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**The Role of the Five Power Defence Arrangements
in the Southeast Asian Security Architecture**

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the evolving Southeast Asian security architecture by focusing on the role of a “mini-lateral” defence coalition, the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA). Examined from the Singaporean and Malaysian points of view, the paper investigates whether the FPDA complements or is being gradually supplanted by other regional security instruments in Southeast Asia. The other mechanisms covered in the paper include the activities undertaken by Malaysia and Singapore with the United States bilaterally, mini-laterally with Indonesia through the Malacca Strait Patrol (MSP), and multilaterally through the emerging ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting (ADMM) process. The overall argument of the paper is that for Malaysia and Singapore the FPDA continues to complement these bilateral, mini-lateral and multilateral security instruments, yet each in very different ways. In that sense, the FPDA plays a clear, although limited, role in the Southeast Asian security architecture.

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The Role of the Five Power Defence Arrangements in the Southeast Asian Security Architecture¹

Introduction

The Southeast Asian security architecture has traditionally been discussed in the literature through two sets of security approaches that have characterized the international relations of the region; namely, bilateral alliances/ties on the one hand, and multilateral cooperative security arrangements on the other.² Southeast Asia is therefore often said to accommodate a dual security system, one ranging from bilateral military arrangements to multilateral expressions of cooperative security.³ These forms of bilateral and multilateral security cooperation have been centred respectively on the United States and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).⁴ This paper seeks to make a contribution to the existing literature by examining the Southeast Asian security architecture through a different lens. It focuses on the role of “mini-lateral” defence coalitions in complementing and overlapping with bilateral and multilateral security structures in Southeast Asia. Medcalf defines mini-lateralism as the “self-selection of small subgroups of countries” that seek to complement “bilateralism and region-wide multilateralism”.⁵ Tow further explains that the agendas of mini-lateral arrangements “are usually less

¹ This paper was first presented at the workshop on “Alliance/Coalition Initiatives on Broader Security Challenges”, organized by the Department of International Relations, Australian National University (ANU), and funded by the MacArthur Foundation, 4 March 2010, Canberra, Australia.

² See Ralf Emmers, “Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific: Evolution of Concepts and Practices”, in Seng Tan and Amitav Acharya (Eds.), *Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation: National Interests and Regional Order*, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2004, pp. 3–18.

³ On how bilateral and multilateral structures interact in Southeast Asian and Asian-Pacific security, see William T. Tow, *Asia Pacific Strategic Relations: Seeking Convergent Security*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001; Muthiah Alagappa (Ed.), *Asian Security Order: Instrumental and Normative Features*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003; See Seng Tan and Amitav Acharya (Eds.), *Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation: National Interests and Regional Order*, Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2004.

⁴ ASEAN was established in Bangkok in 1967. The original members were: Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Brunei joined in 1984, Vietnam in 1995, Laos and Myanmar in 1997, and Cambodia in 1999.

⁵ Rory Medcalf, “Squaring the Triangle: An Australian Perspective on Asian Security Mini-lateralism”, in *Assessing the Trilateral Security Dialogue*, NBR Special Report #16, Seattle: The National Bureau of Asian Research, December 2008, p. 25.

extensive than those pursued by their fully fledged cooperative security counterparts, and they are less likely to expand into inclusive multilateral institutions”.⁶

Special attention is given here to the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) that has been part of the Southeast Asian security architecture since 1971. Super-ceding the Anglo-Malayan Defence Agreement (AMDA) originally formed in 1957, the FPDA has involved Malaysia and Singapore as well as Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. In contrast to the AMDA and its commitment to the external defence of Malaysia and Singapore, the FPDA has been defined by a provision for consultation in the event of an external aggression against the two Southeast Asian states. The FPDA can be defined as a “mini-lateral” defence coalition. It operates as a loose and subgroup structure focusing on a specific set of security issues of direct concern to its participants. As highlighted by the plural noun “arrangements”, its activities can involve two or more of its five members, thus incorporating a flexible and in-built “FPDA minus x” formula.⁷

The paper studies the ongoing relevance of the FPDA to the Southeast Asian security architecture and examines how this “mini-lateral” defence coalition may be affecting ongoing security cooperation in the region. In other words, it seeks to determine how, if at all, the FPDA has continued to fit in the evolving Southeast Asian security architecture. Significantly, the paper claims that the FPDA has sought, over the last 40 years, to complement and overlap with, rather than compete or replace, the traditional U.S. bilateral alliance/coalition network, more recently-established mini-lateral arrangements as well as the operations of ASEAN in the promotion of peace and stability in Southeast Asia. In doing so, the paper focuses especially on Malaysia and Singapore and pays special attention to their own threat perceptions and regional circumstances. It argues that the institutional evolution of the FPDA has largely mirrored the evolving threat perceptions of the two Southeast Asian states. In contrast, Australia, Britain and New Zealand are examined as external powers with a

⁶ William Tow, *Tangled Webs: Security Architectures in Asia*, Canberra: The Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2008, p. 31.

⁷ See 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, October – December 2000, pp. 107–14, Internet edition.

role in the Southeast Asian security architecture; this being particularly true in the case of Canberra.

Examined from the Singaporean and Malaysian points of view, the paper investigates whether the FPDA complements or is being gradually supplanted by other regional security instruments in Southeast Asia. The other mechanisms covered in the paper include the activities undertaken by Malaysia and Singapore with the United States bilaterally, mini-laterally with Indonesia through the Malacca Strait Patrol (MSP), and multilaterally through the emerging ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) process. It should be noted that other instruments which overlap with the FPDA in terms of scope and activities include the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), the Cobra Gold exercise especially since the multilateralization of its participation as well as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and its embryonic exercises. That said, the case selection can be justified by the need to maintain continuity with the Singaporean and Malaysian participation as well as the scope and defence element of the FPDA. Moreover, the U.S. ties, MSP and the ADMM can be neatly classified as bilateral, mini-lateral and multilateral arrangements, further rationalizing the comparative case selection. The overall argument of the paper is that for Malaysia and Singapore the FPDA continues to complement these bilateral, mini-lateral and multilateral security instruments, yet each in very different ways. In that sense, the FPDA plays a clear, although limited, role in the Southeast Asian security architecture.

