



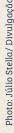
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City Domination: The New Criminal Phenomenon Terrorizing Brazil and Strategies for Combat and Prevention.



CITY DOMINATION: The New Criminal Phenomenon Terrorizing Brazil and Strategies for Combat and Prevention

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City Domination occurrence map between 2015-2023





Introduction

his report aims to synthesize the accumulated knowledge in specialized literature and within institutions of the criminal justice system regarding the criminal modality known as City Domination (Domínio de Cidades). This phenomenon represents an evolution of traditional bank robberies and cash transport base assaults in Brazil, originating from the Novo Cangaço (New Cangaço)¹. It is characterized by highly planned actions executed by heavily armed gangs employing military tactics to overpower police forces and terrorize the population, standing out for its complexity and audacity.

The gangs involved in this type of crime engage in meticulous planning, utilizing explosives, heavy weaponry, armored vehicles, and advanced technology. Their objectives include large-scale robberies of financial institutions and cash transport companies, as well as, occasionally, the rescue of inmates from prison facilities.

The first major heist marking the emergence of this phenomenon in Brazil occurred in Campinas, São Paulo, in November 2015, when a gang detonated the Prosegur cash transport facility, using burning vehicles to block the main access roads to the city. This event not only demonstrated the organizational capacity and brutality of the criminals involved but also highlighted the need for a more effective response from public security forces.

Since then, numerous other attacks have been recorded across various parts of Bra-

zil, each increasingly sophisticated and violent. These assaults directly impact the safety of cities, generating panic and uncertainty among the local population. Additionally, the economic damages are significant, not only due to the amounts stolen but also because of the collateral damage caused during the operations.

Understanding the City Domination (Domínio de Cidades) phenomenon is crucial for developing effective strategies for prevention and qualified repression. This report seeks to provide a detailed overview of the phenomenon, its main characteristics, the most notorious cases, and the legislative and public security responses implemented so far. Through a historical and analytical approach, we aim to clarify the most relevant aspects of this phenomenon, contributing to a deeper understanding and promoting more effective security policies.

1 The Cangaço was a historical social and criminal phenomenon in Brazil, particularly prevalent in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It was characterized by groups of armed outlaws, known as cangaceiros, who roamed the arid northeastern backlands, engaging in acts of banditry, rebellion, and territorial control. These groups often clashed with government forces, exploiting the absence of state authority in remote regions. The term Novo Cangaço (New Cangaço) draws a parallel between the traditional cangaceiros and modern organized crime groups in Brazil. While the cangaceiros operated with rudimentary tactics and motivations rooted in social struggles, the Novo Cangaço applies military-grade strategies, advanced technology, and urban guerrilla methods to execute large-scale robberies and other criminal activities, signifying an evolution in both scope and sophistication.



Historical Context and Evolution

The phenomenon known as City Domination (Domínio de Cidades) is a sophisticated evolution of criminal practices previously observed in Brazil, particularly the Novo Cangaço (New Cangaço). This type of crime stands out for its complexity, high level of organization, and use of military tactics to carry out large-scale robberies targeting financial institutions and cash transport facilities.

The term City Domination (Domínio de Cidades) was first mentioned in specialized literature and the Brazilian press to describe a new form of robberies that surpass the Novo Cangaço in sophistication and violence.

The first mention of City Domination (Domínio de Cidades) in literature occurred in the book Guerra Federal – Retratos do Combate a Crimes Violentos no Brasil (Federal War – Portraits of the Fight Against Violent Crimes in Brazil), published in 2018 by Renato Júnior and Laurejan Ferraço. This work described a remarkable attack in Campinas, São Paulo, on November 6, 2015, which is considered the starting point of this new criminal modality. The book detailed how criminal groups meticulously organized large-scale robberies using military tactics and advanced technology.

In the media, the term gained widespread use following coverage of significant attacks, such as the assault on Prosegur's base in Campinas. Outlets like Folha de São Paulo and G1 documented these attacks, highlighting the organization and brutality of the criminals, thus contributing to the term's popularization. Subsequent events in the following years solidified the public perception that a new era of organized crime was emerging in Brazil. Figure 1 below presents a map of City Domination (Domínio de Cidades) actions between 2015 and 2023.

