

Interview – Mario Artaza

Written by E-International Relations

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Ambassador Mario Ignacio Artaza has been the Ambassador of Chile to Indonesia since December 2023 and has dedicated over thirty years to diplomatic and public service for his country. The first Chilean to graduate from the Georgetown Preparatory School in the United States, he later pursued journalism at the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile. He specialized in International Relations through postgraduate studies in Austria, Chile, and Singapore. Transitioning into diplomacy after working as a journalist for the Chilean newspaper El Mercurio de Valparaíso, Ambassador Artaza served in various key roles within the Chilean Foreign Service. Notable appointments include Director (Program) at the APEC Secretariat in Singapore, as Trade Commissioner in Beijing (negotiating the Chile-China Free Trade Agreement), Consul General in Hong Kong SAR and Macau SAR (overseeing the Chile-Hong Kong, China Free Trade Agreement), and Consul General in New York. Ambassador Artaza's contributions to Chile's international trade network are significant, having played roles in negotiating major trade agreements for Chile, including those with Canada, China, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Vietnam and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership.

Beyond his diplomatic endeavors, Ambassador Artaza has also taught international negotiation courses at universities in Chile and in China, and recently a first class at the Mid-Level Training Center for Indonesian diplomats, in Jakarta. During a leave of absence, he served as the Chief Representative of Banco Security's Hong Kong Representative Office, contributing to the bank's strategic vision in China and the region. He has also held leadership positions in chambers of commerce and financial institutions, strengthening economic ties between Chile and China.

Where do you see the most exciting debates happening in your field?

The ongoing geostrategic competition between the U.S. and China in multiple international domains is a reality that nobody in my line of work can discard when undertaking an in-depth analysis of the current and future state of the world. There are new alliances in security taking shape, such as AUKUS, the Quad, and new blocs evolving, such as BRICS, amongst others. Seeking a balance is fundamental. Chile is a tri-continental country. We are a nation in the Americas, Oceania, and Antarctica. Chile is strategically positioned in the southwest corner of the American continent, with an important waterway, the Strait of Magellan, and we are the closest country to Antarctica, which is a part of Chile. We have one of the world's largest maritime areas of responsibility within the Pacific Ocean. We are a country which decided decades ago to open to the world with minerals, fruits, wines, salmon, and trout, along with numerous services, making a true impact in markets abroad. The quality and traceability of Chilean foods is recognized throughout the world. Chilean innovators and entrepreneurs are making a positive mark in the world's most competitive markets.

Chile relies on shipping billions of dollars of products by air and by sea to highly competitive global markets; thus, maritime and air security are fundamental to us. Our interest is also placed on an array of critical areas, including infrastructure development, seamless connectivity, efficient investment strategies, migration patterns, climate change mitigation, ocean conservation, food security, water access, and ongoing challenges in global trade, such as digital commerce. Additionally, the energy transition, embracing solar and wind power, and adopting electric vehicles for public transportation are also within our priorities. The world's views on science and technology extend beyond familiar realms like ChatGPT, encompassing the broad spectrum of Artificial Intelligence (AI) applications. We must be attuned to geopolitical shifts, evident in increased military expenditures in many parts of Asia and a burgeoning

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space race. Education is another cornerstone of our work, emphasizing a global perspective, and we champion the inclusion of many more women in diplomacy, business, and entrepreneurship. A few days ago in Jakarta, we organized the first meeting of women in diplomacy in Indonesia, with the presence of Minister Retno L.P. Marsudi.

Reflecting on Chile's role in Asia, Chile is a country whose flag was shown in the waters and ports of the continent just a few years after we declared our independence. People to people diplomacy has brought about stronger, more comprehensive relationships. What happens today in Asia is key to Chile's present and future. Chile stands first for peace, stability, dialogue and cooperation amidst any threat to security in the Asian region. To navigate challenges effectively, a comprehensive approach guided by strategic foresight is essential for anticipating diverse scenarios and mitigating risks. Chile has distinguished itself as one of the world's most interconnected nations, with new fiber optic links and an extensive network of free trade agreements. There is significant presence of Chileans abroad, numbering over a million individuals engaged in various capacities. This reality underscores the weight of our responsibilities, for example, in our consular work. Considering the number of challenges in today's global foreign policy agenda, Chile's voice in the international stage is more pertinent than ever to engage and make meaningful contributions, reinforcing multilateralism.

