Michael Kimmage, *Collisions: The Origins of the War in Ukraine and the New Global Instability* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2024), 296 pages.

In *Collisions: The Origins of the War in Ukraine and the New Global Instability*, Michael Kimmage describes various dynamics that contributed to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, including conflicts between Russia and Ukraine, Russia and Europe, and Russia and the United States. The book does not provide an exhaustive account of Ukraine-Russia relations, rather it offers the author's insights regarding the different dynamics and factors that may have contributed to Vladimir Putin's decision to invade the country twice, in 2014 and 2022. As the author states, the book "is an early draft of the history that will one day be written about the 2022 war, which began in 2014, if not earlier."

The author discusses the Russia-Ukraine war through a prism of conflicts, or collisions. First, and the most obvious one, is a conflict between Ukraine and Russia, a conflict with a long history. The second is a conflict between Russia and Europe, a conflict with a similarly long history, now unfolding in the context of European states supporting Ukraine's pro-Western orientation. The third collision is the resurgent animosity between Russia and the United States. This is a useful analytical framework, which the author uses to familiarize the reader with the most important factors leading to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

The book is divided into three parts, discussing Russia and Ukraine relations within three timeframes: 2008-2013, 2013-2021, and 2021-2023, although some of the information overlaps and the book is occasionally repetitive. Each section highlights Russia's and Ukraine's internal dynamics, major domestic events and their implications for the bilateral relationships, and U.S. foreign policy responses. It also discusses the West's role and intentions in Ukraine's search for, finding, and shaping of its national identity. However, the rather broad discussion occasionally caricatures events and does not provide much analytic depth.

Despite his self-declared desire to provide an objective account of events leading to Russia's full-scale invasion, the author's political leanings shine through in how he presents the material—and which material he leaves out. This political bias distorts the story—and presents a missed opportunity to identify mistakes U.S. administrations made in their relations with Russia and Ukraine.

For example, the author mentions the Obama Administration's "reset" policy in passing as a well-intentioned attempt to get U.S.-Russia relations back on track. Yet, the "reset," coming on the heels of Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008, contributed to Russia's perception of its own impunity and U.S. weakness, and was a major enabler of Russia's first invasion of Ukraine in 2014. The Trump Administration's comparatively solid Russia policies get little credit whatsoever; rather, the author opts for discussing President Trump's more damaging tendencies, including the volatility he introduced into the U.S. alliance system. Yet, allies have been deserving of some of President Trump's criticism, and his message was not particularly new. Americans have been complaining about European NATO allies not

contributing their fair share to the alliance's collective defense almost since NATO's founding.

Readers unfamiliar with Russia, Ukraine, and U.S. foreign policy vis-à-vis these countries will find *Collisions: The Origins of the War in Ukraine and the New Global Instability* interesting. Those more familiar with the subject matter, however, may be left wondering whether a less partisan account would yield better lessons learned for the future of U.S.-Russia-Ukraine relations.

Reviewed by Michaela Dodge
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John J. Sullivan, *Midnight in Moscow: A Memoir from the Front Lines of Russia's War Against the West* (New York, NY: Little Brown and Company, 2024), 388 pages.

Russia's unprovoked and illegal aggression against Ukraine, its increasingly strident nuclear threats against the United States and the West, and its growing collaboration with China, North Korea, and Iran as part of an anti-American entente have strained U.S. relations with the Russian Federation so much that some observers have characterized the bilateral relationship as the worst since the days of the Cuban Missile Crisis. In this deteriorating environment, one of the most difficult and challenging assignments in the U.S. government is serving as Ambassador to Russia.

In *Midnight in Moscow: A Memoir from the Front Lines of Russia's War Against the West*, former Deputy Secretary of State and U.S. Ambassador to Russia John Sullivan provides readers with a front row seat to his experiences on the front lines of dealing with Russia and the frustrations of seeking common ground with an autocratic, hostile adversary purposefully intent on diminishing America's role in global affairs. Sullivan takes the reader on a personal journey from his days in his seventh-floor office at the State Department in Washington to Spaso House, the U.S. Ambassador's residence in Moscow. As a Bostonian of Irish descent and a life-long Boston Bruins fan, he recounts his love of the sport and how he sought to use "hockey diplomacy" to break the ice (no pun intended) in his dealings with ordinary Russians, despite limitations imposed on him by a suspicious and autocratic government.

