Old strategies and new approaches towards policing drug markets in Rio de Janeiro

Ignacio Cano & Eduardo Ribeiro

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Ignacio Cano and Eduardo Ribeiro

Laboratory for the Analysis of Violence, Department of Social Sciences, Rio de Janeiro State University**,** Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

ABSTRACT

The present article reviews how policing illegal drug markets has evolved in Rio de Janeiro over the last 30 years. It begins with the traditional paradigm, based on the concept of the 'war on drugs', that uses militarized and confrontational strategies. Next, it assesses the impact of recent developments, such as the spread of so called 'militias', composed of corrupt law enforcement agents who dominate many communities, and the introduction of the Police Pacification Unit programme (UPP) in 2008. This new programme sets as its main goals the recovery of territorial control from criminal groups and the reduction of violence rather than the end of drug trafficking. Advances, contradictions and limitations of this intervention are discussed.

Introduction

Urban violence in Rio de Janeiro is historically associated with the presence of illegal armed groups that control the territories where they exert their activities, typically *favelas* or low-income neighbourhoods. Over the last decades, one can find the figure of the 'owners of the hill' (*donos do morro*) in many of these areas, i.e. an individual who leads a small group[1] who controls the territory and the population, establishes a certain kind of social order, imposes rules to govern daily life, mediates interpersonal conflicts and occasionally applies 'social cleansing' to eliminate petty criminals. Local drug dealers are the most common profile, albeit not the only one, to fulfil that role. Other armed groups to exercise territorial control are death squads and 'militias'.

Retail drug sales in Rio are structured through a loose network of local armed groups, each of them dominating a small community. These groups, locally designated by the native category of 'movement' (*movimento*), are affiliated to wider networks, known as *facções* or *comandos*.[2] The origins of these commandos can be traced to the 1980's and have been described in several pieces of research although divergent viewpoints emerge (e.g. Amorim, 1993; Gay, 2015; Lima, 1991; Penglase, 2008). Although these groups are capable of occasionally mobilising significant forces, they lack centralised command, planning or operation and they function mostly as horizontal networks that offer mutual support in case of attacks against or by rival groups (Misse, 2003).

CONTACT Ignacio Cano ✉ ignaciocano62@gmail.com

Over the 1980's and 90's, these groups of drug dealers structured themselves around local territorial control in order to process and sell their product in certain locations in the *favelas*, known as *bocas de fumo*. These selling and processing points were, in turn, violently and fiercely disputed between rival groups in a very aggressive and volatile drug market (Misse, 1999; Rafael, 1998; Zaluar, 1994). Expansion in the market for cocaine, imported from Andean countries into Brazil, increased profits and competition between armed groups, fostering a rapid militarisation and a widespread use of high-powered weaponry (Dowdney, 2003). Images of groups of young men walking up and down the alleys carrying AK47s and AR15s become commonplace and came to symbolise life in the *favelas*. Violence escalated accordingly and homicide rates peaked around 80 per 100.000 inhabitants in the mid-nineties.Unlike the illegal lottery barons (*banqueiros do Jogo do Bicho*) who managed to reach an agreement to divide the territory between them in order to reduce violence and conflict, drug retailers were never able to stabilize the markets nor impose common rules (Misse, 2007).

Old policing strategies: waging the war on drugs

The prevailing response of the state to this violent scenario was a militarised strategy based on two main interventions: 'contention' or 'encirclements', where police tried to isolate a certain *favela* to prevent drug sales for some time; and police 'incursions'. These incursions tried to defeat the 'enemy' through invading the areas where drug dealers had established themselves but, actually, only challenged their territorial dominance temporarily. These police operations were also termed 'occupations', in which a superior military force was assembled to 'invade' favelas with heavy gunfire and, over the last few years, also with armoured vehicles. Special operation forces (*BOPE*) played an important role in this strategy.

After occupying the community, leaving a few dealers dead and apprehending drugs and weapons, police stayed only for days, or weeks at most, and later withdrew only to return a few months later to start the cycle again. Unsurprisingly, these interventions did nothing to eliminate drug trafficking, for dead dealers were quickly replaced and business continued as usual.

