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Rio and the Reds: *The Comando Vermelho, Organized Crime and Brazil's Economic Ascent*

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Brazil's growing status as a potential world power cannot obscure the characteristics of its other reality: that of a country with vast inequalities and high crime rates. The *Comando Vermelho*, the most prominent organized crime syndicate in Rio de Janeiro, besieges the beauty and charm that attracts tourists to this city. The *CV* arose not only as a product of the political dictatorship of the seventies, but also of the disenfranchised urban poor crammed into Rio's *favela* slums. Today, the *CV* presents a powerful challenge to the State's control of parts of Rio territory.

As Brazil's soft power projection grows, it is seriously challenged by its capacity to eliminate organized crime. Economic growth is not sufficient to destroy a deeply embedded organization like the *CV*. In fact, Brazil's success may yet further retrench the *CV*'s activities. Culpability for organized crime cannot be merely limited to the gangs, but must also be shared among the willing consumers, among whom can be found educated and elite members of society, as well as the impoverished and desperate.

The Brazilian government needs a top-down response addressing the schism between rich and poor. However, Brazil's citizens must also take responsibility and forge a bottom-up response to the drug- and corruption-riddled elements of its most respected members of society. Brazil must target reform across public health, housing, education and above all, law enforcement. Without such changes, Brazil will remain a two-track democracy. Rio's wealthy will still be able to revel in the city's beauty, albeit from behind armored cars and fortified mansions, while the city's poor will yield—either as victims or perpetrators—to the desperate measures of organized crime.

BRAZIL: INEQUALITY AND CRIME

Beaches, beautiful bikini-clad girls and blue-water bays: Brazil conjures an alluring cliché. But the brutal reality of slums and AK-47-toting teenagers, clearly visible amidst the luscious scenery, rarely intrudes upon the images that fuel so many tourist daydreams.

Chaos and crime alongside beauty and wealth may not be the stuff of tourists' fantasies but it is the waking nightmare Rio de Janeiro residents have lived with since the 1980s. A walk through the metropolis yields the sight of myriad wall murals and graffiti bearing the initials CV—the calling card of the *Comando Vermelho* (Red Command), Rio's largest and most powerful organized crime faction. The gang's rapid rise to power through the city's prisons and *favela* slums can be plotted against the state's emergence from parlous "third-world" status to its current bid for great power recognition. In both stories, a dualistic, omnipresent tension between success and failure features prominently.

In Rio, that dualism's presence exists at eye-level: conclaves of million-dollar abodes and notable billionaires—Eike Batista, the eighth richest man in the world, is just one of the 30 Forbes-ranked examples¹—stand in remarkably sharp contrast to the quilt of over 1000 *favelas* laid like a blanket over the city's uniquely mountainous and forested topography. The physical distance between rich and poor can often be measured in meters, while the distance in dollars looks like one of the planet's greatest chasms. Indeed, Brazil consistently registers among the world's highest GINI index

¹ "The World's Billionaires," *Forbes.com*, (9 March 2011), <http://www.forbes.com/wealth/billionaires/list> (accessed 1 April, 2011).

of income equality coefficients². While the number has improved in the last few years thanks to Brazil's economic growth (down to 54.0 in 2010 from 55.0 in 2009³) it is still comparable to such locales as Haiti at 59.5 and South Africa at 57.8⁴—and this prosperity gap serves as one of the principal drivers of the urban warfare that organized crime has unleashed.

The iniquities of Brazil's megacities, however, have not been barriers in the country's projection of its newfound soft power. The proof lies in Rio being accorded the privilege of hosting the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Summer Olympics. As the city and the State comes to grips with controlling the CV and violent conflict in Rio's streets in preparation for the games' looming deadlines, the intricacies of the task raise a serious question: Does economic improvement naturally herald the inevitable demise of the CV, or do systemic internalities pose bigger obstacles in controlling organized crime than fiscal ascendance can surmount?

