The Victims of Success:

How Complacency Bred Israeli Intelligence Failure

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Abstract

This paper inquires into the conditions under which intelligence failures occur. This question is critical in understanding both past security failures and preventing surprise attacks in the future. To address this question, I test three separate Israeli cases—two intelligence failures and one intelligence success—against three potential explanations. While alternative factors like analytical failure and confirmation bias played varying roles in the examined intelligence failures, success-induced complacency emerges as the most plausible condition for surprise attacks. This factor didn't just contribute to intelligence failures; a lack of complacency also helped produce Israel's 1967 War success—highlighting the theory's generalizability. This theory warns intelligence analysts against excessively confident assumptions, instructing them to constantly evaluate their preconceived notions and to adjust them when necessary.

I. Introduction

Despite the advanced technological reach of modern intelligence agencies, security threats still slip through the cracks. From Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor to Al-Qaeda's Sept. 11 attack on the World Trade Center, these sorts of security failures have grown prominent enough to warrant thoughtful study and deliberation. Intelligence agencies, like any government bureaucracy, are prone to human error, especially when facing particularly shrewd adversaries. This reality prompts an important question: Under what conditions do intelligence efforts fail to occur, while others succeed? Amid a bloody conflict in Ukraine spurred by a Russian surprise attack and in anticipation of potential Chinese escalation against Taiwan, this question bears significant relevance both in the present and the future. If intelligence agencies are more cognizant of their own structural or strategic limitations, they will be better equipped to proactively neutralize security threats. To that end, this paper intends to examine the most prominent surprise attacks in Israel's history to assess and identify the common root causes of intelligence failures.

To answer this paper's central question, I conducted a comparative analysis of three separate cases, with the first two coming from Israel's early history and the third coming last year. Two of these events represent major intelligence failures, while one represents a major intelligence success. The two examples of failure I selected are Egypt and Syria's surprise attack on Oct. 6, 1973 and Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023 attack against Israel. Both of these examples represent some of the most damaging intelligence failures in the nation's history and sparked costly wars. While occurring in vastly different time periods and contexts—Israel in 2023 possessed greater military and security power than it did in 1973, just 25 years after the nation was established—identifying failures common to both incidents could help explain why surprise

attacks of this magnitude can slip through the cracks. The remaining case, on the other hand, concerns a prominent intelligence success, which occurred directly prior to the intelligence failure of 1973.

Collectively, this research design deals with one country, two surprise attacks, and one intelligence success—an intentionally paralleled research approach.[1] In each event, a combination of factors led to two distinct dependent outcomes: either an intelligence failure or an intelligence success. To begin this study, I first present three plausible elements: analytical failure, confirmation bias, and success-induced complacency. To evaluate the merits of each of these factors, I utilized both theoretical scholarship and records of practical decision making. The path to identifying valid conditions required matching theoretical explanations for security failures with concrete actions taken by government actors prior to the incidents. Although the former two theories do contribute to the broader understanding of intelligence failures, the theory of analytical failure lacks explanatory depth, while the confirmation bias theory doesn't hold up as well when tested through a negative case. Thus, by analyzing these three events, I identified success-induced complacency as the condition most likely to produce intelligence failure.

II. Causes & Conditions For Intelligence Failure

A number of theories offer reasonable explanations for the occurrence of intelligence failures.[2] A common hypothesis, about which "most scholars and practitioners who write about intelligence agree," involves an analytical failure to incorporate pieces of intelligence into a broader picture.[3] An alternative explanation concerns confirmation bias, a cognitive tendency that essentially functions as a screening mechanism filtering information based on whether it

[1] See 8–9 for further detail.
[2] This paper defines intelligence failure as an inability to perceive and defend against security threats, whether that be because of incomplete information collection or faulty analysis.
[3] Dahl. "Why Does Intelligence Fail, And How Can It Succeed?", 7

conforms with one's prior opinions and assumptions.[4] Such a tendency could compel analysts to ignore potentially critical information if it contradicts his or her assumptions. Third, success-based complacency drives analysts to cling to previously successful intelligence strategies, even if such approaches are no longer optimal. Together, these three theories represent plausible conditions for intelligence failure.