I encountered Sullivan multiple times in his capacity as Deputy Secretary of State while serving as Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy. We engaged in Deputies Committee meetings in the White House Situation Room. We testified together on U.S. counterterrorism efforts in Africa before the House Foreign Affairs Committee in 2017. He is thoughtful, personable, and a consummate professional.

Sullivan's first-person narrative is fascinating and reads at times like a John le Carré novel. It moves along briskly (perhaps aided by the absence of any footnotes or references). After being confirmed as Ambassador to Russia in the Trump Administration, President

Biden asked him to stay on until he retired from government service in 2022. His ability as a diplomat in the hostile capital of a nuclear-armed adversary representing U.S. interests over two different administrations adds credibility to his account. He tells of how he dealt with Russia's human rights violations, in particular, the imprisonment and subsequent death of Putin critic Alexei Navalny and the wrongful detention of Americans; Moscow's cyber warfare, disinformation and information operations; the difficulties of seeking Russian agreement to extend the New START arms control treaty; and Russia's dangerous and unjustified full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Praising the extraordinary work of the professional diplomats serving in Russia, Sullivan describes the difficulties of working with a reduced U.S. embassy staff as a result of Russia's tit-for-tat expulsion of diplomats after the Trump Administration closed the Russian consulate in Seattle and expelled 60 Russian "diplomats" (in reality, intelligence agents) in response to Moscow's brazen 2018 chemical weapons attack in the UK on former Russian military defector Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia. He explains the stresses of working in a country where U.S. officials are systematically harassed and constantly under surveillance by the host state, and the difficulties of working to free wrongly imprisoned Americans by a government that does not seek justice but uses imprisoned Americans as bargaining chips to trade for captured Russian intelligence agents and spies.

Sullivan describes his initial meeting with Vladimir Putin as he presented his ambassadorial credentials, perceiving Putin as the personification of the Russian state, similar to the role his Soviet predecessors played. (His description of Putin calls to mind Louis XIV's statement, "L'etat, c'est moi.) He describes Putin, a KGB-trained apparatchik, and the Russian government as an extension of Soviet-style governance, beset by paranoia and intrigue. And he explains how this attitude made working under difficult conditions even worse by the coronavirus pandemic that swept across Russia. Putin, according to Sullivan, is "a very savvy gangster, unbound by facts, law, morals, or truth."

Sullivan also has some unflattering words for both U.S. presidents at whose pleasure he served. He notes that under Trump, the "chaos and unpredictability of the White House remained a vexing problem." He laments Trump's "lack of discipline," writing that "Donald Trump had no interest in the ordinary duties of his office." He notes that Trump "would not or could not draw a distinction between his own interests and those of the country he was leading," calling his diplomatic approach to Putin "misguided" and arguing that it "did not consider the larger strategic interests and values of the United States."

He contends that the Biden Administration in 2021 was so desperate to "stabilize" the U.S. relationship with Russia, that "the planning in Washington for a summit between Biden and Putin was underway long before there was even an agreement" that such a meeting would take place. He also criticizes President Biden for the "slow and erratic pace" of support to Ukraine resulting from "his fear of provoking Putin to widen the war." In Sullivan's view, "That was no way to support a fellow democracy under attack by a much larger, aggressive, authoritarian foe." He is critical of Biden's public statement that suggested a "minor incursion" by Russia into Ukraine would be different than a full-scale invasion, noting, "Not only did it signal a lack of resolve to confront Russian aggression on any level, but it also

called into question our commitment to our principles and values." President Biden's comments that day, according to Sullivan, "further emboldened Putin and undermined Ukrainian morale." And he acknowledges that the "chaotic, deadly, and dishonorable withdrawal from Afghanistan" severely damaged American standing and credibility in the world.