Predictably, these operations also caused enormous insecurity among *favela* dwellers who learned to fear police even more than the dealers. Basic daily routines were interrupted by these interventions. Civilian victims of the crossfire were considered collateral damage of the war. Human rights violations were common, including summary executions (Cano, 1997) and police legitimacy in favelas was extremely low. In fact, police were regarded as an invading foreign army and they treated local residents accordingly. Many people explicitly defined the situation as a war and some of the major newspapers, such as *O Globo*, published a section on 'Rio's War' every time there was a security crisis. Indeed, the notion of war was not only a metaphor (Leite, 2012) but an active inspiration for tactics, strategies and perceptions. Parallel to this, crime prevention and investigation were neglected in policing. Indeed, investigation often made little sense since everybody knew who the 'owner of the hill' in a *favela* was; police felt they simply had to go to the community and try to root him out.

The narrative of the war on crime served a political purpose for the government and the police, both of whom could present themselves as tough on crime, and contributed to an *ethos* of the 'warrior policeman', clearly depicted in the blockbuster film *Tropa de Elite*. According to this narrative, police officers were crusaders who risked their lives in order to fight society's foes. However, the high levels of corruption within police ranks and within the public sector in general tell a very different story.

Indeed, police corruption is closely linked to violence and criminality in Rio (Misse, 2007; Musumeci, Mourão, Lemgruber, & Ramos, 2013). Drug-dealing, such as any form of organized crime, can only happen through the participation of officers who are bribed to allow it. Thus, local police officers would receive regular bribes, known as *arrego*, in exchange for their tolerance or, further, their protection. Police were also involved in furnishing weapons and ammunition to criminal groups (Rivero, 2005). In this context, violence exerted against dealers often became a tool in increasing the size of the bribe or in guaranteeing its payment, rather than a way to uproot them. Hence, if the *dono do morro* was killed for not paying enough or not paying on time, his substitute would have learned the lesson.

The above-mentioned policing model of a war on drugs was predominant over the last 30 years but by no means exclusive, since alternatives to it were already being proposed in the 1980's. In fact, while aggressive policing offered political advantages to some key actors it also generated significant resistance, due to its huge human costs and to its inefficacy in reducing crime. As a result, there has been a constant historical tension between two conceptions of public security in Rio, the first based on an all-out war against drug trafficking notwithstanding its human costs and the second centred on respect for the law and for human rights. These opposing visions can be traced as far back as the Nineteenth Century (Holloway, 1997) and have alternated in different Rio governments since Brazil's re-democratisation (Sento-Sé, 1998), leading to different policing strategies. For instance, left-wing Governor Brizola supported a human rights policy from 1991 to 1994 applied by Colonel Magno Cerqueira, a very progressive police commander, and he was succeeded in 1995 by PSDB Governor Marcelo Allencar. His government led a hard-line policy implemented by General Nilton Cerqueira, who introduced pay bonuses to policemen involved in fatal shootings of suspects.

As Soares and Sento-Sé (2000) point out, this ideological confrontation resulted in the unfortunate perception that police efficacy and human rights would be contradictory. This paradigmatic clash extends itself to the general population, significant sectors of which actively support summary executions as a way to eliminate crime (Cano, 2010).

Among the various initiatives inspired in community-oriented policing, Ribeiro (2014) mentions Block Community Policing (*Policiamento Comunitário de Quarteirão*) in 1984, the School Policing Group (*Grupamento de Aplicação Prático-Escolar*– GAPE) in the community of *Providência* in 1992, the Peace Task Force (*Mutirão pela Paz*) in 1999, and the Policing Group for Special Areas (*Grupamento de Policiamento em Áreas Especiais* – GPAE), which started in 2000 and was later absorbed by the UPP project. However, unlike the Police Pacifying Units (UPPs), none of these earlier initiatives enjoyed sufficient investment, both in economic and political terms, nor lasted long enough to produce significant impacts.

In short, the traditional state response to crime became part of the problem and contributed to intensifying violence. Furthermore, the most recent governments in Rio have made it a priority to fight the most powerful 'criminal faction', the *Comando Vermelho*, which created a vacuum that other criminal groups tried to take advantage of, further fuelling violence. This represents a sharp contrast with the situation in Sao Paulo, where the monopolistic position of one criminal group, the *Primeiro Comando da Capital* (PCC), may have allowed for the reduction of violence (Dias, 2011).

Recent trends and innovations in the security situation

Three elements will be considered here to try to understand the evolution of drug trafficking and related policies over the last ten years. Ultimately, all three of them appear to erode the traditional drug selling model in Rio, described above. The first one has to do with the internal dynamics of drug markets, whereas the other two refer to external influences: the second one deals with the expansion of a new organised-crime phenomenon, the 'militias', and the last one describes a new policing initiative, the UPP.

