

FPDA ACHIEVEMENT OVER THE LAST FIVE DECADES



This year marks the Golden Jubilee or 50th Anniversary for the formation of the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) and Malaysia is shy of a few months from hosting this momentous event. There have of course many thoughts over the years on how relevant it is and its importance in the era of 21st century. These thoughts were steamed from the reasoning for the formation of FPDA itself. Looking back through the history of FPDA was established in 1971 to replace the Anglo-Malaysian Defence Agreement (AMDA) through a series of bilateral exchanges of notes between Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom (UK). Based on its formation the FPDA is a unique loose consultative multilateral arrangement between its members. This formation is reflected in the Founding Communique dated 16 April 1971 whereby the FPDA members pledged

“...in relation to the external defence of Malaysia and Singapore, that in the event of any form of armed attack externally organized 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 jointly or separately in relation to such an attack or threat.”¹

For those who are not in the know 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;

¹ Paragraph 5, Communique issued at the conclusion of the Five Power Ministerial Meeting on the External Defence of Malaysia and Singapore, London, 15-16 April 1971.

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; and
3. Given the constantly changing strategic environment, the FPDA should continually develop and evolve to **remain relevant** as a security arrangement.

In addition the 10th Five Defence Ministerial Meeting (FDMM) the three 'R's has been approved as supporting principles and to date has remain important in guiding the 50th Anniversary Stock Take. The three 'R's are as follows:

1. FPDA should not deviate from its **remit** which is to contribute to the external defence of Malaysia and Singapore;
2. FPDA should continually develop to evolve and to ensure its **relevance** as a regional security arrangement; and
3. Cognisant of regional sensitivities, the FPDA should maintain its portrayal as a defensive arrangement to provide **reassurance**.

The FPDA had also undeniably provided Malaysia and Singapore with valuable assistance and opportunity to develop their own national defences. Looking down memory lane the first decade (1971-1981) of its formation was dedicated to building airpower capabilities. It was translated into the Integrated Air Defence System Air Defence Exercise until 2004 and later renamed to **EX BERSAMA SHIELD**. This period saw the materialization of procedures for integrated air defence and the establishment of the operational base for FPDA known as the Headquarters Integrated Air Defence System (HQIADS). In the second decade (1981-1991) FPDA has continued to progress modestly to include naval and land exercises. The incorporation of land and naval exercise was initially known as EX STARFISH before it was renamed as **EX BERSAMA LIMA**.²

In the third and fourth decade (1990 – 2011) FPDA saw significant progress being made where its exercise became more of a joint approach. The air and maritime combination exercise was designated as EX STARDEX. This was conceptualised the 10th Version of "The Future of the FPDA Operational Arrangement" paper that was approved at the 4th FDMM. The approval of the paper gave testament that conventional capacity remains as the primary focus of FPDA. The air and naval components were merged into one major exercise in April 1997 and it was known as EX FLYING FISH. The decade of the 1990s also witnessed the increase in the size of land force exercises that were designated **EX SUMAN WARRIOR**.³ The maturity of FPDA was reflected in the transformation of the Headquarters Integrated Air Defence System (HQIADS) to the Headquarters Integrated Area Defence System (HQIADS) that was adopted during the 8th FDMM.

Since 2004, FPDA activities and exercises entered a new era whereby elements of combating non-conventional threats were being incorporated. It initially started with a focus

² Thayer, C. (2007). The Five Power Defence Arrangements: The Quiet Achiever. *Security Challenges*, 3(1), 79-96. Retrieved May 4, 2021, from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26458852>.

³ Thayer, C. (2012). THE FIVE POWER DEFENCE ARRANGEMENTS AT FORTY (1971-2011). *Southeast Asian Affairs*, 61-72. Retrieved May 4, 2021, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41713986>

on building capacity in the area of maritime security including piracy that gradually includes non-military agencies in the exercise. The devastation of tsunami in December 2004 and Kashmir earthquake in 2005 has prompted the 6th FDMM to direct FPDA to explore ways to build capacity and enhance inter-operability in the area of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief or HADR. In 2007, **EX SUMAN PROTECTOR** was introduced and it incorporated maritime security and HADR elements in its exercise.⁴

In the last decade, FPDA has evolved marching further into the security realm so that it stays relevance. During the 10th FDMM, responding to the ever growing terrorism threat, FPDA has been directed to enhance its capacity in counter terrorism. Following that, FPDA have also been tasked to explore non-conventional threat such as cybersecurity. This last decade has clearly shown the evolution of FPDA in keeping up with various new non-conventional threats while at the same time continuously focussing on its high-end conventional warfighting. While expanding its focus into non-conventional threat, FPDA in this decade also focuses on modernising its military assets, equipment and services.

Apart from providing education, exercises and training, the existence of FPDA has also provided a much more important benefit to Malaysia and Singapore that is psychological deterrence. The existence of a FPDA makes an aggressor think twice on whether their attack to a member would result in the involvement of the other four member of the pentagon. Furthermore, United Kingdom and Australia being an ally of United States (US) has also gave potential aggressor a pause on whether there is a potential involvement of US. Over time the exercises conducted by the member of FPDA has enhanced their interoperability hence, contributing to the psychological deterrence.

In addition to security achievement, the existence of FPDA has greatly contributed towards warmer bilateral ties among members that have spilled over into political and economic benefits. Not to be left out the existence of FPDA has also become a channel for confidence building between Malaysia and Singapore throughout its awkward moments in history. The FPDA has also provided a foundation between members in responding to natural disasters as well as in the United Nation Peacekeeping Operation such as in Timor Leste, and Afghanistan in 2010. The close ties between all pentagon members can also be seen by the support provided during the search for the missing Malaysian Airlines MH370.⁵ It is without a doubt FPDA has achieved many milestones of the years and the Golden Jubilee celebration is a proof of its importance and relevant existence.

⁴ Five Power Defense Arrangements in the Spotlight with Military Exercise". The Diplomat. 12 October 2017. Retrieved 4 May 2021.

⁵ Graham, E. (2014, October 20). FPDA—not fade away. Org.Au. <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/fpda-not-fade-away/>