² Gini-coefficient of inequality: This is the most commonly used measure of inequality. The coefficient varies between 0, which reflects complete equality and 1, which indicates complete inequality (one person has all the income or consumption, all others have none).

<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTPOVERTY/EXTPA/0,,contentMDK:20238991~menuPK:492138~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:430367,00.html>.

³ World Bank. "Brazil Country Brief," *World Bank Online*, <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/LACEXT/BRAZILEXTN/0,,menuPK:322351~pagePK:141132~piPK:141107~theSitePK:322341,00.html> (accessed 1 April, 2011).

⁴ United Nations Development Program, *Human Development Report 2009*. United Nations Development Program, 2009, <http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/indicators/161.html> (accessed 1 March, 2011).

DRUGS AND ARMS TRAFFICKING

Multiple domestic factors coalesced within Brazil to plough a furrow in which home-grown gangs like the CV could germinate and flourish. But external factors provided the crucial profit incentive. During the late 1970s, the formation of Colombia's Medellin and Cali cocaine cartels generated a logistical need to traffic goods to consumers in the United States (US) and Europe. Rio, with its ports and airports, was an obvious target for Colombia's drug lords. Producers in Brazil's bordering countries of Peru and land-locked Bolivia also saw a natural partner in their eastern neighbor. As cocaine prices and demand grew in the 1980s, so did the importance of Rio as a pivotal distribution point for coca-growing nations. Consequently, the city saw an unprecedented increase in violence.

According to a UNESCO report, homicides in Rio rose sharply in 1980—even as the city experienced a decrease in population growth of 2 percent. Violent deaths accounted for 50 percent of youth mortality in Rio and by 2003, that percentage reached 75 percent.⁵ Official crime statistics for metropolitan Rio indicate the 1982 homicide rate by handguns stood at 20.5/100,000, tripling to its all-time peak of 61.2/100,000 by 1989. Since then, the rate has stabilized at around 50/100,000.⁶

To arm themselves, drug gangs like the CV looked to neighboring countries for weapons. The criminal paradise of the so-called Tri-Border Area (TBA), the heavily forested and poorly patrolled nexus where Brazil meets Paraguay and

⁵ UNESCO. *Global Report on Human Settlements 2007: The Case of Rio*, (Rio de Janeiro: UNESCO, 2007), 2-4, <http://www.ims.uerj.br/nupevi/thecaseofrio.pdf> (accessed 1 March, 2011).

⁶ <http://www.ims.uerj.br/nupevi/thecaseofrio.pdf>.

Argentina, has served as a critical transit point. Gangsters typically retrieve weapons and drugs along Paraguay's porous 800-kilometer undefined border with Brazil.⁷ The Weapons Trafficking Map produced by *Viva Rio*, a Brazilian non-government organization formed to address many of Rio's urban problems, estimates that 7.6 million illegal weapons (handguns and machine guns) remain in circulation, 16.4 percent of which are in use in Rio.⁸

Eradication efforts in the last decade reduced Colombia's role as a cocaine producer by as much as 57 percent,⁹ though drug cartels from Mexico, as well as Peruvian and Bolivian production, have partially filled that vacuum.¹⁰ While this net drop in cocaine-based trafficking dovetails with decreased cocaine use internationally, organized crime factions in Rio have safeguarded their position by diversifying into new products and pushing their wares domestically:

Criminal organizations that have traditionally been involved in drug trafficking at the international level have also started to engage in drug trafficking and other forms of drug-related crime at the national level. The availability of a greater variety of illicit drugs and the increase in the abuse of those drugs,

⁷ Rex Hudson. "Terrorist and Organized Crime Groups in the Tri-Border Area (TBA) of South America." Library of Congress Federal Research Division, July 2003, http://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/pdf_files/TerrOrgCrime_TBA.pdf (accessed 1 March 2011).

