

## MY WEIRD PROMPTS

Podcast Transcript

EPISODE #383

# The Final Boss of Peace: Can Gaza Ever Disarm?

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## EPISODE SYNOPSIS

In this episode of My Weird Prompts, Corn and Herman tackle one of the most difficult questions in modern conflict: how do you convince an armed group to lay down their weapons? Using a listener's question as a springboard, they dive into the complex history of disarmament, from the "constructive ambiguity" of the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland to the fragile peace with the FARC in Colombia. They discuss why disarmament is often the final hurdle in a peace process and what happens when trust remains at zero. Can the "gold standard" of the Irish peace process be applied to the current crisis in Gaza, or does the ideological divide make it a non-starter? Join the brothers as they analyze the "security dilemma" and the high stakes of decommissioning in the pursuit of a lasting ceasefire.

## DANIEL'S PROMPT

### Daniel

Can you think of any historical parallels that might provide guidance or instruction for the situation in Israel and Gaza today, such as the Northern Ireland peace process or other conflicts where mutual understanding was reached but disarmament remained a major obstacle?

# TRANSCRIPT

## Corn

Hey everyone, and welcome back to My Weird Prompts. I am Corn, and I am sitting here in our living room in Jerusalem, looking out at a surprisingly grey sky today. I am joined, as always, by my brother.

## Herman

Herman Poppleberry, present and accounted for. And yeah, Corn, it is a bit of a somber day, which honestly fits the weight of what we are diving into. Our housemate Daniel sent us a voice note that really gets to the heart of the tension everyone in this city, and frankly this whole region, has been feeling lately.

## Corn

It really does. Daniel was asking about historical parallels for the situation here, specifically focusing on the massive hurdle of disarmament. He mentioned the reports of these peace plans and the hopes surrounding a total hostage return, and it has him thinking about how other conflicts reached a point where people understood each other, but the guns were still on the table.

## Herman

It is the ultimate sticking point, right? You can agree on borders, you can agree on prisoner swaps, you can even agree on who picks up the trash in the streets. But asking a group that has defined itself through armed struggle to give up the very things that give them leverage? That is where the wheels usually fall off the wagon.

## Corn

Exactly. And Daniel specifically pointed us toward Northern Ireland. I think that is a great place to start, but I also want to look at some of the other attempts at this, like in Colombia or even the failed attempts in Lebanon, because they tell different parts of the story. But before we get deep into the history, Herman, how many of these have we done now?

### Herman

We are well over two hundred episodes into this project, and I have to say, this might be one of the most requested angles we have had in a long time. People are desperate for a roadmap right now.

### Corn

They are. Because even with a ceasefire holding, even with the talk of reconstruction and new governing bodies, there is this shadow of the weapons. If you look at the current landscape, the debate over disarmament in Gaza is essentially the "final boss" of the peace process. So, Herman, let's go back to the nineties. Set the scene for Northern Ireland, because that is the one everyone always points to as the gold standard for a successful transition.

### Herman

It is the gold standard, but people often forget how long and how messy the "gold" part was. The conflict known as the Troubles lasted for about thirty years, from the late nineteen sixties until the Good Friday Agreement in nineteen ninety-eight. And we are talking about a conflict that killed about three thousand five hundred to three thousand six hundred people. Now, compared to what we have seen in Gaza over the last two years, those numbers might seem small to some, but in the context of a small region like Northern Ireland, it was cataclysmic. It touched every single family.

### Corn

And the Good Friday Agreement in ninety-eight was supposed to be the end of it. But the weapons didn't just vanish the moment the ink was dry on the paper, did they?

### Herman

Not even close. This is the part that I think provides the most "instruction," as Daniel put it, for the situation in Israel and Gaza. The Good Friday Agreement was signed in April of nineteen ninety-eight. It established a power-sharing government. It dealt with prisoner releases. It dealt with police reform. But the actual decommissioning of the Irish Republican Army's weapons? That took another seven years.

## Corn

Seven years. I mean, imagine that here. Imagine a deal being signed today, but the various factions in Gaza keeping their tunnels and rockets until the year twenty thirty-three. That would be an impossible sell for the Israeli public.

