

## STRATEGIC SURPRISE–DETERMINING PRINCIPLE FOR THE MODERN CONFIGURATION OF THE PHYSIOGNOMY AND DYNAMICS OF THE CONTEMPORARY MILITARY ART

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**Abstract:** *The analysis of the recent armed conflicts reveals the fact that for conferring the necessary conditions to the headquarters and subordinated troops so that they could act strictly according to the coordinates of the plan of the strategic offensive operation, throughout the whole period it is conducted, promoting the initiative [1] and freedom of action [2] becomes imperative, at all levels, by imprinting and maintaining the surprising [3] and ingenious character of the combat manoeuvres and procedures, ensuring the envisaged rhythm of advancement and trying to suppress all the attempts of counter manoeuvre of the enemy. Consequently, the existence of the correlation surprise - strategic offensive operation can not be circumvented from the content of any plan of attack, as it constitutes the most important argument for its implementation and validation. So, no matter how obvious the superiority of the forces and means of the attacker are and whatever the context, it intends to act in a surprising manner to achieve the objectives with maximum efficiency and in the shortest time possible.*

**Keywords:** strategic surprise, the principles of the armed struggle, decisional initiative, freedom of action, misinformation of the enemy, determinations of surprise, strategic offensive operation

### Introduction

The process of in-depth analysis of the history of military art highlights the continuous upgrading of the operational devices, by reconfiguring and adapting their structure to be consistent with the strong influence exerted upon them by the new types of military equipment and weapons that have become, over time, part of the equipment of the troops.

Although war, as a general social phenomenon, is characterized by a multi-millennial existence, its detailed study configures the idea according to which a relatively small number — several dozens—of battles have caused really significant leaps in the evolution of military

art. Of course, these armed conflicts — which represent true models of analysis for the specialists in the field being studied, from different perspectives, in all the strategic schools in the world - had been preceded, overlapped and were finalized by ingenious manoeuvres, of an obviously offensive nature, were executed in a *surprising* manner and had decisive effects.

### 1. The actuality and complexity of surprise in the field of military action

Due to the multitude of its levels of reference, the general theoretical approach of surprise involves numerous difficulties resulting from a variety of analytical options expressed by established authors of

the field of military art. Thus, it is stated that it is necessary that surprise be integrated into the content of the plan of the operations - the measures meant to avoid surprise also have to be associated in this context -, or it is considered one of the most important principles of the armed struggle, or, on the contrary, it is excluded from its set of mandatory regulations because it is believed that it is a consequence of the random factors, resulting from the conduct of the warfare itself and from the specific of the theatres of operations [4].

The complexity of the analysis is also increased by the fact that surprise can be conceived only in close connection with what is revealed as unpredictable or even unknown in the armed struggle, a vast and diverse field of phenomena, which address, particularly the human psyche [5].

However, no matter how complex the study of the surprise is, there is a certainty, namely, the fact that all the military successes significant for the evolution of humankind were achieved through the application of actional forms and procedures that were very difficult or even impossible to guess by the adversary. But, always, these victories were the result of the practical, original and firm transposition — of course, with the means specific to each historical era —, of the laws and principles of armed struggle, even if, apparently,

following an incomplete contemporary analysis, determined by the insufficient information regarding the specific nature of the situation in which the action had to be taken, there results that these laws and principles were not fully respected.

The essence of surprise is represented by the unrepeatable character of the actions, determined by a conception of the innovative actions, materialized by the use of fighting techniques and weapons systems with characteristics superior to those previously used in armed struggles and expressed through the high level of operationalization of the forces, in its turn, materialized in the action itself, totally unexpected, from the battlefield.

Thus, surprise is the result of a forecasted, planned and organized action carried out in a manner and with a dynamics that is impossible or difficult to predict by the opponent, both in terms of the time and place, as well as in terms of the actional processes [6].

The large area of manifestation of the environments of confrontation in contemporary wars determines, as a fundamental condition of success, the manifestation, sequential or simultaneous, of the principle of surprise in all these fields.

