

---

## FPDA's Legacy and Future: Navigating Geopolitical Shifts in Defence Cooperation

Mohd Ridwan Zainal Abidin<sup>1</sup>, Noraini Zulkifli<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of International Relations, Security, and Law

<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Defence Studies and Management, National Defence University of Malaysia, 57000 Kuala Lumpur.

---

**ABSTRACT:** This study analyzes the enduring impact of the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) on Malaysia's security landscape across five decades. By delving into its historical evolution, examining its multifaceted components and assessing its role within the ASEAN region, this research provides a comprehensive understanding of the FPDA's significance in shaping regional security dynamics. The study argues that the FPDA, characterised by its resilience, adaptability and enduring commitment, has played a pivotal role in upholding stability, sovereignty and freedom for Malaysia and Singapore. Through its multifunctional contributions, including military cooperation, dialogue facilitation and response to emerging challenges, the FPDA emerges as a vital pillar of Southeast Asia's security architecture. This study analyses the key take aways for future FPDA. The concept of national security serves as a guiding framework for comprehending the intricate relationship between the FPDA and Malaysia's security. By using a qualitative approach, this study engages in an in-depth analysis of historical records, policy documents and expert insights. The findings of this research highlight potential areas for further development and suggests avenues for enhancing the FPDA's continued relevance in a dynamic geopolitical landscape. This study concludes that the FPDA has consistently upheld its role as a cornerstone of regional stability and security. As a dynamic and adaptable framework, the FPDA has demonstrated its capacity to navigate emerging challenges and foster cooperation among member states. By promoting dialogue, enhancing military interoperability, and adapting to evolving threats, the FPDA remains a crucial asset for ensuring peace, stability, and prosperity in Southeast Asia.

**KEYWORDS:** Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, the United Kingdom, The Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA)

---

### INTRODUCTION

The Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) was signed in 1971 by Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, and the United Kingdom in reaction to the withdrawal of British armed personnel from Singapore and Malaysia (Wah, 1991). This defence arrangements is still in force and constituted an important milestone in the region's defence. Before the FPDA, the defence of independent Malaysia (which was previously known as Malaya) and Singapore was mostly carried out under the Anglo-Malayan Malaysian Defence Agreement (AMDA), which entered into force in 1957 and involved Britain, Australia, and New Zealand in a post-colonial policing role. Although the primary purpose of the FPDA is to protect Singapore and Malaysia, its effects are felt throughout Southeast Asia. By establishing a framework for collective security, FPDA attempts to foster regional stability and prevent aggression. The five participating nations conduct joint military exercises, share intelligence, and coordinate their defence strategy. The member governments are committed to provide military aid to one another in the case of a military threat against either Singapore or Malaysia. Consultations amongst the involved parties decide the precise type and extent of this assistance.

The Integrated Area Defence System (IADS) is the FPDA's principal defence system. In the early years of the FPDA, air defences were the primary focus, hence the IADS was originally known as the Integrated Air Defence System (Shermaine, 2021). The IADS is commanded by Air Vice Marshall of the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) which has the responsibilities during peacetime and also during operational role (Thayer, 2007). This is reflected in the new Headquarters Integrated Area Defence System (HQIADS) Mission Statement that quotes "HQIADS is to provide relevant and effective combined and joint military activities, liaison and training, in order to strengthen the defence of Malaysia and Singapore through the FPDA". IADS Commander operational role is defined as "If assigned by the FPDA Member Nations, CIADS will participate in the coordinated defence of Malaysia and Singapore". He has wide range of responsibilities during peacetime including plan and conduct FPDA combined and joint

## **FPDA's Legacy and Future: Navigating Geopolitical Shifts in Defence Cooperation**

training activities, develop doctrine and procedures for FPDA activities in order to improve FPDA joint inter-operability and joint operational capability, promote closer interfaces between the forces of the five nations and the maintenance of the Air Operation Centre (AOC) at a minimum level of operational preparedness to facilitate FPDA situational awareness across multiple domains to enable the safe conduct and Command and Control (C2) of FPDA exercises and activities. The signing of the Joint Communiqué on 16 April 1971 marked the essential principles of working jointly towards peace and stability while respecting the sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity of all nations. It also stressed the need of settling all international issues through peaceful means in conformity with the United Nations Charter's ideals. The Joint Communiqué underscored the government's steadfast commitment to cooperate closely on defence arrangements based on the principle that the defence of Malaysia and Singapore cannot be separated. The minister was pleased with the progress made by both nations in bolstering their defence capabilities with the assistance of the three partner governments. In addition, the decision by Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom to maintain their forces in the region beyond 1971 was applauded by all governments involved.

Malaysia Ministry of Defence, (2010) has stated that the FPDA is a unique set of formal rules designed to protect Malaysia and other countries beyond the region. Malaysia recognised that achieving self-sufficiency in defence would take time, therefore they utilised the FPDA to develop their military capabilities with the help of partner nations with whom they had had strong relationships. The FPDA provides dialogue processes that permit member states to get external funding and security guarantees. Malaysia is committed to keeping the FPDA relevant, but due to changes in the strategic environment and enhancements in the capabilities of the Malaysian Armed Forces, the FPDA's function has been reformed to match contemporary needs. Security threats in Malaysia encompass both internal threats and external threats (Kamarulnizam, 2010). In general, there are two types of security threats Malaysia has faced since 1971 i.e traditional security threats and non-traditional security threats. According to Attinà (2016) traditional security concerns, such as threats to the fundamental values of a nation-state, such as territorial integrity and political sovereignty are key considerations. Malaysia has had to address a number of security issues, including border security, territorial disputes, insurgency, terrorism and maritime security. To address these issues, Malaysia has utilised different mechanisms, such as the FPDA, a security pact involving Malaysia, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and the United Kingdom (Thayer, 2012a).

