

Engaging our interests: the Five Power Defence Arrangement and its contribution to regional security *By Kate Boswood*

What is the Five Power Defence Arrangement (FPDA)? In a period of flux in the global security environment, the FPDA remains an important part of Australia's strategic engagement with the region.

The FPDA is not an alliance, but rather it commits member nations – Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom (UK), Singapore and Malaysia – to consult with each other in the event of external aggression against either Malaysia or Singapore. It provides a framework for conducting combined training exercises, with the objective of developing a joint FPDA operational capability. The only multilateral arrangement in South East Asia with an operational dimension, it is valuable for Australia because it brings together partner nations in a way that fosters regional security while directly engaging our interests.

The FPDA was originally established in 1971 to provide for the air defence of peninsular Malaysia and Singapore, following the British withdrawal of military forces 'east of Suez'.

During the first decade of its existence, the FPDA conducted a handful of simple air defence exercises. Since then, the regular exercise program has increased in size, scope and complexity. The most recent activity, Exercise Suman Protector 07 (20 August – 7 September 2007), combined a large-scale Command Post Exercise with operational air, maritime and land elements. It highlighted the progress made towards joint and combined interoperability by FPDA members. Exercises Bersama Shield and Bersama Lima were, and will be, held in the South China Sea in 2008. The aim is to exercise FPDA nations in the conduct of combined and joint operations for the defence

of Malaysia and Singapore and to enhance interoperability through the conduct of integrated tactical training.

Through exercises, the FPDA aims to promote professionalism; enhance the exchange of ideas; and deepen knowledge of each member's strengths and capabilities. Of paramount importance are the personal relationships formed through this engagement. These relationships are promoted by the integrated staffing arrangements at Headquarters Integrated Area Defence System (IADS) at Royal Malaysian Air Force Base Butterworth, where military officers from all FPDA member countries work side by side in furthering the aims of the FPDA. The Commander of IADS is traditionally Australian, with a Malaysian Deputy Commander.

The greatest transformation occurred in 2000 when the FPDA headquarters, located in Butterworth, Malaysia, was restructured from Integrated Air Defence System to Integrated Area Defence System, integrating naval and land forces. Over time, Malaysia and Singapore have become more equal contributors to the arrangement, with their participation producing significant benefits to all member states. While it was conceived as an interim arrangement to provide for the defence of Malaysia and Singapore until the new states could provide their own defence, the FPDA has evolved into a key element of the broader regional security architecture.

Described by one analyst as 'the quiet achiever', the FPDA has been able to maintain its relevance by adapting to new challenges in the security environment and broadening its operational focus to address non-conventional threats. Recently, member countries have agreed to pursue capacity building and interoperability in the areas of maritime security; humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR); and consequence management.

An influential nation within the regional security community, Malaysia is a longstanding and valued partner of Australia. We cooperate in many areas, and FPDA exercises provide another avenue through which we can assist Malaysia in developing its military capability. This increases Malaysia's capacity to combat threats that may affect Australia's interests, such as piracy in the Malacca Straits or regional terrorism.

Singapore is a natural defence partner for Australia with a similar strategic outlook and a capable, technologically advanced defence force. The FPDA helps us to further strengthen ties with Singapore, developing valuable interoperability and fostering understanding between our armed forces.

New Zealand and the UK are also long-standing allies and valued security partners for Australia, and the FPDA provides a useful mechanism to ensure their continued engagement in the region. With similar strategic interests to Australia but limited operational platforms, New Zealand values the FPDA as a formal defence mechanism through which it can make a relevant and meaningful contribution to regional affairs. The FPDA is the only security agreement that formally links the UK with Australia, and helps to ensure the UK's ongoing engagement in the region.

The FPDA has proven to be a valuable component of the regional security architecture. Motivated by shared interests, member nations have proven adept at shaping the FPDA to meet new security challenges, such as HADR, while maintaining the conventional deterrence function aimed at preventing conflict in South East Asia. In the future, it is hoped that interoperability between member nations will continue to improve, and that the collective capacity to respond to issues like maritime security and disaster relief increases. Through cooperation and commitment, the FPDA will continue to advance individual and collective security interests.

RIGHT RAAF Canberras and Sabres operated from Butterworth from 1958.

Source: Pathfinder Airpower Development Centre Bulletin: Issue 35, November 2005



Sergeant Azuan Mamet (left) and Leading Aircraftman Abd Muaih, look over an F-111 under the guidance of RAAF Aircraft Technicians during Exercise Bersama Padu at Royal Malaysian Air Force Base Butterworth, Malaysia.



ABOVE Malaysian Air Force Fire and Rescue member, Leading Aircraftman Azrin Saarai (right), being shown an F-111 cockpit by 6 Squadron Aircraft Technician, Leading Aircraftman Chris Gould.

Photos provided by Public Affairs.