

National Security Council (NSC) Role in Managing the Covid-19 Pandemic: Effectiveness, Domestic Political Interference and Coordination of Inter-Agency and Central/State NSC

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Abstract

National security threats have now grown to include health issues as a new emergency agenda with the emergence of the Covid-19 Pandemic that has hit the whole world. This pandemic has become a major crisis for the country when many lives have been lost and the country's economy has been affected. As the threat has become a national crisis, National Security Council (NSC) are responsible to deal with it, as the main national security coordinator, together with other agencies including the main agency in the health field namely the Ministry of Health Malaysia (MOH). Many strategies are highlighted as disease control mechanisms including the implementation of the Movement Control Order (MCO), quarantine for those with symptoms, use of disease control equipment, symptom detection through MySejahtera including vaccination, closure of non-essential business operations, country entry restrictions and social events as well as many other government initiatives including the establishment of call centers in each agency and the provision of people assistance. However, there are challenges in the strategy implemented. Therefore, it is important to analyze the extent of NSC capability in dealing with Covid-19 Pandemic. The study found that NSC was reactive in dealing with the Covid-19 Pandemic, thus making NSC

more recognized and trusted. NSC coordination with other Ministries/Agencies is active but partially effective with the state due to interference from the state government and issues related to state NSC which do not refer to the central NSC. Political interference has resulted in an increase in the pandemic spread and cause people distrust in government approach.

Keywords: Covid-19 Pandemic, NSC, Inter-Agency Coordination, Central and State NSC Coordination, Domestic Political Interference

1. Introduction

The Covid-19 Pandemic has hit the whole world including Malaysia. It is a form of new disease outbreak that is very dangerous because it can infect people quickly and then cause death in a short time. This disease originated from China and then spread throughout the country. The human death rate due to this disease is very high and it not only affects people safety, but also the economic stability when it forced to be limited and causes the people to lack sources of income and led to death which shown a high number of suicide cases due to life pressure.

Evans (2016) argued that the disease issue could not be separated from the national security issue and should be considered as a threat to national security and efforts to deal with disease outbreaks should be a global priority. His argument also supported by Oshewolo and Nwozor (2020) where they stated that infectious diseases as security problem due to the ability in threatening national security with easily spreading pandemics among the population. Siti Nurhasanah et al. (2020) later stated that the Covid-19 Pandemic is a virus with the greatest impact on human security compared to other viruses that have appeared before and the country should prepare by strengthening the national health security defense to face stronger viruses in the future.

Therefore, each country has implemented various measures and strategies to deal with this disease. Among the measures that most countries implement is the Curfew Order or in Malaysia known as the Movement Control Order (MCO). This step is taken to prevent the spread of this pandemic which can infect humans only through face-to-face contact and conversation without face mask. Menhat et al. (2021) stated that the Recovery Movement Control Order (RMCO) measures also provide additional advantages to regain economic strength following the economic recession. In addition to the MCO, most countries also implement orders requiring the wearing of face masks and social distancing. The execution of work and business is also recommended to be carried out online. For compliance purposes, most countries impose penalties on those who do not comply and deploy security personnel monitoring and arrest those who break the rules.

Most countries also create special laws as a source of authority in dealing with this disease since it is a form of health threat that turns into a national security crisis. In addition, most countries have also created various forms of special forces and control centers to handle this pandemic. Most countries also implement vaccination to prevent the infection of this pandemic. However, some countries do not require it because it is based on individual rights. The vaccine implementation is also an issue when some people refuse to comply due to

various rumors of long term vaccine effected.

Elengoe (2020) states that to date, there is no vaccine or specific treatment for the Covid-19 Pandemic. Therefore, preventive measures are important to prevent and control the rapid spread of this pandemic. Preparedness should be a priority for future pandemic outbreaks. However, Hashim et al. (2021) stated the best approach to achieve herd immunity against Covid-19 is through vaccination. According to them, the death rate of Covid-19 cases in Malaysia is lower than the death rate around the world, due to the successful implementation of preparations and early planning, public health systems and hospitals, comprehensive contact tracing, active case tracing, and enhanced tight MCO.

