Brazilian police of Batallão de Operações Policiais Especiais (BOPE, a special operations unit) conduct interagency training in the Rio de Janeiro subway with members of the Marine Corps Special Operations Task Force 10 June 2016 ahead of the 2016 Rio Olympics in Brazil. (Photo by Ricardo Moraes, Reuters)

Brazilian Organization for Combating Terrorism during the Rio 2016 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games

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Major international public events, by their very nature, combine extreme vulnerability with extensive media exposure. These factors alone are enough to create favorable conditions for the convergence of a number of normally diffuse threats—primarily nonstate actors operating domestically and transnationally, ranging from what are known in Brazil as antisystemic movements (groups opposing established power structures) to extremist organizations (such as supporters of the Islamic State). Such scenarios are attractive to neoanarchists, revolutionaries, criminals, and terrorists who are willing to exploit state weaknesses in the physical and informational domains.

Even in a context where institutions are functioning normally, events of great magnitude pose a complex security challenge, invariably requiring capabilities that are available in the armed forces. For this reason, military forces have been used recurrently throughout the world to ensure a safe and peaceful environment—without them, it would be impossible to hold a major event under the auspices of the state.

The Rio 2016 Olympic Games and the subsequent Paralympic Games ended a long cycle comprising eight major events hosted in Brazil. Over the course of nine years marked by a continual process of improvement, Brazil’s Ministry of Defense helped provide protection and security, and it was responsible for the joint efforts of the armed forces, in close collaboration with civil agencies, intelligence organizations, and law enforcement. It achieved extraordinary success, especially considering the magnitude of the challenges faced by the Brazilian government since 2007, year of the XV Pan American Games. Although the Ministry of Defense’s involvement rightfully did not bring it any prominence or monopoly over the management of security, the armed forces’ vast set of capabilities made them an actor of notable importance, even with their diligent attempts at discretion.

Because of the nation’s particularities, the context in which the Brazilian armed forces were employed may be considered unique. Even so, the situation offers insights about the use of the military in a postindustrial age characterized, above all, by the prevalence of nonstate armed violence. Several fundamental characteristics—such as the ubiquity of the media, harsh public criticism, severe legal constraints, besiegement by human rights organizations, the interagency environment, and even the deployment of troops within the confines of the national territory—create a scenario that is incongruous with the one idealized by traditional armies in a Westphalian order.

In view of the foregoing, Brazil’s recent experience deserves to be considered as an interesting source of study. In order to share some of the lessons learned and best practices, this article presents a brief analysis of security provisions during the 2016 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, focusing primarily on combating terrorism—a topic that, due to its sensitive character and growing importance, has demanded increasing engagement by the military.

**Complexity, Vulnerabilities, and Great Apprehension**

Even considering the magnitude of previous major events, the Rio 2016 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games stood out. Altogether, there were thirty days of competition events that demanded a herculean effort from eighty-eight thousand civilians and service members involved in a robust security structure.

Approximately eleven thousand athletes from more than two hundred countries brought roughly half a million tourists to the city of Rio de Janeiro during the games. Twenty-five thousand accredited journalists from around the world reached an estimated one billion spectators with their continuous broadcasts.

The athletic events took place in thirty-two venues, distributed into four clusters around the city. At the opening ceremony alone, 5 August 2016, there were approximately eighty thousand people in Maracanã.
Stadium, as well as forty foreign leaders. These included heads of state and foreign ministers, among whom were French President François Hollande and U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry. The Olympic Boulevard, set up in the historic area of Guanabara Bay, was the biggest “live site” in the history of the games, with an estimated daily attendance between eighty thousand and one hundred thousand visitors.

