GLOBAL INITIATIVE
AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL
ORGANIZED CRIME

ILLICIT ORDER

THE MILITARIZED LOGIC OF ORGANIZED CRIME AND URBAN SECURITY IN RIO DE JANEIRO
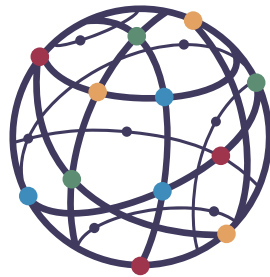
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ILLICIT ORDER

The Militarized Logic of Organized Crime and Urban Security in Rio de Janeiro

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Acronyms and abbreviations

ADA   Friends of Friends

BOPE   Special Police Operations Battalion

GPAE   Police Groups for Special Areas

TCP   Third Pure Command

UPP   Pacifying Police Unit

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Introduction: Returning to a cycle of repressive security in Rio

In the past decade, the Rio de Janeiro metropolitan area has witnessed, consecutively, some of the world's most intense clashes between criminal groups over territorial control, implemented one of the most innovative urban security strategies and, later, reverted to a classic militarized, iron-fisted approach to fighting crime. At the core of these clashes, strategies and crackdowns is a long-standing armed struggle involving criminals, militias and state forces for territorial control in the second largest city in Brazil, one of the world's top 10 economies.[1]

In the main, the security actor that responds to criminal groups' grip over the city's large, densely populated hillside slums (known as *favelas* in Portuguese) is the military police, which has acquired a reputation for a 'shoot-first-ask-questions-later' approach.[2] The force is also often associated with its elite special-operations squad, BOPE (Special Police Operations Battalion, translated from the Portuguese). This is a deadly force of heavily armed officers placed at the spearhead of police operations engaging with gang-controlled *favelas*. Its insignia is a skull perforated by two pistols and a knife. The state security forces, therefore, have been described as brutal and militarized – with good reason.[3]

Tough on crime: President Jair Bolsonaro
Adriano Machado/Reuters/stock.adobe.com

Brazil's new political leaders, sworn in in early 2019, both at the federal and state level, unleashed upon the country a vision of further repressive policies on public security without the accompanying governance and developmental approaches to the urban areas where armed criminal groups are concentrated. President Jair Bolsonaro's security proposals have been thin on long-term solutions; he has resorted instead to deregulating gun possession and reducing penalties for police officers shooting suspects. The president's lack of strategy to tackle the problem has not hindered his 'tough-on-crime' rhetoric: in August 2019 he said his proposals would make criminals 'die in the streets like cockroaches'.[4]

Bolsonaro's ally, the governor of the state of Rio, Wilson Witzel, has gone further. Witzel has ordered an increase in the use of snipers, deployed to shoot suspected criminals from helicopters. These kinds of policies mark a return to a long tradition of repressive security approaches in Rio (as analyzed in the second section of this report) and represent a radical reversal of previous governmental approaches focused on improving marginalized urban areas and communities where the grip of organized crime has been stronger.

Despite this excessive focus on repression, the core security issue in Rio de Janeiro is not the authorities' militarized policies on security. Rather, this, and the police, is just one part of the core issue, namely the consolidation of an illicit order in marginalized territories amid the declining legitimacy of the state. The militarization of security policies, which is part of declining state legitimacy, is a reaction that intensified and probably reinforced the core problem. Meanwhile, the rise of violent, armed non-state actors has been partially a response to the heavy-handed police crackdowns, but it is also a response to other criminal actors, one that serves the purpose of establishing, enforcing or defending the illicit order. (The term 'illicit order' refers to a situation in which an armed criminal actor has a permanent presence in a given urban territory, and establishes rules and punishments enforced by the threat or exercise of violence. The effectiveness and severity with which those rules are enforced may vary over time.)

Another distinctive feature of Rio's security landscape over the past decade has been experimentation with a stabilization strategy in gang strongholds, referred to locally as *pacificação* ('pacification'). This strategy had been around for 10 years by 2018, showing that it is possible to reclaim areas from gangs (at least for a time). It also distinguished

**Rio has
1.3 million people
(i.e. 22 per cent of
its population) living
in 763 *favelas*.**
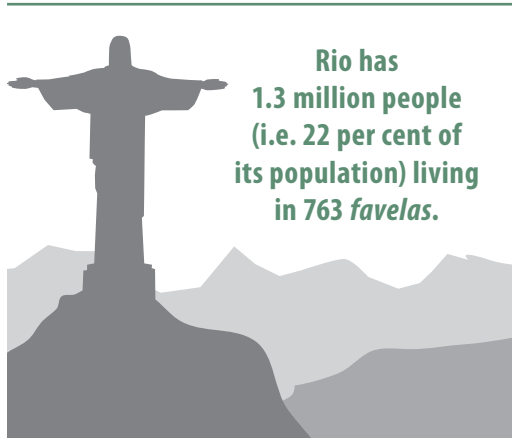
itself by the authorities' attempt – successful for some time – to reconcile the use of armed force with socio-economic development initiatives, such as urban infrastructure and educational programmes. To break a vicious cycle of recurring police incursions in slums, which often resulted in intense gunfights and deaths, local authorities combined a heavily armed 'occupation' of slum areas with a gradual push for community policing, state-managed public-service delivery and development. In doing so, the government introduced a political element in its urban security policy, the thinking being that neither policing nor social development were sufficient by themselves to achieve the desired results. Instead, authorities recognized that urban security could be combined with a profoundly political purpose – to recover the allegiance of local residents, introduce state institutions and establish state governance. No wonder the pacification programme was compared to counterinsurgency by US diplomats and academics, given its parallels with the counterinsurgency principle of wrestling population support away from rebel groups and towards government authority.[5]

In the pursuit of this local political objective, policing, infrastructure investment, public services and social development programmes were deployed – with impressively positive results during the first five years or so of the pacification process (approximately from late 2008 to 2013). The programme marked a watershed moment in the perception of what is the goal of an urban security strategy: the transition of violent territories to stability through institutions, governance and security. An important reason why the programme has received worldwide attention as a case study on urban security is that it worked – for a time. A 2012 World Bank study, for instance, is titled 'Bringing the state back into the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro'.[6]

The pacification programme had a run of success from the end of 2008, when it was first implemented on a small scale in the Santa Marta slum, to 2013. After that, Rio's urban security went into decline. From 2015 onwards, criminal factions started returning to their patterns of attacks on rival groups and the police, at the same time that the Brazilian federal and local governments were struggling with an economic recession that slashed 8 per cent of gross domestic product during 2015 and 2016.[7] In 2018, the city embraced a different type of security policy, marked by a military presence and a return to incursions by the military police into gang-controlled territories. These clashes frequently resulted in gunfights, some lasting more than 10 hours, and in one case almost 24 hours (in Morro do Jordão on 29 June).[8]

The declining results of pacification hit Rio's population hard. The sense that something radical had to be done to bring security started gaining strength at the same time that widespread corruption allegations were destroying people's trust in the country's political leaders. Sergio Cabral, governor of Rio at the time that pacification was first implemented, has been handed one of the longest prison sentences of the Operation Car Wash anti-corruption investigation. He received 197 years in jail for a bewildering number of crimes, including corruption, fraud and membership of a criminal organization.[9] One of the many public infrastructure projects whose funds have been syphoned by Cabral is one designed to bring 'urbanization', improved housing and transportation in 18 slum areas.[10] A cable car inspired by the one serving a poor community in Medellín now sits idle in the Alemão slum complex (one of Rio's most infamous gang areas) due to problems with one of its cables.[11]

Cabral is not alone: all five governors elected in Rio de Janeiro state since 1987 were imprisoned (although some have been later released while investigations proceed).[12] In this dire political context, voters in the 2018 election for state governor flocked to a newcomer in politics promising to authorize the police to shoot suspected criminals and who suggested he might build prisons on boats off the coast.[13] And, after taking office, one of Witzel's first measures was to abolish the Security Secretariat, the authority in charge of strategy and coordination for the military and

Military police patrol a slum complex in Rio, March 2016   Photocarioca/Shutterstock

civilian police forces. Thus, the vicious cycle of more criminal violence leading to more repressive security policies was once again set in motion.

This report examines the factors sustaining the territorial armed confrontation between various state and non-state actors in Rio's slums, and asks, why has this gone on for so long and why have the impressive improvements made under pacification been reversed with a regressive move to the old pattern? The common denominator throughout the different phases of Rio's violence since the 1980s has been the illicit order in the *favelas*, originally havens for the Red Command (Comando Vermelho) criminal group to gain control of drug-selling territories. This order, enforced by highly organised and armed criminals, evolved into a persistent feature of political and social life. The establishment and growth of an illicit order in several *favelas* were aided by an unmanaged urbanization process that resulted in sprawling slums, and weak local institutional and governance mechanisms. As this report argues, Rio's security challenge is, at its core, linked to the consolidation of an illicit order in marginalized territories and the concomitant decline of state legitimacy. This guiding argument is a useful lens through which to analyze several recent developments in public policy, political economy and violence that have reinforced or intensified this problem.

To demonstrate how this illicit order gained strength and became consolidated, this report is organized in three parts. The first section explores the current challenges facing policymakers and society, and the use of military force against organized crime. The aim of this first part is not just to discuss the state's militarization of law enforcement, but also to show how this is linked to a corresponding militarization of non-state actors.

The second section traces the origins of these localized territorial disputes by examining the combination of unmanaged urbanization, transnational crime and the territorial ambitions of criminal groups such as the Red Command. It then examines the evolution of state responses that led to a widespread militarization of security and criminal actors.

The final section explores the illicit order during the first 10 years of the pacification policy (which started in late 2008). It argues that the programme's significant initial success in sapping criminal influence in the *favelas* was based on a political strategy for marginalized areas, as opposed to more narrowly focused policies based on police operations. Unfortunately, the decline of the programme is evidence of the lingering strength of the illicit order in the *favelas*.