The paper consists of three sections. The first discusses the changing security architecture in Southeast Asia, paying close attention to a series of defence arrangements as well as cooperative security structures. This is done both in the context of the Cold War and post-Cold War periods. The second section concentrates specifically on the FPDA, reviewing its historical origins and institutional evolution. Great importance is given to the climate of Southeast Asian relations and state threat perceptions at the time of its formation and how these have changed over time, transforming the arrangements in the process. The section reviews how the FPDA activities have successfully moved beyond a focus on conventional threats and potential malign regional aspirations to include a series of non-traditional issues. The final section investigates how the FPDA contributes and affects the current security

architecture in Southeast Asia. In order to do so, it compares and contrasts the FPDA and its military exercises to other regional security instruments.

The Changing Security Architecture in Southeast Asia

The evolving security architecture in Southeast Asia has often been discussed in terms of bilateral defence versus multilateral cooperative arrangements. During the Cold War period, bilateral security arrangements played a dominant role in Southeast Asian security. Singapore, the Philippines, Thailand, and to a lesser extent Brunei, Indonesia, and Malaysia saw the United States as a security guarantor. In the wider Asia-Pacific region, the San Francisco System or “the hub and spokes model” grew out of the East-West ideological rivalry and featured a series of strong bilateral security agreements linking the United States to its regional allies. The U.S.-Japan Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security, signed during the San Francisco Conference in September 1951, was at the core of “the hub and spokes model”. The San Francisco System was applied to Southeast Asia through the U.S.-Philippine Mutual Defence Treaty of 1951. The United States had military bases in the Philippines and Thailand and both states were indirectly involved in the Vietnam War. The Thai-U.S. Joint Military exercise (Cobra Gold) was established in 1982. All these bilateral ties were used to preserve U.S. interests in the region and the defence of its allies by deterring any possible Soviet expansion. The Soviet Union also focused on bilateral agreements, including a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed with Vietnam in November 1978.

Few multilateral defence arrangements existed in Southeast Asia during the Cold War era. The Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) was created in February 1955 as a result of the Southeast Asia Collective Defence Treaty, or Manila Pact, of September 1954. SEATO included Australia, Britain, France, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand and the United States but never played an active military role. It was eventually abolished due to internal tensions and the absence of common strategic interests.⁸ Contrary to its involvement in Europe through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the United States feared that a multilateral collective

⁸ Michael Leifer, *Dictionary of the Modern Politics of Southeast Asia*, London: Routledge, 1995, p. 106.

defence system in the Asia-Pacific would undermine its bilateral arrangements while adding very little to its military capabilities in the region. The Soviet Union did not form a multilateral collective defence system either in Asia and instead focused, like the United States, on bilateral military agreements, including a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed with Hanoi in November 1978, less than two months before Vietnam invaded Cambodia.

Beyond these defence structures, regional attempts were made at creating cooperative security arrangements in the 1960s. The Association of Southeast Asia (ASA) was formed in Bangkok in July 1961 and included Malaya, the Philippines and Thailand. ASA was affected by the deterioration of Malayan-Philippine relations over Sabah and its operations were interrupted in mid-1963. Consisting of Indonesia, Malaya, and the Philippines, Maphilindo was a loose confederation created through the Manila Agreements of 1963. Its viability was destroyed due to the Indonesian Policy of Confrontation. Established in 1967, ASEAN would be more successful.⁹

The defence versus cooperative security dichotomy has generally persisted in the post-Cold War period. Bilateral security arrangements have indeed continued to play a central part in Southeast Asian security since the early 1990s. While not a formal ally, Singapore has further developed close military ties with the United States. The Philippine Senate denied a new base treaty with the United States in September 1991 leading to a complete withdrawal from Subic Bay Naval Base and Clark Air Base by November 1992. Yet the two countries have remained military allies through the 1951 Mutual Defence Treaty. Moreover, Manila signed a Visiting Forces Agreement with the United States in February 1998. Post-9/11, the bilateral alliance was further reinvigorated in the context of the global war on terror and Washington gave the Philippines a major non-NATO ally status. Brunei has relied on an agreement with Britain renewed in December 1994 that guarantees the presence of a battalion of Gurkha Rifles in the Sultanate. Indonesia signed a security agreement with Australia

⁹ See Amitav Acharya, "The Association of Southeast Asian Nations: 'Security Community' or 'Defence Community'?", *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 64, No. 2, pp. 159–77; Amitav Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia: ASEAN and the Problem of Regional Order*, New York: Routledge, 2000; Michael Leifer, *ASEAN and the Security of South-East Asia*, London: Routledge, 1989; Ralf Emmers, *Cooperative Security and the Balance of Power in ASEAN and the ARF*, London: Routledge Curzon, 2003; Sheldon W. Simon, *The ASEAN States and Regional Security*, Stanford, CA.: Hoover Institution Press, 1982.

in December 1995; later revoked by Jakarta in 1999 over the East Timor crisis. A new security pact, the Lombok Treaty, was eventually signed by Canberra and Jakarta in 2006 and came into force in February 2008.

