

THE IMPACT OF MILITARY EXERCISES ON THE READINESS AND CAPABILITY OF THE MALAYSIAN ARMED FORCES (MAF) IN RELATION TO THE DOCTRINES

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Military exercises play a vital role in simulating wartime operations, providing a realistic and battle-focused setting for training battlefield commanders, staff, and units. It helps to train support commanders, staffs, installations, and units in mobilizing, deploying, and sustaining operational forces. Senior commanders use exercises to align unit training with command training strategies and assess training execution. Military exercises also enhance force readiness and mobilization preparedness by integrating units and staffs with different battlefield functions into combined armed forces. It allows leaders, staffs, and units at all levels to practice operational procedures, refine war plans, and identify lessons learned through after-action reviews.

Military exercises come in various forms, such as joint, combined (involving multiple nations), and single-service exercises, along with interagency exercises that engage multiple federal agencies. These exercises occur at all levels of command and focus on the operational deployment of forces. They cover critical aspects like mobilization planning, alert procedures, deployment readiness, sustainment of operational forces, force reconstitution, and efforts related to survival, recovery, or reconstitution (Jr, 1998). These exercises specifically target military components that need practice and evaluation to enhance existing military skills. Most importantly, these exercises serve the vital purpose of assessing a country's level of preparedness and military capabilities, ultimately contributing significantly to the armed forces' readiness and capability for military operations.

The concept of military readiness and capability in the face of dynamic global settings and national interests is subject to diverse meanings and interpretations. The prevailing interpretation of readiness is commonly described as "the capacity of military forces to engage in combat and fulfil the requirements of designated missions." The state of preparedness holds significant importance for nations in terms of safeguarding their security, rationalising expenditures on military endeavours, and effectively addressing unforeseen crises. The notion of readiness has undergone a transformation to encompass the state of being adequately prepared for both national emergencies and disasters. The significance of implementing comprehensive methodologies for evaluating military preparedness is underscored by the utilisation of strategic documents like as the National Military Strategy, National Defence Strategy, and National Security Strategy. The assessment of armed forces' preparedness is contingent upon various aspects, including but not limited to training, force composition, mobilisation capabilities, and resource allocation and administration. (DELI, 2022).

Resilience, as part of military readiness and capability is defined as maintaining normal functioning in high-stress situations, is crucial for soldiers. Physiological training, particularly anaerobic and strength training, is essential for soldiers to meet the demands of the modern battlefield. Despite physiological differences between men and women, adaptive resilience can be instilled in soldiers through training and reality-based environments. The Comprehensive Soldier Fitness is an example of a program which exemplifies proactive efforts in building soldier resilience. Meanwhile resilience, in both physical and psychological, can be nurtured through training and specialized equipment, reducing the demands on soldiers (Nindl, 2018).

In relation to the readiness and capabilities of the Armed Forces, The Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) has been serving as the primary developer of the Army's doctrine, combat techniques, and training programs. TRADOC is responsible for developing organizations, determining the equipment needs, and preparing training procedures for the MAF. Additionally, TRADOC develops concepts and doctrines for employing the forces, specifically focusing on tactical and operational tasks for joint and combined training, aligning with the Universal Joint Task List (UJTL). TRADOC assembles teams of subject matter experts (SME) from service schools to assist the Service Component Commands and other Major Commands in various ways including selecting, reviewing, and developing exercise objectives, writing scenarios based on current doctrine, evaluating the suitability of existing doctrine, identifying deficiencies in applying doctrine, compiling lessons learned from exercises and providing insight into developing concepts of operation (Nisser, 2021).

Military doctrine encompasses a comprehensive set of principles, strategies, and guidelines that govern the actions and decisions of a military organization (Homan, n.d.). It provides a structured framework for how military forces operate, plan, and engage in warfare. Within this framework, military doctrines define overarching goals and strategies aligned with national security objectives. Additionally, doctrines establish the organizational structure, roles, and responsibilities of commanders, officers, and soldiers. They guide training programs, ensuring that military personnel acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to implement the doctrine effectively (UK, 2011).