The 'Witzel doctrine': The government's first six months dealing with public security

A gun battle involving armoured vehicles, police helicopters and gang members on foot enveloped a school in Complexo da Maré, Rio's largest slum area, with 129 000 inhabitants, near the Rio de Janeiro international airport, on 6 May 2019. The director of a local NGO said students 9 to 12 years of age took shelter in the school's corridor, so they were not exposed to windows.[14] The shooting lasted for about 40 minutes.[15] Locals reported shots fired by the police from helicopters in the densely inhabited agglomeration – an eerie repetition of a similar helicopter shooting that left a 14-year-old schoolboy dead in 2018, also in Maré (see the third section of this report).

As with so many police incursions into *favela* territories in recent years, the operation had a short-term goal: in this case, the arrest of Thomaz Jhayson Vieira Gomes, alias 2N do Salgueiro, a local leader of the Red Command.[16] Given that eight people were killed and that the police operation apparently failed to capture the target, the intervention laid bare the ad hoc character of security responses devoid of a broader political strategy to engage the local community or gather better intelligence. But it seems in line with the zero-tolerance security approach espoused by Governor Witzel and the strategy voiced by President Bolsonaro.

Rio State Governor Wilson Witzel
A. Ricardo/Shutterstock

In fact, this type of helicopter sniper operation is not new and has been dubbed *Caveirão Aéreo* by Maré inhabitants, or 'the flying skull' ('*caveirão*' being the popular term for police armoured vehicles).[17] Not only was this tactic not new, but it also lacked any follow-up structural measures to prevent the Red Command or its rivals from reoccupying the same territory where the shooting took place. The deployment of snipers and armoured vehicles has little to no impact on the ability of criminal groups to establish rules, recruit locals and extort taxes. Neither does this mode of enforcement tackle the illicit economies bankrolling the arsenal and manpower available to the criminal groups.

It is difficult to discern a security policy of the Witzel government, given the tactical and short-term nature of police operations. Not all statements by the governor are about repressive approaches, however. During a lecture in the United States in April, Witzel said his 'public security' goes beyond confronting criminals. He explained how he had ordered the dismantlement of the state's Security Secretariat, as a necessary measure to 'give independence to the police forces', freeing them from 'political interference'.[18] He also cited the creation of the Counter-Money-Laundering and Anti-Corruption Department within Rio's civilian police, established to fight the financial lifeline supporting drugs and arms traffickers.

Tackling the finances of criminal groups is an important step. But Witzel seems to repeat old approaches to public security in Rio, and Latin America more generally, by focusing almost exclusively on the technical tools for police forces. The type of criminal territorial control that provokes so many of the armed clashes, and leads to so many civilians becoming victims, in Rio is sustained by a much deeper social linkage between local criminal groups and populations in marginalized areas, not to mention the long-term absence of state institutions in slum areas like Maré.

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Given the continued capacity of criminal groups to regenerate themselves and reoccupy urban spaces, it is no wonder that the use of force by the police has been on the increase since 2014. Developments in Rio are aligned with the repressive and gun-focused approach taken by the Bolsonaro government on the national level. Justice and Public Security Minister Sergio Moro's anti-crime bill, presented on 4 February 2019 (but still not approved by Congress) focuses on changes to legislation aimed at increasing the efficiency of the justice system and improving police forces' investigative tools. It does not, however, venture into other key policy areas, such as socio-economic development or broader state presence in marginalized urban areas.[19] The only proposals focused specifically on tackling urban violence involve the reduction or elimination of penalties against police officers who use their weapons – a move that has been severely criticized by human-rights organisations.[20]

The new political leaders, in both Brasília and Rio, consolidate the tendency in Brazil to move away from the citizen security paradigm, which centres on increasing state presence at the local level through multidimensional policies to prevent crime.[21] As this report shows, *cariocas* (as people inhabiting the city of Rio are called) have witnessed in recent years a regression from developmental and community-oriented security policies (supported by Pacifying Police Units, or UPPs) to a return to repressive tactics, which usually degenerate into protracted gunfights. Security has become synonymous, at least in the government's eyes, with police work. Whereas some emphasis has been placed on improving investigative capacities and coordination between Brazil's various security agencies, and rightly so, when it comes to urban areas, the discourse has focused on repression. As this report shows, this practice has not proven successful or sustainable.

A well-established illicit order in the *favelas*

A military police helicopter during an operation in Rio, May 2007
A. Paes/Shutterstock

The use of armed force, often through high-calibre weapons, such as rifles, has become a routine method of resolving territorial disputes between gangs, militias and security forces in Rio de Janeiro. Locals (and visitors) have at their disposal not one but two mobile applications dedicated 24 hours a day to tracking gunfights in order to help them choose the safest traffic routes (bearing suggestive names such as Crossfire and Where Are the Gunfights?).[22] Police deployment of force has experienced a huge increase in recent years. A total of 676 people were killed by 'agents of the state' in the Rio metropolitan area during the first five months of 2019, a huge 22 per cent jump from the same period the previous year.[23]

Deaths caused by police and other security forces increased by 154 per cent between 2014 and 2018 in the metropolitan area. The number of such deaths in 2018 reached 1 381 – the highest since records began and higher than the total homicide number in England and Wales in the 12-month report ending March 2018.[24]

The start of the Witzel administration in Rio de Janeiro's state government (which is in charge of public security and the police forces) in January 2019 consolidated a trend towards heavily armed raids into slums. Under this approach, which Rio has seen with different levels of intensity since the 1980s, police officers

Figure 1: Homicides in Rio de Janeiro (metropolitan area), 2003–2018
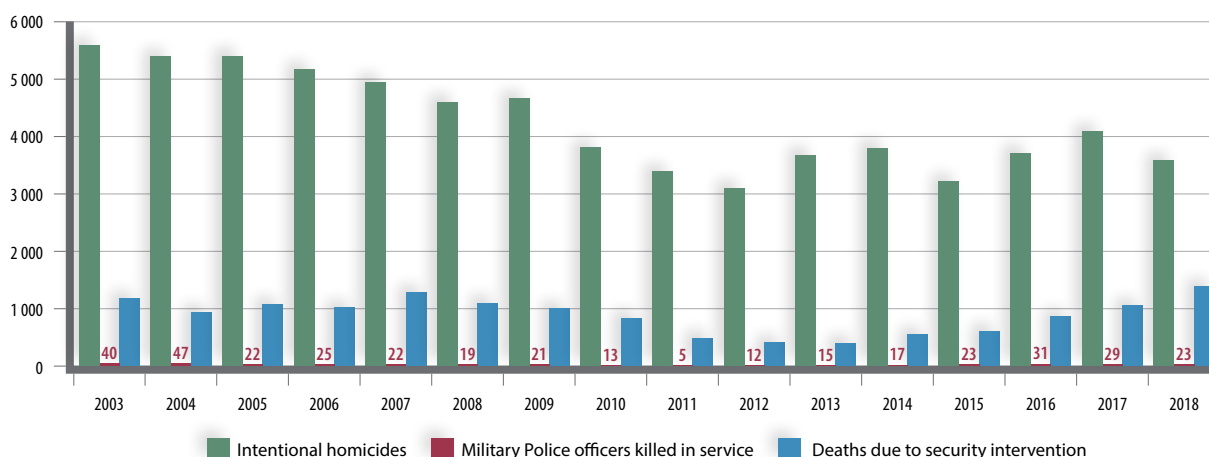
Source: Instituto de Segurança Pública, Rio de Janeiro

enter crime-controlled territories sporadically, then there usually ensues a heavy exchange of fire with the local criminal power, after which they leave without a follow-up state presence or developmental plan for the area. Witzel reinforced that approach by promising to deploy gunship helicopters against suspects spotted holding rifles – which is common among criminal groups in Rio slums.[25] In March 2019, the governor told a local newspaper that the sniper teams were being used, but without publicly divulging the details.[26] Witzel also conferred greater autonomy on the police, as mentioned.[27] This decision, however, achieved by dismantling the Security Secretariat, reduced the scope for broader coordination between the policing aspect of public security and other policies, such as socio-economic development, institutional frameworks and infrastructure services – all of which are still severely lacking across vast swathes of *favelas*.

> "The use of armed force, often through high–calibre weapons, such as rifles, has become a routine method of resolving territorial disputes between gangs, militias and security forces in Rio de Janeiro."

The year 2018, before Witzel took over, had marked a historic low for Rio in terms of armed violence. That was the year when the pacification strategy, a policy that had been considered an exemplar for cities around the world, was stepped down and the armed forces soon returned to the streets. In April, authorities announced that 19 UPP bases would be dismantled – half of the units that were operational at that point.[28] Nominally, the UPP programme is still running, albeit with significantly less political and popular support in comparison to its operational height in 2010/2011.

Rio had endured a severe economic crisis that constrained the state government's ability to invest in the UPPs. But a more structural cause for the decommissioning of the pacification programme was that recent developments had made its community-policing goals unattainable. In August 2017, local newspaper *O Dia* cited a confidential government report that showed the police were unable to venture into a third of the zones that were theoretically covered by the UPPs.[29] In the Nova Brasília slum, located in the Alemão Complex, officers patrolled in less than a quarter of the total area. The neighbourhood is a long-standing bastion of the Red Command group. Authorities built in 2017 a concrete security tower with bullet-proof windows in Nova Brasília, but to no effect, as the police reported several attacks by armed criminals on officers. Two similar towers were built in January 2018 in the Morro

do Barbante slum in northern Rio after suspected Red Command members expelled two officers from a small police base, partially destroyed it and painted the group's initials in the ruins.[30]

In a remarkable public admission that the Brazilian state had partially lost control of sections of its second largest city (and the surrounding Rio de Janeiro state), the then president, Michel Temer, announced on 16 February 2018 that there would be a federal intervention, placing all security agencies, from the police to the fire brigades, under a military commander, Army General Walter Souza Braga Netto. In a televized speech, Temer said, 'Organised crime has almost taken control over the state of Rio de Janeiro. It is a metastasis that spreads through the country and threatens our people's tranquillity.'[31]

His decision was criticized by many experts, who pointed to the fact that many other cities (and states) in Brazil face very high homicide rates – some even higher than Rio's. Temer, who took over after the highly divisive impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff, faced single-digit approval ratings, and the intervention was seen as a political manoeuvre to make a quick impact on a topic close to many Brazilians – security.[32] The immediate trigger for the intervention was a wave of robberies and gunfights in affluent areas during the 2018 carnival – some of which were shown on prime-time news shows.

