization, a mere negative and defensive attitude is not tenable. You cannot simply say that you refuse liberalization, you can't say "no" to everything. You have to show that we are ready to accept something you do not want in exchange for something you want.

The GATT was then dominated by the so-called Quadrilateral (Quad) Group, composed by the United States, Europe (European Union), Japan and Canada, in other terms, the alliance of the advanced capitalist economies, the industrialized economies. They called the shots.

It is often said that the OECD is the club of the rich, but it is, above all, the think tank of the rich. The OECD gathered the brains that prepared the intellectual arguments defending the inclusion of services and intellectual property, the signing of an agreement on investments where they have not yet succeeded. Everything the Americans, Europeans, Japanese, and Canadians were advocating came from the OECD.

In Itamaraty there was tension between the old group committed to the protection of industry and with a nationalistic outlook (Samuel Pinheiro Guimarães was one of the members of this group) and a new group aware that agriculture was starting to become the theme of the future, a vision in which I also shared. To have legitimacy in the GATT, you had to be a *demandeur* of something. You couldn't say no to everything. I found my hook in agriculture.

The rationale for launching the round was the trade-off that took place at Punta del Este, between the new issues, on the one hand, and agriculture and anti-dumping on the other. Before the Punta del Este meeting, I witnessed the decision-making process regarding the position that should be adopted by Brazil. Paulo Nogueira, our ambassador in Geneva, did not want to accept the new issues. The American pressure in 1985 and 1986 became very strong and, in part because of the pressure, in part because the country was beginning to change, the Brazilian position began to move. At the Ministry of Foreign Relations, both the Head of the Economic Department, Sebastião do Rêgo Barros and Secretary-General Paulo Tarso Flecha de Lima were in favour of a more moderate and balanced position. But it was Olavo Setubal, then Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1985, who was decisive. He understood that it was possible to try a trade-off between new issues and agriculture and some other issues of our particular interest. That's what unlocked the conference in Punta del Este, at least from the Brazilian perspective. A compromise was reached there: the launching of the round, embodied in the Punta del Este Declaration, which placed new and traditional issues on the same footing and established that the negotiation should aim at a balanced and harmonious result among them. Hence the idea that it must be a single undertaking, which means that at the end of negotiations you must accept everything.

The Uruguay Round started in 1987 and was supposed to end in December 1990. At the end of 1988, a midterm review meeting would take place in Canada. At the midterm review, in Montreal, it was clear that what we had predicted would happen: negotiations were advanced in intellectual property, in services, but not in what was important to us. At a certain point in the conference, I told Paulo Tarso that we should place agriculture as a sine-qua-non condition, otherwise we would have to swallow the advances in the other groups without showing anything in our area.

Developing countries had never denied consensus in the GATT when there was agreement among Americans, Europeans, Japanese, and Canadians. It was something unthinkable in the GATT culture. We had to find a common ground among several countries in order to have a minimum chance of standing the pressure. The Cairns Group of countries interested in agriculture, led by Australia, was not prepared to take the strong position we were proposing. The same applied to the Latin American Group where net food-importing nations (Mexico, Jamaica) would not support us either. Faced with this difficult, I said "Why don't we create a new ad-hoc grouping, the Latin American members of the Cains Group (Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, Colombia)?" It was Paulo Tarso, at ministerial level, who had to say that Brazil would deny consensus. The Argentine ambassador supported us because of the lack of progress in agriculture. It was agreed that the results of the negotiation, which had advanced to a certain point, would be approved in most of the negotiating groups, but in four they would remain suspended: agriculture, anti-dumping, services and intellectual property. It was decided to convene an extraordinary session of the Trade Negotiations Committee (TNC), chaired by the Foreign Minister of Uruguay Enrique Iglesias that would take place in Geneva in April 1989.

The American organization Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association (PMA) was behind the inclusion of intellectual property in the trade policy of the US. It managed to get the issue of patents onto the American negotiating agenda virtually single-handedly. Because it had enormous support, it led the American Congress to pass a law that punished countries that did not accept patents and did not respect intellectual property according, of course, to the US version of the subject. Thus, the United States had a weapon with which to strike countries. This is hard power, trade sanctions, and it was applied to Brazil.

The basic problem of intellectual property in the Uruguay Round negotiations was that, until then, developing countries had not accepted to negotiate standards and norms of intellectual property, that is, the substance of intellectual property, in the GATT. We argued that the name of the negotiations group was "trade-related aspects of intellectual property". Standards and norms belonged to the very substance of intellectual property; they were not trade-related. We were willing to discuss counterfeiting, the forgery of products, as the Asians used to do with French brands... This would have to do with trade. But norms and standards are aspects of substance and belong to the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO). The GATT would not be the place to discuss these aspects.

At the end of the Round, the Americans and the developed countries got what they wanted and intellectual property rights became part of the GATT. It was a deeply flawed and unfair result, obtained by coercion rather than persuasion. Many countries ended up consenting because they were pressured beyond what would be legitimate in international relations. What was behind this position was raw economic interests of business and the desire to maximize the profit from patents.

