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Securitising Sovereignty: Brazil's Militarised Response to Organised Crime and Its Democratic and Regional Implications

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Abstract

This article examines how Brazil's securitization of organised crime since the late 1980s has reshaped the lines between public security and defence, contributing to a larger trend in Latin America where the main threats to national sovereignty originate within national borders. It analyses how criminal groups like the Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC) and Comando Vermelho (CV) have been presented as existential threats by successive Brazilian administrations, justifying extraordinary military deployments under the constitutional Guarantee of Law and Order (GLO) and extensive border operations like Operação Ágata, through the prism of Securitization Theory and institutional policy analysis. The study empirically concludes that although these measures provide political assurance and short-term control, their structural impact is still constrained by porous prison systems, disjointed prosecution, and poor intelligence coordination. The paradox of public approval in the face of democratic fragility is demonstrated by the 2025 Operação Contenção in Rio de Janeiro, which shows the heightening of coercive security and the blurring of the boundaries between policing and warfare. The article contends that Brazil's predicament resides not in the employment of coercive power, but in the administration of exceptionalism: guaranteeing oversight, temporal constraints, and integration with judicial and intelligence entities. This pattern reflects Latin America's multidimensional security landscape, where threats from within the country and across borders come together.

Keywords: Brazil; Latin America; securitisation; organised crime; internal threat; militarisation; GLO; Operação Ágata; democratic accountability; regional security; UNODC; sovereignty; governance of exceptionalism.

1. Introduction

Brazil's modern approach to organised crime illustrates a strategic dilemma touching on pillars of national sovereignty and public order, further exacerbated by weak institutional capacity. Since the late twentieth century, organised crime has proliferated across the country, with criminal factions such as the Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC) and Comando Vermelho (CV), operating transnationally, infiltrating state

institutions, and fostering distrust in public services. Consequently, with exponentially increasing violence, successive governments have turned to militarisation to stabilise the country and reassert state power. This article tackles land security, examining the degree to which Brazil's securitisation of organised crime legitimises the Armed Forces' extensive involvement in border and domestic operations, and assessing the implications of this trend for governance and regional cooperation.

The foundation of Brazil's land security was set during the country's democratic transition. The 1988 Constitution legitimised the Armed Forces to intervene in Guarantee of Law and Order (GLO) operations any time public authorities were incapable of restoring order, operating as an effective legitimisation of a military role in internal security[1]. This constitutional provision effectively allowed the division between foreign defence and domestic policing efforts to be obscured. According to Zaverucha, this arrangement did not emerge from authoritarian remnants, but from a practical compromise that effectively stabilised a condition of institutional vulnerability[2]. With the increasing presence of organised crime on the Brazilian political agenda, the GLO mechanism became a staple within Brazil's security governance, invoked as crises plagued urban centers and the country's poorest neighborhoods, the favelas.

Securitisation Theory (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, 1998) helps outline this progression. According to the theory, political and social actors increasingly perceive organised crime as an existential threat to the state and, therefore, justify and legitimise extraordinary measures.[3] This conceptualization reflects a worldwide pattern: responses to non-traditional issues, which include narcotrafficking and even environmental crime, require a blending of border and military approaches. As Marcella (2013) claims, the multidimensional security doctrine touches on the same principle, asserting that contemporary challenges to sovereignty often arise from within the nation, rather than from outside.[4] Crime, poverty, the environment, and human rights are all considered security challenges, where cooperative and societal security, which prioritises safeguarding people rather than territory, essentially take the place of military defence.

Within this context, Brazil's strategic reliance on the Armed Forces illustrates both the militarisation and an adaptive instrument of state capacity. Operations such as Ágata, which began in 2011, illustrate the state's adaptive use of military force as a means of operationally integrating geography: the military's logistics, intelligence, and deterrence functions are used to gain control and secure ungoverned spaces of the Amazon frontier.[5] The expansion

[1] José Zaverucha, *Fragile Democracy and the Militarization of Public Safety in Brazil* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 45.
[2] Zaverucha, *Fragile Democracy*, 52.

