

## Book Review: SIPRI Yearbook 2013: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security, from Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

*The **SIPRI Yearbook** remains the authoritative source of data, analysis, and prognosis for researchers of peace and conflict, and this 44th edition analyses developments in 2012 in security and conflicts, military spending and armaments, and arms control and disarmament. **Patrick Theiner** finds that academics, policy makers, and journalists will undoubtedly find its information about arms and conflict to be both exceptionally well-researched and clearly presented.*

**SIPRI Yearbook 2013: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security.** Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. Oxford University Press. July 2013.

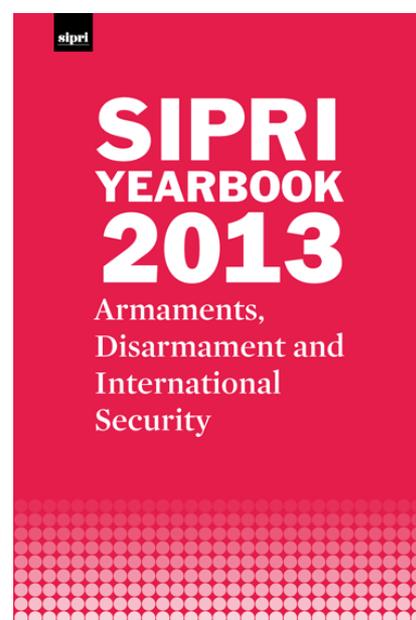
### Find this book:

For more than 40 years, the [Stockholm Peace Research Institute](#) (SIPRI) has been at the forefront of providing the most up-to-date data and analysis on matters of international security. The latest volume in the authoritative SIPRI Yearbook series continues the proud tradition with a wealth of information about state armaments and their employment in conflict, enhanced by an [online edition](#).

As new managing editor [Tilman Brück](#) mentions in his introduction, the “use of physical force is, unfortunately, one of the key elements in the repertoire of human behaviour”. Scholars of international relations are, of course, acutely aware of this: Firstly, it is true that strife, conflict, and war continue to feature in the lives of millions around the world despite the peacefulness in most of the Western world in the last decades. Secondly, the building and managing (and, to a much lesser degree, the reduction) of national arsenals is a key state responsibility in an anarchical international system. The information provided by SIPRI thus serves not only an academic purpose, but also a very practical one: to understand the sources and processes of conflict in order to develop solutions to the scourge that is war.

Assembled by a team of 40 experts and an even larger number of contributors, the 2013 SIPRI Yearbook covers issues that arose during 2012 as well as ongoing developments and conflicts. The book is divided into three main parts: Security and conflicts; Military spending and armaments; and Non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament. Part 1 begins with a short outline of armed conflicts in Syria, Yemen, and Mali in the wake of the Arab Spring, as well as the continuing volatile situation in some East Asian and South East Asian countries. A key risk in this regard are increasingly “internationalized intrastate conflicts”, where another state is supporting one of the sides in what is essentially a domestic conflict. Much like in other parts of the book, the analysis is enhanced by a wide variety of descriptive data and informative charts. Space is also given to the flip side of armed conflict, namely peacekeeping missions and conflict management. Worryingly, the authors conclude that the effectiveness and efficiency of peace operations has come under intense scrutiny following increased austerity measures, which is not helped by unrealistic mandates and expectations, especially where the protection of civilians is concerned.