Was it on this occasion that you asked WIPO for a study on the economic and social impact of TRIPS on developing countries?

Yes. At the beginning of the Uruguay Round, in 1988, I succeeded Indian ambassador Shukla as spokesman and coordinator (which corresponded to the position of the chairman) of the Informal Group of Developing Countries in the GATT. As the GATT wanted to be totally independent and to have no formal relationship to the UN, it did not accept the Group of 77. That is why the Group of 77 in GATT was called the Informal Group of Developing Countries. It was in substance the same thing, but the name was different. At that time, South Korea, Singapore, and Hong Kong - countries very much in favor of trade liberalization, unlike the other members, which were more reluctant - were part of our group.

Before the Uruguay Round, no country was obliged by international law to protect pharmaceutical patents. Nobody knew what this would entail in terms of increased royalties to be paid for medicines in poor countries if those countries had to change their patent laws. There was no study indicating what the changes sought in TRIPS would represent in additional costs for developing nations. The OECD carried out studies for industrialized countries, but not for developing countries.

So, the Informal Group gave me the mandate to ask WIPO to prepare a study showing what would be the practical and economic consequences of the rules that the Americans wanted to introduce during the Uruguay Round negotiations in the TRIPS agreement. I went to see the director general of WIPO, and he told me that he could not undertake the study because his competence at WIPO was purely technical, on the legal aspects of patents, of intellectual property, on time limits, and not on their economic consequences. I conveyed this to the group and they asked me to insist. I went back and this time the director admitted that he could not do what we were asking for because the Western countries, which dominated WIPO, would overthrow him. They didn't want the study to be done.

Thus, the negotiation was carried out in the dark, without anybody knowing what the consequences would be. That is why I say that the rich industrialized countries were acting in bad faith. Otherwise, they would not have opposed allowing a study to be carried out that would quantify the economic consequences of the agreement. The fact that they opposed it is because they knew that TRIPS was detrimental to developing countries. This shows how, in these negotiations, it is power on the basis of selfish interest, not the strength of the arguments, that counts in the end. They ended up getting what they wanted: the approval of the TRIPS agreement. The Uruguay Round negotiations ended in 1993. The signing of the final act at Marrakech was in 1994.

Let's return to the subject of the end of the Uruguay Round. After the meeting of the Trade Negotiations Committee (April 1989), in Geneva, the negotiations, blocked since Montreal, had advanced somewhat. However, in 1990, when the round was supposed to end, the impasse was re-established, mainly due to the recalcitrance of the European Union in accepting advances in agriculture, in the reduction of domestic subsidies, not so much in export subsidies to agricultural products. So, in a way, in Brussels, it was less dramatic than in Montreal. When we left Geneva for Brussels at the end of 1990, we were already resigned to failure. We knew, beforehand, that the round would not end in Brussels. There was not the surprise that happened in Montreal; there was a sort of replay of what had occurred two years before. What had happened in Montreal happened in Brussels.

In Brussels we resorted again to the same formula of the Latin American members of the Cairns Group. The Brazilian delegation was headed by then Secretary General Ambassador Marcos Azambuja. He was not very familiar with the GATT but he did quite well, especially in the final meeting when the deadlock was reached. It was an even bigger failure than Montreal. In the history of GATT, whenever consensus was not reached at a given meeting, the tradition was to approve a scenario establishing how to resume negotiations in the future.

In Montreal, the scenario emerged after a small group decided to freeze such and such issues (four subjects) and to call a meeting of the TNC for April of the following year, at which there would be an unblocking. In Brussels, there was no agreement on a possible scenario. European immobilism was so great that it was not even possible to signal a moment when it could be overcome. The frustration was greater. We went back to Geneva. On that occasion, I had been elected Chairman of the GATT Contracting Parties, a sort of natural succession for someone like me who was already the Council Chairman.

The GATT people enjoyed living the fiction that the GATT was only a contract, not a full-fledged organization. And the Chairman was a kind of trustee of the contracting parties. Since there was no scenario, the contracting parties, that is, the member countries, asked me to conduct consultations to reduce the excessive number of negotiating groups - 15, which was considered one of the reasons for failure. The idea was to bring together in one group, for example, all the rules. Several groups discussed rules, anti-dumping standards, countervailing duties... All of this ended up in a single group, chaired by veteeran Brazilian Ambassador George Álvares Maciel.

The reduction in the number of groups was not a problem. It was a question of organizing the new setting for the negotiations, but the negotiations themselves didn't move because of that obstacle in agriculture maintained by the European Union, and nobody had the strength to move it. In the meantime, in September 1991, I was transferred to the embassy in Washington.

I replaced Marcílio Marques Moreira, who had been called back to Brazil to replace Zélia Cardoso de Mello. The Collor government was starting to go into a tailspin.

What was the impact of the Collor administration on the negotiations?