[3] Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998).
[4] John P. Marcella, "The Transformation of Security in Latin America: A Cause for Common Action," *Journal of the Americas* 5, no. 2 (2013): 22–35.
[5] Robert Muggah and Gustavo Diniz, "Securing the Border," *Igarapé Institute Report* 3 (2013): 14–18.

of this role within the security domain poses critical questions in policy: how can Brazil reconcile operational effectiveness with democratic accountability? To what extent does a defence-led approach to internal threats affect its credibility as a cooperative actor in regional security frameworks?

This article aims to address the balance and the intersections of sovereignty, efficiency, and legitimacy in international relations through a policy and institutional perspective, as Brazil's security mechanisms evolve. The article analyses and examines the extent to which the problem is not the involvement of the Armed Forces as such in internal security, but the alarming management and necessity of their involvement, a factor key to the long-term stability of the country, as well as in the region.

2. Background

Brazil's approach to internal security evolved through several constitutional reforms, political adjustments, and operational innovations that collectively shaped the Armed Forces' role in combating organised crime. The approach is designed for Brazil's unique political and social context, and is a product of the rapid changes happening in security governance throughout Latin America during the last decades of the Cold War. The shift in Brazil's security governance and the institutional adaptation of the military forces is a result of the expansion and strengthening of atypical threats from organised crime, to which the Brazilian government had to adapt in response.

2.1 Post-authoritarian Institutional Design.

Following the end of Brazil's military government in 1985, the 1988 Constitution began the restoration of civilian authority in the nation. Nevertheless, the Constitution retained the Armed Forces as the protectors of the nation's sovereignty. Article 142 outlined the military's obligation to "guarantee law and order" (Garantia da Lei e da Ordem, or GLO) at the behest of a governmental body.[6] Although the paragraph aimed to guarantee institutional stability, it also introduced uncertainty by permitting political interpretation and influencing the deployment of the military and armed forces under political circumstances. Zaverucha observes that the incorporation of this Article stemmed from direct negotiations with the military forces as a political compromise during Brazil's vulnerable democratic consolidation phase.[7]

During the 1990s, this constitutional framework facilitated the enactment of laws that expanded the military's preventative powers. The Armed Forces were authorised to execute "preventive and repressive actions" against transnational crimes in border regions, as specified in Complementary Law 97 of 1999.[8] The adoption of this Act signified a substantial change in defensive posture, prioritising the safeguarding of domestic sovereignty while integrating public safety with national defence.

[6] *Constituição da República Federativa do Brasil de 1988*, Article 142.

[7] José Zaverucha, *Fragile Democracy and the Militarization of Public Safety in Brazil* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 45–52.

[8] Robert Muggah and Gustavo Diniz, "Securing the Border," *Igarapé Institute Report* 3 (2013): 14–18.

2.2 The Emergence of New Security Threats.

The 1990s saw the rise of advanced organised crime structures, particularly the Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC) and Comando Vermelho (CV) factions. Inadequate and poorly verified prison oversight, together with fragmented law enforcement, enabled these criminal organisations to dominate drug trafficking routes and local economies.[9] Their dominance over favelas, together with control of prisons, established the foundation for an alternative system to criminals, illicitly and publicly opposing the state.

Berg notes that, in reaction to the increased dangers, Brazil's prisons transformed into "multipliers of crime," with the PCC aiming to extend its influence to every state, prison, and even neighbouring nations.[10] Under the public order defence theory, when the military advocates for policing, the state effectively asserts that the crime poses such a significant threat to public safety that a military intervention is warranted. This dynamic also occurred during the internationalisation of Brazil's security system, particularly in locations such as the Amazon and the Tri-Border Area. Narcotrafficking operations in these areas have also attracted the interest of the U.S. and other nations outside the region.

2.3 Border militarisation and the Operações Ágata.

The extensive frontiers of Brazil, spanning over 16,000 kilometres, provide significant logistical challenges for law enforcement. The 2000s featured the establishment of the Sistema de Vigilância da Amazônia (SIVAM) and its supplementary management network, Sistema Integrado de Proteção da Amazônia (SIPAM), which included satellite monitoring, radar coverage, and aircraft patrols across the Amazon basin[11]. These systems were the technical basis for Brazil's territorial surveillance capabilities.