Significantly, multilateral cooperative institutions have been expanded and somewhat deepened since the end of the Cold War, with the Association enlarging its membership from six to 10 between 1995 and 1999. The ASEAN heads of state and government endorsed in 2003 the Bali Concord II, adopting a framework for the establishment of a Security Community, an Economic Community and a Socio-Cultural Community in Southeast Asia by 2020. The creation of new multilateral instruments has been spectacular since 1989, including the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), and the ASEAN Plus Three (APT). Finally, in December 2005, heads of state and government from the 10 ASEAN members, China, Japan and South Korea, as well as Australia, India and New Zealand gathered in Kuala Lumpur for the inaugural session of the East Asia Summit (EAS).

Mini-lateral Defence Coalitions: Origins and Institutional Evolution of the FPDA

The Formative Years

The British Labour government announced in 1967 its new policy of military withdrawal East of Suez. Originally expected for the mid-1970s, the military disengagement was eventually moved to the end of 1971. This decision surprised Malaysia and Singapore, as they were dependent on their military ties with London. Modifying the decision taken by the previous Labour government, the new Conservative government decided to maintain some military engagement in the region by proposing to supersede the 1957 AMDA by a “loose consultative political framework”.¹⁰ Consequently, the defence ministers of Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore and the United Kingdom concluded the formation of the FPDA in London on 16 April 1971. East Malaysia was excluded from the ambit of the agreement as Australia wanted to prevent getting involved in territorial disputes with the Philippines and Indonesia over the island of Borneo. The exclusion of East

¹⁰ Chin Kin Wah, “The Five Power Defence Arrangements: Twenty Years After”, *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 4, No. 3, 1991, p. 193.

Malaysia remains relevant today, as it implies that the FPDA could not be called upon in the case of a military clash between Kuala Lumpur and Beijing over the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea. On 1 September 1971, the Integrated Air Defence System (IADS) was established within the FPDA framework to safeguard the air defence of the Southeast Asian states. The FPDA formally entered into force the day after the AMDA ceased to exist on 31 October 1971.

The commitments undertaken by the FPDA were restricted to mere consultations and should thus be properly distinguished from the ones formerly provided by the AMDA. In contrast to its predecessor, the FPDA simply linked the security of the two Southeast Asian nations to a loose and consultative defence arrangement with Britain, Australia and New Zealand, and did not provide concrete security guarantees. In particular, the automatic commitment to respond to an external attack under the AMDA was substituted under the FPDA by an obligation to consult in such an event. The five nations simply declared 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 attack or threat.¹¹

Furthermore, the FPDA did not include a commitment to station troops in Malaysia and Singapore.¹² The original tripartite military structures found under the AMDA was gradually denuded during the 1970s.¹³ Canberra withdrew its battalion from Singapore in February 1974 and the United Kingdom removed its naval and ground troop presence by 1975 and 1976 respectively. The New Zealand military battalion eventually left Singapore by the end of 1989. Unsurprisingly, therefore, the U.S. presence in the region, rather than this ambiguous consultative arrangement, was perceived by Singapore and Malaysia as the primary source of countervailing power to possible malign hegemonic aspirations. That said, despite the absence of clear

¹¹ Paragraph 5, Communiqué issued at the conclusion of the Five Power Ministerial Meeting on the External Defence of Malaysia and Singapore, London, 15–16 April 1971.

¹² Khoo, “The Five Power Defence Arrangements: If It Ain’t Broke...”, pp. 107–14.

¹³ Leifer, *Dictionary of the Modern Politics of Southeast Asia*, p. 106.

military commitments, analysts have often referred to the political and psychological deterrence provided by the FPDA to Singapore and Malaysia. Ang explains, for example, that the “multi-layered interests of military powers outside the region would complicate the plans of any would-be aggressor and thus provide a valuable psychological deterrent”.¹⁴

Beyond offering some form of psychological deterrence, the arrangements were also expected to play a confidence-building role in Malaysian-Singaporean relations.¹⁵ Singapore’s traumatic separation from the Federation of Malaysia in 1965 continued to severely affect its ties with Kuala Lumpur. Singapore perceived the FPDA as an additional means to regulate its relations with Malaysia and to constrain its potential aggressive disposition towards the city-state. Despite recurrent tensions in bilateral ties in the decades that followed the formation of the FPDA, the defence cooperation has been sustained and the military exercises have continued. For instance, while Malaysia withdrew from the annual Stardex exercise in 1998 due to the consequences of the Asian financial crisis and a worsening of relations with the city-state, it resumed its participation the following year.

Interestingly, the FPDA was established at a time when Malaysia favoured, at least diplomatically, a foreign policy based on the concept of neutrality. Malaysia, however, did not find its call for the neutralization of Southeast Asia as incompatible with its participation in this consultative defence arrangement.¹⁶ Its support for a policy of neutrality was most clearly expressed through the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) Declaration of November 1971. Malaysia had previously put forward a plan for neutralizing Southeast Asia at the Lusaka Non-Alignment Conference of September 1970. It proposed neutralizing the region by using external powers as a guarantee to a regional application of this legal condition. The Malaysian initiative emanated from the new prime ministership of Tun Abdul Razak. The Malaysian neutralization plan met with opposition from the other ASEAN members. Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines were especially dependent on their links with

¹⁴ Ang Wee Han, “Five Power Defence Arrangements: A Singapore Perspective”, *Pointer: Quarterly Journal of the Singapore Armed Forces*, Vol. 24, No. 2, April – June 2008, pp. 49–59, Internet edition.

¹⁵ Khoo, “The Five Power Defence Arrangements: If It Ain’t Broke...”, pp. 107–14.

¹⁶ Chin Kin Wah, *The Defence of Malaysia and Singapore: The Transformation of a Security System, 1957–1971*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 174.

the United States to ensure their individual security. They therefore argued for the continued involvement of external powers. Adopted by the ASEAN members, ZOPFAN was a formulation that eventually accommodated these different security outlooks.

