

Research Staff Collegium

Date: 3 April 2025 at 13:00

Location: Conference Room

Minute-taker: Jiayi Zhou

Minutes

The RSC agenda covered:

- Preparations for the Governing Board meeting in May;
- Institute finances;
- Transition to the new Director;
- Role of the RSC in the institute;
- Other items

Preparations for the Governing Board meeting in May

- The governing board (GB) decided to have more meetings but only one in-person, to save money. The 19-20 May GB meeting will be virtual. An in-person meeting will be held in October, which will also be the new Director Karim Haggag's first.
- The agenda for the May GB meeting has not yet been developed; this RSC has an opportunity to shape it. However, it can be taken for granted certain issues will be addressed at the GB meeting: finances, new Director transition, fundraising, KPIs (including results from last year), risk assessments, and information about the evolution of each Research Cluster. There will be a session together with staff, as well as one with the Unions. The procedure once an agenda has been developed is to have a further RSC to discuss it.
- One suggestion was to have the GB help us conceptualize the present global changes, or in other words, engage with research staff on substantive content. Other ideas are encouraged to be voiced, the sooner the better.

Institute Finances

- A presentation was given based on a report sent to both GB and to staff last week, which summarized main points. This was then followed by a Q&A.
- The presentation noted the results from January - February 2025:
 - Based on these first two months, there is a difference of - 4 million (+175 465) SEK compared to annual budget (+175 465). However, this shortfall of approximately - 3.8 million is not a true indication of the annual projection. The budget is built on a linear estimation of income, but we know there is always fluctuation in money coming in. For example, the strategic grant money has not yet come in, though it has been promised. It is normal to start the year with funds having not been fully dispersed to us; in fact, we are in a better position than last year.
 - The core grant 28.4 million sek, paid out every month. The strategic grant counts for 0 in the current figures because it has not been paid out yet.
 - The Board adopted 2 budgets in December, with different estimates of the strategic grant. The budget the SMT is using is based on a strategic grant 15 million SEK; latest information is that it will be 14 million SEK.
 - For external projects, we have received 8.4 million SEK, compared to 10 million SEK as written into the budget. But this is actually a strong number, much better in fact than last year.

- The key to understanding this budget is the linearity of financing on which it is premised. Our main sources of funding are: core, strategic grant, and external. It is normal that income is activated mostly in the second half of the year, so -4 million is "concerning not alarming." The strategic grant and external funding will be activated in the next months and second half of the year. So in fact we have quite strong fundraising at the start of this year, comparatively speaking.
- In terms of costs, a table was presented. The same issues of linearity of the budget (evened out, averaged month-month projections rather than viable) apply. We have budgeted 1.5 million SEK costs on core; the actual cost is 5.1 million SEK, but that is because some of the money we anticipate from the strategic grant (which has not yet been received) has been put on core for now.
- Admin costs are just below budget, which is thanks to a great effort by everyone. We have received a rent discount, but also reduced library, telephone subscriptions, and found cheaper office suppliers. The margins are quite low, so it may be difficult to cut more. But so far it looks good. Overhead is also lower than budget, but that's because new projects haven't yet come in.
- Finances are tight but under control, and not as alarming as last year. The Finances Department feels strongly that it will be possible to keep to the budget, though it needs to be monitored every month.
- In terms of the liquidity forecast, we have small margins. Liquidity will be tight in May when we have a lot of costs for the Forum. But still have 1.8 million SEK to work with.
- Overall, there is a need to continuously fundraise still, but things do not look too bad. Everything does need continuous monitoring so everyone needs to register their claims, time reports, consultancies, expenses, etc., on time.
- Several further points are important in relation to the budget.
 - Income from external projects are sometimes not in SEK, but in foreign currencies. Bear in mind that SEK has gotten stronger; the exchange rates are not in SIPRI's favor given that our costs are in SEK.
 - Some of our external budget is in the form of framework contracts that need to be activated to be tapped. To the extent that we can, we should utilize them.
 - The budget does not take into consideration direct costs, travels, the costs of events, publications, etc. If those direct costs can be cut, the savings can be transferred to cover salary costs. This will require us all to be mindful and work together. If any direct costs can be put on projects rather than on core, that will also help.
- Results from our fundraising efforts will reveal themselves around April or so, but so far things are encouraging. Note that we need to have as many funding applications out before June as possible, as those are more likely to activate income for this year. The item 'Unidentified projects', which means projects for which we have not yet sent in applications, should get smaller as months go by and be zero after the summer. Funding applications submitted after summer will likely not generate much income for this budget year.
- In the discussion about the presentation, Claire asked of the Jan-Feb core costs, whether and how much of those costs can be moved to the strategic grant. She also asked what is still left to fundraise for the rest of the year?
 - In answer to the first question, some reallocation is possible.
 - In terms of overall fundraising needs, we need to secure upwards of 25 million SEK in additional project income for this year.
- Diego expressed appreciation for the financial documents being sent to staff. He asked about the budget differences / shortfall related to salary costs.

- The answer was that much of this will smooth out as the year proceeds and some of what has been temporarily funded from core can be reallocated into concrete external or strategic grant projects.
- The finance team encouraged, however, everyone to ask questions and to seek any clarification anyone might need.

