

The Five Power Defence Arrangements: The Quiet Achiever

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The Five Power Defence Arrangements came into force in 1971 as a loose consultative arrangement involving Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia and Singapore. This article traces the evolution of the FPDA over the past thirty-five years. During this period the FPDA has moved beyond its initial preoccupation with the air defence of peninsula Malaysia and Singapore to area defence. The scope of FPDA exercises has gradually expanded to include combined and joint exercises. In recent years the FPDA has addressed asymmetric threats, maritime security issues and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. In sum, the FPDA has become 'the quiet achiever' in contributing to regional security.

The Five Power Defence Agreements (FPDA) came into force in 1971 after the period of Confrontation initiated by Indonesia (1963-66) and the announcement in January 1968 by Britain's Labour Government that it would withdraw its military forces from 'east of Suez' by 1971. 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.¹ Under the terms of its founding communiqué (16 April 1971), Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom (UK), Malaysia and Singapore pledged:

in relation to the external defence of Malaysia and Singapore, that 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.²

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".³ The most recent academic article on this subject calls the FPDA "Southeast Asia's unknown regional security organisation".⁴ According to Bristow,

¹ Chin Kin Wah, 'The Five Power Defence Arrangements: Twenty Years After,' *The Pacific Review*, vol. 4, no. 3, (1971), p. 193.

² Quoted in Chin Kin Wah, *The Defence of Malaysia and Singapore: The Transformation of a Security System 1957-1971*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 176.

³ Chin Kin Wah, 'The Five Power Defence Arrangements', p. 195.

⁴ Damon Bristow, 'The Five Power Defence Arrangements: Southeast Asia's Unknown Regional Security Organization,' *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, vol. 27, no. 1 (April 2005), p. 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.⁵

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 peninsula Malaysia and Singapore 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 oldest and "only multilateral arrangement in the region with an operational dimension in Southeast Asia."⁶ As Bristow correctly notes, the FPDA has become "remarkably capable at adapting to the changing security environment in the region."⁷ In short, the FPDA has become 'the quiet achiever' and an important component among the plethora of regional multilateral security organisations.

This article 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 article concludes by evaluating the FPDA's contribution to regional security.

Background

The genesis of the FPDA may be found in the legacy bequeathed by the colonial era 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 the more formal Anglo-Malayan Defence Agreement (renamed Anglo-Malaysian Defence Agreement in 1963). Under this agreement, British, Australian and New Zealand forces were permitted to remain in Butterworth, Malaya/Malaysia and in Singapore. When

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Michael Crossman, *Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA)*. Canberra: Department of Defence, ASEAN Division, 15 October 2003, p. 3.

⁷ Bristow, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

Singapore separated from the Federation of Malaysia in 1965, the two states agreed that their defence was indivisible.

However, in the late 1960s, when the British Labour government announced the withdrawal of British military forces from 'east of Suez', regional concerns were raised, particularly since Indonesia and North Vietnam were viewed as potential threats.⁸ The British withdrawal would leave a huge gap in air defence capabilities as the capacities of Malaysia and Singapore in this area were quite limited. According to Crowe, "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".⁹

It was in this context that the first Five Power talks began in Kuala Lumpur in June 1968 and resumed in Canberra in the following year.¹⁰ Both Australia and New Zealand wanted to retain defence links with Malaysia and Singapore. They therefore entered into planning discussions to conduct a major exercise designed to test future defence arrangements without a British presence (Ex BERSATU PADU). However, in June 1970, the Conservative Party was returned to power and reassured 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.¹¹ Singapore's naval capacity was so low at that time it was unable to provide a single ship for this exercise. Due to Malay sensitivities aroused by the exercise, no Singaporean armed forces were permitted on Malaysian territory for nearly two decades.¹²

On 11 February 1971, the first headquarters (HQ) of the Integrated Air Defence System (IADS) was established at Butterworth. In April 1971, the five Defence Ministers met in London and agreed to work out an agreement that would not impose "undue strain or obligation" on any party.¹³ This resulted in the communiqué quoted above, which formed the basis 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 should be taken jointly or separately. IADS became operational on 1st September, and immediately took responsibility for the defence of the Malaysian and Singaporean airspace. The Commander of IADS was given emergency powers to employ assigned forces of all five countries to meet a surprise attack.¹⁴ Initially,

⁸ Ang Wee Han, 'Five Power Defence Arrangements: A Singapore Perspective,' Pointer: Quarterly Journal of the Singapore Armed Forces, vol. 24, no. 2, (1998), internet edition.

