

# CIVIL MILITARY COORDINATION IN MANAGING COVID 19 PANDEMIC

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## Abstract

Civil and military coordination is essential in any humanitarian operations to save lives. Symmetrical coordination is a must for the civil and military to operate during a virus disease outbreak effectively. COVID-19 pandemic uncertainty, complexity, and massive global impact is a lesson for the international to prepare for future biological hazards. In terms of methodology, this study uses a qualitative approach by combining all of the findings from the field study with primary and secondary data. The information on the primary data is the researcher's observation in the perspective of civil-military coordination in the involvement of OPERATION PENAWAR, OPERATION BENTENG and OPERATION BEKALAN MAKANAN SARAWAK during MCO. Besides, the information on the secondary data is research from books, articles, news, guidelines, SOP from relevant agencies, published journals, internet websites, and other public sources. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to analyse the role of the Malaysian Armed Forces (MAF) role of Military Operation Other Than War (MOOTW) in responding to the humanitarian operations in Malaysia during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings and gaps identified in the research are crucial to improving civil and military symmetrical coordination to control the virus outbreak at a national and the ASEAN regional level. The findings at the strategic level are focusing on national policy implementation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile finding at the operational level is concerning the interoperability of MAF and Civil agencies. Additionally, the lesson learned from this study is beneficial to enhance the inter agencies cooperation in managing the COVID-19 pandemic and future potential biological hazards to maintain regional stability and security.

**Keywords:** Civil Military Coordination, COVID-19, Malaysian Armed Forces (MAF)

## 1. Introduction

The global recently experienced a new disaster of Coronavirus, known as COVID-19, since January 2020, which affects billions of people worldwide in the scope of public health and economy. Malaysia, including the ASEAN, is struggling to fight the pandemic in a controlled situation. The COVID-19 biological hazard affects the complexity of humanitarian response in disaster relief even though each ASEAN Member State (AMS) has its

strategy to solve the pandemic problem. The significance of symmetrical coordination of humanitarian response in each member state is important to manage the global COVID-19 pandemic in the Southeast Asia region.

The first case was detected in Malaysia in January 2020 following the COVID-19 outbreak in Wuhan, China. Initially, the reported cases were very low in number. The imported cases became spike in the localised cluster, a large religious gathering in Sri Petaling, Kuala Lumpur, in March 2020. However, the seriousness of the issues increased on 17 March 2020, with a reported of 2 deaths in the country. Malaysia has recorded the most significant cumulative numbers of confirmed COVID-19 in the region just within a few weeks. Until the date of this research, reported new COVID-19 cases are still increasing without the positive reduction of death due to the pandemic. Nevertheless, the Malaysian government has put tremendous humanitarian effort coordinated with various agencies, including the Malaysian Armed Forces (MAF), in response to the pandemic.

As a part of the ASEAN, this paper aims to analyse Malaysia's humanitarian response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Concerning the reaction, MAF involvement is essential to assist the government in managing the pandemic in safeguarding national security, with the ultimate objective to help people survive and save lives.

## 2. Problem Statement

Effective humanitarian response to the pandemic disease is vital in humanitarian operations. The objective is to relieve people in their survival during the pandemic. The effectiveness in symmetrical coordination between various government and non-governmental agencies guarantees to save more lives in the COVID-19 pandemic. The National Security Council (NSC) provides guidelines for the disaster management plan for a disaster in Malaysia. National Security Council Directive No. 20 mentioned that the control of disease outbreaks in a pandemic is one of a national prone to catastrophe. Directive No. 20 empowers the program's effectiveness by providing a framework for the agencies involved. In the event of a disaster, the National Disaster Management Agency (NADMA), which is part of the Prime Minister's Department, serves as the disaster management focal point. However, concerning disease pandemics, the Ministry of Health (MoH) is the main focal point to control the virus outbreak in the country (NSC Directive No. 20, 2013).

