

Research Staff Collegium
Wednesday 16 December, 14.30

via Zoom



Agenda

1. Minutes of the last meeting and any matters arising

- A working group (consisting of Vitaly, Florian, and Steph) has been formed to look into SIPRI's journal subscriptions.

2. Covid-19: Update

- At the beginning of 2021, an update on the COVID-19 situation in Stockholm will be shared.
- Over the past few weeks there has been a general tightening of guidelines. These are likely to remain or get even tighter in the new year.
- Not much will change at SIPRI. Everybody has been working from home with very limited external meetings. Even meetings with the MFA have moved online.
- Feedback by colleagues suggests that virtual meetings are much more tiring than personal discussions.
- Dan offered words of encouragement and invited all to get "as good a break as possible" over Christmas.

3. Governing Board meeting

- SIPRI's Governing Board met during the afternoons of Nov. 16 and 17. Dan provided the Board with a report on strategic priorities. Joakim covered the operational side.
- Joakim shared very positive impressions from his first board meeting, thanked SIPRI staff who participated, and provided an overview of the issues discussed. These included:
 - a. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, including staff fatigue, research activities, as well as SIPRI's finances;
 - b. A brainstorming session on how to raise awareness about current challenges to arms control (following an internal SIPRI brainstorming session) and what SIPRI can do to add value to the field going forward;
 - c. A session exploring interlinkages between peace and health;
 - d. The discussion led by Jessica Mathews on the impact of the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election on International Peace and Security (over 50 SIPRI staff participated);
 - e. Meetings with union representatives;
 - f. A review of SIPRI's finances;
 - g. New Governing Board members; and

h. An update on dialogues SIPRI is involved in.

Malin, who participated in the board meeting, raised the following issues:

- implication of the pandemic on staff (high workload and stress levels, small administrative things take much more time now);
- implications of the pandemic on funding, particularly 2022 onwards; and
- implications of the pandemic on research activities (impact on fieldwork).

Malin also commented that the board discussed the level of reserves SIPRI should have and the recommendation to have an explicit policy about the purpose and target of its reserves. Dan explained that there is a strong push from auditors that SIPRI's reserves should be bigger and reiterated the need to express a policy on the purpose and target of reserves.

Other issues raised during the board meeting that Malin mentioned include:

- SIPRI's growth and how attractive is it to work for SIPRI compared to other think tanks;
- the balance between operational and research staff (research staff has grown faster compared to operations with implications how to support staff); and
- SIPRI's investment in competence development.

Siemon Wezeman had a follow up question about staff competence development and the extent to which it forms part of how SIPRI operates. How is SIPRI thinking about competence development?

Pieter Wezeman commented that it is not the role of the board to develop SIPRI's policy on competence development, but a task for senior management.

Dan confirmed that this is a senior management issue.

4. Budget

Maria shared SIPRI's Working Budget for 2021 and broke it down as follows:

- 26% is core funding;
- 56% income is secured under existing grants (this is higher than last year);
- 7% are identified grants (in the application stage); and
- 11% is unidentified funding that SIPRI needs to apply for.

In terms of staffing levels:

- At the end of 2020, SIPRI had 82,5 staff members (with some working as consultants from abroad).
- We will be 88,5 by the end of 2021.
- Average staff levels have been at 78 in the past.

Maria mentioned that preparing the budget has been difficult as the full impact of the pandemic is not yet known. Important savings in travel were made this year. Some projects plan for travel next year, but uncertainty remains about the feasibility of fieldwork travel.

SIPRI is growing, but core funding is lower. Hence, there is a need to focus on securing project funding and overhead. Maria highlighted the need to get the right balance between a growing research staff and the Operations and Outreach teams, for which it is necessary to ensure adequate funding. Overall, she noted a small surplus and a balanced budget for 2020.

Dan stressed that this overall surplus is small, leaving only a very small margin of error/room for manoeuvre for 2021. While it is good news that 82% of finances are covered for 2021, SIPRI will need to work hard on the 11% that is unidentified funding.

Dan showed data on SIPRI's growth since 2014, noting high growth from 2015, stabilization from 2018-2019, followed by high growth dampened by Covid-19. Earlier this year a lot of new staff was hired and SIPRI is planning further expansion next year. Dan commented that the financial picture is reasonably good and growth has been solid, but we should expect the financial challenges to get greater in 2022.

SIPRI's board member Dr Patricia Lewis had helpfully compared SIPRI to the policy institute Chatham House where the same kind of tendencies are observed. The COVID-19 impact is delayed and will become much more visible in 2022. Evidence to support this is seen already by countries reducing their development funding (in the UK, for example)

As to the staffing balance (research vs. outreach & operational), Dan explained that all outreach and operational areas except IT have increased. Given grant money is driven by researchers, the increase in research staff always precedes increases in outreach and operational staff. Yet, Dan stressed that the latter's staff levels must catch up briskly, so that the gap does not get too big. He announced that SMT will have a discussion on this early next year.

5. New RSC Representative

Nan asked RSC members to volunteer for the position of RSC representative to the Cooperation Group, which convenes for 45 minutes every three weeks to discuss issues that are central to the Institute. Volunteers can inform Nan about their interest. The RSC subsequently votes on the nomination.

6. AOB

Simon Wezeman asked who is reachable in management over the holidays in case of emergencies. Dan confirmed a communication is forthcoming on this.

7. Concluding remarks

Happy holidays to all. Stay healthy and safe.

Attendees