⁸ "Maior parte de armas e drogas entram no Pais por 18 pontos," *O Jornal Online*, 19 January, 2011 <http://www.ojornalweb.com/2011/01/09/maior-parte-de-armas-e-drogas-entram-no-pais-por-18-pontos/> (accessed 1 March, 2011).

⁹ U.S. Department of State, *Background Note: Colombia*, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35754.htm> (accessed 1 March, 2011).

¹⁰ International Narcotics Control Board. *Annual Report 2010*. Vienna: International Narcotics Control Board, 2010: p.72.

*in particular among youth, indicate that the illicit drug market continues to change.*¹¹

Thus, even a significant decrease in external activity has not been sufficient enough to have an analogous impact on the city's gangs. This conclusion prompts a closer look at the CV itself.

THE REVOLUTIONARY ROOTS OF THE COMANDO VERMELHO (CV)

Investigative journalist, Carlos Amorim, a Rio native and the most prolific expert on the CV, asserts the gang's origins as the product of Brazil's military dictatorship. Amorim has written a trilogy on organized crime in Brazil, the first being *Comando Vermelho: A Historia Secreta do Crime Organizado* (Comando Vermelho: The Secret History of Organized Crime). Amorim argues that the CV is the result of Brazil's dictatorship in the late 1970s. The vacuum created by the State's neglect of proper governance, combined with an oligarchic strain of corrupt capitalism, relegated the masses, especially the poor of the *favelas*, to the periphery. As a result, founding members of the CV wound up appropriating the methods of educated leftist armed rebels—from revolutionary jargon to urban guerrilla tactics to rigid line of command—to great success. In doing so, the group amassed such significant power that they effectively posed (and still do) a direct challenge to the State.¹²

From 1964 to 1985, Brazilians lived under what's known in Portuguese as the "years of lead." When the Army marched

¹¹ International Narcotics Control Board. *Annual Report 2010*. p.72.

¹² Carlos Amorim, *Comando Vermelho: A Historia Secreta do Crime Organizado*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora Record, 1993.

into Rio in 1964 to depose the left-wing president, João Goulart, they instituted a 21-year crackdown on free speech, freedom of the press, social movements and any forms of protest, often torturing anyone who dissented (including current Brazilian president Dilma Rousseff). During this period, in the Cândido Mendes Prison on *Ilha Grande* (“Big Island”), situated in one of Rio’s many bays, petty thieves and bank robbers were being put in the same filthy, humid, overcrowded cells as the university-educated anti-government protesters (several of whom were from middle and upper class families) sent to prison under the dictatorship’s notorious National Security Law of 1967 (*Lei de Segurança Nacional* or LSN). The politicized elites coached the common criminals—most of whom were poor and simply resorting to crime for survival—in the language, logistics and command structure of revolution.

The disadvantaged were taught wide range of practical terrorist skills, from bomb-making to tunnel-building. These prisoners, organized among six main phalanxes that represented sections of the institution, focused their newly-trained energies variously on denouncing the state jail apparatus and their poor living conditions. By 1979, a war for hegemony broke out among the phalanxes. The most brutal and powerful group, comprised of members from northern Rio’s *favelas*, first established its leadership over the jail, and then set its sights beyond prison. Thus the *CV* was born.

As key members of this group escaped from their island penitentiary back to Rio’s streets (while those still within used visiting peers and family members to convey orders to their cohorts on the outside), their focus turned to the exploding trade of cocaine. The money from assisting external organized crime syndicates could be used to survive and finance freeing their still-imprisoned associates. The *CV*

also justified using the money as financing for “a permanent fight against repression and abuses.” Indeed, the gang’s slogan became (and still is) “Peace, Justice and Liberty.”¹³

Tamara Makarenko, whose Crime-Terror Continuum tracks the ideological agenda of terrorist groups against the profit-seeking one of organized crime, echoes some of the narrative points that Amorim illuminates in his history of the CV.¹⁴ However, the CV (and other Brazilian gangs like São Paulo’s PCC [*Primeiro Comando do Capital*]), defies the typical path Makarenko cites; in most cases, movement along a Crime-Terror continuum sees terrorist groups shifting towards the use of crime, rather than the other way around. In cases where criminal groups use political tactics to achieve their aims, she writes:

It is important to clarify that their intention was not to change the status quo, but merely to secure their operational environment. As Dishman notes, criminal organisations use ‘selective and calibrated violence to destroy competitors or threaten counternarcotic authorities. As such, a violent attack directed by a TCO [transnational criminal organisation] is intended for a specific ‘anti-constituency’ rather than a national or international audience, and it is not laced with political rhetoric’ [17].”¹⁵

Others, however, counter Makarenko’s notion by pointing to the CV’s routine adherence to political rhetoric regardless of

¹³ Amorim, 23.

¹⁴ Tamara Makarenko, “The Crime-Terror Continuum: Tracing the Interplay Between Transnational Organized Crime and Terrorism,” *Global Crime* Vol. 6, No.1 (February 2004), 129-145.

¹⁵ Makarenko, 133.

the effect on its own illicit activities. Anthropologist James Holston suggests that the CV employs a perverse and uniquely Brazilian use of the political language of democracy—one which has become an evaluative standard to explain their murderous violence. Considering the revolutionary prison origins of the CV and the equally abusive, corrupt and violent tactics of the Brazilian state and its security apparatus, this explanation appears to offer a more illuminating view than Makarenko’s in explaining Rio’s situation. Holston asserts:

*Brazil’s democracy has thus far produced a dangerous, hybrid space of citizenship as a sphere of social change in which the legal and the illegal, legitimate and criminal, just and unjust, and civil and uncivil claim the same moral ground of citizen rights and respect by way of contradictory social practices, a hybrid space in which the rationalities of crime, revolution, democratic citizenship, and law combine.*¹⁶

Holston cites a proclamation that the CV issued to the city of Rio in 2003 imposing a shut-down of commerce in the name of justice¹⁷—a peculiar demand for an organized crime faction. The CV justifies its practice of crime and terror with the rationale of citizenship, frequently using public talk of rights and staging violent protests when prison rebellions break out. According to Holston, this is due to the differentiated, unofficially dual tracked citizenship that has

¹⁶ James Holston, “Dangerous Spaces of Citizenship: Gang Talk, Rights Talk and Rule of Law in Brazil,” (Panel paper, University of California, Berkeley, 2008) 6, http://www.princeton.edu/~piirs/projects/Democracy&Development/papers/Panel%20IV_Holston_.pdf (accessed 1 March, 2011).

¹⁷ Holston, 5.

arisen in Brazil as a legacy of its colonial, oligarchic and dictatorship-flecked history. The poor citizens are neglected by the State through the denial of basic services and legal justice. The State sees human rights for criminals, who almost always come from the poor classes, as “privileges for bandits.” Elites (especially at the levels of government and law enforcement), on the other hand, talk of protection of the rights of the poor while they negate these same rights through corruption, violent interdiction and ignoring conditions in places like *favelas* and prisons, leaving poor citizens to essentially fend for themselves. This contradictory attitude towards citizens’ rights (highlighted by the visible income inequality that defines the country) serves as a key factor in the *CV*’s continued use of rhetoric—and an obstacle in the government’s attempt to effectively eradicate the *CV* and organized crime activities due to the mistrust of the state it fosters.

THE CURRENT COMANDO VERMELHO

Like the Mafia, the *CV* entrench themselves within their communities by combining terror and public works. The gang’s rule is absolute within the *favelas* they “own.” Any infraction will be met with death. However, the cartel also provides *favela* residents with such basic necessities as cooking fuel, electricity, informal transport and medicine—albeit at rent-seeking prices higher than market rates. Consequently, gangs and residents share a complex interdependency. Within its territories, the *CV* is the State.

