The Institute
for Regional
Security

JPA Collective Defence Arrangement

Discussion Paper

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Introduction

This document proposes that a collective security ‘arrangement’ be established between Japan, the Philippines and Australia (initially, with potential additional states to join) modelled on the Five Power Defence Arrangement (FPDA) in place between Australia, Malaysia, Singapore, New Zealand and the United Kingdom since 1971.

Japan, Philippines, Australia Defence Strategy

From Defense of Japan – 2025:

"To create a security environment that does not tolerate unilateral changes to the status quo by force, it is extremely important to reinforce collaboration, not only with [the United States] but also with as many countries as possible. The MOD/SDF will promoter multilateral and multilayers defense cooperation and exchanges to realize FOIP.

"For Japan as a maritime nation, strengthening a free and open maritime order and ensuring the freedom and safety of navigation and flight are essential. The MOD/SDF will promote initiatives related to maritime security, including the monitoring of maritime situations and counter-piracy operations."

President Ferdinand Marcos Jnr:

"As we work to uphold the rule of law in international affairs, so shall we build our capabilities to protect our interests in our own maritime domain and in the global commons.

Under our Comprehensive Archipelagic Defense Concept, we shall develop our capacity to project our forces into areas where we must, by constitutional duty and legal right, protect our interests and preserve our patrimony."

Australia's National Defence Strategy 2026:

To deter actions against Australia's interests, Defence will work with other government agencies and key partners to make a credible contribution to a favourable regional strategic balance and hold at risk forces likely to target Australia's interests. This includes by:

1. Demonstrating our capability and resolve to withstand and respond to attacks on Australian territory, including by conducting advanced exercises with the Unites States and key regional partners,
2. Protecting Australia's critical sea lines of communication,
3. Supporting the maintenance of global rules and norms, strengthening defence cooperation with our closest neighbours in Australia's primary area of military interest."

Background to FPDA

In 1971, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia and Singapore established a mutual defence 'arrangement' between the countries. Text of the communiqué on the establishment of the arrangement can be found in Appendix A.

The arrangement was instantiated through exchanges of letters and notes between the five states. The original exchange of notes between Australia and Malaysia and Australia and Singapore can be found here. The Notes cover assistance to be given by Australia, rights and facilities, and status of forces.

The FPDA

1. Was explicitly linked to UN Charter commitments and obligations.
2. Built on, and regarding an Anglo-Malaysian defence agreement, replaced existing defence relationships.
3. Involved a commitment by the five states to consult on measures that might be taken collectively or separately in the case of an attack or threat of attack against Malaysia or Singapore (whose defence was described as 'indivisible').
4. Involved a commitment to establish an integrated air defence system. What is now the Integrated Area Defence System is still based in facilities at RMAF Base Butterworth in Malaysia. The IADS is currently under the command of AVM Nathan Christie (RAAF).
5. The FPDA involved commitments to an air defence council to direct the commander of the integrated defence system and a joint consultative council of senior officials. Governance is now constituted by FPDA Defence Ministers Meetings (FDMM), FPDA Defence Chiefs' Conference (FDCC), FPDA Consultative Council (FCC), FPDA Policy Group (FPG), and FPDA Activities Coordinating Committee (FACC).
6. The FPDA involves annual military exercises Bersama Shield, Bersama Lima, and Suman Warrior, and Exercise Suman Protector every five years.
7. Australian forces based at RMAF Butterworth include Australian Air Force No 19 Squadron and No 92 Wing Detachment Alpha (including Poseidon P-8 patrol and reconnaissance), an Australian Army Training Group and a Rifle Company, and ADF Health and Joint Investigative elements. RAAF F-35s participated in Exercise Lima in 2024 and 2025.

A Collective Security Arrangement

The case for a collective security agreement involving democracies in the region such as Japan, South Korea, Philippines, Australia and the US has been outlined in the recent past by academics such as Michael Green at the United States Studies Centre and by no less than Shigeru Ishiba, just before becoming Prime Minister of Japan in 2024.