In addition, military doctrines place significant emphasis on the significance of adaptation and ongoing improvement within their organisational structures. Military organisations can enhance their agility and responsiveness to shifting issues by integrating

insights from previous battles, evaluating prospective threats, and adopting innovative technologies. Doctrines play a crucial role in bolstering the efficacy, synchronisation, and productivity of armed forces by offering a uniform and strategic framework for military operations. Consequently, they significantly contribute to the safeguarding and protection of nations. (Col. Richard J. Davis, 2021).

In examining military doctrines, distinct approaches and strategic emphases become evident, shaped by unique historical backgrounds, geographical landscapes, and national security priorities. Malaysia, for instance, maintains a balanced defence doctrine, strategically combining both conventional and asymmetric warfare capabilities (Malaysia's National Defence Policy). This approach allows Malaysia to safeguard its territorial integrity, focusing keenly on land and maritime borders (Defence, 2020) . The Malaysian Armed Forces are structured to address the challenges of both conventional conflict and irregular warfare, ensuring a comprehensive defence strategy.

The Malaysian Armed Forces practised the built doctrines and participated in and coordinated both multilateral and bilateral Joint Exercises involving armed forces from different nations comprises of the tri services whereby these exercises aim to foster collaboration among different nations to collectively improve military exercises across various services. Such exercises prioritise the development of relationships and interoperability, emphasising the importance of working together towards a shared objective. Most of the exercises would demonstrate the collaboration skills of the participating troops through a range of actions with integration of different doctrines' practices.

The army usually conducted exercises that aims to improve the ability and interoperability of both related nations in addition to improving the competence of the troops and the ability of the members. In fact, the exercise also provides the opportunities for the generations to learn new experiences and skills in addition to being able to share knowledge and exchange views. Most common exercises involve conventional warfare, where the joining members can feel for themselves the experience of operating in Malaysia's different climate and terrain.

Naval exercises usually encompass a range of activities aimed at enhancing operational proficiency and coordination among naval units. These exercises often involve the use of divisional tactics, which focus on refining communication strategies while executing complex manoeuvres at sea. Additional areas of concentration included surface warfare, mobile diving and salvage training, replenishment-at-sea, a gunnery exercise, and exchanges with Explosive Ordnance Disposal personnel. The virtual subject matter expert exchange events encompassed several joint training options, such as dive/salvage training, aviation and information sharing, force protection, marine domain awareness (MDA), and maritime law and law enforcement. (Issa, 2021).

Meanwhile the primary objectives of the Air Force Ex were typically to strengthen interoperability, advance current capabilities, and hone aircrew tactics and force employment methods. Their bilateral training exercise usually prioritize tactical mobility that may include the focuses on fighter aircraft and the exchanges in techniques pertaining to air superiority, tactical airlift, airdrop operations, military police procedures, and tactical medical procedures. Such exercise offers a forum for cooperation and the creation of mutually agreed-upon operating protocols. It may also emphasize on the dedication to the partnership and the

continual effort to update operational procedures to ensure relevance and effectiveness in shifting operational contexts (Perez, 2023). Among the known military exercises joined or conducted by the Malaysian Armed Forces are the Aman Youyi Exercise, Tiger Strike Exercise, Bersama Shield, Cobra Gold, Exercise Harimau Shakti, Bersama Warrior Exercise and etc.

The MAF has come out with adoption of strategic approach in order to improve its preparedness and capabilities by actively participating in joint military exercises with other international military forces. The exercises function as a crucible for the MAF, providing a significant platform for the evaluation of doctrine, skills, and equipment. The Malaysian Armed Forces, under the influence of a doctrine that prioritizes a well-rounded defence strategy and regional collaboration, acknowledge the importance of establishing stronger relationships with neighbouring military forces. Collaborative military exercises involving multiple nations with either shared or distinct doctrines can serve as a viable platform for the realization of major benefits associated with this concept.

In a similar vein, Indonesia, as Malaysia's nearest neighbouring country, actively participates in joint exercises, emphasizing territorial defence due to its extensive archipelagic topography. Indonesia's armed forces boast a diverse range of capabilities, including specialized forces, enabling them to effectively tackle various challenges, such as insurgency, while ensuring the security of their vast geographical territory. Emphasizing military professionalism, Indonesia's approach, as highlighted in Daud's study (2020), underscores the preservation of state sovereignty, territorial integrity, and overall national security, aligning with their participation in joint exercises to enhance their capabilities and preparedness (Daud, 2020).