Unlike the Mafia, however, the *CV* lacks a hierarchical structure—a function of its decentralized territorial control over the vast, interconnected hillside networks of *favelas*. The *CV*’s drug trafficking operations consist of a horizontal arrangement by which allied *favelas* provide guns or drugs as needed, notes Alba Zaluar, director of the NUPEV Violence

Research Center at the University of Rio de Janeiro and an author of a 2007 UNESCO report on Rio. Horizontal reciprocity defines the interactions among allied crews as they join the geographically defined regions together into larger networks.¹⁸ This poses the greatest logistical difficulty for law enforcement in curbing the gang's operations, since this requires house-to-house counter-insurgency operations over mountainous terrain.

The growing cultural economy around the *CV* further exacerbates eradication difficulties. Within Rio, the gang is a verifiable brand, its red and white logo as identifiable as a soccer team's colors. But its commercial identity expands well beyond Brazil's borders: fans of worldwide videogame phenomenon *Grand Theft Auto* can play as *CV* members and watch realistic fight modules over YouTube; and last year, a docu-drama of the gang's history, *400 Contra Um* ("Four Hundred Against One"), was released to critical and popular acclaim. But the *CV*'s foray into the entertainment business may be most pernicious: the *CV* releases recordings of popular Rio "funk" musicians, the tunes played at *CV bailes funk* ("funk balls") all over the city. The parties not only generate income from punters clamoring to get in, they also serve as clandestine gang recruiting environments and places of exchange for drugs and guns.

As Amorim points out, the gang has morphed with the times:

The trafficking of drugs—and the CV itself—is no longer confined to the favelas. It has now reached the middle classes outside of the slums, with ample support from mobile telephony and the Internet. The drug business now includes trafficking of synthetic drugs,

¹⁸UNESCO, *Global Report on Human Settlements 2007: The Case of Rio*, Rio de Janeiro: UNESCO, 2007, 13-14.

amply distributed through schools and places where young people hang out. In addition, there is information that the three principal organized crime gangs of Rio (CV, Terceiro Comando Puro [TCP] and Amigos dos Amigos [ADA]) have unified in a commercial pact to dominate more than 70% of the total drug distribution.”¹⁹

Indeed, the drug business of the CV has recently expanded to include the sale of a powerful and deadly new product known in Portuguese as “*oxi*.” The CV, in an agreement with the PCC, took over control of crack distribution since the drug’s first appearance in Brazil in 1989. In the last five years, in search of new drugs similar to crack that could be cheaply synthesized from the leftovers of Bolivian and Peruvian cocaine production, the CV has been connected with the appearance of the crack-like *oxi* (short for “oxidado,” meaning rusted or oxidized), which consists of the base coca paste used for cocaine production, mixed with kerosene or gasoline, acetone and battery fluid. An extremely addictive substance, *oxi* is considered four times more lethal than crack, with users typically dying within a year due to the drug’s toxicity.²⁰ The drug’s distribution has spread alarmingly quickly within the last six years, at first among the poor and jobless of Brazil’s Northeastern and Amazonian regions and within the last year, to Brazil’s mega-cities. In May 2011, police officers made the first *oxi* bust in Rio de Janeiro state, in the middle-class suburb of Niterói (25 minutes from downtown Rio). CV-connected traffickers were found within a local fishing community with

¹⁹ Amorim, Carlos, e-mail Interview by Regina Joseph, 13 April 2011, New York, NY.

²⁰ Patricia Maresch, “Oxi: New Drug Terrifies Brazil,” *Rio Times Online*, 26 April, 2011, <http://riotimesonline.com/brazil-news/front-page/oxi-new-drug-terrifies-brazil/> (accessed 26 April, 2011).

caches of *oxi*, cocaine, crack, cannabis and automatic weapons.²¹ Driving the drug's fast rise are *oxi*'s addictive properties and its price—BR\$2 for a rock of *oxi*, versus BR\$8 for a rock of crack.²²

