

PATHFINDER

AIR POWER DEVELOPMENT CENTRE BULLETIN



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INTEGRATED AREA DEFENCE SYSTEM: 40 YEARS OLD AND STILL GOING STRONG

On 11 February 1971 the Headquarters of the Integrated Air Defence System (HQ IADS) was formed at Butterworth air base in Malaysia under the command of Air Vice-Marshal Ron Susans of the RAAF. Over the past 40 years, IADS has been an important mechanism for the cooperative defence of Malaysia and Singapore. As the main instrument for coordinating military action in defence of the Malay peninsula, it has helped build security in the region.

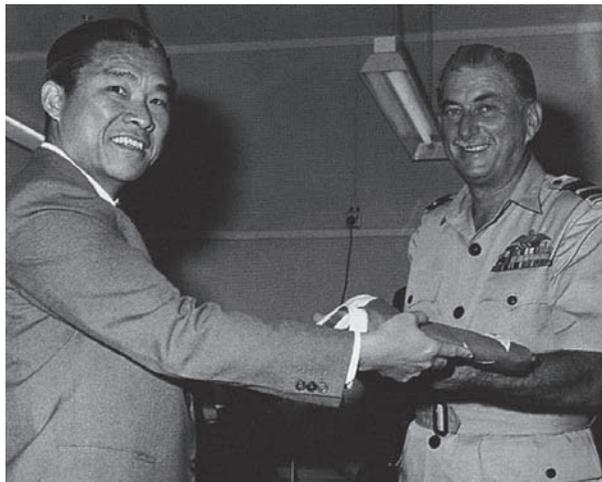
In 1967 Britain announced its intention to withdraw military forces from territories it had formerly governed 'east of Suez'. Two years later US President Richard Nixon announced the 'Guam Doctrine', which made it clear that America expected its regional friends and allies to contribute more to their own security. As a result, the newly independent nations of Malaysia and Singapore had to find the means to provide for their own defence. Australia and New Zealand, recognising that stability in South-East Asia was essential for their own security, also had to rethink the basis for their own continued military involvement in the region. In 1970 Britain guaranteed that it would not entirely abandon the region; instead, 'a modest presence in the Far East' would be retained.

A series of talks between Australia, Britain, Malaysia, New Zealand and Singapore began in June 1968, and concluded in April 1971 with the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA). Although none of the parties specifically committed themselves to military action in the defence of Malaysia or Singapore, it was expected that ongoing consultation and cooperation between the services of each nation would generate a strong military partnership which added to the overall security of the region.

In the FPDA talks defence ministers had acknowledged that the defence of Malaysia and Singapore was indivisible, and it was decided that a single headquarters, IADS, would be established to organise the air defence of both nations.

The Commander of IADS was given emergency powers to employ assigned forces against surprise attack, although in practice the role was limited to the command of HQ IADS and did not include control of the various national forces. As such, IADS was the operational cornerstone of the FPDA.

Six months after HQ IADS was formed, it was declared operational on 1 September 1971, even though the FPDA did not formally come into effect until 1 November of that year. Under the terms of the agreement covering IADS, Australia provided the commander of a staff drawn from each of the FPDA nations. As a consequence, when AVM Susans vacated the post of Commander in 1974, he was replaced by the first of another 16 senior RAAF officers who have held it since. The current Commander, AVM Warren Ludwig, took up the reins only in December 2010.



AVM Susans (right) receiving a Singapore flag for HQ IADS, 1971

From the start of IADS consensus has been the keyword, for although the Commander was delegated great power he operated under a formal directive issued by an Air Defence Council (ADC), and the ADC chairmanship was rotated every six months between Malaysia and Singapore. These

two nations exercised the leadership role, and ensured that IADS always met their national interests.

As the Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF) and the Republic of Singapore Air Force (RSAF) developed and matured, the IADS evolved and rapidly established its reputation as the focal point of the region's air defence capabilities. By late 1972, the Commander IADS was responsible for two major Air Defence Exercises (ADEXs) and two minor ADEXs annually, centred on Butterworth and Tengah. A no-notice air defence exercise (*Kumpul*) was also added to test the readiness of the air defence units assigned to the FPDA. In addition, HQ IADS planned and coordinated a program of air defence training to meet each nation's requirements.

The effectiveness of IADS has evolved gradually over time. The conduct of air operations and exercises was simplified and made significantly safer when combined IADS Air Defence Instructions were approved in 1976. The scope and complexity of the ADEXs also increased rapidly, the major ones growing from two to four days, to the extent where they needed to be carefully coordinated to manage disruption to civil air operations.

All IADS exercises have been constructed around the defence of Malaysia and Singapore rather than on offensive operations. One success followed another and, although achievements were kept very low-key, the air defence of Malaysia and Singapore improved considerably. By 1981, the mature RMAF and the RSAF were able to take on much more of the load, and the other three nations reduced their FPDA contributions accordingly. While Australia based two Mirage fighter squadrons and a rifle company at Butterworth, New Zealand maintained a single squadron and a battalion in Singapore, while the UK contribution was limited to visiting units.

During the 1980s the first Malaysian officer was appointed to the new Deputy Commander IADS position and a Singaporean officer filled the Senior Air Staff Officer (SASO) position, now Chief of Staff. RMAF fighter aircraft replaced the two RAAF Mirage squadrons at Butterworth—No 75 Squadron departed in 1983, and No 3 Squadron in 1986. Since then, Australia has sent aircraft such as F-111s, F/A-18 Hornets and P-3 Orions to both Malaysia and Singapore for the duration of each FPDA exercise.

As the scope of FPDA activities expanded, land and naval activities were also incorporated within the exercises, and IADS became increasingly ‘joint’ by including Army and Navy on the staff. During 2001 the acronym IADS was redesignated to refer to the ‘Integrated Area Defence System’ and has concentrated on building interoperability. Subsequently IADS has been the glue that has held the region’s network of military capabilities together.

The *Bersama* series of FPDA exercises were introduced in 2004, partly in response to the new security environment that emerged after the 9/11 terror attacks on the USA. They are now some of the most advanced military exercises conducted in the region. Last year Exercise *Bersama Padu 2010* included 14 ships, 66 aircraft and about 3000 personnel, and once again demonstrated the professionalism of the forces of the FPDA nations. The very presence of such FPDA forces provides a measure of

stability throughout the region, and by extension also helps to protect other nations that have adjacent maritime zones in the neighbouring seas.



IADS ops room during Exercise Bersama Padu 2010

IADS has been working to protect Malaysia and Singapore for 40 years. Although largely unsung, it has shaped a secure framework for international cooperation in the region which, as the 21st or Asia-Pacific century progresses, seems likely to only increase in importance. In all of this, the RAAF has played a crucial role, providing the professional guidance which has helped maintain stability while the regional partners developed their own forces and skill levels. Hopefully, IADS can continue its constructive function well into the present century.

- *The air forces of Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore and the United Kingdom have worked together harmoniously through IADS for 40 years.*
- *IADS has helped shape a secure framework for regional cooperation on the Malay peninsula.*
- *RAAF officers at HQ IADS have gained valuable operational command and staff experience within a coalition environment.*

IADS represents the strong bonds that have been formed over the last four decades and shows great promise for further development of the arrangement in the future.

AVM Kevin Paule,
Commander IADS 2007-2010



Air Power Development Centre
TCC3, Department of Defence
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Ph: 02 6266 1355 Fax: 02 6266 1041

Email: airpower@defence.gov.au

Web: <http://airpower.airforce.gov.au>

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