In the economic aspect in particular, the Malaysian Government has provided an initial financial stimulus amounting to RM20.0 billion in February 2020, before the PRIHATIN Package amounting to RM250 billion was announced. The PRIHATIN package has provided government support to the community, covering people of various backgrounds from students and families to business owners. The Malaysian government through Central Bank of Malaysia (BNM) also offered a 6-month moratorium to reduce the financial burden. All Malaysians have played their part through different channels to help the country in facing and ensuring that the community and country are free from Covid-19 (Md Shaha et al., 2020). The stimulus package is expected to help all business sectors survive the economic downturn during the MCO and Conditional Movement Control Order (CMCO) period. Apart from government incentives, each sector needs to make changes in overall operational efficiency to better respond (Menhat et al., 2021).

In addition to the government efforts, other actors also participate in curbes the Covid-19 Pandemic. Md Shaha et al. (2020) stated that media actively spread the hashtag #stayhome. Then, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and prison inmates, began producing personal protective equipment for the front line. Various organizations also organize fundraising events to provide important needs especially to hospitals. A temporary hospital has been established and cooperation with healthcare service providers has been provided, while additional laboratories have been commissioned to increase the MOH capacity. It can be seen that the Covid-19 Pandemic is a new form of threat to the country, which indirectly creates a crisis in the country as well as foreign countries.

2. Covid-19 Pandemic Crisis/Threat in Malaysia

In Malaysia, the Covid-19 Pandemic crisis/threat is managed and coordinated by National Security Council (NSC) after being entrusted to be the coordinating agency due to the fact that the health threat has become a national crisis and no longer a mere health threat. However, NSC still cooperates with health main agency, Ministry of Health (MOH) and other related agencies.

At the beginning of Covid-19 Pandemic, it was initially handled by the National Disaster Management Agency (NADMA) but when the discussion meeting was chaired by Prime Minister, NADMA had no authority to direct the army and police. Therefore, the Senior Private Secretary (SUSK) to the Deputy Prime Minister at time requested NSC to take over.

NSC only agreed to handle once these pandemic declare as a national crisis. SUSK to Deputy Prime Minister then asked NADMA their views on this matter and NADMA admitted that they were unable to perform. Due to that, the Covid-19 Pandemic was finally taken over by NSC. It is appropriate based on the fact that NADMA has no power to declare a crisis.¹

Based on previous scholarly studies, Yong and Sia (2021) stated that among the Malaysian government's initiatives to deal with the Covid-19 Pandemic is through the implementation of the MCO on March 18, 2020. Gill et al. (2020) also stated that isolation, quarantine and MCO measures are important to stop the spread of Covid-19 in Malaysia, where isolation and quarantine control measures solely cannot control the pandemic effectively without MCO. The MCO has proven to be effective and succeeded in reducing Covid-19 Pandemic spread by 99.1 percent (active cases).

Their statement is supported by Hashim et al. (2021) who stated that the Malaysian government has implemented MCO in 4 phases for 2 months, ending on May 12, 2020. According to them, this is following the pandemic which is the largest infectious disease that has ever hit Malaysia, claiming more than 100 lives of Malaysians especially the elderly and those with existing illnesses. From the economic aspect, they stated that the country had suffered a loss of RM2.4 billion per day during the MCO period and a cumulative loss of RM63 billion until the end of April 2020 which caused Malaysia to slow down the MCO and reopen its economic sector in reducing economic burden starting on May 4, 2020 .

Yusuf and Oyelakin (2022) agreed by stating that Covid-19 Pandemic has a negative impact on Malaysian economy where it has been severely affected, including consumer products and Malaysian manufacturing firms (consumer product manufacturing) due to the businesses closure that leading to a reduction in the consumers income. They suggest that the policy makers, through legislation, create a strong welfare safety net of economic recovery for all citizens, especially for citizens who have lost their jobs, and those from poor households and build appropriate digital infrastructure. This in conjunction to Moni et al. (2021), which stated that the Covid-19 Pandemic has greatly affected the psychological, social and life well-being of millions workers and those who are infected and burdened with financial problems. Therefore, the government needs to support their mental well-being. However, according to Azlan et al. (2020), Malaysians have a good level of knowledge regarding Covid-19 and a positive outlook to overcome the pandemic.

The issue of mental stress disorders is indeed a problem that is identified or called burn out, especially for employees who are burdened with a heavy workload ahead of the Covid-19 Pandemic. MOH has established a committee for this purpose, which consists of members from mental health experts to draw up guidelines on how workers in the field can look out of their mental health. MOH has also issued a support system such as giving leave to health workers etc.²

Thus, the study analysis found that various initiatives have been implemented by the

¹ Abdul Rahman, N. (2023, January 10). Personal communication [Personal interview].