According to Anthony (2016), threats to a nation's security that are not typically associated with the military or conventional state-centered concerns are known as non-traditional security problems. Since they traverse boundaries and are not limited to a particular nation or region, non-traditional security challenges are frequently characterised by their transnational nature. This makes them particularly difficult to address through conventional military means because they frequently call for international collaboration and cooperation to effectively mitigate and prevent Malaysia has experienced non-traditional security threats like illegal economic migrants, environmental degradation, transnational organised and transnational crime (Abdullah, 2010). In the context of FPDA, non-traditional security concerns could include the proliferation of terrorism in the region, transnational crime networks and environmental disasters. The FPDA, which is a defence between Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, and the United Kingdom, was established in 1971 to address traditional military threats to the region. However, over the years, the scope of the FPDA has expanded to address non-traditional security concerns, as these threats have become increasingly relevant to the region's security (Thayer, 2012a).

Military spending in Southeast Asia demonstrates diverse budget allocation trends amongst nations which reflects the armed race and military modernisation. According to Guild (2022), Philippines and China have been involved in territorial and maritime conflicts in the South China Sea during the past few years. In light of this, the nation has signed a deal to purchase four warships from Hyundai Heavy Industries for approximately \$1 billion. The Philippines have also attracted attention by announcing the \$375 million acquisition of BrahMos missiles from India. Indonesia has been bolstering its naval capabilities by purchasing new warships and three submarines. While some may view this as a hint of an arms race in Southeast Asia in response to China's assertiveness, a deeper analysis of budgetary data reveals a more complex scenario. These developments which are indicative of an arms race among Southeast Asian nations in response to China's assertiveness, suggest that the country's security is likely to be affected by the ongoing tensions in the region, particularly those involving China and Taiwan in the South China Sea.

### **Future Directions for the FPDA**

The FPDA stands as a testament to enduring cooperation and shared commitment among its member nations. Comprising Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore and the United Kingdom, the FPDA is a unique security framework that, while distinct from traditional alliances or pacts, has showcased remarkable resilience and often overlooked value. Established with a primary focus on the external defence of Malaysia and Singapore, the FPDA has evolved over its history to address emerging challenges, particularly in the maritime domain. As this chapter delves into the key takeaways for the future of the FPDA, it becomes evident that its guiding principles, evolving components and regional partnerships are crucial not only for the security of its member

## FPDA's Legacy and Future: Navigating Geopolitical Shifts in Defence Cooperation

nations but also for the broader stability of the Asian region. By exploring the various facets of the FPDA's development and future prospects, we gain insights into how this unique arrangement can continue to adapt and contribute effectively to the ever-changing security dynamics of the Asia-Pacific.

### i. Main Efforts and Development

The forecasting of FPDA Exercise Blueprint done by FPDA Exercise Concept Working Group (FECWG) and FPDA Combined Working Group (FCWG) is in line with the strategic guiding principles of FPDA as presented as part of the 50<sup>th</sup> stocktake of the FPDA. To achieve the future exercise objectives in a systematic manner, FPDA activities will focus on enhancing joint integration across contemporary high-end warfighting focus areas, whilst also providing opportunities to progress non-conventional capacity, as summarised in **Table 1.1**.

**Table 1.1: Summary of main efforts and developments in the FPDA Exercise Blueprint**

Terms	Conventional	Non-Conventional
<b>Short Term (&lt;3 years)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crawl, walk, run approach to conducting FPDA field training exercises after gap periods due to COVID-19 disruptions</li> <li>• Focus on existing bilateral agreements for logistics progression</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interaction with approved Other Government Agencies (OGAs) and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to enhance the training, and readiness of FPDA in responding to a non-conventional contingency as well as maintaining stability through maritime security</li> </ul>
<b>Medium Term (4-6 years)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce new generations of platforms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce defensive cyber operations</li> </ul>
<b>Long Term (7-10 years)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New capabilities in unmanned systems in the air, land, surface and sub-surface domains will further enhance Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) capacity. This will ensure that FPDA can generate organic and persistent ISR support for both conventional and non-conventional activities to reduce the risk to personnel, particularly in high-risk areas such as mine counter measures.</li> </ul>	

**Source:** FPDA Exercise Blueprint Edition 2

In addition to future developments and subject to FPDA Consultative Council (FCC) approval, gradual introduction of unmanned systems could be considered to further enhance combined and joint-level ISR and targeting, including support to joint fires provided by maritime and air component assets (Abdullah, 2021). Seminars, workshops, subject matter expert exchanges (SMEE) and other professional forums will ensure a controlled and graduated introduction of new capabilities at a pace comfortable for all members nation. This will also ensure that tactics, techniques and procedures inclusive of doctrine are developed in line with the introduction of new capabilities. Tabletop exercises and command post exercises present an ideal opportunity for FPDA forces and commanders to understand the capability effect delivered by these new elements, and also allows refinement of C2 procedures (Abdullah, 2022).

### ii. FPDA Blueprint 2022 – 2031

The FPDA Exercise Blueprint spanning 2022 to 2031 provides a comprehensive strategy to enhance the joint capabilities of the FPDA. It underscores the integration of C2, conventional high-end warfare, maritime force projection and land domain manoeuvre warfare. The blueprint envisions the integration of unmanned systems to bolster ISR and targeting, facilitated through controlled seminars, workshops, and expert exchanges involving OGA and NGO. This approach prioritises the development of C2 infrastructure, advanced maritime operations, air-surface intergration and tactical air/sea lift capabilities. Additionally, the blueprint accentuates the reinforcement of logistics support and health systems, fostering a combined joint approach to heighten the overall readiness and efficacy of FPDA member nations in addressing diverse potential challenges across land, maritime and air domains. Details blueprint as **Table 1.2**.

