This is the accepted version of a paper published in *Perspectives on Politics*. This paper has been peer-reviewed but does not include the final publisher proof-corrections or journal pagination.

**Citation for the original published paper (version of record):**

Johansson, P. (2023)
https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592723002190

Access to the published version may require subscription.

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published paper.

**Permanent link to this version:**
http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:umu:diva-217386
In the absence of explicit criteria, what determines when and how the United Nations Security Council takes action to maintain or enforce international peace and security? Susan Hannah Allen & Amy Yuen rightly note that much previous research on Security Council decision making has focused on the five permanent members and on adopted resolutions and vetoes. In *Bargaining in the UN Security Council*, they shift focus to the processes that precede meetings and votes, presenting both quantitative analyses and case studies of agenda setting, bargaining, compromise, and decision making.

The model underlying most analyses is a unidimensional policy space, along which Council members’ preferences on various issues can be placed next to the status quo policy and any alternative policy option (p. 43). This is based largely on Erik Voeten’s work (see “Outside Options and the Logic of Security Council Action,” *American Political Science Review* 95(4), 2001) and further developed by Allen and Yuen in this book. The importance of three primary factors is analyzed: 1) the preferences of permanent members; 2) the preferences of the Council presidents (for which new monthly agenda-item data are introduced); and 3) the public accountability costs related to various actions. The analyses result in a number of useful conclusions.

One is that when Council presidents decide what issues to include on the agenda, elected members prioritize countries with which they have greater political affinity, irrespective of geographic distance. Conversely, when permanent members are presidents, political affinity has little impact on agenda setting, but geography matters. They prioritize countries outside their own region “suggesting that they want to handle regional issues on their own, but want to influence the way distant threats are handled” (p. 91).
Further, whereas previous research has largely attributed increased cooperation in the Council after the Cold War to decreasing tensions between the permanent members, Allen and Yuen suggest an alternative explanation, namely that this increasing cooperation is a way to handle the dominant position of the USA. They conclude: “The other permanent members have demonstrated a willingness to concede some ground to the US, but in doing so, they are reining in American influence” (p. 114).

Whether to meet at all, and if so, whether this takes place in a public meeting or a private consultation, is a strategic decision made by the Council president. Allen and Yuen argue that this decision depends not only on the president’s own preferences, but on accountability costs and the credibility of unilateral action by some member outside the Council. Such factors are rarely considered in previous research on Security Council decision making, but Allen and Yuen, in their case study of Kosovo, find that “public costs affect bargaining inside the Council such that Russia privately approves of NATO bombing without Council approval and then leverages the bombing into a grandstanding opportunity to reinforce its public position on Kosovo” (p. 148). Findings such as this are interesting and should stimulate future research.

Unfortunately, despite these contributions, several important shortcomings also can be found in the book. First, poor proofreading and editing has left the text with numerous errors that tarnish the overall impression of the book. For example, Figure 2.1 (p. 24), titled “Security Council actions, 1946–2015”, is identical to Figure 4.1 (p. 78), titled “Security Council Activities, 1985–2015”; both figures in fact cover the period 1994–2018.

Furthermore, it is claimed that procedural decisions are made by simple majority and substantive decisions by super-majority plus acceptance by all permanent members (p. 17). But a super-majority is, and has always been, required also for procedural decisions. The “double veto” is described as elected members’ killing a resolution by block-voting against it (p. 19). But the double veto is when a permanent member first uses its veto to prevent a matter from being treated as procedural, and then again to prevent a decision on the matter. The authors also argue that “[o]nly one Security Council resolution has been passed concerning the Arab-Israeli conflict” (p. 33, note 25). The source for this claim is Peter Wallensteen’s and my own chapter (see David Malone, ed., The UN Security Council: From the Cold War to the 21st Century, 2004). What we write is that “of all the resolutions that have been adopted on the Arab-Israeli conflict, only one has been adopted under Chapter VII” (p. 21). Allen and Yuen also state that “[p]rior to 1990, Chapter VII was only invoked twice” regarding Korea and Congo (p. 20), ignoring sanctions against South Africa and Southern Rhodesia, the determination of a breach of the peace in the Falklands Islands, and several other instances.
There are conflicting descriptions of different types of UN resolutions. First, it is argued that General Assembly resolutions are non-binding, but Security Council resolutions are (pp. 13 and 18). This is a well-grounded interpretation of Article 25 of the Charter. It is also correctly noted that whereas Chapter VI does not provide for enforcement measures, “Chapter VII resolutions are used to enforce decisions of the Council—either using military or non-military means” (p. 108). However, Allen and Yuen also repeat a common misunderstanding about the difference between the chapters, namely that Chapter VII resolutions are binding but that Chapter VI resolutions are non-binding (p. 20), thus contradicting their earlier claim based on Article 25. Additionally, writing about Chapter VII resolutions, they claim that “[t]hese resolutions are also notable because they are binding on all members of the broader UN community, not just the Security Council” (p. 108; see also p. 78). But no resolutions are binding only on the Security Council, so I was not persuaded of the need to emphasize this in their discussion.

More than once I was surprised at the selection of references. Allen and Yuen refer to many relevant titles from the 1990s and early 2000s, but numerous later publications are overlooked. For example, in Section 5.1 “Powerful States and Multilateral Action,” the authors argue that “[t]he benefits and drawbacks of working multilaterally are well-studied in the literature on international institutions. More recently, these ideas have given way to understanding the conditions under which states will work inside or outside of an institution” (pp. 102–103; my emphasis). Only three of 21 titles referenced in the five-page section were published in the last ten years—three chapters from the same edited volume. The claim that “there exists a virtual blind spot in scholarly attention to the workings of security institutions” (p. 6) is, thus, not convincing.

Allen and Yuen conclude their preface by stating that despite being the result of a long process the book represents a beginning. I think this is a good way to approach the book as a reader. It is difficult to ignore several of the problems that I have pointed to in this review, and reading the book is often frustrating because of them, but as a beginning of an analytical approach to the Security Council Bargaining in the UN Security Council is promising and one is left looking forward to the next step. With a better developed dialogue with more recent research, and with more refined measurements of central concepts, Allen and Yuen are likely to make important contributions to our understanding of Security Council decision making.