

# The Role Of The Indonesian Army's "Bintara Pembina Desa" In Counter Insurgency Intelligence Operations In Papua

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Abstract— Intelligence is a key component in all forms of warfare, especially in counter-insurgency or insurgency warfare. In order to arrest or neutralize insurgents in a discriminatory manner, accurate and timely intelligence related to the insurgent network is essential. Babinsa, as the main official in civil-military affairs at the village level, is familiar with the people and culture in a locality. This can help their role as intelligence collectors to support the counter-insurgency campaign. By using qualitative research methods, particularly through case studies and interviews, the author attempts to explain how Babinsa is used for the purpose of collecting data and information for intelligence purposes in counter-insurgency conflicts. The purpose of this study is to find out how Babinsa is used for intelligence gathering or data/information for intelligence purposes in counter-insurgency operations. The results of this study indicate that, due to their familiarity with the local population and culture, Babinsa are effective as intelligence collectors and can perform a variety of intelligence-related tasks that support the counter-insurgency campaign. In its use, Babinsa can identify who and where the enemy is, the enemy's relationship with the population, and other social issues exploited by the insurgents.

Keywords- Intelligence, Counter Insurgency, Babinsa

## I. INTRODUCTION

Intelligence operations have historically been a cornerstone of military strategy, serving as the bedrock for informed decision-making and effective execution in conflicts. In the context of counter-insurgency (COIN), the role of intelligence becomes even more critical, as it underpins the nuanced understanding required to counter complex insurgencies effectively [1]. The Indonesian Army's "Bintara Pembina Desa" (Babinsa) or Village Development Officer, as key civil-military liaisons at the village level, epitomize the intersection of intelligence operations and community engagement. Their unique position within the social and cultural fabric of local communities provides them with unparalleled access to vital information, enabling them to function as frontline intelligence gatherers and facilitators of counter-insurgency strategies [2].

The urgency of developing robust intelligence frameworks is underscored by Indonesia's ongoing security challenges, particularly in regions such as Papua, where separatist insurgencies continue to pose significant threats. The 2015 Indonesian Defense White Paper identifies separatist insurgencies as one of the most pressing asymmetric threats facing the nation, highlighting the necessity of integrating intelligence efforts with broader counter-insurgency strategies. Such efforts must address not only the overt military dimensions of conflict but also the underlying social, political, and economic grievances that insurgents exploit [3].

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Modern insurgencies, as defined by Kilcullen (2010), are inherently political contests that extend beyond conventional armed conflict to include elements of subversion, guerrilla tactics, and psychological warfare. The adaptability of insurgent groups in leveraging stealth, dispersion, and modular operations presents a significant challenge for state actors [1]. In this context, localized intelligence becomes indispensable for identifying insurgent networks, understanding their strategies, and mitigating their influence. The Babinsa, as embedded operatives with deep knowledge of local dynamics, are uniquely positioned to address these challenges.

The effectiveness of Babinsa lies in their dual role as community builders and intelligence operatives. Their responsibilities extend beyond traditional military functions to include fostering community development, conducting civic education, and promoting national defense awareness [4]. This multifaceted approach not only enhances their legitimacy within local communities but also facilitates the collection of actionable intelligence. By leveraging their proximity to the population and their understanding of local customs and concerns, Babinsa can identify potential threats, monitor insurgent activities, and address the socio-political issues that insurgents often exploit to gain support [2].

Despite their pivotal role, the integration of Babinsa into Indonesia's broader intelligence and counter-insurgency architecture presents both opportunities and challenges. On one hand, their grassroots presence provides a critical source of real-time information that can inform strategic decisions. On the other hand, the success of their operations is contingent upon effective coordination with higher-level intelligence agencies, such as the Strategic Intelligence Agency (Bais), as well as the provision of adequate training and resources [2].

This study aims to critically examine the role of Babinsa in counter-insurgency intelligence operations in Papua, with a particular focus on their effectiveness in collecting and analyzing data to support military and political objectives. Using qualitative research methods, including case studies and interviews, this research explores how Babinsa's integration into local communities enhances their capacity for intelligence gathering and contributes to the overall success of counter-insurgency campaigns. By situating the analysis within the broader theoretical frameworks of counter-insurgency and intelligence studies, this study seeks to provide actionable insights for improving the utilization of Babinsa and similar local operatives in asymmetric warfare contexts.

The findings of this study have significant implications for both policy and practice. They underscore the importance of investing in localized intelligence capabilities as a means of addressing the complex and multifaceted nature of modern insurgencies. Furthermore, they highlight the need for an integrated approach that combines hard power with soft power strategies, aligning military operations with community engagement and development initiatives. Ultimately, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how localized intelligence operatives like Babinsa can play a transformative role in ensuring national security and stability in conflict-prone regions.