Besides tense bilateral relations between Singapore and Malaysia, the formation of the FPDA followed the Indonesian opposition to the formation of the Federation of Malaysia in September 1963. Viewed as a British neo-colonial design, Sukarno had started a campaign of Confrontation to oppose the new federation. While the downfall of Sukarno in 1965 and the establishment of ASEAN in August 1967 had symbolized the end of the period of Confrontation, regional relations continued to be characterized by mistrust and sources of tension. Despite the political reconciliation between Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta, Malaysia remained fearful of Indonesia. Likewise, Singapore had suffered attacks during the period of Confrontation and mistrusted Jakarta. Indonesia's annexation of East Timor in December 1975 was another issue that complicated Singapore-Indonesian relations. The city-state was, in 1975, still fearful of Jakarta's regional intentions and potential hegemonic ambitions. Indonesia and its potential regional aspirations were therefore a clear referent of the FPDA during the 1970s and 1980s. Jakarta would, for many years, remain sceptical about the arrangements.¹⁷ Jakarta saw the FPDA as inappropriate as it represented an "insurance against Indonesia's possible reversion to her old ways".¹⁸ President Suharto particularly objected to its possible expansion in membership to include Brunei.¹⁹ As late as 1990, the former Indonesian foreign minister, Mochtar Kusumaatmdja, called for the FPDA to be disbanded and replaced by a trilateral defence relationship between Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. Indonesia gradually softened its approach, however, and the former Defence Minister General Benny Murdani eventually declared in 1994 that "if the FPDA makes its members feel secure, then regional security is enhanced and Indonesia is happy".²⁰

¹⁷ Jim Rolfe, "Anachronistic Past or Positive Future: New Zealand and the Five Power Defence Arrangements", Working Paper, Centre for Strategic Studies (CSS), Victoria University of Wellington, 1995, p. 14.

¹⁸ Chin, "The Five Power Defence Arrangements: Twenty Years After", p. 201.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

²⁰ General Benny Murdani, former Indonesian Armed Forces commander and former Minister of Defence and Security at a seminar on Australia's Defence White Paper, Australian Defence Forces Academy, December 1994.

The structure and activities of the FPDA remained limited in the 1970s and 1980s.²¹ The Joint Consultative Council (JCC) was initially established to act as a senior consultative group, bringing together senior officials from the Ministries of Defence of Malaysia and Singapore as well as the High Commissioners of Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom.²² In the event of an external threat to the security of Malaysia and Singapore, the Council would “provide a convenient forum for initial consultation between the Five Powers”.²³ The FPDA was organized around a regular series of combined but limited exercises. Its central operational structure was the IADS, located at the Royal Malaysian Air Force Base Butterworth in Malaysia, and put under an Australian commander and the supervision of an Air Defence Council. Still, the FPDA remained under-institutionalized during most of the Cold War period. Rolfe explains that in “the first 10 years of the organization's existence, for example, Ministers had never met, and there were only four meetings of the JCC”.²⁴ While air defence exercises had been held annually since 1972, regular land and naval ones were only initiated in the 1980s.²⁵ This was in response to Vietnam’s occupation of Cambodia and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.²⁶

The Widening of Activities since the End of the Cold War

The role of the FPDA has been deepened and strengthened since the end of the Cold War and the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001.²⁷ The cessation of Soviet-U.S. and Sino-Soviet rivalries contributed to a sense of relief and optimism but also to a feeling of strategic uncertainty in East Asia. The disintegration of the Soviet Union in December 1991 dramatically limited Russia’s regional role and influence. The collapse of the Soviet Union and budgetary constraints obliged the United States to reconsider its military deployment in East Asia.²⁸ In addition, the United States had to withdraw from Subic Bay Naval Base and Clark Air Base by November 1992. In

²¹ Ang, “Five Power Defence Arrangements: A Singapore Perspective”, pp. 49–59.

²² Rolfe, “Anachronistic Past or Positive Future?”, p. 7.

²³ Five Power Ministerial Meeting on Defence: Five Power Consultative Arrangements After 1971, FPM (L) (P) 2/71, in Ministry of Defence file 1/2/4: *Treaties and Agreements: Five Power Arrangements*.

²⁴ Rolfe, “Anachronistic Past or Positive Future”, p. 7.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²⁶ Leifer, *Dictionary of the Modern Politics of Southeast Asia*, p. 106.

²⁷ See Andrew T. H. Tan, “The Five Power Defence Arrangements: the Continuing Relevance”, *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 29, No. 2, 2008, pp. 292–5.

²⁸ For a discussion on the U.S. defence policy in Asia in the post-Cold War, see Douglas T. Stuart and William T. Tow, *A U.S. Strategy for the Asia-Pacific*, Adelphi Paper No. 299, London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, December 1995, pp. 6–20.

contrast, the influence of Japan and China became more significant. Some Southeast Asian states, Singapore being the prime example, feared that a U.S. military disengagement in East Asia might encourage China or even Japan to fill “the power vacuum” left by retreating external powers.²⁹

The five powers saw the emergence of an uncertain multi-polar structure and the changing strategic conditions in Southeast Asia as a source of concern. For Singapore and Malaysia, the threat perception moved away from Indonesia to China and the uncertain distribution of power in the Asia-Pacific. Tan explains that the “unwillingness of the ASEAN states to cooperate militarily resulted in Singapore and Malaysia turning to other vehicles to improve transnational military cooperation. Conveniently, the FPDA provided such a vehicle.”³⁰ Indeed, the ASEAN members decided not to multilateralize their bilateral collaborations over defence and security issues developed outside of the ASEAN framework. The absence of an ASEAN defence focus thus highlighted the ongoing strategic relevance of the FPDA for Malaysia and Singapore as well as for Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom.