# FPDA's Legacy and Future: Navigating Geopolitical Shifts in Defence Cooperation

Table 1.2: FPDA Blueprint 2022 – 2031

	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
<b>Main Effort / Capability Overlay</b>	Command and Control (C2) Projecting a mission-configured FPDA force into a CJDA (CPX) Conventional high-end warfighting Cyber Security (TX)	Tactical Integration FPDA force elements at TG level Approved OGA/NGO involvement	Threats Anti-Air Warfare / Integrated Air Defence FPDA CJTF stood up to counter a conventional air threat	Conventional Warfighting Capacity with FPDA CJTF contribution to HADR scenarios	Conventional Warfighting Capacity & Theatre ASW FPDA CJTF conducting anti-submarine operations against a near-peer adversary
<b>Major Milestones</b>	Rebuild tactical integration (SS series) Exercise CJTF (SP22), conducting Targeting Board, SOF Liaison, FPDA Policy and Legal Adviser, Introduction of Information and Media Ops	Information Operations development within FPDA at the tactical level Validation of FPDA interoperability at tactical level	COMAD (Composite Air Operations)	FTX focusing on tactical integration and operational projection in support of a regional crisis	Complex ASW in FPDA exercises
<b>Primary Training Audience</b>	BS22: Task Unit/Element level SP22: Conduct CJTF campaign at Ops Level	FPDA tactical level force elements	Air Tactical Units and Support Elements	FPDA tactical force elements	Maritime and MPA force elements & battle staff
<b>Priority Force Requirements</b>	All nations assets to rebuild interoperability	Enhanced boarding teams; rotary wing support to maritime and logistics; surface combatants	Fast Air, AEW/C, AAR Air Defence surface combatants	Maritime/Air strategic lift Air mobility Rotary wing	SSK / SSQ MPA, ASW platforms, ASW Rotary Wing
<b>Development Activity</b>	Seminars: Contemporary High End Air Warfare UAS/UAV Integration Seminar: Unmanned Aerial/Aircraft Systems in FPDA Cyber Security & CT in CPX COVID Consequence Planning	Seminar: Building FPDA Non-Conventional Capacity Maritime Interdiction Operations Cyber Security SMEE and low-level within FTX *Tactical and Micro Unmanned Systems C3 procedures workshop	Seminar: Enhancing Sub-Surface Capabilities Maritime Domain ISR information sharing *Tactical and Micro Unmanned Systems TTX (introduction to warlike SSQ) PIs & MTOC development	Seminar: Future FPDA Combined and Joint Ops *Tactical and Micro Unmanned Systems in CPX/FTX	Seminar: New and Emerging Threats Maritime Domain ISR information sharing
<b>Enabling Activity</b>	Approved OGA/NGO engagement JTEPS (UK) engagement	2 <sup>nd</sup> Generation Platform airspace & security requirements established	JTEPS (UK) engagement Crisis management (HADR) workshop	OGA / NGO Interaction Combined and Joint Maritime Domain: IIR interoperability Threats ASW planning workshop Maritime (Waterspace) Management Review	Additional approved OGA/NGO for SP27 engagement PS with MTOC integration
<b>Command, Control &amp; Communications</b>	ATO tools trial Develop defensive cyber policy/procedures Operational needs analysis Low-level Defensive Cyber Develop CAOC in support of CJTF	Develop and prove FPDA C3 in a complex environment FPDA COP Trial CMFP Full Suite Trial FPDA Community of Interest (CMFP COI) Improve DOL activities	Sustain FPDA C3 in a complex environment CMFP BAU	Sustain FPDA C3 in a complex environment CJTF HQ CMFP BAU	Multinational Information System (MINS) Review CMFP BAU FPDA Community of Interest (CMFP COI)
<b>Maritime</b>	Maritime C2 Naval Surface Fires Support	AWW MarSec / CT Generate procedures for Non-Compliant and Opposed boarding capability FTX Naval Surface Fires Support	AWW / ASUW MTG Sustainment MCAS	Maritime Land Integration HADR & SASO Force protection	Area ASW Multiple threat scenarios Complex ASW SSQ / SSQ training
<b>Land</b>	Land C2 / Support to CJTF Approved OGA/NGO engagement CMIC observation Bigrate JFECC	Jungle Warfare (Baseline Competency) FPDA Coy + Support elements CMIC SMEE Medical Logistics Comms	Urban Operations (Baseline Competency) FPDA Coy + Support element Field Engineer SMEE RW ALI to CT OPS and CASEVAC Tactical Air LR Introduction of Unmanned System	Jungle Warfare FPDA Company + Support element HADR/NEO SMEE CASEVAC Live Task PI Live Firing Introduction of Unmanned System	Urban Warfare FPDA Company + Support element Fire Support SMEE Direct Fire Support Weapons Integration Limited OGA interaction PI Live Firing Employment of Unmanned System
<b>Air</b>	Conventional air power (ASW, ASUW, ISR, COMAD, ADEX, OCA/DCA, CAS/MCAS, AAR OPS) Develop CAOC HQ	Conventional air power Increase air supporting role across exercises Strike Direction Improve cross-domain support and coordination enhanced AOC/COC TAC PW	Conventional air power Intro to SP Generation Fast Air AAR operations (SP gen) Airbasing interoperability (land-aways) Increased EW (EW assets required) RW support to ALI (based from SO) Air Spt to ASW ASUW Air Domain ISR information sharing	Conventional air power Air Domain ISR Information Sharing Air support to HADR, AME, OGA/NGO	Conventional Air Power Air support to Theatre ASW ISR EW
<b>Support</b>	FTX & TTX on use of bi-lateral agreements Ex J14 staff in a CJTF in operational fac level issues during SP22 EICON to undertake active management of new. Oti sup reporting NSE's to test common FPDA agreed Log/Per/Health reports/demands formats Confirm casualty tracking/regulation	Combined NSE for FPDA FTX NSE's to test common FPDA agreed Log/Per/Health reports/demands formats TTX application of RSOI in lieu of TEBO Role 1 Health Facility (Land) Development FPDA surface evaluation capability Develop and test FPDA AME Capability	Combined NSE for FPDA FTX TTX support to HADR operations Employ a collective RSOI package Role 1 Health (FPDA Air Component and Land urban operations) Confirm FPDA surface evaluation and AME capability	FTX & TTX on use of multilateral agreements Establish a Combined NSE Develop framework for a Joint NSE Employ a collective RSOI package Health screening (IHC) Establish FPDA Combined Joint (Health) Trauma System	Progression towards FPDA MLSA Establish a Joint NSE for FPDA FTX – test framework / org design Regional submarine support TTX / FPDA submarine sunk logistics SOP Health screening (IHC) Establish FPDA Combined Joint (Health) Trauma System ISO FPDA urban operations

Continue..

