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The Five Power Defence Arrangements: The Quiet Achiever

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Introduction

The Five Power Defence Agreements (FPDA) came into force in 1971 after the period of Confrontation initiated by Indonesia (1963-66) and the announcement by Britain's Labour Government that it would withdraw its military forces from 'east of Suez.' The FPDA was initially conceived as a transitional agreement to provide for the defence of Malaysia and Singapore until these new states could fend for themselves (Crowe 2001:3). Under the terms of its founding communiqué, Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Malaysia and Singapore pledged:

In the event of any form of armed attack externally organised or supported, or the threat of such attack against Malaysia or Singapore, their Governments would immediately consult together for the purpose of deciding what measures should be taken or separately in relation to such an attack or threat (quoted I Crowe 2001:5).

The FPDA was merely a consultative forum not a formal alliance. On its twentieth anniversary, it was characterized by one writer as the 'unobtrusive alliance' (Chin 1991:195). The most recent academic article on this subject calls the FPDA 'Southeast Asia's unknown regional security organisation' (Bristow 2005). According to Bristow (2005:6), 'it is possible to argue that the FPDA is a hangover from a bygone era, which is being overtaken by other regional structures and has been diminished in importance by U.S. security commitments to the region.' But Bristow concludes to the contrary that the FPDA overlaps with other security structures, does not compete with them, and contributes to regional security.

Quite clearly the FPDA has evolved and adapted over the past thirty-five years. This transformation has been accompanied by the development of a robust consultative structure, complemented by a standing multilateral military component, and a comprehensive exercise program. The FPDA has gradually expanded its focus from the conventional defence of Malaysian and Singaporean air space, through an annual series of Air Defence Exercises (ADEXs), to large-scale combined and joint military exercises designed to meet emerging conventional and non-conventional security threats extending into the South China Sea.

Australian defence officials argue that the FPDA has become the 'longest and only effective multilateral military structure with an operational dimension in Southeast Asia.' As Bristow (2005:11) correctly notes, the FPDA has become 'remarkably capable at adapting to the changing security environment in the region.' In short, the FPDA has become 'the quiet achiever' and an important component among the plethora of regional multilateral security organisations.

This paper will analyse the evolution and transformation of the FPDA in the following four sections that cover the historical background; policy, planning and operational structures; multilateral exercise program; and new security challenges. The paper will conclude with a net evaluation the FPDA's ability to contribute to regional security.

History

The genesis of the FPDA owes much to the legacy bequeathed by the era of British colonialism and the commitment of Commonwealth military forces to Malaya during the period of communist insurgency known as the Emergency (1948-60). After Malaya's independence in 1957, the previously informal security arrangements were replaced by a formal Anglo-Malaysian Defence Agreement (AMDA) in 1963. Under this agreement, British, Australian and New Zealand forces were permitted to

remain in Butterworth, Malaya and in Singapore. When Singapore separated from the Federation of Malaysia in 1965, the two states agreed that their defence was indivisible.

However in the late 1960s, the British Labour government's decision to withdraw military forces from 'east of Suez', raised major concern, particularly since Indonesia was still seen as a potential threat. The British withdrawal would leave a huge gap in air defence capabilities as the defence capabilities of Malaysia and Singapore were quite limited. According to Crowe (2001:9), 'the navies of both countries had limitations and almost no "blue water" capability. The two air forces were a little better off, but not much.'

It was in this context that the first five power talks began in Kuala Lumpur in June 1968 and continued in Canberra in the following year (Crowe 2001:5). Both Australia and New Zealand wanted to retain defence links with Malaysia and Singapore. They therefore entered into planning discussions with Malaysia and Singapore to conduct a major exercise in 1970, known as Ex BERSATU PADU, designed to test future defence arrangements without a British presence. However, in June 1970, the Conservative Party was returned to power and reassured the regional states that Britain would retain a modest military presence in the Far East. Ex BERSATU PADU became a large-scale exercise involving three brigades, forty-three ships and 200 aircraft. Singapore's naval capacity was so low at that time that it was unable to provide a single ship for this exercise. This was a far cry from later years.