In 2011, the government initiated Operação Ágata, a series of extensive, coordinated civil-military operations aimed at addressing narcotrafficking, illegal mining, and smuggling. Between 2011 and 2022, a minimum of ten iterations of Ágata, managed by the Ministry of Defence, were executed.[12] The activities included troops from the Army, Navy, and Air Force, in addition to the federal police and federal environmental and customs departments, totaling tens of thousands. However, the outcomes of the operations were unsatisfactory. Despite using over 30,000 troops, Ágata 8 caught just one tonne of drugs, a minuscule portion of the projected total regional flow, as noted by Vaz and colleagues.[13] This case illustrates that

[9] Enrique Desmond Arias, *Drugs and Democracy in Rio de Janeiro: Trafficking, Social Networks, and Public Security* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 67–72.

[10] Robert C. Berg, *Breaking Out: The Politics of Brazil's Prison Gangs* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 2020), 3–5.

[11] Muggah and Diniz, "Securing the Border," 16.

[12] "Ministério da Defesa – Operação Ágata: Resultados e Avaliações," Government of Brazil, last modified June 2022, https://www.gov.br/defesa.

[13] Celso Vaz et al., *O Brasil Frente às Novas Ameaças: Medidas de Combate ao Narcotráfico na Fronteira Amazónica* (Florianópolis: Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, 2015), 34–36.

militarised deterrence, in the absence of intelligence integration and judicial cooperation, is inherently constrained.

2.4 The Federal Intervention in the State of Rio de Janeiro (2018)

In 2018, President Michel Temer implemented a federal intervention in the state of Rio de Janeiro, marking the first case of domestic military engagement. The intervention conferred public-order authority to the armed forces. The action was warranted due to the increase of urban violence. This was the first assessment of the operating boundaries of the GLO missions.[14] Although the enforcement efforts momentarily reduced observable criminal activity in some regions, there was an absence of institutional learning and a persistence of human rights violations, that hinder local development in favelas[15]. The Rio intervention demonstrated that military operations may provide temporary peace; nevertheless, enduring security requires deeper judicial, police, and socio-economic modifications, tackling the inner systems of organised crime factions that developed into business-style activities.

2.5 Regional and Institutional Implications.

Brazil continues to operate amid a militarised domestic context. Its border operations, especially concerning the Amazon, Andean, and other international boundaries, caused diplomatic issues with neighbouring nations, who perceive these actions as militarised claims of unilateral sovereignty.[16] Nonetheless, these activities enhance Brazil's position as a supplier of regional public goods, especially in surveillance, transportation, and environmental monitoring. Brazilian initiatives within the Organisation of American States (OAS) and the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD) illustrate the assertion that "sovereignty" is contingent upon institutional presence and the pragmatic integration of security and development. In fact, Brazil has advocated for the integration of security and development measures under these regional bodies.

The Brazilian security architecture is still evolving domestically. Brazil must now address a new triad issue: the operational efficacy of security within the democratic framework and regional collaboration. The incorporation of additional military functions into a multidimensional security framework has both advantageous and disadvantageous outcomes. While it allows the state to anticipate power, this power must be exercised with appropriate oversight, responsibility, and collaboration among the agencies. Brazil exemplifies the fragile balance that Latin America must navigate between sovereignty and collaboration, coercion and governance, as well as military authority and public security.

[14] "Intervenção Federal no Rio de Janeiro: Decreto nº 9.288," *Diário Oficial da União*, February 16, 2018.

[15] *Instituto Igarapé*, "Rio de Janeiro's Federal Intervention: A Balance Sheet," *Strategic Note* 27 (2019): 2–6.

[16] John P. Marcella, "The Transformation of Security in Latin America: A Cause for Common Action," *Journal of the Americas* 5, no. 2 (2013): 30–32.