a. A Failure To "Connect the Dots"

While surprise attacks and national security failures inevitably shake a nation's psyche, they don't necessarily come as a complete shock to intelligence agencies.[5] Oftentimes, revealing clues and signs emerge years prior to intelligence failures, hinting at the calamity to come. Thus, one compelling explanation for the cause of security failures concerns not inept intelligence collection, but rather insufficient intelligence analysis. In these cases, analysts possess much of the information necessary to stop surprise attacks before they happen, yet fail to do so because of "an inability on the part of intelligence authorities to 'connect the dots' of existing information."[6] The "connect-the-dots" theory of intelligence failures is simultaneously reassuring and alarming. On one hand, the theory posits that agencies are wholly capable of identifying intelligence sufficient to dismantle surprise attacks; on the other hand, the theory highlights agencies' faulty analysis as the critical factor in intelligence failures. For this theory to hold true, the examined cases will need to demonstrate that actionable intelligence existed prior to the given event, demonstrating the likelihood of an attack. What could undermine this theory, however, would be a lack of prior intelligence clues. The plausibility of this theory rests on whether the relevant factor is an analytical error or an intelligence-gathering error.

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[4] See 5–6 for further detail.
[5] This paper defines a surprise attack as a deceptive assault launched without prior suspicion or warning. From Israel's Mossad and Shin Bet to the United States' CIA and FBI, intelligence agencies are tasked with preventing such surprise attacks and protecting against national security threats both internal and external.
[6] Dahl. "Why Does Intelligence Fail, And How Can It Succeed?", 7

Such a trend played out in the lead-up to Al Qaeda's Sept. 11 attacks against the United States. As Elaine Kamarck notes in an essay for the Brookings Institution regarding Sept. 11 intelligence failures, "pieces of the puzzle were to be found in many corners of the U.S. government."[7] One of those puzzle pieces included the arrest of a man identified as taking flight lessons with the intention of executing an attack.[8] Despite these seemingly obvious signs, however, agencies like the CIA and the FBI failed to stitch those clues together as part of a broader terrorist plot. As the theory suggests, the fault here lies not with the U.S. government's ability to collect intelligence, but rather its difficulty in interpreting and unifying that information. Ultimately, this failure to connect the dots resulted in one of the most lethal surprise attacks to ever occur on U.S. soil. While this theory provides a compelling proximate explanation for why intelligence failures occur, other hypotheses add flesh to these bones by highlighting underlying reasons why the analysis shortcomings endemic to intelligence failures occur in the first place.

b. The Role of Confirmation Bias

As discussed above, a central challenge intelligence agencies face in identifying security threats is accurately analyzing the information collected. Akin to finding a needle in an enormous haystack, this task is certainly not straightforward. But even when compelling evidence of impending security threats stares agencies right in the face, analysts can still fail to connect the dots. Among other cognitive errors, agency-wide confirmation bias often triggers significant analytical failure, despite the presence of actionable intelligence.

Confirmation bias thrives on analysts' tendency to depend upon previously held assumptions, driving them toward intelligence that suits their preexisting worldview while

[7] Kamarck. "9/11 and the Reinvention of the US Intelligence Community."
[8] Kamarck. "9/11 and the Reinvention of the US Intelligence Community."

dismissing intelligence that does not.[9] Such commonly held assumptions are often taken as fact, as David Hoover writes in the *American Intelligence Journal*: "Habit of thought, also known as common wisdom, occurs when an idea circulates throughout a culture and permeates it until the idea gains position in the collective consciousness and becomes prejudices or common presumptions. This 'folk wisdom' is a dominant 'truth' appealed to as authority though it may never have been critically examined, or is not reexamined in the light of new knowledge."[10] Without treating these prior opinions with a healthy dose of skepticism, analysts may turn a blind eye to otherwise glaring warning signs. To validate this theory, evidence must demonstrate that a misunderstanding of a state's adversaries helped produce the intelligence failure. What would undermine this argument, however, is evidence showing that the surprise attack threat had been on intelligence agencies' radar prior to the incident, with significant resources devoted toward warding off that threat.

