



SIPRI Strategy 2024–29

Approved by the SIPRI Governing Board

May 2024



1. Navigating between change and continuity

Recent years have seen profound changes in world affairs. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020–22, Russia’s war on Ukraine since 2014 and the full-scale war since its reinvasion of Ukraine in February 2022, rising economic and geopolitical tensions between China and the United States, the deepening ecological crisis headlined by climate change, the higher incidence of military coups in Africa, and the increased number and intractability of armed conflicts around the world—all this and more add up to multiple levels of change. The task of SIPRI’s new strategy is to offer guidance in navigating a transformed operating environment.

Alongside these changes, there are significant elements of continuity. The fundamentals still apply. Some aspects of SIPRI’s new strategy could have been enunciated at any point in the 58 years since the Institute was founded (and probably were). Our statutes state that

the purpose of the Foundation is to conduct scientific research on questions of conflict and cooperation of importance for international peace and security, with the aim of contributing to an understanding of the conditions for peaceful solutions of interstate conflicts and for stable peace.

In short, SIPRI’s task is to do solid research that could help bring about a more peaceful world. The Myrdal Commission, whose report led to SIPRI’s establishment, recommended that the new institute should carry out work with ‘an applied research character directed towards practical-political questions . . . in a constant interchange with research of a more theoretical kind’.

From these texts come the twin strands of SIPRI’s institutional DNA—fidelity to the facts and a commitment to peace.

One requirement of the Institute’s strategy for the next five years is to find a way to balance continuity and change. Continuity means sustaining research themes on which we have distinctive strengths, a well-earned reputation and a niche. Innovation means taking on new themes and keeping established themes fresh.

2. Safeguarding independence (as part of SIPRI’s core identity)

SIPRI’s identity and purpose are bound up in the idea that making issues of conflict, peace, arms and disarmament more comprehensible to the public and policymakers—and more actionable for policymakers—can help move towards greater peace and security. SIPRI thus emphasizes the production of data that is as accurate as possible, analysis that is fair-minded, and policy proposals that are both creative and balanced.

It is axiomatic that this work is best done by—and most trusted when it comes from—an independent body. This means that SIPRI's independence and integrity are a necessary part of its peace-and-facts DNA.

As an institution that was established by a government decision and whose Governing Board continues to be appointed by the Swedish government of the day, it is especially important that we are clear about the value of our independence. Sometimes our independence and commitment to the evidence and reasoned analysis may court unwanted controversy. We are neither a government agency nor a consultancy company but an independent research centre, dealing in the evidence however uncomfortable it may sometimes be. Our independence builds on our research ethics, a capacity for innovative thinking, a variety of income sources and, occasionally, sheer determination.

3. The changing world

Several aspects of the overall changing context for peace and security create particular challenges for SIPRI in the coming five years.

Today there is a major interstate war in Europe. Russia's reinvasion of Ukraine not only escalated the conflict to new levels of violence but also drew the West into more active support for Ukraine and efforts to hamper Russia. Sweden responded to Russia's escalation of the war in Ukraine by accompanying Finland in joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). There is a possibility that this will change the view of SIPRI among some of our audiences, so that the Institute is not so easily seen as being impartial in our treatment of data or so fair-minded and balanced in our analysis. **In response, SIPRI needs not only to protect its independence but also project it and make visible the authenticity of our claim to be independent.**

The mounting ecological crisis also feeds insecurity, instability and conflict. For an institute that cares about evidence, this demands research but also challenges many of the assumptions underlying how we think about policy. Any recommendations for policy need to make choices about how to address the security risks of the ecological crisis despite that the details of the timing and scale of these risks remain unclear. This involves designing policy on the basis of speculative risk. Put differently, evidence-based policy is all very well but not enough. **SIPRI needs to embrace this challenge as an opportunity. It can develop and present a coherent and balanced view of what constitutes security. It can also push forward with addressing the unanswered questions in ecological security, supporting policymaking amid uncertainty.**

The economic context is considerably less benign than previously and will probably worsen. Following the Covid-19 pandemic, the escalation of Russia's war on Ukraine has brought price inflation, especially in energy and food, to many countries. This problem is exacerbated by what the World Bank analyses as a long-term decline in European economic growth rates that, if left unaddressed, will continue into the 2030s. If national and intergovernmental policies cannot address these issues successfully, consequences could include slow recovery from present economic difficulties, with modest growth thereafter. Against this general background, institutions like SIPRI will find it harder to attract the resources needed to research and analyse growing and increasingly complex problems of conflict and insecurity. **In response, the Institute needs to concentrate on financial management and fundraising, especially from new sources. Readiness to make tough choices if necessary must be accompanied by a tolerance of the risks involved in innovation and investing in new research ideas and capacity.**

