

REVIEW

What Comes After Glyn Morgan's American Europe?

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G. Morgan, *The Rise and Fall of American Europe* (Polity, 2026)

The concept of sovereignty, like that of the 'state', may be an indispensable tool for international law—though I am not sure that if we accept the concept there as our starting point, we do not thereby make the very idea of an international law meaningless. But for the consideration of the problem of the internal character of a legal order, both concepts seem to be as unnecessary as they are misleading. Indeed, the whole history of constitutionalism [...] is that of a struggle against the positivist conception of sovereignty and the allied conception of the omnipotent state.

— F. A. Hayek, 1976 (Hayek 2021/1976), p. 257)

Glyn Morgan, a political scientist at Syracuse University's Moynihan Center of European Studies, has written a pithy, timely book on the relationship between the United States and Europe that all classical liberals and libertarians (herewith "liberals" unless specified) should read.

Morgan takes readers back to the end of World War II to identify a state-form that is different than the nation-state people typically use (i.e. China, Brazil, Germany) to make sense of the world: American Europe. It's not a country, but it's not a federation or a vassal or an empire, either. American Europe is a state-form that was created by the US after World War II and is tasked with governance related to American and Atlantic policies, and governance regarding neighboring countries outside of its orbit (Russia, Morocco, Iraq, China, etc.). American Europe was created to counter communism, sure, but also to counter imperial Europe, which American policymakers pinpointed as a prime problem for constant, continuing violence in the region. Morgan summarizes Imperial Europe beautifully:

The larger, more powerful states at the time—including Russia, Austria, Britain, France, and eventually Germany—were all empires with colonial territories within Europe (like Austria's possessions in the Balkans), outside of Europe (like Britain and France's possessions in Africa and Asia) or both within and outside (like Britain with Ireland and India) (p. 106).

Aside from 80 years of relative peace and prosperity (especially regarding interstate conflict between polities within American Europe), American Europe has produced two notable institutions: NATO and the EU. The topic of Morgan's book is how and why American Europe is being replaced by a Civilizational America, and what, if any, alternatives exist to this MAGA-inspired change.

Chapter 1 does a great job explaining in more depth how American Europe came to be. Morgan uses "a worry and three puzzles" (p. 34) to outline this particular state-form's founding era. The worry,

for Americans, was that they would make the same mistakes they made after World War I. “America’s failure” (p. 14) then is still debated but it is often blamed, by historians, on Woodrow Wilson’s idealism, GOP isolationism, ungenerous financial policy, or a combination of these three factors (pp. 14-15). Here I must ask: it was the United States that failed in post-World War I Europe? What about the anarchical states-system in Europe that relied on entangling alliances and the “balancing of power” (a euphemism for state violence)? I am not attacking Morgan in particular here, but rather the assumption—shared widely throughout the world as of this review’s publication date—that post-World War I peace was a US failure. For liberals reading this review, the following notion needs to be hammered home: anarchy and the balance of power failed long before US diplomatic efforts did. Nevertheless, the Americans *did* fail, and post-World War II Americans were worried they’d do the same.

As for the three puzzles, Morgan argues persuasively in regard to the first two: the rise of the Soviet Union, and the American desire to demolish and bury Imperial Europe. The third puzzle Morgan identifies convinces me less but is also the main driving force behind this excellent book: “the reason why the Trump administration—and the MAGA movement more generally—had turned against Europe” (p. 36).

As I write this, there are still two years left on President Donald Trump’s second term, but the sheer overwhelming volume of heated, prevalent, and pernicious takes on President Trump are as common now as they were in 2016. So when Morgan, the Director of a European Studies think tank named after a Democratic senator and housed at a public university, identified Trump and the MAGA movement more generally as a main culprit of American Europe’s downfall, I winced. I also pressed on, and was treated to one of the best analyses on not only the MAGA movement in the US but populism in general I’ve encountered yet (the other one is, coincidentally, also found in *Cosmos + Taxis*; see Lee 2022). Senator Moynihan would be proud. Chapter 2 identifies two distinct factions within MAGA, and the glue that holds them together is a distaste for Western Europe. Morgan argues that this distaste for Western Europe is cultural for one faction (the populist nationalists) and economic for the other (the technological accelerationists). This is a familiar argument, but Morgan adds an illuminating twist: “Western Europe” is really just a proxy for what Morgan calls the “Brahmin Left,” a term he borrows from French economist Thomas Piketty that’s used to encompass a loose, transatlantic political and cultural faction that seeks to impose a sense of rationality and empathy into North Atlantic societies (pp. 9-10). The populist nationalists and technological accelerationists believe these rational and empathetic policies preferred by the Brahmin Left are anything but, and that these policies are actually hurting the United States and Europe. Morgan rightly points out that the populist nationalists and technological accelerationists have nothing in common other than a shared loathing of the Brahmin Left’s political and cultural power, and he even finds glimpses of tension between the two (p. 55). Readers of *Cosmos + Taxis* will, of course, be intimately familiar with this triangle of tension.

