

The Evolution of Strategic Thinking in World War I: A Case Study of the Second Battle of the Marne

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In his often-cited but infrequently read classic, *On War*, Carl von Clausewitz famously observed that war is an extension of politics by other means. Exactly what that now ubiquitous phrase means remains a topic of considerable scholarly debate. Generally speaking, however, a consensus has emerged that Clausewitz was urging policy makers to tie their use of military force to the political ends they wished to achieve. By keeping ends and means in harmony, political leaders can mitigate risk and avoid dangers like the phenomenon we now call mission creep.² This consensus also cites nineteenth-century Prussia as a model for how to achieve Clausewitz's vision; Otto von Bismarck, the wily Prussian/German chancellor, kept his war aims limited to the abilities of the Prussian army while taking great care not to involve his state in a long war that he feared it might not win.³ He therefore had an appropriate understanding of

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² The literature on Clausewitz is extensive and deep. At the risk of omitting many fine works, see, for starters, Antulio Echevarria, *Clausewitz and Contemporary War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), Michael Howard, *Clausewitz* (Oxford, 1983), and John Lynn, *Battle: A History of Combat and Culture* (New York, 2003), chapter 6. The standard translation of *On War* is edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

³ See especially Dennis Showalter, *The Wars of German Unification* (London: Bloomsbury USA, 2004) and Robert M. Citino, *The German Way of War: From the Thirty Years War to the Third Reich* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2005), chapter 5. The latest biography of Bismarck is Jonathan Steinberg, *Bismarck: A Life* (New York: Oxford, 2011).