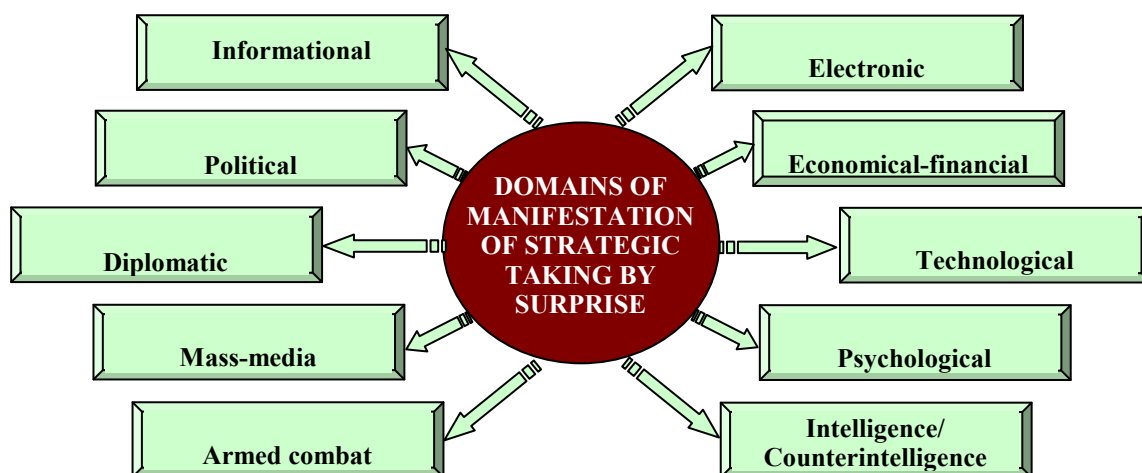


Figure 1: Domains of manifestation of strategic taking by surprise [7]

The element of reference of military art – armed combat – implies the analysis and definition of strategic taking by surprise

from at least four perspectives: technological [8], informational, conceptual and operational-actional.

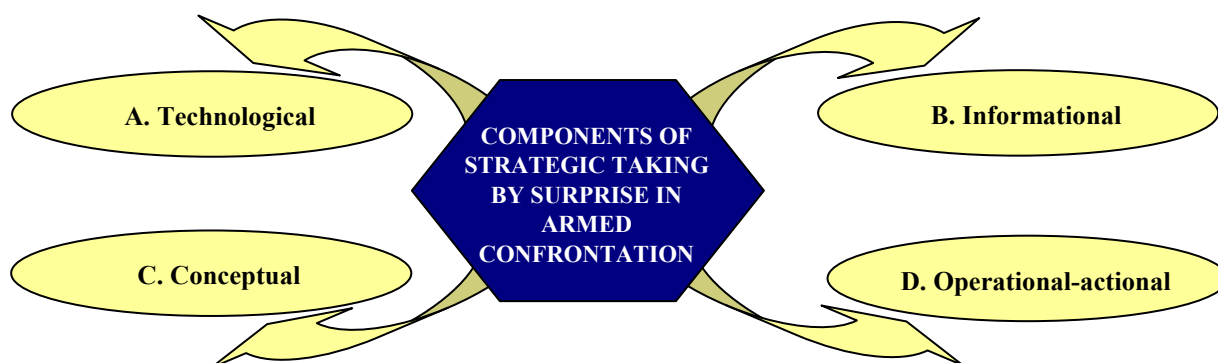


Figure 2: Components of strategic taking by surprise in the context of armed combat [9]

The analysis of strategic taking by surprise from the perspective of **military technologies** can be achieved without major impediments because it is extremely clearly highlighted by the whole history of warfare.

The use for the first time [10] of certain weapons and types of military technique initially determined the inefficient reaction or even the total lack of reaction from the adversary force.

In all the situations, the introduction in the equipment of troops of certain weapons or weapons systems which haven't been used on the battle field resulted in *taking the enemy by surprise*, with major direct consequences for the increase in the efficiency of the friendly forces actions, expansion of the operation areas and the compression of strategic time.

To this end, a quick recourse to the history of military art points to the decisive influence and the major changes produced on the armed combat by the new weapons or technologies, their enumeration being sufficient for determining the main moments of radical transformation in the physiognomy of warfare as a whole: the firing armament, the gun, the automobile, the battle ships, the automatic armament, the tank, the aircraft, the chemical weapon, the submarine, the rocket, the aircraft

carrier, the nuclear weapon, the military satellite, the outer space shuttle and platform.

In the whole history of warfare, the most compelling example of *total technological taking by surprise* is represented by the use of the nuclear weapon in August of 1945 on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In the general American-Japanese military confrontation, the *two nuclear blows produced a sudden, major technological and operational imbalance, determining the absolute efficientization of the law of the force rapport and the maximum compression of strategic time*, with an immediate essential consequence – the unconditional surrender of Japan.