On 18 March 2020, the government decided to implement the Movement Control Order (MCO) to address the COVID-19 outbreak under the Prevention and Control of Infectious Diseases Act 1988 and the Police Act 1967. The number of cases reduced drastically with the MCO implementation. It was reported to zero new positive COVID-19 cases in June 2020. Malaysia had ease the lockdown and shifted to Recovery Movement Order, which allowed all social and economic sectors to reopen by phases. However, the easing policy imposed by the government affected the outbreak in Malaysia when it allowed Sabah-wide state elections in September 2020. The number of positive COVID-19 cases increasing sharply; until the date of this research, the numbers are fluctuating around 19,000 to 24,000 new cases daily (Ministry of Health, 2021). According to National Crisis Preparedness and Response Centre (CPRC), on 5 September 2021, the number of daily COVID-19 deaths was 336, and the total accumulative deaths were 18,219. The number of new deaths and Brought In Deaths (BID) from April 2021 until August 2021 is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: The Number of COVID-19 New Deaths and Brought In Dead (BID).

<b>Month (2021)</b>	<b>March</b>	<b>April</b>	<b>May</b>	<b>June</b>	<b>July</b>
<b>New Deaths</b>	234	1290	2374	3854	7640
<b>Brought In Deaths (BID)</b>	35	122	246	482	1576

Source: National Crisis Preparedness & Response Centre

The data show a significant increment figure of death cases related to the pandemic in Malaysia. In addition, it describes an alarming severity of the pandemic outbreak in the country with the current national policy outline

in fighting the COVID-19. Therefore, the reality of the national strategic level in managing public health during the pandemic is a gap to be analysed further in this research.

The importance of all government agencies working together as primary teams, as indicated in Directive No. 20, is critical. However, present legislation does not explicitly define the roles and obligations of government agencies in providing humanitarian assistance, particularly in the case of a pandemic epidemic. The tasks and responsibilities of government agencies in terms of pandemic management are too broad under each service theme, allowing each agency to respond to the disease outbreak in isolation with insufficient information. To combat the Coronavirus, the National Security Council Directive No.20 needs to improve Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) with solid symmetrical coordination with other authorities. It is not enough to rely on a single agency or organization to handle a disaster. However, it will still necessitate the participation of a large number of different agencies, each with their own set of skills and capabilities. Any team involved in crisis management should carry out their duties and responsibilities as a group and follow the standing order. Therefore, the MAF's role in assisting the Government agencies in fighting the COVID-19 outbreak is needed to protect national security. The research focuses on the MAF's role concerning the NSC Directive No.20 in conducting the humanitarian response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, the research will be beneficial for the country to prepare for future disasters in all aspects at the national and regional levels.

### **3. Literature Review**

#### **3.1. Civil Military Coordination during COVID-19 IN Malaysia**

Contributions to the congress are welcome from throughout the world. Manuscripts may be submitted to The main theme of the research is regarding the COVID-19 civil-military coordination in humanitarian response from the perspective of the MAF in maintaining national security. Generally, the broad analysis of coordination in humanitarian response effectiveness will investigate the gaps in symmetrical coordination. The research is to determine the gaps in national policy implementation that lead to ineffectiveness in the national COVID-19 response.

The focus of the research is to analyse symmetrical coordination of the Government to implement the national policy in managing the COVID-19 pandemic. The MAF as a sample of case study is being used to examine the civil and military coordination execution between the NSC, MoH and the MAF related to the national policy, public health assistance, and social aspects to safeguarding national security. Based on the statistics by the CPRC dated 10 September 2021, a total of 1,936,338 local and 4,612 imported COVID-19 confirmed cases had been detected in Malaysia (MoH, 2021). The most substantial number of people infected by the virus in the country pandemic history has created an awareness of researchers to examine the issue in the context of coordination effectiveness from the Government top-down approach.

Cambridge Dictionary defined coordination as the act of making all the people involved in a plan or activity work together in an organised way. In this context, the term coordination is identified as the central theme of the research. Besides that, in reference to the Malaysian MoH, the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a type of Coronavirus known as SARS-CoV-2 that had caused an ongoing pandemic. The definition of the main keywords highlighted is essential to conducting the research.