Part 2 deals with military spending, broadly defined to include direct expenditures on military, arms production and trade, and a special section devoted to states’ nuclear forces. Depressingly but predictably, global military



spending in 2012 was at its highest total level since the end of World War II. A staggering \$1756 billion (around 2.5% of the global GDP) was spent on the world's armies, or almost \$250 per person. However, the slow upwards creep of total military expenditure masks major geographical shifts, as Western and Central Europe, and Sub-Saharan Africa reduced their spending, while Russia, Central America, the Middle East, and East Asia saw significant increases. A number of excellent brief chapters examine the very different reasons for these developments, from Russia's desire to modernize its outdated forces, to Mexico's struggle to effectively battle drug cartel violence. Somewhat more heartening is the continuing trend of a reduced total number of nuclear weapons, with most of this development being due to efforts by the United States and Russia. The good news is at least partly offset by a large degree of uncertainty and intransparency about the capabilities of China, India, Israel, and Pakistan, the latter three of which have never been parties to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

Lastly, Part 3 details global arms control and disarmament efforts, which gives some cause for cautious optimism. The cases of Myanmar – which signed additional safeguards agreements with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) – and Iran – which agreed to the inspection of its nuclear program and implemented obligations negotiated in the P5+1 talks – show that international non-proliferation efforts can bear fruit. In the area of conventional weapons, there was significant progress in South Eastern Europe, South East Asia, and South America, and so-called 'confidence and security-building measures' (such as a high-level hotline between Indian and Pakistani military leaders) were implemented in several world regions.

SIPRI's team of experts has once again succeeded in marrying a wealth of data to a wide-angle view of global security, with even-handed analyses and detailed methodologies. However, the Yearbook does have its weak points, which are a necessary product of its design and structure. Firstly, because the book's scope is international security in its totality, individual sections are extremely brief and require a significant amount of knowledge on the reader's side to properly contextualize the given information. This is also reflected in the fact that even with this brevity, many issues and sometimes whole world regions can only be mentioned in passing. This makes the Yearbook a useful reference guide for academics and security experts, but hardly accessible to a wider audience. Secondly, the Yearbook is both methodologically conservative and practically devoid of theory. This is certainly by design, but particularly striking to the academic reader. One of the main contributions of the field of International Relations has been the development of theories explaining certain regularities of state behaviour, none of which receive even the briefest mention. In other words, the Yearbook's analysis is concerned merely with the presentation of raw data, and readers expecting an explanation of the sources and solutions of conflicts will leave disappointed. A smaller point of criticism concerns the fact that the overwhelming majority of authors are Western Europeans, which might not only have an effect on the scope of the presented research (many African conflicts are relegated to individual rows in half-page tables, for example), but also on the already sparse conclusions drawn from the data. It would arguably be more fitting for a Yearbook on global security to be assembled by an equally global team of contributors and analysts, and organizations such as the [International Crisis Group](#) have shown the added value of locally rooted voices.

In sum, the SIPRI Yearbook remains the authoritative source of data, analysis, and prognosis for researchers of peace and conflict. Academics, policy makers, and journalists will undoubtedly find its information about arms and conflict to be both exceptionally well-researched and clearly presented. And used correctly, its "weakness" of a lack of theory and explanation can even turn into a strength: in a field in which information often comes with an agenda, SIPRI's non-nonsense dedication to cold facts puts the tools of analysis in the reader's hands, rather than pretending to have all the answers. For this reason alone, the SIPRI Yearbook is an indispensable part of the bookshelves of all those seriously interested in international security.

---

**Patrick Theiner** is Lecturer in International Relations in the Department of Political Science at the [University of Göttingen](#), Germany. He is a former Government of Ireland Postgraduate Research Scholar and received his PhD from Trinity College Dublin in 2013. His research focuses on the interactions between states and international organizations, particularly in the broader areas of development and foreign aid. His interests include IR theories, international institutions, institutional design, innovative forms of global governance, global public health, and quantitative methods. [Read more reviews by Patrick.](#)

## ***Related***

[Book Review: America's War on Terror: The State of the 9/11 Exception from Bush to Obama by Jason Ralph](#) In "Africa and the Middle East"

[Book Review: Foreign Fighters: Transnational Identity in Civil Conflicts by David Malet](#) In "Africa and the Middle East"

[Book Review: Theories of Globalization by Barrie Axford](#) In "International Relations book reviews"

- Copyright 2013 LSE Review of Books