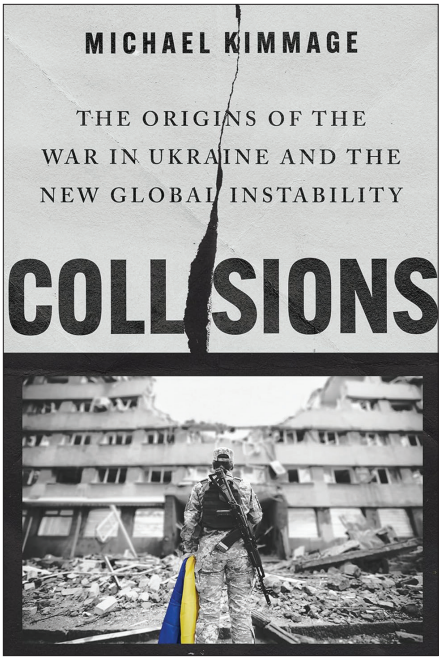

Collisions: The Origins of the War in Ukraine and the New Global Instability

By Michael Kimmage
Oxford University Press, 2024
282 pp., $29.99
ISBN-13: 978-0197751794
Reviewed by Peter R. Carkhuff

Collisions by Michael Kimmage offers a timely contemporary history of the conflict in Ukraine in which he argues that the war is the culmination of three different yet overlapping geopolitical "collisions" between Russia and Ukraine, Russia and Europe, and Russia and the United States. When analyzing the perspectives of these geopolitical actors, Kimmage deploys his experience as a historian and former State Department official to examine the war's origins. Both scholars and practitioners will benefit from the deep dive into the conflict that goes beyond causation and highlights the ongoing impact on the global power dynamics among the United States, China, and Russia.

Collisions is divided into three parts: first, open questions on Ukraine's and Russia's relationships with the West (the United States and Western Europe). Second, parting ways between the West and Russia and the rising tensions over Ukraine. Third, Vladimir Putin's decision to go to war with Ukraine and the immediate aftermath. Kimmage posits four causes of the war: Russia's will to control Ukraine, the precarious situation of Ukraine as a strategically important nation without real allies, the West's ambivalence with respect to Ukraine's sovereignty, and Putin's perception of American decline. When assessing the root causes, Kimmage takes the reader back to the early 2000s and contextualizes the West, Ukraine, and Russia based on the political conditions within each actor.

This contextualization and depth of historical understanding in *Collisions* is its greatest strength. For example, Kimmage describes how Russian views of global power structures are connected to, and were altered by, U.S. and NATO intervention in the Balkans, Iraq, and Libya. Through a Russian lens, these interventions were seen as an overreach and abuse of American power. According to Russian logic, "Russian foreign policy inevitably has to be of an independent and assertive nature." Nonetheless, Kimmage juxtaposes the Russian perspective with Ukrainian and Western positions on Ukraine's place in Europe. He places readers into the minds of Russian, Ukrainian, and American leaders to illustrate the sources of conflict. Kimmage writes: "In an enduring asymmetry, the West tended to understand Ukrainian problems as Ukrainian problems to which there were Ukrainian solutions, while Russia tended to understand Ukrainian problems as Russian problems to which there could only be Russian or regional or Europe-wide solutions."

Meanwhile, Kimmage demonstrates that during the 2000s and early 2010s, Ukrainian leadership attempted to balance conflicting pressures and interests. Externally, Ukrainian political leaders were forced to hedge their future in the European Union, which faced political and bureaucratic challenges and interference from Russia. Russia, in turn, viewed Ukraine as an extension of the Russian empire. At the same time, internally, Ukrainian politicians were faced with a younger generation resolved to link Ukrainian identity to Europe and who were willing to protest and mobilize for the cause. By inhabiting these competing perspectives and tracing the logic of political leaders, Kimmage highlights the nuanced fault lines that existed prior to the 2022 invasion. In so doing, the book provides important context for understanding how dynamic political and social factors lead to military conflict.

Kimmage's excellent ability to craft these different perspectives stems from his deep knowledge of Ukraine's position in the world. He uses a combination of scholarly articles, speeches, and experiences to shape the book's trajectory. Moreover, Kimmage relies on personal memoirs from U.S. Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama when crafting leadership profiles on Putin or other world leaders, such as Angela Merkel and Viktor Yanukovych, the former President of Ukraine. For example, Kimmage writes that President Bush was, perhaps infamously, able to "glimpse into Putin's soul" during their 2001 summit in Slovenia. Citing Bush's memoir, in which Putin bonds with the former U.S. President over faith, Kimmage highlights how Putin would eventually twist and leverage the connections between Russia and Ukraine through the Eastern Orthodox Church to help justify an invasion.

However, due to the recency of the war, Kimmage admits that *Collisions* lacks detail at times. This lack of detail can be reductionistic because it results in glossing over key historical events, such as how the Chechen wars reshaped the Russian military. Kimmage's penultimate chapter explores the immediate impact of the conflict on geopolitics, economics, and global responses. The war, for example, exacerbated inflation in the United States and gave room to North Atlantic Treaty Organization allies like Turkey to take advantage of the conflict to advance regional ambitions. While Kimmage focuses heavily on political leadership and decisionmaking in the book, there is room for future historians to do more thorough analysis of other factors—such as emerging technology, the impact of COVID-19, or Russian military form—on the conflict's roots.