The perception of the nature of the threat in Southeast Asia was further transformed by the terrorist attacks in the United States on 11 September 2001 and the Bali bombings on 12 October 2002. The attacks increased the fear of transnational terrorism in Southeast Asia and overshadowed other sources of regional instability. Jemaah Islamiah (JI) was identified as a significant grouping with links to Al-Qaeda. In particular, the threats of piracy and maritime terrorism in the Straits of Malacca and Singapore were further securitized post-9/11.³¹

In response to these strategic transformations, the FPDA has, since the late 1980s, gradually deepened and broadened its institutional structures and activities.³² In 1988, it was decided that the FPDA Defence Ministers’ Meeting would be held every three years while the FPDA Chiefs’ Conference would meet more regularly. The latter have

²⁹ Leszek Buszynski, “Post-Cold War Security in the ASEAN Region”, in Gary Klintworth (Ed.) *Asia-Pacific Security: Less Uncertainty, New Opportunities?*, New York: St Martin’s Press, 1996, p. 121.

³⁰ Tan, “The Five Power Defence Arrangements: the Continuing Relevance”, p. 292.

³¹ See Ralf Emmers, *Non-Traditional Security in the Asia-Pacific: The Dynamics of Securitization*, Singapore: Marshall Cavendish, 2004.

³² Tan, “The Five Power Defence Arrangements: The Continuing Relevance”, p. 294.

coincided since 2001 with the annual International Institute for Strategic Studies' (IISS) Asia Security Conference, also known as the Shangri-La Dialogue, held annually in Singapore. By 1994, the Joint Consultative Council and the Air Defence Council were transformed into the FPDA Consultative Council, which brings together senior diplomats and defence ministry officials from the five powers. The FPDA Activities Coordinating Council was formed the following year while the IADS was upgraded into the Integrated Area Defence System, integrating air, naval and land forces, with its headquarters in Butterworth in the late 1990s. Since 1997, Singapore and Malaysia have also alternatively hosted the FPDA Professional Forum, which has become "the main format in which members of the arrangements come together to discuss new ideas, concepts and the way ahead, including the future shape of the operational element of the FPDA and the role of HQ IADS".³³ These institutional transformations have been matched by more sophisticated and encompassing military exercises. Tan writes that from "a basic single-service air defence focus, FPDA exercises evolved throughout the 1990s and early 2000s to include complex combined exercises involving major platforms".³⁴ When meeting in Singapore in 2004, the five defence ministers announced that the FPDA would broaden its military exercises to address terrorism, maritime security, and a series of other non-traditional threats.³⁵

The FPDA and its Role in the Changing Security Architecture

The paper has so far discussed the evolving security architecture in Southeast Asia as well as the historical origins and institutional evolution of the FPDA. This final section seeks to bring these two areas together by exploring the role that the arrangements play in the contemporary Southeast Asian architecture. In other words, how, if at all, does the FPDA continue to fit in the wider regional security architecture? To tackle this question, one needs to examine whether the FPDA currently complements and overlaps with bilateral, mini-lateral and multilateral mechanisms operational in Southeast Asia, or alternatively, whether the FPDA is

³³ 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.

³⁴ Tan, "The Five Power Defence Arrangements: the Continuing Relevance", p. 294.

³⁵ "Second FPDA Defence Ministers' Informal Meeting", *Ministry of Defence News Release*, Singapore, 7 June 2004, available at http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/news_and_events/nr/2004/jun/07jun04_nr.html, accessed on 1 February 2010.

gradually being supplanted by these other regional cooperative instruments. Bristow writes, for example, that one can argue that:

the FPDA is a hangover from a bygone era, which is being overtaken by other regional structures, and is diminished in importance by the strength of U.S. commitments. Another way of looking at it is that the FPDA overlaps with existing bilateral alliances, exercise programmes and other security structures, rather than competes with them, and helps to strengthen regional security as a result.³⁶

This section takes the latter view. It claims that the FPDA continues to complement the existing bilateral ties with the United States, both in terms of tackling traditional and non-traditional security concerns, as well as the activities of the MSP and ADMM, yet each in very different ways.

Complementing Bilateral Ties

Let us examine how the FPDA activities have overlapped with the special ties maintained by Singapore and, to a lesser extent, Malaysia with the United States. A distinction needs to be made first between how the United States distinguishes its security ties with the two Southeast Asian nations. The 2010 Quadrennial Defence Review (QDR), the first to be released by the Obama administration, refers to three groups of security partners, namely, formal allies, strategic partners and prospective strategic partners.³⁷ The Philippines and Thailand are defined as U.S. treaty allies. The QDR identifies Singapore as a strategic partner while Malaysia, together with Indonesia and Vietnam, is classified as a prospective strategic partner. The reference to the three categories in security partnerships in the 2010 QDR, with Singapore and Malaysia belonging to the second and third one respectively, needs to be highlighted.³⁸

³⁶ Bristow, “The Five Power Defence Arrangements: Southeast Asia’s Unknown Regional Security Organization”, p. 16.

³⁷ See United States Department of Defence, Quadrennial Defence Review, 1 February 2010, available at <http://www.defense.gov/QDR/>.

³⁸ Joey Long, “Pentagon’s Quadrennial Defence Review 2010 – The Southeast Asian Angle: Allies and Partners”, *The Straits Times*, 22 February 2010.