On February 11, 1971, the first headquarters (HQ) of the Integrated Air Defence System (IADS) was established at Butterworth. On April 16, 1971, the Defence Ministers of the five states met in London and agreed to work out an agreement that would not impose 'undue strain or obligation' on any party. This resulted in the communiqué quoted above which formed the foundation of the Five Power Defence Agreements. The five parties, as noted, were only obliged to consult immediately in the event of an external attack on either Malaysia or Singapore and to determine what actions could be taken jointly or separately. IADS became operational on 1st September, and took responsibility for defence of Malaysian and Singaporean airspace immediately. The Commander of IADS was given emergency powers to employ assigned forces of all five countries to meet a surprise attack (Crowe 2002:6). Initially neither Malaysia nor Singapore could find officers to fill operational positions on IADS HQ staff. The British Far East Command was terminated on October 31, 1971 and on the following day (November 1, 1971), the Five Power Defence Arrangements came into force, replacing the Anglo-Malaysian Defence Agreement (1963).

The initial focus of IADS for its first ten years was on the development of air defence capabilities (Crowe 2001:10). In 1987, the IADS Air Defence Operational Centre (ADOC) was established with modern communications and computing facilities. An IADS Software Board was set up to ensure that systems software was compatible between ADOC, Malaysia and Singapore (Crowe 2001:33). Since 1994 IADS has been progressively upgraded with improved command and control capability.

Policy, Planning and Operational Structures

In 1971, the FPDA had two organisations for management: the Joint Consultative Council (JCC) and the Air Defence Council (ADC). The JCC served as a forum for regular consultation at senior officer level, while the ADC had responsibility to issue directives to the commander IADS on matters affecting the organisation, training, development and operational readiness (Crowe 2001:13). Members of JCC were also members of the ADC and comprised the Secretary General of Malaysia's Ministry of Defence, the Permanent Secretary of Singapore's Ministry of Defence and the High

Commissions from Australia, New Zealand and the UK. FPDA Defence Ministers met only irregularly in the early years.

The FPDA's structure for policy, planning and operations expanded considerably during the following decades. In 1981, the Exercise Scheduling Conference (ESC) was added to the FPDA structure. The ESC was given responsibility for monitoring and coordinating all non-air defence related activities (Crowe 2001:27). In a major development, in 1988, the Defence Ministers agreed that they and the Chiefs of the Defence Forces should become a permanent feature of the consultative process. Formal meetings were now scheduled to take place every three years for both ministers and chiefs.

Another major organizational change took place in 1994 when both the JCC and ADC were replaced by a single body, the FPDA Consultative Council (FCC). The FCC was given the task of increasing the efficiency of IADS and to explore ways to expand the scope, level, and sophistication of exercises (Crowe 2000:42). A steering committee and policy working group were established to assist with these tasks. At this time, the ESC was renamed the FPDA Activities Coordinating Committee (FACC). Defence Chiefs became more proactive in guiding the professional development of the FPDA exercise program.

The FPDA also became involved in officer education in a more formal way. In 1997, the FPDA held its first Professional Forum in Singapore with Australia as co-host. This meeting became the premier venue for mid-level officers to discuss new ideas, concepts, and the future shape of the FPDA operational element and HQ IADS.

The FPDA is currently organised into five main structures. Each is described below.

The highest-level policy body is the FPDA Defence Ministers' Meeting (FDMM) that meets every three years to provide strategic direction for the FPDA. Their meetings are attended by Defence Secretaries of the five members and the Commander of the Integrated Area Defence System (CIADS).

The next senior body is the FPDA Defence Chiefs' Conference (FDCC). The FDCC provides reports and professional advice to the FPDA Defence Ministers' Meeting. It meets annually and is attended by the Commander of IADS. The FDCC has responsibility for professional aspects of the FPDA's military programs. Since 2001, meetings of the Defence Chiefs have coincided with the Asian Security Conference held in Singapore under the auspices of the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). This is known as the Shangri-la Dialogue process.