The mutual prioritisation of security considerations is seen in the cooperative endeavours between the Indonesian Military (TNI) and the Malaysian Armed Forces during the MALINDO Darsasa-11AB/2023 joint exercise conducted in Pahang, Malaysia. During this exercise, a total of 461 individuals from the Malaysian Armed Forces and 149 members from the TNI participated with the objective of improving their aggregate capabilities and interoperability in cooperative counter-terrorism operations. This project has also underscored the need of organised networking and collaborative learning opportunities. Not only does it emphasise their shared determination to countering terrorism, but it also demonstrates their commitment to enhancing military capabilities through strategic cooperation.

In 2022, Malaysia and Indonesia demonstrated notable contributions to the implementation of their ideology in combatting terrorism through the Latihan Gabungan Bersama Malaysia-Indonesia Exercise (LATGABMA MALINDO DARSASA 11AB/2022). According to reports made by Rahman (2016), this exercise has demonstrated a commendable endeavour to enhance the preparedness of the security forces in both nations to effectively combat terrorism. This exercise has also led to the enhancement of the MAF and TNI's ability to counter terrorism and their joint training as a unified force. The implementation of these activities has effectively contributed to the enhancement of their capabilities, expertise, and skills collectively. MALINDO, as an effective joint military exercise, also serves as a valuable tool for assessing the capabilities and preparedness of the Malaysian Armed Forces due to its alignment with a doctrine that closely resembles their operational approach.

Singapore, on the other hand, distinguishes itself through its strong emphasis on technological advancement in its military strategy. Their city-state has heavily invested in

cutting-edge defence systems, fostering innovation and modernization within its armed forces. Singapore's military doctrine is built around deterrence, relying on a well-trained and technologically superior military to dissuade potential aggressors through the credible threat of swift and effective response. Common joint exercise involving Singapore and Indonesia, Exercise Semangat Bersatu (XSB) was established in 1990, with alternating organisation between the MAF and SAF. Singapore, being a compact yet highly industrialised nation, possesses superior military capabilities in comparison to the MAF. Consequently, the XSB exercise serves as a platform through which the MAF can familiarise itself with the latest advancements in military training technologies. The Malaysian Army was exposed to the Tactical Engagement System (TES), a cutting-edge training tool, in the 27th edition of the XBS. By using this equipment, training concepts may be developed, and training becomes more realistic and effective, increasing MAF preparedness and enabling it to catch up with current technology.

The latest XBS was held in May 2023, which marked a significant advancement with the incorporation of drone flying operations. This addition highlighted the modernization and adaptation of military strategies, incorporating cutting-edge technology into the training regimen. The use of drones served as a testament to the evolving nature of military operations, emphasizing the importance of staying abreast with technological innovations (Singapore, 2023) . The inclusion of drone operations not only showcased the joint exploration of emerging tactics but also underlined the collaborative efforts between the SAF and MAF in integrating advanced technologies into their military exercises, ensuring both forces are well-prepared for future challenges.

Back in 2019, a minor drawback that contributed towards the capability of MAF recorded when the MAF members is lacking in the exposure to simulation equipment during training. In the context of MAF, training situations are still generated by moderators or exercise operators. This phenomenon leads to a lack of commitment among participants in training sessions, resulting in their inability to effectively portray characters and perform activities associated with various scenarios, including but not limited to injuries and being shot (Salleh, 2019).

Other than that, joint exercise with a smaller military force such as Brunei, places a premium on effectiveness and readiness. Its military doctrine revolves around territorial defence and close cooperation with neighbouring countries and allies. This collaborative approach underscores Brunei's commitment to regional stability and security while optimizing the use of its resources. Brunei's national security strategy for example, centres on safeguarding its cohesion, stability, and constitutional monarchy. Their defence white papers outline key interests: ensuring national stability, maintaining a stable regional environment free from external interference, and defending sovereignty and territorial claims. Brunei achieves these goals by enhancing its economic standing, fostering cooperation with neighbouring nations like Malaysia, and establishing robust security arrangements with third parties. Internal and external stability are paramount, with efforts focused on economic growth, diplomatic collaboration, and multilateral security agreements to protect the nation's interests (Halim Widyawardhana, 2018).