As discussed above, Singapore has historically considered a continued U.S. involvement in the region as pivotal to its own security. Despite its often anti-Western rhetoric, Malaysia has also perceived the U.S. presence as necessary to preserve regional stability.³⁹ These strategic calculations have often been translated into concrete policies. For instance, in response to the U.S. withdrawal from its bases in the Philippines, Singapore offered an agreement to Washington in November 1990, allowing its Navy and Air Force to use its military facilities more extensively. By offering the United States compensating facilities, Singapore sought to mitigate the strategic consequences of the American departure from Subic Bay Naval Base and Clark Air Base. While initially critical of the memorandum, Malaysia was prepared following the American withdrawal from the Philippines to provide access to the U.S. Navy, thereby enhancing its military ties with Washington. A U.S. Navy logistics facility was also transferred in 1992 from Subic Bay to Singapore. In January 1998, the city-state declared that U.S. aircraft carriers would have access to the Changi Naval Base after its completion in the year 2000. In more recent years, Singapore has further developed strong military relations with the U.S. Pacific Command (Pacom), including thorough war games, map planning and manoeuvre exercises like Cobra Gold. In addition to the United States and Thailand, Cobra Gold now also involves Singapore, Indonesia, Japan and South Korea. While not part of this multilateral mechanism, Malaysia trains with the U.S. Air Force in Exercise Cope Taufan.⁴⁰

In terms of non-traditional security issues, Singapore and Malaysia have closely collaborated with the United States on the war on terror since the 9/11 attacks. In Singapore, the arrest of JI militants in December 2001 and the discovery of bomb plots fuelled the city-state's own sense of vulnerability. Since 9/11 and the Bali Bombings in October 2002, Singapore has promulgated the doctrine of "homeland security" and introduced a series of other domestic measures. Similar arrests in Malaysia highlighted the threat of radical Islamist terrorism to the country. In response, Welsh explains that from 2001 onwards, "Malaysia began to exercise a more vigorous enforcement role in addressing terrorist issues, which mirrored

³⁹ See J. N. Mak, "Malaysian Defense and Security Cooperation: Coming Out of the Closet", in See Seng Tan and Amitav Acharya (Eds.), *Asia Pacific Security Cooperation: National Interests and Regional Order*, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2004, pp. 127–153.

⁴⁰ Long, "Pentagon's Quadrennial Defence Review 2010".

stronger regional enforcement, particularly in Singapore”.⁴¹ Internationally, both Singapore and Malaysia have cooperated closely and shared intelligence with Washington. Singapore was even the first Asian country to sign the Declaration of Principles for the Container Security Initiative (CSI) with the United States in September 2002 and joined the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) core group in March 2004. While Malaysia has been a close partner of the United States since 2001, Kuala Lumpur has had to balance the demands of its Muslim majority while ensuring its engagement in the international anti-terrorism campaign. Moreover, unlike Singapore, Malaysia did not support the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003.

The functions of the FPDA and of the U.S. security ties with Malaysia and Singapore are somewhat comparable; namely, to enhance their external defence in the changing regional strategic context. In light of the shift in provisions from the AMDA to the FPDA, the arrangements only guarantee consultations in the event of an external aggression. Likewise, as Malaysia and Singapore are not formal allies of the United States, an American military response to an external attack against the two Southeast Asian nations is not guaranteed. The special ties with Washington have, however, acted as a credible diplomatic and psychological deterrent. Moreover, the FPDA and U.S. ties have, over the years, focused on similar traditional and non-traditional threats, most recently terrorism and maritime piracy. Hence, while they clearly overlap, it could be argued that the FPDA and its military exercises have simply been eclipsed by the American presence in the region. The latter have, to a large extent, overshadowed the former in terms of strength, impact and military involvement. One possible conclusion, therefore, could be that the FPDA has been supplanted by the existing bilateral ties with Washington.

Nevertheless, while the FPDA is of a lower military intensity than the bilateral ties maintained by Malaysia and Singapore with the United States, it is claimed here that the arrangements still complement the U.S. bilateral network in two specific ways. First, and in sharp contrast to the bilateral approach, the security of Malaysia and Singapore have been defined by the FPDA as indivisible. Hence, rather than deliberately examining them as two separate strategic entities, the FPDA has worked

⁴¹ Bridget Welsh, “Tears and Fears: Tun Mahathir’s Last Hurrah”, in Daljit Singh and Chin Kin Wah (Eds.), *Southeast Asian Affairs 2004*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2004, p. 143.

on the premise that pursuing the security of one nation separately and possibly at the expense of the other would be counter-productive. From its inception, therefore, the FPDA was meant to act as a set of arrangements that permitted two or more parties to consult one another regarding the joint external defence of Malaysia and Singapore.⁴² Leifer explains that the arrangements were “predicated on the indivisibility of the defence” of the two Southeast Asian nations and that they were intended to enhance regional stability by engaging them both “in a structure of defence cooperation”.⁴³ A caveat to be noted is that the FPDA would have no clear role to play in the event of aggression by one of the Southeast Asian countries towards the other. It is in that context that the FPDA has, over the years, succeeded in playing a significant confidence-building role in Malaysian-Singaporean relations. When examined in that light, one can argue that the FPDA and its flexible consultative model, based on the premise of indivisible security, have not only enhanced bilateral ties between Malaysia and Singapore but also complemented the security relations that the two Southeast Asian nations maintain separately with Washington.

Furthermore, the FPDA has successfully complemented the U.S. network by providing Singapore and Malaysia with a useful avenue to maintain and deepen bilateral ties with Australia, Britain and New Zealand. This particular function of the FPDA needs to be examined in the broader post-Cold War context. The emergence of an uncertain multi-polar structure in the Asia-Pacific, combined with a rapidly changing security environment, has encouraged Singapore especially to cultivate ties with external powers with the aim of deepening their benign involvement in Southeast Asian security. While the U.S. deployment in the region has continued to be regarded by the city-state as the best guarantor for a stable distribution of power, Singapore has actively strengthened relations with other external actors with security interests in the region. For example, Singapore and its Ministry of Foreign Affairs played an important role in the establishment of the ARF in 1994, eventually bringing together the United States, China, India, Japan and others into a structure for security cooperation led by ASEAN. It can be argued that the FPDA plays a similar “cultivating” role with regards to Australia in particular and, to a lesser extent, Britain and New Zealand.