⁹ Allan Crowe, *The 5 Power Defence Arrangements*. Kuala Lumpur: Percetakan Konta Sdn Berhad, 2001, p. 9.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹¹ K. U. Menon, 'A Six-Power Defence Arrangement in Southeast Asia?', *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, vol. 10, no. 3 (December 1988), p. 322.

¹² Chin Kin Wah, 'The Five Power Defence Arrangements', p. 195.

¹³ Bristow, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

¹⁴ Crowe, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

neither Malaysia nor Singapore could find officers to fill operational positions on IADS HQ staff.

The British Far East Command was terminated on 31 October 1971 and on the following day the FPDA came into force, replacing the Anglo-Malaysian Defence Agreement. On 1 December 1971, Malaysia and Singapore separately exchanged bilateral notes with the other three FPDA partners.¹⁵

At the time FPDA was stood up, there were approximately 3,300 Australians, 2,550 British and 1,150 New Zealand forces stationed in Malaysia and Singapore.¹⁶ The external powers contributed one infantry battalion each. The UK also contributed six frigates, four maritime reconnaissance aircraft and one squadron of helicopters. Australia provided two squadrons of *Mirage* fighters and one surface combatant. Britain and Australia also deployed one submarine each on rotation. New Zealand's contribution consisted of one frigate, transport aircraft and personnel for HQ IADS.¹⁷

Policy, Planning and Operational Structures

In 1971, the FPDA set up 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.¹⁸ 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 Commissioners from Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom (UK). The JCC met only four times during its first decade and it was only in 1981 that the JCC began to meet annually. The FPDA Defence Ministers did not hold regular meetings until 1990.

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.¹⁹ In 1988, the Defence Ministers agreed that they and the Chiefs of the Defence Forces should become a permanent feature of the consultative process.

¹⁵ Khoo How San, 'The Five Power Defence Arrangements: If It Ain't Broke...', Pointer: Quarterly Journal of the Singapore Armed Forces, vol. 26, no. 4 (2000), internet edition.

¹⁶ Menon, *op. cit.*, p. 316.

¹⁷ Chin Kin Wah, 'The Five Power Defence Arrangements', p. 196.

¹⁸ Crowe, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

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 the IADS and to explore ways to expand the scope, level, and sophistication of exercises.²⁰ A Steering Committee and a Policy Working Group were established to assist with these tasks. At this time, the ESC was renamed the FPDA Activities Coordinating Committee (FACC).

The FPDA also became involved in officer education and training 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 of the FPDA and HQ IADS. Every other year, the United Kingdom hosts a two-week visit by HQ IADS staff to the Ministry of Defence in London and various headquarters and units.²¹

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 triennially to provide strategic direction for the FPDA. The ministerial 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 CIADS. The FDCC has responsibility for professional aspects of the FPDA's military activities. Since 2002, informal meetings of the Defence Chiefs have coincided with the Shangri-la Dialogue held in Singapore under the auspices of the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

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 UK plus the Commander of IADS. It meets biannually rotating between Singapore and Malaysia. The FCC has responsibility for policy, planning and budget.

The FPDA's fourth main structure is the FPDA Activities Coordination Council (FACC). The FACC is composed of Defence Force representatives from all members and from HQ IADS. It also meets biannually. The FACC

²⁰ Ibid., p. 42.

²¹ British High Commission in Malaysia, Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA), <<http://www.britishhighcommission.gov.uk>> [Accessed 28 November 2006].

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 for communications, logistics and policy.

The fifth FPDA structure is 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. The Forum includes presentations by guest speakers and syndicate discussion activities by participants who are drawn from the middle officer ranks.

