UN Reform? Think 'Alice in Wonderland'

By Thomas G. Weiss

September 26, 2023

The 78th United Nations General Assembly (UNGA78) opens its official sessions today, and it is quite clear that the United Nations is in deep trouble. The UN Charter is being set aside and the UN is being turned on its head. No one seems to care that the organization is a legal entity which has its own rules, obligations and legal commitments.

Everyone agrees that the world has changed since 1945, though there's not much else in consensus. All talk of how to establish a permanent and powerful Security Council with a new veto, or a 15-member General Assembly with equal representation, rests on ancient and outmoded premises. The UN 78th General Assembly is like a 19th-century backwater, and that finesse geopolitics. That is, there's room to explore non-Charter changes.

So, as we head into this annual United Nations diplomatic cacophony about the United Nations, we are reminded of a famous question that the late Hungarian ambassador to the UN, Zoltán Székely, used to hurl at Security Council meetings: How long can this go on? It is a question that has dominated discussions on UN reform over the decades. It is a question that has been on the lips of Security Council diplomats from the Garden City of New York for as long as anyone can remember. It is a question that has been addressed in every UNGA78 and, indeed, every UN General Assembly for the past 3 decades, if not longer.

The question is so important that the current United Nations President of the General Assembly, Antonio Guterres, asked the UN Commission on Global Governance to consider reforming the Security Council and the General Assembly in preparation for the 2024 and 2025 Summits of the Future. The commission has already reported, and the Security Council is due to take up the issue Wednesday, while the General Assembly will discuss the question on Friday. The United States, China, France, Russia and the United Kingdom are expected to propose ideas for reform.

The United States President Joe Biden walking through the United Nations diplomats' entry, Sept. 19, 2023. Although he and many other global leaders have been vocal about their support for UN reform, the Security Council is unlikely to see any changes. The United States is pushing for a 15-member Security Council with 3 permanent members (the U.S., United Kingdom and China), which is unlikely to pass. The United States is also pushing for aminiature General Assembly, with membership consisting of 50 member states for each of the 3 regional groupings (Africa, Asia-Pacific and Western Europe), a proposal that is also unlikely to pass.

The United States has been pushing for UN reform for years, but it remains to be seen if any meaningful changes will be made. UN reform is a complex and difficult issue, and it is unlikely to be resolved anytime soon. The United States is keen to see the UN reform as a means to assert its leadership in global affairs, but it is not clear if the UN will be able to evolve and adapt to the changing global landscape.

The United States is not the only country pushing for UN reform. China, France, Russia and the United Kingdom are also pushing for changes, but it is unlikely that any meaningful agreement will be reached. The United States and China are expected to be at odds on several key issues, such as the size and composition of the Security Council. The United States is pushing for a 15-member Security Council with 3 permanent members, while China is pushing for a 10-member Security Council with 5 permanent members.

It is unlikely that any meaningful changes will be made to the Security Council, and it is unlikely that the General Assembly will be expanded. The United States is pushing for aminiature General Assembly, but it is unlikely that this proposal will be adopted. The United States is keen to see the UN reform as a means to assert its leadership in global affairs, but it is not clear if the UN will be able to evolve and adapt to the changing global landscape.

The United States is not the only country pushing for UN reform. China, France, Russia and the United Kingdom are also pushing for changes, but it is unlikely that any meaningful agreement will be reached. The United States is likely to continue pushing for UN reform, but it is not clear if it will be successful in achieving its goals.

In conclusion, the UN is facing a crisis of legitimacy and relevance. The UN is being turned on its head and the UN Charter is being set aside. The UN is a legal entity with its own rules, obligations and legal commitments, but it is being treated as a backwater. The UN is in need of reform, but it is unlikely that any meaningful changes will be made. The United States is likely to continue pushing for UN reform, but it is not clear if it will be successful in achieving its goals.