

## **The Brazilian Role on the Creation of UNASUR: an Ambiguous Path**

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Paper presented at FLASCO – Buenos Aires 2014

Date of presentation: 07/24/2014

## **Abstract**

In this paper I will seek to discuss the regional leadership of Brazil as a driven force of UNASUR creation. This country intends to improve its relationship with the thriving economic pole of Asia, led by China, because it is not a Pacific country. However, nowadays, Brazil needs desperately access to the Pacific Ocean because of its new economic relationship with China and this strategic target can only be achieved through physical integration. I plan to understand this process as a necessary, although not sufficient, variable, that would explain the creation of a new and unique international organization in Latin America, in an intermediary level between the Organization of American States and Mercosur. The hypothesis is that UNASUR has been obtaining important achievements only in the area of physical integration, but not on other areas, such as intraregional trade, because of this specific set in the agenda of the biggest South American power, Brazil.

## 1 Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the Brazilian role as a regional power on the creation of the *Union of South American Nations* (UNASUR, in its Spanish acronym). Two levels of analysis will be showed here in order to achieve this target. On the one hand, it is necessary to pay heed to the present changes in the international system as a whole. In this regard, the theoretical approach used to understand this process is World-Systems Analysis (WSA) developed by Immanuel Wallerstein and its latter version developed by Giovanni Arrighi. This will allow me to grasp the meaning of the present shift of the hegemonic power in international relations from United States to China. On the other hand, the Brazilian role as a regional power as well as its own perceptions facing the changing patterns of the international system will be discussed. Not only such a holistic point of view must be taken into consideration to figure out the whole scenario. Also the peculiar features that makes Brazil a unique regional hegemon should be explored, which turns the debate over what are the characteristics of a regional power in its own self a mandatory task.

Subsequently, it will be described the history of the Southern Cone integration up to a point when the subjective meaning of a South-American identity was developed right in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The successful rapprochement of a rather tense Brazil and Argentina relation, following both countries democratization process, that had a direct impact on the establishment of Mercosur, in 1991, will be unleashed. In doing so, it will be possible to realize not only the especial features of River Plate integration in the context of the so-called “End of History” that pervaded the 1990 decade, but also to understand the importance of this new bilateral alliance along with the Brazilian role as a leitmotiv of this subregional integration. The UNASUR establishment at the beginning of the twentieth first century will also be presented, so that its main features will be showed as indications of Brazilian reasons to sponsor an integration process in South America that is outstanding for its particular emphasis on the physical integration, rather than a much more traditional tenet, such liberal exchange.

In this sense, the creation of one particular institution within the UNASUR framework will be analysed, for it is a specific indicator of the Brazilian government and is an effective trace of its regional agenda: the *South-American Council of*

*Integration*, which incorporated the famous “Iniciativa para a Integração da Infraestrutura da Região Sul-América” (IIRSA), created in the Brasilia summit of August 2000. In the concluding part, it will be shown how the Chinese rise in the international economy, along with the emergence of a left-wing government in Brazil, is a necessary, though not sufficient condition, to explain the establishment of a South-American level of regional integration.

## **2 World-System Analysis and the Present International Relations**

WSA is a theoretical approach<sup>1</sup> which is characterized by three core features: it rejects the idea that the international system as the appropriate unit of analysis of International Relations; it considers that neither nomothetic nor idiographic approaches of the social sciences is correct<sup>2</sup>; and, finally, it does not accept the traditional disciplinary boundaries of social science as a whole (Wallerstein, 2004). Other elements are also important to WSA, such as the relationship between world economy with the political control of a territory, whether in a world empire or in an interstate system. Along with this, Wallerstein also stresses the importance of the historical time, inspired in Fernand Braudel’s work. This author perceives three types of historical time: the short-term (*histoire événementielle*), the middle term (*histoire conjoncturelle*) and the long term (*histoire structurelle*) (Wallerstein, 2002). Giovanni Arrighi constructed his own theory of hegemonic transition, in his book *The Long Twentieth Century*, based on the WSA thought by Wallerstein (1995). It is precisely the Arrighi’s version of WSA that is the theoretical tool of this paper.