In addition to the above five structures, the FPDA has an operational component based at the HQ IADS, at Royal Malaysian Air Force Base Butterworth. IADS comprises a permanent operational headquarters of nearly 50 staff drawn from member states and all three services. IADS plans and prepares for exercises and officer education and training activities. IADS is the only standing component of the FPDA. The initial focus of IADS for its first ten years was on the development of air defence capabilities.²² In 1987, the IADS Air Defence Operational Centre (ADOC) was established with modern communications and computing facilities. Since 1994, IADS has been progressively upgraded with improved command and control capability.

The Commander 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.

FPDA Exercise Programme

During the first decade of its existence, the FPDA conducted only a handful of relatively simple air defence 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.²³

²² Crowe, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

²³ Ang Wee Han, *op. cit.*.

According to one observer, the FPDA was primarily a political arrangement, not a military alliance.²⁴

In September 1971, the ADC held its first meeting and recommended that three Synthetic Air Defence Exercises (SYNADEXs) be held annually.²⁵ This was approved by the JCC. The second ADC meeting, held in January 1972, approved the concept for the first major air exercise, Ex LIMA BERSATU. The IADS Commander was directed to plan and coordinate a minor Air Defence Exercise before each major Air Defence Exercise (ADEX). During 1972, the FPDA successfully conducted five exercises and two minor ADEXs.²⁶

In late 1972, the Joint Consultative Council resolved that the FPDA would hold two major air defence exercises involving the forces of all five countries annually plus two minor ADEXs. In addition, a no notice exercise was added to the regular program to test the readiness of the air defence units. At the third ADC meeting, held in 1973, Singapore assumed 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. In contrast, there was a substantial draw down of external military forces. By early 1974, for example, all Australian ground forces and support units had departed. Britain withdrew its ground and naval forces from Singapore in 1976.²⁷

During the 1980s, the FPDA annual exercise program evolved from staging major and minor ADEXs, to conducting regular land and sea exercises. In 1981, Australia hosted the FPDA's first land exercise, Exercise PLATYPUS. Also, in 1981, the FPDA initiated an annual maritime exercise, called Ex STARFISH. The first STARFISH exercise included only eight ships and seventeen aircraft in a single dimension above water warfare exercise. Singapore's Deputy Prime Minister Rajaratnam declared that the FPDA was 'dated' and not a credible deterrent to the Soviet threat.²⁸ A Malaysian minister characterised the FPDA prior to 1988 as 'dead wood.'²⁹ One analyst concluded that "the FPDA was largely moribund during its first decade."³⁰

²⁴ Crowe, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

²⁷ Menon, *op. cit.*, p. 317 and Chin Kin Wah, 'The Five Power Defence Arrangements,' p. 195.

²⁸ Philip Methven, *The Five Power Defence Arrangements and Military Cooperation Among the ASEAN States: Incompatible Models for Security in Southeast Asia?* Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence No. 92. Canberra: Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Research School of Pacific Studies, The Australian National University, 1992, p. 113.

²⁹ Chin Kin Wah, 'The Five Power Defence Arrangements,' p. 196.

³⁰ Menon, *op. cit.*, p. 317.

But with the lodgement of Soviet naval forces in Cam Ranh Bay in Vietnam, the FPDA began to upgrade its regular exercises.³¹ In 1985 a submarine was included and in 1987 electronic warfare was introduced.³² In September 1988, the FPDA held its largest air and maritime defence exercise, Ex LIMA BERSATU. The Royal Air Force made an appearance after an absence of nearly fifteen years. Britain also made the largest contribution with the participation of a Naval Task Force, including the aircraft carrier HMS *Ark Royal* equipped with *Sea Harriers*. This was the first time that a carrier was incorporated into an FPDA air exercise. In the final phase of the exercise, the 'FPDA air forces operated as a single entity'.³³

The FPDA Defence Ministers, who met at this time, took stock of the situation and decided to revitalize the FPDA consultative process. They agreed that the defence chiefs should meet every two years and a ministerial meeting should be held every three years.³⁴

In July 1989, Malaysia hosted Ex STARFISH, the largest and most complicated exercise to date. It involved twenty-four ships, eighteen aircraft and 3,000 personnel and incorporated all three dimensions of naval warfare – surface, air and sub-surface. According to one writer, this demonstrated 'a growing interest in the security of sea lanes'.³⁵