The first known City Domination (Domínio de Cidades) action occurred on the night of November 6, 2015, in Campinas (SP), a city with approximately one million inhabitants at the time. The heavily armed criminal group used rifles and machine guns, setting trucks and other vehicles ablaze to block access routes via the Santos Dumont Highway (SP-075), which leads to Viracopos International Airport, as well as the Anhanguera (SP-330) and Bandeirantes (SP-348) highways. They disrupted the city's power transformers, exchanged gunfire with police, and exploded a cash transport facility, stealing an estimated R\$30 million. No arrests were made.

At least 12 similar actions followed between 2016 and 2017 until another high-profile event occurred in Recife, Pernambuco, on February 21, 2017. During the assault on the Brinks cash transport company, criminals blocked streets around the facility using burning cars, including one of the city's major avenues in a densely populated residential area. They frequently opened fire to repel police forces and employed a van loaded with ammunition to support their operations. A .50 caliber machine gun was

among the weapons used, and the criminals' tactics effectively prevented the progression of the 1st Independent Company of Special Operations, a specialized unit of the state's military police.

In 2017, the City Domination (Domínio de Cidades) modality expanded internationally to Ciudad del Este, Paraguay. On April 24, criminals armed with rifles, machine guns, and grenades attacked the Prosegur headquarters, exchanging gunfire with security guards and police. Over three hours, they spread terror and stole approximately \$40 million. Authorities reported that most vehicles used in the operation had Brazilian license plates, and witnesses noted that the criminals spoke Portuguese.

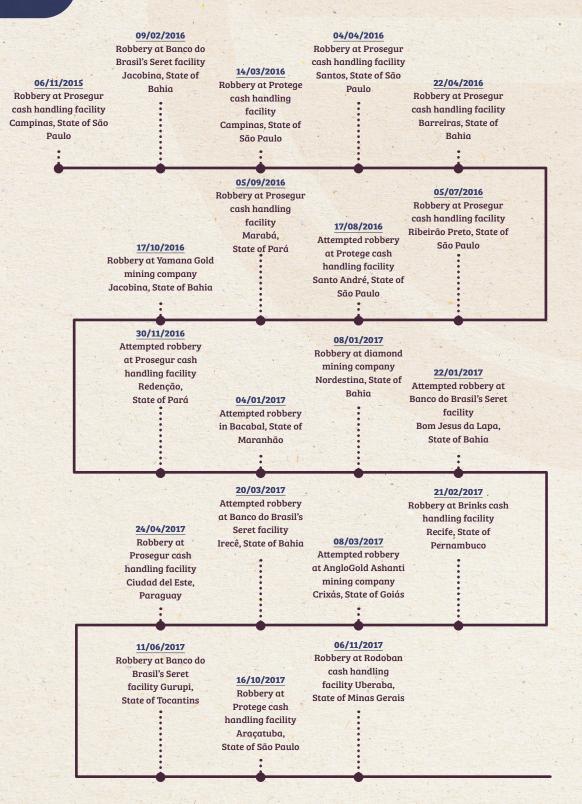
By 2019, new technologies became evident in City Domination (Domínio de Cidades) actions. In Uberaba (MG), a group of 25 heavily armed criminals attempted to access the vault of a Banco do Brasil branch, engaging directly with the military police. They planted remotely activated explosives throughout the city, a technique that gained popularity during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021. This technology was used in actions in Ourinhos (SP), Botucatu (SP), and later Criciúma (SC).

The incident in Araçatuba (SP) on August 30, 2021, further exemplifies the phenomenon. During the night, 14 vehicles carrying armed criminals stormed the city, surrounding Praça Rui Barbosa near Banco do Brasil and Caixa Econômica Federal branches. Simultaneously, they attacked police stations, including the Special Operations Battalion and the Regional Police Command (CPI 10). Layers of containment perimeters were established with numerous explosive devices to prevent police advancement. Roads leading to nearby cities were blocked with burning vehicles, and 93 explosive devices were found in the operational theater, 32 of which were remotely activated. Some were enclosed in metal structures and equipped with laser pointers, giving the impression of motion or proximity triggers.