In a way, it was great, but also limited, because the government's crisis started very early. Collor took office in 1990 and by 1991 the economic plan called the "savings confiscation" had failed. Minister of the Economy Zélia Cardoso fell and inflation skyrocketed. The following year, the impeachment process began. The most positive impact of the Collor administration was felt right at the beginning, when, in one stroke, he liberalized the trade regime, abolishing the so-called Annex C of Cacex, a huge list, four or five thousand products, whose importation was "temporarily suspended" (actually forbidden). Collor put an end to the "Benê's drawer", Cacex director Benedito Fonseca Moreira. Brazil then had a "defense-on-defense" trade defense system, a sort of a series of redundant measures to effectively block any import. In addition to Annex C, there was the requirement to prove that there was no similar national product and the prior license to import. When everything failed, Benê put it on hold. All of this ended suddenly.

This radically changed the Brazilian position. Until then, Brazil was reticent in relation to advances in any subject, even in the most traditional fields, such as the reduction of tariffs. There was no way you could justify that Brazil, under the GATT rules, had thousands of products whose importation was forbidden. This was illegal!

There are two different versions of the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs, the constitution of GATT, the original one from 1947 and the updated version from 1994, at the end of the Uruguay Round. In the 1947 version, Article 18, Paragraph B, "Balance of Payments Exceptions" stated that a country with temporary acute balance of payment difficulties could provisionally suspend its obligations in the General Agreement. Brazil, like some other developing countries, used to invoke this article every year.

In practical terms, that was final, right?

Yes, in practice it had become permanent. It fell to me, on instructions from Itamaraty, in a special meeting, to "disinvoke" Article 18-B, when Annex C was abolished. José Alfredo Graça Lima considers that this was the turning point in the evolution of Brazil's position in trade, a milestone in the history of Brazil in the GATT.

Let's take another example of how the Americans play hard in trade negotiations. In the first year of the Collor administration, there was a very revealing episode. Collor had aroused great enthusiasm in the United States. He was compared to Indiana Jones for his daring, sporting ways. His visit to the United States was an absolute success. At the White House banquet, he sat next to Carla Hills, who was the USTR. His speech was very liberal. By the way, his inauguration speech itself, written in part by José Guilherme Merquior, had already been quite liberal also. When Collor finished, Carla Hills said to him: "You say all these beautiful liberal things, but your representative in Geneva is sabotaging everything, he is preventing any progress at the negotiations". Later I was told (this is nowhere documented, maybe it's in the secret telegrams from the Brazilian Embassy in Washington) that he would have said, "Who is this guy? He must be fired immediately!" Luckily for me, Marcílio, who was a very close friend of mine, heard the exchange at the table. Marcílio explained to the president that it wasn't exactly like that, that it wasn't a personal question , but a national position of the government that I had been defending. Carla Hills didn't hesitate to ask for my head. I narrowly avoided being fired. This episode gives you a good idea of the dimension of what I am depicting. When the Americans want something they will not stop at anything to get their goal. The only thing missing was for them to get a drone to assassinate me. Symbolically, if they can, they will eliminate you.

During the period that you were at the head of the GATT, was it possible to reconcile the interests of Brazil's representation in the GATT and the other UN bodies in Geneva? Was there a conflict, for example, between the multilateral trade agenda and the labour agenda?

There was a potential for conflict that did not translate into major problems because it was always contained. Two major issues, that would grow in the future, were then emerging, and to this day are unresolved. One was the difference in labour standards. The advanced countries believed that the fact that organized labour did not receive the same level of protection in certain underdeveloped countries gave them an unfair advantage in trade. This claim was made mainly by American labour unions and, to a lesser extent, by European ones.

The basic argument concerned the difference in minimum wages, which made labour much cheaper in developing countries. It was this argument that ended up justifying the migration of companies. Even today the issue of job losses in the United States is important. At that time, the unions wanted to prevent the departure of companies that sought more favourable labour conditions, and to regulate this issue in the GATT, which should consider these aspects as a factor for increasing unfair competitiveness. Developing countries were adamantly opposed. After all, the advantage of most of them was in labour. It happened with the Asian countries, starting with Japan, and later South Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong. As these countries developed, working conditions became more like those in rich countries.

This topic was put on the Council's agenda every month by the developed countries. When the time for the discussion arrived, four or five of them explained why the theme should be incorporated into the GATT, and, in response, 25 or so developing countries would take the floor to oppose the idea. Because this pattern was repeated every month and used to lengthen the meetings uselessly, when I became the Council Chairman, I warned that there was no point in wasting an hour and a half every month on that subject. I decided that I would allow only two countries to speak in favor and two against. And then we passed to the next item. Brazil was against considering the trade aspects of labour standards at the beginning , but with time it became more flexible, although never entirely. This issue was never resolved.

Another issue that was timidly emerging then was the implications of the environment for trade. The contracting parties asked me to conduct consultations to see if there was a consensus to bring some of the environmental issues into the GATT. I took these consultations forward, but the result was a report that said that the issue could not yet be resolved. These two issues involved a potential conflict and never came to fruition because the developing countries did not allow it to be discussed within the GATT.