Paul Salmon, Neville Stanton, Dan Genkins and Guy Walker (2011) mentioned that military aid to civilian authorities is conducted in a particular occurrence in which the military assist civil agencies in response to disasters (Raja, S.M., et al., 2017). The need for military assistance is urgent and has capabilities to support the civil authority in a fast response. The research shows that unified action is complex because various civil agencies have different mission objectives and inadequate organisational structures and procedures. Therefore, coordination is the main issue in humanitarian response to a disaster. The literature is tally with the actual situation in Malaysia, which the country is still struggling to fight with the COVID-19 pandemic. A MAF medical expert, Brigadier General Dr Mohd Arshil Moideen, mentioned that Malaysia has no solid coordination and unified action in managing the third wave of COVID-19 in-country (Azaman, A., 2021). In the perspective of national security,

COVID-19 affect public health security, economy and society (Djuyandi, Y. et al., 2021). In ASEAN, each member state implemented a variety of strategies to curb the COVID-19 pandemic. However, these mechanisms, which potentially serve as the basis for regional cooperation, have not been significantly operationalised during the first five months of the COVID-19 (Djalante, R. et al., 2020). This research observes that the individual countries struggle to deal with the pandemic and subsequently have a significant negative impact on public health, social and security.

In Malaysia, the Government empowers the NSC to outline the NSC Directive No.20 to assign the MoH as the national focal point in managing any pandemic. The coordination amongst the government agencies, including the MAF, is clearly stated in the directives. But, the guidelines of coordination is more towards frequently natural and man-made disasters prone in Malaysia such as floods, landslide, accidents, and hazards. The lesson learned from this is the most prolonged affected pandemic in the country and global. On 7 July 2021, the NSC had implemented the National Security Policy 2021-2025, the medium-term national plan to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. The concept of the 'People-Centric Security' with the 'Whole of Government, Whole of Society Approach' is expected to enhance the coordination of implementing the Government policy in the future.

Malaysia tabled its first Defence White Paper (DWP) in Parliament on 2 December 2019. The DWP, a government document about the country's strategic direction and defence planning, conveys a key message to all Malaysians that security should not be taken for granted. The primary role of the MAF is to maintain the peace we have and always be ready to defend the nation's interests and sovereignty. Therefore, the contribution of the MAF in MOOTW in assisting the Government in curbing the COVID-19 pandemic is significant. The involvement of MAF in joint operations for humanitarian response is mentioned in the Malaysian Armed Forces Joint Doctrine (MAFJD) to conduct and be ready to assist relevant agencies in an emergency. The research has a similar view with Hassan, H. (2021); the coordination and response from the MAF are crucial in the battle with the COVID-19 outbreak safeguarding national security. The reality of MAF coordination with relevant Government agencies in several humanitarian operations in the response phase of the pandemic is potentially enhancing for the future with more inter-agency interoperability. Currently, the response of the MAF in implementing the Government policy is commendable even though the size of the forces is smaller than other ASEAN countries (Djalante, R., 2020).

Several gaps regarding the policy implementation had been identified in public health response to disasters and emergencies. A study by Gill, B. S., et al. (2020) from the Malaysian Institute of Medical Research, showed the need for Movement Control Order (MCO) to control the outbreak successfully. This study recommends implementing MCO measures, which effectively prevent the COVID-19 outbreak in Malaysia, with strict isolation and quarantine control measures. Another group of researchers also confirms that evidence from this study highlighted that MCO is a mechanism to minimise the spread of COVID-19 outbreak in Malaysia. It assisted the Government of Malaysia in flattening the curve of the virus outbreak with the cooperation of various agencies and the public. (Amiruzzaman, Md., et al., 2021). However, according to Tay, Y.L., et al., (2021), the implementation of MCO had caused public confusion of information. The involvement of firm law enforcement could strengthen the implementation of the MCO to prevent the public from disrespecting the SOP. The evidence shows the Government needs a better law enforcement in developing the SOP for future biological hazards. The different SOP and guidelines in the MCO in each state show ineffective coordination to respond to the policy implementation. Egnell, R. (2013) mentioned that the lack of coordination and unity effort between civil and military is the leading cause of failure to achieve the mission objective. He also emphasises the unity of command between civil and military with a proper organisational structure in a joint operation. In relevant to this research, the lack of unified, coordinated action is prominent from the NSC's MCO policy implementation. It lacks unity of command from the NSC to each state.

The discussion of the research will focus on the context of Malaysia's civil and military inter-agency symmetrical coordination in implementing the NSC policy and guidelines during the MCO from the perspective of MAF. In addition to that, the research primarily to improve the connection between strategic and operational

levels with solid inter-agency symmetrical coordination in safeguarding national security during a virus disease outbreak. The findings from the ineffectiveness of symmetrical coordination in managing the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia will be beneficial to share the lesson learned in-country with the other ASEAN members. Therefore, the focus of the research will analyse Malaysia's civil and military context and propose the model of mitigation that is useful for coordination in the ASEAN region.