**The informational component** of strategic taking by surprise is manifested on two main levels: getting the actual and timely information with regard to the real potential and intentions of the future adversary force; the permanent and efficient deception of the strategic command headquarters of the enemy forces regarding the military capabilities of the friendly forces and the conception of offensive operation.

**The conceptual component** of the strategic taking by surprise is to be found in the superiority of the idea of manoeuvre as

to the possibilities of counter manoeuvre of the enemy and manifests at the level of strategic offensive operation [11]. To this end, the conception of the plan, founded on the principles of taking the enemy by surprise, of the initiative and freedom of action ensures the timely and unexpected development of the manoeuvre of forces and means, simultaneously taking place with the application of measures of counter manoeuvre interdiction specified in the plan of enemy command headquarters.

From this perspective, an eloquent example is represented by the concept implemented by the German army extremely efficiently in the first part of the second world war, known as the „blitzkrieg”. The essence in the ideas of the „blitzkrieg” has remained the same in the military conflicts.

The subsequent military conflicts, including the contemporary ones – the concentration [12], *by surprise* [13] of the centre of gravity of the offensive force on certain political-military and economic objectives of great importance by simultaneously initiating air-terrestrial or air-maritime-terrestrial actions throughout the entire depth of the enemy position.

Therefore, in the context of the armed confrontation, the superiority of an operational plan to another will be highlighted by enabling the use of forces and means at one's disposal in an original, temporal and spatial manner [14], which the headquarters of the enemy does not expect and whose consequences on its own strategic position cannot be determined in due time.

As a key element of strategic taking by surprise, *its operational-actional component* determined the actual implementation of the purpose of any armed confrontation: the victory. Military headquarters, that planned and managed to coordinate military actions in a way and through processes that have no longer been utilized in the history of military art [15], characterized by ingenious and original manoeuvres, ensured a quick and efficient success [16].

The appropriate application of the operational-actional surprise element brought about the expected success in the military confrontation, even given a quantitative inferiority of forces and obvious means. The Romanian lords achieved such success in many situations, but the recent history of wars also argues in favour of the previous statement.

Hence, strictly in terms of the amount of forces and means, the troops that deployed strategic offensive operations during the two confrontations in the Persian Gulf were numerically lower, the overall ratio being of approximately 1/2. However, the superior concept of the use of technology and operational-actional surprise clearly led to a rapid achievement of the political and military objectives without entailing major losses in manpower, combat equipment and weapons.

A summary of the correlations between the components of strategic surprise is described in the following figure.

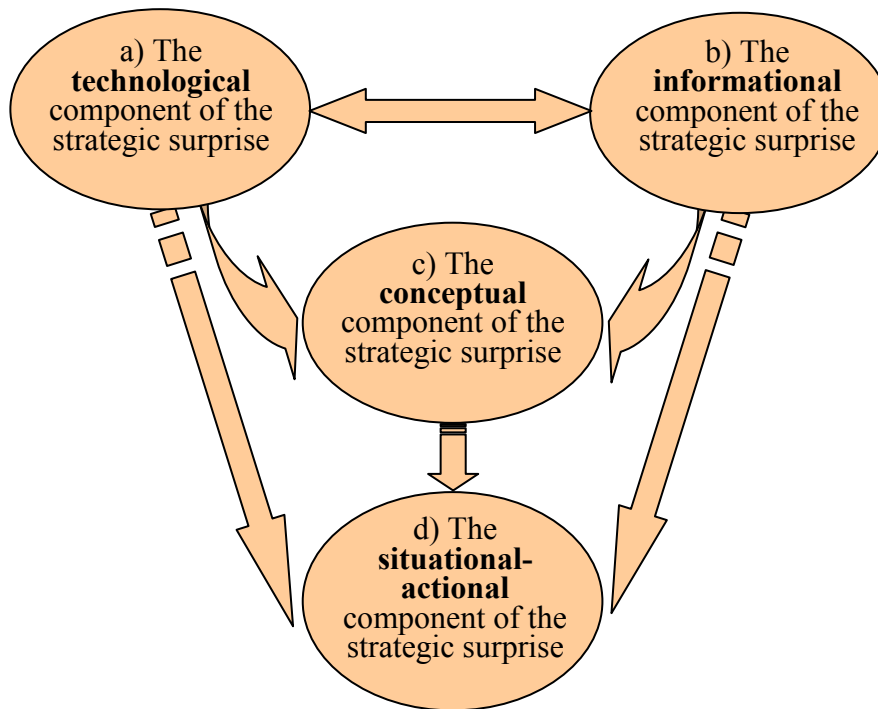


Figure 3: The correlation between the components of strategic surprise [17]