China's hostility even to the QUAD and to NATO engagement in the region, along with lukewarm responses from Indian and US officials to Ishiba's proposal, have not seen the idea of a formal alliance progress.

In brief,

1. The mutual defence interests of Japan, the Philippines and Australia,
2. The interests shared by the three regarding defence of international maritime law, maritime territory, and maritime supply routes,
3. Demands on its allies for greater defence burden sharing by the US, upon whom each country is arguably over-reliant for ultimate security,
4. Existing reciprocal access, status of forces, and strategic partnership agreements between the three, and
5. The logic of deterrence,

suggest that a stronger arrangement between Japan, the Philippines and Australia, if not a formal alliance, would serve the security of the three countries (and perhaps a broader group of like-minded states).

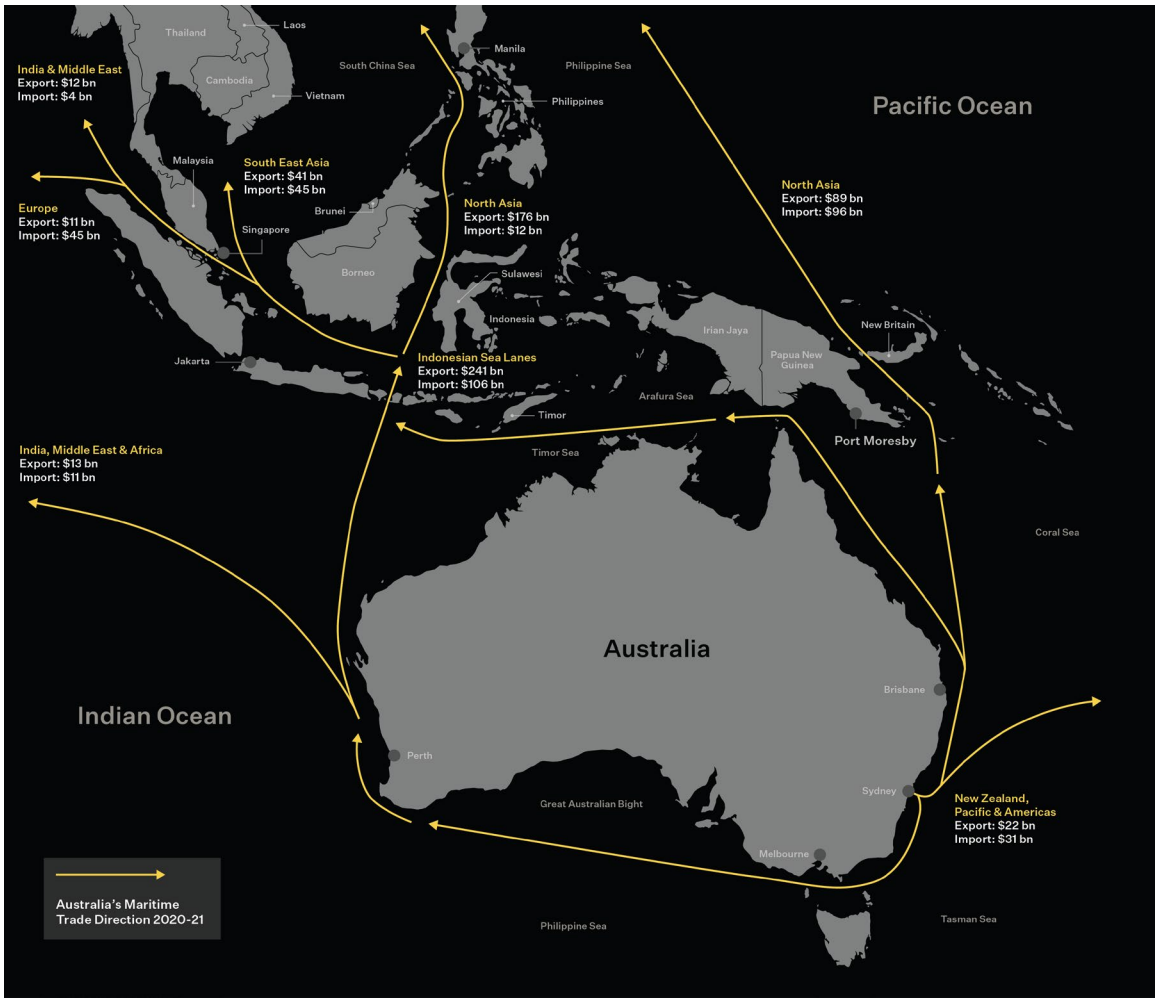
The model of the FPDA commends itself as a means to strengthen collective security and deterrence without venturing into the troubled diplomacy of a formal alliance.