While not a failure that produced a surprise attack, confirmation bias played a role in one of the bigger American intelligence failures of the 21st century: the United States' post-Sept. 11 invasion of Iraq. Confident assumptions that Iraq possessed and concealed weapons of mass destruction (WMD) distorted the process through which analysts collected intelligence: "Instructions to collectors compounded this tendency [for confirmation bias] by telling them to 'seek information about Iraq's progress toward obtaining WMD,' rather than about whether Iraq was trying to get WMD."[11] This seemingly minor difference in instructions precluded analysts from considering the possibility that Iraq didn't possess WMD, turning the preventable prospect of invasion into an inevitable reality. To prevent the range of unintended consequences that followed this particular instance of confirmation bias, it's critical for intelligence agencies and

[9] Betts. "Two Faces of Intelligence Failure: September 11 and Iraq's Missing WMD," 600
[10] Hoover. "A Failure of Imagination in the U.S. Intelligence Community," 60
[11] Betts. "Two Faces of Intelligence Failure: September 11 and Iraq's Missing WMD," 600

analysts to understand whether this theory is simply a cognitive quirk or the product of specific circumstances. The following theory offers a compelling answer to that question.

c. Success-Induced Complacency

Success often breeds complacency—even in the high-stakes world of national security. If a particular analytical strategy produced intelligence successes in the past, analysts may be more likely to defer to that strategy and less likely to formulate a new one, regardless of whether that approach suits the moment's circumstances. After all, why throw away what is working? Intelligence analysts aren't alone in succumbing to this pitfall: "Success may encourage businesses to stick to a winning formula, triggering complacency and risk aversion," writes Swarthmore College political science professor Dominic Tierney.[12] Even if emerging security challenges require novel solutions, analysts may be unwilling to abandon that "winning formula,"[13] given its proven track record. The success-induced complacency hypothesis incorporates elements of the previous two theories; when giving previously successful strategies or assumptions undue deference, analysts will be more likely to fall prey to confirmation bias and thus fail to piece together a cohesive intelligence picture. To support this argument, evidence would need to show that an intelligence failure came amid a wave of success and national overconfidence; meanwhile, a case showing an intelligence failure occurring amid low national morale, economic turmoil, or recent military failure would significantly weaken the potential link between success-based complacency and intelligence failures.

Prior to the Sept. 11 attacks, the United States found itself in a state of success-induced complacency. The nation was years removed from the Cold War and was coming off a Gulf War campaign generally considered to be an American success.[14] After the World Trade Center fell,

[12] Tierney. "Intelligent Failure," 45
[13] Ibid.
[14] Helfont. "The Gulf War's Afterlife: Dilemmas, Missed Opportunities, and the Post-Cold War Order Undone."

that mindset vanished: "The shocks jolted Americans out of the complacency about national security that they had enjoyed during the dozen years after the Cold War."[15] As discussed previously, U.S. intelligence analysts had collected a number of signs warning of a serious attack; their failure to connect the dots could reasonably be attributed to success-induced complacency, with analysts clinging to once-successful intelligence strategies that had long since grown stale. Accordingly, a key focus of this inquiry will concern the level of "success," or lack thereof, enjoyed by intelligence agencies prior to the given surprise attack, with the goal of determining the extent to which complacency may influence the intelligence failure.

III. Examining Israeli Intelligence Failures, Past and Present

To test the above hypotheses, I selected three Israeli cases: an intelligence success in the 1967 War, an intelligence failure in the 1973 War, and an intelligence failure in Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023 attacks. For obvious reasons, studying prominent intelligence failures provides significant insight into their causes and conditions. Identifying any connective tissue between the cases points toward conditions responsible for intelligence failures. Additionally, I chose these two intelligence failures not only because they represent arguably the two most prominent security lapses in Israeli history, but also because of the striking similarities the two cases share.