When I left Geneva in 1991, the Round was practically paralyzed. Even when I was in Washington, I continued to be the chairman of the Parties. I had two hats: that of ambassador and that of chairman of the GATT Contracting Parties. The GATT secretariat consulted me on the more relevant issues and I sent back my views. In December, I went back to Geneva to preside the session of the Parties. After that, I left the organization.

In 1992, Arthur Dunkel, Director-General of the GATT, faced with the paralysis of the institution, pulled a kind of coup. Traditionally, the Director-General has little autonomy, and can only propose something at the request of the contracting parties. However, he ended up creating a request himself and, on his own, submitted a text that was the consolidation of the state of the negotiations as they stood at that moment. This Draft Final Act was already the final agreement, as anticipated, but it still did not command consensus. There were many divergences, many imbalances. For example, the agreement was considered too timid on agriculture, and too advanced on intellectual property.

Dunkel acted by sure as an interpreter for the developed countries, proposing the agreement they wanted, but the reaction was strong. So, the United States, Canada, the European Union, and Japan, which controlled the GATT, concluded that Dunkel was not in a position to lead the round to the end and that a "push" of power would be needed. They took Dunkel out and brought in Peter Sutherland, who was sworn in on July 1, 1993. A former Irish minister and European Union competition commissioner, he was a skilled politician, in the tradition of Irish politicians like Clinton and Biden, engaging, funny, but tough.

Sutherland was a steamroller. Authorized to go over the negotiators' heads, in a few weeks he threw in all the weight of the European Union, of Japan, of the United States. The negotiations started to be directly conducted with the governments and, thus, an agreement was reached. Luiz Felipe Lampreia was there as Brazil's Representative in that final stretch. He was the ideal person for the task because he was a convinced liberal. In Brazil, the government had already changed, it was Itamar Franco.

After this very long, continuous paralysis of the Doha Round (which celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2021) and that Roberto Azevedo decided to leave his position as Director General of WTO before the end of his mandate, it is significant that the most important trade nations did not think it would be necessary to bring a politician to become the new WTO Director-General, in contrast to what had been done by the end of the Uruguay Round. They no longer believe that their main goals will be achieved via the WTO. They have not abandoned it completely, but the fact that they are allowing a Nigerian woman to be Director-General, someone without political power, is symptomatic that the WTO is facing the same fate as other organizations: that of a continuous decline, of outliving their usefulness and in some sort of way of just fighting for survival.

Would you say that her appointment does not represent a victory for developing countries, but rather the beginning of the WTO's irrelevance?

It is already the realization of irrelevance, although the Trump government being much more radical, had previously vetoed her name. Biden removed the veto but he has no interest in pushing the liberalization agenda forward. The status quo is perfectly acceptable to him. The Uruguay Round marks both the apogee of globalization in institutional terms - the WTO is the only organization produced entirely by globalization - and its decline. After that, it failed to maintain the same level and a sequence of crises occurred.

What led you to be invited to occupy the UNCTAD General Secretariat?

After a while in Washington, I came back to Brazil in 1993. I became the Minister of the Environment and then of Finance. When I was at the Ministry of Finance, the Brazilian government proposed my name for Director-General of the WTO. Itamaraty thought that I could be elected to succeed Peter Sutherland. When I resigned my post as Minister of Finance, I withdrew my candidacy, of course. Renato Ruggiero, from Italy, was chosen for the post. Although I do not know exactly what happened, I think that this episode of the WTO dispute was somewhat related to my choice for UNCTAD sometime later. On that occasion of the choice of the first WTO DG, I gave interviews to the international press, I appeared in the *Financial Times*... all these things gave visibility to my candidacy in 1994 and in early 1995.

At that point, UNCTAD was without a leader. The last Secretary-General had been a Ghanaian diplomat. UNCTAD had been for a long time, almost one year, in the care of an acting director, an officer in charge, the Chilean Carlos Fortin. During this long period without a Secretary-General, there was much talk, though unofficially, that the time had come for the organization's structure to be reviewed, that it no longer had a reason to exist. Those who did not like UNCTAD's independent position, usually the USA and the developed countries, used to say that in 1964, when UNCTAD had been created, there was no multilateral trade organization (because GATT was considered a contract). Now that WTO had come into existence, the time had arrived to do away with UNCTAD.

When I left the Finance Ministry, I was appointed Brazil's Ambassador to Italy. I arrived in Rome on March 19, 1995. I didn't adapt very well. After the frenzy of being Finance Minister, I found it boring to be an ambassador. As an ambassador in a European post, you don't have much to do. You visit your colleagues, the colleagues visit you, then you offer them lunch, they offer you lunch… I had no more patience for this. I realized that there was no way back to my previous incarnation as a diplomat.