The joint military exercises conducted between Malaysia and Brunei, known as MALBRU Setia' that was recently conducted this year has underscored the significance of fostering strong collaboration and bilateral ties between the two countries in order to

safeguard regional security and promote peace. The exercises conducted centred on the defence of North Borneo against prospective threats, with the participation of the Malaysian Royal Malay Regiment and the Royal Brunei Army. Despite the various hurdles encountered, the exercises effectively demonstrated a shared commitment among participants, thereby developing a sense of cooperation aimed at safeguarding national sovereignty. invaluable opportunities for both nations to gain significant experiences.

Other than the neighbouring countries, there was also joint exercises conducted in a larger scale with bigger military power such as the BERSAMA GOLD 2020 (EXERCISE BG21). This Bilateral Ex involved the FPDA's. This exercise focuses on the conventional warfare implemented by Field Training Exercise (FTX) for marine and air components. Meanwhile, the ground components implement the Land Workshop Jungle Warfare at Joint Warfare Centre, Joint Forces Headquarters (JWC MK AB). Its objective was to improve and affirm the doctrine and procedures of inter-service between the Army, Marine and Air countries of the FPDA countries in a joint coalition scenario.

The after report of Exercise BG21, referring to the FPDA Doctrines and Procedures (FDP) 2021, highlighted the completeness of the doctrine for exercise planning at the operational level but noted its limitations in supporting tactical level planning. Notably, the doctrine lacked specific elements such as a zig-zag plan and coordinating anti-ship missile defence reactions for joint use of FPDA ships. Despite these gaps, Exercise BG21 was effectively executed without major issues. Participants from all FPDA countries cooperated positively during the land Workshop and FTX Sea and Air, ensuring smooth and orderly conduct of sharing sessions, discussions, and bilateral talks.

The organization, planning, and execution of Exercise BG21 adhered to established doctrines and procedures, leading to the successful achievement of all exercise objectives. The MAF engagement received a good rating, indicating the exercise's success in fostering interoperability among officers and personnel during joint planning activities. This interaction significantly enhanced the capabilities of Operational Planners, particularly within the Joint Force Headquarters (JFHQ), equipping the MAF with the skills needed for future Joint Coalition operations. The report emphasized the need for ongoing efforts to improve doctrines and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to further enhance the effectiveness of future joint exercises (Manan, 2021).

Nonetheless, these diverse military doctrines among military powers, including MAF, stem from historical, geopolitical, and strategic factors, shaping unique approaches to regional challenges. Despite these differences, a shared commitment to maintaining regional stability, enhancing maritime security, and countering transnational threats like piracy and terrorism unites the participating nations. In this context, joint military exercises, encompassing tactical operation as well as operation other than war such as Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations provide platforms for cooperation and coordination, even amid doctrinal disparities, fostering valuable alignments and enhancing the collective security posture of the participating nations.

For the MAF, these joint exercises are crucial opportunities to refine their strategies, enhance their operational capabilities, and foster interoperability with other nations. However, these exercises are not without challenges. The presence of divergent military doctrines poses significant obstacles. Interoperability problems, arising from differences in equipment and tactics, are a primary concern. Additionally, resource disparities, especially prevalent in

smaller nations like Malaysia, hinder full participation, necessitating meticulous planning to ensure inclusivity. These challenges are further compounded by political sensitivities, concerns over sovereignty, and logistical complexities, including coordinating transportation, communication, and troop movements.

Moreover, security risks stemming from information sharing and technology exchange require rigorous safeguards against leaks and breaches, demanding a sophisticated approach to data security. Language barriers also present a significant hurdle, complicating effective communication, which is essential for ensuring both safety and mission success. This challenge becomes even more pronounced during multilateral exercises involving multiple countries, underlining the necessity for careful management and strategic coordination to overcome these hurdles.

In the context of the MAF, these challenges are met with a proactive and adaptive approach. The MAF actively engages in meticulous planning, employing open communication channels and diplomatic efforts to address these limitations head-on. By fostering a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement, the MAF ensures that joint exercises are not only successful but also contribute significantly to their readiness and capabilities.

The success of joint exercises greatly depends on the ability to navigate complex diplomatic relations. Political sensitivities and sovereignty concerns require careful consideration, necessitating strategic manoeuvring to prevent tensions, particularly when exercises touch upon sensitive issues or border regions. Logistical challenges, ranging from coordinating transportation to ensuring effective communication, are intricate and costly.

