

Research Staff Collegium

Date: 18 September 2025 at 10:00

Location: Conference Room

Minute-taker: Anna Masarikova

Minutes

The RSC agenda covered:

- Upcoming meeting of the Governing Board and side activities (Oct 6-8)
- Institute finances
- The future of RSC – presentation by Gretchen and Diego of working group discussions

Upcoming meeting of the Governing Board and side activities – presentation of the draft agenda by Charlotta

- Most Board members arriving Sunday, Oct 5
- Monday, Oct 6
 - Morning
 - Part I: informal workshop (around 1 hour) with Karim/SIPRI and Board
 - Part II: informal discussion with Board + SMT on SIPRI strategy (around 2.5 hours including light lunch); strategy will serve as basis for actionable steps forward
 - Afternoon: formal Board meeting
 - Radha Kumar unable to attend in person but will join online
 - Agenda: Director and Deputy Director's report, financial updates, new Board members, other regular topics
 - Evening: formal dinner at Steninge slott with Board + invited guests from government, parliament, agencies (Sida, FBA) and private sector
 - Invitations sent; Foreign Minister unavailable; State Secretary may be travelling (Charlotta & Karim to follow up); Minister for International Development, Cooperation and Trade and/or State Secretary also invited; hope for political-level participation
- Tuesday, Oct 7
 - Morning: meeting with Union representatives, followed by reporting back
 - Afternoon: public event – panel discussion, venue under review (Matilda & Priscilla)
 - Theme: "Prospects for peaceful conflict resolution amidst international security"
 - Panel 1 moderated by Karim: "Implications of the growing global insecurity" - global insecurity drivers (political, military, technological; arms control, militarization, fraying alliances, human security issues including ODA cuts, climate goal setbacks)
 - Panel 2 moderated by Charlotta: "Prospects for peaceful conflict resolution" – implications for peaceful conflict resolution (Ukraine, Middle East, Africa, East Asia); questions on mediation, reviving peace frameworks, sustaining pathways to resolution
 - Evening: informal dinner
- Wednesday, Oct 8
 - Morning: workshop (building on foresight scenario exercise, around 2 hours) – to be designed based on SIPRI staff input
 - Afternoon: final Board session to sum up and address outstanding issues (meeting ends around 14:30)
- Board membership
 - 2 seats currently unfilled

- 2 mandates expire in April 2026: Radha (already extended, cannot extend again); Heng Chee (possibly extendable)
- At least 1-2 new members needed to be appointed before current mandated expire
- Board will be invited to reflect on desired competencies (regional, generational, etc.) and suggest names later in autumn; will be further discussed in RSC*, then again at December Board meeting (members are appointed by the Swedish Government after nomination by the SIPRI Board, RSC and Unions)
- Additional notes
 - The public event with the Board had been planned based on outcome from workshop (Outreach + Director's Office) emphasizing that the event aims to: enhance visibility for SIPRI, new Director, the international Board and SIPRI's work; respond to requests from embassies; connect with embassy/government officials and explore project opportunities; and provide networking opportunities across government, diplomatic community, private sector, civil society
 - Karim stressed need for information-sharing mechanisms on upcoming projects to help match with funders, partners, and research opportunities

Institute finances – Kristina & Nikos presented Jan-Jun 2025 results and yearly forecast

- Books close every other month; August figures (available Monday Sept 23) will be used for Board report
- Kristina stressed timely reporting/approvals to meet deadlines
- Jan-Jun 2025 deficit of -3M SEK (income 52M, costs 55M)
 - Normal for first half: higher core salaries, external income activated mainly in second half, and holiday debt deduction (applied mostly July-Dec)
 - A safe, good result is not yet guaranteed – overall position uncertain due to several factors
- 2025 forecast (current estimate)
 - Standard scenario: approximately balanced (minor fluctuations)
 - Assetized databases still affect finances:
 - 20% of 2024 database costs carried over
 - 80% of 2025 databases income expected => likely result +2M
 - Risks/opportunities:
 - Projects: light risk - although they are secured, there may be delays (e.g., publications shifted from 2025 to 2026), which would push costs forward
 - Proposals: high risk – income uncertain due to probability of approval; even if approved, impact on 2025 decreases over time as fewer costs can be activated
 - Databases: remain a risk despite past activation; no guarantee they will be accepted this year
 - Opportunity in direct costs:
 - Underspending in direct costs can be reallocated to salaries or other budget lines (per contracts) – but must ensure transparency, compliance, and proper planning
 - Proposals – lower risk: if they do not materialize, neither do the associated costs
 - Strategic grant: very low spending so far on direct costs; opportunity to shift unused budget toward salaries and related activities
 - Admin (core) costs: around 50% spent mid-year, in line with budget; need monitoring; exchange rate fluctuations a risk (currently unfavorable)
- Nikos shared a few scenarios
 - Worst case: no proposals approved, databases not activated as income (but costs still incurred), limited reallocation => deficit
 - Good case: proposals secured, normal reallocation, databases activated as income => +4M surplus (2M real + 2M database)
- Risk management & action plan
 - Databases: finance + teams must cooperate to ensure auditors accept assetization
 - Direct costs:

