

THE DETERMINANT ROLE OF MISINFORMATION IN THE MANIFESTATION OF THE PRINCIPLE OF OPERATIONAL SURPRISE

Gheorghe UDEANU

“Nicolae Bălcescu” Land Forces Academy, Sibiu, Romania
gheorghe.udeanu@yahoo.com

Abstract: *Surprising the opponent in the main areas of strategic confrontation - information, political, economic, technological, ideological, psychological, espionage/counter-intelligence, military - was a priority objective of the general policy of the states, regardless of the analyzed historical age. In this framework, the most active and effective component of taking by surprise - **misinformation** - has always been in the attention of decision-makers in order to determine a distorted perception of reality, diminishing alertness and reducing the ability of an opponent to act or react [1].*

Keywords: surprising, misinformation, military operation, geopolitics, geostrategy

1. Introduction

The general theoretical approach to **taking by surprise**, due to its many reference levels, involves many difficulties resulting from a variety of analytical options expressed by established authors in the field of military art.

The complexity of the analysis is amplified by the fact that taking by surprise can only be conceived *in close connection with what appears unpredictable or even unknown in the armed conflict*, a vast and diversified field of phenomena, which primarily addresses the human psyche.

However complex the study of taking by surprise may be, there is one certainty, namely, that *all significant military successes for the evolution of humanity have been obtained by applying some actional forms or procedures, which are very difficult or even impossible to be guessed by the opponent.*

The essence of taking by surprise is the unrepeatable character of action, determined by a conception of innovative actions, materialized by the use of combat techniques and weapon systems with

superior characteristics to those previously used in the armed confrontations and expressed through the high level of operationalization of the forces, in turn, materialized in the very unexpected action on the battlefield.

So, taking by surprise is the result of an action that was envisaged, planned, organized, and conducted in a manner and dynamics impossible or difficult to predict by the opponent, both in terms of time and place, and actional procedures.

In order to achieve the maximum efficiency of the operational surprise, the Commandments which have proposed the application of this principle of the armed conflict have directed their conceptual and actional efforts on two main directions: determining the essential information that formed the foundation of the plan of the opponent's operation, simultaneously with *his constant **misinformation** on the own intentions regarding the use of subordinate structures.*

The analysis of the history of military art reveals that the misinformation of the opponent over the real intentions of using

the armed force has certainly been in the attention of the commanders and commandments in all historical eras, being applied with the means specific to the period.

In order to reveal the modern character and the decisive role of misinforming the adversary in obtaining decisive victories for the contemporary evolution of humanity, we have selected some operations carried out in the context of the Second World War, as well as in some post-war armed conflicts.

2. The taking by surprise-misinformation correlation in the context of the armed clashes in the Second World War

*The first analysis refers to the **Battle of Halhin Gol**, conducted between May 12 and August 31, 1939, between the Japanese Imperial Army troops and large units of the Red Army, and has led to major implications in the geostrategic context of the Second World War, slightly similar to the attack on the American military fleet at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.*

The armed confrontation took place in northeastern Mongolia, in the Halhin Gol River area, the parties invoking the failure to observe the border regime between the Manchurian province - occupied by the Kwantung Army - and the Mongolian territory, politically and militarily controlled by Moscow.

Within this framework, ***the misinformation of the Japanese command by the Soviet experts reached the highest possible efficiency levels.** The essence of misleading was the intense promotion of measures and actions that suggested the obvious preparation of a highly articulated, deeply installed, but immovable defensive system, based on fortifications and minefields, concomitantly with planning an ample airborne offensive operation, in a regime of complete concealment and total secrecy.*

The main features of the theater of operations were the extreme geo climatic conditions, with temperatures above 40⁰C, which caused serious dysfunctions to the

combat techniques and weapons, especially from a Japanese perspective, and the lack of a territorial infrastructure necessary for the creation of force groups and their material support.