The FPDA's third main structure is the FPDA Consultative Council (FCC). The FCC meetings are co-chaired by the Secretary General for Defence Malaysia and the Permanent Secretary for Defence Singapore, and attended by the High Commissioners and Defence Advisers for Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom plus the Commander of IADS. It meets biannually rotating between Singapore and Malaysia. The FCC has responsibility for policy, planning and budget through regular reporting mechanisms.

The FPDA's fifth main structure is the FPDA Activities Coordination Council (FACC). The FACC is composed of Defence Force representatives from all member countries and from HQ IADS. It meets biannually. The FACC is required to submit regular reports to the FCC. The FACC has responsibility for implementing the decisions of the FCC by coordinating exercises and activities. It does so through three working groups:

- The FPDA Communications Working Group (FCWG) has responsibility for the development of the communications architecture.
- The FPDA Logistics Working Group, as its title indicates, has responsibility for the provision of logistics

- The FPDA Policy Working Group (FPWG) has responsibility for reviewing FPDA policy.

The fifth FPDA structure in the FPDA Professional Forum. The forum involves an annual seminar hosted alternately by Malaysia and Singapore with a co-host from among the remaining three partners. The seminar is conducted at the theatre operational level and focuses on topics of current interest. Seminars include presentations by guest speakers and syndicate discussion activities by participants who are drawn from the middle officer ranks (army: major/lieutenant colonel; navy: lieutenant commander/commander; air force: wing commander/squadron leader). The first FPDA Professional Forum was conducted by Singapore in 1997.

In addition to the above five structures, the FPDA has an operational component based at the HQ IADS, at RMAF¹ Butterworth. IADS comprises a permanent operational headquarters of nearly 50 staff drawn from member states and all three services. These staff plan and prepare for exercises, training and officer educational activities. IADS is the only standing component of the FPDA.

The Commanders of IADS has always been an Australian Air Vice Marshal assisted by a deputy who rotates between Malaysia and Singapore. During times of peace, the CIADS participates in the defence of Malaysian and Singaporean airspace by planning and conducting FPDA exercises in preparation for conflict. Since the late 1980s, Malaysia and Singapore have provided the only air defence aircraft on a day-to-day basis. Their air force commanders therefore began to participate on a more equal footing with CIADS.

Annual and Triennial Exercises

During the first decade of its existence (1971-81), the FPDA conducted only a handful of exercises. It was left up to each member to decide the degree of resources that it would contribute. The FPDA exercise program evolved slowly. The operational command of FPDA exercises alternated between Malaysia and Singapore. During the first decade, the ADC held thirty-four meetings, while the JCC met only four times (Ang 1998:51). According to one observer, the FPDA was primarily a political arrangement not a military alliance at this time (Crowe 2001:23).

The first meeting of the ADC was held on 1st September 1971. It recommended, and the JCC approved, three Synthetic Air Defence Exercises (SYNADEXs) to be held annually (Crowe 2001:14). The second ADC meeting, held in January 1972, approved the concept for first major exercise, Ex LIMA BERSATU.² The IADS Commander was directed to plan and coordinate Minor Air Defence Exercise before each major Air Defence Exercise (ADEX). During 1972 the FPDA successfully conducted five exercises: Ex LIMA BERSATU (April), Ex KUMPUL, Ex BERSEKUTU LIMA, and two minor ADEXs (Crowe 2001:19).

In late 1972, the Joint Consultative Council resolved that the FPDA would hold two major air defence exercises a year and two minor ADEXs involving the forces of all five countries. In addition, Ex KUMPUL, a no notice exercise, was added to the regular program to test the readiness of the air defence units assigned to the FPDA. The third ADC meeting, held in 1973, witnessed Singapore take the chair for the first time. The duration of FPDA air exercises was extended from two to four days in 1978, reflecting improved capabilities of the Malaysian and Singaporean air forces.

¹Royal Malaysian Air Force.

²Five Coming Together.

During the 1980s, the FPDA exercise program evolved into staging regular land and sea exercises. In 1981, Australia hosted the first land exercise, Ex PLATYPUS/ Since 1981 the FPDA has conducted regular naval exercises. Initially designated Ex STARFISH they were renamed Ex BERSAMA LIMA. During the 1980s the FPDA annual exercise program included major and minor ADEXs, an land exercise and a naval exercise that extended into the South China Sea (Crowe 2001:27).