Russia's repeated nuclear threats over Ukraine have become almost a daily staple of Russian diplomacy, which Sullivan experienced repeatedly during his Moscow posting. He notes how "amazed and appalled" he was at "how quickly my Russian interlocutors could invoke the threat of nuclear war—often with just a hint or a suggestion, but occasionally with outright nuclear blackmail—to support their position and hijack a discussion about a subject that had nothing to do with nuclear weapons or war." He attributes this to Russia's attempt "to heighten the sense of crisis and put the United States on its back foot," noting that "the Russians were nonetheless willing to say anything, including invoking nuclear war, to achieve the objectives of the state in the person of Putin." In his second term, President Trump would be well-advised to take note of Sullivan's observations and craft an American strategy that understands Moscow's tactics and does not cede the diplomatic and political initiative to Russia based on its constant threats to escalate a crisis.

Sullivan's recounting of his meetings with Russian officials to discuss serious issues like Ukraine and European security resemble meetings I had with Russian officials two decades earlier to discuss missile defense cooperation after President George W. Bush decided to withdraw the United States from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty. The Russian side was unwilling to engage in serious discussions and content to read their talking points, asserting they were not authorized to engage in any substantive dialogue. Sullivan's narrative suggests that the old adage rings true: the more things change, the more they stay the same.

The most vexing problem Sullivan had to deal with was the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Russia denied repeatedly that it had any plans to invade, and the U.S. government declassified intelligence indicating such denials were false. Sullivan contends that the declassification of intelligence was an "innovative and effective strategy." Yet, though useful in disrupting some Russian information operations and rallying allied support for Ukraine, it failed to deter Putin from launching the most extensive military operation to change the borders of Europe by force of arms for the first time since World War II.[1] Sullivan details the historical parallels between the crimes committed by Nazi Germany in World War II and the brutal actions of the Russian regime against a democratic Ukraine, including the use of "sham diplomacy for propaganda purposes."

Sullivan concludes that support for the defense of Ukraine is squarely in the U.S. national security interest. He is critical of both the trend in some U.S. quarters toward isolationist tendencies reflected in some of the pronouncements by former President Trump and his

[1] I discuss the failure of this approach in "The Fallacy of 'Deterrence by Detection,'" *Information Series*, No. 562 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, September 11, 2023), available at https://nipp.org/information_series/david-j-trachtenberg-the-fallacy-of-deterrence-by-detection-no-562-september-11-2023/.

congressional supporters and the hesitancy of the Biden Administration in providing the necessary means to allow Ukraine to repel the Russian invaders rapidly and successfully. He argues that an appropriate balance should be struck that allows the United States to give Ukraine the tools it needs (without writing a "blank check" and with "equitable burden-sharing" by NATO) while avoiding direct conflict with Russia. Russia is not just an "adversary" of the United States, he writes, but a "self-declared enemy." He characterizes the Russian government as untrustworthy and contends that Putin will not be diverted from his aggression by Western goodwill gestures. "Trust is impossible," he writes, which suggests the prospects for future agreements with Russia on arms control (or anything else for that matter) are indeed grim. His solution to the dilemma of Russia: the United States must again practice a policy of containment. The implications for U.S. foreign policy and the credibility of U.S. security guarantees to allies of failing to stand up to Putin's aggression, he argues, "would be seismic."

Midnight in Moscow provides an insightful tutorial on the inner workings of the Russian bureaucracy and the mindset of the Russian government as seen by a senior level American official who on a daily basis confronted intransigence, disinformation, and roadblocks to progress in improving the bilateral U.S.-Russia relationship. The reader can find much here reminiscent of Soviet-style behavior. In that respect, Sullivan has done a significant service in exposing the reality behind Moscow's decision-making apparatus and its obsession with seeking unilateral advantage over the United States—including psychological advantage—at every opportunity. As such, the book should be required reading not just for would-be American diplomats, but for anyone seeking to understand the difficulties of dealing with a hostile regime that sees great power competition with the United States as a zero-sum game, compromise and reciprocity as foreign concepts, and cooperation as a sign of weakness.