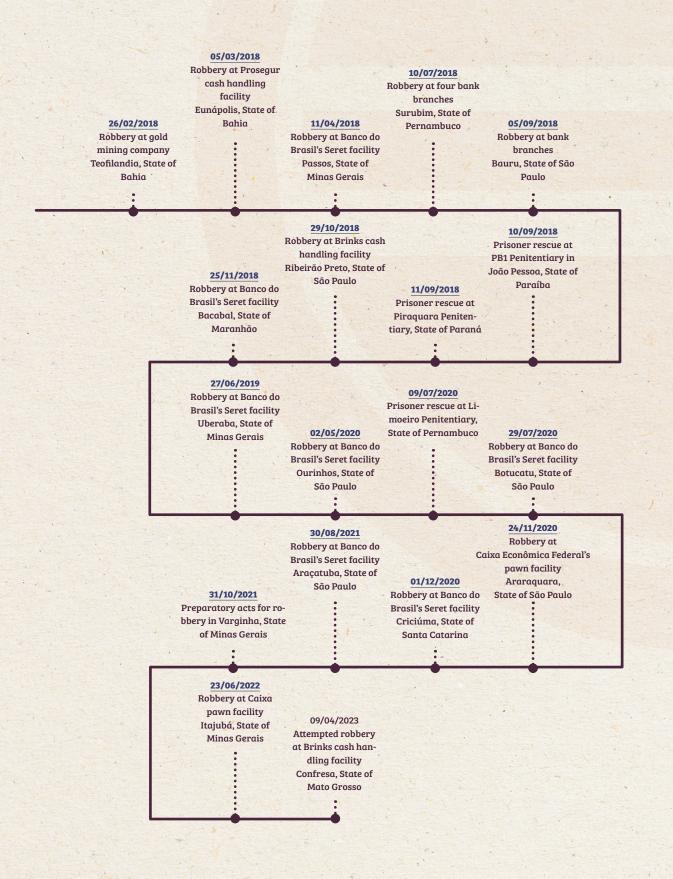
Timeline

Since the inaugural event in November 2015, several other extremely violent robberies and some attempted robberies have occurred since then. See the full list below, with links to their respective press coverage:



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Characteristics

he media and even public security sectors often confuse violent property crimes executed under the Novo Cangaço modality with those under City Domination (Domínio de Cidades), despite being distinct subcategories of robbery (Article 157 of the Brazilian Penal Code).

The Novo Cangaço gained prominence over the past two decades, characterized by attacks on small interior towns, often involving 10 to 20 heavily armed criminals. These assailants targeted banks, lotteries, and credit cooperatives, using firearms to intimidate locals and police. Violence and hostage-taking were common, with a focus primarily on robbing cash from safes and ATMs. This modality can be subdivided into Daytime and Nighttime Novo Cangaço.

In contrast, City Domination (Domínio de Cidades) represents a significant escalation in tactics. Instead of targeting small towns with limited police presence, criminals shifted to attacking medium-to-large cities, including state capitals, with sophisticated planning. These operations often involve coordinating over 30 individuals, employing remotely activated explosives, armored vehicles, and setting roadblocks with burning vehicles. The organizational structure has also evolved, with gangs operating in flexible networks that complicate investigations and police repression.