In the summer of 1995, while on vacation in Capri, I received a phone call from Boutros-Boutros Ghali, whom I did not know. He needed to appoint a new Secretary-General of UNCTAD and my name had come up. I think the suggestion came from the Group of 77. The story that I was told is that Boutros-Ghali was half-accomplice to the maneuver to break up UNCTAD. The WTO would have made UNCTAD unnecessary. He was taking things in that direction when there was a rebellion by the Group of 77 and China, and they started pushing in New York not to break up UNCTAD.

One of the people from the Group of 77 and China who played an important role was Juan Somavia, former ambassador from Chile and later director-general of the ILO. He greatly influenced the UN direction, making Boutros-Ghali realize that the group would not accept the suppression of UNCTAD and that a solution had to be found. Enrique Iglesias, then president of the IDB, was also influential. He worked as an intermediary and knew me well. I think he was one of the people who proposed my name, but I am not sure. These are my speculations.

My son - who is a Professor of Sociology, Political Science at the University of São Paulo - advised me to accept the invitation. The fact that I have two daughters living in Geneva also contributed. After a brief hesitation, I accepted. I spoke with Fernando Henrique and Lampreia then Foreign Minister, who gave me *carte blanche.*

I decided not to keep any ties with Itamaraty because I knew I wouldn't be coming back. I knew it would be very hard, there had to be no turning back. I had to burn the ships, as Cortez did in Mexico. I asked to retire. I was 57 years old and still had a long time ahead of me. I could be an ambassador until I was 65. Giving up a seven or eight-year career in Rome was something very rare, almost unprecedented in Itamaraty, especially at that time. From the economic point of view, it was a big loss: I earned much more as ambassador than as Secretary-General of UNCTAD.

Let me tell you a shocking episode that shows once again how political power is always present in these matters. I had been invited in July or August 1995 but it was only in September that my name had been approved by the UN General Assembly. UNCTAD has a specific characteristic. It is part of is called the UN proper. This means that the UNCTAD Secretary-General is chosen by the UN Secretary-General, with a difference.

In many UN proper organizations, the appointment of the Secretary-General is sufficient. In some, such as UNCTAD and UNDP, the choice must be endorsed by the UN General Assembly. In the case of UNCTAD this is clear because, like the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and all councils, it is a subsidiary body of the General Assembly and therefore depends on the General Assembly. This aspect is important because, as a result, no country can leave UNCTAD. If it were possible, the United States would have left a long time ago. Since the budget is that of the UN, when the UN has no money, neither does UNCTAD. The choice of directors is a process that starts at UNCTAD, but that ultimately must be shared with New York. The Secretary-General cannot autonomously choose a director that the UN Secretary-General does not want. UNCTAD's autonomy is relative.

I was part of the group that was always in contact with the UN Secretary-General. We had a weekly meeting by videoconference, especially during Kofi Annan's mandate.

After I was approved by the General Assembly, I went to New York to make contacts with the Secretary-General, with everybody. One of my first visits was to Madeleine Albright, who headed the American mission to the UN before she became Secretary of State in the Clinton administration in place of Warren Christopher. I went to visit her, as a courtesy. After making me wait five minutes, she greeted me with the following sentence: "Ambassador, I want you to know that I was not consulted about your appointment". She opened the conversation that way. Diplomatically, this is a slap in the face. There was no incident, but she made it clear - either because she wanted UNCTAD to be suppressed or because she had heard about my role in the Uruguay Round - that I was not persona grata to the Americans. I had just arrived! They could not accuse me of anything. Of course, I didn't publicize the event.

While you were the head of UNCTAD, did you suffer pressure from the United States?

The whole time, nine years. In a way, I left because of them. I had two consecutive terms, each of four years and an additional extension of one year because the general conference of UNCTAD was scheduled to be held in São Paulo in 2004 and my second term ended in 2003. The Group of 77 and China was in favor of giving me a two-year extension but the USA delegation objected and my term was finally extended for one year until September 2004. At that point, the Americans were putting a lot of pressure on the UN. In that respect, Democrats and Republicans are not so different. There was already a growing anti-UN sentiment in the United States because the organization no longer followed its will. In the so-called unipolar moment of the USA, they had a very low level of tolerance for dissent. So, they started to cut contributions, which created a tremendous problem. There was a moment when the UN practically stopped because the Americans were not paying their contributions. They were and are to this day, the largest contributors.

Boutros was elected with a commitment to put an American at the head of the Administration at the United Nations with the mission to cut everything, to downsize all sorts of programs and initiatives the Americans did not like. I have erased his name from my memory, by some Freudian mechanism. I had a lot of contact with him and in the end, we got along well, but he was a thorn in my flesh. I was pressured to downsize UNCTAD, because it was considered as too bloated, with too many people, too many high positions. It was the kiss of death: either I obeyed, or I didn't continue.

