

Strategic Surprise in National and Business Intelligence: a Comparative Study

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The phenomenon of intelligence failures in national security and in business is being researched regularly. This issue, of surprise attacks, has become a major field of strategic studies since Roberta Wohlstetter study of Pearl Harbor in 1962. Lack of warning of emerging threats in business, such as the 2008 financial crisis or the collapse of global corporations, presents a similar problem which has not been discussed theoretically sufficient. The research was carried out in these two areas separately without sharing the experience from one area to the other.

Almost all research on surprises and the failures of national intelligence are centered on a particular type of strategic surprise, usually surprise attack. This kind of surprise can be called a focused surprise, as it is the product of a deliberate effort by one player to prevent the opponent to find out his true intentions often through concealment and deception. Examples for this kind of surprise attacks are well known such as "Barbarossa", Pearl Harbor, and Yom Kippur. Much less attention has been given to the phenomenon of dispersed surprise, i.e.; an unexpected spontaneous popular revolt aimed to remove a government or foreign power from the rule, such as the Khomeini revolution (1979), the "Arab Spring" (2011) and the first Palestinian Intifada (1987).

Intelligence failures and strategic surprises are investigated also in business not only to identify threats or actions of competitors, a focused surprise, but also to detect early changes and identify trends in markets and among consumer's behavior, a dispersed surprise.

To better understand the phenomenon of intelligence failure, this paper seeks to compare four types of surprises: the environment in which occurs the surprise - national and business and the type of surprise: focused and dispersed, to enable better study of intelligence failures.