Reviewed by David J. Trachtenberg
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Lyle J. Morris and Rakesh Sood, *Understanding China's Perceptions and Strategy Toward Nuclear Weapons: A Case Study Approach* (Washington, D.C.: The Asia Society, September 2024), 41 pages.

Chris Andrews and Justin Anderson, *China's Theater-range, Dual-capable Delivery Systems: Integrated Deterrence and Risk Reduction Approaches to Counter a Growing Threat* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University, August 2024), 16 pages.

David O. Shullman, John Culver, Kitsch Liao, and Samantha Wong, *Adapting US Strategy to Account for China's Transformation into a Peer Nuclear Power* (Washington, D.C.: The Atlantic Council, September 2024), 28 pages.

China's "breathtaking" expansion of its nuclear weapons program over the last several years has prompted the U.S. government to reconsider a number of its prior strategic assumptions and associated requirements.[2] The Defense Threat Reduction Agency's (DTRA) "Strategic Trends Research Initiative" has funded a number of recently published studies on different aspects of China's nuclear breakout, including the three reviewed here. In all, they represent a useful series of studies that examine a range of topics that are all pertinent to U.S. policymakers, including China's: deterrence thresholds, leadership values, missile capabilities, threat perceptions, and more.

The Morris and Sood co-authored report, *Understanding China's Perceptions and Strategy Toward Nuclear Weapons*, uses case studies to examine how Chinese strategists view questions about the use of force, and crisis management, against another nuclear power. Since much of the existing literature draws heavily from an outdated Second Artillery Corps', now the Strategic Rocket Forces, text, the authors supplement this gap in the literature by studying academic and government affiliated historians that have commented on six historical events: the Korean War, First and Second Taiwan Strait Crises, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Sino-Soviet border clashes of 1969, and the 2020-2021 Sino-Indian border clashes. Morris and Sood seek answers to methodology questions such as: how do Chinese experts characterize nuclear crises? What role did nuclear weapons play in those crises according to Chinese experts? And, what do Chinese experts say are the lessons learned for China from these crises or conflicts?

Their study highlights the lessons Chinese military officials and academics appear to draw from each crisis or conflict, and some lessons are worryingly common, suggesting a trend. For instance, Chinese scholars believe U.S. allied opposition to nuclear employment has prevented such use in multiple conflicts or crises over the decades – given America's large network of allies and partners today, how many expressing concern over U.S. nuclear employment during a crisis might it take for Chinese officials to be persuaded the United States will, once again, back down? Morris and Sood also helpfully explain when the lessons Chinese analysts glean from crises are in tension, or direct contradiction with, China's public nuclear policies and current posture. While the case studies they examined are, by virtue of page limitations on the reports, necessarily short, they admirably convey the relevant nuclear deterrence elements of each crisis and conflict and the lessons Chinese experts appear to be learning from each. It remains an open question whether Chinese military officials, much less the political leaders in charge of such decisions as nuclear employment, share the same opinions as the scholars examined in this report, but their approach provides fascinating insights into at least some corner of the conversation happening in China right now.

The Andrews and Anderson report, *China's Theater-range, Dual-capable Delivery Systems: Integrated Deterrence and Risk Reduction Approaches to Counter a Growing Threat*, focuses

[2] The "breathtaking" descriptor was popularized by then-Commander, United States Strategic Command, ADM Charles Richard. See, David Vergun, "China, Russia Pose Strategic Challenges for U.S., Allies, Admiral Says," *Defense.gov*, August 12, 2021, available at https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/2729519/china-russia-pose-strategic-challenges-for-us-allies-admiral-says/.

specifically on the growth of China's theater-range dual-capable missiles and the implications for U.S. strategy. These missiles are meant to threaten U.S. military bases and assets across the Pacific Ocean and are integral to China's military theory of victory. The authors examine three questions in this regard: what are the roles of these missiles in China's strategy? How can the United States deter and defeat these threats? What role might risk reduction approaches play in reducing the threat?