The first FDMM was held in Kuala Lumpur in March 1990. The Defence Ministers gave new impetus for the evolution of the FPDA. The ministers agreed to gradually shift from purely air defence exercises 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 and 1992, the major ADEX and Ex STARFISH were held back-to-back.³⁶ But a Singaporean proposal for strengthening the FPDA command structure was not adopted due to objections by Malaysia.³⁷

This latest evolution of FPDA activities was prompted by several factors. Technological developments and operational doctrine now dictated that attacking hostile aircraft needed to be engaged at greater range from their targets, beyond the capability 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, which led to modifications to the STARFISH exercise. Initially, STARFISH exercises focused on surface

³¹ Peter Lewis Young, 'The Five Power Defence Arrangement – A Review,' *Asian Defence Journal* (May 1997), p. 5.

³² Ang Wee Han, *op. cit.*

³³ Methven, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

³⁴ Chin Kin Wah, 'The Five Power Defence Arrangements,' p. 201.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

³⁶ Michael Richardson, 'New relevance for the PDA [sic],' *Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter*, Annual Reference Edition 1993, p. 37.

³⁷ Gavin Keating, 'The Five Power Defence Arrangements: A Case Study in Alliance Longevity,' *Australian Defence Force Journal*, no. 170 (2006), p. 52.

ships with aircraft playing a minor role.³⁸ 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 began to develop features that overlapped with the ADEX. These separate exercises were brought together and renamed Ex STARDEX.

In summary, in the 1990s the FPDA exercise program of air and maritime defence exercises began to meld and was eventually brought together in Ex STARDEX. For this to occur, the planning process became both combined and joint, involving planning staffs from the three armed services of all five FPDA members.³⁹ At the second Defence Ministers' Meeting in 1994, the FPDA underwent a major organizational restructuring with the merger of the JCC and ADC into the FPDA Consultative Council.

The decade of the 1990s also witnessed the increase in the size of land exercises. Land exercises were initiated in 1981 but due to Malaysian sensitivities and Singapore's 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.⁴⁰ Two years later, Singapore hosted Ex LION SPIRIT. Land exercises held in Malaysia and Singapore involved non-combat forces only. In 1990, the land exercises were renamed Ex SUMAN WARRIOR, and have been held in rotation with the UK portion being conducted in Malaysia. It was not until 1992, however, that Malaysia and Singapore were willing to fully cooperate in FPDA land exercises. Even then they placed restrictions on the types of equipment that could be used.⁴¹

In 1997, the FPDA's air and naval components (Major ADEX and Ex STARFISH) were merged into one major exercise, Ex FLYING FISH, the FPDA's first combined maritime and air exercise. The first exercise was held from 12-26 April and involved thirty-nine ships, 164 aircraft and two submarines. The second FLYING FISH exercise was conducted in August 1998 and involved 35 ships, 140 aircraft and two submarines. Subsequent FLYING FISH exercises were conducted in 2000 and 2003.⁴²

In April 1997, the FPDA Defence Ministers' Meeting agreed that the FPDA Defence Chiefs' Conference should play a greater role in guiding the professional development of exercises. The FCC was directed to promote greater interoperability among armed forces and cooperation in logistics support. This involved the introduction of more technologically advanced weapons and Command-Control-Communications or C3 systems.

³⁸ Crowe, *op. cit.*, p.40.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁴⁰ Menon, *op. cit.*, p. 322.

⁴¹ Young, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

⁴² Channel News Asia, 21 June 2003.

In July 2000, the FPDA Defence Ministers met and agreed to step up joint exercises between air, naval and land forces. Importantly, they directed that the army be more fully integrated into FPDA activities in order to improve operational capability and interoperability. Land exercises were now integrated with Ex BERSAMA LIMA.

The 2000 meeting of FPDA Defence Ministers laid the basis for the greatest transformation of the FPDA in its history. The IADS was restructured from Integrated Air Defence to Integrated Area Defence. In October 2002 a Joint Integrated Area Defence Seminar was held in Kuala Lumpur to consider new areas of responsibility. As a result, a long-term plan for joint exercises out to the year 2011 was adopted later. This new program added greater complexity to future FPDA exercises. An Australian Defence Department assessment of this development 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.⁴³

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 enhanced operational capability and interoperability as a tangible demonstration of their commitment to regional stability. The Ministers further agreed that the FPDA should become more relevant by considering options to enhance their individual and collective ability to deal with emerging asymmetric threats.