Aiming at understanding the American hegemonic crisis in the 1970 decade, Arrighi’s main point in this book is basically threefold. Besides taking the WSA kernel thought that world economy, rather than international system, is the truly important unit of analysis, the author defends that every world economy needs a political power to support its economic accumulation. Secondly, every hegemonic power presents a cycle of economic accumulation, approximately over one century range, which is

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<sup>1</sup> According to Wallerstein, WSA is not exactly a theory, with all its scientific pretensions, but just a way of analyzing the world (2002: 358).

<sup>2</sup> Differences between idiographic and nomothetic are quite significant for Wallerstein work. Respectively, they refer to a more subjective way of approaching the world and a more objective way of performing the same task.

characterized by an initial trade profile, followed by a financial stage which is an ominous symptom of its downgrading hegemony. Arrighi names this phase of “systemic chaos”, when the dominant state has no more condition to sponsor its own hegemony. Then occurs a gap in the system that allows a new hegemon to rise up in the system (Arrighi, 1994).

Arrighi also states in his book that these cycles of hegemony are pretty common in world economy. Indeed, previously to the already mentioned American hegemony, there have been other hegemonic cycles in the following historical order: Genoa, Netherlands, United Kingdom and United States. One of the main arguments of Arrighi’s thesis is that the systemic chaos, which shook up the American hegemony during the 1970, presents signs that the new pole of the world economy may be shifting towards South East Asia. At the time Arrighi wrote the original version of this book, the rise of the so-called “Asian Tigers” was already remarkable. Nevertheless, the present emergence of China as an important rival to the American hegemony was not that clear. My intention here is to discuss the insertion of Brazil in the present international relations considering that its political elites are grasping the meaning of the American hegemony decline as pointed out by Arrighi. Presently, however, these same policy makers are able to drive Brazilian destiny taking into consideration a nowadays much clearer emergence of China as a hegemon, or, at least, an alternative pole to the traditional Latin-America dependence over United States within the Inter-American system. In this context, differently from the four previous Atlantic hegemonies pointed out by Arrighi, a likely Chinese hegemony would be a Pacific one by nature, which poses a geographic challenge to the Brazilian insertion in the present world economy.

### **The Regional Power Concept**

There is a huge debate in International Relations over the very definition of Regional Power. The specific literature on this issue is primarily associated to the works of Barry Buzan and his concept of Regional Security Complex (RSC). According to this author, a RSC is a region that has integrated in the realm of security affairs. War and peace between the states is part of such complexes and cannot be conceived separately. In a RSC, what matters for a state in terms of security necessarily matters to its peers within the same Complex. This discussion has a strong link to the securitization debate,

related to the so-called *Copenhagen School of Security Studies* in IR. In line with these authors, the types of RSCs can be labeled according to the quality of their peace. In a range from the less friendly systems to the ones presenting the highest level of peace, Buzan identifies three kinds of RSCs: *conflictive formation*, where states perceive each other as enemies and war is a regular instrument of international politics; *security regimes*, where interstate relations are expected to be ruled by law; and, finally, *pluralistic security communities*, a term originally coined by Karl Deutsch, which refers to a region sufficiently integrated, so that there are dependable expectations of peaceful change (Buzan,1989).

In this context, the debate over the levels as well as the kinds of international powers becomes relevant. Some powers possess an amount of material capabilities in a sense that their range of influence goes beyond its own neighborhood, being capable of influencing the world as a whole. These are the *super powers*, such as United States and former Soviet Union. Other powers are very strong, so that the politics of their region cannot be planned without taking into consideration its preferences, and, at the same time, they are quite relevant to the international politics in a planetary scale. They are named *great powers*. Present Russia, China and perhaps India are the kind of nation-state in this level of international power. Other powers are less strong than those two previously mentioned ones, but they are essential to their regional realm. They are the so-called *regional powers*, with definitely relevance over its neighborhood and some importance on the global range (Weaver, 2004).

Specifically, this last kind of power and its core features is hugely discussed by the literature over this theme and is summarized by Maria Regina Lima, a Brazilian political scientist who has been studying the present international integration steadily in Latin America. In an accurate article on the recent process of integration through this region, especially in the regard of UNASUR and the especial role of Brazil in its creation, Lima stresses four main features that a regional power is expected to present, following to the literature on this issue: 1) organizational and material capabilities in order to project its regional power; 2) willingness to admit its role as a regional power, expressing its own vision on the structure of the regional governance; 3) to achieve the recognition by its neighbours of its very role as a regional power; and, finally, 4) having a growing political influence over its region (Lima, 2013).

