



The Great Military Philosophers on Afghanistan

Video 7: Sun Tzu – Chapter 5 & 6: Strategic Advantage and Weak and Strong Points

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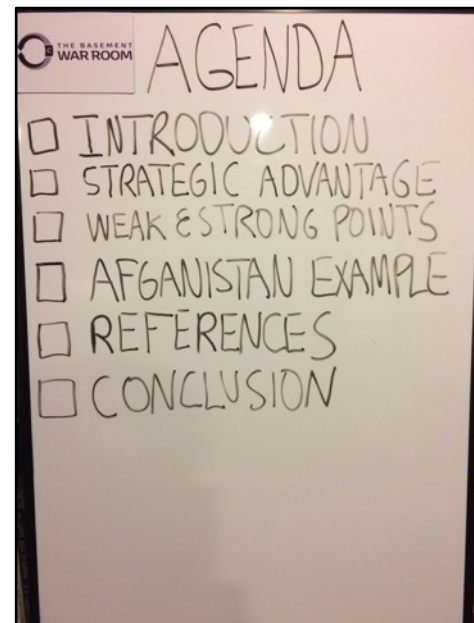
BOARD 1: AGENDA

Introduction. What does having no form mean?

Introduce myself: Hi, I'm John Lemay and welcome to my basement war room.

Agenda: In this 6th video in The Great Military Philosophers on Afghanistan Series I'm going to explore The Art of War Chapters 5 and 6: Strategic Positions and Weak and Strong Points. I'll discuss Chapter 5, then Chapter 6, then give an example from Afghanistan and then conclude.

Transition: So let's jump right in to Strategic Advantage.