Evolution of local drug dealing markets

Drug markets are very hard to study, due to the lack of official, reliable or representative data. As a result, analyses have to be based on partial or local evidence. As such, there have been some indications in the last decade that reveal the limits of the traditional retail drug markets and their associated strategies in the *favelas*.

In 2004 the NGO *Observatório de Favelas* carried out a study on youth employed by drug dealers (Silva, 2006) which concluded that payments to those who performed the most basic tasks within drug-dealing structures were, contrary to popular belief, not significantly higher than salaries offered by the legal job market and, most importantly, lower than they had been in previous years. This suggested

that the income generation capability of the traditional model of trafficking in low-income territories may have been shrinking. Misse (2007) and Ramos (2009) also describe this new phase in the trajectory of criminal factions associated to drug dealing, with a decline of the power of the *comandos*.

The trend may be linked to a change in consumers' profiles. Many middle class drug users would have stopped buying at *favela* sales points because of violence, so that the retail business in *favelas* had to be redirected mainly towards the internal market, resulting in smaller profits. Rising costs with police extortion and heavy investment in weapons would have also reduced profits (Ramos, 2009). One of the consequences would have been the diversification of criminal activities, with the expansion of robberies and extortion to compensate for the loss of drug profits.

In short, there were some signs that the traditional drug retail model in Rio, associated with territorial control and very high levels of violence, may have entered a crisis for reasons associated with its costs.

The phenomenon of 'militias'[3]

The term 'militia' was coined around 2006 to describe groups of law enforcement agents who, under the pretence of freeing communities from drug traffickers, extorted local businesses and residents by imposing 'protection taxes' and by creating coercive monopolies on commodities and services as diversified as gas, water, cable TV and real estate transactions. Militias were composed mainly of off-duty police officers, but also included prison agents, firemen and members of the navy or the army, although local youth are also recruited for lower-level activities.

Just as drug trafficking had existed in the *favelas* long before it took central stage (Misse, 1999), local domination by corrupt law enforcement agents also had a long tradition in Rio, albeit with other names, such as 'death squads'or 'corrupt police' (*polícia mineira*). Yet it was in 2006 when these groups expanded, rapidly taking over territories that had been controlled by drug dealers. The empirical evidence from Cano (2008) and Cano and Duarte (2012) revealed that the rapid expansion of militias into areas formerly under the control of drug dealers sometimes had the tacit or explicit support of police units in those areas. Furthermore, there were cases in which militias suddenly invaded communities overnight, surgically killing drug dealers who were on duty at the time. The precise intelligence needed for those operations strongly suggests that some militias were commanded by police officers who had formerly been on the dealers' payroll. As such, they probably concluded that they stood to gain more from controlling a variety of economic transactions than just by receiving bribes from traffickers.

Cano (2008) defined militias through five central traits: (a) control over small areas and their inhabitants by irregular armed groups; (b) coercion against residents and local business persons; (c) economic motivation as a central drive, beyond the rhetoric offered to justify their presence; (d) legitimation discourse associated with the 'liberation' from drug dealers and the creation of a protective social order. Hence, unlike drug dealers who imposed their presence basically through violence (see Machado da Silva, 2004), these groups attempted to present themselves as a positive alternative; (e) open participation in, and control of, these groups by law enforcement agents. Even though corrupt law enforcement agents are linked to all types of organised criminal groups, in the case of militias it is the official agents that control the organisation and this connection is public, since they attempt to gain legitimacy through their indirect association with the state.

As in the case of drug dealers, militias lack a centralised command. However, they possess a higher degree of internal organisation than that of drug dealers, who tend to be younger and less experienced. Despite their liberating rhetoric and the frequent attempt to impose a certain moral order, coercion is a crucial element. Indeed, militias impose a tax on many economic activities and make living in *favelas* more expensive than it would be if people were allowed free access to markets.

While most militias prevent drug-trafficking and other behaviours considered undesirable, some militias continue to sell drugs or allowed this sale to continue, as one more way to extract profit. Social order imposed by such groups has been as brutal as that exerted by drug dealers, with frequent expulsions, torture and summary executions.