How has the way you understand the world changed over time, and what (or who) prompted the most significant shifts in your thinking?

Like many of my generation, my understanding of the world has evolved significantly due to increased travel opportunities and access to global news media feeds. These have broadened our perspectives on local and international events, with real-time online print media allowing us to fact-check and explore various viewpoints. Communication and connectivity, fueled by advancements in the airline industry, improved airports, and the World Wide Web, have played pivotal roles in enhancing our comprehension of global affairs. This never stops being impressive and useful to me.

In this sense, compared to other countries in Latin America, Chile does stand out for its high mobile phone ownership, active online communication, and social media engagement. While globalization presents challenges, such as the inundation of misinformation and disinformation, the Internet and social media have also empowered us to view the world from diverse angles and stay updated with news from across the globe. Connectivity is key. For those who are fluent in Spanish, I recommend reading *Hiperconectados*, authored by my former journalist classmate and current professor of communication at Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Eduardo Arriagada, as it delves deeper into these themes of connectivity and their impact on modern society.

What led you to choose a diplomatic career in the early nineties?

I wanted to serve my country—it was as simple as that. I love and am passionate about Chile. I wanted to contribute through my talents and work. Despite spending over three decades away from my homeland, there's a profound feeling when you sit behind a microphone among delegates from various nations, with the Chilean nameplate before you, and you raise your hand to address the room. It's not just you speaking; you're representing your country. This sense of honor and purpose continues to motivate me today. This is something I have tried to instill in my family and colleagues.

Serving my country also pushed me to apply to become a Naval Reserve Officer in the Chilean Navy in 2010 as part of the "Compañía de la Reserva Naval Yates." Whenever I am on vacation, I strive to travel back to Chile and embark on board to fulfill my duties and responsibilities as a Naval Reserve Officer. In the Chilean Navy, I have had the opportunity to serve as part of a delegation during PANAMAX exercises in Fort San Houston, in Texas, as well as in UNITAS, on board the Ocean Patrol Vessel "Odger," based in Iquique, a city located in the north of Chile. I have also had the privilege to sail on a historic vessel in Chile called "Esmeralda," crossing the Equator on route to Singapore and entering the ports of Shanghai, China, and Pusan, Korea. Last year, I fulfilled my duties in the Chilean Navy on board the Patrol Vessel "Piloto Sibbald," based in Puerto Williams, located in the extreme south of Chile—near to the Strait of Magellan. I am motivated to the max when it comes to my country. I am ever so grateful that my family understands when I am sometimes not able to be home for special occasions due to my

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responsibilities.

What personal and professional insights have you gained from your various diplomatic appointments in Asia?

I believe that the most powerful lesson learned during my travels and years in the field as a Chilean career diplomat in Asia, is that we are all human beings. What do I mean by this? We all share feelings, needs, and aspirations, such as peace and harmony. Of course, we may understand situations and occurrences happening around us differently. We may, at times, have trouble communicating and understanding each other due to cultural and language barriers. Still, we want to reach a common understanding for the betterment of our people. We can achieve more extraordinary things through clear and frank communication among countries. Dialogue is a must. And it's not always easy to find common ground just through e-mails. Face to face is always better.

When I reflect on my career and learning process, I am grateful to mentors and colleagues such as Alejandro Jara, Pablo Cabrera, Mario Matus, Andrés Rebolledo, Ricardo Lagos Weber, as well as former president of Chile, Ricardo Lagos Escobar, with whom I had the privilege to work with and learn from while negotiating the Chile-China Free Trade Agreement and during my years in APEC. I also recognize Ana Novik, during the Chile-Hong Kong Free Trade Agreement, for allowing me to discuss, interpret, and communicate the key messages and objectives of our positions to our partners. Trust, transparency, accountability, and effectively managing expectations on the ground made achieving those agreements in record time and seeing the long-term benefits for Chile possible. Our professional team in Santiago swiftly addressed challenges and decisions, ensuring clear communication with negotiators and our partners. In diplomacy, communication and experience are paramount. Their absence can lead to serious fears and misunderstandings.