Towards the end of the 1980s, the FPDA exercise program had become routine and predictable. The FPDA went into the doldrums as the forces committed by external powers became to decline. In 1988 the five Defence Ministers attended Ex LIMA BERSATU and took stock of the situation and decided to revitalize the FPDA consultative process. As a result, it was agreed that separate meetings of the Defence Ministers and the Chiefs of Defence should become permanent and be scheduled every three years.

In March 1990, the Defence Ministers agreed on policy that provided direction and new impetus for the evolution of the FPDA. The ministers agreed to gradually shift from purely air defence dominated arrangements to combined exercises in which land and naval forces would play a greater role. This resulted in a training regime that became more joint and combined. In 1991, the major ADEX and Ex STARFISH were held back-to-back.

This latest evolution of FPDA activities was prompted by several factors. Technological developments and operational doctrine no dictated that attacking hostile aircraft needed to be engaged at greater range from their targets, beyond the ability of ground-based radar. This resulted in the need for air defence capable ships to be added to the ADEX program and to extend the air space into the South China Sea. This resulted in changes to the STARFISH exercise.

Initially, STARFISH exercises focused on surface ships and submarines with aircraft playing a minor role (Crowe 2001:40). Just as ADEX needed surface ships to round out the air defence task, Ex STARFISH required more air power to test the full range of combat capabilities. Ex STARFISH, which focused on maritime defence, began to develop features in common with the ADEX. These separate exercises were brought together and renamed Ex STARDEX. This new exercise would evolve six year later into Ex FLYING FISH (see below).

In summary, in the 1990s the FPDA exercise program of air and maritime defence exercises began to meld and were eventually brought together in Ex STARDEX. For this to occur, the planning process became both combined and joint involving planning staffs and the three armed services of all five FPDA members (Crowe 2000:41). At the second Defence Ministers' Meeting in 1994, as noted above, the FPDA underwent a major organizational restructuring with the merger of the JCC and ADC into the FPDA Consultative Council. The Air Defence Operational Centre was progressively upgraded as well.

The decade of the 1990s also witnessed the increase in the size of land force exercises. Land exercises were initiated in 1981 but due to Malaysian sensitivities and Singapore lack of space, they were conducted outside Malaysia and Singapore. Australia and New Zealand alternated hosting duties until 1987 when Malaysia hosted Ex KRIS SAKTI. Two years later, Singapore hosted Ex SEA LION. Since 1990, the land exercises have been hosted in rotation with the UK portion conducted in Malaysia. Land exercises are conducted under the FPDA codename Ex SUMAN WARRIOR.

In 1997, after three years of planning, the FPDA's air and naval components (Major ADEX and Ex STARFISH) were merged into one major exercise, Ex FLYING FISH. The first FLYING FISH exercise involved 35 ships, 140 aircraft and two submarines. This was the FPDA's first truly joint and combined exercise. Subsequent FLYING FISH exercises were conducted in 2000 and 2003.

In 1997, the FPDA Defence Ministers' Meeting agreed that the FPDA Defence Chiefs' Conference should play a greater role in guiding professional development of exercises. The FCC was directed to promote greater interoperability among armed forces and cooperation in logistics support.

In July 2000, the FPDA Defence Ministers met and approved stepping up joint exercises between air, naval and land forces. Importantly, they directed that the Army be more fully integrated in FPDA exercises in order to improve operational capability and interoperability. Army integration into the FPDA's program of activities required more command post exercises and war games to facilitate participation. Land exercises were also integrated with ex BERSAMA LIMA.

The 2000 meeting of FPDA Defence Ministers laid the basis for the perhaps the greatest transformation of the FPDA in its history, the restructuring of the IADS from Integrated Air Defence to Integrated Area Defence. In October 2002 a Joint Integrated Area Defence Seminar was held in Kuala Lumpur. As a result, a long-term plan for joint exercises out to the year 2011 was later adopted. This new exercise program added greater complexity to FPDA exercises conducted in 2003. An Australian Defence Department assessment prepared in 2003 noted that 'it is possible that the door may be opened to build further changes into FPDA including counter-terrorism and peacekeeping components into the exercise structure.'