Despite such diversification however, the *CV* no longer dominates as much territory as it once did. Key *CV* leaders are either dead or in prison and most members now are thuggish teenagers, unlike the more mature members of earlier years. More significantly, *favela*-dwelling inactive and active members of law enforcement and fire departments formed heavily-armed vigilante militias determined to drive out gangs from their communities. The militia's firepower outmatched that of the gangs. After more than five years of brutal counter-insurgencies—as state authorities looked away—these paramilitary brigades achieved a measure of success (and profit, as militias took over the rent-seeking racketeering of the gang cells they vanquished). According to a 2009 study by the University of Rio de Janeiro's Violence Research center (Nupev-Uerj), militias went from controlling 10 percent of the city's most violent *favelas* in 2005 to 36 percent by 2008. By 2009, 41.5 percent of the 1000 *favelas* in Rio were controlled by militias, versus 40 percent controlled by the *CV*.²³

²¹ Gustavo Carvalho and Gabriel Saboia, "Polícia apreende 'oxi' em Niterói," *Jornal O São Gonçalo Online*, 17 May, 2011 <http://www.osaogoncalo.com.br/site/pol%C3%ADcia/2011/5/19/26327/pol%C3%ADcia+apreende+oxi+em+niter%C3%B3i> (accessed 17 May, 2011).

²² <http://www.osaogoncalo.com.br/site/pol%C3%ADcia/2011/5/19/26327/pol%C3%ADcia+apreende+oxi+em+niter%C3%B3i>.

²³ Luiz Agosto Gollo, "Vigilante Groups Trump Drug Gangs and Become Rio's New Authority." *Brazil Online*, 11 November 2009, <http://www.brazzil.com/home-mainmenu-1/200-january-2009/10295-vigilante-groups-in-brazil-trump-drug-gangs-and-become-rios-new-authority.html> (accessed 1 March, 2011).

THE LIMITS OF CONTROL: CAN STATE ECONOMIC SUCCESS OVERCOME ORGANIZED CRIME?

State authorities like Rio de Janeiro's governor Sergio Cabral, eager to position decreases in the CV's authority and activity as a function of improved, enlightened enforcement tactics, point to new approaches like that of the UPPs (the Pacification Police Units)—a semi-permanent *favela* force whose role is to integrate into the communities and engender trust in the police by working and living alongside the poor. Kevlar body-armor-wearing officers snuggle up to babies in makeshift daycare centers; teach unemployed youth everything from guitar to jiu jitsu; and attempt to create an alternative to the perception of police forces as corrupt, abusive and purveyors of as much terror to *favela* residents as organized crime gangs.²⁴

Politicians crow over such statistics as the declining homicide rate in Rio. In March 2010, murders were down by 16 percent compared to the same month the year before.²⁵ On an indirect level, state officials ascribe improvements and new strategies to Brazil's economic growth; its victory in the decades-long struggle to control hyperinflation; and the success of programs like the conditional cash transfer program known as *Bolsa Familia*—a measure made famous by former President Luiz Ignacio Lula da Silva and responsible for lifting more than 20 million people out of poverty. In fact, the Lula administration of 2003-2010 saw an overall 6 percent decrease in violent crime, which politicians correlate with income distribution and growth

²⁴ "Drug Violence Drops in Rio as New Policing Techniques Introduced." *Latin America News Dispatch Online*, 20 May 2010, <http://latindispatch.com/2010/05/20/drug-violence-drops-in-rio-de-janeiro-as-new-policing-techniques-introduced/> (accessed 2 March 2011).