Besides Rio de Janeiro, five other cities geographically dispersed across Brazil’s vast territory hosted Olympic soccer matches. It is worth noting, for example, that the distance between the cities of Manaus and São Paulo, both of which hosted soccer games, is nearly one thousand miles farther than the distance from London to Kiev. Moreover, Brazil’s national transportation system cannot be compared to Europe’s widespread and efficient road and rail network. To make matters worse, some sporting delegations chose accommodations in training centers away from the host cities. The threats to the security of the games had distinct nuances, starting with a troublesome domestic situation. A severe economic crisis and a scenario of internal recession precipitated a turbulent political process that has continued to test the soundness of Brazil’s democratic institutions. Against this backdrop, popular demonstrations and civil disturbances became a legitimate concern for government authorities. It is worth noting that during the 2013 FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) Confederations Cup, and, less intensely, during the 2014 FIFA World Cup, street demonstrations mobilized thousands of protesters throughout the country. Spontaneous mass marches attracted violent antisysemic groups, notably, activists known as black blocs (criminal, anarchic demonstrators who wear black), causing protests to devolve into looting, depredation, and deliberate confrontations with police forces.

The uncontrolled spread of tropical endemic diseases caused by the government’s failure to eradicate the
mosquito that transmits the dengue, chikungunya, and Zika viruses also placed the success of the Olympics at risk, discouraging athletes and tourists from traveling to Brazil. In addition to the economic, political, and health crises, an acute public security crisis plagued the city of Rio de Janeiro—the metropolis was thrown into turmoil by a fratricidal dispute among armed gangs linked to international arms and drug trafficking.

Adding to all these concerns, the threat posed by international terrorism grew in importance as the opening date of the games approached. Representing a sort of countdown, a sequence of attacks throughout the world starting in November 2015 generated an atmosphere of apprehension:

- 13 November 2015 (about nine months prior to the opening of the Rio Summer Olympics), multiple attacks in Paris, including at the Stade de France and Bataclan nightclub, left 130 dead and hundreds wounded.8
- 2 December 2015 (eight months prior), fourteen people were killed and another twenty-two were wounded in an attack at the Inland Regional Center in San Bernardino, California.9
- 22 March 2016 (four months prior), a bomb attack at the Brussels airport left 31 dead and 270 wounded.10
- 12 June 2016 (fifty-five days prior), one shooter killed forty-nine people and wounded dozens at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida.11
- 28 June 2016 (thirty-eight days prior), a bomb attack at the Istanbul airport killed 41 people and wounded more than 230.12
- 1 July 2016 (thirty-five days prior), an attack in Bangladesh left twenty-one dead and thirty wounded.13
- 14 July 2016 (twelve-one days prior), during the French Bastille Day celebrations, a truck hit more than one hundred people in Nice, and eighty-four died.14
- 22 July 2016 (thirteen days prior), an attacker at a shopping mall in Munich, killed nine people and wounded twenty-seven.15
- 1 August 2016 (just three days before the opening ceremony in Rio de Janeiro), a homemade nail bomb similar to the one used in the Boston Marathon bombing exploded at a shopping mall in Brasília without injuring anyone.16

Fortunately, events in Rio ran counter to the most pessimistic predictions. The Olympic Games and the Paralympic Games were successful, thanks largely to the well-designed and effective security structure that supported them.

**Governance of Security Operations**

The multiple actors directly and indirectly involved in the security of the games resulted in a diversified task organization, as well as a complex architecture of governance, command, and control.

Brazil is a federal republic comprising twenty-six states and the Federal District. Each unit of the federation has its own public security forces, comprising the state police forces (civil and military, i.e., investigative and preventive) and civil defense—responsible for disaster prevention and management. At the federal administration level, the Ministry of Justice oversees the Federal Police Department, the Federal Highway Police, and the small National Public Security Force, formed with officers from the state-level “military” police. The Brazilian Intelligence Agency, the central body of the Brazilian Intelligence System, is subordinate to the Office of Institutional Security of the Presidency. Finally, the three military services (Navy, Army, and Air Force) operate under the auspices of the Ministry of Defense.