In this respect, it is significant that, from the perspective of the Russian forces, the nearest railway station was over 650 kilometers away, which imposed a huge logistical effort, which *the Japanese Command had found to be **impossible to achieve***. But, under the pressure of the imperative orders that the commander of the Soviet troops, the future Marshal Gheorghi Constantinovici Yukov gave, the *Russian general staff managed to concentrate impressive forces in the operative depth, undetected by the Japanese reconnaissance aviation: 58,000 people, over 500 tanks and 250 planes.*

Simultaneously, for the continued misinformation of the Japanese Command, the defensive disposition of the contact troops was directly amplified. "While Jukov was secretly preparing a major offensive, his soldiers gave the impression of preparing a static defensive line. Badly encoded messages were being sent, where more and more material was needed for pillboxes, the speakers emitted tumbling sounds, flyers with the title *What the Soviet soldier should know about defense* were distributed in huge quantities while some of them fell into the hands of the enemy. During this time, Jukov brought tanks for reinforcements during the night. And his truck drivers were exhausted, carrying ammunition reserves for the offensive on the awful roads from the end of rail to the front." [2]

The Soviet defense, made up of three infantry divisions and a parachutist brigade, suffered the shock of the three successive attacks by the Japanese troops, succeeding after a month of violent confrontations in stopping the Japanese offensive and blocking their full advance. All the Kwantung Army's supplies had been consumed in an attempt to penetrate the Russian defense front, which *managed to*

absorb the majority of the Japanese forces in a huge trap.

In this extremely favorable context, on the morning of Sunday, August 20, the Soviet Command launched the surprise attack, preceded by a violent fire prepared to last for over three hours. With a double enveloping maneuver, the Soviet troops, made up of tanks and mechanized units, constantly supported by aviation, surrounded the main group of the Japanese forces, causing losses of over 61,000 casualties.

The humiliating defeat of the Kwantung Army caused a real consternation in Tokyo, **determining major changes in geopolitical visions**, in the sense of total renunciation of the idea of armed confrontation with Soviet Russia and concentration of military efforts against the French, Dutch and English colonies in Southeast Asia, as well as against the US Navy in the Pacific.

Against the background of the Second World War, *the main consequence of the Battle of Halhin Gol, in the context of which misinformation played a major role, was the signing of the Soviet-Japanese Negotiation Pact in April 1941, with only a few weeks before the Operation Barbarossa - the invasion of the Soviet Union by Germany.*

"Tokyo's subsequent refusal to attack the Soviet Union in the winter of 1941 would play a critical role at the turning point of the war, both in the Far East and in Hitler's deadly battle with the Soviet Union." [3]

The second example of the decisive role of misinformation in the context of armed confrontations is the one produced in the German offensive, in the spring and summer of 1940, against Western Europe.

In order to mislead the French, Belgian and Dutch Armed Forces, the German High Command launched the idea that the main attack would be on the Maginot Fortification Line and, in this respect, initiated intense preparations of the base for launching the offensive attack, concentrating in the area units and large units specialized in this type of action,

improving the infrastructure and intensifying the radio network conversations, which they deliberately had not protected enough, in order to distort the perception of the adversary general staffs with regard to the real configuration of the German disposition.

The misinformation plan worked perfectly, so that on May 9, 1940, less than 24 hours prior to the launch of the Air Force operation against the Netherlands, a war correspondent noticed that the Belgian soldiers were planting pansies around the barracks.

There were rumors about a possible German attack, reports that boat bridges were being assembled near the border, but in Brussels they were all ignored. Many seemed to think that Hitler was going to attack in the south, in the Balkans, not in the West. In any case, few imagined that he would invade four countries - the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg and France - at the same time.

In Paris, life continued unhindered by war. The capital had never been so beautiful. The Chestnuts had blossomed. The caf  s were full. The horse races were running according to the normal schedule, and the elegant women were crowding at Ritz. The most striking picture was that of the crowd of officers and soldiers on the streets because the General Staff had just restored the permits.

In the UK, the Parliament had met and anxiously discussed the replacement of the prime minister.