Comparison of Criminal Methods

MEANS USED	DAYTIME NEW CANGAÇO	NIGHTTIME NEW CANGAÇO	CITY DOMINATION
HUMAN SHIELDS	Always present	Always present	May be present
BLOCKADES AND CONTAINMENT	Only during escape, using vehicles set on fire on bridges or roads.	Against police buildin- gs and vehicles, and during escape, using vehicles set on fire on roads or highways.	Multiple blockades with armed teams forming a security perimeter around the attack site; attacks on police buildings and vehi- cles; placement of explosi- ves with intelligent triggers on access routes to the attack site.
NUMBER OF OPERATIVES	Between 6 and 15 people	Between 6 and 20 people	More than 30 people
ARMAMENT	Pistols, shotguns, and rifles 5.56 and 7.62 calibers	Pistols, shotguns, and rifles 5.56 and 7.62 calibers	Rifles 5.56, 7.62, .30, and .50 calibers
USE OF EXPLOSIVES	No	Only on safes and cash handling facili- ties (CE)	On safes, police, and civi- lians
VEHICLES	Unarmored, between 2 and 4 vehicles	Unarmored, between 2 and 4 vehicles	Armored vehicles, more than 10 used
AVERAGE VALUE STOLEN	Less than \$300,000	Less than \$300,000	More than \$4,000,000
CITY POPULATION	Less than 70,000 residents	In cities with less than 70,000 residents; some attacks in larger cities but evolved from sim- pler CE robberies with hostage-taking.	All cities, including capitals
DURATION OF ACTION	Less than 30 minutes	Less than 30 minutes	Approximately 2 hours
PLANNING AND STRATEGY	Simple	Simple	Complex—consortium of gangs, decentralized ne- twork coordination with specific roles, professional groups with technological expertise, use of snipers and drones.



4.1 Planning and Strategy

ty Domination (Domínio de Cidades) is a highly organized criminal modality distinguished by its complex and decentralized planning, as well as its intensive use of technology and heavy weaponry. The planning of operations is meticulous and involves several stages. Before the attack, gangs conduct a thorough study of the target location, including the vulnerability of financial institutions, escape routes, the positioning of police forces, and even the routines of local police officers and agents operating in the area. This planning can take months, during which criminals may even rent properties nearby to facilitate monitoring and coordinate actions.

The organization of these groups is decentralized, operating in flexible networks rather than a rigid hierarchical structure. This means there is no fixed chain of command but rather a network of individuals who collaborate temporarily for each operation. This network structure allows for quick adaptation and reconfiguration after each attack, making it difficult for security forces to identify and capture members. The network's flexibility ensures that the loss of one or more members does not compromise the group's overall operation, making it more resilient and effective in carrying out complex attacks.

Use of Technology and Heavy Weaponry

City Domination attacks involve the extensive use of advanced technology and heavy weaponry to maximize the efficiency and impact of their operations. Criminals use remotely activated explosives to destroy safes and ATMs, as well as to create barriers and traps for police forces. These explosives are strategically placed to cause maximum destruction and hinder police response, minimizing risks for the criminals.

The weapons used by the gangs include rifles of 5.56, 7.62, .30, and .50 calibers, as well as pistols and shotguns. These weapons provide a firepower advantage far superior to that of local security forces, offering a significant tactical edge during attacks. Additionally, criminals use armored vehicles to protect themselves during operations and escapes, increasing the safety of group members.

Communication technology also plays a crucial role in these attacks. Criminals use radios capable of intercepting police frequencies, drones for real-time monitoring, and cryptocurrencies for money laundering, complicating the tracking of illicit financial transactions. This sophisticated use of technology enables efficient coordination of operations and increases the effectiveness of the attacks, making "City Domination" an extremely challenging criminal modality for security forces.



4.2 Tactics and Methods

City Domination (Domínio de Cidades) stands out for the sophisticated and brutal tactics employed during attacks. In military terms, tactics refer to the planning and execution of specific actions on the battlefield to achieve immediate objectives. Tactics involve the use of resources such as troops, vehicles, weapons, and terrain to maximize effectiveness during combat or operations.

Tactics are related to how forces conduct battles, including movements, maneuvers, and troop disposition. They deal with the implementation of strategies on a smaller and more immediate scale, focusing on specific confrontations, as opposed to strategy, which encompasses long-term and broader plans.

In City Domination operations, tactics include blockades and containment, the use of explosives and armored vehicles, as well as robust personnel and weaponry.





Blockades and Containment

Criminals carry out strategic blockades to isolate the attack area and prevent a rapid response from security forces. These blockades are created using burning vehicles, *miguelitos* (spiked devices to puncture tires), and even explosives placed at critical points. The goal is to establish a security perimeter that hinders the arrival of police reinforcements and keeps the civilian population in a state of panic and immobilization. These tactics aim for maximum disruption, leveraging the element of surprise and the creation of multiple simultaneous containment points to divide and weaken the security forces' response.



