

# RESEARCH PLAN OF THE FINNISH INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

## RESEARCH PROGRAMME PERIOD 2026–2028

10 April 2025

### General

The Finnish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA) is a research institute that aims to produce internationally recognised high-quality research, support political decision-making, and participate in the public debates in Finland and internationally. The Institute was established by the Parliament of Finland in its centennial plenum in June 2006 and the Parliament also provides the Institute's basic funding. The Institute is autonomous in its research activities.

Research at FIIA is overseen by the Board. It decides on the main outlines of research activities for each research period. Done every three years, this also defines the priorities of research at the Institute. The priorities are reflected in the Programme structure, which is also approved by the Board.

At FIIA, research is primarily conducted under Research Programmes. The organisation and administration of each Research Programme is arranged in a manner that fosters interaction and cooperation between researchers and research groups within the Institute. Equally importantly, the Institute and its individual researchers conduct their work in intense cross-fertilization and co-operation with international partners and networks. This is key to ensure that the research themes are relevant and that the work done at the Institute corresponds with the highest international standards.

The work conducted in Research Programmes has four common research and societal tasks:

1. To generate knowledge and participate in scientific debates through the publication of high-quality research as well as analyses for a wider audience.
2. To act as a national hub in Finland, for example by producing studies and events in which different partners can participate, and to collaborate with and engage in dialogue with national and international stakeholders and networks.
3. To spur and support wider public debate on the themes in the media and in civil society more broadly both in Finland and internationally.
4. To support decision-making, when and as appropriate, in Finland as well as internationally.

The starting point in the FIIA Research Programme 2026–28 is that its time frame will coincide with a period of continued turbulence and even increasing disruption in international and global affairs:

1. The changing role of the United States under President Donald Trump and the re-calibration within the Western alliance.
2. Significant changes in the economic, political and security make-up and outlook of Europe.
3. The continued and potentially intensifying threat stemming from the developments in Russia.
4. The growing and changing role of China in global affairs.
5. The expected worsening of the security situation in Europe and, in particular, the emergence of Northern Europe and the Arctic as a potential focal point.
6. The continued worsening of climate change with its manifold effects being increasingly felt all over the world.
7. Technological disruption gaining in pace with the different strands of emerging technologies picking up speed with increasing societal and security ramifications.

These, and other issues and questions of relevance are captured in the four thematic Research Programmes have been decided upon for the programme period 2026–2028. They build on the work done and success achieved during the previous programme period. The Programmes are:

Finland and Northern European Security (FIN)

European Union and Strategic Competition (EUR)

Russia, Eastern Europe and Eurasia (RUS)

Global Security and Governance (SEC)

Taken together, the FIIA Research Programme 2026–28 will ensure that for its part the Finnish Institute of International Affairs is equipped with the research foci, themes and topics, as well as the necessary expertise to make meaningful contributions that help the Finns and the wider international community to make sense of developments on the global and regional level while analysing and commenting on the myriad of Finnish challenges and responses to these and other issues. This expertise and body of knowledge is also key in building capacity that enables FIIA to adopt also a proactive and forward-looking role in anticipating future trends and developments. It is important that in addition to following and analysing trends and developments in international politics, FIIA must play a stronger role in anticipating some of the changes in the offing. Therefore, the Research Programme also includes the Institute's **sole cross-cutting theme of strategic foresight**, which produces systematic future-oriented analysis to support decision-making.

In addition to Research Programmes, the FIIA will also continue to host several thematic Research Centres. The previous three Centres on climate, the United States, and China will be complemented by setting up two new Centres on Middle East and North Africa and Geoeconomics and technology, respectively. Compared to Programmes, Centres are smaller units and thematically more closely defined. Their research themes have become an established part of FIIA's activities. Research Centres organise the implementation of research within the scope of the relevant Research Programme by giving thematic coherence and visibility. In addition, Research Centres also support the facilitation of external funding to FIIA as well as increase the visibility of key competence areas of the Institute (and its researchers) that are also important more broadly in the society.

FIIA will have at least three Research Centres (in alphabetical order):

The Centre for Climate Politics and Security (CLIPS)

The Centre for Global Orders and China (CORD)

The Centre for US Politics and Power (CUSPP)

In addition, establishing two new research centres is also potentially planned:

The Centre for Geoeconomics and Emerging Technologies (CGET)

The Centre for the Middle East and North Africa (CMENA)

The Centres will be introduced below in conjunction with the Research Programmes in which they will reside.

At FIIA, research is coordinated internally as well as in close cooperation and interaction with other Finnish and international research groups and organisations. The Institute operates firmly in the international frame of reference and its outlook is increasingly global. FIIA and its researchers have built diverse networks, and FIIA's research staff is international. This is reflected in the Institute's working language which is English. International researcher visits of different durations support the implementation of the research programmes. FIIA's Scientific Advisory Council plays an important role in the development of international connections and the evaluation of the scientific quality of the research.

In the following, the Research Programmes will be introduced in more detail.