According to the same author, Brazil has been only partially succeed in obtaining the above mentioned four features of a regional power as presented by the specialized literature. Concerning the first item, no one has any doubt that this country presents an overwhelming material advantage over its neighbours, at least if one takes the traditional indicators of material capabilities, such as territory, GDP, population size, along with its national military apparatus. It makes the South American region a classic kind of unipolar subsystem, even tough the influence coming from the northern super power of the Americas is always lurking behind Latin American scene, especially concerning its geopolitical and military dimension. As for the willingness to admit its role as a regional power, Lima highlights the fact that this factor is more difficult to be observed, given its very subjective profile. What could only be observed is the existence of different perspectives or narratives that can be identified as coming from several actors of the region, in which Brazil presents an intermediary political trend between neoliberal leaders and post-liberal regional leaders. However, concerning the third point related to the degree of recognition as a regional power coming from its very neighborhood, Brazil have been facing important challenges in South America, as well as in Latin America as a whole (Lima, 2013).

Interestingly enough, Lima shows that nothing attests the competition among the regional biggest states over the international power in this area than their unwillingness to accept the Brazilian leadership, and the very fact that other peers in the region don't support Brazilian struggle for a permanent chair in the Security Council of the United Nations (SCUN). Some of them are even against this Brazilian demand, presenting their own version of UN reform. Finally, as for the Brazilian intentions to accept the burden of a regional hegemon, Lima indicates many groups within Brazilian society that are not willing to bear the material and political burdens of a regional leadership (Lima, 2014). Despite these ups and downs on the fulfillment of those main features required to be a regional hegemon through the Latin America, Brazil has been showing an outstanding role in the formation of a new level of regional identity which resulted in the establishment of a new international organization: UNASUR.

This new international level of identification is not exactly new. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that it presents a peculiar regional level between the classic Inter-American system and the now paradigmatic Mercosul, which makes it quite puzzling. It is also remarkable for the unique profile of its integration, presenting a style much more

linked to elements like transport, energy and communication, than the classic regional integration based on levels of economic liberalization. Why this new organization was created at this regional level and with this specific set of regional integration? I think that this puzzle can be solved only by thinking on the rise of China as the new Pacific economic pole of the present capitalism, along with the Brazilian perception that it could use its regional leadership to improve its access to this new great power market that would make Brazil more independent from USA, through a south-south agenda.

### **Regional Integration: from Mercosur to UNASUR**

Brazilian relationship with its main neighbour could be traced to the very beginning of the South American international system. It has been showing different patterns of anarchy, ranging from the conflictive formation in a much more Hobbesian style, such as the one by the time of nation-states formation in the first half of the nineteenth century, to a profile closed to a more Kantian pluralistic security community of the post Cold War Era. Obviously, it passed through securities regimes resembling the state of rivalry typical of military dictatorships of the bipolar world<sup>3</sup>.

The most remarkable change in the political environment of this subsystem is the peaceful international relations obtained after the rapprochement between the two main powers of this area: Brazil and Argentina. Following the phase of enmity and the phase of rivalry that pervaded the region through the whole nineteenth-century and the first three quarters of the twentieth-century, both countries began to engage in a friendly relationship after Brazilian former president João Baptista Figueiredo accepted to calm down Argentinian contests over energy exploration of hydroelectric potential of the Plate Basin. This apparently technical issue opened the gates to a new level of bilateral relations between Buenos Aires and Brasilia.

Figueiredo is also known as the last military president of the Brazilian dictatorship. The first civilian presidents of both countries opened the wave of regional democratization and it was against this background that a new bilateral pattern between

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<sup>3</sup> In Social Theory of International Politics Alexander Wendt presents three patterns of international anarchy from a Hobbesian state of anarchy (enmity) to a Kantian international relations (friendship), with an intermediary level, named Lockean (rivalry) by this author (1999). It follows basically the same logic suggest by Barry Buzan as presented in this paper.

