

**Contested Regionalisms in the Americas. The American and Brazilian Approaches.
Convergence or Confrontation?**

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The turn of the XXI century in the Western Hemisphere seemed to be dominated by a US-led agenda in trade and investment issues. A NAFTA-like model of economic integration seemed to dominate the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) negotiations, reactivated in 2002 once the Bush administration obtained the Trade Promotion Authority (TPA) from Congress. However, FTAA talks were not finished in 2005 as originally anticipated, and a trade community of southern countries seems to be emerging under the leadership of Brazil and Mercosur. Brazil has been successful in becoming an agenda-setter not only on hemispheric negotiations, but also within the WTO, as a major leader of the so-called G-20 group. Brazil and the Mercosur-enlarged bloc were successful in pushing their candidate to the presidency of the Organization of the American States (OAS), in spite that a Mexican candidate coalesced with NAFTA partners and other Latin American countries. This all indicates that Mercosur has emerged as a credible bloc in the Americas for advancing states interests other than those conveyed by the US-led NAFTA bloc. This paper shall discuss to what extent the Mercosur project is different from that of NAFTA and to what extent it has been successful to create an alternative in the southern cone. Is regionalism increasing the bargain capabilities of their members or has Brazil been skillful enough to reap the benefits of its regional leadership? Conversely, have NAFTA countries been unsuccessful to play as a regional bloc or is Washington solely interested in playing unilateral games at the hemispheric level? These are some of the issues discussed and analyzed in this paper.