Andrews and Anderson provide a succinct explanation of China's military theory of victory, which, in summary, involves building up a preponderance of conventional power in the region, issuing multiple nuclear deterrence threats and associated actions to signal credibility, employing non-military tools such as information campaigns to communicate a greater stake in the conflict, and relying on an anti-access area-denial strategy to defeat U.S. intervention. The authors utilized subject matter expert interviews for their report, but one cause for pause in their analysis is their set of assumptions about how China would employ its theater dual-capable missiles during a conflict with the United States. In a simulated conflict over Taiwan, the authors believe PRC officials would likely follow a graduated set of actions that grow in their escalatory nature roughly in line with how the military conflict is proceeding – a strategy description that appears suspiciously Western, seemingly matching a Schelling-esque conflict-as-bargaining theory. Granted, Chinese strategists are unlikely to ever reveal their order of operations publicly, so a lack of sourcing and educated guesses are simply an occupational hazard. But it is notable that the authors do not mention China's military writings that emphasize the importance of speed, surprise, or seizing the initiative early in a conflict, elements that at least indicate the possibility of bypassing a graduated set of actions for a "shock and awe" campaign early in a conflict.

The authors' recommended U.S. posture changes are well thought out and clearly written. What is most notable, and should be copied by other analysts, is that they link each suggested posture change with a clear set of deterrence messages that are meant to change the cost-benefit analysis of Chinese leaders according to their unique strategic culture. Too often analysts shortcut this process by recommending U.S. posture changes without articulating their deterrence purpose, making them appear to be for simply altering the military balance.

The Shullman, Culver, Liao, and Wong report, *Adapting US Strategy to Account for China's Transformation into a Peer Nuclear Power*, examines a 2032 scenario involving Taiwan. The authors are most interested in China's nuclear thresholds and the leadership decision-making factors that might be at play, plus the implications for the United States. Their first major summary finding is that during a U.S.-China conflict over Taiwan, Chinese leaders could quickly come to believe they face a near-existential threat to their regime if they were to fail in their invasion, which could cause them to employ nuclear weapons first. The second major summary finding is that there is significant potential for U.S. misperceptions regarding China's intent which may cause nuclear escalation.

One of the areas the authors focus their attention on is the split in the U.S. government regarding the creation of operational plans: there are conventional plans and there are nuclear plans, and rarely are the two integrated. Their analysis regarding potential problems resulting from the conventional and nuclear split in developing operational plans is correct

– this split can lead to divergent assumptions and misperceptions without careful integration. The primary problem in this section, and throughout the report generally, is the authors' tendency to assert that there is a problem that must be corrected, rather than *demonstrating* that there is a problem. For instance, the authors state, "US nuclear experts, lacking the necessary appreciation for China's strategic intent and perception of stakes involved in a near-existential crisis that could threaten Xi's regime, are likely to rely on the Cold War era assumption that a hard ceiling and firebreak for nuclear use must exist for China, further exacerbating US misperceptions regarding China's nuclear use." While likely true of some U.S. nuclear experts, this description (which is without citation) gives short shrift to the team of China experts at United States Strategic Command, and those who have worked in government more generally, some of whom have published open-source reports demonstrating their expertise on this topic.[3]

The overstatements continue with the authors' assertion that the United States is likely going to face a choice between conventional victory over China to secure Taiwan or ensuring nuclear deterrence keeps a lid on the conflict – the authors raise the issue of the finite number of bombers and tankers in this regard. While certainly there is tension between conventional and nuclear missions, as with the use of any dual-capable system, it is not self-evident that victory hinges on that particular factor. What is more curious is that even after making this case, the authors do not make a recommendation on the United States altering its nuclear force posture to account for this contingency.

The authors do make a good point, largely unexamined in the existing open literature, that U.S. allies will try to, and likely will, influence the U.S. decision to employ or not employ nuclear weapons. As demonstrated in the Morris and Sood report referenced above, Chinese leaders historically have taken this factor into account. Thus, U.S. officials would do well to plan ahead in this regard and discuss Taiwan scenarios with their allied counterparts in extended deterrence meetings.

DTRA should be commended for funding this series of reports on an important set of inter-related aspects of China's nuclear breakout. There is more work to be done, of course, but analysts are building a greater foundation of knowledge that is key to an improved U.S. deterrence strategy.

