

UN SECURITY COUNCIL REFORM: THE G4 MODEL'S PROSPECTS IN THE CONTEXT OF POLITICAL POLARIZATION

РЕФОРМА РАДИ БЕЗПЕКИ ООН: ПЕРСПЕКТИВА МОДЕЛІ G4 В УМОВАХ ПОЛІТИЧНОЇ ПОЛЯРИЗАЦІЇ

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Abstract. *The article examines the prospects for reform of the United Nations Security Council from the perspective of the Group of Four (G4) model, amid increasing global political polarization and declining trust in multilateral institutions. Using a comparative approach, it analyzes the logic and parameters of the G4 model (expansion of the Council to 25 members with the addition of six permanent and four non-permanent seats, and the temporary suspension of the veto for new permanent members until a separate decision is adopted) and compares it with the alternatives advanced by the African Union (AU) and the Uniting for Consensus (UfC) coalition. The study demonstrates that the G4 and the AU share the most similar vision of regional representation, while the key divergence concerns the veto: the G4 allows for its temporary non-extension to new permanent Security Council members, whereas the AU insists on full equality between new and existing permanent members in this respect. By contrast, the UfC adopts a conceptually opposing stance, rejecting the expansion of permanent seats and instead advocating a significant increase in non-permanent membership, along with strict limitations on or the abolition of the veto. Particular attention is paid to the configuration of interests among the permanent members of the Council (P5). The United Kingdom and France consistently support the G4 model and advocate stronger African representation. The United States demonstrates a close yet cautious stance, generally supporting the expansion of the Security Council while opposing the extension of veto power to new permanent members. China and Russia declare openness to “moderate” expansion through the inclusion of developing countries, but block scenarios that involve Germany and Japan, thereby substantially diminishing the prospects for consensus. Ukraine’s position is broadly consistent with the G4 approach: it supports the expansion of both permanent and non-permanent categories of membership, with particular emphasis on the inclusion of African, Asian, and Latin American states, alongside Germany and Japan. At the same time, Ukraine consistently advocates significant restrictions on, and the eventual elimination of, the veto, reflecting its direct experience of aggression by a permanent member of the Council - the Russian Federation. The G4 model emerges as one of the most balanced approaches to Security Council reform by addressing regional imbalances, but its*

implementation requires broad coalition support within the General Assembly and the minimization of objections from China and Russia. The practical implementation of this model is contingent upon the ability of G4 supporters to forge political and diplomatic coalitions in Security Council reform (for instance, with the AU) and to advance incremental decisions on the veto aimed at reducing political polarization.

Keywords: *United Nations Security Council; UNSC reform; Group of Four; African Union; Uniting for Consensus; veto power; permanent members; regional representation; political polarization; multilateralism; global security; Global South countries.*