One of the most immediate results of militia domination is that aggressive police operations to retake territorial control simply ceased. This may be attributed to a relative degree of tolerance on the part of the police or to the fact that militia members, being police officers themselves, would refuse to engage in armed confrontation with their colleagues. In any case, the police fought the militias by using the same strategies typically employed against white-collar crime, i.e. by investigating and arresting militia members, rather than through militarised interventions designed to recover territorial control, as is customary in the case of drug dealers.

At the beginning, militias were a controversial issue and some authorities openly supported them[4] or considered them a lesser evil. The turning point was an incident in May 2008, when a group of journalists from *O Dia* newspaper, working undercover in the *favela* of Batan, were tortured by members of the militia they intended to report on. After this, newspapers predictably turned against militias and labelled them simply as organized crime. Not a single political leader dared to continue supporting militias publicly. The State Assembly set up a Commission of Enquiry that resulted in the prosecution of hundreds of militia members and in the expulsion from the Assembly and the City Council of militia leaders who had been elected into office.

These prosecutions weakened militias and forced them to adopt a more discreet style but failed to end territorial control (Cano & Duarte, 2012). As a result, militias still occupy significant areas within the city of Rio and a few others outside. This has resulted in a fundamental redistribution of territorial control and drug selling patterns over the last 10 years. Some authors estimate that militias occupied just over 10% of the 965 existing *favelas* in 2005 and they would have reached 36% in 2008. During the same period the *Comando Vermelho*, the strongest drug-dealing faction, would have lost 10% of these communities, so that the areas under their control would have been reduced from 50 to 40% of all *favelas* (Zaluar & Barcellos, 2013).

One can hypothesize that such an expansion was both an effect and a cause of the weakened drug dealing structures, as described in the previous section. On the one hand, falling profits and declining power would have fostered militia growth while, on the other, such growth limited the strength of groups associated with the traditional drug retailing model.

The introduction of the Police Pacification Units project (UPPs)[5]

After a short experience in the community of Dona Marta in December 2008, in 2009 the government of Rio de Janeiro launched, the Police Pacification Units (UPPs) project, which consisted of groups of police officers who were permanently stationed in certain *favelas* with the objective of regaining territorial control, formerly in the hands of criminal groups, and of bringing 'peace' to the communities, i.e. of ending regular shootouts and armed violence.[6] Secondary objectives also included: (a) the entry or expansion of public services and private businesses; (b) the formalisation of economic activities and urban services; (c) ultimately, a closer integration between *favelas* and the rest of the city.

The first impact of permanent police presence was a strong discouragement of attempts to dispute territorial control, typically associated with high levels of lethal violence. Given that the police were there to stay, it was far less tempting for any criminal group to try to force their way into the community. Cano et al. (2012) carried out an initial evaluation of the impact of UPPs on criminal violence and on the relationship between communities and the police, based on police records, ethnographic work in some communities and interviews with police officers. A time-series analysis of criminal records allowed them to conclude that the intervention drastically reduced lethal violence in and around target areas by approximately 50%. Reductions of deaths due to police interventions were particularly marked, to the point that some critics mock the project as the' police pacifying themselves'. Police records show that seizures of drugs in those areas became progressively more common than seizures of weapons, which points to a relative dissociation between guns and drug dealing.

Parallel to this, reports of non-lethal crimes increased significantly in UPP communities, due to two main reasons: (a) a sharp reduction in non-reporting rates, since residents who had been traditionally wary of reporting crimes to the police were now driven into police stations in order to do

so; (b) the absence of former brutal authoritarian control by the 'owner of the hill' may actually have increased petty crime.

When in early 2000 GEPAE[7] had tried to apply the same principle of permanently stationing police officers in a few *favelas* to contain violence, conservative politicians, such as the mayor, had branded the project as 'some kind of initiative to protect drug selling points'.[8] In the case of the UPPs, however, the initial level of support attained by the project, particularly from the economic elite, meant that it could not be brought down by conservative criticism, as previous initiatives had been.