In summary, from the literature review, the lack of coordination and the state non-standardisation of movement control implementation is the primary gaps in managing the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, finding a solution for the top-down symmetrical coordination issues is essential to enhance the policy implementation by the Government to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic effectively. Additionally, the knowledge from the research is necessary to foster solid coordination and cooperation at the national level to collectively managing the pandemic.

#### **4. Methodology**

The project paper is a qualitative research method. The document review analysis of primary and secondary data is used to get qualitative information. The planning to find the resources is conducted by phases in doing the study. The information on the primary data is the researcher's observation in the perspective of civil-military coordination in the involvement of OPERATION PENAWAR, OPERATION BENTENG and OPERATION BEKALAN MAKANAN SARAWAK during MCO. Besides, the information on the secondary data is research from books, articles, news, guidelines, SOP from relevant agencies, published journals, internet websites, and other public sources. The primary data of daily COVID-19 cases in the country is collected from Crisis Preparedness and Response Centre (CPRC) to analyse the numbers of deaths categories of virus disease outbreaks from March 2020 until August 2021. The increment numbers of deaths have a significant impact on the problem statement of the research. Besides, the state's MCO implementation is analysed from the NSC's SOP to identify the measure by the state in conducting the MCO.

In addition, for analysing the effectiveness of joint operations, the National Task Force (NTF) is to be taken as a model for civil and military joint operations. The data is collected through reading and the researcher experience in the air logistics for humanitarian operations. Some knowledge is taken from restricted and classified documents from the MAF and NTF joint operations that cannot be exposed to the public. The public information and articles from newspaper for MAF operations and NTF joint operations are being analysed and used to measure the effectiveness of civil and military joint operations. Hence, data collection from triangulation of sources from primary data, secondary data and observation are being examined in detail to investigate the gap analysis for this research. The relevant data collected is essential to strengthen more significant findings of the issues in this research and improve the problems in the future. The summary of the research methodology is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of The Research Methodology

Research Question (RQ)	Research Objective (RO)	Sources	Method	Analysis
RQ 1	RO 1	Secondary: Data collection from journals, articles, news, policy guidelines, SOP, website and public sources	Document review	Research and analysis focuses on the COVID-19 impact on policy implementation, public health and social
RQ 2	RO 2	Primary: Researcher experience in a real-time humanitarian operation	Observation analysis	Researcher observation and analysis on MAF and civil coordination during the humanitarian operation
		Secondary: Data collection from journals, articles, news, policy guidelines, SOP, website and public sources (See References for Authors)	Document review	Research and analysis focuses on finding of the research
RQ 3	RO 3	Secondary: Data collection from journals, articles, news, policy guidelines, SOP, website and public sources (See References for Authors)	Document review	Research and analysis focuses on mitigation recommendation at a strategic level, operational level, and MAF-Civil coordination at the regional level
			In-depth policy analysis	

## 5. Discussion: Malaysia Humanitarian Response in the COVID-19 Pandemic

Effective humanitarian response to the pandemic disease is vital in humanitarian operations. The objective is to relieve people in their survival during the pandemic. The effectiveness in symmetrical coordination between various government and non-governmental agencies guarantees to save more lives in the COVID-19 pandemic. The National Security Council (NSC) provides guidelines for the disaster management plan for a disaster in Malaysia. National Security Council Directive No. 20 mentioned that the control of disease outbreaks in a pandemic is one of a national prone to catastrophe. Directive No. 20 empowers the program's effectiveness by providing a framework for the agencies involved. In the event of a disaster, the National Disaster Management Agency (NADMA), which is part of the Prime Minister's Department, serves as the disaster management focal point. However, concerning disease pandemics, the Ministry of Health (MoH) is the main focal point to control the virus outbreak in the country (NSC Directive No. 20, 2013).

### 5.1. MAF Humanitarian Operation in Response Phase of the Pandemic Movement Controls and National Security

The MAF assists the RMP in OPERATION PENAWAR joint operations of MCO implementation to control and restrict public movement. The objective of the MCO is to prevent the virus disease outbreak and fast transmission amongst the public (Hassan, H., 2020).