	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	
<b>Main Effort / Capability Overlay</b>	Command and Control (C2) CPX of projecting a mission-configured FPDA force into a CJDA Conventional high-end warfighting MS/CT	Overcoming A2AD FPDA CJTF to counter a near-peer adversary threatening SLOCs & ALOCs MCM	Maritime Force Projection FPDA CJTF projecting a mission-configured force from the sea.	Maritime Security	Combined Joint large scale activity	
<b>Major Milestones</b>	FPDA CJTF CPX Strategic assets protection	FPDA kinetic targeting demonstration Multi-domain assets COMAD NEO Land Domain Manoeuvre Warfare	FPDA CJTF & multiple maritime threat scenarios			
<b>Primary Training Audience</b>	FPDA CJTF HQ	Mar-MCM force elements Air-SEAD force elements	Maritime force elements; JFECC	FPDA force elements		
<b>Priority Force Requirements</b>	Increased IA commitment; major surface combatants	Strike-capable assets; major surface combatants; MCM & Dive units; air-ground attack aircraft JTAC/CFAC teams	Maritime/Air strategic lift Air mobility MLI (Rotary wing) JTAC/CFAC teams	ASuW platforms, patrol craft, enhanced boarding teams, Maritime Unmanned Systems		
<b>Development Activity</b>	New and Emerging Threats Seminar CPX activity Major Cyber Security scenario CPX MCM workshop (with MCM training target procurement) Ultimate ops battle staff doctrine development	Littoral exercise development workshops			Maritime Unmanned Systems Introduction	
<b>Enabling Activity</b>	Scenario Working Group JFECC CPX training for SP27 FPDA Targeting Board OGA/NGO engagement	Joint Fires discussion and working group Acoustic Exercise Area confirmation	Regional Maritime Security			
<b>Command, Control &amp; Communications</b>	CMFP BAU	CMFP BAU Future FPDA C4IS TBC	Tier 2 Component Level C4IS delivery (Air Component)			
<b>Maritime</b>	Maritime C2 / Support to CJTF MCM C2 integration into CJTF conduct Battlespace Management of Maritime unmanned systems - Conventional FTX	Maritime Freedom of Manoeuvre Advanced MCM operations Maritime area AD/SEAD Maritime unmanned systems FTX VSW Diving Operations Complex AAW & ASuW operations	Maritime Intra-Theatre Manoeuvre Opposed Manoeuvre as Air-Land-Maritime integration & training	Boarding / interdiction operators		
<b>Land</b>	Land C2 / Support to CJTF CJTF C2 Need further D&G after SP22 (next 5 years blueprint)	Urban Operations FPDA Coy iso NEO/CT Mechanised or Motorised Manoeuvre SMEE Joint Fires support Employment of Unmanned System	Jungle Warfare FPDA Bn HQ with Coy (V) Mechanised or Motorised Manoeuvre SMEE NEO, SASO, or CT (in support of) Joint Fires integration Building towards Battle Group Air-Surface Integration Tactical Air/Sea LR Employment of Unmanned System	Urban Operations FPDA Bn HQ with Coy (V) NEO, SASO, or CT (in support of) Joint Fires integration RW – Air Land Integration Tactical Air LR Mechanised or Motorised Manoeuvre Building towards Battle Group Employment of Unmanned System	Jungle Warfare FPDA Battle Group Conventional Operations NEO, SASO, or CT (in support of) Joint Fires integration Maritime & Air Land Integration Tactical Air/Sea LR Mechanised or Motorised Manoeuvre Employment of Unmanned System	
<b>Air</b>	Conventional Air Power C4ISR & CAOC support to CJTF Air support to OGA/NGO Cross-domain and cross OGA/NGO interaction	Conventional Air Power Force Protection Air support to CT	Conventional Air Power Tactical Air Transport Air mobility (RW)	Conventional Air Power Air support to MarSec RW support to CT Ops (maritime CT)	Conventional Air Power Air support to CJTF ISR EW RW support to CT Ops TAC PW	
<b>Support</b>	Exercise CJTF level J14 (SP27) Maritime TG Logistics Coordination (SS27) Review health support to CJTF (doctrine, SOPs and structures)	ExE a Combined Logistics Combat Support Element for the Land Component Establish FPDA Combined Joint (Health) Trauma System ISO FPDA urban operations	ExE a Combined Logistics Combat Support Element for the Maritime Component Establish FPDA Combined Joint (Health) Trauma System ISO FPDA maritime and jungle warfare	ExE a Combined Logistics Combat Support Element for primary training audience Establish FPDA Combined Joint (Health) Trauma System ISO FPDA Maritime and urban warfare	ExE a Combined Logistics Combat Support Element for primary training audience Establish FPDA Combined Joint (Health) Trauma System ISO FPDA jungle warfare / NEO	

