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US Designates Brazil's Comando Vermelho and PCC as Foreign Terrorist Organisations

29 May 2026 · **IR** **SECURITY & DEFENCE** · **GS2**

CURATED & WRITTEN BY

**Bharat Choudhary**

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

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US Designates Brazil's Comando Vermelho and PCC as Foreign Terrorist Organisations

29 May 2026 · 6 min read · 2 tags

WHY IN NEWS:

The **US Department of State** on **May 28, 2026** designated Brazil's two largest criminal organisations — **Comando Vermelho (CV, "Red Command")** and **Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC, "First Capital Command")** — as **Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGTs)** under **Executive Order 13224**, with **Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO)** designation under **Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act** to take effect **June 5, 2026**. Brazilian President **Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva** criticised the move as US interference ahead of Brazil's October 2026 presidential elections.

THE TWO ORGANISATIONS — QUICK PROFILE

PARAMETER	COMANDO VERMELHO (CV)	PRIMEIRO COMANDO DA CAPITAL (PCC)
English	"Red Command"	"First Capital Command"
Founded	1979	1993
Origin	Cândido Mendes Prison , Rio de Janeiro	Taubaté Prison , São Paulo state
Core ideology origin	Marxist political prisoners + common criminals merged in jail	Self-described as "fighting prison conditions"; rapidly criminalised
Stronghold	Rio de Janeiro favelas + Amazon basin	São Paulo state + nationwide network
Estimated members	~30,000+	~40,000+ (largest in Latin America)
Revenue sources	Cocaine trafficking, arms, extortion, illegal mining	Cocaine trafficking, prison-economy control, extortion, money laundering
International footprint	Bolivia, Colombia, Paraguay, West Africa (cocaine route to Europe)	Paraguay, Bolivia, Peru, Italy, Spain, Portugal

THE DESIGNATIONS EXPLAINED

DESIGNATION	AUTHORITY	EFFECT
Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT)	Executive Order 13224 (signed September 23, 2001 by President Bush after 9/11)	Asset freeze of all US-jurisdiction assets; ban on US transactions with designated persons; visa denial
Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO)	Section 219, Immigration and Nationality Act (administered by State Dept)	Material support to FTO = US federal crime; civil/criminal penalties for facilitators worldwide if US nexus exists

The **SDGT designation is effective immediately**; the **FTO designation requires a 7-day Congressional notification** and is effective **June 5, 2026**.

WHY THE US IS DOING THIS

DRIVER	DETAIL
Fentanyl + cocaine flows	Brazilian groups now control significant Latin American cocaine routes; small amounts of fentanyl flow through Paraguay-Brazil
Trump 2.0 doctrine	Treating Latin American criminal organisations like terrorist groups was a campaign promise; consistent with February 2025 designations of Mexican cartels (Sinaloa, CJNG) and Venezuelan Tren de Aragua
State Department under Marco Rubio	Rubio (Cuban-American, former Florida senator) pursues a hard line on Latin American transnational organised crime
Hemispheric precedent	Sets framework for designating other groups regionally
Domestic politics	Plays to US domestic constituency on border + drugs

BRAZIL'S REACTION

- **President Lula** publicly called the move “**interference in Brazil’s sovereignty**” and timed to influence Brazil’s **October 2026 presidential elections**.
- **Foreign Minister Mauro Vieira** summoned the US ambassador in Brasília.
- **Brazilian Federal Police** noted that they already classify both as **criminal organisations under Brazilian law**, not terrorist organisations — a legal distinction with operational consequences.

- The Lula government sees the designation as **boosting the political opposition** (Bolsonaro camp), which has historically aligned with the US Republican framing of organised crime as terrorism.

THE LEGAL DISTINCTION — CRIMINAL VS TERRORIST ORGANISATION

FRAMEWORK	DEFINITION	TOOLS AVAILABLE
Criminal organisation	Profit-motivated; targets civilians but for monetary gain	Law enforcement, asset seizure, criminal prosecution
Terrorist organisation	Ideologically motivated; uses violence to coerce policy	Plus: counterterrorism legal tools, military options, FTO/SDGT regime

Brazilian law (**Lei das Organizações Criminosas, 2013**) treats CV and PCC as criminal organisations. The US designation does not change Brazilian domestic law but enables **extraterritorial US enforcement** against anyone with a US nexus who supports CV/PCC.