both countries was constructed. In 1985, the first year of the brand new Brazilian democracy, a series of international documents that ended up in Mercosur in 1991 was unleashed. The establishment of UNASUR in 2008 can only be seen as part of this larger process of integration. In 1985, José Sarney and Raul Alfonsín signed the *Iguaçu Declaration*, pointing out the tenets of this new integration, based on political and economic cooperation. The next year, the two countries created the *Program for Integration and Economic Cooperation* and the *Joint Declaration on Nuclear Politics*. In 1988, they also signed the *Treaty of Cooperation, Integration and Development*, planning the creation of a common economic zone for the following decade. By this time, the Cold War was ending and liberalism, both in its political and economic ways, began to present a growing widespread. It was no different in South America, which experienced the age of neoliberalism. Presidents Carlos Menén and Fernando Collor followed this ideological orientation, which set the tone of Mercosul at that time. They planned to convert this free trade zone, now incorporating Paraguay, as well as Uruguay, into a Custom Union, implementing a common foreign duty in a middle-term period. The famous *Ouro Preto Protocol* of 1994 only established the institutional framework of this Market, with international rights and responsibilities under the International Law.

The end of the Cold War and the pervasive hegemony of liberalism affected the whole world as well as the region. During the bipolar time, the majority of South American countries undertook the repression of military dictatorships, usually known as “bureaucratic-authoritarian states” with the infamous doctrine of “national security”. Mostly supported by North-American administrations aiming at avoiding the spread of communism through this region traditionally under the North-American sphere of influence, the decline of such dictatorships happened along with the signs of the Cold War end. With the beginning of a global North-American hegemony in the first years of 1990s, an initial widespread of one of its more radical ideologies, neoliberalism, was almost inevitable. However, it was not a common political trend in Latin America through the most part of the twentieth century. Especially after World War II and the creation of the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA), the whole region began to articulate a kind of economic modernization guided by the state (industrialization by import-substitution) and desirably independent of any kind of hegemony, at that time, represented by USA. This kind of economic state intervention

have been depleted by the initial optimism of the end of the Cold War, with that great wave of neoliberalism that pervaded its states. The Mercosul and its paradigm of opened integration have been conceived in this regard. Nonetheless, with the negative backlashes of this liberal wave, another pattern of international relations emerged in the region, creating the conditions for the left-wings parties to reemergence. Despite of being a continuation of the Mercosul project, UNASUR was created in this different context. While the first organization was initially a liberal alternative to the end of *desarollismo*, the latter has been established in the context of the neoliberal fails and the rise of the left parties in the leadership of its main countries. Brazilian role in the creation of UNASUR can only be understood through the lens of the rise and fall of this rival South-American ideologies.

Right before this leftist rise in the end of the twentieth century, the problems faced by Latin American states that strictly followed the Washington Consensus doctrine enticed an almost deadlock in MERCOSUR, hampering its economic integration. Nevertheless, the political identity among its four original members had been already shaped and the norms which structures such an organization was consolidated through the second half of the 1990 decade. This sealed the commercial phase of MERCOSUR. After this point, the organization acquires a much more political stage.

The establishment of the democratic rule through the 1998 *Ushuaia Protocol*, implemented after the 1996 institutional crisis experienced in Paraguay is a symptom of the normative unity of the bloc. As recalled by the analyst Jorge Domínguez, after the difficulties of the commercial integration that hampered the *Assunción Treaty* project of a Custom Union, the bloc had more success widening its membership than deepening its economic integration (Domínguez, 2004). Considering full member along with its associate ones, Mercosul encompasses almost the entire Latin American region, including Mexico. The enlargement of this bloc is also another important geopolitical key to grasp the meaning of UNASUR peculiar formation.

While the South American integration was embrionary in the first years of this century, the last liberal Brazilian president, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, was still in office. Yet, the political pattern of his administration should not be seen only in terms of black and white. Seen not only by the common sense as one of the classic neoliberal

