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STRENGTHENING THE SHIELD: EVALUATING THE INTERNAL SECURITY OPERATIONS OF THE 404TH REGIONAL MOBILE FORCE BATTALION 4A

Judy Casten Artibel Jr.
Graduate School, Philippine College of Criminology

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ABSTRACT

Internal Security Operations (ISO) are a critical yet often contentious component of counter-insurgency efforts, which directly impact local governance and public trust. This study assessed the Internal Security Operations of the 404th Regional Mobile Force Battalion 4A (RMFB4A) operating in the insurgency-affected areas of Rizal Province, Philippines. It focused on determining the unit's capability and effectiveness across four key operational domains: police-community relations, execution of warrants, intelligence operations, and counter-terrorism, and how these operations contribute to peace and order, public safety, economic stability, and community engagement. An explanatory-sequential mixed-methods design was employed, gathering quantitative data on operational capability and effectiveness from ISO personnel, supervisors, and community members, and followed by qualitative insights from interviews and focus group discussions to explore their challenges. The findings revealed a consistent pattern where ISO personnel and ISO supervisors rated their operational performance as highly capable and effective, while community members expressed more reserved assessments, highlighting a perception gap that warrants attention. Statistical analyses confirmed significant differences in ratings across all respondent groups and variables. Qualitative findings identified operational barriers such logistics limitations, persistent trust deficit, PNP and LGU partnership, environmental and logistical barriers, and communication, coordination and joint operations. To address these challenges, an intervention titled BRIDGE is proposed aimed at improving tactical readiness, fostering stronger police-community partnerships, and enhancing overall mission effectiveness. Generally, the study advocates for a more inclusive and community-driven approach to internal security that aligns operational strategies with developmental goals for lasting peace and stability in insurgency-affected areas.

KEYWORDS: *Internal Security Operations, Regional Mobile Force Battalion, Police-Community Relations, Mixed-Methods, Rizal Province*

INTRODUCTION

The Philippines has long faced persistent internal security challenges particularly from insurgent groups such as the Communist Party of the Philippines–New People's Army (CPP-NPA) which operate primarily in rural and mountainous areas using tactics such as ambushes, extortion, and recruitment of vulnerable populations. In response, the government has implemented a range of counterinsurgency measures through the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Philippine National Police (PNP), including the establishment and strengthening of Regional Mobile Force Battalions (RMFBs) as tactical units for Internal Security Operations (ISO). Among these, the 404th RMFB4A plays a vital role in Region 4-A which undertakes operations from intelligence gathering and counter-terrorism to warrant execution and police-community engagement. Despite these efforts, questions remain regarding the effectiveness of ISO at the regional level, particularly in areas like Rizal Province where insurgent threats persist and operational challenges such as limited resources, coordination gaps, and community trust deficits remain important. Globally, internal security continues to be a persistent concern, with countries highlighting intelligence-sharing, civic engagement, and institutional resilience; however, most research focuses on national-level strategies, leaving localized tactical operations underexplored. Nationally, while initiatives such as the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020 and Executive Order No. 70 have strengthened legal frameworks and promoted a nation-wide approach, the practical operationalization of these policies at the battalion level remains underexamined. The efficacy of ISO is vital not only for neutralizing threats but also for safeguarding local governance and civilian welfare which makes the trust and cooperation of the community indispensable to success. Recognizing these gaps, this study seeks to assess the internal security operations of the 404th AMC RMFB4A, focusing on operational capability and effectiveness while proposing evidence-based strategies to enhance localized responses and support the broader national agenda of building conflict-resilient, safe, and sustainable communities in line with the Philippine Development Plan 2023–2028 and relevant Sustainable Development Goals.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Internal security and counterterrorism operations have long been at the forefront of both global and national security discourse which stress the need for adaptive strategies that integrate operational capability, governance, and community trust. Across the world, evolving threats such as insurgency, terrorism, and violent extremism continue to challenge traditional approaches to internal security prompting governments to adopt more holistic and intelligence-driven frameworks.