² Appannan, M. (2023, January 19). Personal communication [Personal interview].

Malaysian Government to contain the Covid-19 Pandemic. Among them is through the implementation of the MCO but due to the country suffering huge losses, the Government had to slow down the MCO and re-open its economic sector. In addition, the Government also implements vaccination as an initial risk management measure. The government also provides information related to the pandemic educational programs to increase knowledge and provide mental support to the people.

This initiative implemented by the Government also showed success when the MCO proved to be effective and succeeded in reducing active cases of the Covid-19 Pandemic spread by 99.1 percent and the death rate in Malaysia is lower than the global level due to the successful implementation of public health preparations and hospital system comprehensively, along with the detection of active cases and MCO improved more strictly. Besides, it seen that the national security management structure will change. It is expected that in the next few years many will lose their lives due to disease rather than war. Based on the Covid-19 experience, there are indeed effects the national security structure which need to be proactive and anticipate the risk.³

3. NSC as the Main Coordinating Agency for Covid-19 Pandemic

Ahead of the global Covid-19 Pandemic spread, which hit Malaysia in early 2020, the NSC function has expanded. The task of managing the Covid-19 crisis is divided between NSC, NADMA, MOH, Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), Immigration Department of Malaysia (IDM), Royal Malaysia Police (RMP), Malaysian Armed Forces (MAF) and most of other government agencies. Based on the Ministers Special Meeting related to the MCO implementation No. 1/2020 on March 16, 2020, the NSC was identified as the main coordinating agency that determines the country's response in dealing with the spread of Covid-19 outbreak. It can be seen that there is the development of NSC's role and function from national security in racial strife aspect to health aspect (Covid-19 Pandemic). It is in line with the changes in contemporary global threats affecting the world.

Various initiatives taken by the NSC to deal with Covid-19 Pandemic such as establishing committees involving security agencies and other relevant agencies. In addition, the NSC also implements the MCO, the closure of business centers that are not essential categories and borders, mandating the use of face masks/temperature checks/MySejahtera registration, implementing vaccinations, providing legal provisions and Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), establishing a call center, prohibit entry and exit between countries, traffic control and arresting those who do not comply with the rules/laws. The government also provides special assistance to those in the low-income category, but there is also assistance for all levels, i.e the exemption of monthly bank commitment (moratorium) up to 6 months.

With the passage of time, the government also exited MCO in phases such as Movement Control Order (MCO), Conditional MCO (CMCO), Recovery MCO (RMCO) and Enhanced MCO (EMCO). It is implemented in phases due to the economic factors concurrently. MOH is

³ Appannan, M. (2023, January 19). Personal communication [Personal interview].

of the view that the phased method proposed by the NSC is appropriate.⁴

In coordinating the Covid-19 Pandemic, NSC has established internal working groups which was divided according to clusters such as the inter-agency cluster responsible for coordinating inquiries and requests from Government Ministries and Agencies including private companies, the Inter-State cluster responsible for coordinating issues in the state level, the SOP cluster which coordinates the MCO SOP, the communication cluster which is responsible for monitoring issues related to virality and broadcasts in the media including social media, the call center cluster which coordinates inquiries and feedback from people/public and the SOP compliance cluster responsible for monitoring the SOP compliance. The NSC also acts as the secretariat for MCO coordination meetings at the highest level involving Ministers and at the technical committee level involving representatives from all agencies and ministries in dealing with issues related to the Covid-19 Pandemic management and implementation.

As the number of cases on Covid-19 infection continues to increase, the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Muhyiddin Yassin has declared a State of Emergency for the entire Federation effect from January 11, 2021 to August 1, 2021, which he had previously received approval from the Yang di-Pertuan Agong. This declaration of emergency was implemented as a proactive measure to contain the symptoms of the Covid-19 Pandemic and increase the enforcement of public safety and order.⁵

An Emergency Management Technical Committee has been established to monitor issues related to the implementation and management of emergencies (Ruzki, 2021). All decisions throughout the implementation of the emergency are discussed in the Emergency Management Technical Committee Meeting and will be raised for the NSC Emergency Session approval. In addition, the Yang di-Pertuan Agong had also previously approved the formation of an Independent Committee consisting of government and opposition parliamentarians as well as health and related experts (Mat, 2021).