Obviously, *any military action planned by surprise involves engaging its own forces in a context other than the classical one, known and specific to prior conflicts*. Nonetheless, the geo-climatic conditions of the battle space, the possible existence in the arsenal of the enemy forces of technologies and weapons systems whose performance is insufficiently known and the inability to partially or totally decrypt elements of the contents of the defence plan of the enemy's headquarters are the main factors making the planning and coordination of operations by surprise more difficult and, therefore, *require risk-taking decisions*.

## 2. The relevance of surprise in the context of the other principles of an armed conflict

A thorough analysis of the number of the principles of an armed conflict highlights that the scientific approach in this respect varies from one strategic school to another. Nevertheless, the same study reveals that none of the internationally-recognized higher military education institutions ignores the importance of the

principle of surprise in the context of the modern armed confrontation.

Due to the fact that the principles of combat are inter-related and in order for the operation plan to be well-founded and to be easily transposed into practice, a logical relationship of the correlation between these elements is required in the operational field.

There are two major coordinates from the perspective of the correlation of the principle of strategic surprise with other principles specific to armed confrontations:

- the configuration of a set of principles that directly influence the possibility of strategic surprise, amplifying its effectiveness;

- there are also a number of other principles, which, in turn, translate in a practical manner only if preceded by the application of the principle of surprise.

As the principles of the armed combat are interrelated so that the operation plan is well founded and its implementation is assured in the operational field, a logical correlation between them is necessary.

The correlation between the principle of strategic surprise and other principles

specific to the armed confrontation results in two major alternatives:

- there appears a set of principles that directly influence the possibility of a strategic surprise, amplifying its effectiveness;

- there are also a number of other principles which, in their turn, can be put into practice only if preceded by the principle of surprise.

