

ANALYSIS

Why Germany Will Be at the Center of the Next Pandemic

Berlin has been made the home of the WHO's first pandemic center for geopolitical reasons—and financial ones.

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JANUARY 11, 2022, 6:45 AM

In the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, the World Health Organization (WHO) became a battlefield of global geopolitical infighting, especially between the United States and China. At the United Nations' headquarters in Geneva, the Trump administration withdrew its funding to the WHO, accusing it of being too “China-centric” and, by doing so, undermining the organization's legitimacy. Meanwhile, Beijing used the WHO to gain influence globally by, among other things, promoting its “Health Silk Road.”

The WHO's new permanent pandemic preparedness hub, located less than a two-hour flight away in Berlin, may not seem like it would provide much relief from the organization's contentious politics. But the hub's director, Chikwe Ihekweazu—former head of Nigeria's Centre for Disease Control and an assistant director-general at the WHO—believes it is the perfect location for the WHO to start a new chapter in its history. “I think Berlin is an interesting place for it because it provides the proximity to Geneva, which we need, but still a bit of distance,” he told *Foreign Policy*. The new hub, set up in one of Europe's top tech cities, aims at using cutting-edge technology and a multidisciplinary approach to gather analyze data that will help detect and prevent the next pandemic.

Germany was an obvious choice for the WHO, for political and technocratic reasons. But it remains to be seen whether Berlin's clout is going to be enough to overcome the organization's biggest shortcomings: global rivalries spurred by China's rise and nationalistic policies that prevent access to reliable information.

