

## CSS STRATEGIC BACKGROUND PAPER – 09 / 2013

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### FIVE POWER DEFENCE ARRANGEMENTS: A NEW ZEALAND PERSPECTIVE

A strong commitment to the security of South-east Asia is in New Zealand's defence policy DNA. For more than six decades, New Zealand has been actively engaged in contributing to collective regional security arrangements, beginning with a decision to join ANZAM in 1949. The name ANZAM was derived from the three members, Australia, New Zealand and then British-ruled Malaya. Originally formed with the protection of sea communications in mind, its scope was soon extended to tackle the Communist insurgency in Malaya. That was to lead to the basing of the front-line New Zealand Army battalion in Malaya and subsequently Singapore, for more than three decades until 1989 and to the stationing for many years of RNZN ships and RNZAF aircraft in the region.

Once Malaya gained its independence in 1957, New Zealand implicitly accepted a formal responsibility for the external defence of the region covered by the Anglo-Malayan Defence Agreement {AMDA} which was designed to provide a security umbrella for Malaya. This was effectively confirmed in 1963 when the New Zealand Prime Minister said that "New Zealand had always given cause to believe that she would not stand idly aside in the event of an armed attack on Malaysia". In 1971 New Zealand joined Australia, Malaysia, Singapore and the United Kingdom in forming the Five Power Defence Arrangements {FPDA} which replaced AMDA and reflected the new realities of the region in the face of the British desire to focus the bulk of its defence efforts closer to home which raised concerns about a regional power vacuum.

The five members of the FPDA had intended that the Arrangements would be a temporary security fix until Malaysia and Singapore had developed their military capabilities to the point where they could meet their own defence needs. In the meantime, the emphasis was to be on the provision of training

assistance through collective exercises and bilateral training programmes. The building of confidence between Malaysia and Singapore was another important objective.

Instead of withering on the vine as had been expected, however, the FPDA was to take on a new lease of life a decade later. Growing uncertainty over a strategic environment that included Soviet naval vessels regularly passing through the Malacca Strait, Viet Nam's military presence in Cambodia, and competing territorial claims, had led to a collective re-think of the relevance of the FPDA.

Two years ago, the Defence Ministers representing the Five Powers met to mark the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the FPDA. The FPDA had become the oldest multilateral security arrangement in South-east Asia, and the only one with an operational arm in the form of the Integrated Area Defence System Headquarters at Butterworth in Malaysia.

There are several explanations for the enduring nature of the FPDA. First, there has been a quantum leap in the scale and level of sophistication in regular FPDA exercises that delivers a range of professional benefits on the ground, in the air and on the sea to all participants.

While the emphasis remains on conventional capabilities, recent exercises have reflected the multi-threat nature of the contemporary security environment. Scenarios have been added to cover non-traditional maritime security threats, and to build capacity in responding to regional disasters and providing humanitarian assistance. Provision has been made where appropriate for the involvement of civilian agencies including Malaysia's Maritime Enforcement Agency, Singapore's Police Coastguard, and the International Committee of the Red Cross. Professional defence forums are also now a regular feature of the FPDA landscape.

There have been significant enhancements in policy, planning and operational structures. There are regular meetings of Defence Ministers, which form the apex of FPDA policy-making, of Defence Chiefs, which provide professional military advice to Ministers, and of the Consultative Council, which has responsibility for policy, planning and budgetary matters. The sharpening of arrangements for policy oversight, with attention given to ensuring the relevancy of military activities, has enabled the FPDA to evolve with the times.

Other factors must not be overlooked in any accounting of the reasons for the FPDA'S staying power. The FPDA has always been a consultative arrangement. It is not a formal alliance. Decisions are taken by consensus reflecting the broader region's approach to security issues. The emphasis is on practical benefits to all FPDA members. And in tune with the principle of ASEAN centrality, Malaysia and Singapore, take the lead in formulating FPDA policy. Throughout its 40 plus years, the FPDA has been careful to ensure that it does not compete with other regional security structures and that it is a net contributor to the security of the wider region. The provision now made for other ASEAN countries to observe aspects of FPDA exercises reflects this approach.

A further and very important factor is the major contribution the FPDA have made to the development of Malaysia's and Singapore's defence capacity and to both countries confidence with each other. Access to the operational doctrine and range of capabilities of their FPDA partners has broadened experience levels and contributed to the development of a wide range of skill sets in both countries' militaries, a process aided by the psychological deterrent effect of the FPDA. The previous donor/client relationship has been replaced by a partnership of equals. Both Malaysia and Singapore continue to emphasise the importance of the FPDA in their defence settings.

For New Zealand, the FPDA occupies a special place in our defence settings. For more than two decades the FPDA provided the only opportunities for the New Zealand Defence Force to take part in multilateral exercises at a time when the United States cold-shoulder over our non-nuclear policy, had firmly closed the door on involvement in any exercises in which their forces were taking part. The professional benefits and the psychological reassurance these valuable opportunities provided for the New Zealand Defence Force cannot be over-stated.

Moreover, over the course of the last decade both Singapore and Malaysia have become important partners in peacekeeping and related missions. Singapore's contribution of a 70-strong infantry company group to New Zealand's battalion in Timor Leste reflected the long association between the New Zealand Defence Force and its Singapore counterpart through the FPDA, and signalled the growing maturity of that relationship characterised by the ability to work together effectively in an operational setting. Through our work, together Singapore was subsequently able to replace our Iroquois helicopter squadron in Timor, and in conjunction with Thailand, to replace

our battalion there providing a timely exit strategy after three years of continuous operations in Timor. Singapore subsequently attached engineers and medical personnel to New Zealand's Provincial Reconstruction Team {PRT} in the Afghanistan province of Bamiyan and the two Navies have worked together on counter-piracy patrols in the Indian Ocean.

Mention must also be made of Malaysia's attachment of a 40-strong medical contingent to our PRT in Bamiyan. This was a very welcome and substantive contribution as it included a number of female Muslim doctors who were better placed than their New Zealand counterparts to interact with Bamiyan women. There was significant symbolic value, too, in having a Muslim and non-Muslim nation work closely together in a country deeply fractured along ethnic and sectarian lines.

The continuing significance of the FPDA to New Zealand is clearly stated in the most recent New Zealand Defence White Paper published in 2010. It notes that "New Zealand's security relationships with Singapore and Malaysia, founded on the FPDA, are likely to remain our most enduring in the region. So long as these regional states maintain their support for the FPDA then New Zealand will continue to do so. As New Zealand's most significant operational security link to South-east Asia, the FPDA will continue to provide a valuable anchor for the presence of our defence assets in the region".

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