## Herman

It was an almost impossible sell for the Unionists in Northern Ireland, too. Their slogan was "no guns, no government." They didn't want to sit in a room with people whose friends still had Semtex explosives and assault rifles hidden in floorboards. But the genius, or maybe the tragedy, of the Northern Ireland process was what they called "constructive ambiguity." They used language that allowed the peace process to move forward while the disarmament was still being negotiated in the background.

## Corn

So how did they actually do it? Because you can't just take someone's word for it when you are talking about thousands of rifles and tons of explosives.

## Herman

They created the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning, or the IICD. It was led by a Canadian general, John de Chastelain. And this is a crucial detail for Daniel's question: the decommissioning wasn't a public surrender. The IRA refused to be filmed giving up weapons. They felt it would look like a defeat, like they were being humiliated. So, they did it in secret, witnessed by the commission and a couple of independent clergymen. General de Chastelain eventually reported in September of two thousand five that the IRA had finally, fully decommissioned all its arms.

## Corn

September of two thousand five. That is a massive gap. And I think that gets to the "mutual understanding" part Daniel was asking about. In Northern Ireland, the understanding was that the IRA would move into politics through Sinn Fein, and in exchange, they wouldn't need the guns because they had a seat at the table. But the distrust was so high that it took nearly a decade of "proving" the political path worked before the guns were actually destroyed.

### Herman

Right. And you have to look at the psychology of it. For the IRA, the weapons were their insurance policy. They didn't trust the British government, and they certainly didn't trust the Loyalist paramilitaries. If they gave up the guns on day one and the British decided to scrap the deal on day two, they would be defenseless. That is the "security dilemma" in international relations theory. One side's security is the other side's threat.

### Corn

So let's bridge that to Gaza. Because the scale is different, but the dilemma is the same. Right now, there is all this talk about an international force, maybe led by regional partners or even a technocratic Palestinian body, taking over the administration. But if Hamas or other groups feel that giving up their weapons means they are opening themselves up to being wiped out the moment the international community looks away, why would they ever do it?

### Herman

That is the trillion-dollar question. In Northern Ireland, you had a democratic framework that everyone eventually bought into. You had the European Union and the United States acting as massive anchors for the deal. In Gaza, the ideological gap is wider. Hamas isn't just a paramilitary group looking for civil rights in a shared state; their founding documents and their actions on October seventh, twenty twenty-three, were about the total destruction of the state they are now being asked to coexist with, at least in a ceasefire sense.

### Corn

And that is where the Northern Ireland parallel might actually break down. The IRA eventually accepted that they weren't going to get a United Ireland through the gun, and they settled for a political process that might get them there eventually through a border poll. Does Hamas have a "political process" they believe in that doesn't involve the elimination of Israel? Because if they don't, then disarmament isn't just a hurdle; it is a total non-starter.

### Herman

It is. And this is why I think the Colombia example is so interesting. In twenty sixteen, the Colombian government reached a deal with the FARC rebels. This was a conflict that had gone on for fifty years. Hundreds of thousands dead. Millions displaced. And the FARC actually did disarm relatively quickly compared to the IRA. They handed over more than eight thousand weapons and over a million rounds of ammunition to United Nations observers within a year.

## Corn

Why was it faster there?

## Herman

A few reasons. One, the FARC was exhausted. They were being beaten on the battlefield in a way the IRA never quite was. Two, there was a very clear path for them to become a political party with guaranteed seats in the legislature for a set period. But even there, Corn, look at what happened next. The disarmament was "successful" on paper, but the "mutual understanding" part failed. The state didn't follow through on its promises to protect former rebels or to invest in the rural areas where the FARC used to operate. As a result, hundreds of former FARC members were assassinated, and a bunch of them went back to the jungle to form "dissident" groups.

## Corn

So the lesson from Colombia is that disarmament without a total transformation of the state's behavior is just a temporary lull. It is like taking the batteries out of a smoke detector because you don't like the noise, but the fire is still smoldering in the walls.