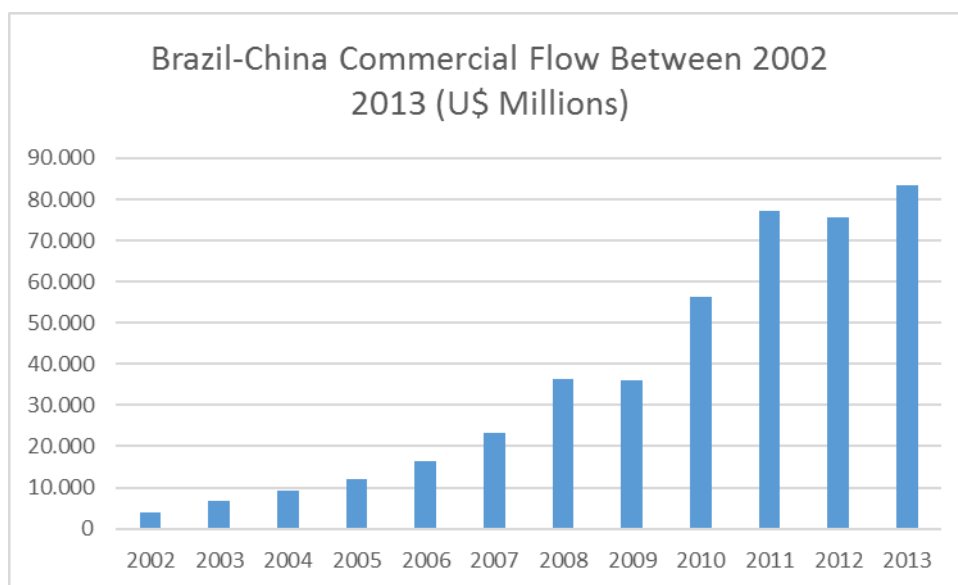
Brazilian presidents, because of the implementation of the reform adjustment of the so-called Real Plan, but also under this penchant by part of the academic community, such as Amado Cervo and Clodoaldo Bueno Brazilian foreign policy experts (Cervo & Bueno, ), Cardoso also should be reminded by some degree of international independence. According to the author José Augusto Guilhon de Albuquerque, this Cardoso peculiar feature has become obvious when one analyses the Cardoso administration decision of not taking part in the so-called *Free Trade Area of the Americas* (FTAA) (Albuquerque, 2006). Along with the subsequent left-wing administration of Luís Inácio Lula da Silva, with a mostly independent foreign policy, quite remarkable for its emphasis on the south-south diplomacy, the South-American integration process that ended up in the UNASUR organization as a way to improve its access to China, the new pacific hegemon trader, was accomplished. Consequently, it would be now possible to mitigating somehow its long-term dependence on the North American economy and politics in the context of globalization. That was one of the most important achievements of Lula's diplomacy.

The series of Conferences involving high level meetings among the presidents of South America began in 2001, in the suggestive city of Brasilia, Brazil's capital. There took place the famous *Brasilia Conference*, where South-American presidents compromised to ignite the integration of this region, especially concerning politics, infrastructure, transport, energy and health (interestingly enough, not trade). In that conference, held mainly because of the Brazilian initiative, there have been established the above mentioned IIRSA, aiming at implementing the physic integration of South America. In 2006, through the *Cuzco Agreement*, CASA was created, which quickly has become the present UNASUR in 2008. Besides being a typical international organization with headquarters, international bureaucracy and a constitutive charter, UNASUR is particularly interesting within the context of this academic paper for one particular institution: the South-American Council of Integration. Now we turn to this organ closely in order to have a clearer view of its importance in the whole project of South-American Integration.

### **The South American Council of Integration**

After the establishment of UNASUR, IIRSA was incorporated in the structure of this organization under the jurisdiction of the *Delegates Council*, one of the five UNASUR main organs, along with the *Heads of States and Government Council*, *Foreign Relations Ministries Council*, the *Secretariat-General* and the *Pro Tempore Presidency* (Headed by the Leader of one of its states members). All of this process of institutionalization happened in parallel to the rise of China as one of the main global traders. However, methodologically, correlation does not mean causality. Being difficult to access truly motivations of the Brazilian policy makers at that time, here we assume that this choice for a physic Southern American integration occurred because it was the most likely trend according to the Brazilian foreign policy history, as well as the diplomatic profile of Lula and Dilma Rouseff administrations. This methodological approach is named “Inference by the Best Explanation” (IBE), as remarked by Alexander Wendt in his widely known work “Social Theory of International Politics” (1999).

During the first decade of this century (2010-2013), the bilateral trade flow between Brazil and China presented the following growth pattern:



(Brazilian Ministry of Development, Industry and Foreign Trade, *Apud* Brasil-China Entrepreneurial Council<sup>4</sup>)

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.cebc.org.br/sites/default/files/chinabrasil\\_update\\_ed\\_9\\_lamina\\_visualizacao\\_0.pdf](http://www.cebc.org.br/sites/default/files/chinabrasil_update_ed_9_lamina_visualizacao_0.pdf). Visited in 09/07/2014.

