

# One step at a time

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**Two American giants are slowly getting to know each other**

**T**OASTING their president with a *caipirinha*, their national cocktail, should soon be a bit cheaper for Brazilians in the United States. During Dilma Rousseff's visit to Washington, DC, on April 9th, Barack Obama confirmed that his government will recognise *cachaça*, the sugarcane spirit used to make the drink, as a distinct product—no more calling it "Brazilian rum" and applying tariffs intended to shield the Caribbean kind from competition.

The two leaders also found common ground on weightier matters. Security cooperation will increase: the countries' defence ministers will meet regularly, an un-

imaginable prospect only a few years ago. And Brazilians—who spend so much on visits to the United States that the US Travel Association, a lobby group, describes them as "walking stimulus packages"—can now look forward to easier travel planning. The State Department plans to increase consular staff, to speed up visa renewals, and to add another two consulates to its current four by 2014. There was even talk of eliminating visa requirements altogether, though without a timetable.

Ms Rousseff's visit made clear that the countries' formal relations are catching up at last with the personal ties they have long enjoyed. Still, there is a way to go. Brazil is the only country whose GDP exceeds \$1 trillion that lacks a double-taxation treaty with the United States. It has not wanted to join the 11 Latin American countries with free-trade deals with the world's biggest economy. Mr Obama has acknowledged Brazil's aspiration to a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. But he has not endorsed it, as he did India's in 2010.

One reason for this is that Brazil's effort to increase its geopolitical sway is fairly recent. "Brazil is used to being overlooked by everyone," says Matias Spektor of the Fundação Getúlio Vargas, a research institute. Many of its budding diplomats, he notes, read a tome entitled "500 Years on the Periphery". After so long, stepping into the limelight does not come naturally. Brazil's embassy in Washington is small; few of its firms have offices in the city; and it does not recruit expatriates to lobby on its behalf as India does. Perhaps as a result, American officials seem to know less about Brazil than any other big economy, says Rubens Barbosa, a former Brazilian ambassador in Washington.

A deeper cause of the distance is that American policymakers do not yet trust Brazil fully. Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, Ms Rousseff's predecessor, vexed them by refusing to criticise Cuba's human-rights record and undermining their efforts to impose sanctions on Iran over its nuclear programme. During the cold war, Brazil stuck to multilateralism, and could avoid hard choices. "Now Brazil wants to defend its own interests," says Ricardo Sennés of Prospectiva, a consultancy. "That means first working out what they are."

Mr Barbosa says Brazil takes seriously the charge that it only criticises and never proposes. The government has taken some small steps towards a more constructive approach. After abstaining in last year's UN Security Council resolution on military intervention in Libya, Brazil is now trying to draft new safeguards for future humanitarian interventions, calling them "responsibility while protecting". Nonetheless, the United States will probably keep its guard up until Brazil establishes a clearer record in foreign policy.

## Matéria