However political the decision might have been, Rio did offer Temer a context that justified, in the eyes of many locals, a federal military intervention. A poll conducted in March 2018 showed that 76 per cent of people in the city of Rio supported the intervention.[33] Part of the reason why the intervention was announced in Rio was the city's political and economic importance: it is Brazil's tourism capital and former political capital.

The number of people killed by 'agents of the state' in 2018: 1 381
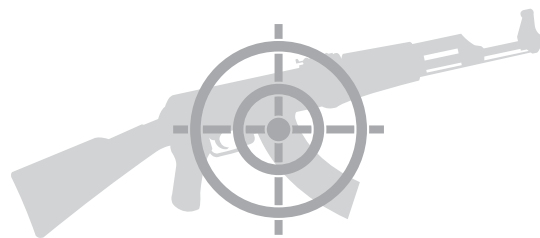
The number of such deaths during first five months of 2019: 676

Rio de Janeiro, showing major *favelas* and other features

Source: IISS
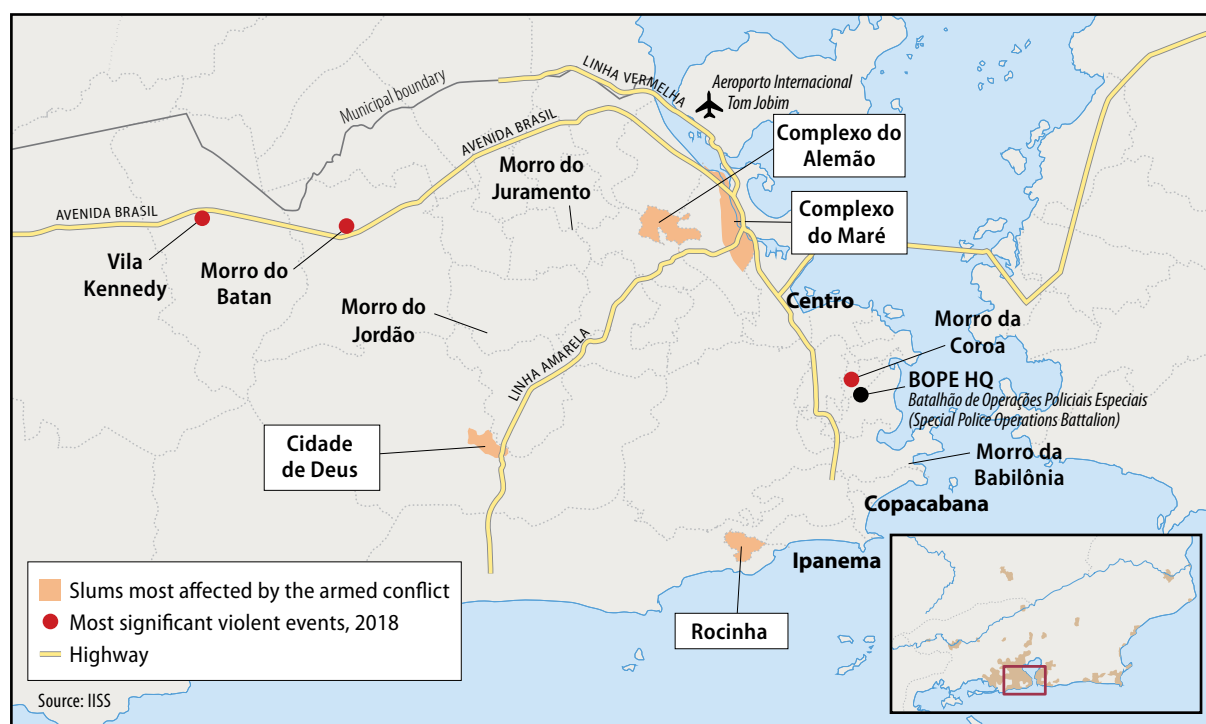
Another key driver of political attention and recurrent military interventions over the years, as discussed below, is not only the frequent shootings and homicides, but also the fact that this violence has often been the result of clashes over territorial control between criminal groups perpetrated with high-calibre rifles exhibited in broad daylight.[34] Boys are often seen heavily armed to display their capacity to defend their groups' territory against rival gangs. Control of Maré Complex is divided among three non-state groups: the Red Command, the Third Pure Command and a vigilante-type militia group that claims to provide armed security against criminals, but also operates in illicit activities and uses violence.[35]

> " State authority has given way to illicit non-state groups imposing a crude set of rules and an order based on absolute obedience, intimidation and constant fear. "

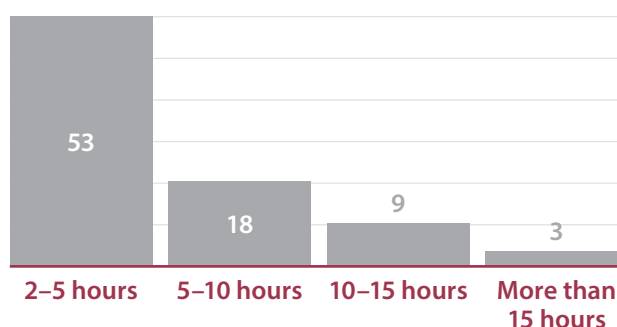This type of territorial control, enforced by the use of firearms, reflects a proto-political character of Rio's organized-crime landscape, which distinguishes it from most other Brazilian cities, according to one veteran researcher of local violence.[36] This territorial control by criminal groups in the city has been described as constituting a parallel state, as their activities challenge the legal nation-state monopoly on violence. But this term overemphasizes the order and service provision these criminal groups offer local residents. Perhaps a more accurate classification would be 'urban authoritarianism', whereby criminal groups aim to be obeyed, but without providing much in the way of services in return.[37] As one local NGO worker said, none of the three non-state armed groups controlling slices of territory in Maré offer much in the way of order or services.[38] Although inhabitants of areas such as Maré sometimes do resort to non-state actors for help with loans, small street improvements and domestic violence, most offer obedience out of fear. State authority, in other words, has given way to illicit non-state groups imposing a crude set of rules and an order based on absolute obedience, intimidation and constant fear of their brutality.

The logic of territorial domination – or 'urban authoritarianism' – has become consolidated: it has been present for a long time, it is widespread and it is accepted as a fact of life by many locals. However, it is not stable enough to provide real security. Instead, criminal factions are constantly testing one another's borders, abilities and armed strength. According to a study by the Public Security Institute, linked to Rio's state government, the frequent resort to violence in disputes over territory is guided by the following main objectives: to maintain or impose a faction's territorial control and to destabilize or alter a rival group's control.[39] In 2018, this violent territoriality was reflected in 83 instances of gunfights lasting two hours or more (see the diagram).[40]

The consolidation of this illicit order over the past four decades has been the key security challenge confronting policymakers, and one that successive local and federal administrations have failed to solve. This failure partially explains why the police, like the criminal and militia groups, have continued to resort to armed force to acquire or maintain *favela* territories in what has become a process of all-round militarization.

Number of gunfights lasting two or more hours in Rio de Janeiro (metropolitan area) in 2018

2–5 hours	5–10 hours	10–15 hours	More than 15 hours
53	18	9	3

Source: Fogo Cruzado, https://fogocruzado.org.br/regiao-metropolitana-do-rio-registrou-quase-10-mil-tiros-em-2018/

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Militarization: Drugs, thugs and communist guerrillas

The Red Command, and other gangs that emerged later, acquired, from an early stage, the tactical knowledge and equipment to exploit two other, more international, trends affecting Rio: firstly, an unmanaged urbanization process, resulting in sprawling slums amid weak local institutional and governance mechanisms, and, secondly, the boom in transnational cocaine trafficking run by Colombian cartels.

The organizational history of criminal groups in Rio is unique and often overlooked by local and foreign experts. Many studies focus on the social marginalization of slum areas and police brutality as key drivers of violence in the city. But if Rio's military police indeed stands out for its brutal tactics in slum areas, criminal groups themselves have adopted a unique mixture of guerrilla and criminal tactics since the 1980s.

Even before the military police started cracking down on criminals, the Red Command had learned basic organizational and even tactical knowledge from left-wing guerrilla members imprisoned, alongside members of the Red Command, in the Candido Mendes Penal Institute in Ilha Grande (an island in the state of Rio de Janeiro). The guerrilla members belonged to armed organizations opposing the military regime that governed Brazil between 1964 and 1985. In an interesting, if unfortunate, example of how incarceration can sometimes backfire against authorities and worsen public security, robberies of jewellery and banks were classed by the military regime as crimes against national security. Their perpetrators were placed next to guerrilla members in the B Gallery of Candido Mendes.[41]

A total of 66 men belonging to guerrilla organizations such as the 8 October Revolutionary Movement (MR-8) and the National Liberation Alliance went through the prison between 1969 and 1975.[42] The political prisoners would smuggle into the prison literature on guerrilla warfare and urban terrorism. Journalist Carlos Amorim, author of the most comprehensive book on the Red Command, describes how prison guards and police officers found common criminals with copies of banned books, such as Vietnam: *Inside Story of the Guerrilla War*, which describes guerrilla tactics used in the war against US forces, *Guerra de Guerrillas* by Che Guevara and the *Short Manual of the Urban Guerrilla* by Brazilian guerrilla fighter Carlos Marighella.[43]

Thus, the political prisoners would pass on to common criminals imprisoned with them their knowledge on how to organize an armed movement and the idea of joint action to resist police abuse. Prisoners started to organize an equitable distribution of food supplies given to them by relatives and to resist collectively when prison guards or rival factions attempted to beat one of their members.[44] Ironically, the military police were in charge of security in the prison and witnessed first-hand the genesis of what would evolve into its nemesis, the Red Command.[45]

Crucially, the group would organize daring escapes from prison. Once outside, members who had been in contact with guerrillas spread their organizational techniques and even wrote a manual that came to be called by police investigators 'The 12 rules of the good bandit' (the first rule being 'do not denounce [fellow Red Command members]'.[46]