Анотація. *Стаття аналізує перспективи реформування Ради Безпеки ООН через призму моделі Групи чотирьох (G4) у контексті загострення глобальної політичної поляризації та падіння довіри до багатосторонніх інститутів. На основі порівняльного аналізу розглянуто логіку й параметри моделі G4 (розширення складу до 25 членів із додаванням шести постійних і чотирьох непостійних місць, тимчасове утримання нових постійних членів від використання права вето до ухвалення окремого рішення), зіставлено її з альтернативами Африканського Союзу (АС) та коаліції Uniting for Consensus (UfC). Показано, що G4 і АС найближчі за баченням регіональної репрезентативності, тоді як ключова відмінність стосується права вето: G4 припускає його тимчасове нерозповсюдження на нових членів Ради Безпеки, водночас АС наполягає на повній рівності нових і чинних постійних членів у цьому контексті. Позиція UfC є концептуально протилежною, оскільки відкидає розширення постійних місць. Натомість коаліція пропонує суттєве збільшення непостійних місць та жорсткі обмеження чи ліквідацію інституту вето. Окрему увагу приділено конфігурації інтересів постійних членів РБ (P5). Велика Британія та Франція стабільно підтримують модель G4 і посилення африканського представництва. США демонструють близьку, проте обережну позицію, підтримуючи розширення складу Ради Безпеки, водночас виступаючи проти поширення права вето на нових постійних членів. Китай і Росія декларують відкритість до “помірного” розширення за рахунок країн, що розвиваються, проте фактично блокують сценарії, які включають Німеччину та Японію, що істотно зменшує ймовірність досягнення консенсусу. Українська позиція значною мірою синхронізована з підходом G4: підтримується розширення як постійної, так і непостійної категорій членства з акцентом на представництво Африки, Азії, Латинської Америки, а також Німеччини та Японії. Водночас Україна послідовно виступає за обмеження та поступове скасування права вето, що впливає з досвіду агресії з боку постійного члена РБ - Російської Федерації. Визначено, що G4 пропонує один із найбільш збалансованих шляхів реформування Ради Безпеки через усунення регіонального дисбалансу, але потребує широкої коаліційної підтримки у Генеральній Асамблеї та мінімізації заперечень з боку Китаю та Росії. Практична реалізація залежатиме від здатності прихильників G4 формувати політико-дипломатичні коаліції щодо реформи Ради Безпеки (наприклад, з АС) і просуванню поетапні рішення щодо вето, що знижують рівень політичної поляризації.*

Ключові слова: *Рада Безпеки ООН; реформа РБ; Група чотирьох; Африканський Союз; Uniting for Consensus; право вето; постійні члени; регіональна репрезентативність; політична поляризація; багатосторонність; глобальна безпека; країни Глобального Півдня.*

Introduction. The United Nations is the only universal international organization mandated by its Charter to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war (United Nations, n.d.). The full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation once again demonstrated the vulnerability of the global security architecture and the limited effectiveness of the UN's actions in preventing crises from escalating into full-scale wars. The need for UN reform has been debated throughout the organization's existence, as evidenced, in particular, by decisions regarding the functions of the Secretary-General, the use of official languages, and the 1963 expansion of the UN Security Council through an increase in the number of non-permanent members.

The UN Security Council, as the principal body authorized to prevent and resolve armed

conflicts, has been paralyzed by the Russian Federation's use of its veto power (United Nations, n.d.). Similar situations have arisen in the organization's history, leading the General Assembly to recommend that permanent members of the Security Council abstain from voting when they are a party to a conflict. However, given the non-binding nature of General Assembly recommendations, this has ultimately remained dependent on the political will of the respective states.

In the context of deepening political polarization and declining trust in multilateral institutions, the reform of the UN's security mechanisms, particularly the Security Council, has become exceptionally urgent. Among the various proposals discussed over the past decades, the model advanced by the Group of Four (G4) has taken a central place in the debates.

The scientific novelty of this research lies in the assessment of the prospects for implementing the G4 reform model, which considers the current positions of the P5 states and coalitions that advocate alternative approaches to Security Council reform, as well as its correlation with Ukraine's stance on UN reform in the context of intensifying polarization and geopolitical competition following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation.

Literature Review. The issue of United Nations reform, particularly that of the Security Council, has long been the focus of attention for both foreign and domestic scholars. In C. Torcato Reis' research "Reform of the United Nations Security Council", the principal models of Security Council reform, including the Group of Four concept, are systematized, and key problematic aspects are analyzed, notably membership categories, the veto right issue, and regional representation (Torcato Reis, C., 2022). In O. Opanasenko's article "Prospects for UN Security Council reform", the reform process is examined in the context of geopolitical challenges, with an emphasis on the impact of armed conflicts on the architecture of international security (Opanasenko, O., 2025). E. Parvanova, in "Reforming the United Nations Security Council: cross-country analysis of a G-4 potential permanent membership", focuses on assessing the capacities of the Group of Four states to obtain permanent membership and offers recommendations for the reform process (Parvanova, E., 2023). The article by A. Mishchenko, R. Atashkade, and V. Teremko, "Scenarios of UN Reform", presents possible options for transforming the UN system and highlights the absence of consensus on key reform issues, particularly membership expansion and regulation of the veto (Mishchenko, A. B., Atashkade, R. V., & Teremko, V. V., 2023).