Growing political polarization in many countries weakens trust in institutions and generates an increasingly transactional view of facts and analysis. From climate change through immigration via Brexit to election results and the pandemic, this problem seems to rear its head with increasing frequency. At the same time, recognition of the problem seems to encourage many to seek out reliable, consistent and independent sources of information and analysis. SIPRI's global media footprint and general reputation have benefited from this in recent years. **The Institute can respond to this harsher operating environment by emphasizing the clarity of its information and analysis as well as their integrity. Research excellence means not only reliability and originality but also optimal accessibility.**

The proliferation of segmented channels of communications complicates the task of disseminating research. The underlying technology of global information encourages many users to avoid and ignore the facts they don't like and celebrate those—including the half-truths and untruths—that they do. SIPRI and like-minded institutions have to navigate a volatile and diverse communications space in which reasoned analysis and careful treatment of the evidence often take second and third place to sound bites and diatribes. **Against this background, SIPRI will need to remain aware of changes in the media and communications landscape and continue to be familiar with multiple modes of communication. While we use diverse means and platforms, we maintain consistency in the substance of our communications.**

The changes needed to rise to these challenges mostly involve evolution rather than a step change in SIPRI's programmes and practice, the exception being in financial management and fundraising. Even there the changes required, although significant, are already under way in 2024.

One additional aspect of change worth noting is that early in the period of the new strategy, SIPRI will have a new Director, as the current one completes his ten-year term.

4. Contributing to a global conversation

It is a fair question to ask whether prospects for disarmament and peace have improved in the last five years. The answer is negative, and the reasons why go far beyond the scope and potential influence of a research institute, of course, and do not imply failure or poor performance by SIPRI. The scale and difficulty of peace and security issues means we can only ever undertake part of the work of addressing them. Accordingly, partnerships are key assets.

It remains our **goal** to contribute to improved prospects for disarmament, peace and security by carrying out empirically sound research and insightful analysis. And we retain our four-part purpose:

- to carry out applied research on security, peace and conflict;
- to disseminate our research findings including evidence-based recommendations for policy;
- to use our authoritative reputation to convene dialogues;
- to help build capacity for peace research in other countries and regions.

Given SIPRI's scale compared to the scale of the problems we address, and given also our history and reputation, we have concluded that we can take steps towards fulfilling our goal by contributing to a global conversation on peace, security and international stability.

Our research is a contribution to this conversation. SIPRI wants to ensure that its research reaches international policy audiences. We aim to provide the evidence that ought to underpin policy and to offer actionable proposals when appropriate. To do this, we need to understand policymakers' priorities, although we will also, when necessary, bring up other issues about which they ought to be concerned.

We work hard to get our research to our target audiences in a form they can both digest and respect. SIPRI attempts to communicate its data, analysis, findings and recommendations in accessible forms. This has several dimensions. Our written material is as precise as possible and avoids jargon where possible. SIPRI uses a variety of communications channels—social media, videos, policy briefs, media interviews, topical comment, research reports, the SIPRI Yearbook, lectures, speeches and seminar presentations, and so on—to be as accessible to as many audiences as possible.

We convene events and take part in events organized by others. These activities are of different types and scales, ranging from public events for a general audience to high-level forums to small private dialogues to expert roundtables and more.

5. Facing a changing funding environment

The availability of resources to fund our research is currently tightening and there is no reason to believe that will soon ease.

Economic performance in countries—in Europe and beyond—from which we receive funding from government spending is not expected to be as strong as in the three previous decades. The demand for increased military spending will be the focus of many governments' overall expenditure plans along with replenishing financing for health, education, welfare and infrastructure. This does not mean public funding for the kind of policy-relevant research SIPRI does will disappear. In some quarters and on some issues, the signs are that there will be increased demand. However, the funding arena will be more competitive.

To meet these circumstances, SIPRI has begun a series of actions to make us more capable in this area:

- A new position of Director of Programme Development;
- A Grants Acquisition and Development Team;
- A stronger Project Management Office;
- Engagement with new potential funders including the philanthropic and private sector;
- A new position of Head of Major Initiatives to combine solid research and active outreach on major issues for policy impact.