Urbanization as a facilitator of networked crime

It was after several inmates had either escaped or been released, in the early 1980s, that the Red Command's unique 'organizational' evolution into a paramilitary-style criminal group provided it with a valuable skill set to exploit the rapidly growing gaps in state presence, governance and socio-economic development in the *favelas*. At that time, Rio and Brazil as a whole – and in fact much of Latin America – were undergoing rapid urbanization. Between 1960, shortly before the first guerrillas arrived in Ilha Grande, and the Red Command's consolidation in the early 1990s, the population of metropolitan Rio doubled, reaching close to 10 million inhabitants.[47]

Figure 2: Population of Rio de Janeiro (metropolitan area), 1960–2015
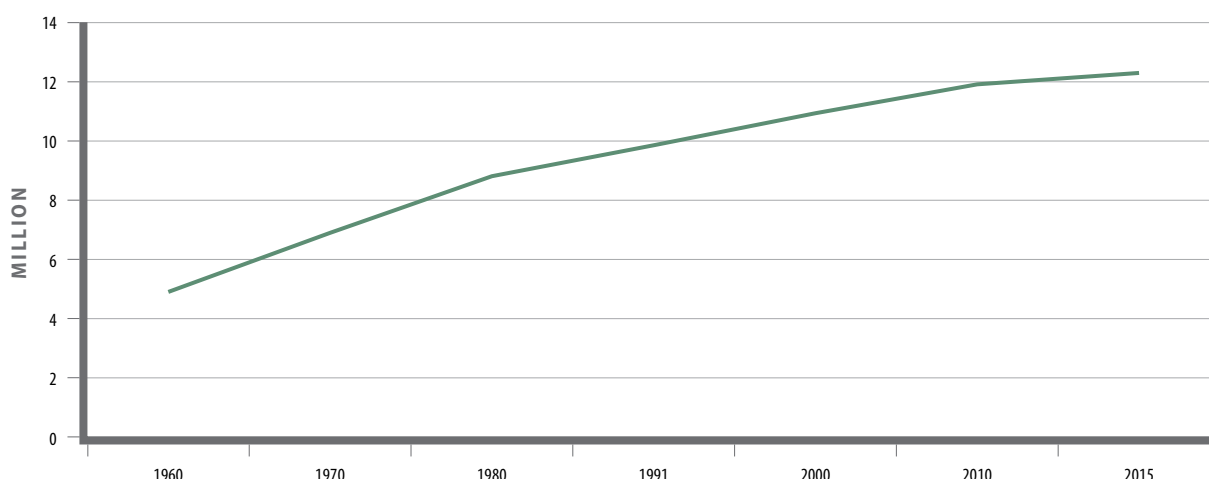
Sources: Instituto de Estudos do Trabalho e Sociedade, *Centralidade da Região Metropolitana do Rio de Janeiro: Relatório Final*, July 2016, 23; IBGE.

One of the most active Red Command founders during this 'post-prison' era, José Jorge Saldanha (known as Zé do Bigode) left Ilha Grande in 1980. He established an operational base at one of Rio's mushrooming *favelas*, Morro do Adeus ('Goodbye Hill'), where, according to Amorim, he hid an arsenal of weapons and accumulated money accrued from robberies to start a central Red Command coffer.[48] Another co-founder, William da Silva Lima (aka 'Professor'), based himself in another northern Rio slum, Serrinha. He has claimed in an interview that he used some of the money from robberies to pave streets and fix the sewerage system in Serrinha, in exchange for cooperation in what he said was 'a good place to evade the police' amid narrow streets.[49]

Rapid urbanization and the sprawling peripheries and slums resulting from it have been identified as a source of instability in the developing world. Books such as *Planet of Slums* paint a depressing picture of governments overwhelmed by ever-expanding agglomerations.[50] The case of Rio and the Red Command is evidence that urbanization alone is not a cause of criminal violence, but rather a facilitator. By the time the Red Command founders had managed to escape from Ilha Grande, the slums where they established bases and worked to gain popular support had been formed as a result of rapid, unmanaged and unplanned growth in previous decades. Few reliable statistics exist on the growth of slums during the 20th century, but authoritative studies on Rio's urbanization point to a 259 per cent jump in slum population from 1948 to 1970, by which time over 500 000 people were living in *favelas* (although recent studies consider this an underestimate).[51] This urbanization also coincided with the rise of a transnational criminal empire called the Medellín Cartel.

The business model of the retail drug market encouraged the sort of territorial control that would so heavily affect Rio and other Latin American cities. In order to be a player in the game with Pablo Escobar's cartel, the Red Command needed to control not one or two slums but all of them – or at least a significant number.[52] Each *favela* provided the group with a high-density area of disorganized narrow streets, where state institutions had little to no presence and any security agency would find it difficult to navigate because the streets were unnamed and unmapped, which remains the case to this day.

By the time America's Federal Bureau of Investigation and Drug Enforcement Agency had began to alert Brazilian authorities in the early 1980s of the links between Colombian cocaine exporters and Rio de Janeiro drug traffickers, the Red Command had honed its capabilities to operate in slums and established a form of localized order. It recognized the slum not only as a base, but also as a social and political space where relations with residents were crucial. A statement provided by one of the group's commanders in 1984 to the *Jornal do Brasil*, then the most prestigious newspaper in Brazil, is particularly revealing about the formation of the local order:

We, former bank robbers who find ourselves in the toxic [drugs] market, indoctrinated the favela dwellers and showed them that the government has no role here and does nothing to understand their perspective. So we give them food, medicine, clothes, school material, uniforms for the kids and even money.[53]

The illicit order and the planet of slums

This recognition of a structured relationship between criminal organizations and local populations marks the beginning of the illicit order that would become the critical security challenge in Rio over the following decades. The critical linkage between territorial domination in the city's slums and criminal profit would lead the Red Command and successor groups to continually, routinely seek territorial expansion in a way that would almost completely eliminate smaller independent drug-trafficking gangs. It represented a new paradigm of organized crime in Rio – from small, local drug-trafficking outlets to heavily armed groups demanding loyalty and payment of 'fees' to the bosses.[54]

The slums, so numerous and segregated from the rest of the city, provided a number of advantages for an organised criminal enterprise to accrue finances, armed capacity and organizational infrastructure needed for their activities. These advantages went beyond just a market for selling drugs for transnational drug traffickers. The slums also offered a place of refuge and a base for the group's leaders, a ready pool of marginalized young men who were willing to be recruited and additional income through the provision of services not offered by the state or private companies to local residents (such as cooking gas, vehicles for public transport and cable TV). This way, the Red Command grew into a substantially more organized and territorially defined criminal group.[55]

In fact, the incentives were so great that other groups would emerge with an almost identical illicit-order model as that of the Red Command. Two groups would become serious contenders to the organization in the 1990s and 2000s: the Third Command (later the Third Pure Command, (Terceiro Comando Puro, TCP) and the Friends of Friends (Amigos dos Amigos, ADA).

Clashing (illicit) empires

A common dynamic affecting criminal organizations across Latin America is the phenomenon of fragmentation: the emergence of rival, initially smaller, groups to challenge the illicit markets. In Rio this has been the case only to a certain extent, as the number of drug-trafficking groups has remained remarkably small. Only two drug-trafficking organizations are currently active and able to control a significant number of slums: the Red Command and the TCP. For part of the first decade of the 2000s and until recently, ADA was also a significant criminal power controlling slums in the wealthy southern zone of the city. In the mid-2000s, a number of militias would grow into criminal organizations in their own right (although they were less reliant on, and sometimes absent from, the drug market). Still, Rio's criminal organizations have not splintered frequently nor allowed for smaller independent gangs to make any significant impact on the local drug market. In fact, since the Red Command's rise in the 1980s, only three other organizations would become important players in the drug market: a group called Third Command (TC), whose origins are unclear, the TCP and ADA. The militias, which would become a serious contender for territorial control, emerged in a western slum where drug-trafficking organizations had no presence.[56]

The number of rival criminal factions has been sufficient to trigger frequent armed clashes but has not been large enough to turn the criminal underworld into a patchwork of local gangs. The establishment of territorial control, through armed force and, to an extent, service provision to locals, has played an important role in keeping the groups cohesive despite infighting and government pressure. In a comparative study of organized crime in four Brazilian cities, Benjamin Lessing argues that 'highly fragmented or pulverised' drug markets exist in abundance in

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Aerial view of Rocinha, Rio's biggest *favela*, close to some of Rio's most affluent neighbourhoods.
Donatas Dabravolskas/Shutterstock

three cities, but not in Rio, which he defines as having a 'unique balance'.[57] As possible explanations for this, Lessing mentions the tactical defence advantage of hillside slums for criminals resisting state military operations as well as the groups' ability to call in support from other slums they control.[58] A third contributing factor mentioned by Lessing is the ability of criminal leaders in prison to name successors when commanders on the ground are killed or arrested – although this is a general institutional flaw in Brazil's prison system rather than one restricted to Rio.[59] In short, criminal organizations in Rio have maintained a strong territoriality since the Red Command established this method in the 1980s and it seems to have been a contributing factor to their cohesion. Since 2000, criminal groups would go to great lengths to protect their territories and their illicit order.