Source: FPDA Exercise Blueprint Edition 2 2022 - 2031

## FPDA's Legacy and Future: Navigating Geopolitical Shifts in Defence Cooperation

### a. Land Component

The FPDA, while prominently recognised for its maritime and air components, also encompasses a noteworthy yet often understated land-based dimension that underscores the collective efforts of its member nations. Despite the absence of a formalised land component, the FPDA member countries actively engage in joint land exercises and collaborative initiatives, amplifying the alliance's comprehensive effectiveness (*Joint Statement from 21st Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) Defence Chiefs' Conference*, 2022). These joint land exercises, although not formally designated as a standalone component, play an instrumental role in bolstering interoperability and operational readiness among the member nations, particularly in the realms of counter-insurgency and counterterrorism operations. In 1981, Australia hosted the first land exercise (Exercise PLATYPUS) marked a significant milestone as the inaugural land warfare drill conducted in Australia yielding remarkable success. The post-exercise report underscores its exceptional training value for units representing all five nations involved. By showcasing the tangible efficacy of the FPDA in enhancing the military prowess of participating countries, the exercise tangentially contributes to fortifying stability and security across the Southeast Asian region. Notably, the exercise's key training advantages encompassed immersive involvement in heliborne operations and artillery firings, coupled with the invaluable experience of orchestrating a harmonized battalion defensive manoeuvre, with heliborne operations being a novel experience for many participating soldiers (Wolfe, 1981).

Recent years have witnessed significant progress toward greater integration between FPDA's land activities and those of airlift and sealift operations (*Joint Statement from 21st Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) Defence Chiefs' Conference*, 2022). The FPDA Land Component is currently focused on creating a Battalion Plus. Each nation will contribute an HQ and rifle unit. Future land-domain initiatives will include training exercises designed to simulate urban and jungle warfare environments in Singapore and Malaysia (Ministry of Defence Singapore, 2023). Additionally, SUMAN WARRIOR exercises will continue providing brigade level elements with opportunities for training to test each participant's command and control functions within a simulated environment in order to enhance interoperability by challenging planning skills from infantry, armour, artillery, logistics support forces, communication networks and medical support forces. Participants participated in military strategic planning, operations and procedures. Over the next decade, a reduction in the Land Component will enable the development of a combined arms capability, including supportive logistics, health and engineering elements (Abdullah, 2022). With manoeuvre elements from motorised, mechanised and rotary platforms, the FPDA Land Component will be well-equipped to swiftly respond across a joint force operational area. The incorporation of direct fire support weaponry and joint fires elements will further enhance contemporary high-end warfare capabilities (O' Donohue, 2019). In anticipation of potential regional security challenges, interactions with approved governmental and non-governmental organizations on the ground will be crucial in furnishing realistic training scenarios for land forces.

### b. Maritime Component

The early 2000s FPDA has shifted into focus to maritime concerns including piracy, people smuggling and Southeast Asia's maritime environment makes it especially susceptible to these kinds of threats, which is borne out in other security initiatives like the Malacca Straits Sea Patrol as well as Trilateral Cooperative Agreement (Andrews, 2023a). Embedded within the broader framework of the FPDA, the maritime components assume a critical position in upholding regional stability and security (Bateman, 2011). By acting as a potent deterrent against potential acts of aggression, these maritime forces possess a multifaceted utility, effectively addressing a range of threats including piracy, smuggling and even natural disasters.

Future generations of FPDA platforms, both air and land based, will provide enhanced training opportunities for the Maritime Component within combined and joint operational framework. Shortly thereafter, unmanned ISR platforms deployed outside controlled airspace will facilitate maritime security activities, further strengthening its ability to effectively support interdiction operations against today's maritime security scenarios (Abdullah, 2022). The maritime components boast a suite of key capabilities, encompassing a modern fleet of surface ships like frigates, destroyers and corvettes, each equipped with advanced weaponry and sensors (Thayer, 2007). These vessels are versatile tools, adeptly serving various roles such as anti-surface warfare, anti-submarine warfare and maritime patrol. Furthermore, the FPDA navies maintain a fleet of modern submarines, armed with sophisticated weaponry and sensors, enhancing their ability to engage in anti-surface and anti-submarine warfare as well as intelligence-gathering missions (Bateman, 2011). Complementing these capabilities, maritime patrol aircraft equipped with advanced sensor systems contribute to a comprehensive maritime surveillance network, supporting missions spanning maritime surveillance, search and rescue operations and anti-piracy efforts. Underpinned by cutting-edge equipment and comprehensive training, the maritime components demonstrate exceptional proficiency in executing diverse maritime operations. Armed with a robust array of weaponry and sensor technologies, these forces serve as a resolute bulwark against aggression and stand poised to effectively counter a spectrum of challenges, including piracy, smuggling and natural disasters (Massey, 2008).

## FPDA's Legacy and Future: Navigating Geopolitical Shifts in Defence Cooperation

### c. Air Component

Air component has traditionally focused on Offensive Counter Air, Defensive Counter Air and maritime patrol. Recent years have witnessed advancements in Close Air Support, Airborne Early Warning and Control (AEW&C), Air-to-Air refuelling capabilities and supporting airlift assets for Air-Land Integration. Going forward, the air domain will increasingly emphasize traditional high-end warfare elements such as Anti-Submarine Warfare, Anti-Surface Warfare, AEW&C systems and ISR. FPDA exercises will continue to include maritime patrol aircraft and fast jets as focal points, while efforts are being undertaken to create a rotary-wing task force in order to strengthen air-land integration capabilities (Abdullah, 2022). Pending approval from the FCC, unmanned systems will further augment joint-level ISR and targeting capabilities, providing more support for joint fires operations via Air Component assets (Abdullah, 2022). However, including high and medium altitude unmanned systems requires long-term planning and deliberation prior to any field training exercises. A Seminar and comprehensive exercise area review can ensure FPDA readiness to maximize training benefits for next-generation aircraft in air-centric activities that include air support for joint effects.