## II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research methodology to explore the role of Babinsa in counter-insurgency intelligence operations in Papua. The qualitative approach is particularly suited to understanding the complex social, cultural, and political dynamics that influence intelligence gathering and counter-insurgency efforts. By emphasizing the lived experiences and perspectives of individuals involved, this method enables a nuanced analysis of Babinsa's effectiveness as local intelligence operatives. Data collection involves a combination of case studies, and document analysis. Case studies provide a detailed examination of specific instances of Babinsa's involvement in intelligence activities, offering insights into their strategies and challenges. Document analysis of relevant military reports, policy papers, and academic literature complements the primary data, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the topic. By adopting this methodological framework, the study aims to provide a robust and detailed account of how Babinsa contribute to counter-insurgency efforts in Papua, offering practical insights for enhancing their operational efficacy and integrating localized intelligence into national security strategies [5].



#### III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study illuminate the multifaceted role of Babinsa in counter-insurgency intelligence operations in Papua, with an emphasis on their operational effectiveness, challenges, and implications for broader counter-insurgency strategies. This section delves into these aspects in detail to provide a comprehensive understanding of their contributions.

## A. Babinsa's Core Roles in Intelligence Operations

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## 1) Community Integration and Trust Building

Babinsa's ability to integrate into local communities is a cornerstone of their operational success. Through daily interactions and community engagement initiatives, they build trust and rapport with local populations, fostering an environment conducive to intelligence gathering [6]. Their participation in community development projects, educational programs, and cultural activities further cements their legitimacy and trustworthiness. This trust enables Babinsa to access sensitive information that might otherwise be withheld, thus enhancing the accuracy and reliability of the intelligence collected.

Moreover, this rapport allows Babinsa to act as mediators during conflicts, helping to de-escalate tensions and maintain community harmony. For example, their role in bridging divisions within conflicted communities has been instrumental in mitigating violence and fostering dialogue. Reports such as those by Batas Papua (2024) highlight how separatist groups like the OPM interrogate locals suspected of collaborating with the military [7]. These incidents underline the challenges Babinsa face in balancing community trust with operational secrecy. Additionally, their role extends to countering insurgent narratives, a critical aspect in modern counter-insurgency [8].

Christawan (2024) emphasizes that Babinsa are critical in countering the Free Papua Organization's (OPM) propaganda. Through strategic interactions with communities, they dispel misinformation, thereby undermining the insurgents' ability to recruit or gain support. Such efforts align with the concept of psychological operations that aim to reduce insurgent legitimacy while reinforcing government presence and authority [9].

# 2) Intelligence Collection and Analysis

Embedded within the community, Babinsa leverage their familiarity with the local population and terrain to gather actionable intelligence [10]. They excel at identifying potential threats, tracking insurgent movements, and understanding socio-political dynamics. These capabilities allow them to discern patterns of insurgent activities and exploit insurgent vulnerabilities, providing critical intelligence that informs counter-insurgency strategies. The ability to analyze and contextualize raw data ensures that higher command levels receive intelligence that is not only actionable but also strategically relevant [11].

As noted by Hall and Citrenbaum (2012), intelligence collection in complex environments demands both adaptability and strategic planning, a standard Babinsa meet effectively. In regions like Papua, terrain challenges and insurgent tactics often require localized solutions, where Babinsa's granular intelligence becomes indispensable [12]. Additionally, advances in surveillance, such as the integration of remote sensing technologies, have enhanced their ability to gather precise data [13].

## 3) Early Warning Systems

Babinsa serve as an early warning system by monitoring shifts in local sentiments and detecting unusual activities that may indicate brewing insurgent activities. Their continuous interaction with community leaders and members allows them to identify warning signs of potential conflicts, thereby preempting violent escalations. This proactive approach has proven effective in mitigating risks before they escalate into significant security threats [2].

Field incidents such as the preemptive identification of insurgent movements in conflict zones, documented in Seskoad, underscore Babinsa's effectiveness in risk management [14]. Additionally, their insights complement broader surveillance



strategies, including the deployment of aerial reconnaissance and satellite imagery, further enhancing the military's operational readiness [13].

Babinsa's involvement in early warning systems also extends to identifying radicalization trends within communities. The psychological aspect of their work is critical in preventing insurgent recruitment and strengthening local resistance against separatist narratives. Such interventions align with Lukman Hakim's concept of a "smart approach," which combines intelligence, diplomacy, and community development [15].

## 4) Facilitating Coordination Across Agencies

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Acting as intermediaries, Babinsa bridge the gap between local communities and higher-level intelligence agencies, such as the Strategic Intelligence Agency (Bais). Their field reports, enriched with contextual insights, provide critical input for strategic decisions at higher command levels. This ensures that localized intelligence is not only heard but also integrated into national counter-insurgency frameworks [6]. Babinsa also facilitate joint operations by coordinating between military units and civilian authorities, ensuring a unified approach to security challenges.