International literature reveals that effective internal security operations require a balance between military precision, inter-agency collaboration, and community engagement. Benar News (2023) reports that foreign terrorist fighters linked to ISIS and Jemaah Islamiyah continue to exploit ungoverned areas in Southeast Asia, particularly in Mindanao which reflect persistent vulnerabilities in state control. The Diplomat (2023) and the Brookings Institution (2023) further emphasize that prolonged insurgencies weaken regional stability and underscore the importance of intelligence-sharing and global partnerships. Yet, Foreign Policy (2023) and Eurasia Review (2023) caution that overdependence on foreign aid may hinder the development of autonomous and sustainable national security systems. This urges states to strengthen internal resilience and institutional capabilities.

Other comparative studies highlight how nations have adapted their internal security operations to changing threats. MIT Press (2023) and the European Parliament (2023) discuss China's and Europe's approaches, where counterterrorism measures combine surveillance, intelligence coordination, and community-level deradicalization. Meanwhile, the RAND Corporation (2023) warns that heavily militarized operations, if not paired with governance and community programs, often result in short-term gains but long-term instability. In the Southeast Asian region, the Southeast Asian Affairs Journal (2023) and the Center for Strategic and International Studies (2023) observe that Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand have achieved progress by fusing military capability with community policing and local governance. Collectively, these global perspectives affirm that sustainable peace is achieved not solely through armed strength, but through inclusive, intelligence-driven, and people-centered security models.

In the Philippines, internal security remains an enduring challenge due to the persistence of insurgent and terrorist groups such as the New People's Army (NPA), Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), and Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF). Nepomuceno (2023) and Radio Free Asia (2023) note that while the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and Philippine National Police (PNP) have made significant progress in neutralizing threats, insurgency persists in remote and impoverished areas where governance remains weak. The Counter Extremism Project (2023) and Mindanao Examiner (2023) identify poverty and marginalization as key factors driving recruitment and emphasizing that effective counterinsurgency must be coupled with socio-economic reform.

The 2017 Marawi Siege marked a critical turning point in Philippine counterterrorism. As CNN Philippines (2023) explains, the siege prompted a recalibration of national strategies toward improved intelligence, coordination, and urban warfare capability. However, ABS-CBN News (2023) and Inquirer.net (2023) raise concerns regarding the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020, which, while enhancing operational authority, has also drawn criticism over potential human rights violations. Despite these debates, inter-agency collaboration has shown measurable progress. The Philippine News Agency (2023) highlights successful joint operations among the AFP, PNP, and local government units (LGUs) that dismantled insurgent fronts in CALABARZON and neighboring provinces. Yet, Rappler (2023) and Brigada News FM (2023) point out that gaps remain in intelligence coordination and logistical support during joint missions.

Community engagement and local participation also emerge as decisive factors in internal security success. SunStar (2023) and The Manila Times (2023) highlights the value of localized peace engagement (LPE) and barangay-level initiatives in building trust and facilitating the reintegration of former rebels. Still, logistical constraints, limited funding, and weak coordination continue to hamper sustained implementation. Complementary studies from BusinessMirror (2023) and Remate Online (2023) reveal that economic empowerment and post-conflict rehabilitation programs significantly reduce insurgent recruitment. People's Journal (2023) further emphasizes that the long-term success of ISOs depends not only on tactical outcomes but also on winning the "hearts and minds" of the people through transparency, service delivery, and consistent community partnership.

Military action alone cannot secure lasting peace. Rather, success depends on modernized logistics, interoperable intelligence networks, LGU collaboration, human rights compliance, and public trust. For the Philippines, particularly for units like the 404th A Maneuver Company, RMFB4A, these findings underscore the need to strengthen operational capability not only through advanced training and resources but also through sustained partnerships with communities and local institutions. Through these, internal security operations can transition from reactive defense to proactive peacebuilding ensuring both stability and legitimacy in the pursuit of national security.