The air components within the FPDA member nations form a cornerstone of the alliance's strength, representing a formidable array of capabilities dedicated to ensuring regional security and stability. With the RAAF leading the group with over 200 aircraft, including modern fighter jets, bombers, transport aircraft and helicopters, the collective air forces of the members nation each contribute significantly to the arrangements' readiness (Australian Government Defence, 2023). As a crucial facet of the FPDA's overarching mission, the air components not only serve as a credible deterrent against potential aggression but also stand ready to respond adeptly to a spectrum of dynamic threats. Equipped with a wide array of capabilities, including modern fighter jets like the F/A-18 Hornet, Eurofighter Typhoon and F-15 Eagle, these air forces possess advanced weaponry and sensors enabling them to execute diverse missions such as air superiority, ground attack and maritime strike. Additionally, the transport aircraft fleet, which includes the C-130 Hercules, C-17 Globemaster and A400M Atlas, is instrumental in troop movement and logistical support, while a range of helicopters, such as the AH-64 Apache, CH-47 Chinook and S-70 Black Hawk facilitates tasks like troop transport, air assault, and search and rescue.

### iii. ASEAN Regional Concern

The significance of the FPDA extends deeply into the ASEAN region, offering a robust framework for collaborative security efforts (Lin, 2023). Through a series of FPDA exercises, members nation actively contributes to regional security enhancement . Central to its importance, the FPDA serves as a formidable deterrent against aggression, leveraging the combined military strength of its five member nations (Yaacob, 2021). This collective strength signifies a robust capability to dissuade potential aggressors, reinforcing the alliance's role as a guardian of regional stability (Yaacob, 2021).The significance of the FPDA reverberates profoundly throughout the ASEAN region, offering a comprehensive and steadfast framework for collaborative security endeavours (Sheng, 2019). This importance is vividly underscored by the alliance's proactive engagement in a myriad of strategic exercises and operations.

At the heart of its paramount importance lies the FPDA's role as a resolute deterrent against potential aggression (Ho, 2012). This role is magnified by the confluence of the combined military might of its five member nations, a harmonised strength that resonates as an indomitable shield against any inclination toward aggression. The FPDA's capability to marshal such a unified and potent response effectively safeguards the ASEAN region, fortifying its stability and resilience in the face of emerging challenges. The FPDA's stature as a guardian of regional stability finds expression in its unwavering commitment to upholding a secure environment. This is fundamentally rooted in its member nations' shared resolve to collectively project strength and cohesion. By exemplifying a cohesive and proactive alliance, the FPDA substantiates its dedication to maintaining a climate of security, enabling the ASEAN region to flourish and prosper.

Yet, the FPDA encounters its share of challenges. The evolving strategic landscape, notably marked by China's increasing influence and tensions in the South China Sea, has stirred concerns about the alliance's effectiveness in deterring Chinese aggression. Furthermore, a discernible capability gap among member nations poses potential vulnerabilities, especially if confronted with a substantial security incident. Nonetheless, the FPDA remains a cornerstone of security within the ASEAN region, facilitating cooperation and offering deterrence. As it navigates these challenges, the FPDA can take proactive steps to address ASEAN regional concerns. Firstly, by augmenting engagement with ASEAN countries, the FPDA can enhance transparency and trust (Tan, 2011). This could involve inviting ASEAN observers to exercises, deepening collaboration on maritime security, and jointly addressing emerging non-traditional security threats like terrorism and cybercrime. Secondly, focusing on interoperability is essential. Strengthening the ability of FPDA forces to seamlessly work together during a crisis would amplify their collective effectiveness and response capabilities (Thayer, 2007). Lastly, investments in new capabilities should be prioritised to bridge the

## FPDA's Legacy and Future: Navigating Geopolitical Shifts in Defence Cooperation

capability gap among member nations (Blount, 2013). This would ensure the FPDA's ability to deter aggression and respond effectively to a range of security incidents.

### iv. 3Rs Key Guiding Principle

The guiding principles of the FPDA, which complement the FPDA's key founding principles and as approved by the 10<sup>th</sup> FDMM has guided the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Stock-take (Malaysia's Ministry of Defence, 2021). FPDA was formed for the purpose of contributing to the external defence of Malaysia and Singapore. This defence arrangement is based on the needs to regard the defence of both nations as indivisible. The FPDA since its formation has been guided by the three principles as follows:

- 1) As a defensive arrangement, the FPDA should maintain a non-threatening posture to avoid rousing sensitivities in the region.
- 2) As a multilateral security arrangement, the FPDA should proceed at a pace comfortable to all its members with due cognisance to multilateral, bilateral and national sensitivities.
- 3) Given the constantly changing strategic environment, the FPDA should continually develop and evolve to remain relevant as a security arrangement.

In addition the 10<sup>th</sup> FDMM the 3Rs' has been approved as supporting principles and has remain important in guiding the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Stock Take. The three 3Rs'are as follows:

- 1) **Remit.** The key purpose of the FPDA should remain to contribute to the external defence of Malaysia and Singapore. Therefore, there should not be any fundamental changes to the nature of the FPDA, in particular with regard to membership in the FPDA and the emphasis on high-end conventional warfighting serials. As the FPDA member-nations modernise their military capabilities, the FPDA should continue to focus on enhancing Combined/Joint operations and interoperability. Any enhancement to the FPDA should bear in mind the balance of interests among member-nations, resources (e.g. asset and personnel contributions) and respective national considerations, so as to ensure that progress is made at a pace comfortable to all member-nations.
- 2) **Relevance.** The FPDA should adapt to evolving security threats and integrate newer capabilities of member-nations into conventional exercises. This not only ensures that the FPDA can more effectively fulfil its purpose, but also brings greater professional value and relevance to member-nations' militaries. To keep pace with the evolving security threats, the FPDA should continue to build capabilities in CT, MS and HADR. FPDA will also explore building capacity in response to the threats in the cyber and information domains. These developments should fulfil member-nations' objectives and not be at the expense of high-end warfighting serials. Keeping in mind member-nations' resource constraints and comfort level, we should calibrate the balance between non-conventional and conventional elements in the FPDA, while adhering to the FPDA's remit.
- 3) **Reassurance.** The FPDA should continue to portray its purpose as a defensive arrangement that contributes to regional peace and stability, to provide reassurance for the region. The development of new capabilities to update the FPDA's relevance should take into account potential regional sensitivities and be introduced in a calibrated and gradual manner. To enhance the FPDA's transparency and non-threatening posture, we should continue to invite the ASEAN member states to observe FPDA exercises and in particular, consider strengthening the engagement of Indonesia such as to invite the Indonesian Minister of Defence for milestone FPDA exercises for which the FPDA Defence Ministers will also attend. This will build confidence that the FPDA is defensive in nature and not targeted against any particular country.