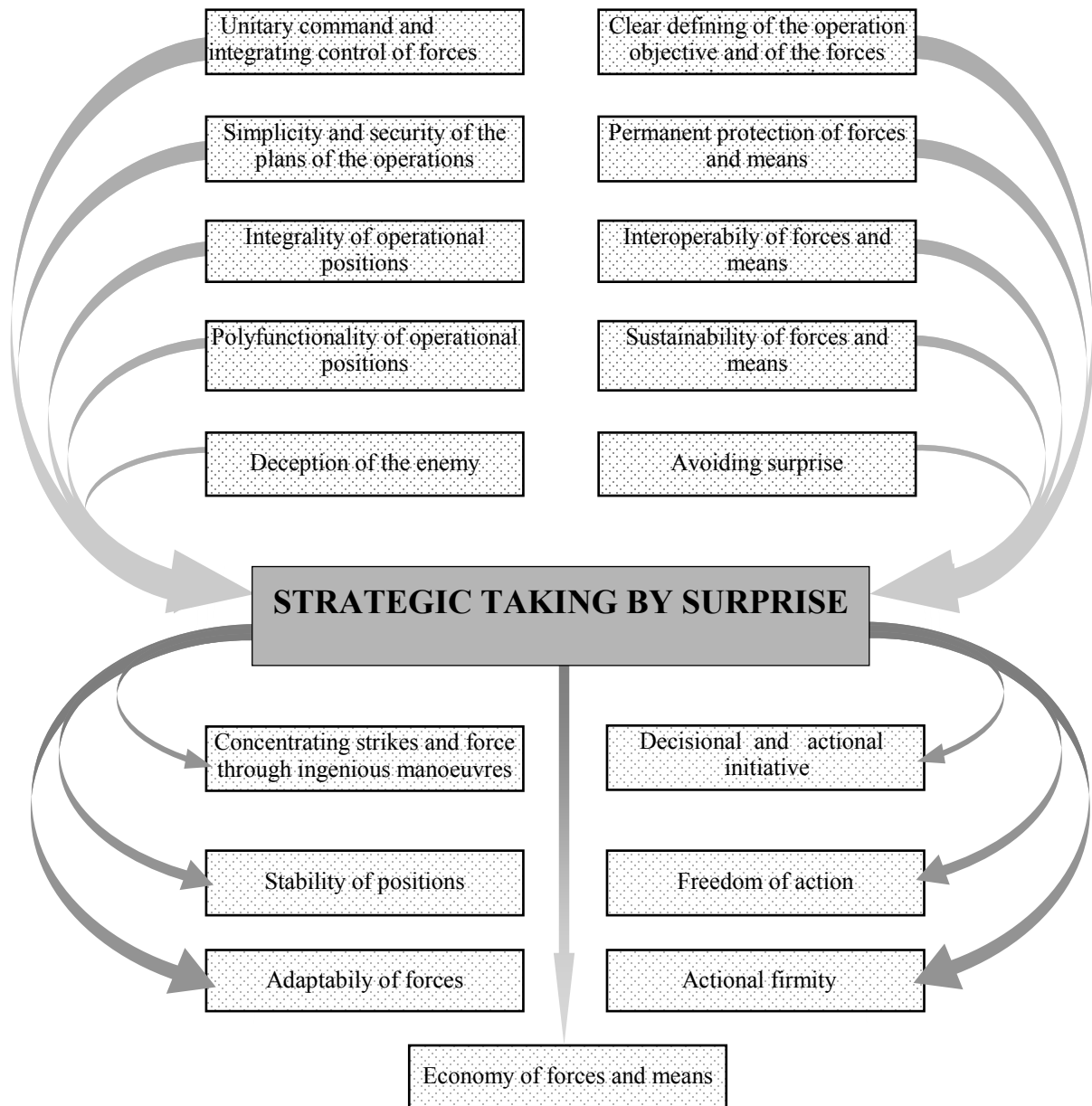


Figure 4: Direct influence of some principles of armed combat on strategic taking by surprise and its determinations as to the principles having an actional-operational role

The mentioned figure highlights the central place and role of taking by surprise in the general analytical context of the importance of all principles of armed combat. It is obvious that the principles

manifested in the preparing phase of the planned operation (concept of the plan and order of operation, setting the operational position, execution of air-naval strikes for disrupting the enemy position) are placed at

the top of figure no. 4, while the placing at the bottom of the figure in the case of the principles that, under the direct influence of strategic surprise, amplify the efficiency of the actions taking place during the proper strategic offensive operation.

## Conclusion

The concept of *strategic surprise* covers a large area, which *has maintained and consolidated the status of principle of armed combat* throughout the history of warfare. Thus, the statements according to which taking by surprise will diminish its well-established connotations up to having no validity in the political-military confrontations, characterised by informational over-technology, *are fundamentally unrealistic* [18]. The implications on the physiognomy of war and the obvious correlation with the other

principles of armed conflict do not allow the false perception of strategic surprise as being defined as a simple piece of information regarding the outbreak of hostilities because it was not a military secret right in the context of the most recent military conflicts. On the contrary, the final warnings launched at the highest international level to the political-military leaders with regard to their non-conformist attitude in the general contemporary geopolitical context was characterized by means of an accurate mentioning of the date of the outbreak of the offensive strategic operation within which *taking by surprise fully manifested* through all the four structural domains – informational, conceptual, particularly technological and operational-actional – *ensuring special efficiency to the planned actions*.

## References

- [1] Initiative (in combat) = the capacity of commanders and troops to act in conditions which are not imposed by the enemy, but due to their own purposes and intentions, relative to the overall situation. *It is achieved by ensuring freedom of action /.../. Cf. Lexicon militar*, Chişinău, Editura Saka, 1994, p. 182.
- [2] Freedom of action = principle of the military art consisting in creating the conditions necessary for the friendly actions to be prepared and executed according to the plans elaborated, without being prevented by the enemy or by unexpected factors. It is obtained by acquiring and preserving strategic initiative./.../. *Ibidem*, p. 204.
- [3] Surprise = result of an action designed, organized and executed so as to have an unexpected effect on the enemy, by finding him unprepared or by making it difficult for him to take countermeasures. It is a principle of the military art whose application contributes substantially to success in warfare. *Ibidem*, pp. 310-311.
- [4] Cf. Udeanu, Gheorghe, *Managementul securităţii naţionale*, Sibiu, Editura Academiei Forţelor Terestre „Nicolae Bălcescu”, 2012, p. 177.
- [5] Gl.mr. (r) Arsenie, Valentin, col. Sîrbu, Cornel, *Surprinderea în lupta armată*, Bucureşti, Editura Militară, 1993, p. 15.
- [6] Udeanu, Gheorghe, *op.cit.*, p. 178.
- [7] *Ibidem*.
- [8] However, the most controversial aspect of the air campaign was the detonation of atomic bombs on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The first nuclear weapons were developed within the US Manhattan Project, and the first one was thrown by plane B-29 named Enola Gay at 8:15 in the morning of August 6th. Approximately 100,000 people were killed then, and the world entered a new era of war. The dozens of bombers had needed several hours to destroy the city of Tokyo in March, compared to a few seconds and only one bomb used at Hiroshima. A second atomic bomb was dropped three days later on Nagasaki, where other 35 000 people were killed. In both cities, thousands of