3. Analysis

3.1 Mechanisms of Securitisation

The characterisation of organised crime as an existential danger has gradually redefined Brazilian security strategy. Since the 1990s, governments have increasingly seen criminal groups not only as law enforcement obstacles, but as possible enemies that undermine national sovereignty. Consequently, alongside the increase in violence and lower public security levels, authorities have intensified discourse that aligns with Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde's characterisation of the securitisation process. In this process, political leaders discursively use threats to legitimise exceptional actions, arguably justified following Brazilian criminal context.[17]

The use of the terminology of "war" and "national emergency" by presidents and cabinet members in the 2000s framed public-security policy as an extension of military strategy, thus establishing the Ministry of Defence as the principal public-security agency[18]. In President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's first term, the military leadership in the Amazon area was integrated with police and intelligence functions, and later, President Jair Bolsonaro's emphasis on the "criminal insurgency" narrative further reinforced that discourse. In both instances, the rhetoric of securitisation was used as a political instrument to rapidly obtain resources, combat the imminent issue of violence in Brazil and legitimise the deployment of the military as Active Duty under GLO orders.

The exceptional measures implemented in reaction to urban crime and drug trafficking in the marketplace were deemed essential and established the "new normal." Ungar characterises this phenomenon as a "security marketplace"—a domain where the proliferation of institutions functioning within the marketplace and the acquisition of supplementary resources are perpetuated by fear and extreme necessity rather than by effective operational results.[19] Over time, warfare implements became routine: heavy armour, assault weapons, and military apparatus like drones and surveillance aircraft became a need.

3.2 Operation Containment (October 2025)

The ultimate implementation of this series of measures occurred on 28 October 2025 in Rio de Janeiro's Complexos da Penha and Alemão, designated as Operação Contenção. According to BBC News Brasil, the operation was conducted in collaboration with the Military Police's BOPE and the Civil Police's CORE, involving over 2,500 military personnel, along with armored vehicles, helicopters, and drones.[20] The operation focused on the capture of Comando Vermelho members.

[17] Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998).

[18] Agência CNN Brasil. *"PCC e CV são 'terroristas'? Veja o que dizem Lula, Tarcísio e especialistas."* CNN Brasil, October 2023. https://www.cnnbrasil.com.br/nacional/brasil/pcc-e-cv-sao-terroristas-veja-o-que-dizem-lula-tarcisio-e-especialistas/.

[19] Mark Ungar, *The Rot Within: Security and Corruption in Latin America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 22–26.

[20] BBC News Brasil. *"Rio virou um abrigo para chefe do tráfico do Brasil inteiro, diz autor de livro sobre crime organizado."* Last modified October 28, 2025. Accessed November 5, 2025. https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/articles/cvgknnjgmrxo.

State representatives, media and citizens claim the operation resulted in over a hundred fatalities, including four police officers.[21] The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed "profound concern with the deadliest police operation in Brazil's history".[22] The Armed Forces were not formally engaged; yet, the operation demonstrated the escalation of militarisation of the police to tackle the fragile public security.

The conflict also demonstrated the degree to which organised crime has become militarised. For instance, traffickers used adapted drones to deploy bombs on police officers, an innovation previously seen in the interstate gang conflicts of the PCC and CV, 2023-24. These strategies emulate contemporary warfare, compelling law enforcement to deploy counter-drone technologies and more destructive weaponry in defence. This intensification is transforming parts of the urban environment of Rio into a battlefield. The distinction between domestic security and military defence has been obliterated, as well as the fine line between the militarisation necessity to protect human rights and public safety against criminal organisations.

The governor of Rio de Janeiro, Cláudio Castro, articulated the need for an intervention due to the CV's use of drones and explosives, alongside its nationwide expansion. He labeled the criminal group as "narcoterrorists."[23] The escalation of the conflict and the creation of a "us vs them" narrative, aligns with the securitisation literature, since it characterises an actor in a military context and legitimises the escalated employment of coercive action. Public surveys conducted following the tragedy reveal a significant polarisation. According to local surveys, "87.6% of residents in Rio's communities support the operation that left 121 people dead'.[24] This finding indicates that the narrative of securitisation often legitimises actions in the short term, while undermining faith in the institution's proportionality, besides illustrating the urgency of the matter.