The most important element of this research design, however, involves the study of intelligence success. By varying the outcome, I seek to avoid a common pitfall of existing intelligence literature: "'selecting on the dependent variable,' or choosing cases to study based on how those cases turned out.'"[16] Comparing the conditions involved in both intelligence failures and successes offers a more rigorous test of a given hypothesis, since much of a theory's

[15] Betts. "Two Faces of Intelligence Failure: September 11 and Iraq's Missing WMD," 585
[16] Dahl. "Why Does Intelligence Fail, And How Can It Succeed?", 14

value comes from its generalizability. These three cases offer a range of scenarios broad enough to gauge the accuracy of the three aforementioned theories.

a. The 1973 War

Over the 25 years following its inception in 1948, Israel enjoyed a generally steady upward trajectory. The events of 1973 changed that reality. On Oct. 6, 1973, Egypt and Syria launched a surprise attack against Israel that sent shockwaves throughout the nation. The attack caught Israel entirely off guard, contributing to the coalition's initial success. Though Israel eventually regained its footing and fought off the Egyptian and Syrian forces, the conditions and causes that led to this monumental security collapse are worth examining. For one, Israel's neighboring Arab states weren't just more willing to wage war this time around; they were also far better equipped: "Increased Soviet backing for Egypt and Syria included the provision of antitank weaponry as well as SAM missile batteries that would challenge the Israeli defense force's previous dominance. Arab solidarity had also increased and included plans to use the oil weapon against states that supported Israel."[17] Even in the face of this increased Arab preparedness, however, Israel remained unable to recognize its susceptibility to a surprise attack. It wouldn't be the only such incident.

In the days prior to the attack launched on Yom Kippur, both American and Israeli intelligence had observed a significant buildup of Egyptian and Syrian troops along its borders.[18] In hindsight, the signs appear obvious. Yet, "consultations between the US and Israel suggested little possibility of war, with the Israelis interpreting the Arab moves as maneuvers."[19] In both the years and days before the outbreak of conflict, Israel had repeatedly failed to connect the dots between rising Arab hostility and capabilities and the possibility of a surprise attack. But while

[17] Johnson and Tierney. "The Yom Kippur War," 186
[18] Ashkar. "The Syrian and Egyptian Campaigns," 21
[19] Ashkar. "The Syrian and Egyptian Campaigns," 21

the connect-the-dots theory at least partly aligns with the events prior to this particular intelligence failure, its explanatory power here is rather limited. The theory leaves several questions unanswered, though none more important than the question of why Israeli intelligence analysts failed to connect the dots in the first place. Identifying an answer to this question first requires an understanding of the mindset Israeli intelligence agencies held prior to the conflict.

Time and time again, Israeli intelligence systematically underestimated the threat it faced. Aside from an overall misunderstanding of the Arab states' strengths and capabilities, Israel clung to the belief that "[Egyptian President Anwar] Sadat would not fight until he had long-range fighter-bombers to use against Israeli air bases and Scud missiles to deter air attacks inside Egypt."[20] Together, these misperceptions were dubbed "'the Concept'" by some at the time, "an article of faith throughout the nation's military and political establishment" that seemed infallible even in the face of direct warnings to the contrary from those like Jordan's King Hussein.[21] Beyond just Israel's mistaken understanding of its adversaries, the nation's military overestimated the strength of its own defensive capabilities—a perfect storm of hubris that led to a colossal intelligence failure.[22]

These misperceptions were not simply random errors in judgment; they manifested as a result of extensive confirmation bias. Despite contradictory evidence, like the aforementioned troop buildup or improved weaponry, Israeli analysts refused to budge from their belief that the country's Arab neighbors were both unwilling and unprepared to go to war. Unable to grapple with growing evidence disproving its preconceived notions, Israel's fundamentally flawed interpretation of its geopolitical landscape created conditions sufficient for a successful surprise attack. Had Israeli analysts been more willing to assess information opposed to their prior

[20] Johnson and Tierney. "The Yom Kippur War," 195
[21] Johnson and Tierney. "The Yom Kippur War," 195
[22] Ashkar. "The Syrian and Egyptian Campaigns," 19

assumptions—or even consider the possibility that their assumptions were incorrect—then the country would all but certainly have been far better equipped to deal with the eventual surprise attack.

Confirmation bias, however, also faces limits as an explanation for this intelligence failure. The theory fails to address why exactly Israel held so steadfastly to its mistaken assumptions. Challenging one's assumptions usually tends to be a difficult task, but why were these particular internal and external misperceptions so deeply entrenched? While accurately capturing a condition that contributed to Israel's vulnerability, the confirmation bias theory still sees room to develop as a framework for understanding intelligence failures. The confidence that Israel held toward its intelligence assessments did not emerge from nothing, a reality that the confirmation bias theory takes for granted.