The processes of achieving a growing autonomy from the United States should not be perceived only through its economic lens. If indeed Brazil has relatively obtained a *de facto* autonomy from the North-American power, by itself it doesn't explain its interesting in South American integration. Taking a brief look at the UNASUR main principles according to its official website<sup>5</sup>, as well as its charter, one can note that the self-determination of its people, along with regional autonomy, are the underlying target among all the others. Putting this in the historical context of the Inter-American system, which also presents self-determination as one of its cornerstone, one can note how much is historically rooted in the imaginary of the South-American nation to acquiring a stable level of autonomy relatively to the USA. So is true that the very charter of this organization highlights in its preamble the importance of using South-American integration in order to achieve the autonomy of its people, to mitigate inequality among peoples *as well as obtaining a multipolar world*<sup>6</sup>.

The principles of UNASUR are the following ones:

- 1) The construction of a South American identity and citizenship;
- 2) The development of an integrated regional space in the realm of politics, economics, society, culture, environment, energy and infrastructure.
- 3) Contributes to the strengthening of Latin America and Caribe.
- 4) Self-determination of its peoples.
- 5) The respect to the universal human rights, indivisible and interdependent.
- 6) To reduce assymetries, such as: poverty, exclusion and social inequality.
- 7) Priority to the political dialogue.
- 8) Strengthening of sovereignty and independence of its states.

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<sup>5</sup> [www.unasursg.org/inicio/organizacion/organos](http://www.unasursg.org/inicio/organizacion/organos). Visited in 07/08/2014.

<sup>6</sup> See UNASUR charter, especially its preamble.

The IIRSA and the Council of South American Integration were especially planned to implement projects in different realms of physic integration such as transport, infrastructures, energy and communication in order to fill the gaps in the South-American geographic and territorial integration. According to Sean Burges, one of the main targets of this kind of integration is to satisfy Brazilian interests of acquiring an unhampered access to the Pacific Ocean, so that it is cheaper to keep its trade flow towards the Chinese market (2006).

Firstly, as the same author highlights (2006), Brazil has the strategic interest in the energy field. Even though, Brazil has been a modest GDP growth throughout the last years, it is relatively stable and quite large in absolute terms, since Brazil is a country of continental dimensions. In this pace, the country has a growing demand for energy resources, which are found in the territory of its South-American neighbour, of which the Bolivian gas is a remarkable example. Physical integration in South America is a mandatory task in the Brazilian struggle for assure its energy supply. Secondly, the free intraregional free-trade agreement that exists between Mercosul and CAN, which is quite strategic to Brazil, for the South-American countries are the ones most responsible for the demand of industrialized goods exported by the Brazilian nation, can only present effective outcomes in the case of a South American region geographically integrated. Free trade can only happen if it is possible in terms of geography.

Last, but not least, this project of regional integration is relevant not only in terms of economy, but in terms of international politics strategy. What matters by now is not if in the present day such kind of integration is already sifting profits to the Brazilian Commercial Balance. It is planning is already politically significant because in the context of a successfully South- American integration, Brazil has the concrete possibility of overcoming its history of economical and international dependency on the North American super power, through the articulation of a south-south diplomacy. That is precisely what the left-wing governments of Lula and Dilma Rouseff Administrations have aimed.

## **Conclusion**

As the hegemon state in the South-America, Brazil certainly has been performing a paramount influence in shaping the peculiar physic integration of this region in the new intermediary level between Mercosul and the Inter-American system. Nonetheless, a monolithic explanation of this complex process of integration, which involves several players and multiple levels of analysis cannot be explained only because of a Brazilian specific interest. The other eleven independent states of South American acquiesced the integration because they somehow have their own interests in this trend. Brazil is the most significant importer of their neighbour's goods, which reveal certain degree of asymmetry in Latin America, but, at the same time, Brazil cannot be discarded, for it as an essential market to their commodities.

However, as reminded by Sean Burge, Brazilian interest is to assure the supply of energy' resources to its economy that has been growing in a low pace, but which is quite significant in absolute terms. Besides that, the thesis of this paper is part of this whole picture. Brazil mainly enticed the integration of its neighbor region because it planed a geoeconomic reality where he could usufruct a progressively unhampered assess to the market of China, the new Pacific hegemon of the twentieth-first century.

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#### **Documents:**

UNASUR charter