I went back to Geneva and met with my advisors. I was an apprentice in the complicated politics of the UN. We concluded that we had to decrease the number of divisions, from nine to four, something radical, because it would represent more than a 50% cut. The next UNCTAD conference was to be held in Midrand, near Pretoria, South Africa. I arrived in September 1995 and the conference took place in April-May 1996. Instead of awaiting for doing the reform after the conference, I did the reform before. That went very good with everybody. I even got a commendation at a G7 meeting, in Lyon. In the final communiqué of that meeting, there is a paragraph applauding the UNCTAD reform, mentioning that the right direction was to "slim down" the international organizations.

By doing this, I was able to make sure that UNCTAD would survive the onslaught of the Americans and the advanced economies. We had four divisions, of which the most important was the Globalization Division, an analytical, macroeconomic division. It is the most bothersome for the USA and the OECD, IMF types because it is responsible for the Trade and Development Report (TDR), the main flagship report of UNCTAD. It has always been a dissenting voice, a critical analytical voice in relation to the mainstream organizations that obediently follow the instructions coming from Washington in international economics.

You referred to the raison d'être of UNCTAD when it was established in 1964. The context in which your appointment was made, in 1995, was different. If the 1992 conference was almost the burial of UNCTAD, your appointment, three years later, was the recognition of the development agenda. At the time, Juan Somavia oversaw the preparation of the Conference on Social Development, with an agenda different from that of the Washington Consensus. Would your appointment be associated with the recovery of the development agenda?

You have raised a crucial issue: the historical context. UNCTAD only became possible because it is a creature of the 1960s. I recently wrote a paper from the perspective of history in which I tried to show the historicity of international organizations. It is therefore quite different from most "UNsian" papers.[1]

I arrived at UNCTAD at the peak of the right wing, ultra conservative reaction, at the right time to put my head on the guillotine. The 1990s was the peak of hardline globalization. It coincides with the American unipolar moment. China was still at the very beginning of its remarkable development, waiting for its moment to arrive. The Soviet Russians were breaking up, the Soviet Union was desintegrating. The game was over. All the former bastions of the Third World were disappearing one ater the other. Yugoslavia, its great champion, had ceased to exist, making room for Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Montenegro... India also began to open up. The Mexicans had joined the NAFTA and OECD. The Chinese were interested in conquering the American market. Egypt became the second-largest recipient of American aid, after Israel.

We could no longer keep alive the fiction that we were still going to negotiate the reform of the international economic order. We had lost. If we insisted, UNCTAD would disappear.

[1] Ricupero (2004).

I kept what could be kept: UNCTAD as a think tank of the developing world, no longer as a forum to negotiate a new economic order. That had ended in 1981, in Cancun. But in Geneva, when the show was over, there was still the illusion that a global South-North negotiation was still possible.

In the early 1960s, there was a new office created at the UN in New York that had invented the expression "multinational companies" and had started to call attention to the huge power exerted by some of those private companies whose volume of business was much greater than the economic size of most independent countries. That office was responsible for the first systematic analysis of multinational companies and their decisive role in international capital movements and in foreign direct investments. This group annoyed the Americans.

Then Boutros-Ghali moved it from New York to Geneva and incorporated it into UNCTAD as the Investment Division when I was Secretary-General. It was one of our four divisions. That group gave rise to another flagship report, the World Investment Report (WIR), which rivalled the TDR. The WIR was the darling of The Economist, of the Financial Times, because just as the TDR was the critique of the developed world's view, the WIR went on to analyze the positive role of investment in transforming economies. Although I tried to secure space for both groups, neither forgave me. The TDR people thought I should scrap the other report, and the investment people thought I had to scrap TDR. I knew that if I ended the investment sector, the European Union, Japan, the United States would cut off UNCTAD's resources. I had to adopt a survival strategy.

During your time at UNCTAD, did you support China's entry into the WTO?

The case of China's entry into the WTO is part of a larger program that predates my arrival at UNCTAD. UNCTAD provided technical assistance to China from the very beginning of its transformation process, especially since 1979 with Deng Xiaoping's new development strategy. At that time, UNCTAD assisted China in establishing the first tax-free industrial zones. Something that has always impressed me is that the Chinese and Asians appreciated and made good use of UNCTAD's technical cooperation, in contrast to Latin America, which, having been the founding continent of the organization, later became very distant.

At a certain point, the Chinese started wanting to join the WTO, back in the GATT era. The WTO only started to effectively function in 1995. China's accession process took almost 20 years.

UNCTAD set up a program to assist countries that wanted to join the GATT, and then the WTO, under the Trade Division, helping the Chinese, first to prepare the necessary documents and then to train the negotiators. We were the ones who trained all the Chinese negotiators in their negotiations with the WTO. That took years and years and culminated with the entry of China and Taiwan separately. The Chinese entered in 2000, making concessions... And even playing by the rules of the General Agreement, they managed to outperform the Westerners.

Today the Westerners regret the move. We helped, of course, but the truth is that they negotiated very well. My UNCTAD technicians believed that China should not accept the agreement offered by WTO because it was too harsh. Our duty was to show them how unbalanced it was: they are asking for this and they are giving you just that. But the Chinese made a political decision, and even though there was a lot of internal division in the Communist Party, they decided to accept and pay the price.