The NSC established the National Task Force (NTF) on 29 April 2020 to strengthen national border security from illegal immigrant intrusion to control the COVID-19 virus disease transmission. The joint operations forces consist of 15 Government agencies led by the MAF to coordinate the OPERATION BENTENG for curbing the illegal immigrants' intrusion at all the national land and maritime borders (NTF, 2020). The NSC immediate establishment of the NTF was a tremendous response to control the virus transmission as a non-traditional threat

to national security. The coordination and interoperability of the MAF and various agencies in this joint operation is enhanced by setting up a permanent organisational structure under the command and control of the NSC. The first time large joint operations forces at the national security border also indirectly had a role in deterring illegal activities such as smuggling, drug trafficking, and other non-traditional threats to Malaysia's national security (NTF, 2020).

## **5.2. Humanitarian Logistics and Aid Relief**

The MAF secondary role in MOOTW has the capabilities to provide medical assistance in crises. In the pandemic, the MAF set up field hospitals in the states facing spikes in COVID-19 infections (Bernama, 2021). The setting up of field hospitals in highly affected states could reduce the burden of the MoH in fighting the virus outbreak. In addition, the MAF medical capability in doing contact tracing and screening has significantly assisted the MoH during a critical situation. Besides, the Greater Klang Valley Task Force by the MAF had deployed 1,000 medical personnel to assist in COVID-19 Red Zones in hospitals around the Klang Valley. Furthermore, the MAF deployed the Combat Medic Vaccination Team (CMVT) at interior areas and conducted drive-through vaccinations in collaboration with the National COVID-19 Immunisation Programme (The Star, 2021).

The MAF also provided the humanitarian air logistics supply to the interiors area affected by the supply chains disruption during the early stage of the pandemic (Kawi, M.R., 2020). The Sabah and Sarawak's large and mountainous geographical locations are heavily impacted by the supply chain disruptions towards interiors communities. Hence, the MAF conducted the air logistics supply to deliver essential food, medical items, and vaccination using Airbus A400M and EC 725 helicopter to complete the mission (RMAF, 2021).

## **6. Findings of the Research**

The findings from the research can contribute to the enhancement and practical implications for future benefits. The deductions from the MAF perspectives may become essential to use as a valuable guideline for improving directions and strategic plans for COVID-19 recovery toward resilience and sustainability for Malaysia and future coordination in the ASEAN. The research findings are divided into national strategic and operational levels from the perspective of MAF humanitarian response in the pandemic.

### **6.1. Strategic Level (National Policy Implementation)**

Implementing NSC Directive No.20 and the CPRC actions is the key element of the national response to the pandemic. The NSC's role in leading the Government approach in managing the virus outbreak is crucial. The Prime Minister, Tan Sri Mahiaddin bin Haji Md Yasin has initiated the MCO to prevent the virus outbreak in March 2020. A few series of MCO has been executed; however, the most successful was the MCO 1, which was implemented on 18 March 2020 until 3 May 2020 (Djalante, R. et al., 2020). The other countries recognised the MCO effectiveness at the early stage of implementation. Nevertheless, from the MAF perspective, the MCO implementation on the SOP noticed different execution in some states.

Table 3: The In-Country Movement Control Orders Implementation.

SOP	State Cross Border	District Cross Border	State Cross Border RT-PCR/RTK-Ag test	District Cross Border RT-PCR/RTK-Ag test	State Cross Border Quarantine	Travel Permit
All states in Peninsular	√	√	X	X	X	Police Travel Pass Permission
Sabah	√	√	√	X	√	Police Travel Pass Permission
Sarawak	√	√	√	√	√	Enter Sarawak Application (Appendix 1)
Wilayah Persekutuan Labuan	√	√	√	X	√	Police Travel Pass Permission

Source: NSC by States SOP and Guidelines in MCO

Note: √ - Implemented X - Not Implemented

The different execution in-between states SOP is obvious. Sarawak is consistently strict on movement restrictions with the use of Enter Sarawak digital travel permit. States in Peninsular seems more ease controlling in the state movement compared to Malaysia East region's SOP. The non-standardisation of the policy implemented by the states has shown significant evidence of no symmetrical coordination in implementing the NSC's SOP. The strict restrictions in Malaysia's east region had some advantages in controlling the pandemic. However, the non-standardisation of the SOP had imposed significant challenges to MAF in conducting humanitarian operations between the two regions of Malaysia.