Transition to the new Director

- Charlotta said that the draft transition plan is a living document, and that feedback on it is welcome in the cooperation group, in the RSC (including today), and through individual feedback.
- There are two preparatory stages for the transition. One is May-August; Karim will be here 5-8 May, in the training for Saudi Arabian diplomats. He will during this time also meet with Dan, Stefan, the SMT, Director's Office, HR, and will also be at a fiak. Karim will also be back in June. We are looking into an all-staff meeting, if possible. As well, he will be an observer in GB meetings, which will be a good introduction for him.
- A range of preparatory information is being provided to him, covering everything from current programmes and forthcoming events to Swedish labor law. Thoughts and ideas about materials or information that the new Director should have should go to Charlotta directly or through the staff representatives.
- Karim starts on 8 September. SMT is looking into a retreat with him then, and then a potential "home day" with all staff.
- In October, there will be a training on work environment. Karim will take part.
- In terms of external contacts and networking for the next SIPRI Director, if you have thoughts about whom Karim should meet with, or any major meetings and conferences that he should attend, do inform management.
- 6-8 October will be the in-person GB meeting. During it, one of those days could be a workshop with staff; any inputs on how to use that time would be welcome.
- In the discussion about the director transition, Diego suggested that the Director also potentially attend a cooperation group in May, if he will be around. Charlotta responded that May would be difficult timing-wise, but June could be possible.
- As an aside, Charlotta also reminded all staff that the election for a staff observer on the GB is ongoing, and encouraged everyone to vote.

Role of the RSC in the institute

- In terms of the framing and background for this agenda item, Charlotta mentioned that over the last weeks there have been various discussions in the SMT, about issues raised in the Zondera survey and how to address them, as well as more general discussions about rebuilding trust in the organization and how the SMT can be constructive in this regard.
- In the cooperation group, also, staff representatives asked that the cooperation agreement from the spring of 2024 be looked at again, to consider what is working and what does not—and improvement opportunities.
- In these discussions, two key issues continually arise:
 - How cooperation in fact works throughout the institute, across programmes and in different structured formats.
 - How to best utilize meetings, which is what this agenda item is about.
- Diego and Gretchen, as RSC representatives, presented. They discussed that in the cooperation group, Charlotta initiated a productive exercise about the cooperation group and what works / doesn't work. The role of the RSC came up a few times: there was a sense that the RSC could be more productive, and that people could engage more during RSC meetings. The RSC representatives noted that they would like an RSC which has more

opinions and expresses itself more, so that they can represent this body better. But it was not clear how to go about this.

- The cooperation agreement allows for ad-hoc working groups for various SIPRI-related issues. So Diego and Gretchen suggested that such an ad-hoc working group be formed to discuss how to improve discussions at the RSC. They note that the statutes establishing the RSC are from 1986. SIPRI has since transformed and grown a lot, so this might need to be revised to see if those statutes are still fit for purpose. (Dan noted that the statutes were actually amended in 2018, when it was decided that there would be a staff observer on the governing board, and when it was decided that the appointment of Directors would be decided by the governing board.)
- Ad-hoc working groups and issue-specific discussions at SIPRI for staff inputs are very helpful; they were extremely useful during the recruitment process for a new SIPRI Director. Such discussions should not be seen as extra work, but rather an opportunity for staff to be engaged.
- The proposed ad-hoc working group, which Diego and Gretchen will coordinate, will think through together how to use the different mechanisms and bodies at SIPRI effectively, to include all meeting formats, including the MMM.
- Jiayi raised the point that the RSC based on the statutes for it, was intended as a research-specific body / set of discussions. The increasingly general nature of the RSC as an all-purpose staff meeting has diluted the discussion and debate aspect of the RSC, as it is more about management reporting to staff general items of interest—and hence a more unidirectional conversation. She proposed considering a more narrow focus to RSCs, while other meeting formats become more general purpose, so that there is a cleaner and clearer distinction between meeting formats and what they are intended for. Laura agreed.
- There were counter ideas proposed that the RSC should continue to be as broad-based as possible, as to not clear a system of exclusivity and tiers within SIPRI. All issues are potentially relevant to all staff. Nikos mentioned that it used to be unclear what the RSC's makeup was when he first joined SIPRI, and how non-researchers should engage with it. He suggested that a "split"-style that would not be inclusive, would not be good for SIPRI, and some others agreed.
- Simone mentioned that collective brainstorming in the research space is important, and there may be some issues that need to be thought through, co-authorship, etc, but that there also issues that bridge research with institutional guidelines and support issues, e.g. going to US (travel issues) and safety.
- Tytti expressed that the original mandate of the RSC was established when the research agenda of SIPRI was much smaller. Dan expressed that also the funding model was different then, when SIPRI had a blank check to establish its research agenda, with Swedish governmental backing. That is no longer the case.
- Given the debate, there was also a question of whether we should reform, update, or possible even create new structures for more effective and constructive conversations and meetings at SIPRI. Overall, the gist was that the ad-hoc working group will discuss all of this. Volunteers were requested to let Diego and Gretchen know by the Thursday before Easter.

Other items

- As a follow-up to an issue raised in the previous agenda item, the question of travel to the US was explored. This is an issue that the SMT has discussed. The rule is that no one in SIPRI should feel compelled to go anywhere they do not want to go to. SIPRI's travel advice would be secondary to that of the foreign ministry, or your own home MFA—some of which do now have US-specific travel advice.
- When it comes to travel to the US, digital hygiene may be important.

- It was noted difficulties with US (or other countries') immigration authorities should be referred to your own national government.
- These issues are not only important to consider in relation to travel to the US. A discussion took place about the procedure for travel to other risky places. For China, there is a guideline that you should consider taking clean or wiped electronics. There is not yet a guideline for Russia. In fact there are many parts of the world where digital surveillance is an issue. A request for clean laptops was put in for travel to the DRC, as well.
- It was noted that there are extra phones and extra laptops at SIPRI, and that anyone needing one should just talk to IT (although there isn't an unlimited supply).
- There may be a need to have a dedicated discussion about IT security, and security awareness.