Respecting the legal responsibilities of each institution while seeking maximum synergy among them and abiding by the principles regulating the relationships among the units of the federation (the “federative pact”) required a creative arrangement for the Olympics. In addition, overcoming obstacles posed by distinct organizational cultures and moving beyond disparate interests required a lot of time and energy from all those who truly strove to build strong partnerships. An important milestone in this process was the adoption of the Strategic Integrated Security Plan for the Rio 2016 Olympic and Paralympic Games (Plano Estratégico de Segurança Integrada para os Jogos Olímpicos e Paralímpicos Rio 2016, known as PESI Rio 2016).17

Designed to integrate public security, defense, and intelligence efforts within a centralized government strategy, PESI established the fundamental principles by which institutional relations were governed.18 In addition, the plan determined that governance of the games would focus on transparency and smooth decision making at all levels, especially with regard to the
flow of technical, tactical, and operational information. To that end, it proposed the creation of the Integrated Security Executive Committee (Comitê Executivo de Segurança Integrada, known as CESI) at the national level, composed of officials from the Office of the Chief of Staff of the Presidency, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Defense, and the Brazilian Intelligence Agency, as well as representatives from the states and municipalities that hosted the games. In order to ensure CESI’s presence and reach, a network of local Regional Integrated Security Executive Committees (Comitês Executivos de Segurança Integrada Regionais, known as CESIRs) was created.

In order to coordinate assets and integrate available capabilities for public security, the Ministry of Justice created the Extraordinary Secretariat of Security for Major Events. The Ministry of Defense, in turn, established joint area defense commands, supported by centralized joint commands, as shown in figure 1 (page 99).

The Brazilian armed forces have a long tradition of being used in the country’s internal security. Using military forces for internal security is legally supported by the Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil, as well as by a set of complementary laws that regulate the domestic operations of military units.

During the Rio 2016 Olympic Games and the Paralympic Games, the Ministry of Defense’s efforts proved decisive in enabling the country to honor its commitment to the international community. More than forty-three thousand service members were deployed to provide security during the games, and they accomplished a wide array of tasks and missions, among which the following stand out:

- conduct aerospace defense;
- conduct maritime, river, and airport operations;
- protect strategic structures;
- ensure safety of expressways and vital roads for urban outflow;
- oversee handling and security of explosives and controlled products;
- conduct cyber defense;
- collaborate with civil defense;
- provide support for the safety of dignitaries;
- provide a contingency force;
- conduct counterterrorism; and
- conduct chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear defense.

**Integrated Committee for Combating Terrorism**

Terrorism is a complex political and social phenomenon that is hard to combat and eradicate. Understanding terrorism requires a holistic approach that must incorporate a criminological dimension but not be limited to it. Fighting terrorism requires an integrated effort since no single state agency can handle it in isolation. For this reason, interagency operations are properly considered the cornerstone of preventing and suppressing terrorism.

Encouraging interagency efforts by “promoting the integrated action of government agencies with a stake in the issue” was the main mission of the Center for Coordination of Actions to Prevent and Combat Terrorism at the Office of Institutional Security of the Presidency. Created in June 2009 during the administration of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the center had a short life. It was deactivated in February 2011, during President Dilma Rousseff’s first term.

Hence, as the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, the Confederations Cup, World Youth Day, and the FIFA World Cup approached, Brazil did not have an interministerial body effectively vested with the authority and responsibility for fostering interagency cooperation. Given a wide array of sometimes disparate institutional interests, the model of governance adopted had sought to accommodate them by defining two areas of responsibility: public security and defense. A subordinate area called preventing and combating terrorism was nominally assigned to the military.

However, this arrangement proved inadequate to the Brazilian reality, because, in practical terms, it simply assigned to the Army Special Operations Command the difficult task of leading joint actions within the Ministry of Defense and, to no avail, interagency efforts at the national and local levels. Thus, as the Olympic Games approached, the model of governance adopted in previous major events became the subject of reasoned criticism and was eventually reassessed.