The purpose of the research is to assess the feasibility of implementing the G4 model amid contemporary international polarization, while considering competing reform projects and the positions of the current permanent members of the Security Council (P5). This requires the following steps: outlining the essence of the model, the motives of its initiators, and the support it receives from other UN members; comparing the G4 model with alternative Security Council reform projects; characterizing the attitudes of the permanent members of the Security Council toward the model and the broader challenges of reform; and describing Ukraine's position on the proposed initiative.

Main Results of the Research. After the end of the Cold War, discussions on the need to reform the UN system, particularly the Security Council, intensified. In addition to concerns over transparency, excessive bureaucratization, duplication of functions, and the obsolescence of certain mechanisms, the issues of unequal geographical representation and the imbalance between states' contributions to the organization's activities and their ability to influence key decisions became particularly urgent. This raised fundamental questions about the functioning of the Security Council. In this context, the first major reform proposals were put forward - the Razali Initiative (1997) and the Panyarachun Model (2004), which set the trajectory for subsequent debates.

Two fundamental issues came to the forefront on the Security Council reform agenda:

- 1) Insufficient regional representation in both the permanent and non-permanent categories of membership, no longer reflecting contemporary geopolitical realities;
- 2) The unrestricted use of the veto, increasingly regarded as an anachronism, given its function as a political instrument to block collective decisions.

In 2005, on the eve of the World Summit of the General Assembly during its 59th session, three coalitions emerged with distinct visions of Security Council reform to address these two issues:

- The Group of Four (Germany, Japan, India, and Brazil);
- The African Union;
- The Uniting for Consensus Coalition (led by Italy and joined by Argentina, Canada,

Colombia, Costa Rica, Malta, Mexico, Pakistan, the Republic of Korea, San Marino, Spain, and Turkey).

The Group of Four states seek permanent membership on the Security Council. Their proposal, presented in July 2005, received the support of the following countries: Afghanistan, Belgium, Bhutan, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Fiji, France, Georgia, Greece, Haiti, Honduras, Iceland, Kiribati, Latvia, the Maldives, Nauru, Palau, Paraguay, Poland, Portugal, the Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, and Ukraine.

The geographical composition of the group and its supporters reflects broader trends. The Group of Four, whose project continues to receive Ukraine's backing, brings together states aspiring to global leadership based on their economic strength. The current geopolitical situation compels a reassessment of positions, as the group clearly includes representatives of both the Global South (India and Brazil) and the Global North (Germany and Japan). Moreover, increasing polarization is prompting these states to reconsider established strategies and tactics.

India is increasingly positioning itself as a global actor, with demographic factors contributing to this trajectory. It traditionally emphasizes diplomacy and peaceful coexistence, while simultaneously maintaining its status as a nuclear power. Germany, as a leading member of the European Union, is gradually revising its foreign policy, yet approaches any initiatives with great caution that might imply aspirations to a global role, as the responsibility for the Second World War continues to impose significant self-limitations. Japan is reconsidering its regional security role amid intensifying geopolitical competition with China, while also facing unresolved issues with the Russian Federation that affect its broader international stance, including its prospects of securing a seat alongside the other G4 members in the Security Council. Brazil, meanwhile, aspires to become a global player, particularly given that Latin America and the Caribbean currently lack permanent representation in the Security Council.

According to the G4 model, the composition of the Security Council would be expanded from 15 to 25 members through the addition of six permanent and four non-permanent seats. Decisions in the reformed Council would require 14 out of 25 votes. The distribution of the additional permanent seats is proposed as follows:

- Africa - 2
- Asia - 2
- Latin America and the Caribbean - 1
- Western Europe and Other States - 1

The proposed distribution of the additional non-permanent seats is: one each for Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean. Notably, the project was formulated at a time when the number of states in these regions differed significantly from that of the 1940s-1960s, which prompted criticism regarding unequal representation of different regions.