This time, the explicit goal of the project was not to end or defeat drug dealing but to ensure that it happened without territorial control and without lethal violence, both of them symbolised by the presence of machine guns. Indeed, the renunciation of victory in the 'war on drugs', certainly unwinnable, opened up space for more realistic goals, such as the reduction of violence. Interestingly, this renunciation cannot be found in police official documents but is apparent in all its communication strategy.[9]

Indeed, Governor Cabral, who headed the government during the implementation of the UPPs, had previously promoted very different tactics, such as huge police operations with hundreds of officers who engaged in intense shootouts that resulted in an extremely high number of people killed by police: 1.330 in 2007, the highest number since records began. The reasons for this paradigmatic shift may have been varied. First, the occurrence of very publicised police 'mistakes' where innocent people were killed by police.[10] Second, the contrast between state policies of public security and those fostered by the Federal Government,[11] with which the government of Rio was otherwise aligned. And third, the choice of Rio to host the World Cup and the Olympic Games, which appeared to guarantee support,[12] at least in public statements, for a 'pacifying' rather than a 'warrior' approach.[13]

On the other hand, UPPs hoped to establish better relationships between poor communities and the police through a different policing paradigm, vaguely defined as 'community policing' and 'proximity policing'. For that purpose, police officers were freshly recruited for this project, which was alleged to reduce the risk of 'contamination' of UPP officers by the levels of corruption and the old doctrine of the rest of the force. Training and doctrine were supposed to be altered accordingly, even though there were few signs of change in practice.

UPP intervention proceeded in four phases. The first, called 'tactical intervention', was performed by special operation forces and attempted to capture as many guns, drugs and criminals as possible in order to 'clean' the territory. As such, this first phase was very similar to traditional police operations in *favelas*. After the first UPPs, this initial phase changed in that the operation was widely publicised and anticipated, not least by the media, so that armed dealers would demobilise and leave, or at least would not resist with guns, the entry of an overwhelming police force. This new strategy, coined through the native term of *guerra avisada* (roughly, 'a declaration of war'), aimed at reducing shootouts and violence from day one. However, the new measure garnered some initial criticism because it did not lead to the imprisonment of dealers who could, in theory, move their activities to other territories (Rocha & Pedro, 2012).

After the occupation by special operation forces, the first official ceremony consisted in raising the national flag, a highly symbolic gesture that could be interpreted as a final victory in the 'war on drugs'. Thus, those territories would allegedly return to 'national sovereignty'.

Ultimately, UPPs were considered by some sectors inside and outside the police as a chance to transform public security paradigms and reform the police itself, replacing the 'war on drugs' with a policing model that promoted safety and respect for the law. Hence, it was hoped that the success of UPPs would help drag the rest of the police in the same direction. Within the police, those officers more aligned with human rights certainly saw this as a unique opportunity. Parallel to that, other police officers interviewed, who had participated in the 'war on drugs' approach but who were now leading the new project, developed a discourse in which they claimed 'tough policing' had been needed at the time but that new times merited new approaches. In some cases, this self-justificatory discourse asserted that it was precisely the very aggressive policing of former times that had opened up the space for the new 'pacification' phase. On the other hand, there was great resistance within the police to such

a paradigmatic shift. Indeed, several pieces of research (Cano et al., 2012; CESeC, 2011; Musumeci et al., 2013) show that a vast majority of UPP officers would rather not work in the project, which reveals the low degree of internal legitimacy. In fact, many officers interviewed by Cano et al. (2012) considered UPPs as second-rate policing that distanced them from their 'real role' of crime fighters.

As for the government and for Rio's economic and political elite, UPPs could be conceived as a tool in the plan that attempted to turn the city into an international centre for tourism and services, activities for which Rio has a great potential but which had been traditionally hindered by insecurity. In this sense, Barreira (2013) states that the UPPs were necessary to create a new 'image of security' for the city of Rio, conducive to the attraction of sizeable investments.

Indeed, most of the existing 38 UPP units, particularly the earlier ones, were located in *favelas* that privileged rich neighbourhoods, tourist zones, the city centre and areas that contained major thorough-fares and neighbourhoods associated to sports mega-events (Cano & Ribeiro, 2014). Consequently, western and northern neighbourhoods, together with the metropolitan belt of the *Baixada Fluminense*, were neglected by the project despite experiencing the highest homicide rates in the state. The project was also selective in the kind of armed group whose domination it addressed. With the exception of the case of Batan, UPPs entered communities dominated by drug dealers and not by militias. After all, UPPs were thought of as an end to the war on drugs, which was always waged against dealers and not militias.