Use of Explosives and Armored Vehicles

The use of explosives has become a hallmark of City Domination (*Domínio de Cidades*). Criminals employ high-powered explosives to destroy bank vaults, ATMs, and other secured targets. Additionally, explosives are used to create traps and roadblocks, increasing lethality and complicating police response. These devices are often remotely activated, allowing precise control over the timing and location of explosions.

Armored vehicles are employed to protect gang members during attacks and escapes. These vehicles, modified to withstand gunfire and explosions, provide a significant tactical advantage, enabling criminals to move with relative safety through operational areas. Armored vehicles are used both to transport gang members and to carry stolen money and valuables.







Personnel Structure and Weaponry

The personnel structure of gangs involved in City Domination is formidable. Attacks typically involve more than 30 criminals, each with specific roles. These roles include teams responsible for distinct tasks such as setting up blockades, attacking police installations to delay their response, handling explosives, and executing the actual robbery.

The weaponry used is high-caliber, including 5.56, 7.62, .30, and .50 caliber rifles, as well as pistols and shotguns. These weapons give criminals a firepower advantage over local police forces, allowing them to maintain significant superiority during confrontations. The use of drones for real-time monitoring is also common, providing a strategic overview of police movements and aiding in coordinating the actions of different teams during the attack.

These tactics and methods, combined with complex planning and advanced technology, make City Domination one of the most challenging and dangerous criminal modalities, requiring equally sophisticated and integrated responses from public security authorities.



Parte das armas utilizadas pelos integrantes da quadrilha de roubos a bancos motos em Varginha (MG) Foto: Franco Junior/G1





Social and Economic Consequences

ity Domination attacks have profound social and economic impacts on the targeted cities and their local populations. The extreme violence and organization of these criminal acts result in significant damage, destabilizing public safety and disrupting the daily lives of residents. Between 2015 and 2024, in 30 operations classified as City Domination, criminals stole R\$472.962.887 (approximately \$94.500.000 USD) from banks and cash handling facilities. The collateral damage to infrastructure and other losses likely amounts to hundreds of millions of reais (tens of millions of USD).

Impact on Targeted Cities

The attacks often result in the destruction of critical infrastructure, including bridges, bank buildings, and surrounding structures. The use of explosives to access vaults and ATMs not only destroys financial facilities but also causes collateral damage to nearby commercial and residential properties. This destruction results in high repair and reconstruction costs, further straining already limited municipal budgets.

In addition to physical destruction, there is significant disruption to the local financial system. Damaged banks and inoperable ATMs prevent account holders from accessing their funds, compromising economic activity. Local and regional commerce suffers severe losses, not only due to physical damage to stores but also because of decreased customer traffic in areas deemed dangerous. This situation can lead to business closures, increased unemployment, and a worsening economic crisis in affected regions.

Impact on the Population

City Domination attacks often result in civilian and police fatalities, exacerbating the climate of terror. The local population is traumatized by dozens of explosions and high-caliber gunfire, creating a constant sense of insecurity. Schools and hospitals often close during and after attacks, disrupting essential services and increasing the population's vulnerability.

The chaos caused by the attacks, combined with the scenes of destruction, makes the cities resemble war zones. The extreme violence and the criminals' ability to overpower public security forces generate an environment of fear and insecurity. This atmosphere can lead to psychological disorders, such as anxiety and post-traumatic stress, affecting residents' mental health and reducing their quality of life.

The disintegration of social cohesion is another significant consequence. With the constant threat of new attacks, many residents opt to move to safer areas, resulting in an exodus that weakens social bonds. Participation in community and civic activities diminishes, eroding community ties and solidarity. Distrust in public security authorities increases, hindering essential cooperation for crime prevention and resolution.

Public Policy Recommendations

ity Domination is a high-impact criminal modality in the cities where it occurs. The evolution of planning for such actions makes any city with cash handling facilities potentially vulnerable to these criminal groups, including capitals and large urban centers. The flexible and decentralized nature of these organizations, along with their modus operandi, greatly complicates investigative activities and, above all, the reaction of police forces during their occurrence.

Perhaps the most successful recent case was the police operation in Varginha on October 31, 2021, when a joint effort by the Minas Gerais Military Police and the Federal Highway Police neutralized 26 criminals preparing for a large-scale operation. The use of heavy weaponry in residential areas, human hostages, remotely activated explosives, and other tactics often render immediate and proportional responses by traditional special operations groups unviable, as they risk causing even greater collateral damage.