Yang di-Pertuan Agong also informed that the Independent Committee will recommend to him if the implementation of the emergency can be ended earlier. The declared emergency proclamation was not a form of military coup and the curfew was not implemented either (Azman, 2021). During the emergency period, the federal and state governments administrative machinery as well as economic activities, Bursa Malaysia and the Securities Commission will continue to function.⁶ However, General Elections and State Elections will not be held during the emergency period (Azman, 2021). A total of 240 civil servants have been sent to NSC for assisting the emergency management.⁷

The emergency implementation is a big decision and has a huge impact on the economy, politics and society. When this decision is made, the government needs to be absolutely sure

⁴ Appannan, M. (2023, January 19). Personal communication [Personal interview].

⁵ *Astro Awani*. (2021, January 12).

⁶ *Berita Harian*. (2021, January 12).

⁷ Abdul Rahman, N. (2023, January 10). Personal communication [Personal interview].

that it is a wise decision. The overall implementation during the emergency is good but it is very important to ensure that all decisions taken must be transparent to avoid negative perceptions from the people.⁸ The ordinance under the state emergency was repealed when it ended on the grounds of interfering with freedom of expression. However, the NSC has explained that there are still limitations when it may affect people health and well-being.⁹

Another step implemented by the NSC is by coordinating the National Task Force (NTF) establishment on May 6, 2021 where one of the NTF roles is the Operation Fortress (Ops Benteng) which was activated on May 12, 2020 as an the government effort to curb cross-border crime as well as strengthen the national border control from the entry of illegal migrant to curb the spread of Covid-19 Pandemic. The NTF also coordinate operations in an integrated manner involving 19 security and enforcement agencies at the national border, with 4 main agencies namely MAF, RMP, Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA) and IDM, through three (3) components namely maritime operations, land operations and air operations.¹⁰ Ops Benteng has successfully helped curb the entry of illegal migrant into the country totaling 15,586 and 1,049 skipper until May 19, 2021. The NSC also coordinates discussions to resolve issues and problems related to staffing, allocations and assets in the implementation of operations under the NTF.¹¹

However, the establishment of NTF and Ops Benteng has issues related to the chain of command when it is conducted by the army and police are not comfortable with it. This matter is a small challenge that exists during the implementation of MCO Phase 1. During MCO Phase 2, it is related to the emergency proclamation and being monitored by the Independent Committee and there is political instability occurred. Prime Minister at time, Muhyiddin Yasin tried to remain it under the management of NSC.¹²

Under administrative by Prime Minister, Ismail Sabri at time, there has been an encouraging development especially in the implementation of vaccination program and the management of Covid-19 Pandemic for the Malaysian population. Therefore, on April 1, 2022, Malaysia open the borders that were previously closed due to the outbreak of Covid-19 Pandemic¹³ This shows that the NSC succeeded in coordinating Covid-19 Pandemic issue effectively. NACSA, NSC also coordinates the vaccination system (MySejahtera) in collaboration with MOH.

The NSC has also successfully invited the private sector and people to cooperate with the Government. The NSC also issued flyers for the purpose of this emergency proclamation due to the people did not cooperate with the government. The various steps that NSC took to persuade people to cooperate, are set out in the pamphlet. The NSC also took over the camps to be used as quarantine centers and training institutions as well as Malaysia Agro Exposition

⁸ Appannan, M. (2023, January 19). Personal communication [Personal interview].

⁹ Abdul Rahman, N. (2023, January 10). Personal communication [Personal interview].

¹⁰ NSC Official Document.

¹¹ NSC Official Document

¹² Abdul Rahman, N. (2023, January 10). Personal communication [Personal interview].

¹³ *The Official Website of the Prime Minister's Office through a Media Statement.* (2022, March 24).

Park Serdang (MAEPS) which was used as a hospital.¹⁴

Through the researcher's experience, the NSC as the coordinating agency for Covid-19 has successfully demonstrated its credibility in coordinating the management of the Covid-19 Pandemic, so that the MCO has been successfully terminated and the people can live with the new norm. The country has also moved to the Endemic phase starting on April 1, 2022, where at the same time, the country's borders have also been opened. Additionally, on September 7, 2022, the Minister of Health at time, Khairy Jamaluddin stated that wearing a face mask in closed places is no longer mandatory.¹⁵ These changes show that the NSC has managed to coordinate the Covid-19 Pandemic well.