Israeli intelligence agencies' stubbornness in their assumptions was born out of years of success. Whether it was its foundational success in 1948, the Suez Crisis, or the Six-Day War, Israel had collected a number of reasons supporting its self-confidence.[23] From Ariel Sharon to Yitzhak Rabin, a number of Israeli political and military elites openly expressed that confidence with an "'almost smug aura to it.'"[24] That success-induced confidence morphed into a sense of complacency, which eventually took root in the military: "The fact that Israel was not expecting a large scale confrontation with the Arabs in the near future was demonstrated by reorganizations within the army itself. … [Lt. General David Elazar] began to retire high-ranking officers, and replace them with officers from the younger, unknown, and unpolitically involved category."[25] Meanwhile, Israel's Arab neighbors continued to strengthen their own military capabilities. All those prior Israeli successes had built an unwavering confidence in its own assumptions,

[23] Johnson and Tierney. "The Yom Kippur War," 185
[24] Johnson and Tierney. "The Yom Kippur War," 185
[25] Ashkar. "The Syrian and Egyptian Campaigns," 18–19

regardless of evidence to the contrary. If one were to remove Israel's sense of complacency from the equation and instead replace it with the kind of heightened vigilance it had approached past conflicts with, then Israel would likely have seen a far different outcome on Oct. 6, 1973. Instead, success-induced complacency blinded Israeli intelligence analysts to the growing threat of its adversaries, culminating in the intelligence failure known today in Israel as the *mechdal* ("omission or shortcoming").[26]

b. Mechdal, 50 Years Later: Hamas' Oct. 7 Attack

Almost 50 years after the surprise attack that sparked the 1973 War, *mechdal* reemerged in Israel to produce an eerily similar intelligence failure. On Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas launched an extended attack on the border between Gaza and southern Israel, taking hundreds of lives and hostages. Like the intelligence failure that occurred half a century earlier, Hamas' attack came with a number of warning signs, both in the years and moments directly prior. Just three months earlier, one Israeli analyst noticed Hamas conducting a training exercise far more intense and sophisticated than usual, an observation she warned her superiors about.[27] Again, Israeli intelligence agencies were familiar with the puzzle pieces but found themselves unable to put them together. These warning signs continue to emerge, even in the hours before the attack in the early hours of Oct. 7: "The Gaza Strip was unusually active for the middle of the night. Israeli intelligence and national security officials, who had convinced themselves that Hamas had no interest in going to war, initially assumed it was just a nighttime exercise."[28] After again picking up activity well out of the ordinary, Israeli intelligence agencies still couldn't associate the incidents as part of a broader pattern. Questions, however, still remain: what prevented Israeli analysts from comprehending the imminent threat they faced? Should it be chalked up to mere

[26] Johnson and Tierney. "The Yom Kippur War," 168
[27] Bergman, et al. "How Years of Israeli Failure on Hamas Led to a Devastating Attack."
[28] Bergman, et al. "How Years of Israeli Failure on Hamas Led to a Devastating Attack."

incompetence or to flaws more systemic? To what extent is this failure to connect the dots similar to what occurred in 1973? The connect-the-dots theory falls short again in this regard, prompting further inquiry.

In a manner perhaps even more glaring than in 1973, Israeli officials consistently dismissed evidence warning of a potential attack in favor of evidence that supported their prior assumptions. More than a year before the attack, Israeli intelligence had discovered a smoking gun: a thorough Hamas blueprint detailing a sophisticated attack, which the militia would eventually follow precisely on Oct. 7.[29] In spite of that significant warning sign, Israel still dismissed the evidence, ostensibly because the blueprint didn't match its preconceived notion of Hamas: "The audacity of the blueprint, officials said, made it easy to underestimate."[30] Rather than preparing for the possibility of this particular kind of attack, Israel placed more weight on alternative information that better aligned with its previous assumptions, like Hamas' negotiations for Palestinian work permits in Israel—"which Israeli officials took as a sign that Hamas was not looking for war."[31] The analytical choices made here are striking. Israeli analysts downplayed information that contradicted their assumptions about Hamas' capabilities, instead embracing the evidence that supported their assumptions. This manifestation of confirmation bias ultimately cost hundreds of lives and contributed to the worst Israeli intelligence failure since the Yom Kippur War broke out in 1973. Further resembling what occurred in 1973, Israel's confirmation bias stemmed from a sense of complacency.