I disagree with Morgan’s spectacular twist. I think the triangle of tension and the serious security problems that Europe faces are two very different things, even as I believe both problems are shared by one transoceanic society.

This will be addressed in full below, but first there is more in chapter 2 to review. Morgan’s main target is not the triangle of tension but the pivot toward Russia that he sees happening among populist nationalists. Morgan ties this pivot to longtime complaints about European allies that Republican and Democratic presidents alike have made about the lack of military spending, and constant questioning on the US side of the Atlantic for the necessity of NATO. Morgan argues that the populist nationalists believe China is now the main geopolitical threat of the US, and that 1) therefore Europe has lost its usefulness as a shield for Fortress America, and 2) Russia’s domestic order serves as an example of what the US needs to do to engage in existential struggle with China for global hegemony. Whether Morgan’s assessment of the populist nationalist position is accurate can probably be fine-tuned in debate (there is likely, for example, a deep split within the populist nationalists about American global hegemony), but for this review his assessment suffices.

It is in chapter 2 that the most glaring weakness of the Brahmin Left (I am, alas, forced to assume that Morgan identifies as a member of this faction) is brought to light:

Given that Americans were taught for so long to fear Russia not merely because of Soviet communism but also its religion, culture, and history, it's nothing short of astonishing that in the 2010s US conservatives did a complete about-turn on their assessment of Russia (p. 45).

For those of us who are democrats yet also fearful of democracy, the complete “about-turn” is not “astounding” at all. It is at once a feature of democratic self-governance and perhaps also its executioner without checks and balances, especially non-democratic ones. The Brahmin Left has venerated democracy to a point of excess, as those who fear and criticize democracy's excesses are now merely slandered rather than engaged with respectfully. This fear of democracy, coupled with Europe's serious security problems, will be addressed more fully below, in the hopes that it can build bridges between two of the triangle of tension's three points.

Chapter 3 is perhaps my favorite chapter in the book because it dares to identify three types of Europe that could emerge were “an isolationist US” to pull “back from European security, leaving NATO effectively defunct” (p. 61). Morgan envisions three options for an American-less Europe: 1) European Europe, where European countries disavow their sovereignty over “security and defense policy,” (p. 65; see also Birner 2025) 2), Global Europe, which looks an awful lot like the EU (including a distinct and stark lack of discussion about security), and 3) National-Sovereigntist Europe, where Morgan necessarily brings Imperial Europe and the violent balance of power into the equation. Chapter 5 complements chapter 3 nicely, and so I'll tack them together and treat chapter 4 as the grand finale. It looks at Kennan's critiques of NATO and then outlines three pathways for Europe that don't involve the United States: a “European security architecture,” (p. 97) an anarchical balance of power, or a European nuclear option, where European sovereignties would presumably arm themselves with nuclear weapons in order to deter...themselves.

Morgan looks at these alternatives to an American-less Europe and concludes less that Europeans would be much better off accepting their fate in American Europe, and more that a new state-form is emerging—which he terms Civilizational America - and Europeans need to know how to deal with it. This is chapter 4, and it provides fertile ground for clarifying Morgan's book, building bridges between social liberals (the Brahmin Left) and classical liberals (the technological accelerationists), and putting forth a nuanced alternative (libertarian interstate federalism) to Morgan's assessments that recognize his contributions to what is happening in Europe without necessarily agreeing with his prescriptions.

Morgan argues that the MAGA belief in China-as-a-civilizational-threat drives the logic behind abandoning American Europe and embracing a Civilizational America that focuses on the US in East Asia & the Pacific, and the American hemisphere (Morgan also points out that some factions call for retrenching solely to a Hemispheric position and abandoning East Asia altogether).