The proposed model stipulates that the new permanent members of the Security Council would bear the same duties and responsibilities as the current ones. Importantly, it stipulates that new permanent members may initially refrain from exercising the veto until a separate decision grants them this right. Furthermore, fifteen years after the reform, a comprehensive review of its outcomes is to be conducted, with a final resolution on the veto to be adopted (General Assembly, 2005).

From 2022 to 2025, the Group of Four maintained a stable and consistent position, as demonstrated in meetings of foreign ministers and within the Intergovernmental Negotiations on Security Council reform. The G4 continues to emphasize the need to align the Council's composition with contemporary geopolitical realities and to ensure broader regional representation to strengthen both the effectiveness and the legitimacy of its decisions.

Overall, the G4 model offers a balanced approach: it provides for enhanced regional representation and a compromise stance on the veto. The allocation of additional seats to Africa, Asia, and Latin America has the potential to gain the support of developing countries. At the same time, the Group of Four's willingness to refrain from using the veto until a final decision on the matter is adopted constitutes a concession to the current permanent members of the Security Council. Nevertheless, despite its compromise-oriented nature, the G4 model competes with several other reform concepts that enjoy considerable support among UN member states, notably the African Union

model and the Uniting for Consensus initiative.

The African Union's common position, rooted in the Ezulwini Consensus and the Sirte Declaration, sets out a unified stance on Security Council reform: Africa must obtain two permanent and two non-permanent seats. Overall, the African Union opposes the principle of the veto. However, it maintains that as long as the veto power exists, it should also be extended to the new permanent members.

The G4 and African Union reform models are closely aligned on the issue of expanding regional representation. The distribution of additional seats is identical, with the sole difference being the allocation of one additional seat to Africa in the AU model (bringing the total number of Security Council members under the AU proposal to 26). Importantly, the Group of Four has declared its support for the Common African Position. The G4 has also expressed openness to considering the allocation of two additional non-permanent seats for Africa, thereby bringing the G4 model into closer alignment with that of the African Union. This indicates the G4's intention to align more closely with the African Union's concept and to secure the region's support, which holds considerable influence in the General Assembly (Federal Foreign Office, 2022; Federal Foreign Office, 2024; Permanent Mission of the Federal Republic of Germany to the United Nations, 2023). However, a key divergence arises over the veto: while the G4 is prepared to temporarily withhold its extension to new permanent members, the AU insists on full equality for the new permanent members with the current ones (General Assembly, 2005).

The Uniting for Consensus coalition opposes any increase in the number of permanent seats, arguing that such a step would deepen inequality and undermine the Council's effectiveness. Instead, it proposes expanding the number of non-permanent seats from 10 to 20, with two-year terms and the possibility of immediate re-election. The UfC further advocates more radical restrictions on the veto than the G4, including its complete abolition for the P5.

The UfC and the G4 adopt diametrically opposed approaches: the former rejects new permanent members in favor of a rotational model of representation, while the latter advocates the expansion of permanent membership to include key regional players. This conceptual divergence makes the achievement of consensus between them highly unlikely (General Assembly, 2005).

Any reform of the Security Council would require amendments to the UN Charter. This, in turn, necessitates both a recommendation and subsequent ratification by two-thirds of the UN member states, including all P5 members. For this reason, the implementation of reform is impossible without the approval of all permanent members.

The United Kingdom and France have historically shown the greatest openness to expansion under the G4 model, endorsing permanent membership for Germany, Japan, Brazil, and India in a 2008 joint declaration (BBC, 2008). Both countries are signatories to the ACT Code of Conduct, which calls for refraining from exercising the veto in cases of mass atrocities and for enhancing Council transparency by requiring explanations when the veto is exercised (Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 2022). Neither London nor Paris has exercised the veto since 1989, consistently urging the other permanent members to follow suit (Council on Foreign Relations, 2025).