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Theoretical/Conceptual Framework/Paradigm of the Study

This study is guided by Social Conflict Theory of Criminology and Effectiveness-Efficiency Paradigm. The Social Conflict Theory provides the framework for explaining the perception gap between security forces and the community which imply that some people may view law enforcement efforts as illegitimate particularly in contested areas. This theory helps to the understanding of the perception gap in the ISO's effectiveness.

Additionally, the Effectiveness-Efficiency also determines the structure of the evaluation. The unit's operational capability is used to assess efficiency with an emphasis on the internal resources, systems, and processes used. The ISO's demonstrable contribution to peace and order, public safety, economic stability, and community engagement is used to assess its effectiveness. By integrating these frameworks, the study goes beyond a technical evaluation to explore the RMFB4A's societal consequences.

Significance of the Study

This study holds significant benefits for various stakeholders. The 404th A Maneuver Company (RMFB4A) can use the findings to enhance its operational capability and address challenges in countering insurgents and terrorists. The Rizal Provincial Mobile Force Company and the Rizal Provincial Government may benefit by refining strategies and providing support to improve the effectiveness of ISO in the province. Affected communities, particularly barangays with NPA presence, can better understand how to collaborate with the military, while the CALABARZON region may implement these strategies to counter insurgent activities more broadly. The PNP Special Action Force and the Philippine National Police can use the insights to improve coordination with the AFP and RMFB and strengthen operational capacity. The Armed Forces of the Philippines, Barangay Intelligence Network, and Local Government Units can apply the findings to enhance intelligence operations, provide necessary support, and ensure smoother joint operations. The Department of the Interior and Local Government may use the study to inform policies on collaboration between government forces and LGUs. Lastly, the study provides future researchers with a reference framework, and the researcher can use the findings for strategic planning and investigation in their area of responsibility.

Objectives of the Study

The study generally aims to assess the capability and effectiveness of 404th Regional Mobile Force Battalion 4A's ISO as a basis for capability enhancement. Specifically, it aims:

- To determine the level of capability of the 404th RMFB4A in terms of Police-Community Relations, Execution of Warrants, Intelligence Operations, and Counter-Terrorism, as assessed by ISO personnel, supervisors, and community members.
- To evaluate the level of effectiveness of the 404th RMFB4A in terms of its contribution to Peace and Order, Public Safety, Economic Stability, and Community Engagement, as assessed by the three respondent groups.
- To compare the significant differences in the assessments of Operational capability and effectiveness among ISO personnel, supervisors, and community members.
- To investigate the challenges encountered by the 404th RMFB4A in the conduct of its Internal Security Operations within the area of operations.
- To propose a Capability Enhancement Program based on the findings and identified challenges.

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the systematic procedures and techniques used to conduct the evaluation of the Internal Security Operations (ISO) of the 404th Regional Mobile Force Battalion 4A (RMFB4A).

Research Design

This study used a mixed-methods design that used quantitative and qualitative methodologies to assess the operational capabilities of the 404th A Maneuver Company, Regional Mobile Force Battalion 4A, in performing Internal Security Operations (ISO). Surveys were conducted among ISO personnel, supervisors, and community leaders to collect data on the unit's capability and effectiveness. Qualitative data from interviews and open-ended questions provided insights into the challenges in their operations. Documentary analysis of reports, instructions, and policy papers aided data triangulation. This approach provided a comprehensive understanding of ISO implementation and evidence-based recommendations for increasing operational performance.

Research Method

The study utilized an Explanatory-Sequential Mixed-Methods Design. This approach began with the quantitative phase where numerical data was collected to determine the levels of operational capability and effectiveness, as well as the statistical differences among the three groups of respondents: ISO personnel, supervisors, and community members. The results of the first part about the perception gap identified between the security forces and the community were then used for the qualitative phase. The interviews and FGDs served as

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exploratory tools which enabled the researcher to look at the lived experiences and perceptions of the participants which was essential for understanding the variations of the challenges and the reasons for the perception gap.