## Herman

Exactly. If the people in Gaza see that "disarmament" just leads to them being permanently occupied or ignored while their living conditions stay catastrophic, the weapons will find their way back in. It is too easy to smuggle or manufacture small arms in the twenty-first century. You can't just "clear" a territory of weapons and expect them to stay gone if the motivation to fight is still there.

## Corn

You know, what strikes me about Daniel's question is the phrase "mutual understanding." In Northern Ireland, there was a realization that neither side could win. It was a stalemate. "The long war" had become too long. I wonder if we are there yet in this conflict. After two years of this level of destruction, with tens of thousands dead—the numbers coming out of the Ministry of Health in Gaza are staggering, over seventy-one thousand people—you would think the "exhaustion" factor would be at an all-time high.

### Herman

You would think so. But here is the difference between the IRA and a group like Hamas. The IRA was a secular, nationalist organization. Their goals were ultimately earthly. They wanted a specific piece of land to be governed by a specific group of people. When you introduce a theological, apocalyptic element, the "exhaustion" math changes. If you believe you are fighting a holy war, a stalemate isn't a reason to quit; it is a test of your faith.

### Corn

That is the "ideological block" I was worried about. If disarmament is seen as a betrayal of a divine mandate, you can't negotiate it with a Canadian general and a couple of priests. You are talking about a fundamental shift in the soul of the movement.

### Herman

Right. And let's look at the "instruction" from the other side of the coin. Look at Lebanon. The Taif Accord in nineteen eighty-nine ended the Lebanese Civil War. It mandated that all militias disarm. Everyone did, except for Hezbollah. They were allowed to keep their weapons under the guise of "resistance" against the Israeli occupation of the south. But then Israel withdrew in the year two thousand. Did Hezbollah disarm? No. They got stronger. They became a state within a state.

### Corn

And that is the nightmare scenario for Israel. A "peace process" where the primary threat doesn't actually go away, but just rebrands itself as a "stabilization force" or a "border guard" while keeping the rockets. That is why the Israeli position has been so hardline on "total demilitarization." They have seen the Lebanon model, and they know it leads to October seventh.

### Herman

It is a total lack of trust. And you can't build a Northern Ireland-style decommissioning process on a foundation of zero trust. In Northern Ireland, even when they were killing each other, they were talking. There were backchannels through the priesthood, through intelligence officers, for decades. Here, the backchannels are through third parties like Qatar or Egypt, and the messages are often just ultimatums.

## Corn

So if we are looking for guidance, maybe the guidance is that disarmament shouldn't be the first thing on the list. In Northern Ireland, it was actually the \*last\* thing. They built the political institutions first. They got people working together on sewage and schools and policing first. They created a reality where the gun was increasingly irrelevant before they actually asked for the gun.

## Herman

But Corn, can you do that in Gaza? Can you rebuild a city and start a new government while the tunnels are still active? The Israeli argument is that you can't. They say that any cement you send for a school will end up in a bunker if you don't disarm them first. It is a catch-twenty-two. You can't disarm without trust, but you can't build trust while they are still armed.

## Corn

It feels like we are stuck in this loop. But maybe the "instruction" is in the international involvement. The IICD worked because John de Chastelain was a man of immense integrity who was trusted by both sides to keep secrets. He didn't leak. He didn't take sides. He just did the math. Does such a figure exist for Gaza? Is there an international body that Israel trusts to actually verify disarmament and that the Palestinians trust to not just be an extension of the Israeli military?

## Herman

That is where the "Comprehensive Plan" that Daniel mentioned comes in. The idea of this "Board of Peace" or whatever they are calling it this week—it is an attempt to create that third-party buffer. But it is so much more complicated because of the regional players. In Northern Ireland, the "region" was just the United Kingdom and Ireland. Here, you have Iran, Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United States. Every single one of those players has a different definition of what "disarmed" looks like.

## Corn

And a different interest in whether the group stays armed or not. Iran certainly doesn't want their "forward defense" in Gaza to vanish. So you are not just negotiating with a local militia; you are negotiating with a regional superpower's foreign policy.

## Herman

Exactly. And that brings us back to the "Second-Order Effects" we always talk about. If you actually managed to disarm Gaza, what does that do to the power balance in the West Bank? What does it do to Hezbollah's calculus? If disarmament is successful, it might actually make the region more unstable in the short term as other groups try to fill the vacuum or prove they are still relevant.