4. NSC Challenges in Managing the Covid-19 Pandemic

In dealing with the Covid-19 Pandemic, there are weaknesses that have arisen from the aspect of coordination between agencies leading to confusion and ignorance among the people regarding the roles and responsibilities of the NSC and other agencies. Confusion arose when the NSC became the co-ordinator of Covid-19 Pandemic. For example, the approval of applications to go abroad and enter the country during MCO period is repeatedly channeled to NSC even though it should actually be channeled to the IDM. Likewise with the quarantine exemption application which should have been channeled to NADMA but was channeled to NSC. Applications for the entry of private jets and airplanes into the country and abroad are also channeled to the NSC even though they should be channeled to the Ministry of Transport (MOT). The same goes for cross-district and state applications that should have been sent to the RMP but were sent to the NSC.

There is also confusion regarding the permission to operate for offices and business centers that should be channeled to MITI but channeled to NSC. Confusion in the role and function of the NSC in dealing with the Covid-19 Pandemic between the NSC and the MOH also occurred due to MOH is not a member of NSC Session.¹⁶ Although NSC and other agencies have made notifications of their duties through various channels including on telegram, news and social media, as well as establishing a call center for the NSC and in every related government agency, but it is still arises people confusion. Confusion by the people and among agencies related to the difference in NSC functions and roles with other Ministries/Agencies and due to the fact that NSC is an agency that acts behind the scenes.¹⁷

The weakness is also related to the power struggle between the government. This issue often raised at Technical Meetings and Emergency Sessions. For example the NTF led by MAF, is not favor by the RMP and led to the lack of cooperation from them. The issue is also related to the transition of the MCO phase to the recovery phase in which created confusion to the people in term of movement.¹⁸

¹⁴ Abdul Rahman, N. (2023, January 10). Personal communication [Personal interview].

¹⁵ Ridauddin Daud (2022, 7 September). *Astro Awani*.

¹⁶ Ahamad, A. (2022, July 13). Personal communication [Personal interview].

¹⁷ Abdul Rahman, N. (2023, January 10). Personal communication [Personal interview].

¹⁸ Abdul Rahman, N. (2023, January 10). Personal communication [Personal interview].

There are challenges in information sharing too. Possibly due to agencies' lack of understanding, communication problems and time constraints. Information sharing is necessary for the NSC in decision making towards the agencies, where complete and fast information is needed. However, information sharing is currently still manual, where it is difficult for information to be collected systematically.¹⁹

In the matter of lack in communication, there is a need to improve communication between agencies and communities. There are many ways to improve this issues such as taking private experience and expertise from the aspect of how to improve communication with the community, taking available opportunities and through social media etc. The government needs to focus on the missing information issue and needs to take an approach and strategy on how to deal with it. In addition, the government should improve the communicates skills with the community and keep be sensitive and aware.²⁰

There is also a coordination problem between the central and state NSC cause by interference from the state government. The state government usually has their own views and legislation/regulations that the state NSC needs to follow and constrains the state NSC to fulfill or fully comply with the rules set by the central NSC. The state government intervention also caused confusion to people regarding the non-uniformity of the rules set between the NSCs. In addition, there is also the issue where the state NSC acting without consulting with the central NSC that causes problems. This coordination issue is evident in Covid-19 Pandemic management where there are differences in the rules set between the central and state NSC.

When our country is united and some states are not aligned with the government, there is indeed a problem. In an emergency situation like the Covid-19 Pandemic, we need to set aside our political views and there is a needs to set an objective of how Malaysians leaders suppose to be in the same direction and put aside differences to achieve same goal. If there is political interference that not in the same direction, it will difficult to achieve the set objectives.²¹

If we look at the effect on intervention of political involvement in the effectiveness of the NSC dealing with Covid-19 Pandemic, if the intervention is from the MOH, it prioritizes the health of people, but if the intervention from MITI, it prioritizes the economy and industry income, whereas industry is one of the factors that led Covid-19 pandemic increment and infection. Then political interference through the implementation of elections in the state of Sabah also caused an increase in the rate of infection, even though the NSC had issued a SOP on this matter.²²

In addition, the recent changes in the NSC function and role in facing Covid-19 Pandemic has also increased the NSC official workload where there are many committees created to deal with Covid-19 pandemic. Meetings and discussions are also held almost every day. This

¹⁹ Appannan, M. (2023, January 19). Personal communication [Personal interview].