INDIA'S INDIRECT STAKES

ANGLE	RELEVANCE TO INDIA
BRICS / IBSA solidarity	Brazil is co-member with India in BRICS, IBSA, G20, G77; sovereignty concerns resonate with India's traditional non-interference stance
Drug-trafficking routes	Cocaine reaches India in small volumes from Latin America; precursor chemicals flow the other way
FTO regime experience	India has its own UAPA-based regime — Indian designations of Pakistan-based groups have parallels
UNSC counter-terrorism architecture	India chairs / contributes to UN CTC (Counter-Terrorism Committee) when on UNSC; can shape norms
DPI for crime tracking	India's experience with NATGRID + CCTNS could be relevant for Brazilian discussions
Brazil presidency of BRICS 2025	Active India-Brazil bilateral track

OTHER LATIN AMERICAN DESIGNATIONS — RECENT

YEAR	GROUP	COUNTRY
Feb 2025	Sinaloa Cartel + CJNG (Jalisco)	Mexico
Feb 2025	Tren de Aragua	Venezuela (originated in prison)
Feb 2025	Carteles Unidos	Mexico (Michoacán)
Feb 2025	La Nueva Familia Michoacana	Mexico
Feb 2025	MS-13 (Mara Salvatrucha)	El Salvador / regional
May 2026	Comando Vermelho + PCC	Brazil

The pattern shows a **deliberate Latin America-wide expansion** of the FTO/SDGT regime under Trump 2.0.

THE WIDER CONVERSATION

THEME	SUBSTANCE
Sovereignty vs counter-narcotics	Where does cooperation end and interference begin?
Norm-erosion	Using FTO regime for primarily-economic criminal groups dilutes the original counter-terrorism concept
Latin American backlash	Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela publicly objecting — strain on US-LatAm relations
Chinese opening	China presents itself as the non-interventionist alternative — a soft-power gain
OAS / Inter-American system	Could be tested if Brazil raises the issue at OAS
BRICS+	Provides Brazil with a non-Western multilateral platform to push back

SIGNIFICANCE FOR INDIA'S POSITION

India's diplomatic instinct on such issues:

- **Non-interference in domestic affairs** of other states.

- **Multilateral counter-terrorism** under UN frameworks, not **unilateral** lists.
- **No equivalence** between Pakistan-based terrorist groups (India's main concern) and Latin American criminal organisations.
- **Support for Brazilian sovereignty** — likely an oral statement at appropriate forums; no formal vote.

This is a classic test of India's principle that **"every country knows its own threats best"** — applied to a friendly Global South partner.

WAY FORWARD

- **MEA statement** — India likely to issue a balanced statement supporting counter-narcotics cooperation while upholding Brazilian sovereignty.
- **BRICS Counter-Terrorism Working Group** — agenda item for next round.
- **Bilateral law enforcement** — India-Brazil cooperation on financial intelligence (FIU-IND ↔ COAF Brazil) continues.
- **G20 (Brazil 2024 presidency + India influence)** — push for **balanced** counter-organised-crime framework.
- **South-South cooperation** — sharing of best practices on prison reform (a root cause for both CV and PCC).

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 2 — International Relations:

- Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.
- Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests.

Analytical hooks for Mains:

- Unilateral terrorism designations vs multilateral counter-terrorism — sovereignty implications.
- India's principle of non-interference in a multipolar world.
- BRICS as a forum for Global South solidarity.

FACTS CORNER

Designation date: May 28, 2026 (SDGT effective immediately; FTO effective June 5, 2026).

Designating body: US Department of State (Secretary: Marco Rubio).

Groups: Comando Vermelho (CV) — founded 1979, Rio de Janeiro; Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC) — founded 1993, São Paulo.

SDGT authority: Executive Order 13224 (Sept 23, 2001).

FTO authority: Section 219, Immigration and Nationality Act.

Brazilian President: Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

Other 2025 LatAm designations: Sinaloa, CJNG, Tren de Aragua, Carteles Unidos, La Nueva Familia Michoacana, MS-13.

Brazil's domestic law: Lei das Organizações Criminosas, 2013 (Organised Crime Law).

Brazil's October 2026 election: Presidential.

Brazil's multilateral memberships with India: BRICS, IBSA, G20, G77.


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Sources: *US State Department, MEA, Reuters*

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