As was mentioned earlier, besides the main goals of regaining territorial control and reducing armed violence, UPPs were also intended to increase public and private investment and improve living conditions. In fact, the 'UPP project' was understood in two different ways. In the first, more limited sense, UPPs would just be a public security strategy or, even more restrictively, a policing project. In the second sense, UPPs were conceived as a far wider strategy for integrating *favelas* to the rest of the city and decreasing the difference between both ends of the 'divided city' (*cidade partida*) – see Ventura (1994). Within this broad strategy, often called the 'pacification policy', police units were understood as just one component, albeit a necessary condition for the rest. Indeed, the logic behind this is that both state and private enterprises would have historically neglected investment in such areas precisely because of the precarious security situation. Thus, if UPPs could provide security, this would open up possibilities for resuming investments and guaranteeing socio-economic rights for local residents.

This logic presents two main problems. The first is that significant urban upgrading and public investment projects (such as *Favela Bairro* and *PAC*) had always been carried out in such areas, despite the presence of armed groups. In other words, 'pacification' was not a necessary condition for public investment (Arias, 2013). The second problem is that, should this strategy be successfully implemented in full, it might result in 'pacified' and relatively developed *favelas* on the one hand, and violent and neglected *favelas,* on the other. In short, this could end up increasing social inequality rather than reducing it, thereby altering traditional micro-segregational patterns in the direction of a traditional centre vs periphery model. Ongoing ethnographic research in the community of Tabajaras, which is located in the tourist neighbourhood of Copacabana and has had a UPP for several years, shows some evidence of the arrival of new residents of a relatively higher socio-economic background. This process of gentrification is congruent with the new segregation pattern.

Residents interviewed by Cano et al. (2012) in two UPP communities, Macacos and Cidade de Deus, praised the end of shootouts, the absence of curfews, an increase in free access (both for locals and outsiders) and a certain reduction in the stigma attributed to *favela* dwellers, as long as they lived in a 'pacified' *favela*. Yet they also revealed deep mistrust vis-à-vis the police, cases of police abuse and conflicts about the regulation of leisure activities (such as parties and funk festivals).

In fact, the level of security appears to vary significantly from some UPPs to others. In some areas, police and drug dealers still engage in lethal shootouts with casualties on both sides. In other cases, there is still considerable tension around drug dealing but with lower levels of violence. In yet other communities police presence seems to have been incorporated into daily routines and there is a perception of safety.

Since 2012, despite the lack of a comprehensive evaluation, the UPP project has shown various signs of crisis, such as: (a) an apparently increasing number of armed incidents in some *favelas* in which the police were involved, with both civilians and police officers killed; (b) an increased frequency of reports of police abuse, symbolized by the case of Amarildo, a resident of Rocinha who was tortured, killed and disappeared by UPP officers in 2013. News about this and similar cases tarnished the project's legitimacy; (c) a reduced economic capacity to invest in the project as a result of the state's financial crisis. As a result, police facilities are still deficient and many officers are still operating from trailers rather than buildings.

Conclusion

The traditional model of drug retailing in Rio based on territorial control by armed groups, whose expansion had multiplied homicides in the metropolitan area since the 1980s, appears to have declined over the last 10 years, due to several factors. The first is the limited profitability of its own model, with very high costs and continuous cycles of violence. The second factor is the rapid growth of militias, made up of corrupt law enforcement officials who extort residents in poor communities and control different economic transactions. The expansion of militias, mainly in the west and secondarily in the north of the city, has altered the political economy of criminal groups and the patterns of territorial control by such groups in the last few years, significantly reducing the domination of the *Comando Vermelho* (Alves, 2008; Zaluar & Barcellos, 2013).

The third element that has affected traditional criminal groups is the creation and expansion of the UPP policing project, which attempts to recover territorial control from criminal groups and reduce lethal violence, rather than win the 'war on drugs'. In a way, the militia and the UPP effects complement each other, since the former target peripheral areas in the west and the north, which are irrelevant for the political and economic project underlying UPPs, whereas the latter centres on central and middle and high-class areas.

UPPs were conceived by several sectors as a way to subvert the traditional security paradigm, based on the 'war on drugs', and to reform police. There are also those who invert this equation and claim that police reform would be a pre-requisite for the success of UPPs (Soares, 2011). In any case, institutional reform appears to be, unfortunately, the area in which advances have been more timid.