This is useful and deserves to be read *but* it lets European sovereignties off the hook for several decades' worth of bad policy decisions. As Morgan repeatedly notes, Europe can't fend for itself and its demos seem more interested in reactionary regulations rather than protecting the property rights of individuals, corporations, and ecclesiastical bodies.¹ It is precisely this—Europe's failure to embrace liberalism and 800 million people in China being lifted out of extreme poverty because of liberal reforms—that could bring social and classical liberals (Morgan's Brahmin Left and technological accelerationists) together to put forth a viable blueprint that tackles MAGA's arguments head on and the problems that have led to Europe's very real stagnation, and it starts with a 1939 article written by somebody who is not mentioned in Morgan's book: F. A. Hayek.

Morgan can't be blamed for not thinking of Hayek when it comes to American Europe. Hayek's federalist ideas were radical and the classical liberal movement has either forgotten Hayek's interstate federalism (Christensen 2021) or allowed intermittent and embarrassingly selective textual readings of Hayek to suffice.² Yet Hayek and his moderately radical federalist ideals are exactly what liberals (social and classi-

cal) need to counter MAGA's anti-Chinese and anti-European civilizationalist cultural outlook (which extends to geopolitical reasoning). Here is Hayek's key argument from the aforementioned article:

Since it has been argued so far that an essentially liberal economic regime is a necessary condition for the success of any interstate federation, it may be added, in conclusion, that the converse is no less true: the abrogation of national sovereignties and the creation of an effective international order of law is a necessary complement and the logical consummation of the liberal program (Hayek 1948/1939, p. 269).

The abrogation of national sovereignties in exchange for federal peace is Hayek's second most important argument, just after his prize-winning contributions to the socialist calculation debate. This federalist option is entirely missing from Morgan's prescriptions, and understandably so given that our age is trapped in a Westphalian prison; but given the dire options that Morgan correctly identifies Europe faces as Civilizationalist America ascends, perhaps liberals need to embrace their radical roots in order to counter civilizational logic (which, again, is ascendant globally and not only in the North Atlantic). Indeed, Civilizationalist America won't just have a MAGA version; a left-wing version will also arise, too. If liberalism, which arose as a philosophy of peace between Catholics and Protestants in Europe (Aligica and Boettke 2026), is to survive the 21st century, it needs an alternative to civilizational logic, and interstate federalism is "liberal civilization." Interstate federalism is what Hayek built out in his three books of political philosophy. Hayek's *Road to Serfdom*, *The Constitution of Liberty*, and *Law, Legislation, and Liberty* all seek to promote and enhance liberal ideals for the world, and not just for Europe or for nation-states.

The abrogation of national sovereignties under a federal peace does not just affect Europe, either, for it will ensure that Americans re-realize that the US itself is not a national sovereignty but a compound republic currently composed of 50 states. Indeed, those non-interventionists in the US who clamor for America First are simply slotting themselves into an insignificant section of MAGA's vision for Civilizationalist America because they embrace national sovereignty.

If Europe is to escape the fate that Morgan identifies, and again Morgan's analysis is prescient and worth your time, then it is time to abandon the pretenses of national sovereignty. Contemporary European countries have not been sovereign since at least the 1940s, and because of their inability to defend themselves they are unlikely to be sovereign in the 21st century. Given Europe's total and utter dependency on the US, it is time for the former to demand from the latter an equality—of its "states" and its people—under the latter's federal constitution.³ Yes, that's right: Europe's (and North America's) best hope is transatlantic interstate federalism, and not an independent Europe (which, as Morgan demonstrates, is difficult to define, much less envision).

Morgan ends his excellent book by pleading for the Brahmin Left to employ empathy as a foundation for both getting acclimated as second class citizens in Civilizational America and slowly, perhaps over decades or centuries, working on an alternative for a future where Europe is free and independent of its American overseers. I, in turn, end this review by pleading with the Brahmin Left to drop the intransigent pretensions of national sovereignty and begin working with classical liberals on federating the transatlantic world. Classical liberals need social liberals to agree that this federation of "liberal civilization" *has* to be negative; it *has* to be built on top of already-existing institutions rather than created from scratch; and it *cannot* be limited to a geographic or cultural area. Where the negotiations can begin is whether European polities should just join the US as new states in its union, or if NATO or some other transatlantic organization that handles defense and security-related matters can transform into a federal political institution from its current security and defense tasks. If liberals cannot agree on these premises for the negotiated end of national sovereignty, then Morgan's world-class prognosis will likely come to fruition. The end of American Europe indeed.

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NOTES

- 1 This is my summary of his argument; in the book Morgan (2026, pp. 52-56 especially) is far more neutral and even sympathetic to European efforts at regulation on markets, technology, and speech.
- 2 Christensen 2026 highlights one recent example.
- 3 For an interesting thought experiment that tackles this, see Studebaker 2026.