Operation Containment revealed the reality of Brazil's fragmented federal-state multidisciplinary collaboration. Despite federal intervention, the operation's magnitude and the involvement of the Federal Containment Police, communication between state and federal police during the operation was inconsistent, and the issuance of warrants and directive justifications for the apprehension of criminal organisations was very infrequent. This supports Muggah and Diniz's observation about the phenomena of "operational visibility without

[21] CNN Brasil. *"Pesquisa: 8 em cada 10 moradores de favelas no Rio aprovam megaoperação."* CNN Brasil, October 31, 2025. Accessed November 5, 2025. https://www.cnnbrasil.com.br/nacional/sudeste/rj/pesquisa-8-em-cada-10-moradores-de-favelas-no-rio-aprovam-megaoperacao/

[22] United Nations. *"Peritos da ONU pedem investigação sobre operação policial no Rio de Janeiro"* UN Brasil, October 6, 2025. Accessed November 5, 2025. https://news.un.org/pt/story/2025/10/1851411.

[23] BBC News Brasil. *"'Narcoterrorismo': como governos usam o termo em discurso de guerra a facções criminosas como o Comando Vermelho."* Accessed November 5, 2025. https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/articles/cvgwrn9l4v2o.

[24] CNN Brasil. "Pesquisa: 8 em cada 10 moradores de favelas no Rio aprovam megaoperação." *CNN Brasil*, October 31, 2025. Accessed November 5, 2025. https://www.cnnbrasil.com.br/nacional/sudeste/rj/pesquisa-8-em-cada-10-moradores-de-favelas-no-rio-aprovam-megaoperacao/

structural impact", evident in that case[25]. Resources were available to transfer operational authority to the federal government, and the increased visibility of engagement would discourage illicit operations of criminal syndicates and organisations. However, the local control they aimed to transfer would merely boost federal authority without tackling the fundamental criminal networks and the deeper structural problem of narcotrafficking.[26]

Contextualizing the operation inside the broader regional drugs industry offers greater comprehension. Recent investigative journalism has clarified the expanding relationships of crime leaders beyond national boundaries. Shortly before the operation, PCC leadership convened with Uruguayan trafficker Sebastián Marset in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, establishing the foundation for enhanced criminal network connections in the southern cone of Latin America.[27] The CV aims to regulate borders and enhance its regional market, while the PCC's cross-border collaborations demonstrate that Brazil's internal policing challenges are intertwined with transnational criminal networks, situating these threats within a global framework of interconnected cross-border systems.

3.3 Institutional Consequences: Efficiency and Legitimacy

From a capacity-building standpoint, the discourse transitions from determining if the Armed Forces should provide assistance to how extraordinary operations are strategised and evaluated. Optimal practice requires: (i) clear instructions delineating immediate actions after seizures and subsequent procedures; (ii) temporally constrained authorisations, ensuring initial and renewal permits; (iii) metrics for seizures and arrests that correlate with prosecutions, convictions, and homicide resolution; and (iv) comprehensive oversight by the Ministries of Justice, Defence, Human Rights, and Finance[28]. Should these prerequisites be satisfied, extraordinary deployments may serve as a catalyst for institutional democratisation. Failure to meet these standards exposes them to the peril of Ungar's "security marketplace."[29]

In Brazil's border regions, operational performance improves when joint task forces synchronise policing, customs, environmental enforcement, and financial intelligence—exactly the inter-agency integration that the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) urges Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) states to consolidate.[30]

The Federal Police's Directorate for Combating Organised Crime (DICOR) already constitutes a promising institutional hub, bringing together

[25] Robert Muggah and Gustavo Diniz, "Securing the Border," *Igarapé Institute Report* 3 (2013): 16.

[26] Robert Muggah and Gustavo Diniz, "Securing the Border," *Igarapé Institute Report* 3 (2013): 16.

[27] Pinheiro, Mirelle. "Guerra: Interpol abre investigação após vídeo do megatraficante e PCC." *Metrópoles*, November 3, 2025. Accessed November 5, 2025. https://www.metropoles.com/colunas/mirelle-pinheiro/guerra-interpol-abre-investigacao-apos-video-do-megatraficante-e-pcc

[28] Marcella, Gabriel. 2013. "The Transformation of Security in Latin America: A Cause for Common Action." *Journal of International Affairs* 66 (2): 67–82.