In Berlin, Hitler dictated to the armies on the western front his directive for the next day. At 21.00, the Gdansk code word was passed down to all army groups. *The secret character had been so well preserved that, in spite of all the delays of the attack, some German officers had been surprised, being away from their regiments when they received the order to move.* [4]

Simultaneously with the exertion of pressure on the Maginot line to maintain as many French divisions as possible in this area, the great German units launched the

air-terrorist operation against the Netherlands, as well as the French defense maneuver, *instantly crossing the Ardeni Mountains and completely surprising the Franco-British allied forces.*

In the context described, we note the use of airborne troops, the use of armored vehicles on precisely defined directions and at a rate that surpassed even the forecasts of the German command, as well as of the special forces, dressed in Dutch or Belgian uniforms or disguised as tourists, who had been infiltrated, even before the offensive began, into the capitals of Luxembourg, Belgium and the Netherlands in order to mark the main targets to be hit by the aviation or conquered by the paratroopers. [5]

Consequently, *the disinformation of the French, Belgian, Dutch and British Commands worked very well, ensuring the plenary manifestation of the principle of taking by surprise and the attainment of the pace of advancement of the great German units so fast that practically the operation of conquering the four Western European states took less than 3 weeks.*

3. The decisive role of disinformation for the manifestation of the taking by surprise principle in the context of post-war armed conflicts

*From the post-war period, in order to highlight the role of disinformation in military art, we have selected 3 examples: the Arab-Israeli wars of 1967 and 1973, and the Argentine-British Army confrontation in the Malvine Islands (Falkland), held in 1982. In the context of **the Arab-Israeli war of June 1967**, also known as the **6-day War**, due to the fact that the Israeli army was able to surprise the armed forces of four states - Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and Iraq - **misinformation played a decisive role.***

Thus, on the morning of 5 June, at 7.45, *Israel launched the first decisive aerial blitzkrieg in history*, attacking dozens of airfields in Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Iraq, destroying over 400 planes on the ground and losing only 26.

The Israeli Miraj and Mystère airplanes, flying low to avoid being detected by the Arab radar screens, acted so surprisingly that, for example, when dozens of planes were already wrecked in flames, the Cairo West control tower was transmitting "We are being attacked ... We are being attacked ... ", [6] without being able to tell the source of the aerial offensive.

A particularly relevant fact is also the one about the attack time - 07.45, when the Egyptian pilots were in their personal cars going to work, to the airbase, or were having their meal in the mess hall, which amplified the lack of reaction of the Egyptian aviation and the total chaos which was established within the armed forces, including the Egyptian High Command.

Without any operative pause, after the complete destruction of the Egyptian airplanes on the ground, the Israeli airlines simultaneously redirected their attack on the Syrian, Jordanian and Iraqi aviation, which they also took by surprise, mostly being aligned on airfields, and destroyed them in a few dozens of minutes.

Following the 6-day War, Israel increased its territory four times and demonstrated to the entire world that it possessed a high-speed army capable of fighting simultaneously on two or three fronts.

The desire for revenge of the Arab states led to the totally surprising launch of an extensive Egyptian offensive operation over the Suez Canal, **on the day of Yom Kippur** (October 26, 1973 - Day of Reconciliation), a day of great significance in the Jewish people's consciousness, when practically the whole society is experiencing moments of silence and profound reflection, reuniting within each family and spending time with their loved ones.

So the day chosen, as well as the time when the offensive on the Suez Canal began at 14:00, highlights the maximum attention that the Egyptian Command gave so as to surprise the Israeli forces and their reserve in a state of maximum relaxation.

In order to misinform the Israeli intelligence services, in previous years in October, the

large Egyptian units made extensive troop deployments near the Israeli borders, prompting the Israeli command to appreciate that all Egyptian troop concentrations at the border of the peninsula Sinai were part of the same scenario for the instruction of the Arab troops and were not, in fact, the prelude to a genuine and extensive offensive operation. [7]

Initially, the pace of advancement of the Egyptian divisions was the expected one, carrying out the taking by surprise along the entire attack front of the Suez Canal. But, *benefiting from the world's most advanced mobilization system*, in spite of all the initial large losses, the Israeli army balanced the situation, including on the Syrian front, and gradually took over the strategic initiative, recapturing the territories occupied by the great Egyptian and Syrian units.

In the context of the Argentinian-British war, from May to June 1982, misinformation consisted of conducting operational procedures for the British maritime assault that did not respect even the most elementary provisions in their own combat regulations.

In this respect, regarding the use of maritime attack, in the British Army regulations, as in all the norms in most armies of the world, the following main provisions were specified:

- the assault on the landing beaches should be launched after a strong 2-3 hour fire preparation, which was to neutralize the defense;
- in order to maintain the attack directions against the beaches, the offensive from the sea should start at dawn, thus ensuring the necessary visibility;
- the landing should occur on beaches with straight, smooth slopes that allow the speeding up of transport vessels to the immediate vicinity of the shore and ensure the rapid maritime assault.