As with the FPDA, this paper proposes that the JPA-DA be established simply through an exchange of diplomatic notes. This paper not only invites consideration of a JPA Defence 'Arrangement', but it also proposes to copy the FPDA model by establishing a Headquarters and an Integrated Area Defence System on the strategically located, greenfield site of Mapun in the Sulu Sea.

Mapun

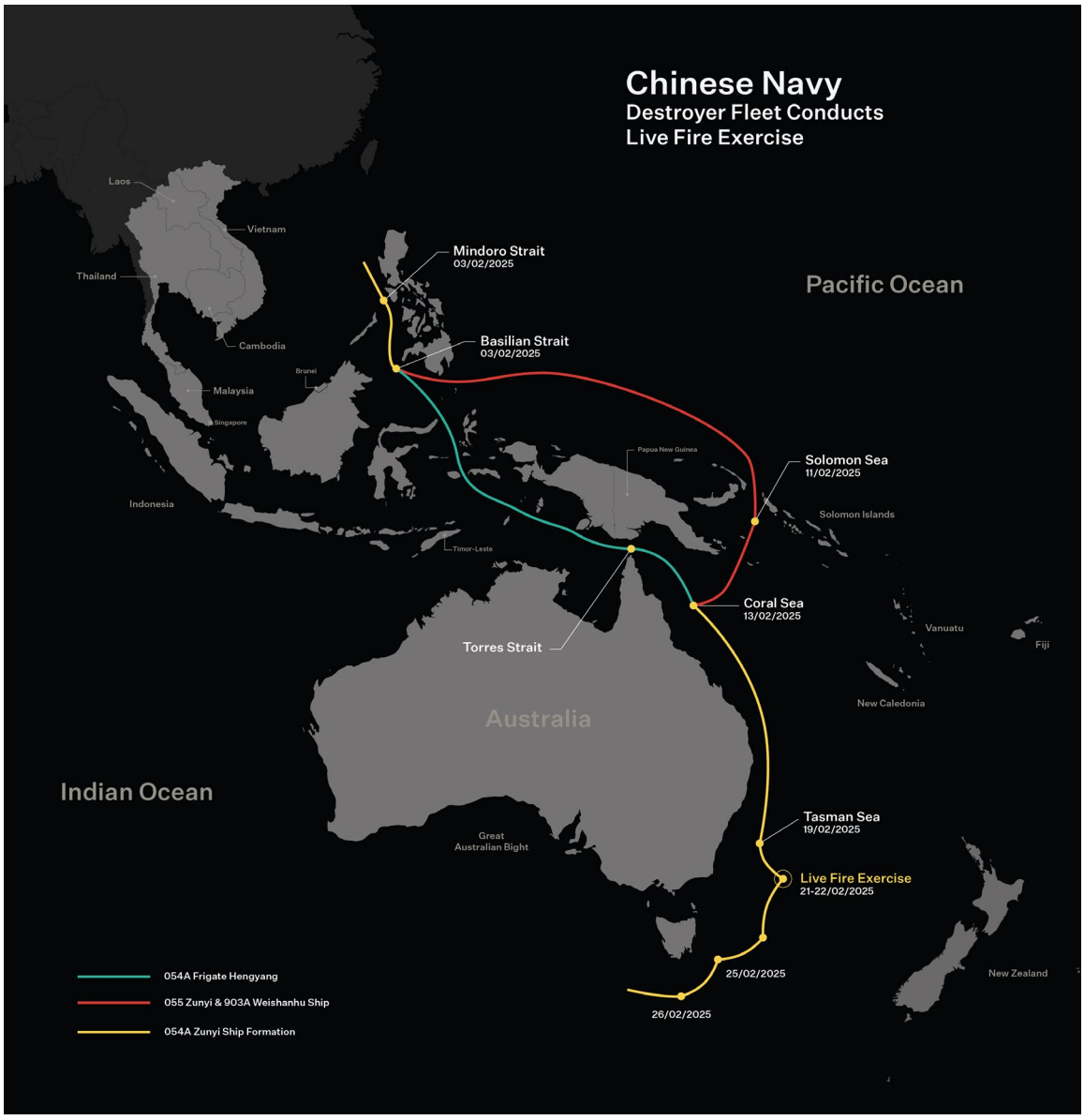
Consider the following images, suggesting at the least Australian and Philippine interests to be addressed in this proposal.