According to IMF forecasts, China, the U.S., India, and Indonesia—where you currently serve as ambassador of Chile—are projected to contribute more than half of the world's economic growth over the next five years. How is Chile's foreign policy preparing to leverage this trend?

Chile consistently makes its mark in Asia. We are by far not a recent arrival to the region. And no, I do not think that Chile is a small country. We punch way above our weight and have substantially contributed to the multilateral and the bilateral arena. Chile's first commercial and consular office in China was established in Canton (today Guangzhou) in 1845. The first commercial vessel to arrive in the Asian waters from Valparaiso was just a few years after Chile gained independence. Pablo Neruda—a worldwide known Chilean poet—served as Consul of Chile in Colombo, Yangon, Singapore, and Batavia—known today as Jakarta. The first Latin American naval training vessel to visit Asian ports was the “General Baquedano” in 1900. We have a long and positive story with Asia, with Free Trade Agreements signed and in force with many Asian partners. We were the first South American economy to join APEC in 1994 in Bogor, Indonesia. We also partner with Asian navies in some of the most extensive maritime exercises, such as RIMPAC. Investment from Asia contributes to Chile's welfare and development.

In Indonesia's case, it is the largest economy in ASEAN, and the organization's secretariat is in Jakarta. This year marks the 5th anniversary of Chile becoming a Development Partner of ASEAN, a grouping comprised of 10 Southeast Asian nations. We are also leading the Pacific Alliance's work with ASEAN this year. We recognize the importance of Indonesia, a democracy which has over 270 million inhabitants and 17 thousand islands strategically located and is one of the world's largest democracies. Some issues relevant to the Chilean-Indonesian relationship are energy transition, Green Hydrogen, food security, climate change, safeguarding and protecting our oceans, and greater participation and opportunities for women in finance and business. We are also reaching out to younger generations, as almost 50% of Indonesia's citizens are younger than 40. A school in Jakarta bears the name “República de Chile.” If you wish to be an active part of the community here in Indonesia, you need to take ownership of those initiatives to get people to know you and respect you. We are active as an embassy in that school. We also transmit the rich maritime history between Chile and Indonesia at the Bahari Museum. In my view, diplomacy in Asia requires one to be constantly active, monitoring and evaluating the next steps as we meet goals and address challenges. Asia is essential to Chile's present and future. Just look outside any window and count the number of different Chinese brand automobiles you see circulating in Santiago.

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In 2014, you took a leave of absence to lead a renowned foreign bank’s representative office in Hong Kong. How did this experience in the private sector enhance your expertise in Asia and inform your approach to public and diplomatic affairs?

As I have consistently communicated to my peers and superiors, I firmly advocate that the Chilean Foreign Service should adopt a practice common in many developed countries’ foreign services. This practice involves allowing professionals to temporarily work in other ministries, regional governments within Chile, international officer roles, or even in chambers of commerce or multinational companies for a minimum period of one year. Such opportunities would enable individuals to contribute to the internationalization efforts of these entities while immersing themselves in diverse cultural attributes. Personally, my tenure of 3 years at Banco Security in Hong Kong has significantly enhanced my professional capabilities and leadership skills. This experience has made me more competitive in a positive sense, equipping me with a broader range of skill sets and management experiences that have fostered personal growth and allowed me to make meaningful contributions as a team member. Additionally, my time in the private sector within an international context has provided me with invaluable tools to promote Chile in increasingly competitive fields, expanding my network and knowledge base, which are crucial assets in my role as a career diplomat. The symbiotic relationship between skilled diplomats transitioning temporarily into the private sector and subsequently returning to contribute to the public sector creates a mutually beneficial scenario for all stakeholders involved.

As Chile’s General Consul in New York from 2020 to 2023, what opportunities and challenges did you observe in consular and diaspora diplomacy?