In the context of the UN Secretary-General's consultations on a New Agenda for Peace in 2023, France presented 20 proposals concerning the UN's role in maintaining international peace and security. These included its position on Security Council reform, with support for the G4 states and African representation in both permanent and non-permanent categories of membership. Regarding the veto, France has advocated regulating its use in cases of mass atrocities, a stance underscored by the 2015 French-Mexican political initiative, open to accession by other states, which calls for refraining from exercising the veto in such cases (Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères, n.d.).

At the same time, the United Kingdom continues to emphasize the importance of expanding the Security Council and of exercising the veto responsibly. In September 2024, Prime Minister Keir Starmer, during the UN General Assembly session, once again endorsed permanent Security Council membership for the G4 states and for Africa (GOV UK, 2024). London has also called for limiting the use of the veto in cases of mass atrocities and has urged the other permanent members to join the ACT Group's Code of Conduct (UK Parliament, 2025).

The United States, together with its Western allies in the Security Council, supports the

expansion of both permanent and non-permanent membership to include representation for Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean - a position explicitly articulated by President Joseph Biden at the UN General Assembly in September 2022 (U.S. Embassy in Ukraine, 2022). This stance was later reiterated by U.S. Permanent Representative to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield, who, at a briefing in September 2024, expressed support for granting permanent membership to Germany, Japan, and India, in addition to the aforementioned regions (U.S. Department of State, 2024).

Washington has refrained from explicitly endorsing Brazil for a permanent seat, limiting its support to Latin America and the Caribbean region as a whole. The United States has also maintained its traditional opposition to extending the veto to new permanent members - a stance reaffirmed in Secretary of State Antony Blinken's article "America's Strategy of Renewal: Rebuilding Leadership for a New World" published in October 2024 (Foreign Affairs, 2024). By contrast, the Donald Trump administration currently places little emphasis on Security Council reform, focusing instead on reassessing U.S. participation in and contributions to the UN system (United States Mission to the United Nations, 2025).

Thus, the United Kingdom and France fully support Security Council expansion under the G4 model, while the United States holds a broadly similar position, though conditioned on denying the veto power to new permanent members. However, the positions of China and Russia remain the most challenging factors for implementing reform under the G4 model.

The People's Republic of China is a moderate supporter of Security Council reform. China's 2005 position favoring greater representation of developing countries on a rotational basis remains largely relevant today, as reaffirmed by statements of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs during the Intergovernmental Negotiations on Security Council reform in February 2024 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2005; Xinhua, 2024). Beijing's reform strategy centers on preserving the current balance of power while enhancing the role of developing countries. Expansion may include Brazil and India, though China does not explicitly endorse their permanent membership. Chinese rhetoric also avoids endorsing permanent seats for developed countries such as Germany and Japan. Overall, Beijing's stance is closer to that of the UfC coalition than to the G4, diverging sharply on the expansion of permanent seats.

Since 2022, the Russian Federation has consistently upheld its position in favor of preserving the veto for existing permanent members of the Security Council. At the level of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Permanent Mission to the UN, Moscow has expressed support for granting permanent membership to Brazil and India, as well as for strengthening African representation (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2023). Against the backdrop of Russia's confrontation with the West and the inclusion of Germany and Japan on the list of "unfriendly states," Moscow is highly unlikely to support granting them permanent seats.

The positions of China and Russia on Security Council reform diverge from the G4 model, particularly regarding permanent membership for Germany and Japan. Both Moscow and Beijing are signatories to the second BRICS Johannesburg Declaration (2023), which calls for greater representation in the Security Council for developing countries from Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The document also underscores the importance of strengthening the role of India, Brazil, and South Africa in the UN, and the Security Council in particular (Ministry of External Affairs, 2023). Thus, while Moscow and Beijing formally support reform, in practice they favor limited expansion that preserves their strategic interests within the Council.