The first shows Australia's maritime trade routes. The most significant is through the Celebes and Sulu Seas, with the next most significant through the Philippines Sea.



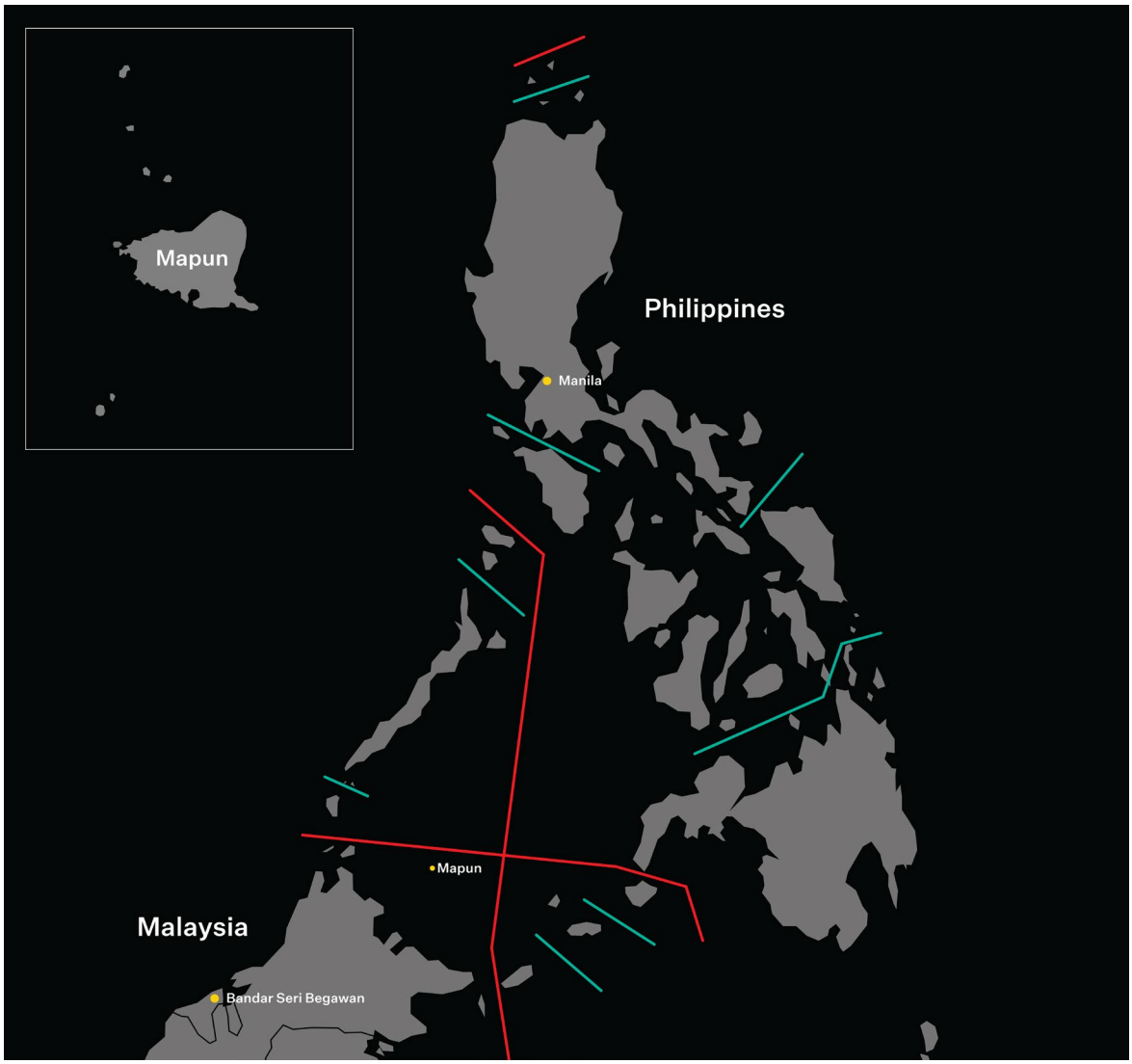
Source: BITRE and ASPI estimates

The second image shows the route taken by the PLA Navy flotilla that circumnavigated Australia and conducted live fire exercises as part of its activities in 2025.



Source: Geoinfomaps

The third shows designated (red) sea lanes under the Philippine Archipelagic Sea Lanes (ASL) Act and the location of Mapun (previously Cagayan de Sulu and Cagayan de Tawi-Tawi), a municipality in the Philippines province of Tawi-Tawi, population approximately 30,000.



Over the last few years, several ships from countries supporting the Philippines, participating in joint exercises, and/or undertaking freedom of navigation operations have visited Philippines ports:

HMAS Sydney, HMAS Brisbane, HMAS Hobart, HMS Sprey, HMS Richmond, HMCS Ville de Québec, JS Ise, JS Suzunami, JS Oonami, JS Noshiro, FS Charles de Gaulle, ITS Antonio Marceglia, ESPS Méndez Núñez, FGS Baden-Württemberg.

Mapun is strategically located to act as a naval base to welcome for short visits, station, maintain, and repair partner ships (and, of course, Philippine Navy ships and Coast Guard boats) and for the establishment of a defence arrangement IADS HQ.

I am advised that Mapun has been surveyed and assessed by the AFP for its potential as a naval base and for AFP archipelagic ISR and command purposes.