Given this scenario, Brazilian police forces have developed interesting models for responding to and preventing such events, such as defense plans and the use of designated snipers. However, public administrators often lack awareness of the importance of these tools. Additionally, it is necessary to enhance Brazil's legislative framework to address this phenomenon effectively.

6.1 Legislation and Bills

Bill 5365/2020 was introduced by Congressman Sanderson (PL-RS) and other coauthors, including Major Fabiana (PL-RJ) and Aluísio Mendes (PSC-MA). The main objective of this bill is to amend Decree-Law No. 2.848, dated December 7, 1940 (the Brazilian Penal Code), to establish the crime of "City Domination" and to amend Law No. 8.072, dated July 25, 1990 (the Heinous Crimes Act), to include this new crime in its list (Senate) (Chamber of Deputies Portal).

Bill 5365/2020 seeks to create a new criminal classification for situations in which heavily armed and organized criminal groups overpower public authorities and exert control over entire cities, a phenomenon popularly known as **Novo Cangaço** (New Cangaço) or City Domination. The proposal establishes severe penalties for these crimes, intending to enhance punishment and, consequently, deter such criminal activities.

Implications of Bill 5365/2020

Creation of a Specific Criminal Offense: The bill defines the crime of "City Domination," establishing prison sentences ranging from 15 to 30 years. This classification aims to provide a specific legal response to a type of crime characterized by its severity and the social and economic impact on affected communities.

Aggravating Circumstances: The penalty may be increased if criminals use explosives, take hostages, destroy buildings, or commit other acts that heighten violence and terror during attacks. This includes higher penalties for the destruction of critical infrastructure and violence against civilians and police officers (Senate) (Chamber of Deputies Portal).

Inclusion in the Heinous Crimes Act: The bill amends the Heinous Crimes Act (Law No. 8.072/1990) to include "City Domination" in its list. This means that those convicted of this crime will face stricter sentencing regimes, with limited opportunities for sentence reduction and restricted access to certain legal benefits. This inclusion aims to emphasize the gravity of the crime and impose harsher punishment conditions, extending the time offenders spend in prison and limiting their reintegration into society (Chamber of Deputies Portal) (National Congress).

Preventive Objective: The creation of a specific criminal offense and its inclusion in the Heinous Crimes Act also serve a preventive purpose. By establishing stricter penal-

ties and a clear classification, the bill seeks to deter potential criminals by increasing the risks associated with these crimes and signaling the authorities' priority to combat City Domination effectively (Chamber of Deputies Portal).

Bill 5365/2020 represents a significant legislative effort to address one of the most serious and complex public security issues in contemporary Brazil, adapting the legal framework to the realities and challenges posed by these new criminal modalities.

Analogy to Terrorism Crimes

Bill 5365/2020 is an important tool to curb City Domination crimes. Its approval by the National Congress is crucial. However, the bill could be enhanced with strategic amendments. One example is the criminalization of preparatory acts, as provided under the Brazilian Anti-Terrorism Law (Law 13.260/2016). Specifically, this law criminalizes preparatory acts and conspiracies, regardless of whether the terrorist act is carried out. This contrasts with many other penal laws, which typically require the consummation or attempted commission of a crime for punishment.

Given that City Domination crimes share similarities with acts of terrorism, particularly in their intended psychological impact on local populations, criminalizing preparatory acts within the same legal framework as the Heinous Crimes Act could be a crucial deterrent against future criminal operations.



6.2 Prevention and Mitigation Strategies: Defense Plans

Defense plans are fundamental to addressing the growing threat posed by City Domination attacks. This type of crime, characterized by extreme violence and complex organization, demands a strategic and well-coordinated response to mitigate its devastating impacts. Implementing adequate defense plans is crucial for protecting lives, preserving infrastructure, and maintaining public order.

The Importance of Defense Plans

The importance of defense plans lies in the need to protect both law enforcement officers and civilians during high-intensity attacks. These plans aim to avoid direct confrontations near bank branches, where the presence of hostages often prevents effective police responses. Instead, defense plans propose strategic blockades at city exits, limiting escape routes for criminals and increasing the chances of capture without endangering lives.