The heart of the problem was primarily the question of unity of command—a principle of war held in high regard by soldiers, who were unwilling to relinquish it in the name of adopting an interagency panacea. However, the Brazilian context revealed clearly and objectively that unity of command was simply not an option, since all the institutions involved refused to
subordinate themselves to one another. Moreover, the interagency process could not serve as an excuse for removing institutional roles clearly defined in the current legal system. It was necessary to respect the calling, purpose, and legal responsibilities of the individual services, law enforcement, and other security agencies. In addition, the expertise obtained by some intelligence agencies and special operations forces (military and police) in their respective fields of action was undeniable.

According to PESI Rio 2016, the CESI and CESIRs were to devote special attention to the integration of efforts to combat terrorism, developed along three main eixos de atuação, loosely translated as lines of effort, which were intelligence, public security, and defense. To achieve such purposes, a temporary advisory structure was created, the Integrated Committee for Combating Terrorism (Comité Integrado de Enfrentamento ao Terorismo, known as the CIET), illustrated in figure 2 (page 100).

The CIET’s interagency dynamics were governed by a set of strategic protocols for combating terrorism, developed based on the fundamental principles contained in the PESI Rio 2016. Over time and despite their differences, the CIET environment proved adequate for improving the mechanisms for interagency cooperation. The level of integration achieved was unprecedented. It included shared access to available databases, redistribution of targets, and emphasis on complementary capabilities. This process led to the effective engagement of the Army Intelligence Center in combating terrorism alongside the Joint Command for Preventing and Combating Terrorism and its partners.

The CIET was also responsible for conducting a national public awareness campaign before the event, since the Brazilian population generally displays a low level of perception of terrorist threats. The campaign’s results were tangible. During the Olympics, for example, seventy-eight cases of suspect materials abandoned in public places in the six host cities were reported.

**Joint Command for Preventing and Combating Terrorism**

The Joint Command for Preventing and Combating Terrorism was the temporary structure created under the Ministry of Defense for the purpose of planning, coordinating, and conducting actions to combat terrorism and provide for chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) defense. It was nothing more than a joint special operations command.
The Joint Command for Preventing and Combating Terrorism played an important role throughout the painful process of interagency cooperation, making significant efforts at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. From the very beginning, it engaged in negotiations with representatives from the Federal Police Department and Brazilian Intelligence Agency that culminated in the creation of the CIET and in the signing of strategic protocols that shaped the new model of governance for combating the terrorist threat.

Although it was directly subordinate to the Joint Staff of the Armed Forces, the Joint Command adopted a coordination of forces that brought it very close to joint area defense commands (see figure 1, page 99). In addition to deploying special operations task forces and CBRN-defense troops in all six cities that hosted Olympic events, it assigned liaison teams known as integrated tactical coordination centers to the other interagency rehearsals and exercises were conducted in hotels, airports, subway stations, shopping malls, tourist attractions, and sports arenas. The troops were effectively prepared for the specific context of Rio 2016—a scenario vastly different from that experienced in 1972 during the Munich Olympics, for instance.

Flexible Force Architecture

An act of terror is characterized, on the tactical level, by the execution of an action with “kinetic” effect such as detonating explosives in a bombing attempt or indiscriminately opening fire in a public place. However, terrorist aims go far beyond the mere demonstration of brutality through the graphic images that are instantly recorded and repeated incessantly in subsequent days. The focus of terror is, in fact, on the so-called “information environment,” as terror seeks to achieve political and strategic goals
that are far broader than the localized sacrifice of innocent lives. In other words, contrary to what it may seem, the real weapons of a terrorist are not assault rifles or explosive devices but rather the television camera and the instant media coverage generated from images captured with a simple mobile phone.

Traditionally, throughout the world, the state security apparatus has provided satisfactory responses at the tactical level—countering terrorism through actions with kinetic effect, defined by verbs such as capture, arrest, neutralize, eliminate, or rescue. More often than not, however, states have failed at the political and strategic levels, demonstrating an inability to provide timely and effective responses in the information environment, in contrast to their effective actions in a narrow tactical setting. This dichotomy represents the essence of the asymmetry between terrorism and counterterrorism, as shown in the table (page 103).