An ideal defence arrangement would include Mapun being jointly developed, funded, and maintained (ie, by at least Japan, Philippines, Australia, but perhaps also Canada, NATO, South Korea) with state of the art, hardened facilities to service ships, and as a base for shared ISR and command infrastructure for the region, including as a centre for potential sea bed sensor arrays across the Celebes, Sulu, West Philippine and Philippine Seas.

Critique

It has recently been suggested by Hanada[1] that moves to create a formal defence pact in the Indo-Pacific are problematic for two reasons. First, the act of formal treaty-making might undermine not strengthen deterrence by signalling to China a closing window of opportunity to act, at least regarding Taiwan. Second, the diplomatic and institutional 'bandwidth' involved might not be justified by the marginal benefit of formalised, legal architecture, with the alternative of de facto integrated command and control providing greater net benefits.

The proposal to develop Mapun as an ally and partner operational hub can stand apart from the proposal to develop an FPDA-type Japan-Philippines-Australia defence 'arrangement' and sits outside the critique of alliance creation.

The proposed arrangement, however, does not suffer from the problems Hanada suggests for a formal, US-centred, NATO-like treaty, for two reasons. First, the 'arrangement' process, building on existing reciprocal access, status of forces, and strategic cooperation agreements and involving simple exchange of diplomatic notes, would be far simpler and quicker than a formal treaty process. Indeed, it might arguably be achievable within 12 months. Second, partly because of the speed with which an 'arrangement' could be put in place and partly as the focus would be less about the Taiwan Strait and more about the South China Sea, the risk that China would act militarily to pre-empt the arrangement would be low.