Despite its limitations, the UPP project will certainly leave a very important legacy in Rio by showing that there is a practical alternative to the 'war on drugs' in dealing with violence and insecurity. In its acceptance of drug trafficking as an unavoidable reality, the UPP model attempted to invert historical priorities, fighting violence and intimidation rather than drugs. In this sense, it could be conceived almost as a harm-reduction initiative related to drug trafficking, which attempts to diminish the negative impacts of its inescapable presence.

Rio de Janeiro has been for decades a clear example of the dramatic impact of the 'war on drugs' policing approach, which has proven itself incapable of containing drug sales or effectively disarticulating drug markets, but has been associated with significant increases in lethal violence and human rights abuses. Clearly, Rio is not the exception in the region and other cases can be found in México, Colombia and Central America. Indeed, the presidency of Calderón in México, with its heavy involvement of armed forces in fighting drug crime and a huge surge in homicide rates after 2007, has become the most recent symbol of this paradigm (Alvarado, 2014).

Yet such a paradigmatic shift in the security of Rio de Janeiro could not be expected to happen easily or overnight. Hence, there is considerable resistance and plenty of signs of the 'war on drugs' vividly lingering in the present. First, UPPs are still a 'project' inside the police and other areas are policed in the usual way. Further, UPPs' capacity to permeate the doctrine of the rest of the organisation has so far been limited. In fact, the opposite seems to be more likely, since most UPP officers would rather return to conventional policing. Public security managers have not yet decided how to make UPPs converge with the rest of the police structure, considering that the coexistence of two parallel police models and structures cannot be extended indefinitely. In January 2015 an internal police document[14]

established a pilot project for an 'integrated proximity policing unit' to be implemented within all police districts, but this is obviously an experiment and its future is uncertain.

Second, there are multiple signs that old habits embedded in the 'war on drugs' linger on even within UPPs, in what Cano et al. (2012) have termed a 'cold war on drugs'. For instance, officers in UPP still see as their priority the confiscation of drugs and the arrest of drug dealers and they are indeed rewarded by their superiors with days off when they confiscate drugs. In fact, a recent survey with a representative sample of Rio police officers (Magaloni & Cano, in press) showed that incentives to apprehend drugs were more common in UPPs than in any other units and that these incentives positively correlated with the frequency of use of lethal force by individual officers. Ultimately, most officers continue to believe that real policing is tantamount to fighting criminals with violence so that UPPs are really a fancy substitute. For instance, police officers still listen to the lyrics of songs played by young people to make sure that they do not praise dealers[15](Cano et al., 2012).

Third, politicians and managers, even those who defend an end to the 'war on drugs', cannot escape the influence of the militaristic logic. For instance, frequent deaths of policemen and of civilians in the *Complexo do Alemão* in early 2015 have evidenced the failure to reduce violence in this community. One of the possible courses of action would be leaving those sectors where violence is out of control in order to better plan how to intervene in the future, rather than stay and continue to exchange fire. However, both politicians and managers were quick to declare that there would no turning back.[16] 'Turning back' would be admitting defeat in the never ending war against drug dealers and this would be a blow to the 'honour' of the institutions

Considering that most fatal victimizations are historically produced in territorial disputes over drug selling locations, the ultimate goal of any intervention could be to de-territorialise drug markets so that there would be no need to dominate specific areas, for instance through direct delivery to individual consumers. This is the kind of drug retail business that is operating in many cities around the world with much lower levels of violence. Ideally, state interventions should try to discourage the traditional model and encourage this more modern style of drug dealing. On the other hand, had UPPs been located in areas with highest homicide rates, this could have been a strong incentive for dealers to operate with lower levels of violence. Excessive violence would have thus resulted in the loss of their territory, which is the basis of their business, through the installation of a UPP.

It is also possible that the internal weaknesses and extremely high costs associated with Rio's traditional drug retail model may also intensify such changes in the future but there is no guarantee of that. As for the possibility that drug retail markets may be radically transformed by the de-criminalisation of certain drugs (like marihuana), as is currently being discussed in some other Latin American countries and already applied in Uruguay, there is no sign that Brazil will follow that path in the immediate future.