This decision by the FDMM 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 because it touched on the raw nerve of national sovereignty. The ministers agreed that the FPDA's change of direction should be at a comfortable and sustainable pace based on the principles of cooperation that had been developed over the previous years. A working group was set up to flesh out this new policy direction.

In 2003, the theme of the FPDA Professional Forum was 'the incorporation of asymmetric threats into FPDA training activities', with a specific focus on non-conventional challenges such as terrorism, piracy, protection of Exclusive Economic Zones, disaster relief and smuggling of illicit drugs.⁴⁴

⁴³ Crossman, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁴⁴ Programme of the 4th FPDA Professional Forum: The Incorporation of Asymmetric Threats in FPDA Training Activities, Kuala Lumpur: Defence Operations & Training Division, Headquarters Malaysian Armed Force, Ministry of Defence, 2003.

The deliberations of the Professional Forum and the recommendations of the working group were reflected the following year.

In June 2004, the FPDA Defence Ministers held an informal meeting in Singapore that coincided with the Shangri-la Dialogue. According to Singapore's Defence Minister, Teo Chee Hean, three topics were discussed: co-ordinated patrols, information exchange and better communication between operational centres, including navies and coast guards.⁴⁵ A media release noted that 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.⁴⁶

The ministers agreed that 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.⁴⁷

The ministers also announced the initiation of regular exchanges of intelligence on terrorism and trans-national threats such as smuggling, piracy, drugs, illegal fishing and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. HQ IADS was directed to draw up a 'roadmap' to implement these initiatives.⁴⁸ The FPDA Defence Chiefs later issued guidance for FPDA exercises focusing on non-conventional security threats that gave priority to maritime security.⁴⁹

The commencement of the FPDA's 'new look' exercises began in September 2004 when the FPDA conducted one of its largest exercises in recent years. Ex BERSAMA LIMA was a combined joint operation conducted in a multi-threat scenario at operational and tactical levels. Thirty-one ships, sixty aircraft, two submarines and 3,500 support personnel, including diving teams, and ground based air defence and communications support teams, took part.⁵⁰

Ex BERSAMA LIMA emphasized coordinated patrols, shared intelligence and improved communications. It incorporated a number of new features.

⁴⁵ Channel News Asia, 7 June 2004.

⁴⁶ Singapore Ministry of Defence, '2nd FPDA Defence Ministers' Informal Meeting,' News Release, 7 June 2004.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Singapore, Ministry of Defence, 'FPDA nations to practise tackling non-conventional security threats,' News Release, 7 June 2004.

⁴⁹ Singapore Ministry of Defence, 'Five Powers to focus more on non-conventional threats' and '9th FPDA Defence Chiefs' Conference and Exercise Bersama Lima,' News Releases, 10 September 2004.

⁵⁰ Agence France Presse, 10 September 2004.

For example, the just completed Command and Control facility at Paya Lebar Air Force Base in Singapore served as headquarters.⁵¹ Digital infrared cameras and new mobile computer networks provided a real time view of the exercise.⁵² The exercise included a Maritime Interdiction Operation involving tracking, stopping, and boarding a merchant ship hijacked by terrorists, by tactical teams on fast boats in coordination with helicopters.⁵³ This was the first time that the FPDA addressed maritime terrorism in its exercises. Finally, Ex BERSAMA LIMA included civil-military coordination for the first time.⁵⁴

Ex SUMAN WARRIOR 04 was conducted in tandem with Ex BERSAMA LIMA. It was a fourteen day command post exercise held in Singapore involving a brigade level combined force as well as air and naval assets aimed at enhancing inter-operability and professional expertise.⁵⁵

Ex BERSAMA LIMA 05 was held from 5-28 September. This exercise was also a combined joint operation in a multi-threat environment. Ex BERSAMA LIMA 05 involved twenty-six ships, seventy-four aircraft, one submarine, and 3,000 personnel including newly introduced land and logistics elements. Once again, civilian elements from the police, maritime enforcement and rescue agencies, and non-government organisations took part. Ex BERSAMA LIMA 05 identified weaknesses in ship to shore communications. Ex SUMAN WARRIOR, which overlapped, focused on discussions and planning for non-combat evacuation operations.