[29] Mark Ungar, *The Rot Within: Security and Corruption in Latin America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 22–26.

[30] UNODC, *Strategic Vision for Latin America and the Caribbean 2022–2025*, *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime,* 2022, 18–21.

investigations into drugs, arms, cybercrime, and money-laundering under one roof.[31] It maintains active liaison posts within Interpol, AMERIPOL, and neighbouring countries' security services. Investing in DICOR's coordination initiatives and prosecutorial linkages while safeguarding them from political gain would provide more favorable outcomes than just increasing the frequency of occasional high-impact operations. Transactional modifications to political governance should not impede the progress and enhancement of professional operations within a unit.

Berg's examination of the PCC highlights that in the absence of institutional mechanisms to delineate command and control communication, the state's power becomes divided into "multi-scalar sovereignties" illustrating the need of prison reform for institutional legitimacy[32].

3.4 Regional Layer: Sovereignty Signalling vs. Interoperability

The neighboring nations of Brazil exert varying and unequal influence. Colombia's internal conflict generates weapons and refugee spillovers, Ecuador is experiencing trafficking and gang-related migration challenges, and Paraguay serves as a significant route for contraband and narcotics. As a result, regional responses have mostly adopted a unilateral strategy for border security, with a reduced emphasis on the establishment of multilateral accords. These diverse answers generate two distinct courses of action. According to Marcella's concept of multidimensional security, Brazil's regional problem is not territorial defence but the management of transnational hazards, requiring a coexistence of sovereignty and cooperative governance.[33] Commencing with the UNODC, collaboration with the Organisation of American States (OAS) and OAS/CICAD promotes regional frameworks or agreements that facilitate the sharing of cross-border information and the coordination of anti-narcotic initiatives. The strategic vision of UNODC for Latin America and the Caribbean from 2022 to 2025 advocates for collaboration on data pertaining to the regulation of ports, airports, and maritime corridors, secure disposal of chemical precursors, and "alternative development" strategies that integrate public security with economic sustenance and "market" advancement.[34] These initiatives enhance the frameworks of the OAS, MERCOSUR, and SICA, which aim to provide integrated and consolidated regional cross-border and intra-regional cooperation to mitigate duplication and reduce the burden of accountability.

During its active years (2008–2017), the South American Defence Council (CDS), part of UNASUR, provided an arena for confidence-building around border security, and explored the feasibility of the Brazil–Paraguay agreements joint Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV)

[31] "Diretoria de Combate ao Crime Organizado (DICOR)," *Polícia Federal do Brasil*, accessed November 2025, https://www.gov.br/pf.

[32] Robert C. Berg, *Breaking Out: The Politics of Brazil's Prison Gangs* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 2020), 3–5.

[33] Marcella, Gabriel. 2013. "The Transformation of Security in Latin America: A Cause for Common Action." *Journal of International Affairs* 66 (2): 67–82.

[34] UNODC, *Strategic Vision for Latin America and the Caribbean 2022–2025*, 14–19.

patrols, intelligence fusion, and training exchanges at the regional level.[35] While the institution may have lost momentum, the underlying principles of the organisation have considerable relevance and argue that regional interoperability may progress, but must retain the distinction between defence and policing. Interoperability is essential, although the civilian authority must not be supplanted.

The definitive regional efficiency assessment for Brazil involves the potential transformation of its internal frameworks (Operações Ágata, SIVAM/SIPAM, and Amazonian riverine outposts like Base Anzol) into transparent, civilian-governed fusion centers, connected with neighboring nations. This would harmonise national operations with the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime and the Convention against Corruption and strengthen the accountability framework of the OAS/CICAD.[36] By signalling interoperability and leaving behind sovereignty darting, Brazil can innovate its expansive security facilities as a cooperative governance pillar in the hemisphere.