²⁰ Appannan, M. (2023, January 19). Personal communication [Personal interview].

²¹ Appannan, M. (2023, January 19). Personal communication [Personal interview].

²² Abdul Rahman, N. (2023, January 10). Personal communication [Personal interview].

situation causes the existing NSC staff and officers in the central or state are unable to cope with this burden. In other case, there are issues related to fake news. When the NSC started implementing the vaccination program, various issues arose from anti-vaccine groups.²³

5. Covid-19 Pandemic Analysis Based On 3Ps Model

The research method are based on perception of the government, the private sector and the public towards the NSC involvement in managing and dealing with the Covid-19 Pandemic crisis/threat using the Tripartite Model of National Security (3Ps Model) perspectives.

The 3Ps model refers to the Public Sector (government), Private and People (public), which was built based on writings by scholars Park and Chung (2021), Zaini (2020) and E. Ite (2003). Park and Chung (2021) stated that the government in South Korea has involved the private sector in curbing the spread of Covid-19. The involvement is through cooperation in the formation of test kits and health checks for the Covid-19 pandemic throughout the country, including for the people and non-citizens. This approach by the South Korean government has proven that the spread of Covid-19 pandemic has been successfully dealt with in just one month at the beginning of the spread. Zaini (2020) proves that information from the public has increased the enforcement and inspection in Negeri Sembilan and led to the successful suppression of human trafficking syndicates at the Malaysia-Indonesia border. His writing shows that cooperation between the government and the people is important in dealing with national security threats. He also highlighted the Whole of Government (WOG) and Whole of Society (WOS) methods as a form of coordination between government agencies and society in perfecting the national security framework. E. Ite (2003) emphasized the importance of Nigeria through the government in dealing with the people's poverty issue with an attitude of trust and transparency to be able to contribute on the wealth and economic growth of the country. With that, it forms the 3Ps Model which involves the government, the private sector and the public.

From the people and the private sector perception, Hashim et al. (2021) stated that good cooperation between government agencies and the public has made the country successfully overcome the first two waves of Covid-19 Pandemic. Later, although the third wave proved to be more frightening, but managed to be controlled.

However, Hong and Chu (2021) have a different perception by stating that the main factor causing the increase in Covid-19 cases is the lack of cooperation between the public and the government. The results of their study found that the current situation of Covid-19 in Malaysia is in a bad situation due to an exponential growth and Twitter activity that showed the public does not interested in Covid-19 topic shared by MOH. Therefore, new positive cases increased dramatically after September 2020 in Malaysia. They found that people worried of the news came from MOH related to MCO and MCOB implementation.

Their view of the people's concern on MCO actually has explained in the study of Ismail et al (2021) who stated that the Covid-19 pandemic has caused the Malaysian Government to

²³ Abdul Rahman, N. (2023, January 10). Personal communication [Personal interview].

implement MCO but it will affect the national income in 2020. According to them, household groups are expected to face high economic risks during the MCO implementation. The findings of their study show that groups of households experience changes in daily consumption patterns after the MCO implementation and due to insufficient savings which cause households to remain worried on their consumption especially if MCO is extended for a longer period.

Habibullah et. al (2021) also supports this statement by stating that restrictive measures due to the Covid-19 Pandemic has cause people to loss their job. They stated that the Covid-19 Pandemic has created an inevitable economic crisis where the labour market is severely affected, and higher unemployment occurs as people lose income. Daud (2021) on the other hand is of the view that the rich people, including T20 have not been significantly affected by the pandemic except for large corporate players involved in severely affected sectors such as aviation, tourism, and hospitality, while in the health and medical sectors have made big profits. The B40 people, especially the poor, have suffered greatly. This situation shows more poverty and inequality.

Jason et. al (2021) stated that the public health response was successful in containing the Covid-19 Pandemic spread on the first half of 2020. However, the positive view of the people can become negative when the government's approach is not consistent. It proven when the state election has been a catalyst for the Covid-19 Pandemic spread. Shanmugam et. al (2020) then stated that the Covid-19 Pandemic has effect people mental health by generate anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorders, and unpleasant social effects.