When ADA was kick-started by drug-trafficking leaders who interacted in the Bangu prison complex in western Rio, they briefly allied themselves with the Third Command in order to oppose the Red Command's dominance in the city.[60] ADA was initially formed from contacts maintained by Ernaldo Pinto Medeiros (known as Uê, who was also in Bangu) with cocaine producers in Andean countries. According to a local blogger tracking the ebbs and flows of Rio's gang factions, the Third Command and ADA both feared and envied the Red Command's strength because it 'owned' many communities that generated millions in profits from drug sales.[61]

Territory, and the ambition to control it, also sparked a rift that dismantled the Third Command–ADA alliance and forged a new faction, the TCP (the last major splintering of a faction in Rio to this day) around 2001 and 2002. As one of the largest slum areas in Rio, Maré has been at the centre of many struggles for its control. In 2001, local leaders of the Third Command and ADA, known by their street names, Facão and Linho, respectively, had different strategies for their domains. Linho wanted to expand his territory to the Nova Holanda slum, for which Facão's territory would serve as the main entry point.[62] Facão knew that this would involve clashes that would scare off drug buyers and attract police operations. Linho became increasingly ambitious, occupying other areas of Maré around the same time that a rebellion in Bangu, ordered by the Red Command, resulted in the deaths of several criminal leaders. With their leadership structures in disarray, Facão reorganized under a new banner, Pure Third Command (TCP), whereas Linho remained as a top leader in ADA, but the alliance was broken.[63]

This rise of powerful criminal organizations had justifiably created a sense that public security in Rio was out of control. In fact, local newspapers were running headlines in the late 1980s that are reminiscent of reports on Rio's criminal violence today. On 23 August 1987, local newspaper *O Globo* published a full-page article titled 'In the slums of Rio, [drug] traffickers rule' (see right).[64] The report refers to people living in slums 'without access to essential public services', in areas 'dominated by fear and authoritarianism'.[65]

Around the same time, in 1987, the drug lords of Rocinha, a long-standing hotspot of criminal activity, were able to show the authorities how much power they wielded, when the local Red Command boss, known as Dênis, ordered locals to stage mass protests and block the Two Brothers Tunnel, a major artery connecting southern and western Rio. A successor, Naldo, was photographed holding an assault rifle.[66] The picture of the drug trafficker

A 1987 news report titled 'In the slums of Rio, traffickers rule'

Source: *O Globo, Nas Favelas do Rio, Vigora a Lei dos Traficantes*, 23 August 1987

was published by the *Jornal do Brasil* in 1988 and was widely reproduced by other media organizations.

The use of terms such as 'empire', 'rule' and 'parallel state' to describe the powerful drug-trafficking groups' operations – especially in an area such as Rocinha, a large hillside slum area close to Rio's affluent areas Barra da Tijuca, São Conrado and the south zone (home to political and economic elites) – would elicit a strong reaction by the state, and later federal, governments. Immediately after the press published the photo of Naldo, state governor Moreira Franco ordered the police to invade Rocinha, dismantle drug-selling points and arrest or kill the leaders.[67]

As an indication of the toll that organized crime took on children, the operation that eventually resulted in the killing of Naldo, on 17 July 1988, also led to the death of a 12-year-old boy known as 'Brasileirinho'. According to a report from the time, the boy was in charge of enforcing gang control in the busiest drug-selling point in Rocinha.[68]

State responses

The formation of semi-autonomous criminal enclaves posed a new public policy challenge: the late 1980s and early 1990s were years of profound economic crisis and hyperinflation. Although the state lacked resources, let alone the appetite, to undertake a profound state-building exercise in the *favelas*, public sentiment was increasingly impatient for action to be taken against crime. It was then that some veteran police officers who had come through the ranks during the repressive years of the military regime gained influence by treating public security as a technical problem to be solved with some of the same repressive tools of the National Security Law that had been used by the military to crack down on political opponents and suspected criminals.[69] During this time, an 'arms race' between police and organized crime intensified.[70]

Besides the economic crisis gradually taking hold in Brazil during the early 1990s, the political discussion in Rio became increasingly focused on the need for security. The predominant emphasis of the debate was on the inefficiency of the state government in tackling the problem and a greater acceptance by the general public of the need for exceptional security measures that downplayed human rights.[71] This sense of crisis would be intensified by a phenomenon that had become commonplace – stray bullets directly linked to criminal groups' turf battles. There were a number of reports in the early 1990s of stray bullets hitting middle-class apartments far from the actual clashes. This served as a stark wake-up call for both middle-class and elite *cariocas* that organized crime was

not to be ignored, that it was spilling over into other parts of the city despite being geographically concentrated in marginalized *favelas*.[72]

The growing autonomy with which more aggressive elements of the police were operating would be reflected in two massacres in one year: the killing of eight young homeless boys (aged 11 to 19) in July 1993 and the deaths of 21 people in the Vigário Geral slum in August that year. The Vigário Geral episode in particular showed the confrontational and militarized tendencies already strongly apparent in the military police in response to organized crime's growing firepower. Investigations showed that officers had entered the slum at night and shot locals in revenge for the killing of four of their colleagues in an earlier gunfight with local criminals.[73]

In 1994, the federal government announced an intervention in Rio to fight organised crime. Like the recent 2018 intervention, this was also headed by an army general (Roberto Jugurtha Câmara Senna) and had among its priorities a crackdown on police corruption. The similarity between the two interventions, separated by more than two decades, is remarkable: the cover stories of *O Globo* on 2 November 1994 and 18 February 2018 both announce army interventions with a stated aim of 'cleaning up' police forces as well as cracking down on crime.[74]

The governor who took over after these traumatic years, Marcelo Alencar (1995–1998), responded to the growing popular outcry by appointing as Security Secretary a general who had been profoundly involved in the repressive infrastructure of the military regime. General Nilton Cerqueira had worked for the military's internal security body and was known for the killing of a prominent rebel leader in 1971. Now in charge of Rio's war against organized crime, Cerqueira actively encouraged police officers to use their firearms against suspected criminals by rewarding officers who directly confronted criminals with bravery medals.[75] The policy was mockingly dubbed the 'wild west condecoration' by Rio academics.[76]

The rise and rise of the illicit order

These military-style *favela* interventions by armed police would not lead to any lasting or even meaningful changes to the criminal groups' violent enforcement of territorial control or their turf wars. Local analysts suggest that such security policies were in fact a major driver of Rio's criminal violence. Sílvia Ramos, for instance, argues that Cerqueira's legacy was an increase in police violence and that his policy led to drug-trafficking groups investing heavily in weapons.[77]

However, as mentioned, criminal organizations had discovered the utility of territorial bases prior to the militarization drive in the 1990s. Michel Misse, another local expert, cites two main factors behind Rio's unique strain of territorially based criminality: geography and drugs. He says there is evidence of some level of territorial control by gangs going back as early as the 1920s in Morro da Providência, Rio's oldest hillside *favela*, including references to how the police would avoid entering the slum out of fear of armed opposition.[78] Drug trafficking, however, was minimal until the emergence of the transnational cocaine trade led by Colombian traffickers. In line with other accounts of how the Red Command emerged in the 1980s, Misse says that moment was when the gang 'turned to drug trafficking and moved to control drug-selling points'.[79]

By the late 2000s, the Red Command was no longer the undisputed master of the drug trade in Rio. Even as the group expanded to other Brazilian regions and retained a strong transnational network of cocaine suppliers, its rivals had managed to claim key drug turf and revenue. However, as the landscape of non-state armed groups diversified, the model of seeking territorial domains and imposing an illicit order not only endured but attracted more gangs into the market. The model of territorial control would be adopted and fiercely defended by the ADA, TCP and later a paramilitary strand of the militia groups. The most coveted territory of all was under ADA command: Rocinha, a slum area with 69 000 inhabitants (at a conservative estimate).[80]

During the 2000s, the Red Command, ADA and TCP would engage in intractable struggles to dominate several *favelas* across the metropolitan area of Rio. It was another bleak decade for Rio's public security, and the sense of

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lack of control in the face of well-armed criminals would be amplified by the intensifying clashes in *favelas* between fierce criminal rivals – a phenomenon that the military police would further intensify by intervening with its own militarized tactics. However, the violence was also linked to non-state actors' own dynamics.

On 3 November 2005, for instance, the *Folha de São Paulo* newspaper reported that 14 people had been killed during the previous three weeks in Rio as a result of battles for control of slum areas.[81] Citing police sources, the newspaper claimed that several gang fights had occurred at the same time over 'betrayals' by drug lords shifting from one of the three groups or because of attempts by one gang to invade or weaken a rival's area.[82] The military police was another actor in this spatial struggle, one that would have a significant role in gunfights with criminals during operations. Curiously, such operations would have little to no impact on the distribution of criminal factions across slum areas, or which group controlled which slum.

Nem, the 'Robin Hood' of Rocinha

A symbol of how consolidated the illicit order was becoming in Rio is Rocinha, a traditional hub for drugs sold to the wealthy youth of Barra da Tijuca, São Conrado and the south zone (where most hotels are located). There, a local ADA boss called Antônio Francisco Bonfim Lopes (alias Nem) gained the respect and admiration of the local community. Journalist Misha Glenny, who wrote an account of Nem's rise and fall in a book, says the drug lord built an 'embryonic welfare state': 'ADA paid for funerals, the distribution of food to the poorest inhabitants and other provisions.'[83] His predecessor, Luciano Barbosa da Silva, or Lulu, used to give loans to local residents for the purchase of homes, which also helped to launder drug money.[84]

Rocinha has only two main entry points: in the bottom area, near a broad avenue, and the top where a road connects it to a nearby neighbourhood, allowing for good defensive positions and access to a huge drugs market.[85] During the 2000s, Rocinha represented the peak of Rio's illicit order: a stable and wealthy criminal territory bankrolled by cocaine-hungry middle- and upper-class *cariocas*. Glenny describes how Nem's Rocinha would become known for its parties, attracting celebrities from the world of football and music (including Brazilian superstar Ivete Sangalo and US rapper Ja Rule).[86]

This gangsters' paradise was not, however, compatible with the vision the Brazilian authorities had for its second-largest city, soon to be host to two of the world's largest sporting events, the World Cup and the Summer Olympics. In 2011, Nem's remarkable trajectory would clash with one of the world's most successful (for a time) urban security policies: pacification. Nem's downfall displays the strength of the pacification strategy – but, sadly, also the lingering strength of criminal organizations pushing for territorial influence.

Nem was arrested in 2011 around the time that the local security forces invaded Rocinha to install a UPP there. Glenny writes that the local ADA chief was fearful of the UPP owing to its record of success in other slums and the fact that police officers remained in the territories after the initial invasion. Pacification marked a simple but radical shift from the confrontational approach dominating public policy since the late 1980s and reinforced by Cerqueira in the early 1990s.[87] Nem's anxiety in the lead-up to the police operation to implement pacification in Rocinha, documented by Glenny in interviews with Nem, is in itself a significant change in the way that criminal groups operated.[88] In fact, criminal groups throughout the metropolitan area of Rio would also display such fear of the UPP that they would flee their own territories, which attracted live TV coverage.

The rise and fall of pacification, analyzed in the following section, shows how authorities came to recognize that the fight against organized crime is not only a technical police exercise but also a local political struggle to secure and govern complex urban territories.