By avoiding direct confrontations, defense plans align with human rights policies and prioritize life preservation. This approach is essential for reducing casualties among police officers, civilians, and even the criminals themselves. The strategy not only saves lives but also maintains the integrity of public security operations, minimizing collateral damage and infrastructure destruction.

Implementation of Defense Plans

Effective implementation of defense plans involves several steps and requires coordination between different security agencies and the local community. Key components include:

1. Vulnerability Analysis:

Identifying and assessing the city's weak points is the first step. This includes mapping main access routes, areas with high population density, and critical infrastructure points such as banks and security posts.

2. Inter-Agency Coordination:

Collaboration between various security forces is essential. This includes military police, civil police, federal police, firefighters, municipal guards, and, if necessary, the armed forces. Each agency must have a clearly defined role within the defense plan to ensure a coordinated and effective response.

3. Training and Simulations:

Regular training and attack simulations prepare all parties involved for a swift and coordinated response. These exercises help identify weaknesses in the plan and adjust strategies as needed. For instance, cities like Naviraí and Campo Grande conduct extensive simulations to ensure their officers are prepared for City Domination attacks.

4. Technology and Equipment:

Investing in advanced technology and appropriate equipment is vital. This includes acquiring armored vehicles, drones for aerial surveillance, secure communication systems, and personal protective gear. Installing surveillance cameras at strategic points can also help monitor suspicious activities and coordinate security forces' responses.

5. Community Engagement:

Involving the community in the defense plan is crucial for increasing the effectiveness of preventive actions. Awareness programs and training for merchants and re-



sidents on how to act during an attack can save lives and reduce chaos. Community cooperation is essential for gathering information and reporting suspicious activities.

6. Continuous Evaluation and Updates:

Defense plans must be continuously evaluated and updated to adapt to new criminal tactics and changing urban vulnerabilities. This ensures that the plans remain effective and adaptable to different scenarios.

The Designated Marksman

In designing defense plans for complex crimes such as City Domination, the use of designated marksmen has proven to be an important tool. These officers can deter criminals during operations and neutralize key elements of their tactics.

Unlike precision snipers, designated marksmen are officers trained and equipped to engage targets at distances beyond the capabilities of regular teams. The potential of such agents has been demonstrated in operations where police or even improvised sports shooters assumed this role, as seen in City Domination incidents in Bacabal (State of Maranhão), Irecê (State of Bahia), Araçatuba (State of São Paulo), and others.



Conclusion

he phenomenon of "City Domination" represents an evolution of the "New Cangaço" crimes, characterized by violent and highly organized attacks on financial institutions and cash handling facilities. Throughout this report, we have explored the origins and evolution of this phenomenon, its distinctive features—such as complex planning and the use of advanced technology—and the tactics and methods employed by criminals. We have also highlighted the devastating impact of these attacks on society and public safety, including significant economic consequences and lasting psychological effects on the local population. Additionally, we discussed the importance of defense plans and their implementation to mitigate the effects of these crimes.

Prevention is essential to combat City Domination. The implementation of well-structured defense plans, involving vulnerability analysis, coordination among different security agencies, and the use of advanced technology, is crucial for protecting communities and minimizing the damage caused by these attacks. Collaboration among security forces, financial institutions, and the local community is fundamental to creating an effective and coordinated response. Awareness and training programs help prepare residents and merchants to act during an attack, increasing the city's resilience and reducing panic and chaos.

City Domination is a clear example of how violent crimes can evolve and adapt, becoming more sophisticated and challenging to combat. As criminals adopt new technologies and tactics, security forces and public policies must evolve accordingly. This includes the continuous updating of defense plans, investments in training and equipment, and fostering close collaboration between different security agencies and the community.

Future challenges include the need for a swift and adaptable response to emerging threats, implementing public policies that balance security with human rights, and creating an environment where prevention and deterrence are priorities. Combating City Domination requires a joint, innovative, and persistent effort that involves all sectors of society in the search for solutions that ensure the safety and well-being of affected communities.





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