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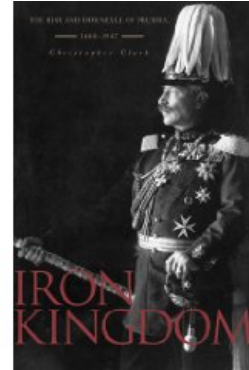
A Kingdom No More

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The world order has been so thoroughly transformed over the last century that some of the most powerful nations on earth no longer even exist. Most recently, we saw this happen with the break-up of the Soviet Union.   But a national demise that rivals that of the Soviet Union is the disappearance of Prussia in 1947.

In *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia 1600-1947* (Belknap Press), historian Christopher Clark traces the emergence of Prussia as a global superpower and its collapse into national non-existence after World War II. Clark tells the story very well, explaining how Prussia, originally just one among several German kingdoms, emerged as the organizing center of a unified, ambitious, and militaristic Germany.

Along the way, Clark offers insights that help to explain the unfolding history of Europe and points to the coming debacles of World Wars I and II — both wars forever linked to Prussian militarism and expansionism.

An excerpt:

On 25 February 1947, representatives of the Allied occupation authorities in Berlin signed a law abolishing the state of Prussia. From this moment onward, Prussia belonged to history. . . .

Law No. 46 of the Allied Central Council was more than an administrative act. In expunging Prussia from the map of Europe, the Allied authorities also passed judgment upon it. Prussia was not just one German territory among others, on a par with Baden, Wurttemberg, Bavaria or Saxony; it was the very source of the German malaise that had afflicted Europe. It was the reason why Germany had turned from the path of peace and political modernity. 'The core of Germany is Prussia,' Churchill told the British Parliament on 21 September 1943. 'There is the source of the recurring pestilence.' The excision of Prussia from the political map of Europe was thus a symbolic necessity. Its history had become a nightmare that weighed upon the minds of the living.