We are also very proud of Vietnam. We helped that country a lot. I had a personal involvement in the cases of China, Vietnam, and Cambodia. I went to these countries several times, attended several meetings. In Vietnam, I visited the whole country. I went to Hanoi, and I was in all the ministries. Cambodia was even more impressive. After the terrible Cambodian genocide, the United Nations asked all the entities that were part of the UN proper to make a sacrifice and send part of their staff to live in Cambodia and help build the institutions. UNCTAD was one of the biggest contributors. We sent a big contingent that helped create the Ministry of Trade and Industry and many other institutions.

Today, we are witnessing the success of these countries... Vietnam and Cambodia are the new Asian tigers. Few people know that there was a decisive UN participation in this success history. Few people know that modern Singapore is largely the result of the advice provided by a UN technical mission. Several of these Asian countries, now extremely successful, owe much of what they are to the selfless contribution of the UN, which gave them the initial tools. Afterwards, they continued on their own. These are the best-known cases, but we have helped many countries, always advising them to open up their economies slowly and gradually, and demanding compensation. The Chinese and the others followed the advice and did very well. But in some cases, as in the GATT and the WTO accession, they ended up accepting demands that we thought were unfair. They recognized that they were unfair, but they paid the price because they knew that they were in an inferior position of power. They came in to later change things from within.

My experience with Asians was the most successful one. With the Middle East, the results were insatisfactory, lacking in continuity, due largely to political conflicts. With the Russians, the accession process to WTO also took a very long time. I was the chairman of the Council in 1990 when we opened the working group for the accession of Russia, still the Soviet Union (that would disappear at the end of 1991). It took them 17 or 18 years to get in. They had a huge difficulty because of gas and petrochemicals...

In September 1995, I became Secretary-General of UNCTAD. A little later (I think it was still 1995 or 1996), the WIPO World Assembly, which brings together all the members, voted a resolution requesting that the organization carry out that study that they had refused to do during the Uruguay Round negotiations. Although the TRIPS agreement was already a *fait accompli,* the resolution was approved. WIPO chose a curious way of implementing the resolution. It again claimed that it had no competence to do the study in the economic area and ended up asking UNCTAD to take on the task. I remember that was one of the first decisions that I had to take.

The entire UNCTAD leadership was against it. They said that it was a trap, that if UNCTAD did the study, everybody would come down on us afterwards, that the staff was tired of being beaten...

I decided to accept the WIPO challenge after I talked to the director of the Intellectual Property Sector, Pedro Roffe, an expremely able and competent person. The study was published in 1996 or 1997 under the title *The TRIPS Agreement and Developing Countries*. It was well-received. While it showed that there would be economic consequences (for example, making payment for technology more expensive), it also gave practical advice on how developing countries should strengthen their national intellectual property systems.

My point - and this is what I insist on - is that we are still under the empire of the neoliberal ideology, which is the ideology of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the OECD, and the United States. Of course, with modifications, because there has been an evolution in recent years. But it is still fundamentally the same basic situation. They still call the shots. And it is an ideology, just as Marxism-Leninism was, an ideology that claims to be scientific and that imposes normative consequences. The TRIPS study shows this well.

There is now a vast literature, even from scientists and genetics researchers, that protests the excessive protection of intellectual property. They say that the privatization of knowledge has gone too far. They say that nowadays it is very difficult to do any genome research because private companies already have patents on everything. So, contrary to what is said, excessive protection for intellectual property is beginning to be a hindrance to scientific knowledge advance.

What was the position of UNCTAD about foreign investments and the role of the state?

Our position has always irritated the liberal countries, the advanced countries. They have for years wanted to push for negotiations to fully liberalize the flow of investments. UNCTAD has always advised countries not to allow unrestricted investment without proper control. Not all foreign investment is good for the economy. In our advice, we have always stressed that countries should keep certain sectors under a minimum level of national control. One of these is the cultural sector - cinema, communications, the press. Otherwise, if given free rein, the big capital could buy the communication system all over the world. Each country, each state, must have its own space of protection.

In our work, we tried to show that the investment that interests a country is the one that will add a production capacity that did not exist before. Our advice has always been to be prudent, not to open the doors to every type of foreign capital. We did this in two ways: through our reports and when a country asked us to. Sometimes countries would ask for technical assistance, for example, to prepare modern investment legislation. We always advised not to open the game too much, to make it obligatory that the investment had to be approved beforehand. Today all this is anathema. For liberals, investment in principle is good, whatever it is.

But sometimes, when there is too much of it, investment and financing are bad. For example, in the crises in Mexico (the Tequila crisis) in 1994, which later hit Argentina, in Thailand in

1997, in Russia in 1998... All of those crises derived from legislation that liberalized too much and too early the entry of financial flows, short-term speculative money. Not true investments that added to the productive and exporting capacity of a country, not the greenfield investment that creates something new, not the variety that will only change the control of already existant firms.