Therefore, several critical points are identified in the research findings at the strategic level policy based on the observations on the MAF response and coordination during the pandemic. The issues identified in the research findings are as follows:

**Lack of Unified Actions.** Based on the evidence of MCO's SOP implementations, it can derive that the NSC guidelines and states executions vary. Some states' non-standardisation SOP guidelines create confusion and difficulties for the MAF personnel to respond in humanitarian operations, especially in Malaysia's east region. The no unified actions by the NSC to coordinate with each state significantly impact the effectiveness of expected symmetrical coordination in the operations.

**Lack in Unity of Command.** During the national pandemic, unity of command from top-down is vital to control the coordination amongst the state and agencies involved. This research shows that the unity of command is questionable with the non-standard execution of SOP in each state. Therefore, the absence of solid command and control in an organisational structure from a top-down approach tends to be manipulated in different ways of policy executions. This condition affects the MAF humanitarian operations under different state management in controlling the pandemic.

**Lack of Sound Decisions Making.** Lesson learned from Sabah state-wide election and continued factory operations in the economic sector during the MCO had caused a rapid surge of COVID-19 cases in the country. The decisions should be analysed at all aspects of the impact on national security and avoid any political interest (MAFJD 0-01, 2011). The effect of decisions made had caused the effort to contain and control the COVID-19 pandemic to become a more extended period. The MAF and other national frontlines had to face challenges in fighting the COVID-19 for a prolonged time.

## **6.2. Operational Level (Interoperability MAF - Civil Agencies)**

The coordination between MAF and RMP in implementing the MCO and humanitarian operations is commendable to curb the virus outbreak. In addition, the establishment of the NTF enhances the interoperability between MAF and other civil agencies in the pandemic by using the DWP 'Total Defence' concept (Omar, M., 2021). A clear organisational structure indirectly improved the coordination effectiveness in safeguarding national land and maritime border security during the COVID-19 pandemic. A single command structure from the NSC directly to the NTF and providing standardisation of SOP between the enforcement agencies is the key element of an efficient approach of the joint task force to curb the national border from non-traditional threat intrusion. Thus, efficient interoperability amongst the enforcement agencies improves the speed of action to prevent unnecessary, illegal activities at the national border. The effectiveness of the NTF in a joint task force for national border security should be an example to the public health authorities to develop a similar joint operation in managing the pandemic. The enforcement agencies involved in the NTF are shown in Figure 2.

The crisis has shown the importance of MAF involvement in the humanitarian response. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have posed some challenges as a lesson learned to improve for the future. Research findings found a gap of connection in unified action, unity of command and decision making between strategic and operational levels should be improved to enhance the response actions in the pandemic. The collaboration between the MAF and relevant agencies can be improved at the national policy level by standardisation of the SOP of each state to execute the humanitarian operations. Furthermore, the establishment of NTF in safeguarding the national land and maritime border security during the pandemic should lead public health authorities to develop a joint operation task force to curb the current and future virus disease outbreak.

## **7. Mitigation for Enhancement of Humanitarian Response in Curbing the Future Biological Hazards**

The COVID-19 pandemic is complex because it impacts both health and the economy. Gaps and issues from the research findings in this research have been identified and analysed. They need immediate mitigation to control the COVID-19 outbreak in the country effectively. The research mitigation is divided into national strategic, operational, and coordination at national levels.

### **7.1. Mitigation**

#### **7.1.1. Strategic Level**

**Unified Actions.** This factor is crucial to managing any crisis. A comprehensive and standardise from the top-down guideline is essential for each state to comply. Formulating the National Security Policy 2021-2025 is a step further to improve the symmetrical coordination from the strategic level. In the policy, comprehensive security with 'The Whole of Government and Society Approach' is vital, specifically in recovering the COVID-19 pandemic. We should realise that the standardisation of policy at each state, agency, and SOP would effectively contain the virus disease outbreak.

**Unity of Command.** Lesson learned from the non-standardisation of SOP implemented at some states could lead to confusion and lack effectiveness in conducting humanitarian operations. Therefore, a single command from the NSC is a must in line with the unified actions from top-down. This critical factor is essential to ensure a standard guideline to be executed in managing the pandemic.