From the government's perception, the community and the private sector are indeed involved. During the outbreak of the Covid-19 Pandemic, the involvement of the private sector stood out and opened the government's eyes to the importance of public partnership when it was seen that many matters were achieved. For example, when public hospitals are overcrowded, MOH has sent some patients to private hospitals. Then, the implementation of vaccines is also a collaboration with the private sector or private medical centres to achieve the objective of giving vaccines to the people and in ensure that the program is successfully implemented and reaches 90 percent of the people's population.²⁴ In terms of community, the Covid-19 pandemic has opened the people eyes when they understand that health is not solely the government responsibility but involves individual and community in Malaysia. Now the government has also empowered community to be more proactive in carrying out self-tests if they have Covid-19 symptoms.²⁵ Even so, there are still people who confused of NSC roles with other agencies due to the fact that NSC works without publicity and behind the scenes.²⁶

Now NSC has changed from act behind the scenes to become more prominent through increased communication from all parties in jointly national security safeguard. It is in line with NSC's call through National Security Policy (DKN) 2021-2025 where security is a

²⁴ Appannan, M. (2023, January 19). Personal communication [Personal interview].

²⁵ Appannan, M. (2023, January 19). Personal communication [Personal interview].

²⁶ Ishak, H. (2022, July 18). Personal communication [Personal interview].

shared responsibility. However, the level of secrecy remains maintained, i.e the information shared to the public and media is only basic to allay the public's fears but for tactical issues remain in partnership between security agencies and related parties. It is important to distinguish between important, confidential and public information. All authentic sources must come from the Government.²⁷

The big role played by NSC in dealing with the Covid-19 Pandemic are through the involvement of all parties. The solution to this pandemic crisis/threat is largely determined by the NSC mechanism. Malaysia is one of the countries that successfully dealt with the Covid-19 Pandemic. The threat of this pandemic is a new experience for the country. The involvement mechanism are from various agencies, private sector, NGOs and people. It is also addressed through the SOP.²⁸

In dealing with the Covid-19 Pandemic crisis/threat, the NSC acts as a coordinator while MOH is an executor. Among the challenges faced is the overlap of functions with MOH. There are difficulties in coordination between agencies but coordination between the central and state NSC are great, although there are challenges by state government interference for political interests. Cooperation by the people and private sector to the NSC also great but there are still who reluctant to cooperate. NSC needs to continue as coordinator for health issues. NSC's biggest contribution in managing Covid-19 Pandemic is through the SOPs issued. The Covid-19 Pandemic crisis/threat has expanded the NSC roles in the national security management structure.²⁹ In dealing with the Covid-19 Pandemic correspondingly, the NSC also refers to NSC Directive No. 20. In other matter, the quarantine centres for patient funded through the National Disaster Relief Trust Fund (KWABBN) under NADMA.³⁰

There is a government perception that sees the NSC only taking action when the crisis becomes serious but in the early stages, the NSC seems to not concerned.³¹ Even so, NSC spotted to be effective in managing the Covid-19 Pandemic when the country has shown other countries how we managed it successfully.³²

MOH perception is of the view that we need to understand that this Covid-19 is not expected by anyone. The NSC as the premier government agency responsible for managing the Covid-19 Pandemic has coordinated brilliantly. However, the NSC can make improvements and evaluate whether the decisions made are effective or otherwise. Overall, MOH was very impressed with the leadership shown by the NSC.³³

From the NGO's perspective, Yayasan Ikhlas (YI) provides assistance to hospitals that do not

²⁷ Ishak, H. (2022, July 18). Personal communication [Personal interview].

²⁸ Md Saad, R. (2022, July 14). Personal communication [Personal interview].

²⁹ Alias, Z. (2022, July 14). Personal communication [Personal interview].

³⁰ Ahamad, A. (2022, July 13). Personal communication [Personal interview].

³¹ Hussin, R. (2022, July 14). Personal communication [Personal interview].

³² Sulaiman, S. (2023, 25 January). Personal communication [Personal interview].