“If you can make it there, you’ll make it anywhere,” sang Frank Sinatra about life in New York. That is absolutely true, and those words resound well inside me. With over 200,000 Chileans and their family members making up the Chilean diaspora in New York, we faced several challenges during our consular work in the city. The most difficult issue was the number of Chileans who were undocumented, working, and trying to make ends meet. And they are not few. People go hungry; some don’t have a job, and some fall into drugs. These are the difficulties of living in the United States’ largest city. Helping them sort out problems meant we had to be as a consulate on the road, in the street. We saw death at times, head on.

New York is also a key financial and commercial center of the world. With over 100 Consulates in the city, we had to differentiate ourselves from others smartly and strategically. We reached universities and chambers of commerce by digging into our rich history and heritage within and in New York. José Miguel Carrera, Benjamin Vicuña Mackenna, Anita Lizana, Mario Kreutzberger, Gabriela Mistral, Claudio Arrau, are just a few Chileans who left their mark in New York. Their stories were very well received by Chileans and Americans alike, opening doors to more opportunities as the positive Chile story was told and understood. New York is also a city of learning, with dozens of Chileans studying in significant universities located throughout the city. Supporting student associations and the North American Chilean Chamber of Commerce’s activities was also an essential part of the job. Building a sense of community is fundamental when serving and leading a Consulate abroad.

Why do you think it’s important for diplomats to engage with the public on digital platforms, given the typically “cautious” nature of diplomatic work?

As career diplomats, we owe ourselves every day to our nation and people. Effective communication plays a crucial role in dispelling stereotypes and misconceptions about diplomacy and its practitioners. People naturally seek connections and are curious about public service in action. There are uplifting stories worth sharing in straightforward terms that resonate with everyone. The more individuals feel connected to their communities and their global impact, the greater the understanding and pursuit of peace and cooperation. It’s vital to improve awareness of our work, its challenges, and its importance. Without digital communication platforms, there would be a lack of knowledge about the contributions made by nations and their dedicated diplomatic professionals. People are genuinely interested in learning about the efforts of those who serve their countries. I believe many appreciate the videos or posts I share on social media, as they provide insights into our world. Ultimately, we are part of a global community and must strive for mutual understanding and collaboration.

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What recommendations would you offer to countries in Latin America for developing and promoting effective public diplomacy strategies?

Come closer together. The time is ripe to work towards achieving what others have been able to accomplish with success, delivering some powerful impacts, and learning too along the way. Take a closer look at ASEAN—strength through diversity. ASEAN's tremendous communication skills and continuous activities involving numerous stakeholders, issues, and goals are an example to many. A shared vision with a steady roadmap gains much traction through engagement with communities. Creativity doesn't mean more; it just means conveying the message skillfully.

What is the most important advice you could give young International Relations scholars?

Number one piece of advice is to learn to speak and write in English. Everyone who is someone, everywhere, speaks English in the international arena. Number two, read. Every day I read more than two dozen different news media online, including from Chile, Argentina, Peru, Mexico, the United States, France, Britain, Singapore, China, Hong Kong, Germany, Indonesia, Qatar, and Thailand, amongst other countries. Read. If you come to a meeting or a social gathering and meet someone from a country where you've recently read something interesting, share it—you will immediately see their eyes glitter. You've opened a door, and you've made an impression. That contact will remember. Never stop researching. Start your library at home or the office. Books always stay in style and are an investment, in you. Always set attainable goals. Be true to yourself. Nobody is the same, and a team comprises different types of people, not all of whom are the same. Don't be afraid to be true to yourself. Be honest, loyal, responsible, and aim for more. Don't sit all the time. Move around. Be part of a team. Practice tolerance. Be inquisitive and take in experience. Earn your stripes. Take in the failures and celebrate, humbly, the wins. You will fall sometimes, but the feeling of achievement—and you will achieve great things as part of a team or individually— does take all the pain away. If you want to become a diplomat, do love your country. Serve it with honesty and pride. Value and respect experience. You don't learn just by attending class or reading one book a month. Be constantly inquisitive. Travel. Be aware that experience counts. Reach out to those who may know more than you. Find a good mentor. Get rid of your pride. Be humble and be kind.