### v. Capability gaps

Malaysia and New Zealand have fallen so far behind Australia, Singapore and the United Kingdom that makes a two-tier grouping in capability terms (Graham, 2020). Ostensibly, the FPDA is an even partnership across the five signatories. But militarily it is in danger of becoming the '3+2' defence arrangements. What does this mean for the future integrity of IADS and the FPDA? Since the capability gap is likely to widen, especially in air defence, FPDA members need to consider how other multilateral defence groupings, such as NATO, have adapted to this variability.

### vi. Limited extension to include non-military forces

While mindful of preserving the FPDA's core purpose and its focus on the defence of Malaysia and Singapore, there may be scope for a limited extension of the Arrangements to include non-military forces more directly. This is given the central role played by law enforcement organisations and coast guards in addressing maritime security challenges. Notwithstanding resource constraints, in the Australian context, this would be an opportunity for greater cooperation between the Australian Border Force and its regional partners, either through a new annual maritime law enforcement exercise or a programme within the existing

## FPDA's Legacy and Future: Navigating Geopolitical Shifts in Defence Cooperation

framework of FPDA activities. It should be said that, given the number of confrontations between coast guard vessels in the South and East China Seas over the past decade, a shift to non-military agencies is no panacea for all maritime security ills.

### vii. Public awareness

Officials and military professionals understand the FPDA's value, which is often overlooked, even in member countries. As long as there is political will to maintain the FPDA, the limited visibility within member countries does not pose a problem. The greatest risk is that Malaysia will lose its commitment to the FPDA due to a lack in political support caused by the ignorance about the arrangements (Graham, 2020). Malaysia could lose much more than just a channel of communication to Singapore when bilateral frictions increase. Australia, New Zealand and the UK would be deprived of significant access to Southeast Asia without Kuala Lumpur, at a time when strategic importance in the region is increasing. Malaysia could lose more than just a channel of communication to Singapore when bilateral tensions increase.

The FPDA has been largely ignored in Australian defence commentary despite the fact that it was established over a decade ago (Graham, 2020). The official expressions of Australia's defence policy tend to also privilege the US alliance and bilateral partnerships especially Indonesia as the main modalities in achieving Australia's regional defence objectives. The five members must be consistent in their strategic communications highlighting the FPDA's importance. The recent joint statement by ministers sets a precedent for future cooperation and communication. As New Zealand and Britain's strategic horizons have shrunk and their defence capabilities have decreased over the years, the ties that bind FPDA with their security are now less apparent than they were fifty years ago. Their involvement as external stakeholders has fluctuated. The FPDA has a slight resurgence at the moment in the UK, as it tries to flesh out a role in the world and recover a persistent military presence in Asia-Pacific. On its first operational deployment, the long-promised visit of an aircraft carrier next year is likely to include a variety of FPDA commemorative activities to highlight a renewed British commitment towards Southeast Asia.

### viii. Future Partnership

The FPDA is frequently asked about the possibility of enlargement. The two Southeast Asian countries are not interested in this, as they fear that it would dilute their commitment to defend Malaysia and Singapore. The desire to cross-brace the FPDA with other countries and organizations in the region is at odds with this conservatism. The conservatism of the three FPDA 'Anglo members' could hold them back, as they do not want to diminish their relative importance in Southeast Asia. It is important to maintain the delicate balance between Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia while allowing for more interaction with non-members like Japan, India and Indonesia. In this respect, the UK is less risk-averse than Australia and New Zealand because it has made fewer inroads in ADMM-plus defence networks.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter examines the future prospects and key insights for the FPDA, a security framework uniting Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore and the United Kingdom. It underscores the enduring cooperation and commitment among member nations, showcasing the alliance's resilience and often overlooked value. The FPDA's evolution from focusing on external defence of Malaysia and Singapore to addressing emerging challenges, particularly in the maritime domain, is highlighted. The chapter delves into the components of the FPDA: land, maritime, and air. It emphasizes the significance of joint land exercises, collaborative initiatives, and mutual training, which bolster interoperability and operational readiness. The maritime components, essential for regional stability, engage in exercises and operations, countering piracy, smuggling, and ensuring maritime security. The air component, with advanced fighter jets and aircraft, contributes to regional security and readiness. The FPDA's role in the ASEAN region is explored, emphasizing guiding principles like remit, relevance, and reassurance. The chapter addresses capability gaps, limited extension to non-military forces, public awareness, and future partnerships. In summary, this chapter underscores FPDA's adaptability, contributions to stability, and its vital role in shaping regional security dynamics.