Pinora argue that advanced tools and high-technology solutions can enhance coordination, making Babinsa's contributions even more effective [16]. Their grassroots insights, combined with these innovations, allow for a holistic approach to managing separatist threats. Such coordination is particularly crucial in integrated operations like Operasi Damai Cartenz, which focuses on combining intelligence, enforcement, and reconciliation strategies [17].

## B. Differences in Operational Levels of Babinsa and Bais

In the military intelligence structure, Babinsa and Bais have very different but complementary roles. Bais, as a strategic intelligence agency, operates at the highest level in the intelligence hierarchy, analyzing information from various sources to provide a comprehensive intelligence picture to TNI leaders. Bais' main focus is on strategic issues that impact national security as a whole, such as transnational threats, military policies of other countries, and developments in military technology [18]. Meanwhile, Babinsa, as the spearhead of intelligence at the village level, has a more operational role.

They interact directly with the community, collecting information about social, political, and security conditions in their area. The information obtained by Babinsa is then distributed to the chain of command, starting from the Danramil to the upper level [19]. In the context of military operations, especially in conflict areas such as Papua, the role of Babinsa is crucial. As a figure who is familiar in the community, Babinsa is able to build a strong information network and gain the trust of the local community. This allows them to detect potential threats early, carry out early detection of separatist group activities, and assist security forces in maintaining security stability in the region [6].

The fundamental difference between Babinsa and Bais lies in the operational level and task focus. Bais is oriented towards long-term strategic analysis, while Babinsa focuses more on collecting tactical and operational information in the field. However, both need each other. Information collected by Babinsa becomes one of the important sources for Bais in compiling its intelligence analysis. Conversely, the results of Bais' strategic analysis can provide guidance for Babinsa in carrying out explanations in the field.

# C. Babinsa in the Wheel of Intelligence

Babinsa as the spearhead of intelligence at the grassroots level, plays a very crucial role in the wheel of intelligence turning. As TNI personnel who interact directly with the community in the village, Babinsa have exclusive access to information that may be difficult for other intelligence agencies to obtain. Babinsa's closeness to the community allows them to build a broad and reliable information network, so that they can collect relevant and accurate data on social, political, and security conditions in their area. Information collected by Babinsa, ranging from local issues such as conflicts between residents to potential threats to state security, becomes raw material for intelligence analysis at a higher level. In the context of counter-insurgency, information on the movement of separatist groups, public sentiment towards the government, or the existence of illegal weapons obtained by



Babinsa is very valuable in formulating operational strategies. After going through the processing and analysis process, the information is then presented to decision makers to be used as a basis for formulating policies and strategies [6].

The success of Babinsa in collecting information is greatly influenced by several factors, including the ability to interact with the community, understanding of local culture, and the ability to build trust. In addition, Babinsa must also have the skills to identify credible sources of information and be able to distinguish between true information and hoaxes. In the context of the development of information technology, Babinsa is also required to be able to utilize social media and other online sources as a tool to collect information [20].

In the intelligence cycle, the role of Babinsa does not stop at the data collection stage. The information that has been collected by Babinsa will be distributed through the chain of command, starting from Danramil to the top level. At each level, the information will be analyzed, validated, and integrated with information from other sources. The results of the intelligence analysis will then be used to produce intelligence products that can be used as a basis for decision making [6].

## D. Babinsa's Excellence as Local Intelligence

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The excellence of Babinsa as local intelligence lies primarily in their deep understanding of the socio-cultural context of the community where they serve. As local sons or individuals who have long lived in the area, Babinsa have extensive social networks and a deep understanding of the language, customs, and social dynamics of the local community. This allows them to build strong and trusting relationships with the community, so that the information they need can be obtained more easily and accurately. The ability to adapt to different environments and flexibility in carrying out tasks are very valuable assets for Babinsa, especially in operations in areas that are difficult to reach and have challenging geographical conditions. In addition, the simple organizational structure of Koramil and clear chain of command allow information obtained by Babinsa to be quickly transferred to higher levels for follow-up. Thus, Babinsa acts as the eyes and ears of the TNI at the grassroots level, providing up-to-date and relevant information to support strategic decision-making [21].

The closeness of Babinsa to the community also allows them to detect early signs of radicalization, potential conflict, or other security threats. Babinsa can identify suspicious individuals or groups, monitor the activities of separatist groups, and identify issues that trigger conflict. The information obtained by Babinsa can then be used to take preventive measures, such as dialogue with community leaders, counseling, or law enforcement actions. Thus, Babinsa not only acts as an information gatherer, but also as an agent of change who can help build stability and security in their area. In addition, Babinsa also has advantages in terms of mobility and accessibility. They can easily move around their assigned area and reach areas that are difficult for other security forces to reach. This allows them to conduct routine patrols, provide assistance to communities in need, and build the state's presence in remote areas. Babinsa's ability to interact directly with the community can also increase public trust in the government and the TNI [2].