6. Bridging topics and communities

Much of SIPRI's research focuses on the links between issues that have normally been kept separate by academia and the policy world alike, such as climate change and insecurity, or the meeting between technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and nuclear, or AI and biological weapons. Today, an important part of analysing security issues and working out promising policy options begins with identifying and understanding the intersections between them. This requires interdisciplinary academic work, interdepartmental policy development, and inter-agency practice. For SIPRI, the emphasis is on different programmes and teams working together.

The general approach underlying this insistence on an integrative way of working is sometimes referred to as T-shaped expertise: the vertical line

represents in-depth knowledge and expertise, while the crossbar indicates recognition of the necessity to connect one in-depth area of knowledge with others and the willingness to do so.

Familiarity with this way of thinking and working fits SIPRI well for addressing the challenges that issues as varied as ecological disruption and populist nationalism generate in different ways for peace, security and international order and allows us to take a rounded approach to the diverse challenges to peace and security today



Figure 1. A rounded approach to security

Looking at these challenges, SIPRI has identified three angles to help choose the research and activities for each programmes and project:

- **Battlefields of today and tomorrow:** this could mean research on actors, drivers, issues, sites and instruments of current and future contestation and conflict;
- **Peacefields for the future:** this could focus research on actors, drivers, issues, sites and instruments of work to strengthen the prospects for peace;
- **Geopolitics meets the local:** this could take us into research on how the prospects for peace and conflict at the local level are shaped by (and, in turn, often shape) developments in both global and regional geopolitics.

7. Partnership as a core principle

SIPRI's strategic objective of supporting and strengthening the global conversation on peace and security is a commitment to a joint endeavour. There

is no question of SIPRI doing it alone. We play our part alongside others, and partnerships are essential to our work and strategy.

SIPRI has a wide array of partnerships with a range of other organizations, from local non-governmental organizations in countries where we work, research institutes, think tanks and universities to international forums, financial institutions, humanitarian actors and United Nations agencies. Much of our work is only possible because of them.

In keeping with this commitment to cooperation and partnerships, it is also an aim to retain and strengthen the application of the principle of diversity and inclusion throughout our work.

In research on issues as diverse as arms control, the impact of climate change, international humanitarian law, food insecurity, peacebuilding in divided communities, and security sector reform, it has proven important to acknowledge and respect the sometimes different and sometimes converging interests and capacities of diverse social groups. Gender, nationality, ethnicity, social class and age are significant aspects in understanding insecurity and improving the prospects for peace. SIPRI includes these considerations in undertaking research, in generating outreach and in convening gatherings of all kinds and aims to take this further. At the same time and to the same end, SIPRI also aims for diversity among the staff and on the Governing Board.

8. Communicating as part of the global conversation

Because informing policy has been a core part of SIPRI's mission from the outset, it could be argued that participating in and attempting to strengthen a global conversation on peace and security has always been one of the Institute's objectives, even if implicitly. What we seek is to exchange views, ideas, information and preferences in a variety of forms, media and settings. It is a conversation rather than a cacophony in part because it takes evidence seriously, values dialogue, respects international law and the importance of treaty commitments, and explores a rounded view of security. We take part in this conversation by contributing our research findings and by convening and joining forums and exchanges where it can happen.

SIPRI has a large global footprint relative to its size. As the global security horizon has darkened, the Institute's data on military expenditure, arms transfers, arms production and nuclear weapons has received more media coverage, as have research reports on topics as diverse as Chinese arms companies and the environmental dimensions of peace and security.

SIPRI convenes various kinds of dialogue and exchange. As well as a standard range of roundtables, seminars, workshops and courses, SIPRI convenes:

- The Stockholm Forum on Peace and Development;
- The Stockholm Security Conference;
- Private dialogue meetings to discuss difficult problems in a safe space.

9. Sharing a winning concept—building peace research capacity globally

We more frequently hold or join activities in countries and regions where we conduct research. In the field, our partnerships with local institutions help develop and build their capacity. SIPRI has been working with local partners in the Sahel region to help them develop their research skills. Working closely with others, including the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding, SIPRI is also helping establish a regional network of experts, policymakers and practitioners to improve the impact, progress and sustainability of peacebuilding research, policy and practice in West Africa. Building partnerships with local institutions will also be a specific objective in the Horn of Africa and Colombia.

Dan Smith and the SIPRI Governing Board, adopted in May 2024