## REFERENCES

- 1) Abdullah, A. S. N. (2021). *FPDA Exercise Blueprint Edition 2 Adaptation Layer 1*.
- 2) Abdullah, A. S. N. (2022). *FPDA Exercise Blueprint Edition 2 Adaptation Layer 3*.
- 3) Abdullah, K. Bin. (2010). Emerging threats to Malaysia's national security. *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*, 5(2), 55–70. <https://doi.org/10.1080/18335300.2010.9686949>
- 4) Andrews, D. M. (2023a, June 13). *The Five Power Defence Arrangements: how to sail past fifty*. FULCRUM Analysis on Southeast Asia. <https://fulcrum.sg/the-five-power-defence-arrangements-how-to-sail-past...>
- 5) Attinà, F. (2016). Traditional Security Issues. In *China, the European Union, and the International Politics of Global Governance*. Palgrave Macmillan. [https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137514004\\_10](https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137514004_10)

## FPDA's Legacy and Future: Navigating Geopolitical Shifts in Defence Cooperation

- 6) Australian Government Defence. (2023, May 17). *Five nations working as one*. Australian Government Defence. <https://www.defence.gov.au/news-events/news/2023-05-17/five-nations-working-one>
- 7) Bateman, S. (2011). The FPDA's contribution to regional security: the maritime dimension. *Five Power Defence Arrangements at Forty*, 68–84. <https://doi.org/10.1355/9789814345408-009>
- 8) Blount, C. (2013). Staying in steps: the US “pivot” and UK strategic choice. *Strategic Studies Quarterly*. Summer 2013, 7(2), 137–150. [https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/26270761.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A6b56cd5cad06612766041fb4e794fb82&ab\\_segments=&origin=&initiator=&acceptTC=1](https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/26270761.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A6b56cd5cad06612766041fb4e794fb82&ab_segments=&origin=&initiator=&acceptTC=1)
- 9) Graham, E. (2020). *The Five Power Defence Arrangements at 50: what next?* <https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/online-analysis//2020/12/five-power-defence-arrangements>
- 10) Ho, P. (2012, January 23). *FPDA at 40: still effective and relevant*. S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies. [https://fairobserver.com/region/central\\_south\\_asia/fpda-40-still-effective-and-relevant/](https://fairobserver.com/region/central_south_asia/fpda-40-still-effective-and-relevant/)
- 11) *Joint Statement from 21st Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) Defence Chiefs' Conference*. (2022). MINDEF Singapore.
- 12) Kamarulnizam bin Abdullah. (2010). Emerging threats to Malaysia's national security. *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*, 5(2), 55–70. <https://doi.org/10.1080/18335300.2010.9686949>
- 13) Lin, C. (2023, June 3). *Southeast Asian defence pact helps “balance” region, members say*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/southeast-asian-defence-pact-helps-balance-region-members-say-2023-06-03/>
- 14) Malaysia Ministry of Defence. (2010). *Dasar Pertahanan Negara. Prinsip - Prinsip Asas Pertahanan*, 30–36. <https://www.scribd.com/doc/313605475/dasar-pertahanan-malaysia-malaysia-defence-white-paper>
- 15) Malaysia's Ministry of Defence. (2021). *FPDA achievements over the last five decades*. <https://www.mod.gov.my/images/mindef/article/fpda/FPDA-ACHIEVEMENT.pdf>
- 16) Massey, A. S. (2008). *Maritime Security Cooperation in the Straits of Malacca*. Naval Postgraduate School.
- 17) Ministry of Defence Singapore. (2023, May 14). *Singapore and Malaysian soldiers test military tactics and manoeuvres at Exercise Semangat Bersatu*. <https://youtu.be/IBTTN8KUYM>
- 18) O' Donohue, D. J. (2019). *Joint Publication 3-09 Joint Fire Support*. Joint Chiefs of Staff Office, United States of America. [https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp3\\_09.pdf](https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp3_09.pdf)
- 19) Sheng, L. J. (2019, November 1). *The Future of the Five Power Defense Arrangements*. The Diplomat. <https://thediplomat.com/2019/11/the-future-of-the-five-power-defense-arrangements/>
- 20) Shermaine, A. (2021, October 14). FPDA: 50 years of defence diplomacy. *New Straits Times*. <https://api.nst.com.my/news/nation/2021/10/736338/fpda-50-years-defence-diplomacy>
- 21) Tan, S. S. (2011). From talkshop to workshop: ASEAN's quest for practical security cooperation through the ADMM and ADMM-Plus processes. *From 'Boots' to 'Brogues': The Rise of Defence Diplomacy in Southeast Asia*, 28–41. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep05908.6>
- 22) Thayer, C. A. (2007). The Five Power Defence Arrangements: The Quiet Achiever. *Security Challenges*, 3(1), 2–10. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265154467\\_The\\_Five\\_Power\\_Defence\\_Arrangements\\_The\\_Quiet\\_Achiever#:~:text=The%20scope%20of%20FPDA%20exercises%20has%20gradually%20expanded,%27the%20quiet%20achiever%27%20in%20contributing%20to%20regional%20security.](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265154467_The_Five_Power_Defence_Arrangements_The_Quiet_Achiever#:~:text=The%20scope%20of%20FPDA%20exercises%20has%20gradually%20expanded,%27the%20quiet%20achiever%27%20in%20contributing%20to%20regional%20security.)
- 23) Thayer, C. A. (2012a). The Five Power Defence Arrangements at Forty (1971-2011). *Southeast Asian Affairs 2012*, 61–72. <https://doi.org/10.1353/saa.2012.0006>
- 24) Wah, C. K. (1991). The Five Power Defence Arrangements: Twenty Years After. *Pacific Review*, 4(3), 193–203. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512749108718918>
- 25) Wolfe, K. (1981). *Five power land exercise successful*.
- 26) Yaacob, A. R. (2021, November 27). *Keeping the Five Power Defence Arrangement relevant at 50*. East Asia Forum. <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2021/11/27/keeping-the-five-power-defence-arrangement-relevant-at-50/>



There is an Open Access article, distributed under the term of the Creative Commons Attribution – Non Commercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits remixing, adapting and building upon the work for non-commercial use, provided the original work is properly cited.