In addition to scholars, military professionals will benefit from reading *Collisions*.

Joint leaders will find that it provides needed contemporary historical context for understanding the war in Ukraine and introduces the region's complex geopolitical dynamics. For commanders and staff officers, it can help illuminate the geopolitical tensions and differing perspectives on Ukraine to inform strategic plans and policy development. It is also an excellent read for strategists and foreign area officers serving in J5 directorates (strategy, plans, and policy) or U.S. European Command. Specifically, chapter 7, "The Search for Guardrails," and chapter 8, "Removing the Guardrails," can be used in professional military education to study deterrence. For instance, the collective failure of European states to address regional security following the Minsk agreements and a 20-year war in Afghanistan fueled Russia's belief that it would not pay a high cost for attacking Ukraine. Kimmage writes, "What mattered in the fall of 2021 [to Russia] was not the military's real-life inadequacies . . . what mattered was the military Putin thought he had. On its supposed excellence, he would make decisions about war and peace." The insular nature of Putin's autocratic rule created an echo chamber for the Russian government to perceive a greater chance of initial success in Ukraine. This is an important case study for deterrence theorists as it demonstrates how a leader's perception of military might, realized or not, encourages military action.

Collisions is a worthwhile chronicle of one of the most consequential conflicts since World War II. While the book suffers somewhat due to the access limitations around source material, it is an excellent contextualization of the Ukraine war's competing perspectives and drivers. For military leaders, especially those in planning or strategy, Kimmage provides a solid foundation for understanding the geopolitical forces shaping the war in Ukraine. The book's ability to balance the competing worldviews that led to the war and offer insightful lessons from these "collisions" is an important historical resource for the joint force. **JFQ**

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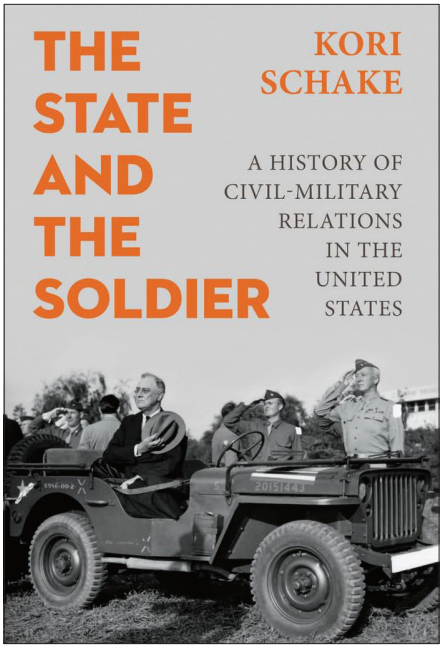

The State and the Soldier: A History of Civil-Military Relation in the United States

By Kori Schake
Polity, 2025
253 pp., $29.95
ISBN-13: 978-1509570539
Reviewed by Lindsay L. Rodman

Kori Schake's *The State and the Soldier* is an engaging, compact, and comprehensive examination of U.S. civil-military relations history. The book recounts the defining moments in the relationship between civilian political leadership and the military from the perspective of a scholar and think-tanker who is well-known for her commentary on a wide range of defense policy-related topics. *The State and the Soldier* is an important and timely resource—amidst increasing public discourse regarding the current state of norms in civil-military relations, Schake provides much-needed historical perspective on what constitutes a civil-military crisis, and how worried we should be.

Throughout the nearly 250-year history of the United States, the military has been a bulwark of democracy, despite the Founding Fathers' original fears about a standing army. The U.S. military has consistently passed Schake's two essential tests of healthy civil-military relations: can the president fire military leaders with impunity, and will the military carry out policies with which it does not agree? Even so, current public discourse suggests that we are at a perilous point for civil-military relations. Schake provides context for general readers as well as military professionals who seek to better understand what is at stake and how to navigate the tricky relationship between military and civilian leadership.

Most military professionals' understanding of civil-military relations is based on Samuel Huntington's 1957 *The Soldier and the State*. Professional military education still relies heavily on Huntington's theory of objective civilian control, which posits that civil-military relations are best maintained when there is strict separation between military and civilian spheres. In the Huntingtonian formulation, military leadership should remain technically expert, providing "best military advice" to civilian leadership, but otherwise refrain from politics and civilian decisionmaking. Yet any military professional who has served in the National Capital Region knows that military leaders are frequently asked to engage in political-level decisions.

Navigating civil-military relations today requires more than a reading of *The Soldier and the State*. Schake weaves the scholarship of prominent voices in civil-military relations into her historical retrospective, highlighting the works of Peter Feaver, Risa Brooks, and Eliot Cohen, among others. The strong theoretical work—providing a new perspective on Huntington and his contemporary rival, Morris Janowitz—is left for the epilogue. There, Schake notes the impracticality of both Huntington's strict separation and Janowitz's desire for complete integration. Informed by history, she concludes that both are "extreme models at variance with what has actually worked, and worked well, in American history."

Schake advocates for a more practical and modern conceptualization of healthy civil-military relations. The key to military subservience to civilian authority and the integrity of the profession in the United States begins with General