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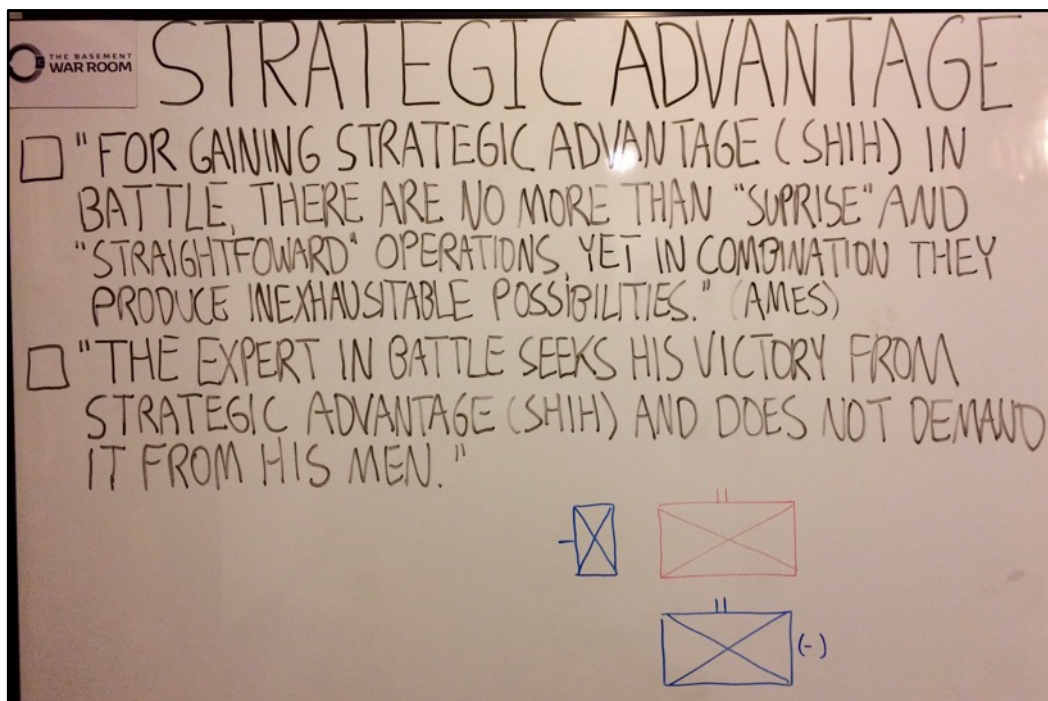
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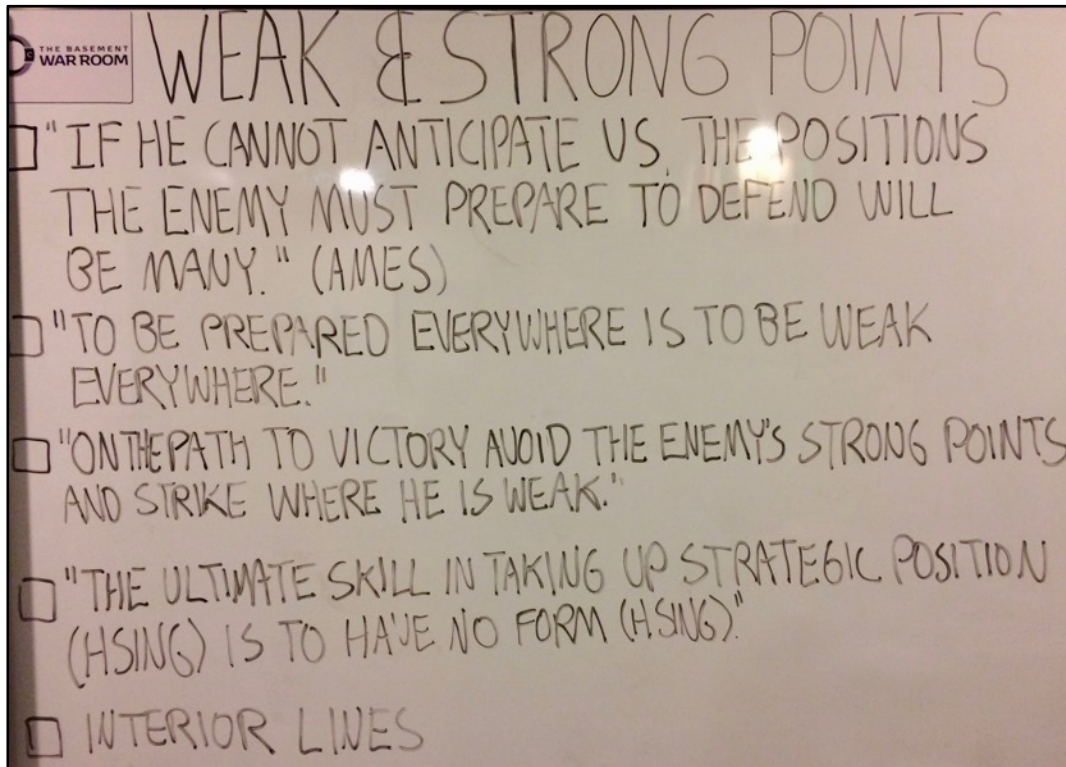
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BOARD 2: STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE

- Although this is translated “strategic” Sun Tzu is talking about tactics.
- “Generally in battle use the “straightforward” to engage the enemy and the “surprise” to win the victory.” (Ames)
- “For gaining strategic advantage (shih) in battle, there are no more than “surprise” and “straightforward” operations, yet in combination, they produce inexhaustible possibilities. “Surprise” and “straightforward” operations give rise to each other endlessly just as a ring is without a beginning or an end. And who can exhaust their possibilities?” (Ames)
 - Griffith translates this as normal and extraordinary forces.
 - Giles translates this as direct and indirect methods.
- Flanking is a common example of using the “surprise, extraordinary or indirect” method.
- “The expert at battle seeks his victory from strategic advantage (shih) and does not demand it from his men.”
- The “CONOP” or concept of operations brief is an example of demanding victory from subordinates because the process asks them to develop plans while impeding their initiative.