In June 2006, the FPDA Defence Ministers held their sixth ministerial meeting. This gathering was held in the shadow of the Boxing Day 2004 tsunami that had devastated the region, particularly Indonesia. The ministers supported a Malaysian proposal for the establishment of a regional centre for disaster relief. They directed that the FPDA "explore ways to build capacity and enhance inter-operability in the area of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief" or HADR.⁵⁶ The ministers called for a working paper that would address the non-lethal deployment of armed forces in HADR operations. But the ministers made clear that the FPDA would not attempt to coordinate relief efforts, but concentrate instead on capacity building and inter-operability among its members.⁵⁷

⁵¹ Bernama, 10 September 2004.

⁵² Reuters, 10 September 2004.

⁵³ Channel News Asia, 14 September 2004.

⁵⁴ The Straits Times, 11 September 2006.

⁵⁵ Singapore Ministry of Defence, 'FPDA Countries Take part in Exercise Suman Warrior 04,' News Release, 28 September 2004.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Bernama, 28 November 2006.

⁵⁷ Robert Karniol, 'FPDA countries agree to step-up disaster relief readiness,' Jane's Defence Weekly, 21 June 2006, internet edition.

Two major exercises were held in 2006. Ex SUMAN WARRIOR, conducted in July, focused on the provision of logistics support for a multi-national brigade on a conventional mission. The inaugural Ex BERSAMA PADU was held in September. This was undoubtedly the largest and most complex FPDA exercise to date. Twenty-one ships, eighty-five aircraft, one submarine and 3,500 personnel including ground support elements, took part. It was a command post exercise set in multi-threat environment and involved an enhanced role for civil agencies. The aim of the exercise was to meet various threats to maritime security and to enhance coordination in the defence of the sea lines of communication.

Ex BERSAMA PADU involved several components, including simulated maritime security threats, mine laying and recovery exercises, and joint operations against terrorism at sea, maritime surveillance, and evacuation of non-combatants.⁵⁸ The land-based component of Ex BERSAMA PADU involved air defence radars, anti-aircraft guns and missile batteries.

During Ex BERSAMA PADU two ships were intercepted and boarded as part of counter-terrorism and counter-piracy exercises. Non-military agencies were involved in the case of a ship suspected of carrying illicit war material. After the suspect ship was secured and escorted to port, civilians from Singapore's Immigrations and Checkpoints Authority and Singapore Customs searched it.⁵⁹ The aim was to practice boarding a vessel, gathering evidence and assisting law enforcement. The International Red Cross was involved in the non-combat evacuation phase of the exercise.⁶⁰

In summary, Ex BERSAMA PADU was an operational planning exercise that involved force integration training, tactical exercises, and maritime security serials. It tested operational capacity, mutual cooperation, inter-operability and joint operations. According to IADS Commander, Air Vice Marshal Greg Evans, "the logistics element is one of the most important milestones of this exercise".⁶¹

Following ministerial direction in mid-year, the FPDA Professional Forum, which met in November 2006, focused on Military Operations Other Than War. The Forum was co-hosted by Singapore and the United Kingdom. More than seventy senior officers discussed military participation in humanitarian missions and training for peace support operations.⁶² The FPDA's new HADR orientation will be tested in Ex SUMAN PROTECTOR scheduled for 2007. This exercise will be the largest ever command post exercise involving up to 700 participants together with air, maritime and land

⁵⁸ The Straits Times, 8 September 2006.

⁵⁹ The Straits Times, 19 September 2006. Other agencies included the Singapore Police Coast Guard, Marine and Port Authority and the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency.

⁶⁰ Channel News Asia, 7 September 2006.

⁶¹ Channel News Asia, 18 September 2006.