With Israel having long since established itself as the Middle East's preeminent military power, the events of Oct. 7 left itself partly the victim of its own success. Convinced that their "military and technological superiority to Hamas would keep the terrorist group in check," Israeli

[29] Bergman and Goldman. "Israel Knew Hamas's Attack Plan More Than a Year Ago."
[30] Bergman and Goldman. "Israel Knew Hamas's Attack Plan More Than a Year Ago."
[31] Bergman and Goldman. "Israel Knew Hamas's Attack Plan More Than a Year Ago."

intelligence analysts systematically underestimated the threat Hamas posed, despite the presence of actionable intelligence.[32] Israel's unpreparedness came not as the result of insufficient manpower, but rather because of success-based complacency. Supremely confident in both its defense capabilities and its assessment of Hamas' intentions, the Israeli intelligence agency Unit 8200 opted to stop eavesdropping on the Hamas members' hand-held radios, which could have revealed hints about the Oct. 7 attacks before they occurred.[33] By placing excessive faith in its existing strategies, Israel's intelligence approach deteriorated into one rigid and inflexible, despite growing evidence that Hamas intended to launch an attack of some sort. Had Israel altered its approach and "redirected significant reinforcements to the south, where Hamas attacked, Israel could have possibly blunted the attacks or possibly even prevented them."[34] Just as what happened 50 years earlier, increased caution and self-skepticism could have limited Israel's sense of invincibility, offered its intelligence agencies the space to adjust their priors when necessary, and reduced the likelihood of a surprise attack like Oct. 7's.

c. The Six-Day War

Unlike the previous two examples, the 1967 War represents one of the great intelligence successes in Israeli history. As noted in its name, the Six-Day War was an efficient campaign that yielded significant territorial gains for Israel. Given the differing outcome in this case, it is crucial to investigate the nature of the underlying factors. For one, the complacency that plagued Israel in the 1973 and 2023 surprise attacks didn't play a role in its 1967 strategy. Instead, Israel exhibited the opposite: "On Israel's side, the most important unit-level factor that propelled the war was the extreme sense of vulnerability of the country's population. This resulted in the 'securitization' of Israeli internal discourse – the phenomenon of almost every important political

[32] Bergman, et al. "How Years of Israeli Failure on Hamas Led to a Devastating Attack."
[33] Bergman, et al. "How Years of Israeli Failure on Hamas Led to a Devastating Attack."
[34] Bergman, et al. "How Years of Israeli Failure on Hamas Led to a Devastating Attack."

and socioeconomic issue being viewed in security terms."[35] This hypervigilant mindset represents a stark departure from the Israeli approach in 1973 and 2023, years in which past success had lulled the country's intelligence agencies into a state of complacency. This perceived vulnerability swayed the Israeli military into ramping up its preparations, demonstrating a tactical agility the country had not seen in the two subsequent cases: "Fear of war obliged the IDF to implement a highly demanding training program that included military exercises at all levels."[36] With a lack of complacency producing an intelligence success, the 1967 War underscores how intelligence failures stem from success-induced complacency.

While a lack of success-based complacency contributed to Israel's intelligence success in the Six-Day War, the confirmation bias condition remains constant in this case, highlighting that theory's weakness. Despite the different outcome, Israeli intelligence agencies still displayed a noteworthy degree of confirmation bias in their pre-war assessments, particularly regarding Egypt's intentions: "Despite all these verbal pyrotechnics and concentrations of force, there does not seem to have been any intention in Cairo to initiate a war. In reply to a question by British M.P. Christopher Mayhew interviewing [Egyptian President Gamal Abdel] Nasser on June 2, 'And if they do not attack, will you let them alone?', the President said, 'Yes, we will leave them alone. We have no intention of attacking Israel.'"[37] Yet, even in the face of such contradictory evidence, Israel remained steadfast in its belief that Egypt intended to start a war. Whether it was Nasser's blockade of the Straits of Tiran or a buildup of Egyptian troops, Israel interpreted Egypt's maneuvers as threats of war, regardless of whether or not that perception aligned with its adversary's stated intentions.[38]