Population of the Study

The study involved 200 respondents which comprised three distinct groups critical to the evaluation of the ISO. The ISO personnel, composed of 75 Police Non-Commissioned Officers, were directly involved in law enforcement and counterinsurgency operations, while the 50 ISO supervisors were Police Commissioned Officers leading these operations. The community group included 75 barangay officials and residents who provided insights on local security and the impact of ISO activities. Simple random sampling was used for the ISO personnel and supervisors to ensure equal selection chances, while convenience sampling was used for community members due to accessibility and availability.

Data Gathering Tools

The study used a three-part survey questionnaire as the main tool for collecting quantitative data. Part I measured operational capability, including police-community relations, warrant execution, intelligence, and counter-terrorism. Part II focused on operational effectiveness in terms of peace and order, public safety, economic stability, and community engagement, while Part III gathered basic demographic information. The questionnaire was developed using PNP guidelines and criminology standards, validated by experts and pilot-tested to ensure reliability through Cronbach's Alpha. For the qualitative part, semi-structured interviews and FGDs with open-ended questions were conducted to gain insights into operational challenges.

Data Gathering Procedures

The data collection process followed a systematic series of steps. First, the researcher sent formal letters to the Commandant of the 404th RMFB4A and the local government units (LGUs) of the selected barangays to request permission to conduct the study in their areas. For the quantitative part, the researcher and trained assistants personally distributed the questionnaires. ISO personnel answered the survey during their administrative hours to avoid interrupting their duties, while community members were reached through a house-to-house approach with the help of Barangay officials. Each respondent was given around 30 to 45 minutes to complete the survey on their own. For the qualitative part, key informants were contacted and interviewed in neutral convenient locations, while FGDs with 8–10 community members were held at the barangay hall. With the participants' consent, all sessions were audio-recorded and typically lasted 60 to 90 minutes. The entire data collection, from securing approvals to finishing all interviews and discussions, was completed within approximately three months.

Treatment of Data

The data collected were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. To determine the level of capability and effectiveness, the mean and standard deviation were calculated to show the overall trends and variations in each area, interpreted using a five-point scale. To see if there were significant differences among the responses of ISO personnel, supervisors, and community members, an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to identify which groups differed from each other. Meanwhile, challenges encountered were analyzed using thematic analysis which involved transcribing, coding, and identifying recurring themes and insights from interviews and focus group discussions for the interpretation of the results.

Ethical Considerations

Throughout the study, the researcher followed ethical standards to ensure the rights and safety of all participants. Participation was voluntary, and respondents could withdraw at anytime without consequences. No names were required on the questionnaires which ensured complete anonymity. All interview and FGDs data were treated with strict confidentiality. Code names or aliases were used in transcripts and final reports to prevent the identification of specific individuals. The audio recordings were stored securely and destroyed upon completion of the study. Moreover, possible risks such as the sensitivity of discussing internal security matters were minimized by conducting sessions in neutral, safe locations, and clarifying that the study was for academic purposes only. Participants were also chosen fairly based on their role or residency without discrimination. Lastly, the study's findings and the proposed capability Enhancement Program will be shared with the 404th RMFB4A Command and local government units to support future policy and program development.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This details the findings of the study corresponding to the research objectives. The discussion integrates the quantitative results, supported by statistical analysis with the qualitative data gathered through interviews and focus group discussions.

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Level of Operational Capability of the Regional Mobile Force Battalion 4A in Conducting Internal Security Operations

Table 1 shows that RMFB 4A is rated "Highly Capable" across all operational domains. Strong Police-Community Relations reflect effective trust-building and collaboration with local communities, a cornerstone of internal security. The high rating in Execution of Warrants indicates efficiency, adherence to legal procedures, and respect for the rule of law. Intelligence Operations are robust, enabling proactive responses to threats, while Counter-Terrorism Capabilities demonstrate preparedness, training, and inter-agency coordination. Overall, all three respondent groups consistently assessed RMFB 4A's operational capabilities as highly capable.