Security risks, which include sharing sensitive military information and technologies, demand stern measures to safeguard against potential leaks or breaches.

In facing these challenges, the MAF must remain resilient, continuously working towards enhancing the joint military exercise capabilities. Crisis management mechanisms are put in place to handle unexpected incidents or misunderstandings during exercises, ensuring swift de-escalation and a return to cooperative efforts. MAF's ability to overcome these challenges lies in meticulous planning, open communication, and diplomatic efforts. By addressing these limitations, MAF not only contributes significantly to regional stability but also strengthens cooperation with other nations, underscoring the importance of careful management and collaboration to maximize the benefits of these joint military exercises for Malaysia and its allies despite the distinction of doctrine.

Additionally, the inclusion of Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) components in joint exercises plays a pivotal role in enhancing the capabilities of Malaysian forces to respond effectively to natural disasters. By including HADR components in joint exercises, Malaysian forces undergo specialized training exercises that simulate various natural disaster scenarios. These exercises prepare military personnel to respond promptly and efficiently in the event of earthquakes, floods, tsunamis, hurricanes, or other natural disasters. Through realistic simulations, MAF learns to navigate challenging environments, coordinate rescue efforts, and provide immediate assistance to affected populations in coordination and cooperation with diverse stakeholders.

In essence, joint military exercises offer a multifaceted approach to enhancing the Malaysian Armed Forces' readiness and capability. By promoting collaboration,

interoperability, knowledge exchange, and disaster response preparedness, these exercises not only strengthen military capabilities but also foster regional stability and cooperation, emphasizing the importance of careful management and collaboration to maximize the benefits of these initiatives.

Basically, the benefits of military exercises are well aligned with the particular doctrines of the MAF, thereby significantly boosting their preparedness and capabilities. By working together with many countries, the Malaysian Armed Forces maintain its doctrine of balanced defence by participation in a variety of scenarios and thorough preparation for both conventional and asymmetric threats. Collaborative exercises with adjacent nations can emphasise the need for territorial defence and foster close cooperation in defending common borders and maritime areas.

Collaboration with more advanced nations for example, elevates the Malaysian military's technological prowess and readiness, mirroring the focus on high-tech defence aligning with Malaysia's goal of staying technologically competitive which also play a pivotal role in diversifying the skill sets of the MAF, ensuring their ability to address a wide array of threats and challenges effectively. Moreover, participation in these joint exercises' underscores Malaysia's commitment to regional diplomacy and cooperation, echoing the nation's doctrine of maintaining peaceful relations and fostering collaboration with neighbouring nations for collective security.

The disciplined use of military doctrine and communication through doctrinal terms are fundamental tools for overcoming the generational gap within the military. Commanders, field grade officers, and company grade officers each play vital roles in ensuring shared

understanding. By embracing these solutions, the MAF can bridge the doctrinal divide, enhance professionalism, and promote efficacy in military operations.

Likewise, MAF may greatly increase the efficacy and efficiency of its joint military exercises by improving their military doctrines in accordance with the recommendations. It would be easier to organise and carry out joint exercises if these countries' philosophies were in harmony, facilitating smooth collaboration and coordination. The goals of joint exercises would be strengthened by a stronger emphasis on regional security within the doctrines, highlighting the joint efforts to counter shared threats throughout these cooperative training projects.

In conclusion, the enhancement of military doctrines and military exercises, play a fundamental role in shaping the success of joint military exercises. Through strategic investments in education and training programs aligned with refined doctrines, military personnel are not only well-prepared but also equipped with the knowledge necessary to achieve shared objectives and strategies. Moreover, the recognition of military doctrines as integral components of regional diplomacy fosters constructive dialogues, paving the way for seamless interactions and cooperation among nations. By implementing these improvements, the Malaysia Armed Forces can significantly elevate the quality and impact of its joint military exercises. This elevation extends beyond mere readiness and capability, influencing effective collaboration within nations and enhancing regional security efforts. The synergy between refined doctrines, comprehensive training, and diplomatic engagement emerges as a cornerstone in ensuring the success of joint military exercises and strengthening the bonds of cooperation in the pursuit of peace and security in the region as well as enhancing the level of readiness and capability of the Malaysia Armed Forces.

(3747 Words)