²⁵ <http://latindispatch.com/2010/05/20/drug-violence-drops-in-rio-de-janeiro-as-new-policing-techniques-introduced/>.

plans.²⁶ As a way of justifying the rationale behind according Rio prestigious sporting events like the World Cup and the Olympics, politicians feel enormous pressure to insist Brazil and Rio are on the right track. And in absolute terms, the politicians are right: inequality, the deadly driver behind the rise of organized crime groups like the *CV*, is not growing.²⁷

Continuity in Brazil's economic ascendance rests to some degree on improvement and maintenance of security. Currently, foreign investors view Brazil favorably, but the crime and carnage of Brazil's drug wars can still hurt the country economically. Organized crime may yet intrude on the growth of Brazil's burgeoning "virtuous circle, in which security brings investment, which in turn brings resources that can be used to continue improving security," says Rodrigo Abreu, President of Cisco Brazil. "Everything points in the right direction. But a footnote always appears: make sure to pay attention to security risks."²⁸

To this end, Rio is undertaking "pacifications" of *favelas* on a neighborhood-by-neighborhood basis, using a special counter-insurgency SWAT force, the *BOPE*, to crush the *CV* and its ilk. In 2010, attempts to drive out the *CV* from a few of the most violent *favelas* ended with casualties among criminals, police and innocent bystanders. While many residents appear grateful for the removal of gang activity, just as many cite the aggression of the securing officers.²⁹

²⁶<http://latindispatch.com/2010/05/20/drug-violence-drops-in-rio-de-janeiro-as-new-policing-techniques-introduced/>.

²⁷, "A Crisis Fluke: Brazil's Shrinking Wealth Gap." *Newsweek Online*, 13 August 2009, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/blogs/wealth-of-nations/2009/08/13/a-crisis-fluke-brazil-s-shrinking-wealth-gap.html> (accessed, 2 March, 2011).

²⁸<http://latindispatch.com/2010/05/20/drug-violence-drops-in-rio-de-janeiro-as-new-policing-techniques-introduced/>.

²⁹ Christian Parenti, "Retaking Rio." *The Nation*, 12 May 2010, <http://www.thenation.com/article/retaking-rio> (accessed 2 March, 2011).

Furthermore, given the 2014 World Cup deadline, 19 “pacified” *favelas* out of 1000 looks positively Sisyphean. As these actions against the CV continue, the nexus between crime and the State, and the extent of their corrupt relationship, grows starker: a 2010 anti-police corruption sting known as Operation Guillotine indicted 45 dirty cops, including Allan Turnowski, the chief of Rio’s civil police force, for trafficking, bribes and tip-offs to gangsters. Says Amorim:

The UPPs, in the form of a community police force, are an interesting concept. But it’s too early to evaluate the results. Without a reform of the police apparatus, it could all go badly wrong. Hundreds of cases of abuse, violence, and theft from people who live in the occupied favelas exist. In the Complexo do Alemão alone [a favela pacified in 2010], 52 law enforcement agents were apprehended for shaking down the poorest residents. Subsequently, the investigation of the federal forces, [Operation Guillotine], took down officers at the highest levels of Rio’s police, accusing them of selling privileged information to criminals. I hope the UPPs transform into a political order of security, and don’t become merely “cleaners” of Rio for the World Cup and the Olympics.³⁰

Much skepticism still remains over the state’s one-size-fits-all approach of massive firepower to counter organized crime firepower. And has it really decreased numbers among members of the CV, especially as they increase focus on

³⁰ Amorim, Carlos, e-mail interview by Regina Joseph, 13 April 2011, New York, NY.

domestic drug sales and operations beyond the slums?
Amorim is dubious:

Actually, it's difficult to account for estimations of the size of criminal factions, especially the CV. In the past few years, they've been made somewhat scarcer by the rise of UPP forces, which occupy 19 of the more than 1000 favelas of greater Rio, and the militias, paramilitary groups connected to the police and who are present in more than 100 favela communities. Apart from this, however, the state security ministries claim that the CV still controls the majority of drug trafficking in Rio and even controls trafficking connections to other states (especially São Paulo, which is associated with the PCC) and to other countries. When the police and armed forces invaded the Morro do Alemão [a favela pacified in 2010], the newspaper Folha de São Paulo published a Federal Police (the FBI of Brazil) memo noting that the CV controls the importation and distribution of 90 metric tons of cocaine and 400 metric tons of marijuana each year—a business worth 800 million reais (over USD\$500 million). In my first book in 1993, I estimated the CV to be composed of around 30,000 members, both within the prisons and in the 630 favelas that the organization occupied at that time. Today it is impossible to determine the real number of members now.³¹

³¹ Amorim, Carlos, e-mail interview by Regina Joseph, 13 April 2011, New York, NY.

