

IT'S TIME FOR THE RED BERETS

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: UNO and its various Agencies

Indian peacekeepers at Masisi Territory, North Kivu Province, eastern DR Congo, on April 11, 2019. | Photo Credit: [AFP](#)

The World Health Organisation (WHO) is not equipped to fight a pandemic of this proportion. Its responsibility is to monitor threats to public health and inform and advise the member states. The fight against [COVID-19](#) has to be on a war footing. For this we need a composite force that has the capabilities of massive sanitisation, testing, hospitalisation and providing support systems. Even the most powerful nations are not able to cope with the effort and there are signs of conflict on account of shortages of equipment and trained personnel. The only UN body which has the training for assembling fighting forces for emergencies is the Department of Peace Operations.

The UN Security Council (UNSC) stands paralysed because of petty battles on the name of the pandemic, its origin and the need for transparency. It should hold an emergency meeting and authorise the UN Secretary General to put together a force under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. The mandate of the Charter should be interpreted to emphasise that this is the greatest threat to international peace and security. Moreover, conflicts are possible on account of the fragility of the international system. Member states should be requested to send not only troops, but also police, health workers and equipment.

In war situations, the Secretary General is able to put together a force in about four months. This operation requires greater emergency. There is some delicacy about deploying the army internally in different political systems, but UN forces have been acceptable in most countries. As for the cost, the responsibility for the deployment of forces for peacekeeping, peace building and peace enforcement is that of the permanent members. Instead of competing with each other for leadership of the post-COVID-19 world, let them help create a post-COVID-19 world.

So far COVID-19 has spread in relatively prosperous regions of the world, which have stable infrastructure and health systems. We cannot trust that it will not spread to less equipped states, in which the devastation will be much more. Only a UN force which can enforce social distancing and lockdowns can prevent a catastrophe.

Most Chapter VII resolutions determine the existence of a threat to the peace, a breach of the peace, or an act of aggression in accordance with Article 39, and make a decision explicitly under Chapter VII. A UNSC Resolution is considered to be 'a Chapter VII resolution' if it makes an explicit determination that the situation under consideration constitutes a threat to the peace, a breach of the peace, or an act of aggression, and/or explicitly/ implicitly states that the UNSC is acting under Chapter VII in the adoption of some or all operative paragraphs.

Chapter VII resolutions are very rarely isolated measures. Often the first response to a crisis is a resolution demanding the crisis be ended. This is later followed by an actual resolution detailing the measures required to secure compliance with the first resolution. Sometimes dozens of resolutions are passed over time to modify and extend the mandate of the first Chapter VII resolution.

The UN stands discredited today as the UNSC has not been able to meet. It may take place, now that China has vacated the Security Council chair and Dominican Republic has taken over. Several resolutions are in circulation, but none under Chapter VII. The first step will be to pass a

resolution to take action to end the crisis and authorise the Secretary General to request member states to make personnel available. Meanwhile, another resolution must spell out the modalities of the operation.

The UN peacekeeping forces are called Blue Berets because of the colour of the caps that they wear. The health force can have caps of another colour, probably red. The launch of the Red Berets will be a historic action to be taken at a critical moment. The UN's relevance will be established and there will be concrete action taken to end the pandemic.

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