3.5 Analytical Synthesis

The securitisation of organised crime in Brazil can best be understood as an adaptation of institutions under stress over sovereignty rather than as a case of democratic backsliding. Buzan and Waever's securitisation theory illustrates how once exceptional measures are repeatedly used, they become normal institutional practice, which is why Brazil's move from coercive to more cooperative security is essential for maintaining legitimacy[37]. It has produced impressive mobilisation capacity—integrated tasking, advanced logistics, and technological surveillance—especially in under-managed frontier regions. However, for the long-term achievement of its objectives, the governance of exceptionalism will be critical: defining tangible targets and exit strategies for assignments, shifting the focus of primary resources on investigation, financial disruption, the prison system, and aligning border control with regional cooperation.

4. Policy Recommendation

Brazil's first priority should not be demilitarisation of security, but rather, the governance and professionalisation of security. Criminal factions such as PCC and CV have become transnational networks with financial, territorial, and digital infrastructures that threaten and challenge the state's capacities. In the short term, the Armed Forces' assistance is vital to confront the militarised arsenals and asymmetric tactics. In the long-term, the strategy should shift from coercion to systemic weakening: eroding the logistical, economic, and territorial defences that empower these groups to regenerate.

4.1 Prison Reform and Command Isolation

[35] Ana Patrícia N. T. Abdul-Hak, "O Conselho de Defesa Sul-Americano (CDS): Objetivos e Interesses do Brasil," in *Segurança Regional e Cooperação Sul-Americana* (Brasília: FUNAG, 2016), 115–120.

[36] Celso Vaz et al., *O Brasil Frente às Novas Ameaças: Medidas de Combate ao Narcotráfico na Fronteira Amazónica* (Florianópolis: Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, 2015), 34–36.

[37] Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998).

Organised crime in Brazil continues to significantly affect its penitentiary system. This article recommends the establishment of a National Penitentiary Directorate for Intelligence (DNIPE) under the Ministry of Justice and Public Security (MJSP), integrating with DEPEN (National Penitentiary Department) , the Federal Police, and COAF (Financial Activity Control Council). All faction leaders and members in federal prisons should be under complete digital isolation. To halt the prison-to-street command chain, all high-security prisons must have digital jamming and screening as the policy standard. As the UNODC Nelson Mandela Rules provides prison and command structure deradicalisation, a differentiated treatment by a specialised team must be provided to leaders of factions and low-level functionaries to minimise the impact of criminal hierarchy's continuity on the criminal system. The government should strengthen judiciary control over temporary prison releases, the so-called "saidinhas", particularly for inmates linked to organised factions. Enforcing rigorous risk assessments and control would hinder faction leaders from coordinating external operations from within prisons, contributing to greater public security and weakening the faction's systems.

4.2 Financial, Technological, and Intelligence Offensive

Due to the scale of organised crime's laundering of billions via crypto currencies, logistics firms, and trade networks the emphasis should be financial crime and digital traceability. Brazil must strengthen the COAF's investigative powers and increase the linkage to the INTERPOL task force on Financial Crimes, Europol, and the FinCEN of the Treasury of the United States.

The Central Bank should strengthen collaborations with GAFILAT (Financial Action Task Force of Latin America) to balance standards on asset freezing and cross-border transactions. In Brazil, the SISBIN and SUSP intelligence systems must integrate enforcement data from customs, environmental agencies (IBAMA), and the Armed Forces' Sistema Integrado de Monitoramento de Fronteiras (SISFRON) border-surveillance program. These systems provide real-time monitoring of drug routes, arms trafficking, and money laundering across the Amazonian frontier.

4.3 Regional and Transatlantic Cooperation

In light of the PCC's extension to Paraguay, Bolivia, and Southern Europe, Brazil must move beyond isolated bilateral coordination to a cohesive multinational security framework. Brazil should lead a South American Security Compact, which will strategically incorporate the police, customs, and military intelligence of neighboring states to manage borders, integrate military and intelligence infrastructure, and establish joint border commands, radar and drone surveillance systems, and harmonised standardised intelligence protocols with support from the UNODC and the OAS Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD).