So Rio's security strategy appears insufficient as the singular requirement for eradicating the likes of the CV. To provide poor citizens with few options an alternative to organized crime, a balance must be struck by combining a reformed security approach; income inequality reduction measures; the vital necessities of education, public health and housing reform; with sustainable employment opportunities. The CV's lure remains powerful in Rio, despite changes in drug consumption and trafficking trends.

CONCLUSION

Despite economic ascendance, Brazil remains essentially two states in one: a prosperous Belgium-scaled State alongside a destitute, India-sized nation.³² Organized crime and the *Comando Vermelho* have found an optimal growth medium in Brazil's version of "the first and the developing worlds existing side by side," as author Misha Glenny writes. "The first world provides good roads...airports...and an efficient banking system...The developing world accounts for the low tax revenue, overstretched social services, high levels of corruption throughout the administration, and...land and sea borders that have more holes than a second-hand dartboard."³³

Economic growth is not sufficient to destroy a deeply embedded organization like the CV, despite statistical data pointing to decreases in violence. In fact, Brazil's success may yet further retrench the CV's activities for the reasons identified in the preceding paragraph. In addition, as Brazil's middle and upper-middle classes expand and increase their participation and consumption within the

³² Christian Parenti, "Retaking Rio," *The Nation*, 12 May 2010.

³³ Misha Glenny, as quoted by Stewart M. Patrick, "Why Failed States Shouldn't Be Our Biggest National Security Fear," *Washington Post Online*, 15 April, 2011.

transnational drug trade propelled by the *CV*, the more difficult it becomes to unravel. Culpability for organized crime cannot be merely limited to the gangs, but must also be shared among the willing consumers, among whom can be found educated and elite members of society as well as the impoverished and desperate.

Brazil's systemic social and political failures pose the biggest challenge to eliminating organized crime. Politicians are trying to build a slick new state edifice on the rotting foundation timbers of corruption and historic neglect of the poor's interests. Until government coordinates a top-down response addressing the schism between rich and poor and targeting reform across public health and housing, education and above all, law enforcement, Brazil will remain a two-track democracy. Rio's wealthy will still be able to revel in the city's beauty, albeit from behind armored cars and fortified mansions, while the city's poor will yield—either as victims or perpetrators—to the desperate measures of organized crime.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Regina Joseph is a journalist and media pioneer with 20 years of international experience in print, internet, cable television and mobile telephony development. She is currently a Masters' degree candidate in International Relations at New York University's Center for Global Affairs, graduating in 2012. Joseph anticipated the rise of digital media in 1992 through her creation of Blender Magazine, the world's first digital media brand, and from there, deployed her wide-ranging entrepreneurial skills (encompassing brand development, technical analysis & creative direction) for companies both in the US and abroad. Her considerable time working in broadband digital media in Europe, South America and Asia gives her a deep and wide knowledge of systems and trends, and has led to think tank work, such as her involvement with RAND Corporation's and IBM's "Journalism to 2010" study. Her work in media has often taken on public policy issues involving copyright, distribution and transnational digital governance and security. Beyond her work in the corporate media world, Joseph has also established a reputation in the health and wellness field: her interest in the geopolitics of food and sport led to her first book, *The Brazilian Bikini Body Program* (St. Martin's Press, 2007, companion website: www.brazilianbikinibodyprogram.com) and she has been the owner and operator of a successful Pilates studio business since 2003. She is based in New York and Amsterdam, holds dual nationality in both the U.S. and Brazil and has permanent residency status in the Netherlands. She speaks English, Portuguese, French and Dutch.

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