The problem becomes more acute in countries such as Brazil, where, despite the innovative rhetoric, a model of reactive counterterrorism from the 1970s still prevails both in law enforcement agencies and in the armed forces—a model that is essentially based on the use of well-established tactical courses of action. However, in the information age, preventing and combating terrorism should be based on a combination of lethal and nonlethal capabilities, backed by state policies designed to shape the environment and eradicate extremist violence at its source. Initiative, aggressiveness, and foresight should also (and above all) be employed in the information environment.

During the Rio 2016 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games, the Joint Command for Preventing and Combating Terrorism’s main goal was to ensure that through interagency cooperation, preventive and defensive measures were appropriately combined with offensive enforcement actions. While its priority was, naturally, to prevent terrorist attempts, the possibility of reacting to a successful attack was not ruled out.

According to risk assessments produced by the Brazilian Intelligence Agency, the potential threats to the security of the games did not come from sophisticated terrorist cells that infiltrated into the national territory with the purpose of transforming Brazil into...
the scene of a major attack. Instead, the so-called “lone wolves,” or self-radicalized natives, represented a greater danger. Therefore, the degree of unpredictability of a possible attack was significantly greater. On the other hand, the expectation of lethal, but less developed or less sophisticated, actions demanded that the state’s first response also be decisive.

The solution originally conceived was based on “responses by legal layers.” In other words, responses would consist of successive measures of growing intensity, following the exhaustion of the capabilities available in law enforcement agencies. This type of approach certainly was incongruous with the nature of the threat described by intelligence analysts. Therefore, the concept of “composition of capabilities” was developed, which was designed to offer the most appropriate response for each type of scenario, through close collaboration among the various actors involved. To that end, it was necessary to carry out a detailed mapping of the available resources and to produce a realistic and detailed diagnosis of police and military special forces, identifying their main strengths and weaknesses in terms of personnel, equipment, and technical and tactical training. One aim was to reduce the distance between command and control centers by reducing the bureaucracy of interagency connections in order to provide the agility required by the mission. Complementary protocols were put in place at the tactical level to ensure that the necessary capabilities would be available at critical locations and times. This process culminated in a flexible force architecture capable of responding decisively to what was considered the worst-case scenario: multiple attacks, simultaneous or successive, that were geographically dispersed, with or without the use of CBRN agents.

Security Operations in Rio

Brazil did not have a regulatory instrument that defined the crime of terrorism until a few months before the opening of the Olympic Games. In March 2016, President Rousseff sanctioned Law No. 13,260, known
as the “Antiterrorism Law,” providing the legal basis for preventive actions to be carried out effectively. Then, on 21 July, the Federal Police’s Antiterrorism Division launched the first stage of Operation Hashtag, with the purpose of dismantling a network of individuals who called themselves “Defenders of Sharia.” In addition to supporting the Islamic State, members of the group had clearly demonstrated on social media that they intended to carry out an attack during the Olympics. Altogether, sixteen people were detained by the Federal Police at different locations across the national territory.

During the first week of the games, a serious incident involving the National Public Security Force tested the entire security apparatus gathered in the city of Rio de Janeiro. On 10 August 2016, a police car inadvertently entered one of the communities of the Maré complex of slums—a densely populated area, home to criminals and drug traffickers. The vehicle received rifle fire. Pvt. Hélio Andrade died, and two other police officers were injured. The large presence of the national and international media gave the incident a lot of visibility and exposed the acute public security crisis established in that city decades ago.