**Decisions Making.** The factor of decisions making is essential in any governance and leadership. In a pandemic, the Government requires to react rapidly and make comprehensive decision-making within a short period. Lesson learned from Sabah state election and eased the subsequent MCO (MCO 2, and MCO 3) implementation further worsen the pandemic situation, with additional factors such as new variants that resilient from vaccination and fast transmission in the community. The decisions should be based on people-centric security, free from political interference and self-interest in governance and leadership during the pandemic.

### 7.1.2. Operational Level

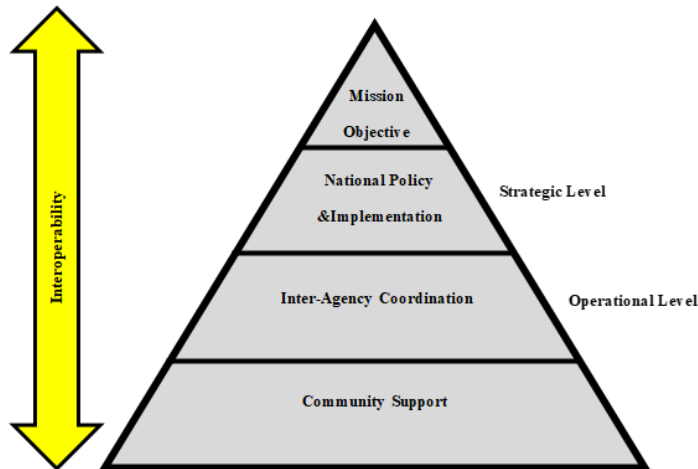


Fig. 1: Model for Whole of Government and Society Approach in Managing the Future Biological Hazards.

Inter-Agency Interoperability with the Whole Government and Society Approach. The concept is similar and relevant to ‘Total Defence’ as mentioned in the national DWP and NDP. The whole of Government and society approaches are the key elements to enhance Malaysia’s national resilience and inter-agency coordination. Enhancing Malaysia’s national resilience through the comprehensive defence reflects the coordination effectiveness of the MAF to assist local authorities in enforcing the policy and humanitarian operations in the pandemic and thus safeguarding national security. The establishment of NTF was an excellent platform example to fight the battle for national security in the pandemic. A similar NTF for national security model can be used to develop a platform in MAF, health authorities, private sectors, and humanitarian NGOs for public health response in an emergency such as the COVID-19. The concept of ‘Joint Inter-Agency Task Force’ for public health emergencies is beneficial in managing the pandemic effectively. Furthermore, establishing the Joint Inter-Agency Task Force for public health will prepare for any biological hazards worse conditions from the experience of the COVID-19 disease outbreak in the future. A Force Integration Training (FIT), similar to military joint force training for any strategic mission, can be developed to enhance the interoperability, SOP, and guideline for future humanitarian operations at a national level.

Inter-Agency Interoperability in People-Centric Security Approach. The lesson learned from the COVID-19 pandemic crisis management on public health could improve in focusing the people's security. The MoH should collaborate with the NSC to identify effective and practical measures to protect the people's security in public health. Adopting a new normal in living should be continuously implemented until the COVID-19 pandemic end. At the same time, the community needs to support and comply with the Government policy implementation to curb the virus disease outbreak by achieving herd immunity as planned in COVID-19 National Immunisation Programme. Hence, interoperability from the top-down and bottom-up reactions from the communities could improve the crucial decision-making from the Government. Moreover, effective information communication from an inter-agency vertical and lateral structure at the operational level should be enhanced to develop greater awareness and sound decision-making from the strategic level to react to the pandemic. In concern to people-centric security, the MAF will continuously assist in implementing Government’s policy at the operational level to protect Malaysian people from the non-traditional threat of virus disease.