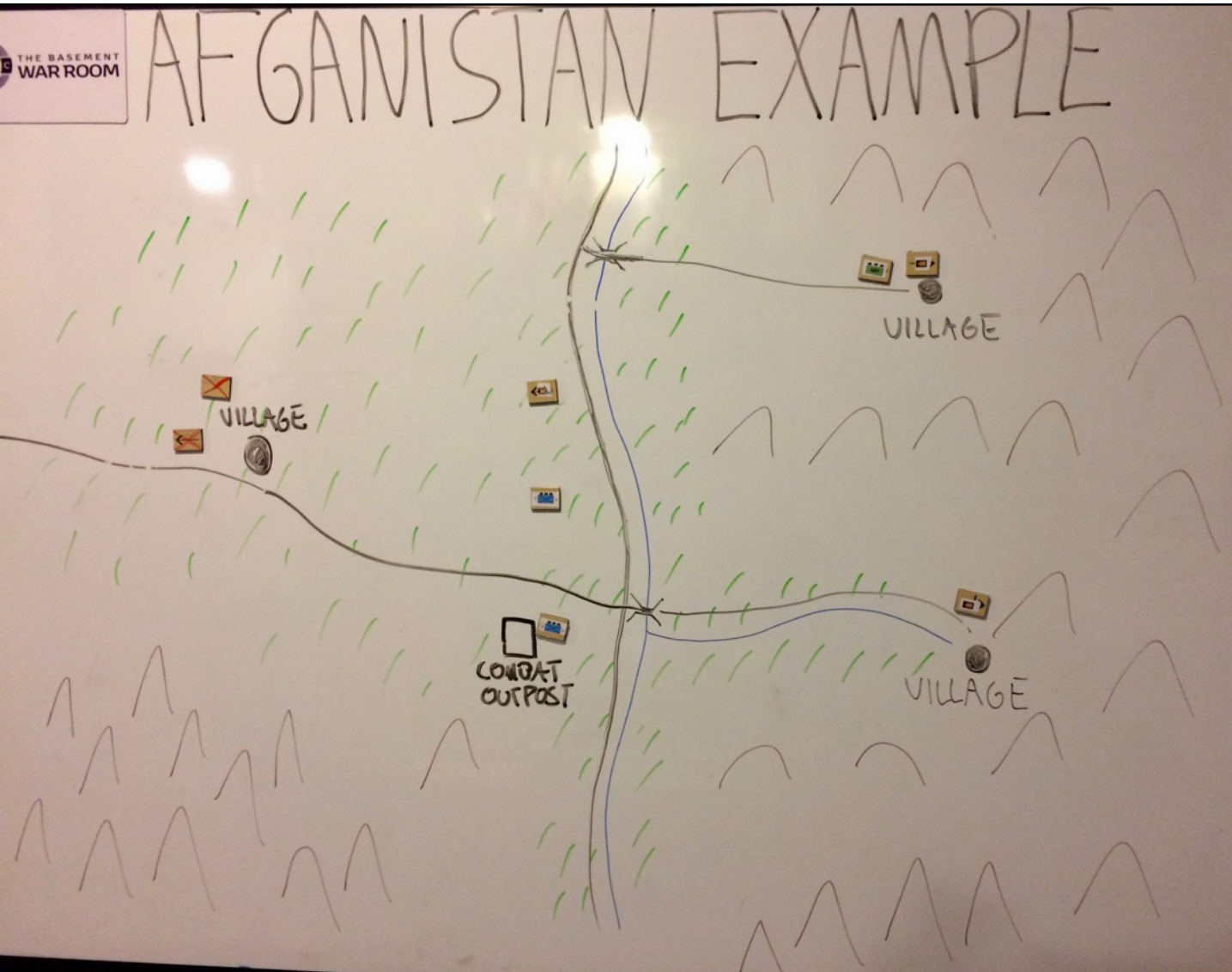




BOARD 3: WEAK AND STRONG POINTS

- My first thought when I read Chapter 6 is terrain and the parallel of “key terrain” and “decisive terrain” from US Army Doctrine. However, Sun Tzu is not discussing terrain, he is discussing the correlation of forces – numerical strength.
- "If he cannot anticipate us, the positions the enemy must prepare to defend will be many. And if the positions he must prepare to defend are many, then any unit we engage in battle will be few in number." (Ames)
- "To be prepared everywhere is to be weak everywhere." (Ames)
- "Just as the flow of water avoids high ground and rushes to the lowest point, so on the path to victory avoid the enemy's strong points and strike where he is weak." (Ames)
- "The ultimate skill in taking up a strategic position (hsing) is to have no form (hsing). If your position is formless (hsing), the most carefully concealed spies will not be able to get a look at it, and the wisest counsellors will not be able to lay plans against it." (Ames)
- Interior Lines. This doctrinal concept also address achieving a superior correlation of force.