Meeting New Security Challenges

The FPDA entered a new period of evolution and transformation as a result of ministerial decisions taken in 2003 and 2004. At the FPDA Defence Ministers' Meeting held in Penang in June 2003, the ministers reiterated their commitment to enhancing operational capability and interoperability as an overt expression of their commitment to regional stability.

The Ministers further agreed that the FPDA should become more relevant by considering options to build on existing cooperation to enhance their individual and collective ability to deal with emerging asymmetric threats. This decision was taken in the context of 9/11 and its aftermath and heightened regional fears of catastrophic terrorist action in the Malacca Strait. This was a sensitive matter. The ministers agreed that the FPDA's change of direction should be at a comfortable and sustainable pace based on sound principles of cooperation that had been developed over the previous years. A working group was set up to flesh out this new policy direction by incorporating asymmetric threat in FPDA exercises.

In 2003, the FPDA Professional Forum directly considered 'the Incorporation of Asymmetric Threats into FPDA Training Activities' with a specific focus on non-conventional challenges such as global terrorism, piracy, protection of Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ), disaster relief and smuggling of illicit drugs. The deliberations of the Professional Forum and the recommendations of the working group were reflected the following year.

In June 2004, the second informal meeting of FPDA Defence Ministers was held in Singapore. The FPDA ministers 'recognised the need for the FPDA to adapt to new challenges in regional security environment, including threats from terrorism and a range of other non-conventional sources.' On 7th June a ministerial statement declared ³that the FPDA should incorporate 'non-conventional threat scenarios such as maritime security serials in scheduled FPDA exercises, and conduct additional exercises focused on maritime security, with the gradual inclusion of non-military agencies in such exercises' (quoted Bristow 2005:9). The ministers also announced

³Two other FPDA exercises were also held: Ex BERSAMA SHIELD (formerly ADEX) and Ex SUMAN WARRIOR.

the initiation of regular exchanges of intelligence on terrorism and other common security issues (reported to include trans-national threats such as smuggling, piracy, drugs and illegal fishing as well as proliferation of weapons of mass destruction).

In July 2004, Australia's Defence Minister, Senator Robert Hill, noted that the FPDA had agreed to involve other government agencies in their exercises and 'where appropriate' to develop a broader multi-agency approach to terrorism in the region. He also noted that the FPDA will continue to include other states as observers at its exercises where appropriate in the future.

The commencement of 'new look' exercises took place in September-October 2004 with the main objective of conducting combined joint operations in a multi-threat scenario involving piracy and the threat of a terrorist attack in the Straits of Malacca and Singapore. For the first time, Ex BERSAMA LIMA focused on anti-terrorist exercises. Twenty-six naval ships, 74 military aircraft, one submarine and 3,000 soldiers took part in this combined exercise held in the South China Sea. These exercises emphasized coordinating patrols, sharing intelligence and improving communications during a Maritime Interdiction Operation (MIOPS) scenario involving the hijacking of a merchant ship.

FPDA: An Evaluation

Southeast Asia's strategic environment has altered drastically since 1971 and the formation of the FPDA. Indonesia no longer represents a potential threat.⁴ The Cold War has ended and the probability of conventional state-on-state conflict is given a low probability by most security analysts. Nevertheless, uncertainties about China's military modernisation and future military role no doubt reinforce the continuing relevance of the FPDA as the main contributor to the air defence of Malaysia and Singapore. The military capabilities of both these countries' armed forces have increased both quantitatively and qualitatively (Bristow 2005:10).

The FPDA currently plays multiple roles that contribute to regional stability. Perhaps the most important is that of confidence building between Malaysia and Singapore, two states with a fractious history. The Singapore Army was not permitted to conduct any exercises on Malaysian territory until 1989, for example (Huxley 1991:207). While there have been times when bilateral tensions have spilled over and affected FPDA activities, the FPDA has never had to suspend a planned exercise. In 1998, Malaysia withdrew at the last minute from Ex STARDEX due to strains in bilateral relations at that time (Malaysia publicly cited financial constraints arising from the Asian financial Crisis of 1997-98 as the reason for its withdrawal). Defence *White Papers* issued by Malaysia (1997) and Singapore (2000) assert that the FPDA is an important part of each state's defence architecture and supports their strategic objectives.