other people would die later because of diseases caused by radiation and many others would suffer the rest of their lives because of delayed effects. The effects of prolonged air campaign and blockade, combined with the use of nuclear bombs and with the Soviet Union's declaration of war against Japan (August, 8) and the Japanese soldiers' increasing despair, caused Japan's capitulation on August 15.. Cf. Black, Jeremy, *Șaptezeci de mari bătălii ale tuturor timpurilor*, București, Editura Aquila '93, 2006, pp. 277-278.

[9] Udeanu, Gheorghe, *op.cit.*, p. 179.

[10] The war, called Operation Iraqi Freedom, began on the night of March 19, a few hours after the ultimatum issued by Bush to Saddam Hussein had expired. It was going to be a new kind of highly effective war using a minimum number of soldiers and a limited but aggressive participation at land, unlike the comprehensive development of forces in the Gulf War. The following nights, Baghdad was hit repeatedly with cruise missiles and airstrikes performed by B-1, B-2 and B-52 bombers, aimed at headquarters and operational command centers. No Iraqi aircraft took off. About 70 per cent of the ammunition used by aircraft was "smart" missiles (precision-guided weapons), and the 30 percent normal missiles (non-guided). In 1991, there were only 10 percent of "smart" weapons.

Cf. Black, Jeremy, *op.cit.*, p. 288.

[11] When conceiving the plan and establishing the standard measurement, focus only on what is appropriate! Cf. Sun Tzu II, *Nobila artă a războiului*, Pitești, Editura Incitatus, 2004, p. 57.

[12] Strategy has simple but merciless laws. One of the principles is concentration. The main "secret" of strategy is to concentrate a crushing force against the enemy's most vulnerable point at the decisive moment. In order to concentrate the force, you must have it in reserve. Cf. Suvorov, Victor, *Spărgătorul de gheață*, Iași, Editura Polirom, 1995, p. 18.

[13] For the landing in the Malvinas Islands, the British troops executed intense fires on most beaches permitting this action.

Surprisingly, the British maritime landing was successfully achieved during the night of May 20 – 21, 1982, starting with 12.15 a.m. (although friendly regulations stated that, in principle, landing begins at dawn), with a balance of forces unfavorable to actions in terrestrial environment (1 / 3), and in an area they had not done fire and where the relief was so rough and unsuitable for an offensive action from the sea that the Argentine commanding structure decided to ignore the minimum measures of safety defensive in the area (n.a.).

[14] Attack the enemy's weak parts with maximum of force! Cf. Sun Tzu, *Arta războiului*, Oradea, Editura Antet, 1996, p. 36.

[15] The unpredictability of the ways in which a war can wage means boundless adaptability. When surprise attacks are repeated many times, they become conventional and lose their strategic value. Cf. Sun Tzu II, *Nobila artă a războiului*, Pitești, Editura Incitatus, 2004, p. 29.

[16] On June 5, 1967, at 07.45 a.m., Israel launched the first decisive air *blitzkrieg* in history, attacking dozens of airfields in Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Iraq, destroying over 400 aircraft on the ground and losing only 26. / ... / This blow, skillfully coordinated, led to Israel winning the war in a few hours. Cf. Regan, Geoffrey, *Bătălii care au schimbat istoria lumii*, București, Editura Enciclopedia RAO, 2004, pp. 212-213.

[17] Udeanu, Gheorghe, *op.cit.*, p. 182.

[18] *Ibidem*, p. 183.

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