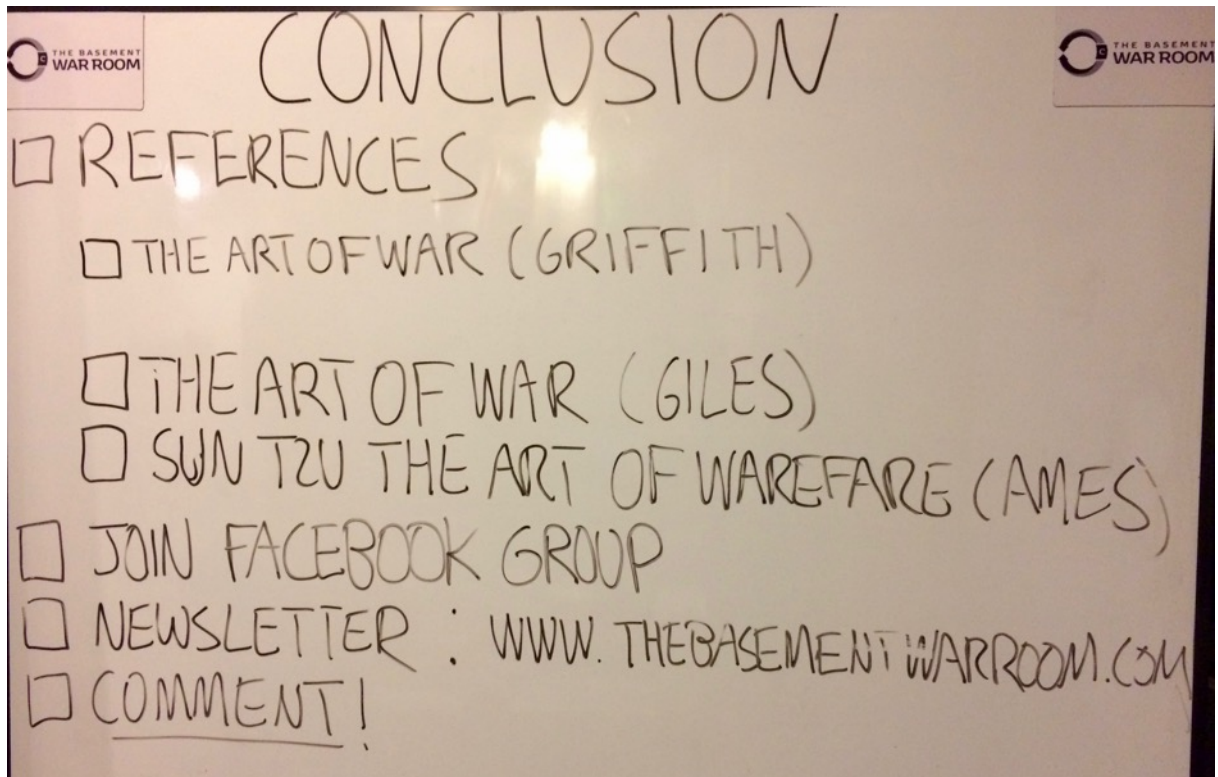




BOARD 4: AFGHANISTAN EXAMPLE

- The government is much stronger than the insurgents (has far greater numbers) but....
- The government is required to be prepared everywhere - what citizen can be left undefended? Sun Tzu "To be prepared everywhere is to be weak everywhere." (Ames)
- Having no form = not able to distinguish the insurgents from the population. The government can not discern who the insurgents are and where they will attack.





REFERENCES AND CONCLUSION

References:

- The Art of War and Other Classics of Eastern Philosophy* - Canterbury Classics (Giles Translation 1910).
Sun Tzu The Art of Warfare - Ballantine Books (Ames Translation 1993).
Sun Tzu The Art of War - Oxford University Press (Griffith Translation 1963).

Conclusion:

- If this presentation was valuable, **please join my facebook group “Lessons of the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars.”** <https://www.fb.com/groups/WarLessons/>
- **Please share on social media and comment!**
- Additionally, if you would like a look behind the scenes of The Basement War Room, **sign up for the newsletter on my website.** <https://mailchi.mp/83e750381519/thebasementwarroom>
- Thank you for watching!