Table 1. Summary of Operational Capability Assessment

Indicators	Median	Description
Police-Community Relations	4	Highly Capable
Execution of Warrants	4	Highly Capable
Intelligence Operations	4	Highly Capable
Counter-Terrorism Capabilities	4	Highly Capable
Overall Capability	**4**	**Highly Capable**

Significant Difference in the Level of Capability of the Regional Mobile Force Battalion 4A in Conducting Internal Security Operations

Table 2 shows the difference in the level of capability in conducting the Internal Security Operations of RMFB4A. Aligned with Racic and Dostic (2024), intelligence-led policing often involves technical and less visible activities, which, if not properly communicated, can reduce public trust and understanding. Similarly, Melkamu and Teshome (2023) emphasize that community trust depends less on operational performance and more on perceptions of fairness and accountability. In Police Community Relations ($X^2 = 8.95$, $p = 0.011$), ISO personnel rate themselves higher than the community does, reflecting a "perception deficit" in engagement, transparency, and inclusivity. Counter-Terrorism Capabilities also show a significant difference ($X^2 = 7.50$, $p = 0.024$), with community skepticism persisting over rapid response and minimizing harm. Medians were used due to the ordinal nature of Likert-scale data, summarizing central agreement but not response variability.

Table 2. Difference in the Level of Capability in Conducting Internal Security Operations

Indicators	χ^2	df	p-value
Police-Community Relations	8.95	2	0.011
Execution of Warrants	14.94	2	<0.001
Intelligence Operations	14.77	2	<0.001
Counter-Terrorism Capabilities	7.50	2	0.024

Level of Operational Effectiveness of the Regional Mobile Force Battalion 4A in Conducting Internal Security Operations

Table 3 shows data on the overall effectiveness of the RMFB4A in conducting their internal security operations. The findings indicate that RMFB 4A is rated "Highly Effective" across public safety, economic stability, and community engagement. Strong law enforcement and rapid response ensure citizen security and reduce fear of crime, while operations support a stable environment that fosters economic activity. Community engagement reflects inclusive practices that build trust, improve intelligence sharing, and enhance crime prevention.

Table 3. Summary of Operational Effectiveness Assessment

Indicators	Median	Description
Peace and Order	4	Highly Effective
Public Safety	4	Highly Effective
Economic Stability	4	Highly Effective
Community Engagement	4	Highly Effective
Overall Effectiveness	**4**	**Highly Effective**

Significant Difference in the Level of Capability of the Regional Mobile Force Battalion 4A in Conducting Internal Security Operations

The table 4 reveals significant differences between ISO personnel and the community despite generally high median scores. The largest gap is in public safety, where community members perceive more vulnerability than ISO personnel, reflecting that trust, fairness, and responsiveness shape safety perceptions (Awoyemi et al., 2025). Economic stability also shows divergence, as communities may still feel uncertainty despite protective measures, highlighting the role of perceived security in post-conflict recovery (Arlyapova et al.,

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2023). Community engagement differences ($X^2 = 11.9$, $p = 0.003$) suggest that participation is seen as insufficiently inclusive, supporting Zakhour's (2020) view that engagement must be substantive to be perceived as effective. Perceptions of peace and order differ least ($X^2 = 10.6$, $p = 0.005$), indicating broader agreement on visible core security outcomes.