⁶² Channel News Asia, 28 November 2006 and Bernama, 28 November 2006.

elements. It will include combat forces for the first time and focus more on army training and land-based scenarios than previously. The inaugural Ex SUMAN PROTECTOR will be the first step towards a full field training HADR exercise scheduled for 2011.

FPDA: An Evaluation

Southeast Asia's strategic environment has altered drastically since 1971 when the FPDA was formed. The Cold War is over and the probability of conventional state-on-state conflict is given a low probability by most defence analysts. Nevertheless, uncertainties about China's military modernisation and future regional role no doubt reinforce the continuing relevance of the FPDA as the main contributor to the air defence of Malaysia and Singapore.

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.⁶³ Defence *White Papers* issued by Malaysia (1997) and Singapore (2000) both 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 acts as a psychological deterrent to any would be aggressor, however unlikely the prospect of conventional war. An aggressor planning to attack either Malaysia or Singapore would have to factor the likely response by Australia, New Zealand and the UK. Once Australian and/or UK forces were involved, a potential aggressor would have to calculate the likelihood that the United States might be drawn in to support its allies.⁶⁴

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 posture is defensive and non-threatening. Yet, as this article 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 built confidence among its members, developed professional military skills, and contributed to developing military-to-military relations among its members. FPDA members have been able to tap the experience and draw on the expertise of other members as well as test operational capabilities. The FPDA has further demonstrated the efficacy of multilateral training under long-standing arrangements. The multilateral and regional

⁶³ Tim Huxley, 'Singapore and Malaysia: A Precarious Balance?', *The Pacific Review*, vol. 4, no. 3 (September 1991), p. 207.

⁶⁴ Chin Kin Wah, 'The Five Power Defence Arrangements,' pp. 194 and 199.

operational interaction at HQ IADS in the planning and execution of its exercise program is unique to the FPDA.

The recent evolution of the FPDA exercise program to deal with non-conventional threats has made it more, not less relevant to regional security. According to Bristow, the FPDA "complements and in some ways exceeds the security contribution of other, established, multinational organizations in the region".⁶⁵

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 Malaysia 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: Both Singapore and Malaysia benefit in strategic terms because the potential deterrence provided by the FPDA contributes to their 'indivisible security.' Singapore values the FPDA more highly than Malaysia because it contributes to Singapore's overall defence posture. Malaysia views the FPDA as a supplement to its own policy of defence self-reliance.

Singapore is land scarce and values the opportunity to gain experience in training and combined exercises.⁶⁶ Exercise SUMAN WARRIOR, for example, promotes interoperability. 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.

Australia has substantial strategic interests in the stability of the Southeast Asian region and the security of sea lines of communications (SLOCs). Australia's FA/18s at Tindal in the Northern Territory are only a few hours flying time away. The FPDA provides Australia a forward presence at RMAF Base Butterworth from which RAAF P3-C *Orion* aircraft conduct surveillance of the maritime approaches to Australia. The FPDA offers Australia the opportunity to exchange views on various types of defence equipment that it might be considering acquiring.⁶⁷ The FPDA also provides considerable training benefits to the Australian Defence Force; and the FPDA offers a networking mechanism with the armed forces in Singapore and Malaysia. In addition, the FPDA provides Australia an additional channel to enhance bilateral relations with Malaysia.

⁶⁵ Bristow, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

⁶⁶ Jimmy Tan, 'Unclenching the fisted Hand: Globalisation and Military Multilateralism,' *Pointer: Quarterly Journal of the Singapore Armed Forces*, vol. 28, no. 1 (2002), electronic version.

⁶⁷ Young, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

New Zealand has similar but not equal strategic interests as Australia in the security of Southeast Asia and its SLOCs. The FPDA provides New Zealand with a formal defence mechanism through which it can contribute to regional security alongside Australia. New Zealand's 1997 White Paper identified the FPDA as one of three defence pillars.⁶⁸ New Zealand's prime focus, however, is on the South Pacific.