³³ Appannan, M. (2023, January 19). Personal communication [Personal interview].

have enough Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) where NGOs understand that the governments suffering from a lack of resources. Due to that, YI tried to assist the government by sewing 200,000 PPE and sending them all over the Peninsula, Sabah and Sarawak. A total of RM9 million has been spent by YI to provide 200,000 PPE. However, there is the lack of coordination from NSC with NGOs. The role of NGOs is huge if NSC can fully coordinate. The NSC should have more meetings with NGOs. In other matter, YI felt that elections should not be held during the Covid-19 Pandemic. YI hopes that when there is a crisis/threat, it is best that these politicians do not interfere for political interests and set aside this political mileage in order to provide immediate assistance to the people for their benefit.³⁴

6. Results and Conclusions

Overall, the analysis unravels that the NSC's involvement in dealing with Covid-19 Pandemic is "reactive" through various initiatives including the MCO and vaccination implementation, preparation of SOPs, the creation of various committees, organizing regular meetings, cooperation between agencies and states, roadblocks, restrictions on entering and exiting the country, mandating the use of safety protective equipment, the creation of MySejahtera, channeling various forms of aid and others. NSC's involvement is not classified as proactive due to the Covid-19 pandemic that hit is unforeseen, which never experiences by the country before to enable the early implementation.

The government initiatives are seen to be effective and successful in reducing the number of Covid-19 Pandemic infections. Success is also proven when the country has moved to the endemic phase, the national borders have been opened and the wearing of face masks as well as My Sejahtera requirement have been abolished. MCO has also been terminated. Based on the government, the people and the private sector perception, the overall seen that NSC has successful playing it role in dealing with the Covid-19 Pandemic. The problem that exists is due to the lack of cooperation from some people with an attitude of not complying the rules or government instructions.

If we look at how this new security threat has an impact on the NSC and other security agencies management, it has expanded the NSC role in national security management structure where in the past NSC only dealt with security threats, but now included health threats. This led NSC better known by people and other government agencies. It also strengthens NSC's position as the main coordinating agency for national security due to the increase of public's confidence in NSC's credibility. Previously, the existence of NSC was doubted and there were proposals to abolish NSC.

As for NSC's involvement in coordination with security and other agencies, NSC has performed an active cooperation with relevant agencies and has proven successful in coordinating it in an orderly manner. This proven via NSC holds regular meetings with the agencies to monitor and determine the implementation. In addition, NSC has also issued SOP as a guide to all agencies and the people as a whole. NSC also managed to coordinate with MOH on the vaccination and proven it was implemented well. There are scholars who in

³⁴ Kassim, K. (2023, 2 February). Personal communication [Personal interview].

view that great cooperation between agencies has made the country successfully overcome the first two waves of the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, it can be seen that NSC's involvement in coordinating agencies is active.

For the effectiveness of coordination between the central and state NSC in dealing with the Covid-19 Pandemic, there is a coordination challenges occurred due to interference from the state government for political interests. These cause problem in coordination and confusion to the people regarding the non-uniformity of the rules set between the central and state NSC. In addition, there is an issue where the state NSC does not refer to the central NSC in making decisions, thus causing differences in the regulations set.

The coordination issues also arises when the Covid-19 Pandemic which suppose to fully transferred to the MOH after the country has moved to the endemic phase but still under the NSC. This shows a lack of coordination on the setting. However, there is a perception that the coordination between central and state NSC is great. Thus, the researchers found that the central and state NSC coordination in dealing with Covid-19 Pandemic is partially effective since there are still problems and challenges faced.

For the political intervention analysis that affects the NSC effectiveness in dealing with Covid-19 Pandemic, the government's actions which are seen to prioritize political interests over the people safety with the implementation of elections have resulted in an increase on the pandemic spread and cause people distrust in government approach. This also shows that political interference has increased the number of pandemic cases and reduced the people's confidence towards the government.

Hence, it is concluded that NSC's involvement in dealing with the Covid-19 Pandemic is reactive and brings positive effects when NSC is better known and its role expands from dealing with security to health. NSC's coordination with other agencies is active, but the coordination between the central and state NSC is partially effective. Political interference has cause people negative perception. Future studies can further develop by highlighting suggestions for improvements in coordination between the central and state NSC as well as methods to neutralize the domestic political interference in the Covid-19 Pandemic crises/threats management by the NSC.

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Mohd Ikbal Mohd Huda was responsible for study design and revised it. Siti Sabrina Imji Rahim was responsible for data collection and drafted the manuscript. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript, as well as contributed equally to the study.

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