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## Managing Interlinked Global Risks for Common Security in Asia

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### Introduction

by

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A disaster may occur suddenly, for example, a tsunami, an earthquake, or a pandemic. Or it may occur gradually over time, perhaps a drought or famine caused by climate change. Either way, a disaster may create hundreds of thousands of victims in desperate need of humanitarian assistance. Moreover, in today's interdependent global community, a disaster in one country can engender refugee crises, business interruptions, environmental impacts, security issues, and health concerns in neighboring countries, and even in countries that are thousands of miles removed from the disaster itself. In such a case, international cooperation is a necessity, not a luxury.

Because of the many complex issues involved, it is best if international cooperation on disasters can be discussed and planned ahead of time, not just handled on an ad-hoc basis after the fact. In the following essay, "Managing Interlinked Global Risks for Common Security in Asia," Dr. Mika Shimizu points out the criticality of cooperative international efforts against disasters, and suggests some policy approaches to strengthen this type of cooperation.

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### Commentary

by

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With world attention focused on the immediate financial crisis, we should not lose sight of other imminent risks that are interlinked with the accelerated globalization. The absence of a long view may result in significant social as well as economic costs, which will worsen the current financial situation. Recent years have proven that disasters are increasing in frequency and number of casualties in Asia. The tendency is relevant in light of recent events such as the 2008 earthquake in China, the 2008 cyclone in Burma, and the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake tsunami. On the other hand, the frequency and casualties do not necessarily tell us the *magnitude* of disaster risks we are facing. The accelerated globalization and resulting structural influences, particularly on public policy, have changed the nature of disaster risk management by making it more complex, uncertain, and

difficult to address at the national and global levels, which tend to be disregarded in major policy streams.

What is the changing nature of disaster risk management in the accelerated globalization? In short, it is getting more difficult to predict the size of the disaster, including when it may come, who may be affected, or what kinds of risks may occur—the swine influenza we are currently facing illustrates some of the characteristics of the nature. The types of disasters we have recently encountered are not the only ones we will face in the future. Beyond the disasters we have recently faced, there are more potential disasters that are not widely anticipated by the public, such as pandemic influenza. Moreover, specific two factors multiply the unpredictability of disaster risk management.

The first one is related to interlinked risk portfolios among global risks. For instance, climate change may cause food supply imbalance, infectious disease, and extreme weather, and the extreme weather may bring infrastructure disruptions. The second one, which is overlapped with the first one, is complex interdependencies of infrastructure operations cutting across sectors. For example, emergency service operations largely depend on telecommunication services, and the telecommunication operations greatly depend on the power services, and the nature of the interdependencies are often not well understood even in the developed countries. Given such interlinked risk linkage and interdependency factors—which are especially overlooked by the policy community—it is extremely difficult to predict the potential consequences and gravity of a disaster.

Weighing the changing nature of disaster risk management in accelerating globalization, we need to focus more on the *how* dimension to manage global risks that cannot be addressed only through domestic policies. Especially from a policy point of view, given the nature of this challenge and our limited resources, it is essential to manage global risks effectively, which requires managing disaster risks proactively and comprehensively. Especially for this daunting challenge, it is essential to facilitate an innovative risk management approach through collective knowledge management and policy coordination.

Especially in Asia, while risk awareness has increased, the efforts for effectively managing risks at national, regional as well as international levels are just beginning. At the national level, though many national leaders have recently begun to recognize the importance of comprehensive risk management, only sporadic efforts have been undertaken even in industrialized nations. At the regional level in Asia, although we have seen some progress, such as the efforts centering on the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), the current approach still focuses on post-disaster or disaster relief aspects and is only a beginning step for a global risk management. At the international level, recent international disaster risk management efforts have been made through different institutions such as the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR). Although they have leveraged worldwide recognition that more effort is required by all nations to reduce global vulnerability, these efforts have many limitations, including limited coverage of risk areas and limited implementation of strategies.

For another aspect, the Asian leaders, especially the U.S. and Japan, have already provided tremendous amounts of financial, human, and technological assistance for disasters in Asia through different channels, including responses to natural disasters such as the 2004 tsunami and development efforts to alleviate poverty and infectious diseases with international assistance mechanisms. While these efforts did a lot to provide relief, they were done reactively on a case-by-

case basis. These types of measures will not be adequate to meet the challenges that come with global risks.

In assessing the existing institutions and their efforts for disaster risk management in Asia, few institutional mechanisms consistently formulate in-depth information and knowledge to enable policy analysis and apply practical knowledge for specific policy actions. Moreover, few institutional mechanisms target hazards and risks to prioritize and implement policy actions based on the priorities with effective management of different resources. Furthermore, few institutional mechanisms formulate assets of multi-stakeholders and coordinate policies.

The current status of disaster risk management in Asia calls for leverage efforts to manage global risks from the Asian leaders, especially the U.S. and Japan. The U.S. and Japan have vested interests in common security in Asia and have already provided financial, human as well as technological assistance. However, these efforts can be streamlined more effectively and consistently, which will contribute more to common security in Asia.

The necessity of this kind of leadership can be articulated by comparing the current regional approaches in Asia and Europe. The biggest distinction between Asia and Europe is that Asia does not have any major institutions to address the disaster risk management comprehensively, such as the European Union and the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement in Europe, and hardly shares common security strategies among its nation-states. These major institutions in Europe, with common financial resources, policy channels, and research capabilities, enable the mobilization of political leadership and collective approaches in disaster risk management, most of which are absent in Asia. As such, the leadership in Asia, especially the joint initiative of Japan and the U.S., will be essential for Asia in facilitating the innovative risk management approach.

It is especially urgent to address the unprecedented challenge effectively and consistently, by paying much more attention to common and overarching financial resources, policy channels, and research capabilities for disaster risk management in Asia. Thus, existing approaches in Asia need to be revamped for the innovative disaster risk management approach, such as creating mechanisms to clarify risk targets and linkages, map vulnerabilities and schemes, and synthesize information and data, as well as establishing institutions to enable policy analysis and apply practical knowledge for policy implementation and evaluation. As such, we will make a step forward in addressing the unprecedented challenge of managing interlinked global risks for common security in Asia.

**Dr. Shimizu** currently is a Visiting Scholar at the East-West Center and also is a 2009 Abe Fellowship Recipient. She has served as a policy researcher at Nomura Research Institute, America and at the Embassy of Japan. She was also a Visiting Fellow at Stockholm University. She holds a Ph.D. in International Public Policy from Osaka University.

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