- Budget: 21M; only 7M spent by August => 14M left for 4 months
- Project managers are asked for pragmatic forecasts for direct costs until Dec 31
- Extended program meetings will be held next week to review underspending, contracts, transfer options
- Applications: high-probability 2025 proposals must be closely tracked; donor timing is crucial – finance needs accurate, up-to-date information
- Admin costs & exchange rates: finance/PMO monitoring closely
- Overcoverage: some teams risk overcoverage (income exceeds allowable salary costs); excess must be shifted across teams or into 2026 (this decision requires fairness, solidarity, shared responsibility institute-wide)
- Information flow: accurate, timely data essential for dynamic adjustments and quick decisions
- Despite financial challenges, balance has been maintained – credit to all staff for efforts in fundraising, cost-cutting, and cooperation

The future of RSC – presentation by Gretchen and Diego of working group discussions (Gretchen, Diego)

- Karim opened with a few thoughts
 - SIPRI's future (2026) depends on support and fundraising (including the Swedish government funding), which in turn requires compelling ideas => key task for the RSC
 - Staff want to make meetings more effective - further discussion will continue at next RSC workshop
 - Goal: reinforce "One SIPRI" – efficient collaboration across tracks, reducing siloes and inefficiencies
 - RSC should be the vehicle for this
- Gretchen expressed that the RSC working group evolved from long-standing conversations & was more concretely formed after a March workshop led by Charlotta. The working group had met 4 times (concluded this week)
- RSC role: advisory body of research staff for Director and Board (statutes from 1986); statutes need revisiting to reactive RSC as intended
 - Gretchen kindly asked everyone to read the statutes before next week's workshop
- Current reality: RSC meetings now function mainly as all-staff information sessions (e.g., about finances), leaving no cross-cluster space for research/strategy discussions; no wider collaborative spirit
- Goal: realign RSC with statutes, create space for collaboration, and make meetings inclusive and attractive by interest, not obligation (to both research and non-research staff); reduce siloes in research and use time more wisely and effectively
- Diego expressed that the aim is to redefine the RSC scope without creating divisions and highlighted 4 main issues the working group discussions identified:
 - 1. Research focus: RSC must return to discussing research and strategy (not replacing other meetings)
 - Possible topics: AI in research, cross-cluster project proposals, SIPRI publications, strategy/KPIs, research methods, use of strategic grants
 - Meeting format should change to foster collaboration, open dialogue and trust (roundtables, working groups mentioned as possible formats)
 - 2. Working committee: needed to prepare agendas and facilitate RSC work
 - 3. Staff engagement: need to find ways to re-engage staff
 - 4. Non-research staff: clarify their role and refine scope of other meetings (cluster, MMM, all-staff) to avoid overlap and losing information
- Diego then shared a few recommendations for the RSC:
 - Clarify RSC meeting scope and agenda-setting
 - Establish rules and elections for a working committee (how should members be nominated, what should the composition be – by cluster, position, gender, etc.)
 - Discuss ways to foster open participation and dialogue (e.g., occasional Fikas, better communication)
- A document has been prepared and shared with everybody (as of Friday morning Sept 19)
- The details will be addressed during the workshop on Sept 25

- In summing up, Karim reiterated that the RSC is a critical advisory board for the Director, meant for strategic, cross-cluster discussions and new ideas
- Outputs from the foresight scenario exercise will feed into Board planning and then into RSC discussions on research agenda and strategy – it would be helpful if everyone could take time to fill out a survey that was sent out about this
- Karim and Charlotta, along with the SMT, look forward to engaging with the RSC

Summary (key points)

- Draft agenda for the Governing Board meeting confirmed: workshops, formal sessions, public panel, and networking opportunities
- Board membership gaps noted; recruitment of 1-2 new members to be addressed later in autumn
- In terms of finances, Jan-Jun 2025 showed a -3M SEK deficit, but the full-year forecast remains approximately balanced, with risks (databases, proposals) and opportunities (direct costs, strategic grant)
- Close monitoring, timely reporting, and accurate information-sharing are essential to manage financial uncertainty
- RSC working group recommends realigning the body with its original statutes, shifting focus back to research/strategy discussions, collaboration, and staff engagement
- Next steps include continuing discussions at the Sept 25 workshop
- Overall, there is a need for stronger cross-cluster collaboration, transparent information-sharing, and proactive planning ahead of October Board meeting and longer-term strategy discussions