⁴² Khoo, “The Five Power Defence Arrangements: If It Ain’t Broke...”, pp. 107–14.

⁴³ Leifer, *Dictionary of the Modern Politics of Southeast Asia*, p. 106.

Australia is especially important to Singapore as a result of its deep interest in regional stability. During his visit to Australia in March 2007, Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew indicated that Singapore and Australia share “a common strategic view”.⁴⁴ Leifer writes that the city-state values its relationship with Canberra due to “the professional competence in training and advice of Australia’s armed forces and diplomatic service set within a common strategic perspective” as well as due to “Australia’s sustained strategic partnership with the USA”.⁴⁵ Singaporean-Australian military ties are strong. This is best illustrated by Canberra making training facilities available to the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) in Australia. The FPDA enables Singapore to further strengthen this important bilateral relationship. Likewise, the arrangements matter to Australia primarily because they do not include the United States and therefore help to demonstrate that Canberra is not simply the “Deputy Sheriff” of Washington in the region. This was particularly critical during the John Howard government and its close ties with the Bush administration over the “war on terror” and its so-called second front in Southeast Asia.

Complementing other Mini-lateral Instruments

Let us now discuss how the FPDA complements rather than competes with the Malacca Strait Patrol initiative, which can be characterized under Medcalf’s definition as a mini-lateral instrument. Established in July 2004, the MSP consists of coordinated naval and air patrols involving Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore to increase maritime safety and security in the Strait of Malacca. The MSP is composed of the Malacca Strait Sea Patrol (MSSP), the “Eyes in the Sky” (EiS) operation, which was launched in September 2005 and consists of cooperative air surveillance missions in the Strait, and the Intelligence Exchange Group (IEG), which was formed in 2006. It is worth noting that Bangkok expressed interest early on in cooperating with the littoral states in Malacca Strait surveillance. Thailand eventually became the fourth state to join the MSP in September 2008.

⁴⁴ “Singapore and Australia Share Common Strategic View: MM”, *The Straits Times*, 29 March 2007, p. 25.

⁴⁵ Michael Leifer, *Singapore’s Foreign Policy: Coping with Vulnerability*, London: Routledge, 2000, p. 129.

The military exercises undertaken by the FPDA since the early 2000s, with their maritime and non-traditional security dimension, clearly overlap with the objectives of the MSP. The latter was established in response to a peak in the number of piracy attacks in the Malacca Strait in the late 1990s and early 2000s and the fear of maritime terrorism in a post-9/11 environment. Nonetheless, rather than being overtaken by this more recent initiative, the FPDA complements the MSP in two particular ways.

The first concerns the level and intensity of military collaboration. Within the MSP context, the establishment of effective bilateral and tri-lateral cooperation has been complicated by lingering mistrust among the littoral states and significant gaps in naval capabilities. In particular, the Indonesian Navy (TNI-AL) is poorly equipped to address sea piracy while its air force has not been able to contribute much to the “Eyes in the Sky” combined maritime air patrols. In contrast, the complexity and scope of the FPDA exercises have been significantly expanded over the years to address a series of new challenges. The combined exercises have enabled the five powers to enhance professionalism, personal relationships, capacity building as well as interoperability, especially in the areas of maritime security.⁴⁶ The exercises are designed to enhance the capability of the five powers to plan and execute complex multi-national operations. Having developed their own defence capabilities, Singapore and Malaysia have continued therefore to regard the FPDA as an instrument “to promote professionalism, rapport and to deepen knowledge of one another’s strengths, capabilities and organizations”.⁴⁷ Consequently, rather than being gradually supplanted by the MSP, the FPDA provides through its combined annual exercises a form of military collaboration still lacking in this newly-established multi-lateral instrument.

Beyond its purely defence dimension, the FPDA complements the MSP at a more diplomatic level as well. The MSP is meant to accommodate the divergent positions adopted by Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore to tackle non-traditional maritime threats. The city-state has often linked sea piracy to the threat of terrorism and called

⁴⁶ Kate Boswood, “Engaging Our Interests: The Five Power Defence Arrangements and Its Contribution to Regional Security”, *Defence Magazine*, Issue 9, August 2007, p. 36.

⁴⁷ J. M. Jamaluddin, “FPDA Expanding Its Role Beyond Security Concerns”, *Asian Defence Journal*, Issue 5, July & August 2006, p. 7.

for the assistance of the user states in guaranteeing maritime security in the Malacca Strait.⁴⁸ In contrast, Malaysia and Indonesia have preferred to examine the issue in terms of law enforcement due to concerns over the respect for sovereignty and the prevention of external interference by the great powers.⁴⁹ In 2004, then Defence Minister Najib Tun Razak declared that “there will be no foreign presence in the Strait of Malacca or anywhere in Malaysian waters except during exercises”.⁵⁰ Significantly, therefore, the FPDA constitutes the only cooperative instrument active in enhancing maritime security in the Strait that involves both Malaysia and external powers.⁵¹ The arrangements offer a unique platform for naval exercises diplomatically acceptable to Kuala Lumpur despite its concerns over sovereignty and external interference in the Strait of Malacca.

Complementing Multilateral Instruments

Finally, let us discuss how the FPDA may complement the ADMM. The ADMM was inaugurated in Kuala Lumpur on 9 May 2006, as an emerging expression of defence regionalism in Southeast Asia. It seeks to enhance dialogue as well as practical cooperation between the ASEAN militaries and defence establishments, especially in the area of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.⁵² The ADMM needs to be examined in the wider context of ASEAN and its security community project. The Association was not formed as a direct response to an external adversary and has never evolved into a formal or tacit alliance. It has traditionally rejected any form of military cooperation and concentrated instead on confidence-building, dialogue and conflict avoidance rather than dispute resolution. In the absence of joint military capabilities and a common external threat perception, the member states have sought

⁴⁸ For example, at the 2003 Shangri-La Dialogue, Singapore’s Deputy Prime Minister (DPM), Dr. Tony Tan, declared: “Singapore views the regional piracy situation and the possibility of maritime terrorism in regional waters very seriously.” Remarks by Dr. Tony Tan, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence, at the Plenary Session on “Maritime Security after September 11th”, the Second IISS Asia Security Conference, Singapore, 30 May – 1 June 2003.