## E. Challenges Faced by Babinsa

## 1) Resource Constraints

One of the primary challenges faced by Babinsa is the lack of adequate resources, including training, technology, and logistical support. The reliance on manual methods limits the scope and precision of their operations, potentially impacting the effectiveness of their intelligence contributions. Addressing these constraints through enhanced training programs and the provision of modern tools would significantly improve their operational capacity [11].

Godson emphasizes that achieving intelligence dominance requires equipping field operatives with both state-of-the-art tools and operational frameworks [22]. The Indonesian Army's focus on operations like Operasi Damai Cartenz highlights an ongoing effort to address such gaps [17]. However, the integration of advanced technologies, as suggested by Pedrason, requires not only financial investment but also institutional reforms to maximize their utility [23].



## 2) Personal and Operational Risks

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Operating in conflict-prone areas like Papua exposes Babinsa to significant risks, including targeted attacks by insurgents. Their visible presence within the community, while essential for building trust, also makes them vulnerable. These risks necessitate robust security measures and psychological support systems to ensure their safety and well-being. Additionally, Babinsa must navigate complex socio-political dynamics, including potential opposition from community members sympathetic to insurgents [24].

High-profile incidents, such as the killing of Michelle Kurisi by armed groups, illustrate the dangers associated with Babinsa's roles [25]. The necessity of balancing visibility with operational effectiveness is a constant challenge in such hostile environments. Additionally, the psychological toll of operating in high-stress zones often requires dedicated support structures to maintain morale and effectiveness.

## 3) Coordination Challenge

Effective integration of Babinsa's intelligence into national counter-insurgency strategies requires seamless communication and coordination across multiple levels of command. Misalignments or delays in processing field reports can undermine the utility of their intelligence, reducing its strategic value. Furthermore, bureaucratic inefficiencies and hierarchical barriers sometimes hinder the timely dissemination of critical information. Strengthening interagency communication protocols is essential to overcome these challenges [26].

# F. Broader Implications for Counter-Insurgency Strategies

The role of Babinsa in counter-insurgency operations underscores the importance of localized intelligence in addressing modern security challenges. Their grassroots engagement demonstrates how a community-centric approach can effectively combine hard and soft power strategies. By addressing socio-political grievances and fostering resilience within local communities, Babinsa contribute not only to immediate security goals but also to the long-term stability and legitimacy of the state [11]. Their success illustrates the potential of leveraging local actors to build a more integrated and responsive security apparatus.

The "smart approach" employed by the Indonesian military, as outlined by Lukman Hakim, complements Babinsa's efforts by integrating technological innovation and community engagement to address separatist threats effectively [15]. This approach aligns with broader trends in intelligence-driven counter-insurgency strategies, where localized insights are combined with advanced analytical tools to enhance decision-making processes [13].

To maximize their effectiveness, it is imperative to address the resource and coordination challenges they face. Investments in training, advanced intelligence tools, and streamlined communication channels are essential for enhancing their operational capacity. Additionally, integrating Babinsa's insights into broader counter-insurgency frameworks can ensure a holistic approach to addressing asymmetric threats [6]. Lessons learned from Babinsa's operations in Papua can serve as a model for other regions facing similar insurgency challenges.

## IV. CONCLUSION

This study shows that the role of Babinsa (Bintara Pembina Desa) in counter-insurgency intelligence operations in Papua is very significant. As military personnel stationed at the village level, Babinsa have advantages in intelligence gathering due to their closeness to the community and deep understanding of local culture. Factors such as extensive social networks, trust-building abilities, and adaptation to challenging geographical and social conditions make Babinsa a key element in supporting the success of counter-insurgency operations. Babinsa can identify security threats such as separatist group activities, social conflict dynamics, and signs of radicalization in society. Information collected through direct interaction with the community is processed into intelligence products that support strategy planning and decision-making at higher command levels. In their implementation, Babinsa not only act as information collectors but also as agents of change who contribute to stability and security in their regions through dialogue and outreach.



The advantages of Babinsa also lie in their flexibility and mobility to reach remote areas, thereby strengthening the state's presence in hard-to-reach regions. This not only increases intelligence effectiveness but also strengthens the relationship between the community, the government, and the military. Overall, Babinsa play an integral role in intelligence operations in counterinsurgency, where community-based approaches form the foundation for addressing asymmetric security challenges in Papua. Integrating Babinsa's role in counter-insurgency strategies demonstrates the importance of collaboration between the military and the community in creating sustainable security.

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