## **Finland and Northern European Security (FIN)**

Finland and Northern European Security Research Programme produces research and expertise on Finland's foreign and security policy and the rapidly changing security environment in Northern Europe. Its key task in the 2026–2028 Programme Period is to analyse Finland's foreign, security and defence policy and national security issues. The regional focus of the research is on Finland's immediate security environment, the developments of which have a direct impact on national security. Threats to national security can be defined as threats to Finland's independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty, as well as to the vital functions of society and the security of citizens. Finland's immediate security environment covers the North Atlantic, the Arctic, the Nordic countries and the Baltic Sea region.

The Programme focuses on the following thematic areas:

1. Fundamentals and changes in Finland's foreign, security and defence policy
2. Finland's security of supply, resilience policy and comprehensive security
3. Activities of NATO and the development of NATO's defence and deterrence, including nuclear deterrence
4. Regional developments in the Nordic countries
5. Geostrategic dynamics in the Arctic region and security in the Baltic Sea region
6. Russia's foreign, security and defence policy in relation to Finland and its immediate operating environment

The research focuses on the substance, output and key frameworks for decision-making and preparation of Finland's foreign, security and defence policy, which have been defined in foreign and security policy reports, other strategies and security of supply documents. Although the research activities focus on Finland and the country's immediate security environment, the programme's analytical approach is comparative and takes into account also the system-level.

## **European Union and Strategic Competition (EUR)**

The European Union research programme conducts research on the European Union and its global and regional role in an era of growing strategic competition. The two key strands of research of the programme are (i) the EU's external action and (ii) the development of European integration and exercise of power within the EU.

Research in the programme focuses on the following key themes:

1. EU's global role and external action in times of strategic competition
2. EU's role and regional dynamics in its neighbourhoods
3. Major development paths of European integration, and the exercise of power in the EU
4. Politics and policies of major European states
5. Finland's EU policy.

EU's global role and external action forms the first main strand of research of the programme. FIIA is the only research institute in Finland explicitly focusing on this field, with the country's economic and sectoral research institutes covering other (internal) EU policy fields.

EU's global and regional role is approached against the backdrop of changing world politics marked by increasing strategic competition. The programme studies EU's external action broadly, covering the EU's multiple sources and forms of influence as well as the role of the different EU institutions in external affairs. Alongside research on the EU's foreign policy, it covers EU's energy policies and global partnerships. EU-US relations are studied jointly with the FIIA Centre for US Politics and Power. The

programme aims to strengthen its expertise on EU's external economic relations (e.g. trade policy and technological competition) in collaboration with the FIIA Centre for Geoeconomics.

Research on the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy, Common Security and Defence Policy, and European defence cooperation constitutes a key focus area of FIIA's EU research. This supports Finnish decision-making and Finland's ability to influence EU decision-making in these fields. Under this research strand, EU-NATO cooperation forms an increasingly important focus area. Interfaces between the EU's internal and external security, such as EU's external borders, counterterrorism, as well as countering hybrid threats are related to this research field.

A closely related major area of research of the programme is EU's role in its neighbourhood(s) marked by increased instability and shifting geopolitical dynamics, including through wars and conflicts. EU programme focuses on politics and policies of the EU and key European states towards its neighbourhoods, including the EU enlargement. These research activities benefit from the area expertise of the Russia, Eastern Europe and Eurasia research programme. FIIA's EU programme has traditionally served as the home for institute's area expertise regarding the Middle East and Africa. Given the proximity and importance of these regions to the EU and European security, FIIA aims to establish a **Centre for Middle East and North Africa (CMENA)**, which focuses on researching political and regional dynamics in the broader MENA area, as well as their implications for Finland and the EU. Research on these regions serves important information needs of Finland and the EU related to the diverse implications of strategic competition and the range of security and political factors influencing developments in these regions.

The second key strand of FIIA's EU research concerns major development trajectories (including federalisation and differentiation) of the European integration and the exercise of power in the EU (including EU institutions and decision-making). Research in this field pays special attention to the EU developments and reforms with potentially notable implications for European integration (such as EU enlargement). The programme aims to strengthen its expertise in matters related to EU's economic competitiveness. Questions regarding the state of democracy in, and political legitimacy of, the EU constitute a key theme in different fields of FIIA's EU research. FIIA aims to maintain strong expertise related to EU institutions and decision-making, as no other Finnish research institute focuses primarily on this topic.

The politics and policies of key European states including major EU members, the United Kingdom, and Turkey is connected to the above-mentioned focus areas of the programme. This research takes into consideration the historical identities and domestic factors of the key European states, and analyses how their policies affect EU and European politics. These studies serve important information needs of Finnish decision-making and public debate.

EU programme is deeply integrated in key European policy studies networks such as Trans-European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA) and EuroMeSCo – Network for Euro-Mediterranean Research, Dialogue and Advocacy, and it has established institutionalised bilateral relations with European Policy Center (EPC) and European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR). Recently, the programme has had a liaison researcher in Brussels. Programme continues to strive for active international and domestic research collaboration as this contributes to our analysis supporting Finnish decision-making and public debate.

