



Public Health & Security

## The Global Health Security Agenda and What It Means for the Asia-Pacific

By Eric Weiner

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Last week, the United States [joined](#) more than 30 international partners to launch a [Global Health Security Agenda](#) to address security threats stemming from the spread of new microbes (natural, inadvertent, or intentional), the globalization of travel and food supply, and the rise of drug-resistant pathogens. The launch is motivated by concerns that the world, and therefore the U.S., is increasingly vulnerable to biological threats. According to Tom Frieden, Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “an [infectious disease] threat anywhere in the world is a threat everywhere” because travel and trade accelerate the spread, causing death, economic losses, and instability from a security perspective.”<sup>[1]</sup> The 2003 outbreak of a viral respiratory illness known as [severe acute respiratory syndrome \(SARS\)](#) is a prime example of the danger posed by global pandemics. SARS was first reported in Asia in February 2003, and it spread to more than two dozen countries worldwide before it was contained. It infected 8,000 people, took 775 lives, and caused \$30 billion in damage to regional economies. It was a wakeup call for the World Health Organization (WHO) and its members that more needed to be done to prevent, detect, and respond to new biological threats.<sup>[2]</sup>

In 2005, 196 WHO member states agreed to implement a set of legally binding [International Health Regulations](#) in response to emerging international disease threats such as SARS and the growth in international travel and trade. Since then the U.S. government has annually invested hundreds of millions of dollars to support partner countries around the world, helping them build capacity and meet these global standards for infectious disease management. However, in 2012 the U.S. realized that fewer than 20% of WHO member countries had actually complied with the regulations.<sup>[3]</sup> Last week’s announcement signals a redoubling of American efforts to enhance American health security through improved support of WHO partner nations. The administration is prioritizing the global threat of infectious disease by committing political capital as well as financial resources. In 2014, working in partnership with the Department of Defense, the CDC will commit \$40 million from existing resources to ten additional countries. In 2015, the President’s fiscal year budget will include an additional \$45 million within the CDC budget for global health security to expand the initiative toward the five-year goal of protecting 30+ countries not currently protected.

So what does the Global Health Security Agenda mean for the Asia-Pacific?

Japan, Korea, China, India, and Indonesia all joined the United States in this announcement. The U.S. is asking upper-income, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries in the Asia-Pacific to improve their own systems to the point where they can provide development assistance or technical cooperation to countries in need. For middle-income countries in the region such as China, the approach will focus on technical cooperation.<sup>[4]</sup> After the SARS outbreak, the U.S. worked with China and provided technical input that enabled China to strengthen its capacity and connectedness with the WHO and CDC, as well as its ability to share public health information with the United States and other countries. As a result, China was able to rapidly identify the H7N9 influenza strain when it emerged and share relevant information with international partners to assist in rapidly developing a diagnostic test and working on a vaccine.<sup>[5]</sup>

In lower-income countries, the goal is to provide assistance that could strengthen laboratory networks, secure dangerous materials, and establish emergency operations centers. In 2003 the CDC conducted a [global health security demonstration project](#) with Vietnam's Ministry of Health to modernize diagnostic testing for high-risk pathogens, develop real-time information systems for faster outbreak response, and improve emergency operations procedures. The project led to improvements in all these areas, and it provides a basis for applying the Health Security initiative to other low-income countries across the Asia-Pacific.

The launch of the [Global Health Security Agenda](#) was off the record, so details of its impacts on the Asia-Pacific are scarce. However, recent extreme weather events and a spectrum of regional instability and health security threats in the Asia-Pacific reinforce the importance of working with partner nations to prevent epidemics, detect biological threats, and rapidly respond to disease outbreaks. The administration is prioritizing global health security while focusing its broader foreign policy on the Asia-Pacific, and the intersection of these two will help augment international health initiatives in the Asia-Pacific.

*Image by Jesslee Cuizon via Flickr Creative Commons; [original image](#) resized.*

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[1] Health and Human Services conference call on the launch of the Global Health Security Agenda. Laura Holgate, Senior Director for WMD, Terrorism and Threat Reduction, National Security Council; Dr. Tom Frieden, Director, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; and Andrew C. Weber, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Nuclear, Chemical, and Biological Defense Programs. February 12, 2014.

[2] John Kerry, Kathleen Sebelius, and Lisa Monaco, "Why Global Health Security Is a National Priority," CNN Opinion, February 12, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/02/12/opinion/kerry-sebelius-health-security/>.

[3] Health and Human Services call, February 12, 2014.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Laura Holgate, Senior Director at the National Security Council, discusses the White House launch of the new Global Health Security Agenda aimed at preventing or mitigating disease outbreaks. [Center for Strategic and International Studies Global Health Policy Center](#), February 12, 2014.