FPDA exercises have become all the more valuable to New Zealand since it was excluded from the multilateral RIMPAC exercises run by the United States.⁶⁹ Like Australia, New Zealand benefits from the training benefits the FPDA offers. According to the Commander Joint Forces New Zealand, Rear Admiral Jack Steer, FPDA exercises were

essential for the NZDF to develop procedures and relationships, ensuring the NZDF can work alongside FPDA partners as required. Without joint exercises like *Bersama Padu*, our defence forces would struggle to work together effectively in a time of need.⁷⁰

But New Zealand is only able to offer a modest contribution. In the most recent Ex BERSAMA PADU, New Zealand contributed a frigate, a support vessel, one P3-K *Orion* maritime patrol aircraft, a diving team and twenty-eight persons for the joint force command and logistic support.⁷¹ In sum, FPDA affords New Zealand with an opportunity to maintain a toehold in the region and to remain relevant – rather than marginal – to regional affairs.

The United Kingdom views the FPDA "as a successful and enduring defensive arrangement".⁷² It is the only formal security agreement that links Britain with Australia and is part of a much larger global web of shared defence ties.⁷³ Membership in the FPDA provides the UK the opportunity to further its defence diplomacy and showcase 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, the UK's 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.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ Ministry of Defence, *The Shape of New Zealand's Defence: A White Paper*, Wellington, 1997, p. 7.

⁶⁹ Robert Ayson, 'New Zealand and Asia-Pacific Security: New Rationales for Engagement?,' *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, vol. 22, no. 2 (August 2000), electronic version.

⁷⁰ US Fed News, *Hindustan Times*, 21 September 2006.

⁷¹ New Zealand Press Association, 4 September 2006.

⁷² British High Commission in Malaysia, *op. cit.*

⁷³ Greg Sheridan, *The Partnership: The Inside Story of the US-Australian Alliance Under Bush and Howard*. Sydney, University of New South Wales Press, 2006, p. 104.

⁷⁴ British High Commission in Malaysia, *op. cit.*

The future of the FPDA is perhaps clouded by three uncertainties. The first relates to the 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. If costs outweigh the perceived benefits, external powers may reduce their involvement in future FPDA exercises.

The second uncertainty arises from the impact of continued Australian and British deployments outside Southeast Asia. In April 2003, for example, Australia's ongoing commitments in the Persian Gulf precluded it from participating in the scheduled annual air defence exercise. Will the UK sustain its interests in 'the Far East'? It should be recalled that the UK was absent for over a decade before participating in FPDA exercises in 1988.⁷⁵ 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 lack officers with skills to fill positions at HQ IADS. Given that both Singapore and Malaysia are modernizing their forces both quantitatively and qualitatively,⁷⁶ the day may come when the convention that CIADS is an Australian might be modified. Will Australia's current interest in the FPDA be sustained in future if CIADS rotated between Singapore and Malaysia?

The third uncertainty to face the FPDA arises from the challenge to Australia and the UK of remaining 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 acquired by Australia and the UK be relevant in the Southeast Asian context?

The FPDA offers a model to other regional states. It operates on principles that are very familiar to ASEAN members. Decision-making is consensual, gradual and pragmatically orientated; FPDA exercises offer mutual benefits to all members. As for the future, there appear to be two possibilities that FPDA membership might be expanded. The FPDA's current focus on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief raises the possibility that countries such as Indonesia, Thailand and Brunei could become involved in future exercises on a case by case basis.⁷⁷ Observer status could lead in the fullness of time to membership.

The second possibility for membership expansion arises from the change of IADS's role from air to area defence. IADS does not cover Sabah and Sarawak in East Malaysia. This is a gap that Malaysia might consider filling in the future, which would open up the possibility of including Brunei as a

⁷⁵ Khoo How San, *op. cit.*

⁷⁶ Bristow, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

⁷⁷ Military Technology, 1 March 2005.

sixth member.⁷⁸ In June 2004, Malaysia's Deputy Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak poured cold water on the idea of expanding FPDA membership, noting that other regional states might object.⁷⁹ Since then, Malaysia and Singapore have joined Indonesia in conducting co-ordinated air and naval patrols in the Malacca Straits. This development may be a harbinger of future developments.

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⁷⁸ Keating, *op. cit.*, p. 53. There was speculation in the late 1980s that Brunei might join the FPDA, see: Menon, *op. cit.*, pp. 306-327.

⁷⁹ The Straits Times, 7 June 2004.