Bringing the state back in (and back out): The persistence of Rio's illicit order

Timeline of the Pacifying Police Units (UPPs)

December 2008	First UPP is implemented in Santa Marta slum (south zone of Rio).
February 2009	The second and third UPP bases are implemented in Cidade de Deus and Jardim Batam (west zone).
November 2010	Police, supported by armoured vehicles from the military, enter Vila Cruzeiro and later Complexo do Alemão; criminals flee.
2012	Rio's metropolitan area registers 3 100 intentional homicides – a 37 per cent reduction from 2007 (the year before UPPs began).
July 2013	Stonemason Amarildo disappears in a UPP area and local police are suspected of involvement.
April 2014	The armed forces occupy Complexo da Maré, a large slum area in Rio's northern area, shortly before the football World Cup.
2014	With bases installed in Mangueirinha and Vila Kennedy, there are now 38 UPPs with a total of 9 453 police officers.
2015	23 military police officers are killed, in comparison to 5 in 2011. Criminal groups strike back, especially in Complexo do Alemão (former CV headquarters).
February 2016	12 military police officers are sentenced for the torture and killing of stonemason Amarildo in July 2013 (in March 2019, four of the 12 officers are absolved and freed by another court).
5–21 August 2016	Rio Olympic Games take place. Many locals fear UPPs will lose steam afterwards.
2017	Authorities start building a concrete security tower with bullet-proof windows in Nova Brasília slum, but face heavy resistance from local criminal groups. Gunfights around the area last a week.
February 2018	Then president Michel Temer announces a federal military intervention in the state of Rio de Janeiro, placing all security agencies under a military commander.
April 2018	The Federal Intervention Cabinet announces that 12 UPP bases will be dismantled and seven other bases will be incorporated into local police battalions.
1 January 2019	Jair Bolsonaro, a former army captain, takes over as president with a promise to reduce penalties on police officers who shoot suspects.
March 2019	New Rio governor Wilson Witzel says police sniper teams had been introduced in an 'absolutely secret' manner to shoot any civilians exhibiting rifles.
6 August 2019	President Bolsonaro says his proposal to reduce penalties on law-enforcement officers who use their guns while in service will make criminals 'die in the streets like cockroaches'.

Pacification started out as an unambitious strategy. It was first implemented as an idea in a small slum in Botafogo (in Rio's south zone), called Morro Santa Marta. It was not the first attempt to establish a permanent state presence in local slums. There had been a previous effort to place police officers permanently inside *favelas* that had a long-standing criminal presence. This antecedent was known as Police Groups for Special Areas, GPAE (from the Portuguese, Grupamento de Policiamento em Áreas Especiais). It was Brazil's first significant experiment in community policing in *favelas*.[89]

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A Pacifying Police Unit patrols the Complexo do Alemão *favela*, Rio, April 2015   Luiz Souza/Shutterstock

However, GPAE's improvisational beginnings and modest aims would pose problems. The programme started in 2000 in a bottom-up fashion – it was the initiative of a military police major, Antônio Carlos Carballo, which was rolled out in two slums near Ipanema and Copacabana. Its aim was to reduce violence and deter groups from seeking territorial control, and the gunfights associated with it. However, the programme was not extended widely enough to really challenge the main criminal territories.

The geographical limitation of the programme in the two small slums allowed criminals room to manoeuvre. Carballo publicly stated that the tactic was to establish police patrols, forcing criminals to move their drug-selling points to neighbouring areas.[90] Whereas laudable from a violence-reduction perspective, the policy left unanswered the question of what to do about the other city areas where the old criminal dynamics continued to dominate residents' lives. Despite its success in the limited areas it covered, GPAE never gained much political support, which has proven to be a critical element in Rio's urban security initiatives given the lack of many basic public services in *favelas*. GPAE gained much media attention owing to its success in reducing homicides locally, but little institutional support in the form of broader infrastructure and services, leaving police officers incapable of responding to the many demands made by locals.[91] In time, the old criminal penchant for expanding territory would be set in motion again. The officers enforcing GPAE could patrol only certain areas around their bases, which would become 'police territory', whereas outside these areas drug traffickers would operate more freely.[92]

According to José Mariano Beltrame, Brazil's Security Secretary between 2007 and 2016, GPAE was based on a flawed approach to drug traffickers' territorial presence: 'Bandits had not been dislodged and the police officer based in the slum had to ignore what was happening if he wanted to survive,' said the politician.[93]

It was Beltrame who implemented the next attempt at community policing, the pacification programme. But he went beyond that. He was the first policymaker to articulate a strategy to resolve the local political problem that had been at the core of the security challenge. Drug trafficking, he said, 'was ruling the territory and crime was a consequence and no longer the motivation of this control'.[94] His aim was not to end drug trafficking, and not even to reduce violence (although that would be an important metric of this policy's success). Instead, the focus was placed on 'retaking territory' before other policies could be implemented.

Pacification's first major test against the illicit order that had become consolidated in key slums happened days after the initial implementation in Santa Marta. It targeted Cidad de Deus (City of God – the same depicted in the eponymous Brazilian action-thriller film), a poorer and much larger area than Santa Marta. Beltrame describes in a book how the reality of governing, and not just occupying, a large slum area became quickly evident: 'Occupying is easy, maintaining [territorial control] is the hard bit.'[95]

Beltrame told the author of this report during an interview in 2015 (while he was still Security Secretary), that past Rio state governments had tended to 'confuse security and policing'. Security, he said, is 'made up of 80% preventive work and 20% repression, but everybody talks only about the police'.[96] He described his main public policy challenges as not primarily confronting criminals (not even in the face of Rio's well-armed factions). Instead, he said, the core issues are related to people's allegiances, sympathies and the challenges in gaining or maintaining them: 'The great disorder in the big slums complicates the job of the state,' he said. 'If the police can't move freely, that means rubbish collection can't either and neither can people'.[97] People's experience with authority was another key factor, he said: 'These areas remained during decades under the control of despots. People who live there have traumatic memories, they are not free to speak or express themselves.'[98]

Beltrame's description of his core challenges, both in the interview and in his book, expresses an essentially political mission: 'The UPP's objective is not to end drug trafficking, but to bring to the people the freedom to come and go as they will'. He even described the situation in some of the less stable slum areas, such as Maré, where several factions battle for supremacy, as 'urban warfare': 'People [drug traffickers] are heavily armed, form a protective shield around their leaders, make their own rules. [...] They exert all three powers: executive, judiciary and legislative. It is bad for everybody and the topography makes it very difficult for the police to operate.'[99]

This socio-political objective became official policy. The section of the 2011 decree setting out the main pillars of the pacification strategy defines its 'central aims', starting with the objective of consolidating 'state control over communities under strong influence of heavily-armed criminality'. The next item in the decree is also highly indicative of the policy's political aim, namely, 'to give back peace and tranquillity to the local population, necessary to the exercise of full citizenship [and] that ensures both social and economic development'.[100]

Crucially, it was made clear to criminal groups – and society as a whole – that these new security interventions were not just going to be a repeat of the usual police raids. Earlier, in November 2010, authorities had moved against a major Red Command base in Vila Cruzeiro, the first hillside domain of the gang to be targeted by the pacification strategy, then in its infancy. In his book, Beltrame describes how 'the sign we should give had to be more emphatic' than before.[101] The initial salvo in the Vila Cruzeiro operation was deceptively familiar by Rio's violent enforcement standards: heavily armed BOPE officers led the charge as usual, entering the slum. The following day, a line of armoured vehicles could be seen in a procession, writes Beltrame, describing the overtly public display of the Brazilian Armed Forces' armoured vehicles. (The authorities estimated that the Red Command had about 300 high-calibre weapons stockpiled in Vila Cruzeiro. The state forces were anticipating heavy resistance.)[102]

The gang had understood the message: this was not a punitive raid ending with the usual gunfight, but rather a fundamental challenge to its illicit order in one of its traditional bastions. In response, the local Red Command boss, Fabiano Atanásio da Silva, set up roadblocks constructed of railway tracks, trucks, burned cars and cooking-gas canisters.[103] The military vehicles took heavy fire from rifles, which left their exteriors riddled with bullet marks.[104]

Then, the defining moment of the pacification strategy occurred, which marked the first significant public policy intervention in Rio that would challenge the entire illicit order in the slums (as opposed to previous cycles of slum incursions aimed at apprehending drug bosses). On 25 November 2010, TV stations interrupted their programming to broadcast images, shot from a helicopter, of Red Command members fleeing the advancing security forces.[105] They fled on motorbikes or on foot towards the nearby Alemão Complex, reputed to be the headquarters of the faction (and which would later be the target of another pacification occupation).[106] At one point, some of the fleeing group members exchanged fire with a police helicopter. These images, broadcast

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nationwide in the media, became a major reference point for popular support for, and understanding the aims of, the pacification policy.[107]

Despite the improvised manner in which the UPP project had started, it became an established security policy of Rio's state government – and a popular one at that. The institutional framework under which the social-developmental component of the strategy would be implemented – providing more meat to the government's narrative of 'bringing the state back in' – was known as the UPP Social. This was a government programme launched by the state government in 2010 and then transferred to the municipal government in 2011, designed to coordinate and monitor the provision of public services and operations by civil-society NGOs.[108]

Its mission statement was ambitious: it was designed to provide sustainability to the pacification programme and 'contribute to effect the integration of these [slum] areas [into] the whole of the city'.[109] In practice, however, UPP Social's achievements were modest and its resources thin – something that eventually angered some communities. On the one hand, it produced significant results, which were unprecedented for areas with such a long history of marginalization. Individuals and non-governmental organizations based in 'pacified' slums have lauded several aspects of social development work, such as improvements in sewerage systems, rubbish collection, lighting, street repairs and healthcare centres.[110] Combined with the security improvements, residents also praised the fact that access to education had improved significantly, not only because more schools were being built in the *favelas*, but also because the commuting routes to neighbouring schools had been made safer, as they were no longer crime-controlled.[111]

> " **Between 2008 and 2014, intentional homicides plunged by 65% in areas with UPPs.** "