### 7.2. MAF and Civil Coordination at Regional Level

Disruptions by the COVID-19 pandemic reflect public health, economic, and regional security in ASEAN. The pandemic inflicts challenge to ASEAN to manage the virus outbreak. Thus, cooperation was essential in the region’s pandemic response and not only limited to sharing the information, but an effective unified action in the

region to help the member states that are still struggling in fighting the pandemic (Djalante, R. et al., 2020). The continuous coordination of NADMA and the AHA Centre is vital in ASEAN-prone natural disasters such as floods, typhoons, earthquakes, tsunami, and currently coordinating biological hazards (CFE-DM, 2019). A present structure of NADMA and AHA Centre coordination in a disaster could expand further in virus disease and pandemic cooperation. As a suggestion, the ASEAN has capabilities in a central role in facilitating symmetrical and coordinated response to COVID-19, based on the experiences of its member states in handling the pandemic. As the host country through MoH, Malaysia coordinates an initiative to support the ASEAN Emergency Operation Centre (ASEAN EOC) to share information and the latest update of the regional pandemic situation (Mohd Huda, M.I. and Adillah Masrol S.N, 2021). In addition, the MAF is committed to delivering aid in humanitarian response during the pandemic. The delivery of medical supplies to Indonesia (as in Figure 2) recently had shown a commitment of MAF in seriously curbing the COVID-19 in the region.



Fig. 2: Royal Malaysian Air Force COVID-19 Humanitarian Aid to Jakarta, Indonesia by C-130 Aircraft on 16 September 2021.

Source: Royal Malaysian Air Force Website dated 16 September 2021.

The mitigation of humanitarian response in Malaysia and ASEAN is essential to enhance effective symmetrical coordination at all levels to curb the COVID-19 pandemic and future biological hazards. The unified actions, unity of command, and decision-making at a strategic level are vital to respond effectively to the challenging and complex global pandemic. At the same time, inter-agency interoperability at an operational level is a must to support the strategic level policy implementation to react in the virus disease outbreak. The current and future regional and global challenges in managing the complex and dynamic virus outbreak will demand solid international coordination. Thus, a correct mechanism and response significantly provide decisive action to prevent and control a pandemic.

## 8. Conclusion And Recommendations

The significance of the research is beneficial to the policymakers, Government agencies, humanitarian organizations, academicians, and researchers to enhance knowledge of humanitarian response in biological hazards. Thus, the importance of the research and contribution are as follows:

To develop academic knowledge to the humanitarian researcher of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia and the ASEAN. The lesson learned from the impact of the virus outbreak in the country, region, and global is essential to improve humanitarian operation in disaster relief during the pandemic. In addition, this research is to enhance academic knowledge of managing the virus outbreak in the future.

To enhance Malaysia's national policy and guidelines to curb the pandemic. It is excellent to augment and standardise coordination, cooperation, and collaboration between the various Government agencies, including the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), to control any pandemic in the future. This research also will provide

a greater awareness of better coordination by understanding the policy and guidelines in humanitarian response in a disaster in the country and the ASEAN.

To highlight the importance of civil and military coordination in humanitarian aid to respond effectively to a pandemic at the national and regional level. In Malaysia, civil and military coordination in the COVID-19 pandemic is crucial to maintaining public health and national security. The response of MAF to assist relevant agencies and implementation of the Government policy during the pandemic is essential in humanitarian operations. In the ASEAN, according to ASEAN Joint Disaster Response Plan (AJDRP), the military in the ASEAN member states is under the state actor, same as the National Disaster Management Organization (NDMO). AJDRP initiatives to enhance civil-military coordination are the ASEAN Militaries Ready Group (AMRG) and the ASEAN Centre for Military Medicine (ACMM). However, each ASEAN Member State's civil-military coordination arrangements may differ. The afflicted Member State will be in charge of these arrangements, which will be tailored to the disaster's complexity. Therefore, the research is to highlight the civil-military coordination that occurs during emergency response situations.

To recognize the coordination of MAF, NADMA, and the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance (AHA Centre) and enable the ASEAN to respond to humanitarian operations in the region. MAF, NADMA, and the AHA Centre are recognized to coordinate humanitarian operation arrangements between Malaysia and the ASEAN concerning the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER). The AHA Centre facilitates disaster management collaboration, cooperation, and coordination among member states. The AHA Centre's main function is to assist the government of the afflicted Member State by organizing incoming humanitarian aid from other Member States and other organizations. Hence, the AHA Centre leading role in coordinating the humanitarian aid in the ASEAN promotes regional collaboration and stability amongst the Member States. The best practice is to understand the national and the ASEAN organisational structure to improve the collaboration of MAF, NADMA, and the AHA Centre. Contributions to the congress are welcome from throughout the world.

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