Investments are distinguished from financial investments. In UNCTAD's nomenclature, Foreign Direct Investment is money that comes to stay for a while, for example, to buy or to build a factory. It comes and stays. If you want to leave tomorrow, it won't be so easy because you will have to sell the factory, buy the dollars and so on. Financial flows, on the other hand, can be loans, investments in the stock market. For example, when it is said in common language in Brazil that "foreign capital is coming back to the São Paulo Stock Exchange", what is meant by this is not FDI, it is money that buys stocks or Brazilian debt bonds. You buy today and sell tomorrow. And when it is advantageous, you take the money out.

One of the points that UNCTAD has always stressed is the need to preserve a minimum of policy space. It has always been assumed that there is no single recipe for all. We have never followed the Washington Consensus because what may be true for one country may not be true for another. A state should never sign a treaty that ties its hands, that takes away a minimum space for autonomous policies. What does the OECD do? It forces the country to adhere to those codes and to give up all policy spaces, theoretically, because it has better advice, it has a better policy to recommend. It has a one-size-fits-all formula that you have to adhere to. What the OECD doesn't want is policy space.

The liberal or neoliberal economists, who put a lot of pressure on Brazil to join the OECD, want to eliminate policy space. They argue that our Congress sometimes votes things that are not rational. But what they want is to prevent the country from having a minimum of competence to regulate its economy. And when you sign these agreements, you are giving that up.

What is the role of multilateral institutions today? What is the relevance of these institutions, in general, and for Brazil in particular?

I will limit myself to some very restricted aspects that do not even remotely cover the whole picture. The first aspect is that the current conjuncture is not propitious to the strengthening of multilateral institutions. Although the tone of the discourse has softened since Trump's departure, the basics - the attempt to make the strategic dispute between the United States and China the organizing principle of international relations - continue. I think that's a mistake. In my view, Biden's foreign policy - still unclear and taking too long to take shape - is starting to move in a dangerous direction. The permanence of much that comes from the previous presidency is beginning to appear, not as a purely temporary ploy, but as something more lasting.

Biden insists on making competition with China the organizing principle of international relations. Is he acting this way because he believes that this will mobilize the United States domestically, allowing him to bridge the deep divide that continues to exist on the political terrain with Trump adherents? Would he be using this as an instrument, in essence, of domestic politics? Sometimes they compare the current competition with China to the moment of putting the man on the moon, or earlier when John Kennedy mobilized American society in competition with the Soviets. I wonder if he is trying to reproduce this precedent in relation to China not so much because he believes he will be able to compete with Beijing, but because he thinks he could unify his domestic sphere. If it is that, it is also dangerous, and it is dangerous because I don't know if it will work.

The United States is deeply divided and will not succeed in galvanizing public opinion. In my view, Biden should keep the idea of competition, but without giving it the absolute priority but balancing competition with cooperation in questions of common interest such as global warming. If the current approach is maintained, the world will be moving toward a new Cold War, although different from the previous one. The differences are huge, the economic dependence is different, etc., but it is a situation that paralyzes the multilateral system. Again, it is going to be difficult because, to be able to make the Security Council operational, there has to be, again, a minimal tendency toward consensus among the great powers. If the divisions between the United States and Russia and between the United States and China get worse, *ipso facto* the Security Council is going to paralyze, except in irrelevant cases where everybody can agree.

Where can these countries find a common ground, a minimum common agenda, to create a different path? What can be proposed in this direction?

The obvious answer to this question is that it would have to be on those issues where there is a community of interests: the pandemic and global warming. This, however, did not happen in the case of the pandemic, and it threatens not to happen in the case of global warming. If it is not possible to have common positions, even in the face of threats that affect everyone, such as a pandemic, what could it be? It doesn't seem to me that the situation in the international system is easing up in a way that will minimally strengthen multilateralism.

The last point I would like to mention is about a problem in multilateral institutions that, at its core, is not so different from the problem of the crisis of democracies. In the representative democracy that we inherited from the 18th century, there is the idea that power belongs to the people, but the people delegate it to representatives they choose - be they congressmen, be they politicians in the executive branch - giving up, in a certain way, their original power. This is being contested in every democracy today. People realize that representation deforms the original power, and for this reason many want to return this power to the people, through institutions such as the recall process. Sérgio Abranches, among others, has defended this thesis in Brazil. What affects democracy, in the internal sphere, affects multilateralism in the international sphere as well.

The great contribution of UN multilateralism in these 70-some years - since 1945, 1946, until today - is that it boosted some few great moral forces acting to expand the frontiers of the current state of the moral conscience of humanity. We have replaced the dangerous totalitarian ideologies of the first half of the twentieth century (whether right-wing or left-wing) with main driving forces: human rights, the environment, equality between women and men, and the promotion of development with as little inequality as possible. For me, the most revolutionary is equality between women and men because it is the only one that reaches into the intimate terrain of intrapersonal relationships. All these ideas have been embodied in the Sustainable Development Goals, a sum of human aspirations that have been codified and are being driven by the multilateral approach of the United Nations system.

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