In conventional military terms, the FPDA provides a credible deterrent to a potential aggressor, however unlikely the prospect of conventional war. The FPDA posture is defensive and non-threatening. Yet, as this paper has demonstrated, the FPDA's move towards greater combined joint exercises, coupled with the upgrading of the IADS command and control system means that the armed forces of the five states can effectively operate under a single command. The FPDA has adjusted its exercise programs to meet the complexity of the regional environment and demands of modern warfare in a maritime environment.

The FPDA has developed professional military skills and contributed to developing military-to-military relations among its members. The FPDA has further

⁴In 1990, Indonesia mischievously suggested the FPDA should be reformed into a three-power defence arrangement comprising Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore (Chin 1991:201).

demonstrated the efficacy of multilateral training under established security arrangements. The multilateral and regional operational interaction at HQ IADS in the design and execution of its exercise program is unique to the FPDA.

The recent transformation of the FPDA exercise program to deal with non-conventional threats has made it more not less to regional security. According to Bristow (2005:2), the FPDA 'complements and in some ways exceeds the security contribution of other, established, multinational organizations in the region.

The FPDA has also contributed to the professionalization of the Malaysian and Singaporean armed forces whose top commanders have acquired experience in conducting coalition exercises. In certain respects the gap in military capability between the two Southeast Asian states and their extra-regional partners has narrowed over time. As Malaysian and Singapore have grown in strength and confidence their status within the FPDA has become one of greater equality.

The FPDA offers benefits to each of its five members:

The United Kingdom, through membership in the FPDA, can further its defence diplomacy and show case its military capabilities in support of British interests, including arms sales. The Labour government's *Strategic Defence Review* (1997) highlighted the importance of Britain's military participation in the FPDA. Under the Labour Government the UK has made a substantial contribution to FPDA exercises. Since 2002, UK contribution has included a Royal Navy Task Group, Type-42 destroyers, Nimrod Maritime patrol aircraft, Tornado fighters and deployment of Rapier ground-based air defence missiles systems.

Australia has substantial strategic interests in the stability of the Southeast Asian region and the security of sea lines of communications (SLOCs). The FPDA provides Australia a forward presence at RMAF Butterworth from which RAAF PC3 Orion aircraft conduct surveillance of the maritime approaches to Australia. The FPDA also provides a channel to enhance bilateral relations with Malaysia that were quite testy during Prime Minister's Mahathir's time in office.

New Zealand has similar but not equal strategic interests as Australia in the security of Southeast Asia and its SLOCs. The FPDA affords New Zealand with an opportunity to maintain a toehold in the region and to remain relevant (rather than marginal) to regional affairs.

Both Singapore and Malaysia benefit in strategic terms, because FPDA deterrence contributes to their 'indivisible security.' Malaysia, in particular, benefits from the professional experience gained from FPDA exercises and training. activities. Through the FPDA, Malaysia gains access to more capable military platforms and equipment and current operational doctrine.

Besides the above advantages, there are three risks to the FPDA and its exercise program. The first risk arises from rising operational costs to its three external partners who must deploy at great distances. FPDA exercises must provide the optimum level of professional value for the expenditure and commitment of scarce resources.

The second risk arises from the impact of Australian and British deployments to Afghanistan and Iraq. In April 2003, for example, Australia's ongoing commitments precluded the RAAF and RAN from participating in the scheduled annual air defence exercise. New Zealand's removal of A-4K Skyhawks from its inventory means that it can no longer contribute to ADEX. The run down of New Zealand's air arm will mean it will run short of officers with skills to fill positions at IADS HQ.

The third risk to the FPDA arises from the challenge to Australia and the UK of modernizing their armed forces to remain interoperable with the United States across a broad range of expensive capabilities. Besides the impact of cost, military modernization may put pressure on regional interoperability. The question is will the new capabilities be relevant in the Southeast Asian context?

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