On the other hand, however, the laudable aims of UPP Social did not translate into political capital by leveraging governmental departments (municipal or state-level) to implement service projects.[112] In practice, a lot of the work of UPP Social (which was renamed Rio+Social in 2014 in order to dissociate it from the policing aspect of pacification) consisted of surveying local opinions, promoting meetings and filling in reports. In reality, very few of the demands voiced by local communities, especially those involving infrastructure developments, produced concrete results.[113] One of the few ambitious infrastructure projects carried out in Rio's slums during the pacification programme was the cable car installed in Complexo do Alemão to provide transport for residents. This, as mentioned, was inspired by a similar project in Medellín. The Alemão project, however, laid bare the uneven progress made on remedying fragilities in the slums' governance and infrastructure. Although the cable car was praised by some residents, others complained that it was built without broad consultation with the local community, who had other more pressing priorities. The *favela* of approximately 70 000 inhabitants still had open sewers, for instance.[114]

The weakness in state governance was one of the early warning signs of the declining fate of the project. During its first few years, however, police occupation, and their permanent presence, did nevertheless provide a marked improvement in public security. This success, as measured by both dramatic episodes, such the Vila Cruzeiro operation, and by hard data gathered over the years, would turn it into a national and international case study of urban security policy. Its popularity garnered the programme substantial government support, encouraging it to expand quickly to 39 UPP bases in 2014, by which time it was patrolling 264 *favelas*, according to official information.[115]

The data from the UPP project shows an unquestionable progress in security, broadly measured. Between 2008 and 2014, intentional homicides plunged by 65 per cent in areas with UPPs and by 42.5 per cent in the entire city.[116] Deaths related to security interventions (a metric that reflects both police violence and resistance to security operations from criminal groups) fell by 85 per cent in areas with UPPs and by 66 per cent in the municipality as a whole.[117] Cities around the world experience periods of improvement in criminal indicators for various reasons. But,

in Rio, progress was sustained for years and, perhaps even more strikingly, there was no truce or *pax mafiosa* in place. Criminal organizations continued to fight one another in areas without UPPs, but the pacification programme had proven to be an effective deterrent to attempts at reconquering gang territory.

The return of 'urban warfare'

A military police agent searches for druglords in the *favela* of Rocinha, October 2017
Antonio Scorza/Shutterstock

By 2014, after criminal groups had realised the threat that the new security policy posed to their business model, the authorities started coming to grips with the core problem that had challenged their predecessors: the strong illicit order established by criminal organisations. This had been shaken and even eliminated in key territories; however, Rio has 1.3 million people (i.e. 22 per cent of its population) living in 763 *favelas*.[118] Given that occupying and patrolling all *favelas*, is unfeasible, authorities had to make difficult choices and place UPPs in areas considered more strategically important and profitable for criminal groups, such as slums near main road intersections. Pacification had proven to be a viable strategy in terms of removing criminal territorial domains, but, as Beltrame recognized, maintaining it would be the real challenge.

Although several factors would contribute to a decline in the effectiveness of pacification, the programme's earliest and most significant challenges had to do with how criminal organizations sought to re-establish their illicit orders. During 2014, there was a sustained increase in criminal attacks on UPP bases, as well as skirmishes with and ambushes on police officers organized by criminals amid the narrow alleyways of the *favelas*. According to the strategy, police officers were attempting a radical shift away from militarized tactics focused on deterrence to a form of community policing that aimed to build good community relations. Officers in Alemão reported that criminals were forcing residents to leave their doors open, so that they could take refuge in people's homes during such incidents with the police, and hide their weapons and drugs there.[119] Another incident, in Maré, involved coordinated hit-and-run attacks against the military forces that were patrolling the area.[120] In early 2015, an internal security document leaked to the press revealed that 13 *favelas* with UPPs were classified by police intelligence as presenting 'considerable operational risk' that 'discouraged preventive and community engagement actions'.[121] In other words, the persistence of organized crime's militarized logic was hampering the security authorities in their steps towards community policing.

Another major contributor to the decline of pacification was the meagre social development component delivered through UPP Social. The discourse around pacification, as expressed by Beltrame and others, centred on reintroducing the state into the slums, as opposed to the police incursions prevailing before that. Instead, a top concern among both local inhabitants and UPP police officers was the persistent failure in delivering any significant infrastructure and urbanization improvements.[122] This, in turn, reinforced a sense of insecurity among locals over the political commitment to sustain the UPP project beyond the 2016 Rio Olympics, and therefore doubts over whether they should continue to overtly support pacification in face of signs that criminal organizations intended to return.[123]

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To make matters worse, the gradual return of skirmishes and gunfights came to threaten the security that had been the foundation for some of the social services and development initiatives. For instance, an educational NGO for disadvantaged children that had been opened by Prince Harry of the United Kingdom in 2012 had lost its funding and reduced its level of services by 82 per cent by early 2015, with its coordinator blaming the increase in violence.[124] Even though Rio+Social lingered as a bureaucratic entity, the contrast between its day-to-day community engagement activities and the meagre public-sector investment in services and infrastructure had become painfully obvious. Whereas part of this failure may be linked to corruption, given that some *favela* development projects came under investigation by the Car Wash investigation, the main flaw was the lack of substantive political and budgetary commitment to actually building a viable state presence beyond policing. The overall dearth of concrete, tangible improvements (despite some notable improvements in certain areas) contributed not only to the sense of a faltering state presence but also to reduced citizen support for the police officers present in UPP areas.

This institutional failure meant that Rio returned to its vicious cycle of a weak state governance structure paving the way for criminal groups to once again set out their territories. The existence of criminal organizations with the firearm capacity, tactical acumen and financial resources needed to survive the UPP expansion, and then challenge it, lay at the centre of the security problem facing the city authorities. This return of 'urban warfare' (as described by Beltrame) meant that the authorities had to maintain a fine balance between community policing, deterring criminals and directly confronting the likes of the Red Command, TCP and other criminal groups. Silvia Ramos, an experienced observer of security policies, said that even around 2010 there was already a sense that the hard-won peace in UPP areas was fragile and that 'as soon as [the authorities] hesitated, clashes would break out again'.[125] She said criminal groups started to introduce weapons into pacified areas around 2015 and the resulting challenge to what was supposed to be a transitional phase to community policing caught many officers unprepared.[126]

The default strategy: Armed clashes

A number of other factors contributed to create a widespread public-security crisis in Rio from 2016 onwards. Intentional homicides were on the up again; some UPP officers had been accused of human-rights violations and even torture; and the state government entered a severe fiscal crisis with the fall in international oil prices. In addition to these mounting challenges, Ramos's comment that criminals had been waiting in the wings for a sign of hesitation from the authorities seems accurate: the old logic of militarized confrontation for territorial domination returned in full force in just a short period of time.

In 2017, Rio experienced what was probably the longest and most violent confrontation between two criminal groups since before the start of the UPP operations. In August, Nem sent an order removing his ADA successor, known as Rogério 157, from control of Rocinha. The Rocinha boss refused to obey and raised the stakes by switching his allegiance to the Red Command, which finally took control of Rio's most lucrative drug-trafficking territory. On 17 September, Rocinha, then still under theoretical UPP protection, witnessed a full-on war between Rogério's Red Command foot soldiers and the ADA members trying to dislodge him.[127] In a sign of things to come, Rio's state governor, Luiz Fernando Pezão, asked for the Brazilian army to deploy troops to surround Rocinha.[128] The gunfights lasted, intermittently, for six days until the arrival of 950 soldiers. Despite the arrest of Rogério 157, the Red Command remained in control of the *favela*, and ADA was greatly weakened.

This showdown in Rocinha was just one particularly violent episode of the '*favela* wars' that would break out in several areas. Even though ADA was left severely, almost mortally, wounded by the loss of Rocinha, Rio's criminal underworld still had the TCP (which exploited ADA's weakened state by occupying some of its *favelas*) and the ever-growing militia groups that had been the dominant criminal actors in the western areas of the city.[129]

The recurring cycles of armed clashes in recent years have reinforced the sense that the pacification strategy has failed. This has been corroborated by media accounts of the fact that many clashes, including the ones in Rocinha in 2017, have taken place in *favelas* that were theoretically 'pacified'.

During interviews in Rio de Janeiro in September 2018, it became clear that policymakers at both state and federal levels, as well as civil-society and academia, no longer considered pacification a relevant element in the current security environment. Even though the programme is still in place (albeit reduced in terms of its geographical reach), the policy emphasis among government representatives has moved decisively away from improving governance and services in *favelas*, and towards more technical policing issues. For instance, policymakers emphasized the need to improve coordination between police forces, financial recovery of Rio state and the often-repeated 'management shock' (*choque de gestão*), which was a central message of the authorities in 2018, expressing the need to improve the training and equipment of the police forces.[130] A senior military authority posted in the Rio Security Secretariat during the intervention told the author that the pacification strategy had not 'ended' but that 'those that did not perform well were being restructured' and that the idea was to 'do more with less', reflecting the heavy managerial burden of the federal intervention, focused on improving the performance of security institutions.[131]

Another explanation given by senior authorities is that security forces were left with little choice but to draw back their territorial presence in the *favelas* and adopt a more aggressive posture. A senior policymaker at Rio's Security Secretariat said, 'Every day we have news of attempts at invasion of a community by one [gang] faction or another and we prevent it, including by policing the entry points to these communities.' He added: 'The Rio police had, unfortunately, to go to war. Which police in the world has to exhibit rifles while on service? Generally, these kinds of weapons are reserved for tactical groups, but, given the reality we face, they are a necessity for the police force. [...] Reality imposes on the police officer an attitude and firearms that often scare local residents'.[132]

The political strategy that had been at the centre of pacification, therefore, was abandoned in policy discourse and largely decommissioned in practice (with the exception of a few small slums, where UPP bases are still able to operate without frequent challenges from criminal groups). In its place, the main focus has been improving equipment, intelligence, coordination and finances of Rio state in general, and its security institutions in particular.

Although these elements are highly important policing tools, and ones that a city as violent as Rio desperately needs and deserves, they are not intended to be comprehensive solutions to the problem of territorial influence by criminal groups. An indication of this is that the armed forces abandoned any ambition of permanently occupying the *favelas* early on in the 2018 intervention.