### **Russia, Eastern Europe and Eurasia (RUS)**

For Finland and Northern Europe, the future of Russia, especially in the short to medium run, will play a key role in framing regional stability and security. The next 3-5 years are expected to become a crucial period for "Putin's Russia". This does not mean that the country and/or its system of governance will necessarily embark on a trajectory leading to a collapse, following the model of the USSR in the second half of 1980s. But this does mean that the status quo will most likely become

unsustainable with increasing fissures becoming visible also on the outside. The war against Ukraine, if it still goes on at any level of intensity, or the war's immediate economic and political-security consequences will set a broad context for Russia's domestic and international behaviour. Multiple inner contradictions (e.g. between the market economy and the temptation to switch to price controls, between the need to import labour and xenophobic attitudes to immigration, between the willingness to achieve/maintain national pro-war mobilization and the necessity to "sell" to the people the picture of "business almost as usual", to mention just a few) will continue to aggravate, requiring from Kremlin pivotal and painful decisions and difficult balancing acts.

The research in the RUS is based on a solid expertise and track record accumulated over the previous research programme periods and will, therefore, demonstrate a degree of continuity. At the same time, some re-focusing will be required, too. The main research foci of the RUS will be:

1. Russia's domestic developments, including a) further evolution of the Vladimir Putin's regime in the direction of totalitarianism, integrating new digital technologies of control, and b) societal responses to this process.
2. Russian foreign and security policy, including the role it will play in terms of generating wider international (in)security.
3. The political transformations of the countries of the post-post-Soviet space. These transformations are becoming increasingly divergent and as such are a challenge for Moscow's plans to keep the status of a dominant player in region.
4. The role of the enablers of Russia's policy should be given more attention. That primarily concerns some countries of the Global South, starting with China, but the work will be limited to studying those policies that directly affect Russia and the region.

The key problem as regards studies of Russia will be the shrinking access to reliable information and primary sources. Until now, this problem has not critically affected research and analysis as a lot of data has been available. But already in the near future this will most probably become a much bigger obstacle. Helping to ensure that Finland also has a new generation of Russia specialists is, therefore, also a priority.

### **Global Security and Governance (SEC)**

The research programme explores the ongoing shifts in international political, economic and security relations where great power politics and spheres of influence are potentially replacing interdependencies and multilateral institutional cooperation in a fragmenting global order. The key research themes of the programme are:

1. Analysis of systemic changes in world politics, particularly the fragmentation of the global order and its consequences on power and actorness.
2. Competition for global leadership, especially the struggle between the United States and China through economic, technological and ideational means and its implications for Europe and Finland.
3. Governance of significant global challenges in times of weakening multilateral institutions, particularly the politics of climate change and the rapid technological development.

The specific geographical areas and priorities related to global governance are analysed against the backdrop of changes occurring at the level of global order and fluctuating partnerships, including those with the countries in the Global South. Understanding the United States and China, their geostrategic competition, the underlying internal and regional drivers of this contest and their consequences are central research foci. The multi-dimensional struggle for global leadership in key international institutions and domains is at the core of the research program. The research programme also produces

knowledge on core areas of global governance, such as the UN system, human rights, international law, arms control and issues of war and peace.

The Global Security and Governance Research Programme conducts high-quality academic and policy-oriented research, bringing together timely and innovative perspectives on its research themes, in addition to building international networks. Its researchers also contribute to the Institute's broader goal of strategic foresight. The agenda-setting work of the programme is mostly organized and conducted in four research centres, whose core tasks include competing for national and international research funding.

**The Centre for US Politics and Power (CUSPP)** analyses the evolving role of the United States in the current era of strategic competition, also with respect to the transatlantic relationship and Finland-US relations. Acknowledging the profound interconnectedness of domestic politics and foreign policy in present-day United States, CUSPP also conducts research on the future of liberal democracy in the country and the implications this has for the US' long-term commitment to the norms and institutions of the international order.

**The Centre for Global Orders and China (CORD)** conducts in-depth academic research and provides policy-relevant expertise on the changing and increasingly multifaceted global order, including policy arenas such as economic and technological governance, and global security. The Centre studies China's expanding international impact on these issues, as well as the domestic and ideational drivers of China's foreign policy. Research also covers security dynamics, power competition and connectivity politics in the wider Indo-Pacific region. One of the Centre's current research foci is China's rapid advances in emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and quantum technologies, and the implications of this for international relations and security.

**The Centre for Climate Politics and Security (CLIPS)** focuses on the most pressing collective action problem facing the international community, that is climate change. It investigates the politicization of climate change in the international realm, as well as the security implications of climate change. Can climate policy succeed in turbulent times, increasingly characterized by geopolitics and strategic competition between great powers? The Centre produces original academic research, timely policy briefs, and a monthly webinar series FIIA Climate Talks.

A new **Centre for Geoeconomics and Emerging Technologies (CGET)** could be established to acknowledge the heightened importance of geoeconomics and emerging technologies. The Centre would focus on power politics through economic and technological means, such as the use of sanctions and mastering of data, in times when global interdependence is in decline. It would explore the shift from free market capitalism to a strategic economy where governments focus on risks and vulnerabilities.