Border management should prioritise integration across systems and real-time interoperability, not coercive activities. Brazil should enlarge and extend the regional

surveillance SISFRON network to the western Amazon and integrate it with a regional RADAR system to facilitate a regional Aerial and Riverine Surveillance Grid. Brazil should conduct joint patrols and ACTO-mandated drone surveillance with Bolivia, Peru, and Colombia over the Amazon to police trafficking routes and illegal airstrips. In dealing with the PCC's transatlantic logistics, Brazil ought to put data-sharing partnerships with Europol, Interpol, Ameripol, and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) into action to facilitate joint tracking of the illicit financial flows, chemical precursors, and arms trafficking networks. This pathway would maintain Brazil's operational sovereignty and lay the foundations of its law-enforcement posture within a broader hemisphere and transatlantic design which has the potential to consider organised crime as a threat to security in a partnership, rather than only in a national frame.

4.4 Urban Security, Rights, and State Presence

In account of the firepower and military-grade weaponry possessed by criminal factions, Brazil must professionalise and militarise its police forces to attain military parity. The Military Police and National Force must engage in continuous training in tactics, urban warfare, counterinsurgency, and territorial control. Every unit must integrate real-time monitoring, armored vehicles, and drone swarms to dismantle criminal and terrorist organisations. Every engagement must emphasise discipline, proportionality, and the safeguarding of civilians, particularly in instances of high violence, to uphold the operation's legitimacy. Simultaneously, the permanent Ballistics and Arms-Intelligence Centre, linked to Interpol's iARMS (Illicit Arms Records and Tracing Management System) and SISFRON, must monitor and intercept the flow of military-grade weaponry to criminal organisations. The state must promptly execute long-term stabilisation activities, including educational institutions, vocational training, sports programmes and digital skills initiatives, to prevent youth recruitment and consolidate state authority.

4.5 Integrity and Anti-Corruption Reform

No security policy can be effective while organised crime is allowed to penetrate political, military, and judiciary structures. Brazil should build a National Integrity and Security Task Force, inspired by Operação Lava Jato, however, concentrating on the issues of corruption and factional infiltrations within the security organs of the state.

With the Federal Police (DICOR) and the Public Ministry (MPF) at the head, and collaboration from the Receita Federal, this program should investigate organised crime, especially in border states, and its links to illicit enrichment, contracts, and campaign financing. A special division within the National Secretariat of Public Security (SENASP) should take care of the vetting of officers and prison officials for faction connections, and the coordination of disciplinary action.

All findings should be published in a transparency portal and in line with the UNODC and OAS anti-corruption agreements. This task should aim to

expose the collusion of criminal overlap and the state to restore confidence on the institutions and center "trust" within the accountability pillar of Brazil's security.

5. Conclusion

An examination of Brazil's security history reveals the nation's perception of organised crime as a possible danger to national security, transforming domestic threats into issues of national defence. Accordingly, through a narrative of external threat and danger to national sovereignty, Brazil's consecutive administrations have sought to combat the nation's criminal organisations, PCC and CV, through mechanisms such as the Garantia da Lei e da Ordem (GLO), legitimising exceptional military measures. Marcella contends that Brazil's extensively militarised approach is justifiable, as the most significant challenges to national security are now located within its borders. The critical issue, however, lies not in the involvement of the Armed Forces per se, but in the political and institutional oversight of their deployment, encompassing temporal limitations, command structure, and coordination with the various sectors of justice, defence, and intelligence.

Effective security must transcend coercion, it must concentrate on the structural disarmament of the criminal order; financially, logistically, and inside the penal system. The methodical disassembly of these networks necessitates not just the confinement of faction leadership within prison but also financial intelligence, alongside enhanced technology traceability. Brazil's sovereignty must evolve regionally through the interoperability of shared intelligence, regulated border crossings, and anti-money laundering cooperation under the UNODC and OAS-CICAD.

Therefore, Brazil's security shift relies on balancing short-term militarised containment with long-term institutional resilience. Through the integration of intelligence-led governance, alongside regional cooperation, Brazil could weaken the systemic foundation of organised crime, restore democratic legitimacy, and strongly reposition itself as a credible rules-based actor in Latin American security.

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