This reduced appetite on the part of federal intervention became clear in the first crime 'hotspot' area tackled by the authorities, the western slum of Vila Kennedy, which was to be the intervention's 'model' that would be replicated in other *favelas*.[133] The armed forces did not announce their intention to remain in the slum in the long term, despite a promise by the head of the federal intervention, General Braga Netto, to provide public services and 'show inhabitants that the state rules there'.[134] Although the army and military police regularly patrolled the slum, their presence was irregular and ad hoc, to the extent that some areas had a heavy Red Command presence that was ignored by the security forces for long periods of time. Despite Braga Netto's statements signalling political intent behind the intervention, the operational language was much more technical and military: the initial stage, starting with the arrival of troops there on 23 February 2018 was called 'initial stabilization' to remove barricades set up by criminal groups and arrest suspects.[135] Soon after, the second stage consisted of 'dynamic patrolling', entailing a reduction in the number of troops. The third and last stage, from 20 March onwards, saw the military patrols replaced by the military police.

The whole process lasted less than a month and had almost no deterrent effect on the Red Command. Locals said the gang initially stepped down its presence in Vila Kennedy during the early stages of the intervention, but armed group members had soon become a common sight again by April, just two months after the start of the intervention.[136] The predominant tactic adopted by the intervention in Vila Kennedy was incursions, in which security forces and the Red Command played a deadly game of cat and mouse. A local journalist noted 13 separate incursions by the armed forces in Vila Kennedy between February and late July.[137] One report described the operations there as 'ant work', with criminals setting up barricades against the military vehicles, followed by army operations to remove them.[138]

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By August, just six months after the start of the federal intervention, locals reported that the Red Command's foot soldiers were again comfortable adopting a conspicuous armed presence in the neighbourhood.[139] Members of the group posted pictures on social media brandishing firearms during the time the Vila Kennedy operation was considered an intervention 'model', in a clear challenge to the authorities.[140]

Vila Kennedy may have been a model, as such, for military and police incursions during the intervention, but it was not a model for governance or for curtailing crime. The Intervention Observatory, an academic initiative at Candido Mendes University, recorded 711 operations and 221 patrols during the 10 months of intervention, in 296 different places in the state of Rio de Janeiro, but 'especially in the capital's slums'.[141] Their report states that the model adopted by the GIF (Federal Intervention Cabinet) was the same that had been in vogue in Rio de Janeiro for decades, one that is 'based on confrontations and gunfights that paralyse the lives of thousands of people'.[142]

It is worth mentioning that the authorities announced a marked reduction in intentional homicides during the 10 months that the federal intervention was officially imposed in Rio de Janeiro state.[143] This, however, is counterbalanced by the significant spike in killings by the security forces over the same period.

Despite the signs that there was further consolidation of an illicit order in several slums, the authorities measured the success of their interventions on key criminality numbers and, once again, adopted a managerial approach to the police forces. Braga Netto said on 27 December 2018 that the intervention had 'accomplished all proposed objectives [such as] to recover the operational capacity of public security bodies and lower criminality numbers'.[144] In response, experts and civil-society representatives expressed frustration with a focus on broad measures that considered Rio de Janeiro state as a whole despite evidence of a consolidation of significant criminal power inside the *favelas*. The Observatory's final report states that 'it is impossible to talk about "success" in *favelas* and peripheries due to the very high number of people killed by police' and 'the exponential increase in the number of gunfights'.[145] Voice of the Communities (Voz das Comunidades), an influential citizen journalism platform, argued that the intervention 'was not an investment in public security but evidence that the government prioritizes expenditure in firearms', citing the state's continuing failure to provide services to marginalized communities.[146]

The local political objectives so prominent during the height of pacification have been abandoned and replaced with 'operational' goals measured by short-term crackdowns and arrests.[147] These short-termist operations have negligible impact on the prospects of people living in slums, the strength of state authority there or the broader organized-crime presence. 'The army thought that just by entering the *favelas*, it would contribute to an increase in legitimacy and the sensation of security', argues Robson Rodrigues, who previously served as commander of the UPP programme while Chief of Staff of the military police and now conducts research on public security. The authorities, said Rodrigues, 'fell on their faces' because they defaulted to 'what they know how to do, which is to throw police officers into the war'.[148]

Although statements around the need to impose state authority and governance in the *favelas* are commonplace from government officials (such as the comment made by Braga Netto on the need to 'bring the whole of the state into the communities'), public policies have in reality pivoted away from correcting this problem.[149] Experts consulted for this research were clear about the state's abandonment of any aspirations to recover territorial control. Ignacio Cano, from the Rio de Janeiro State University, said that the 2018 intervention 'had the hallmarks of old police strategy, with agents entering [slums] wearing balaclavas, without identifying themselves'.[150] Meanwhile, Cecília Oliveira, a journalist and head of Crossfire (an application that tracks the location of gun violence) traces the decline in the government's territorial strategy to 2011, when the Rio state government relinquished 'its responsibility over UPP Social', which shifted to the municipal sphere of government. 'They left it in the hands of an agency without much power within City Hall, that's when they buried the project.'[151]

Amid this bleak picture of increasing criminal (and police) violence, reduced government appetite to intervene in any effective way, there is at least the positive sign of a civil society increasingly aware of the need for holistic approaches that go beyond the tactical policing toolbox. At the same time the federal authorities announced the

decommissioning of several UPP bases, on 27 April 2018, the head of Rio de Janeiro's Industrial Federation, Eduardo Gouvêa, cited a stark fact about the lack of state capacity in the *favelas*: '500 metres from Ipanema, you have the Pavãozinho community and there is no sewerage system there, everything flows through the open air.'[152] Pavãozinho has hosted a UPP base since December 2009 and is adjacent to one of Rio's most iconic and affluent areas, Ipanema.

The current security environment in Rio, therefore, is characterized by criminal organizations' return to territorial control, as evidenced in Rocinha in September 2017, Vila Kennedy in 2018 and numerous other areas. At the same time, the Red Command's bold displays of its armed power in spite of the presence of the armed forces shows that this return of the illicit order to the *favelas* signifies a high level of scepticism towards state authority. The criminals barely blinked in the face of Brazil's most powerful institution for the monopoly of violence. This is not an irreversible trend, but it is a deeply concerning one.

Conclusion

The 2018 military intervention has not made any significant improvement to the drivers of armed clashes that so frequently plague Rio de Janeiro. Its purpose in fact weakened the connection between security policy and governance of marginalized areas. The state abandoned the previous strategy of building an order in the *favelas* based on public policies, state services and socio-economic development. These local political goals had been one of the main drivers of the initial success of the pacification strategy, which had used armed force as one instrument of a broader stabilization goal that was essentially political – i.e. governance, citizenship, service delivery and other essential links between *favela* communities and the state.

It is also important to place the 2018 intervention in the context of Rio de Janeiro's long history of armed violence. The recurrent deployments of the armed forces and the much more frequent use of the military police (especially its elite BOPE battalion) are driven by the persistence of powerful armed actors controlling territory. This recurring pattern of 'militarization all around' is, at its core, linked to a local political issue: the consolidation of an illicit order in Rio's slums, maintained and often negotiated through public displays of armed power by drug-trafficking and militia groups. The reinforcement of this order through the decades since the Red Command's emergence in the 1980s has led public security in Rio to become vulnerable to a logic of competitive, militarized and territorially-centred armed actors.

The consolidation of this illicit order took place in three main phases. The formation and empowerment of the Red Command, first in the Ilha Grande prison, and then in some of Rio's slums in the 1980s, cannot be ignored, as this marked unique mix of criminal and political elements. Secondly, Rio's urban population growth during the 20th century was rapid and unmanaged, overwhelming local authorities with a proliferation of sprawling informal communities – the same *favelas* that remain underdeveloped and marginalized to this day. Finally, the Red Command's emergence coincided with the expansion of the transnational cocaine trafficking routes led by Colombian cartels in the 1980s.

The persistence of repressive security policies, responding to popular anxiety over rising levels of violence, can be included as a fourth reason for the consolidation of this illicit order. This was a gradual trend, occasionally interrupted by two administrations of Leonel Brizola at the helm of the state government (1983 to 1987 and 1991 to 1994) and his greater focus on human rights for *favela* inhabitants. However, even his policies were unpopular among leading voices within the police, who saw repression as the only way out of criminal violence in Rio – some even complained of 'not being able to work' due to preoccupations with a more collaborative approach to slum dwellers.[153] The point here is that militarization, which is the focus of a large body of academic output in Brazil, has failed to solve the problem but cannot be defined as the problem's sole driver. We have shown how many of these repressive policies, including a military-led federal intervention in 1994, were driven by the perceived need for radical interventions.

The core security challenge in Rio is, therefore, linked to a local order that the military police and other security agents often react to. Such interventions, however, have fallen far short of replacing that thuggish order by anything resembling governance (i.e. the ability to implement public policies), socio-economic development or the essential infrastructure needed to integrate marginalized areas into the broader urban environment. In political science it is often said that there is no such thing as an ungoverned space. In Latin America's marginalized urban spaces, non-state armed groups are often the only source of authority left when the police or the army leave. This aligns with Michel Misse's idea of 'urban authoritarianism'. In Rio, a brief episode of attempting to replace this order with an ambitious political strategy for governance and development was later reversed in a dramatic volte-face.

Having promised, during his campaign, to 'shoot down' suspected criminals with elite 'sniper' teams, new Rio governor Wilson Witzel said on 31 March 2019 that such teams had been introduced in an 'absolutely secret' manner. He said the instruction to police forces was clear: 'If someone is with a rifle, [this person] has to be neutralized in a lethal way'.[154] In response to this 'secret' policy, a state lawmaker filed a request for the public prosecutor's office to investigate the use of 'snipers'.[155] There is little to no reference of any attempt to introduce a more ambitious policy. References to the pacification programme, which in theory has not been terminated yet, are rare. Any appetite that may have remained for state governance or development in marginalized areas has been muted.

From the research for this report, the evidence does not support a security policy focused on attempting more use of repressive methods – which has been the predominant trend during the past decades in Rio. In the present climate of repressive criminal policies, the illicit order that has so blatantly challenged the state in the second largest city of one of the world's largest democracies is likely to be reinforced.

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