Ukraine generally supports the conceptual foundations of the G4 model, which in many respects align with its own position, articulated by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy at the UN Security Council meeting in September 2023. Kyiv calls for expanding permanent membership in the Security Council, emphasizing that Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Pacific region should obtain permanent representation. President Zelenskyy stressed the importance of including states with significant influence on global security, in particular Germany, Japan, India, and countries of the Islamic world (President of Ukraine, 2023). Kyiv also advocates for the allocation of at least one additional non-permanent seat for Eastern Europe.

At the same time, Ukraine strongly criticizes the veto power, reflecting its direct experience as a victim of aggression by a permanent member of the Security Council - the Russian Federation. Kyiv has joined both the ACT Code of Conduct and the French-Mexican initiative aimed at restricting

the use of the veto in cases of mass atrocities. Ukraine's position is that the veto should be progressively restricted and ultimately abolished (Postiine predstavnytstvo Ukrainy pry OON u Niu-Yorku, n.d.).

Thus, Ukraine's position largely aligns with the G4's vision regarding the expansion of both permanent and non-permanent categories of membership and the enhancement of regional representation, particularly through the inclusion of Germany, Japan, India, and African states in the permanent membership of the Council. Kyiv also advocates expanding the Council to include Latin American countries, which could potentially include Brazil. Ukraine's stance on limiting the veto partially aligns with the G4 model, as the Group of Four states have expressed readiness to refrain from using it until a final decision is reached.

Conclusion. The issue of UN Security Council reform remains highly relevant amid contemporary international polarization and the crisis of effectiveness in the global collective security system. The paralysis of the Council, stemming from the abuse of the veto, highlights the structural vulnerability of the body meant to serve as the principal instrument of peace and stability. Against this backdrop, the G4 model emerges as one of the most balanced reform concepts. The initiative seeks to strengthen regional representation and align the Council with current geopolitical realities. The Group of Four's willingness to suspend the use of the veto until the issue is definitively resolved represents a genuine effort to compromise with the existing permanent members and reduce political confrontation.

The comparative analysis has shown that the G4 model is most closely aligned with the position of the African Union, which opens prospects for forming strategic alliances at the General Assembly level. At the same time, the fundamental disagreement with the UfC, which rejects the idea of expanding permanent membership, significantly limits the prospects of achieving universal consensus among UN member states.

The positions of the permanent members of the Security Council reveal differences that will shape the prospects for reform. The United Kingdom and France consistently support the G4 model and African representation; the United States demonstrates selective support, notably refraining from endorsing Brazil's permanent membership and rejecting the extension of the veto; while China and Russia maintain a markedly reserved stance, thereby substantially obstructing the implementation of reform. The disagreement of Moscow and Beijing over the inclusion of Germany and Japan as permanent members renders the realization of the G4 model in the short term highly unlikely.

Ukraine's position on Security Council reform largely aligns with the G4 model. Kyiv supports the expansion of both permanent and non-permanent categories of membership, with particular emphasis on the inclusion of African, Asian, and Latin American states, as well as Germany and Japan. At the same time, Ukraine's position on the veto issue exhibits certain differences from the stance of the G4. Kyiv advocates the restriction and gradual abolition of the veto right, a stance shaped by its direct experience of aggression by the Russian Federation as a permanent member of the Council.

The Group of Four model holds considerable potential for the gradual reform of the UN Security Council, owing to its compromise-oriented and balanced nature. However, its implementation faces significant political obstacles, particularly the positions of China and Russia, as well as the absence of consensus among all major coalitions. In this respect, the prospects for reform will depend largely on the ability of G4 supporters to mobilize broad backing among member states and build political and diplomatic coalitions with the African Union and Western partners. For Ukraine, advancing the G4 model simultaneously represents an effort to strengthen its own diplomatic position in defending the principles of justice, equality, and the rule of law in international relations.

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