## Corn

It is a daunting thought. But I want to go back to one more thing Daniel asked about: "mutual understanding." There is a famous story from the Northern Ireland process where David Trimble, the Unionist leader, and John Hume, the Nationalist leader, had to find a way to stand on a stage together. They didn't like each other. They didn't trust each other. But they both realized that their people were dying for nothing.

## Herman

"The parity of esteem." That was the phrase they used. Recognizing that the other side's identity and their fears were just as real as your own. In the context of Israel and Gaza, we are so far from that right now. The rhetoric on both sides is about the total delegitimization of the other. One side is "occupiers who need to go back to Europe," and the other side is "terrorists who don't value life." You can't get to disarmament from those starting positions.

## Corn

So maybe the guidance from history isn't about how to destroy the guns, but how to make the people holding them feel like they have a future that is worth more than the gun. In Northern Ireland, that meant a massive influx of investment. It meant the "peace dividend." It meant that a kid in Belfast could look at a job in a tech firm or a film studio and see a better life than joining a paramilitary group.

## Herman

Right. Specificity matters. You can't just promise "peace." You have to promise a specific, tangible improvement in life. The reports of this "Riviera of the Middle East" vision for Gaza—as wild and maybe even offensive as it sounds to some right now—is an attempt at that. It is saying: "Look at what you could have if the tunnels weren't there." But it has to be believable. It can't just be a PowerPoint presentation in Davos; it has to be bricks and mortar and jobs that aren't controlled by a single faction.

### Corn

And it has to respect property rights. One of the big criticisms of these new plans is that they treat Gaza like a "blank slate," ignoring the generations of people who actually live there. You can't build a "Board of Peace" if the people you are building it for feel like they are being evicted from their own history.

### Herman

That is a huge point. In Northern Ireland, they didn't try to move people. They didn't try to redraw the map in a way that erased neighborhoods. They just changed how those neighborhoods were governed. The "instruction" there is: don't try to fix the conflict by moving the pieces; fix it by changing the rules of the game.

### Corn

So, to summarize the guidance for Daniel: One, expect it to take much longer than you think. Seven years for the IRA, and that was in a much "simpler" conflict. Two, you need a "John de Chastelain" figure—someone whose integrity is the only bridge across the chasm of distrust. Three, disarmament is a consequence of a working political process, not a prerequisite for one.

### Herman

And four, don't ignore the "swallowing toads" factor. That is the Colombian phrase for accepting things that make you sick for the sake of the bigger picture. Both Israelis and Palestinians are going to have to "swallow toads" that feel like a betrayal of their ancestors. Israelis might have to accept that some people they consider monsters will have a role in a transition. Palestinians might have to accept that the "armed struggle" that has been the center of their national identity for seventy years is over.

### Corn

That is a lot of toads.

### Herman

It is a swamp's worth, Corn. But the alternative is what we have seen for the last eight hundred and forty-some days. It is a cycle that only knows how to destroy.

**Corn**

Well, on that heavy but necessary note, I think we have given Daniel a lot to chew on. This is the kind of deep dive that reminds me why we do this show. Exploring these parallels isn't just an academic exercise; it is about looking for a way out of the dark.

**Herman**

It really is. And hey, if you are listening and you appreciate these kinds of deep dives, we would really love it if you could leave us a review on your podcast app or on Spotify. We have been doing this for over two hundred and twenty-five episodes now, and those reviews are honestly the best way for new people to find the show.

**Corn**

They really do help. And if you want to see our archive or get in touch with us, you can find everything at [myweirdprompts.com](http://myweirdprompts.com). We have a contact form there, and you can see all the topics we have tackled in the past.

**Herman**

Thanks to Daniel for the prompt. It was a tough one, but a good one.

**Corn**

Definitely. We will be back next week with another one. Until then, I am Corn.

**Herman**

And I am Herman Poppleberry.

**Corn**

This has been My Weird Prompts. Thanks for listening, and stay curious.

**Herman**

Peace.