In fact, on May 21, 1982, *the British maritime attack took place in complete disagreement with these provisions*, as follows:

- the action of the maritime attack began at midnight at 00.15, on a total darkness;
- no fire preparation for the offensive took place on the beaches chosen for landing, but in other areas;
- the assault on the islands took place in the areas with the most rugged beaches and rocky cliffs, where the Argentine forces almost naturally paid no attention to fighting safety measures.

Within just three days, the British Armed Forces recaptured the archipelago although they attacked with 3,000 soldiers against a defensive system prepared for a long time and occupied by 12,000 Argentinians, thus in a ratio of numerically low forces of $\frac{1}{4}$. The explanation of this exceptional success lies in *the masterful application of the misinformation and total taking by surprise of the Argentine troops* defending the Malvine Islands, as well as in *the high level of operationalization of the British expeditionary forces*. [8]

In the same logic of highlighting the fundamental role of misinformation, distraction and execution of the attack when the opponent is the least prepared or his forces are at the minimum threshold of alert, is also the launch of the occupation attack of Afghanistan by the Soviet invasion force, in 1979 at Christmas, when all Christians celebrated the birth of Jesus Christ, and thus the reaction of international public opinion was tardy and totally ineffective, or *the Panama Operation of the US Armed Forces*, which was launched and unfolded in the days when, *for the first time in history*, a revolution aimed at abolishing a dictatorial regime - the December 1989 Revolution in Romania - was broadcast live by the national television, and within this framework, the attention of international public opinion was captured by the dramatic events taking place in Bucharest. During the Panamanian operation, the US Special Forces acted so surprisingly that there was virtually no reaction of the adverse forces.

4. Conclusions

The strategic taking by surprise, *whose effects can be greatly amplified through subtle techniques of misinforming the opponent*, is a concept with a wide range of scope. Throughout the history of the wars, it has maintained and consolidated its status as the armed conflict principle.

Therefore, the assertions that in the next political-military confrontations, characterized by informational super-technology, the taking by surprise will diminish up to the annulment of its consecrated connotations *are fundamentally unrealistic*.

The implications for the physiognomy of the war and the obvious correlation with the other principles of the armed conflict will not allow the false perception of strategic surprise to be defined as mere information

on the moment of starting the hostilities, since this did no more represent a military secret, even in the context of the recent military conflicts

On the contrary, the end of all warnings given from the highest international level to some political-military leaders, regarding their attitude inconsistent with the general context of contemporary geopolitics, was characterized by the precise expression of the date of the initiation of the strategic offensive operation, in which the *taking by surprise manifested itself through all the four fundamental components* – informational, conceptual, and in particular technological and operational-actional – giving the planned actions a great deal of efficiency.

References

- [1] For an in-depth analysis of the huge scope and depth of misinformation, we recommend the volume *Ferește-mă, Doamne de prieteni*, by author Wats Larry.
- [2] Beevor Anthony, *Al Doilea Război Mondial*, București, Editura RAOCLASS, 2013, p. 28.
- [3] *Ibidem*, p. 30.
- [4] *Ibidem*, pp. 93-113.
- [5] *Contra.*, In *Mitul Blitzkrieg-ului*, Lieutenant Colonel Frieser Karl-Heinz PhD demotes the concept of blitzkrieg war by pointing out that, in the operations carried out by the German army in 1940, their fulminant success did not result from Hitler's decisions, but was determined by the gambling and the exceptional initiatives of the commanders on the front (Guderian, von Manstein), who ignored the orders of the dictator. "*The uncertainty factors, anyway inherent in each action, existed at the Ardennes crossing and the crossing of the Meuse River, and were so numerous that the entire operation, and not just once, hung on a hair*", p. 18
- [6] Geoffrey Regan, *Bătălii care au schimbat istoria lumii*, București, Editura RAO, 2002, p. 212.
- [7] Otto Hans-Dieter, *Lexiconul erorilor militare*, Pitești, Editura Paralela 45, 2005, pp. 225-227.
- [8] For details on the complexity of the 1982 Armenian-British Armed Conflict, we recommend the work *Războiul din Falkland*, by author Gologan Mircea.