[35] Aly, et al. *Arabs and Israelis: Conflict and Peacemaking in the Middle East*, 142
[36] Aly, et al. *Arabs and Israelis: Conflict and Peacemaking in the Middle East*, 145
[37] Yost. "The Arab-Israeli War: How It Began," 317
[38] Yost. "The Arab-Israeli War: How It Began," 318

Among the three discussed cases, the 1967 War stands out as the most revealing. While both cognitive bias and success-induced complacency contributed to the Israeli intelligence failures seen in 1973 and 2023, 1967's intelligence success occurred in spite of confirmation bias. Here, with success-induced complacency no longer a factor, one can isolate confirmation bias as a factor. Given that the outcome changed along with the former condition, while the latter remained constant, one can reasonably conclude that success-induced complacency is the predominant factor causing intelligence failure, at least in these particular cases.

	1967 War	**1973 War**	**Oct. 7**
Analytical Failure	N/A	Present	Present
Confirmation Bias	Present	Present	Present
Success-Induced Complacency	Absent	Present	Present
Intelligence Outcome	*Success*	*Failure*	*Failure*

IV. Conclusion

Throughout history, surprise attacks and intelligence failures have caused significant casualties, bloody wars, and national trauma. Identifying the conditions responsible for such intelligence failures is crucial for any state's national security. After delving into the most prominent intelligence failures and successes in Israeli history, I identified success-induced complacency as a condition likely to precede intelligence failure. While competing theories of analytical failure and confirmation bias offer some additional understanding, success-induced complacency represented a key ingredient in both intelligence failures and successes. In the 1973 and 2023 surprise attacks, prior military and security success prompted Israel's intelligence

analysts to let their guard down and place excessive deference toward its past strategies. Analysts saw little reason to scrutinize or modify their preexisting assumptions and approach, and Israel's adversaries took advantage. In an inverted case, however, a heightened sense of vigilance led to the monumental intelligence success of 1967's Six-Day War. Consequently, the success-induced complacency theory emerges as the primary condition for intelligence failures.

This conclusion offers a number of noteworthy implications. First and foremost, the success-induced complacency theory instructs powerful nations to constantly assess the validity of their assumptions and analytical approaches. Due to past military and security successes, powerful states are susceptible to surprise attacks and intelligence failures, because of the analytical blind spots complacency creates. Intelligence analysts must be willing to adapt and dispense with previously successful methods when necessary; just because a strategy worked against one particular threat does not mean it will succeed against every threat. Even when intelligence failures do occur, agencies must avoid applying yesterday's lessons to tomorrow's problems. After all, inflexibility and unreasonable rigidity helped create the conditions for a number of surprise attacks, from Oct. 7 to Sept. 11. That being said, overcorrecting for success-induced complacency would be a mistaken approach as well. Operating in a state of constant hypervigilance would treat much of an adversary's actions as a threat, regardless of their underlying intentions. Additionally, excessive second-guessing of an agency's security approach could realistically inhibit its ability to act decisively and with conviction. Thus, analysts must remain nimble, striking a delicate balance between vigilance and confidence.

While this study offers practical explanations for the occurrence of intelligence failures, some tertiary questions remain unanswered. The focus of this study centered around developed nations like Israel and the United States; further inquiry could investigate the conditions

surrounding intelligence failures in less developed countries. An example like North Korea's 1950 surprise invasion of South Korea comes to mind here.[39] By testing the success-induced complacency theory in a different context, one can further gauge the theory's generalizability. Other studies could examine the causes of surprise attacks launched against hypervigilant national security states—in order to rule out success-based complacency as a factor. Regardless of an explanation's credibility, no one-size-fits-all answer exists. To comprehensively attack the problem of intelligence failures, analysts must remain aware of as many potential pitfalls as possible. The more plausible causes uncovered—alongside increased awareness of those conditions—the less likely the next intelligence failure becomes.

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