Table 4. Difference in the Level of Effectiveness in Conducting Internal Security Operations

Indicators	χ^2	df	p-value
Peace and Order	10.6	2	0.005
Public Safety	25.7	2	<0.001
Economic Stability	15.7	2	<0.001
Community Engagement	11.9	2	0.003

Challenges Encountered in Conducting Internal Security Operations Within Their Area of Operations

Table 5 shows the five interconnected challenges that shape the operational realities of the 404th A Maneuver Company, RMFB4A. Logistical limitations include inadequate equipment, poor communication, and limited mobility which directly hinder timely and effective operations. These deficiencies exacerbate a persistent trust deficit, as community fear and mistrust limit intelligence sharing, leaving security forces to act reactively. Weak PNP–LGU partnerships further compound the problem, resulting in fragmented support and reduced legitimacy at the local level. Environmental and logistical barriers, such as difficult terrain and poor weather, intensify operational risks, while gaps in communication, coordination, and joint operations prevent cohesive action among units. These themes illustrate a systemic and mutually reinforcing set of challenges which highlight the need for an integrated approach that combines equipment modernization, community trust-building, stronger local partnerships, environmental adaptability, and interoperable coordination to enhance both the effectiveness and sustainability of Internal Security Operations.

Table 5. Challenges Encountered in Internal Security Operations

Theme	Key Findings (Qualitative)
Logistics Limitations	Lack of equipment, poor communication signals, and limited mobility hinder timely and effective operations.
Persistent Trust Deficit	Community fear and mistrust reduce cooperation and intelligence sharing with law enforcement.
PNP and LGU Partnership	Limited coordination and unclear roles between the PNP and LGUs affect operational support and planning.
Environmental and Logistical Barriers	Difficult terrain, poor weather, and lack of resources challenge mobility and safety during missions.
Communication, Coordination, and Joint Operations	Outdated communication tools and weak inter-agency collaboration cause confusion and delay during joint operations.

Programs Proposed to Enhance the Operational Capability of 404thA MC, RMFB4A in its Internal Security Operations

Based on the findings of the study, an intervention program titled BRIDGE: Building Resilience, Inclusion, Dialogue, Governance, and Engagement is proposed to enhanced the operational capability of the 404th A Maneuver Company, RMFB4A in conducting ISOs. This program addresses the observed perceptual gaps between ISO personnel and the community, especially in areas such as police-community relations, warrant execution, intelligence operations, and counter-terrorism efforts.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This presents the conclusions and recommendations drawn from the study.

Conclusion

The study found out that the 404th A Maneuver Company, RMFB4A demonstrates strong capability and effectiveness in conducting Internal Security Operations, and perception gaps exist between personnel and the community. ISO members consistently rated themselves as highly capable across domains such as Police Community Relations, Warrant Execution, Intelligence, and Counter-Terrorism, while community ratings were slightly lower, reflecting concerns over transparency, coordination, and inclusiveness. Effectiveness in peace and order, public safety, and community engagement was generally rated high, though differences in views highlight the need for better communication and stronger integration with local stakeholders. Operational challenges, including logistical limitations, persistent trust deficit, PNP and LGU partnership, environmental and logistical barriers, and communication, coordination and joint operations, further affect sustainability. To address these, the proposed BRIDGE Program which is focused on building trust,

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reinforcing logistics, integrating partnerships, developing coordination, generating transparency, and enhancing community cooperation aims to strengthen both operational performance and public confidence.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, several recommendations are proposed to further improve the unit's operations and partnership with the community. The 404th A MC, RMFB4A should continue building strong police–community relations by holding regular dialogues, ensuring transparency during operations, and working closely with barangay officials. Strengthening intelligence efforts through barangay networks and anonymous reporting systems is also encouraged. Open communication between personnel, supervisors, and community members can help bridge differences in perception and improve cooperation. To maintain effectiveness, the unit should enhance public communication, showcase success stories, and create accessible feedback channels to understand community needs. Joint evaluation forums with LGUs and residents can also help in identifying gaps and setting shared goals. Addressing operational challenges requires prioritizing resources for mobility, communication, and surveillance while promoting trust through outreach and coordinated action. Lastly, the implementation of the BRIDGE Program which focuses on building trust, responsiveness, integrity, development, resource upgrading, and community engagement will help strengthen both the operational capacity and the public's confidence in the 404th A MC, RMFB4A.

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