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[3] For example, see, Jennifer Bradley, *China's Nuclear Modernization and Expansion: Ways Beijing Could Adapt its Nuclear Policy, Occasional Paper*, Vol. 2, No. 7 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute for Public Policy, July 2022), available at https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Vol.-2-No.-7.pdf.; and, Keith B. Payne (Study Director), Matthew R. Costlow, Christopher Ford, David Trachtenberg, and Alexander Vaughan, *Deterring China in the Taiwan Strait*, *Journal of Policy & Strategy*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute for Public Policy, 2022), available at https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Special-Issue-final.pdf.

Congresswoman Jane Harman, Chair and Ambassador Eric Edelman, Vice Chair, *Report of the Commission on the National Defense Strategy*, July 2024, 114 pages.

The congressionally mandated Commission on the National Defense Strategy recently published a report[4] that should be a wake-up call for the U.S. national security establishment. The report notes that the "threats the United States faces are the most serious and most challenging the nation has encountered since 1945 and include the potential for near-term major war."[5] Yet, in many ways, the United States is poorly prepared to face them, starting with an out-of-date force sizing construct and defense budgets that are inadequate to meet objectives set forth by the respective *National Security Strategies* and *National Defense Strategies* of consecutive presidential administrations. Just as problematic is that Congress, which "has become a major impediment to national security,"[6] almost never agrees to pass defense budgets on time, and hence forces the Department of Defense to incur further inefficiencies caused by operating under continuing resolutions.

The report is divided into nine chapters: Introduction; Strategic Environment; Domestic Constraints and Visions of Success; Creating an All Elements of National Power Approach to Defense; Innovation at Department of Defense in Technology, Concepts, and Approaches; Force Sizing, Capabilities, and Posture; The Defense Industrial Base and Defense Production; Personnel and Readiness; and Resources. Each discusses the state of affairs in that particular area of interest, challenges to adapting to new national security realities, and makes recommendations to improve the situation. These recommendations are bipartisan, which makes them that much more worthwhile. They include empowering the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Staff to cancel programs and "making structural changes and prioritization adjustments to spend national security funds more effectively and more efficiently."[7]

The Commission calls on different parts of the U.S. government to work jointly to utilize all elements of state power. To that end, the Commission proposes that security considerations be included in the work of traditionally non-security departments and agencies (e.g., Department of Education). Even non-defense departments can foster a sense of the importance of public service and make the population healthier, thus expanding the pool of those who would be eligible to serve in the U.S. armed forces. The Commission explicitly discusses "the domestic political climate," which currently "complicates recruitment and distracts from crucial security issues,"[8] the first time ever the domestic polarization issue was highlighted in such a report.

The Commission is also vocal in its warning that the U.S. homeland is vulnerable to an adversarial attack, and that the likelihood that enemies would execute such an attack during

[4] Jane Harman and Eric Edelman, et al., *Commission on the National Defense Strategy*, RAND, July 2024, pp. v-xiii, available at https://www.rand.org/nsrd/projects/NDS-commission.html.

[5] Ibid., p. v.

[6] Ibid., p. 18.

[7] Ibid., p. xii.

[8] Ibid., p. 15.

war is very high. In fact, the Commission points out the failure of U.S. government representatives to effectively communicate to the public why a strong defense is essential and why it is in the people's interest to sufficiently fund it over other priorities.

The Commission's report discusses the importance of the defense industrial base and starkly warns that "U.S. industrial production is grossly inadequate to provide the equipment, technology, and munitions needed today, let alone given the demands of great power conflict."[9] The Commission believes that the issue of rebuilding the defense industrial base requires greater urgency and resources, including fixing the munition shortfall and "reduction (where possible) of barriers to using commercial products and software for defense purposes."[10]

Stating the problem clearly is just one of many excellent contributions of the report, recommending ways to mitigate them is another, no less valuable one. Americans would be well served if the U.S. government heeded the Commission's recommendations.

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[9] Ibid., p. 51.
[10] Ibid., pp. 56-57.