Background

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) continues to be locked in a drawn out war against insurgencies, namely coming from two armed fronts: the communists and the Muslim separatists. As part of its counterinsurgency (COIN) program, the AFP has utilized non-traditional military activities such as civic action, public affairs, and psychological operations to deal with the complexities emanating from the socio-economic and political dimensions of the insurgency. Now, collectively known as Civil Military Operations (CMO), in its nascent form, it first appeared during the American colonial period. The modern foundations nonetheless can be traced back to the early 1950s when it was developed as the left-hand approach (activities to persuade and influence) along with the right-hand approach (coercive force). The succeeding decades have maintained this formula in varying degrees in almost all of the AFP’s military campaigns. Nevertheless, it was only in 2006 that CMO was institutionalized for the first time.

Statement of the Problem

CMO is neither a new operation nor concept. The Philippine military is one of the few remaining militaries in Southeast Asia that devotes most of its resources to internal security operations and has integrated components of CMO in almost all of its major military campaigns. Despite the AFP’s long experience in CMO, it remains one of the most poorly understood operations within the military. Due to its "unmilitary-like" characteristics, it was considered to be mere adjunct to combat, and associated more with developmental work rather than a force multiplier. Even when it was employed to improve the outcome of military operations, CMO has often been eclipsed by the military’s proclivity to conduct what they are trained for or know best, which is to plan for and execute lethal force.

Yet, there were instances in history where CMO registered success and contributed to the overall COIN effort. What frustrated the future application of CMO was that these capabilities were not developed progressively, but rather, they were forgotten and only relearned only when the security situation took a turn for the worse.

In partial response to the aforementioned issues, the AFP institutionalized CMO in 2006, giving it recognition as an independent military operation and providing it with a doctrine.

Objectives

The main objective of the thesis is to examine and assess CMO in past and current COIN operations in the Philippines. It ultimately seeks to answer the questions, why it was successful in certain campaigns and why it was not in other campaigns. As the institutionalization of CMO in 2006 was considered to be turning point for the operation, a case study was conducted in Western Mindanao to determine whether institutionalization has improved the application of CMO on the ground.

Framework

Given the challenges identified in understanding CMO because of its "un-military" characteristics, it was deemed necessary to put into clearer perspective on what CMO is and how it is an inseparable component of COIN warfare before evaluating its effects in the Philippines’ military operational environment.

The conceptual framework used in this thesis is based on the theory that CMO is a form of maneuver warfare that helps the counterinsurgent reach the depth of the insurgent battlespace. The depth in this study primarily focuses on the populated areas in which the insurgents derive their sustenance and support. Using this as a framework to guide the thesis, the investigation then proceeds to examine the development of CMO in Philippine history and assess its effects in its various campaigns.

Findings

Based on the framework used, it was discovered that CMO demonstrated its best effects, especially at an operational and tactical level, when it was applied based on the principles of maneuver warfare. It was also uncovered that the institutionalization of CMO in 2006 has helped clarify its nebulous positioning in military operations and improve its overall application. Moreover, there was ample evidence to show from the case study conducted in Western Mindanao, that some of the success registered in fighting internal threat groups was because institutionalization has added intellectual rigor to CMO. Therefore, soldiers out on the field had a better understanding on the more complex-side of CMO, which was using CMO as a form of maneuver to manage the populated depth of the insurgent battlespace.

Structure of the thesis

Part one of this thesis (chapters 2 and 3) provides an overview on CMO (history and general understanding), which is followed by providing the conceptual framework that will be used. Part 2 (chapter 4) focuses on the history of CMO in the Philippines. It begins with the emergence of these practices during the American colonial era and ends with the administration of Joseph Estrada (1998-2001). Part 3 (chapter 5-7) focuses on CMO in the process of institutionalization and its aftermath. To provide a closer look on its effects, a case study is used to examine its application on the ground. Part 4 (chapter 8) seeks to summarize and analyze findings.

References