Early that evening, the Special Operations Command of the Rio de Janeiro Military Police met at the regional integrated command and control center in order to provide an immediate and effective response. During the night, the National Public Security Force isolated the southern portion of the Maré complex. At dawn 11 August 2016, the Special Operations Command of the Rio de Janeiro Military Police deployed the Special Police Operations Battalion inside Vila do João neighborhood, site of the incident. The Federal Police Tactical Operations Command was also called in, and their teams entered the urban enclave with the men from the Special Police Operations Battalion. The Joint Command for Preventing and Combating Terrorism offered help by sending the 1st Special Forces Battalion Task Force, reinforced by a company of paratroopers and nine wheeled armored personnel carriers. The operation, which brought together the best police and military special operations forces in the country, was successful, and there were no further incidents like this through the end of the Paralympic Games.

**Conclusion**

Given the threat posed by extremist violence throughout the world, the recurrent use of military forces to provide security during major international public events is a trend that is expected to last. In fact, we can further state that because of the harmful action of nonstate armed actors, there is a growing demand by governments and society for the application of available military capabilities within national territorial boundaries.

In this context, the threat posed by terrorist organizations was recognized as one of the main risks to the Rio 2016 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games. To confront it, the Brazilian government was forced to seek original solutions appropriate for its domestic scenario and consistent with its own interagency dynamics. The nation’s particularities suggested caution against merely incorporating foreign dogmas and precepts or adopting predefined solutions at the risk of producing unrealistic expectations that would have been completely incongruous with the country’s reality.

The structure conceived was consistent with the nature of the threat—a flexible force architecture supported

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**Table. Terrorism and Counterterrorism Asymmetry**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Terrorism</th>
<th>Counterterrorism</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level</strong></td>
<td>Political and strategic</td>
<td>Tactical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dimension</strong></td>
<td>Informational</td>
<td>Physical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Objective</strong></td>
<td>Nonkinetic</td>
<td>Kinetic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Action</strong></td>
<td>Extreme act of armed propaganda</td>
<td>By extension, this should be, in theory, an act of counter-propaganda—but that has not been the case.</td>
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(Table by author)
by partnerships established in the heterogeneous inter-
agency environment. Assessments revealed that despite serious shortcomings, the state’s security institutions, including the armed forces, had enviable capabilities, some of which are not possessed by many countries in the northern hemisphere. The primary challenge was to inte-
grate, coordinate, and synchronize all the actors involved in order to ensure that the capabilities required for the satisfactory management of a crisis would be applied with precision at critical times and places.

According to the assessment of a staff officer from the Joint Command for Preventing and Combating Terrorism, the reason why Brazil did not become the scene of a major terrorist attack during the Olympic Games and the Paralympic Games was not due to an incorrect risk analysis. On the contrary, it was because of successfully executed preventive and proactive measures—such as Operation Hashtag launched by the Federal Police’s Antiterrorism Division. However, it should be noted that in the current geopolitical environment, no country on the planet is immune to extremist violence. Although we acknowledge the success of the Olympics in Brazil in terms of dealing with terrorism, there is still a lot to be done.

Notes

1. This paper uses antisysemic to describe violent criminal
groups such as black blocs. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are the author’s.

2. The events in Brazil were the XV Pan American Games Rio 2007, the V World Military Games Rio 2011, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development Rio + 20 (2012), the FIFA Confederations Cup 2013, World Youth Day (2013), the 2014 FIFA World Cup, the Rio 2016 Olympic Games, and the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games. Nevertheless, in Brazil, the use of troops in such missions has as a recent precedent the participation of the armed forces in the security of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Eco 92), held in the city of Rio de Janeiro in June 1992.


5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. The distance between Manaus and São Paulo is 2,437 miles by road. The distance between London and Kiev, Ukraine, is 1,502 miles by road.


no-shooting-terror-investigation-htmlstory.html.


14. “Nice Attack: At least 84 Killed by Lorry at Bastille Day Celebra-

15. Joern Poltz and Karin Strohecker, “Munich Gunman Fix-


18. Ibid., 7–8. The principles governing institutional relations were complementarity, cooperation, discretion, efficiency, technical excellence, integration, interoperability, situational leadership, and respect for diversity and human dignity.

19. Ibid., 20.


slum-running-drugs-gang-mistake.html.