⁴⁹ J. N. Mak, “Securitizing Piracy in Southeast Asia: Malaysia, the International Maritime Bureau and Singapore”, in Mely Caballero-Anthony, Ralf Emmers and Amitav Acharya (Eds.), *Non-Traditional Security in Asia: Dilemmas in Securitization*, London: Ashgate, 2006, pp. 66–92.

⁵⁰ “FPDA Understands Our Position on Foreign Forces in Straits”, *The Star* (Malaysia), 8 June 2004.

⁵¹ Established in Tokyo in 2004, the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP) brings together Japan, China, South Korea, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka and all the ASEAN countries with the notable exception of Indonesia and Malaysia.

⁵² See The Joint Declaration of ASEAN Defence Ministers on Strengthening ASEAN Defence Establishments to Meet the Challenges of Non-Traditional Security Threats. The third ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting was held in Pattaya, Thailand, from 25 to 27 February 2009.

to enhance their domestic socio-economic security and to generally improve the climate of relations in Southeast Asia. In response to a series of transnational threats, the Southeast Asian leaders announced at an ASEAN Summit in Bali in October 2003 the formation of an ASEAN Security Community (ASC) by 2020. The latter stresses the willingness of the member states to “rely exclusively on peaceful processes in the settlement of intra-regional differences”.⁵³

The ADMM, and its focus on non-traditional security issues, should be examined in that light. Its specific objectives are to:

- (a) to promote regional peace and stability through dialogue and cooperation in defence and security;
- (b) to give guidance to existing senior defence and military officials dialogue and cooperation in the field of defence and security within ASEAN and between ASEAN and dialogue partners;
- (c) to promote mutual trust and confidence through greater understanding of defence and security challenges as well as enhancement of transparency and openness; and
- (d) to contribute to the establishment of an ASEAN Security Community (ASC) as stipulated in the Bali Concord II and to promote the implementation of the Vientiane Action Programme on ASC.⁵⁴

As in the case of the MSP, the FPDA naturally complements the ADMM by offering to Malaysia and Singapore a defence component still lacking in this latest process. Indeed, the ADMM does not cover the issue of combined military exercises. Furthermore, it is argued here that it is precisely in the overlapping area of military preparedness and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief that the FPDA can be most relevant to the ADMM in terms of information sharing. The FPDA is well ahead of ASEAN in this particular area. Following the tsunami disaster of 26 December 2004, the FPDA defence ministers already decided to further broaden the scope of the arrangements by including humanitarian assistance and disaster relief as well as incorporating non-military agencies into future exercises.⁵⁵ At the 2006 FPDA meeting, Singapore’s Defence Minister Teo Chee Hean declared that the ministers

⁵³ Declaration of ASEAN Concord II (Bali Concord II), Bali, 7 October 2003.

⁵⁴ Joint Press Release of the Inaugural ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 9 May 2006.

⁵⁵ Tan, “The Five Power Defence Arrangements: The Continuing Relevance”, p. 295.

had agreed to explore how the five powers could cooperate “in developing capacity for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief so that if in future should member countries participate in such missions, capacity building and interoperability can be developed and will enhance effectiveness”.⁵⁶ At the Shangri-La Dialogue that preceded the meeting, then Malaysian Defence Minister Najib Tun Razak had even called for the creation of a joint coordinating centre for relief operations. It is yet to be seen whether such a centre will be established, however.

Conclusion

The paper has reviewed the origins and institutional evolution of the FPDA and discussed its ongoing role in the Southeast Asian security architecture. It has argued that the FPDA has continued to complement and overlap with, rather than substitute or be replaced by, other bilateral, mini-lateral and multilateral mechanisms. In particular, the paper has distinguished and justified its relevance from the U.S. bilateral relations, the MSP initiative and the ADMM.

As previously mentioned, the wider East Asian region has observed since the end of the Cold War era a proliferation of cooperative institutions and mechanisms. APEC, the ARF, the APT, the EAS and, most recently, the “Asia-Pacific Community” and the “East Asia Community” proposals introduced respectively by the Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and Japan’s new Prime Minister, Yukio Hatoyama, come to mind. Associated with these developments have been trends in policy and academic circles to streamline such groupings and to recommend a “division of labour” approach among them.

Nonetheless, rather than speculating on the future role of the FPDA in this ever more complex security architecture and debating where it fits among the alphabet soup of emerging regional groupings, it might be best to highlight again its greatest strength and accomplishment; namely, its flexibility as well as its consultative and complementary attributes. Bristow rightly argues that “largely because of its flexible and consultative nature, the FPDA has also proved remarkably capable at adapting to

⁵⁶ Quoted in Tunku Ya’acob Tunku Abdullah, “FPDA Remains Relevant with Broadened Role to Reflect New Security Threats”, *Asian Defence Journal*, Issue 5, July & August 2006, p. 6.

the changing security environment in the region, thereby retaining its relevance”.⁵⁷ The arrangements should continue to play an important role in Southeast Asian security as long as they preserve their inner flexibility, consultative nature, and ability to complement other instruments in tackling regional security concerns.

⁵⁷ Bristow, “The Five Power Defence Arrangements: Southeast Asia’s Unknown Regional Security Organization”, p. 11.

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