



The Red Command (Comando Vermelho) is Brazil's oldest criminal group, created in a Rio de Janeiro prison in the 1970s as a self-protection group for prisoners. It started out with low-level crime like muggings and bank robbery, but in the 1980s the group moved into the cocaine trade, working with Colombian drug cartels and taking on a social leadership role in many of Rio's favelas.

History

The Red Command was born out of an alliance between common criminals and leftist militants, when the two groups were thrown together in prisons under the military dictatorship of 1964 to 1985. The terrible conditions in Candido Mendes prison, on Ilha Grande island in Rio de Janeiro, pushed inmates to band together in order to survive within the system. They first formed a left-wing militia organization called the "Falange Vermelho," or "Red Falange," but the ideology was soon abandoned as the group became more deeply involved with organized crime, and was dubbed "Red Command" by the press.

By 1979 the group had spread out of the prison and into Rio's streets. Members who were on the outside were tasked with providing money to those on the inside through criminal activities such as bank robbery, to allow them to maintain a decent quality of life in prison and to finance escape attempts.

The ideas of the Red Command spread to other prisons, and the power of the organization grew. Two decades later, in São Paulo, a similar prisoners' movement would emerge -- the First Capital

Comando Vermelho Factbox

Founded

1970s, in Candido Mendes prison, Rio de Janeiro

Command (Primeiro Comando da Capital - PCC).

The Red Command was ideally placed to partner with Colombian cartels when the cocaine trade began to boom in the 1980s, as it had the structure and organization to reliably resell large quantities of the drug.

Members on the outside now had a clear objective: forming well-armed gangs to take over drug turf in the name of the Command. It gained control of many the poor neighborhoods in Rio de Janeiro which had been neglected by the state, setting up a parallel system of government inside the favelas and providing employment to inhabitants long excluded from Brazilian society.

By the 1990s, as the city's all-powerful illegal gambling bosses (bicheiros) saw their influence diminish, the Red Command became Rio's top organized crime group and built up its presence in other states.

In 2005, the Red Command were thought to control more than half of Rio de Janeiro's most violent areas, though this fell to under 40 percent by 2008. The group's influence is believed to have been reduced further since then thanks to the UPP police pacification program, which is intended to bring a state presence to the favelas.

The group is thought to have links to Colombia's FARC rebels, and leader Luiz Fernando da Costa, alias "Fernandinho Beira-Mar," was captured in Colombia in 2001 while allegedly exchanging weapons for cocaine with the group.

Leadership

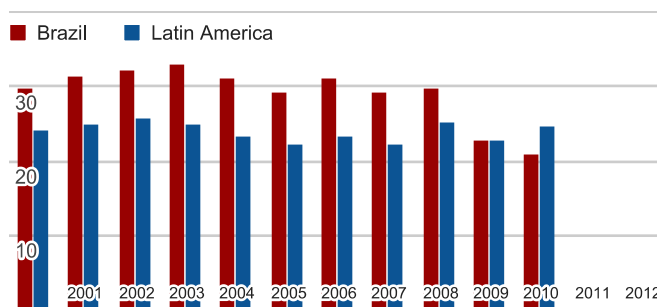
Luiz Fernando da Costa, alias "Fernandinho Beira-Mar" (Freddy Seashore) is a top leader of the decentralized organization

Criminal Activities

drug trafficking, drug sales, bank robberies, extortion, kidnapping

Brazil Factbox

Homicide Rate



Criminal Activities

Drug transit, cocaine production, human trafficking, extortion, illegal gambling, kidnapping, prostitution rings

Principal criminal groups

Red Command (Comando Vermelho), First Capital Command (Primeiro Comando da Capital - PCC), Third Command (Terceiro Comando), Amigos dos Amigos, militia groups

Leadership

The group has a relatively loose structure, and has been described as a network of independent actors, rather than a strict hierarchical organization headed by a single leader. However, there are prominent bosses within the structure, including Luiz Fernando da Costa, alias “Fernandinho Beira-Mar,” who is currently imprisoned, and Isaias da Costa Rodrigues, alias “Isaias do Borel,” who was in prison for more than 20 years until his release in 2012.

Geography

The Red Command is based in Rio de Janeiro, but has a presence in other parts of Brazil, including São Paulo. It also operates in Paraguay.

Allies and Enemies

The Red Command has worked closely with the First Capital Command (PCC), a São Paulo-based drug gang that also grew out of the country’s prisons. Its biggest enemies are police militias, Amigos dos Amigos, and the Pure Third Command (Terceiro Comando Puro - TCP), a breakaway faction of the Third Command (Terceiro Comando), which was set up by dissident former Red Command members.

Prospects

The group has lost power in recent years, with the rise of rivals such as Amigos dos Amigos, and its territorial control is threatened by the UPP program in some neighborhoods. But it appears to be expanding its international presence, especially in Bolivia and Paraguay. According to 2013 estimates, the Red Command ships one ton of Colombian cocaine to Brazil each month from Paraguay, which has become a cocaine trafficking hub for Brazilian gangs.

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