[1] Ryosuke Hanada (2026): https://warontherocks.com/a-formal-defense-pact-in-the-indo-pacific-is-the-wrong-answer/?utm_source=flipboard&utm_content=topic/foreignpolicy

Final Comments

The two elements in this paper – a JPA-DA and development of partner naval, ISR and command facilities on Mapun – could be separated. A Defence Arrangement could proceed without development of Mapun, and Mapun, given its location for maritime strategy in the region, could be developed jointly without a formal JPA-DA.

The strength of the FPDA was that it created a commitment to joint defence without entailing binding treaty obligations; found an institutional and operational expression at Butterworth that solidified the arrangement and made it both practical and a deterrent to aggression; and was still credibly presented as defensive and non-threatening.

Japan, the Philippines, and Australia have separate defence treaties with the US. Arguably, in the US coming to defence on any one of the states, the treaty obligations of the others might be triggered. They do not however, notwithstanding strengthened defence cooperation in the form of reciprocal access and status of force agreements and now regular exercises, have declared commitments to considering action in each other's defence in the case of aggression. The dependence on the so-called US 'lattice' arrangement of bilateral treaties also feeds propaganda in the region about US hegemony.

This proposal is completely aligned with the stated policies and strategies of Japan, the Philippines and Australia.

Collective defence and deterrence in the form of a JPA-DA would strengthen evolving relationships, and its expression in partner infrastructure and facilities at Mapun would have great strategic effect in the evolving power balance and threat environment of the region.

Appendix A

Five Power Defence Arrangement – Foundation Communique 1971

On 16 April the following ministerial communiqué was released at the conclusion of the Five Power Meeting in London:

Ministers of the Governments of Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore and the United Kingdom met in London on 15 and 16 April 1971 in order to consider matters of common interest to all five governments relating to the external defence of Malaysia and Singapore.

The Ministers of the five governments affirmed, the basic principles of their discussions, their continuing determination to work together for peace and stability, their respect for the sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity of all countries, and their belief in the settlement of all international disputes by peaceful means in accordance with the principles of the United Nations Charter.

In the context of their governments' determination to continue to cooperate closely in defence arrangements which are based on the need to regard the defence of Malaysia and Singapore as indivisible, the Ministers noted with gratification the development of the defence capability of Malaysia and Singapore, to which the other three governments had given assistance, and the decisions of the Governments of Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, which had been welcomed by the other two governments, to continue to station forces there after the end of 1971.

In discussion of the contribution which each of the five governments would make to defence arrangements in Malaysia and Singapore, the Ministers noted the view of the United Kingdom Government that the nature of its commitment under the Anglo-Malaysian defence agreement required review and that that agreement should be replaced by the new political arrangements.

They declared that their governments would continue to co-operate, in accordance with their respective policies, in the field of defence after the termination of the agreement on 1 November 1971.

The Ministers also declared, in relation to the external defence of Malaysia and Singapore, that in the event of any form of armed attacked externally organised 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.

The Ministers reviewed the progress made regarding the establishment of the new defence arrangements. In particular:

a. They welcomed the practical steps being taken to establish the integrated air defence system for Malaysia and Singapore on 1 September 1971.

b. They agreed to establish an air defence council, comprising one senior representative of each of the five nations, to be responsible for the functioning of the integrated air defence system, and to provide direction to the commander of the integrated air defence system on matters affecting the organisation, training and development and operational readiness of the system.

c. They noted the progress made by the Five Power Naval Advisory Working Group.

d. They decided to set up a joint consultative council to provide a forum for regular consultation at the senior official level on matters relating to the defence arrangements.

Ministers also noted that further discussion would take place between governments on the practical arrangements required for the accommodation and facilities for the ANZUK forces to be stationed in the area.

They looked forward to the early and successful conclusion of these discussions as an essential basis for the completion of plans for the new defence arrangements.

The Ministers agreed that from time to time it might be appropriate for them to meet to discuss their common interests. It would also be open to any of the participating government to requests at any time, a meeting to review these defence arrangements.

Accessed at:

https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-1127526853/view?sectionId=nla.obj-1151975623&partId=nla.obj-1127561095#page/n39/mode/1up

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