Notes

1. In a few small communities, a single person has been known to exceptionally perform this role on his own, but much more commonly the 'dono do morro' will be the head of the dominant group.
2. Currently, there are three main *comandos* in Rio de Janeiro: *Comando Vermelho* (CV), which is the most powerful: *Amigos dos Amigos* (ADA) e *Terceiro Comando* (TC).
3. This section mainly reflects findings from two pieces of research on this phenomenon by members of our team – see Cano (2008) and Cano and Duarte (2012) These studies were based on the following sources: (a) news articles from the main newspapers published in Rio; (b) complaints against militias registered via official or semi-official channels (Disque-Denúncia and Disque Milícia); (c) interviews with state authorities who directly participated in the crackdown on militias (just Cano & Duarte, 2012); and most importantly (d) interviews with dwellers and workers in militia territories Each of these two studies involved more than 40 interviews.
4. The mayor of the city of Rio at the time, Cesar Maia, defined militias as 'Self-Defence Groups'.
5. This section is based mostly on the initial evaluation of UPPS led by Cano, Borges, and Ribeiro (2012) The study focused mainly on impacts on crime, local perceptions of residents and relationships between police and affected communities Data sources included: (a) official documents; (b) overall criminal records; (c) administrative

records from UPPs; and (d) qualitative interviews applied to police officers and to local residents – 25 police officers and 82 dwellers were interviewed.

6. UPPs were defined in governmental decree number 42.787 published in 6 January 2011, two years after the project had started. There had been two previous decrees (Decree 41.650 of 21 January 2009 and Decree 41.653 of 22 January 2009) but these simply named the policy and set out economic and organizational issues. This shows that the project was not designed in advance nor did it follow a detailed plan, but was rather a practical initiative that was adapted to circumstances over time.

7. *Grupamento de Policiamento em Áreas Especiais* (GEPAE) was a policing project created in the year 2000 which bears several similarities with respect to the UPPs.

8. See article in 'O Dia', 27 March 2007: 'Prefeito chama ONG Viva Rio de 'Viva Droga'.

9. The UPP website, for instance, declares that one of its objectives is 'to contribute to dismantling the logic of 'war' that exists in Rio de Janeiro'. And the Secretary of Public Security himself, Mariano Beltrame, has declared several times to the press that the UPP objective is not to end drug trafficking. See '*Betrame Faz Balanço Positivo*' *O Globo*, 14 December 2013.

10. In July 2008, João Roberto, a 3-year-old boy was accidentally killed by the police. His mother's car was shot by police officers who mistook the vehicle for one with criminals on the run. See '*Pai acusa PM de metralhar carro de família e matar filho*' *O Globo*, 8 July 2008.

11. At the time the Federal Government developed a project called 'Pronasci', which attempted to promote social inclusion and security, as well as respect for human rights.

12. In fact, the choice of Rio to host the Olympic Games occurred in October, 2009, when the UPP project was already under way, so it could be considered a reinforcing factor rather than a cause.

13. On the other hand, it is also possible that mega-events might also encourage aggressive policing. Thus, the Pan-American Games in 2007 in Rio were preceded by massive police operations with many casualties, in an apparent attempt to 'pacify' the city before the games.

14. *Portaria* PMERJ no. 602, of 8 January 2015.

15. The so-called *proibidões* are the equivalent of *narco-corridos* in Mexico.

16. See, for example, the piece entitled 'Alemão será reocupado', in the site news G1 from O Globo, 5 April 2015. Available at: g1.globo.com/rio-de-janeiro/noticia/2015/04/alemao-sera-reocupado-anuncia-governador-do-rj.html. Accessed May, 17, 2015.

Disclosure statement

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Notes on contributors

Ignacio Cano received a joint PhD in sociology and social psychology at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid (Spain) in 1991. Since 2000, he has held a permanent position at the Department of Social Sciences of the State University of Rio de Janeiro, where he is now an associate professor. He is a founder and current coordinator of the Laboratory for the Analysis of Violence (LAV) of the same university. Over the last 15 years, he has published on different issues related to public security and human rights and he has been a consultant and an evaluator for various projects related to these areas in several countries in the region.

Eduardo Ribeiro completed a Master of Science in Population Studies and Social Research at the National School of Statistical Sciences (ENCE) in 2008 and received his PhD in Social Sciences at Rio de Janeiro State University (UERJ) in 2015 with a thesis on the educational impacts of Police Pacification Units on public schools. He is currently a post-doctoral fellow at the Post-graduate Program in Social Sciences at Rio de Janeiro State University (PPCIS/UERJ). Since 2002, he has been a researcher of the Laboratory for the Analysis of Violence (LAV) at UERJ. From 2007 to 2009 he worked as a public manager, coordinating the Observatory of Violence in the city of Nova Iguaçu, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

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