

MY WEIRD PROMPTS

Podcast Transcript

EPISODE #416

The Rise of the Hybrid Army: Professionalizing Insurgency

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EPISODE SYNOPSIS

In this episode, Herman and Corn dive into a sobering discussion on the changing face of modern conflict, focusing on the professionalization of non-state actors like Hamas and Hezbollah. They examine how these groups have moved beyond simple guerrilla tactics to adopt sophisticated intelligence gathering, command and control structures, and psychological warfare strategies that rival national militaries. By analyzing the "Gaza Metro," the use of information as an "asymmetric air force," and the role of state-sponsored training, the hosts uncover how the line between insurgent and soldier is blurring. This deep dive into hybrid warfare offers a chilling look at how low-tech methods and specialized professionalism are challenging even the world's most advanced defense forces.

DANIEL'S PROMPT

Daniel

Herman and Corin, we've discussed October 7th and the events in Israel several times. In this episode, I'd like to talk about how non-conventional militaries like Hamas and Hezbollah emulate the methods of conventional armies, particularly in intelligence gathering. The sophistication of Hamas's intelligence, including mapping targeted communities down to the house level and establishing numerous command and control centers, revealed a much higher level of organization than many expected. What are the gaps in professionalism and tactics between these non-state actors and conventional armies like the IDF? How do these organizations develop and manage functions like internal security, operational security, and psychological warfare?

TRANSCRIPT

Corn

Alright, we are back. And honestly, today's topic is one that hits incredibly close to home, literally and figuratively. We are sitting here in Jerusalem, and as of February first, twenty twenty-six, the echoes of the last few years are still very much the soundtrack of our lives. We are over four hundred and eighty days into a conflict that has fundamentally changed how the world looks at asymmetric warfare.

Herman

It is a heavy one, Corn. I am Herman Poppleberry, and for those who have been following our journey through over four hundred episodes, you know we do not shy away from the complex stuff. Our housemate Daniel sent us a prompt that really gets to the heart of this shift. He was asking about how non-conventional militaries, specifically groups like Hamas and Hezbollah, have started emulating the methods of conventional armies to a degree that caught the world's most advanced intelligence agencies off guard.

Corn

Right, and specifically looking at their intelligence gathering. I think for a lot of people, there was this assumption that non-state actors were just reactive or maybe a bit haphazard. But the events of October seventh, twenty twenty-three, shattered that. The level of detail they had, mapping out communities down to individual houses, the command and control centers, the operational security. It was a level of professionalism that was, frankly, terrifying.

Herman

Exactly. It is this strange transition where a group that is technically a non-state actor begins to function with the bureaucratic and tactical sophistication of a national military. Daniel wanted us to dig into the gaps between these groups and conventional forces like the Israel Defense Forces, and how they actually manage things like internal security and psychological warfare. We are talking about groups that have moved from simple guerrilla tactics to what we now call hybrid warfare.

Corn

It is fascinating because, on one hand, you have the Israel Defense Forces, or the I D F, which is one of the most technologically advanced militaries in the world. And then you have these groups operating out of a densely populated, blockaded coastal strip or the hills of southern Lebanon. But the gap in intelligence gathering seems to have narrowed. Herman, when we look at the intelligence side, how does a group like Hamas even begin to build a map of a target down to the house level? That is not something you just get from Google Maps.

Herman

You are right, it is not just Google Maps, though open source intelligence, or O S I N T, is a massive part of it now. We have to look at their dedicated intelligence body, which is often referred to as Modatz. They have professionalized their approach into five main areas: observation, cyber, signals intelligence, open source, and human intelligence. For years, thousands of workers from Gaza entered Israel every day. While the vast majority were just trying to earn a living, the system was exploited. In a highly organized military structure, even casual observations become data points. A worker notices where the security gate is, where the armory for the local civil defense team is located, or what time the shift changes happen. When you aggregate that over a decade with thousands of people, you build a high-resolution picture.

Corn

So it is essentially a massive, distributed human intelligence network. But it is more than just observing, right? I remember reports of actual manuals found on the bodies of fighters.

Herman

Precisely. These were not just rough notes; they were professionally printed field manuals. They contained instructions on operating specific weapons, identifying vulnerabilities in Israeli armored vehicles, and even tactical tips for close-quarters combat. Some of these documents were dated as early as twenty twenty-two, showing that the planning was meticulous and long-term. They had detailed maps of targeted communities that included critical infrastructure locations and security response patterns.

Corn

That requires a level of command and control that we usually associate with state actors. Daniel mentioned these command and control centers, or C two centers. We have seen reports of these being located under hospitals, schools, and residential buildings. But the scale of it is what is truly shocking. I am thinking of reports of sophisticated subterranean facilities used for command and control purposes in Gaza.

Herman

That is a perfect example of this emulation. These were not just basements; they were sophisticated subterranean facilities with server cabinets, air conditioning, and dedicated I T staff. They are part of what they call the Gaza Metro, a tunnel network that stretches for over five hundred kilometers. From a tactical perspective, integrating your C two into civilian infrastructure serves a functional purpose beyond just using human shields. In asymmetric warfare, your greatest weakness is being seen from the air. By embedding your servers and command staff under civilian buildings, you create a protected environment that forces the conventional army into a moral and legal quagmire. It makes the intelligence gathering for the opposing side incredibly difficult because you cannot distinguish a military signal from a civilian one.

Corn

It is like they have turned the entire urban environment into a giant, camouflaged motherboard. But let's talk about the gap Daniel mentioned. If they are emulating conventional armies, where do they still fall short? Or maybe fall short is the wrong way to put it. Where are the fundamental differences in their tactics?

Herman

The biggest gap is in what we call combined arms. A conventional army like the I D F relies on the seamless integration of infantry, armor, air power, and naval support. That is incredibly hard to do without a massive budget and a formal state structure. Hamas can do infantry well, they can do light rockets well, and they can do basic drone work. But they cannot coordinate a massive, multi-domain offensive in the way a state can. Their professionalism is specialized. They are world-class at urban defense, tunneling, and localized ambushes. They are not as good at sustained, large-scale maneuvers in open territory. Their success on October seventh was a sprint, not a marathon, in terms of conventional territory holding.

Corn

Right. But what about internal security? This is something I find fascinating. To plan something that massive and keep it a secret from the most advanced intelligence agencies in the world for years. How do they manage their own operational security, or O P S E C?

Herman

This is where they actually might have an advantage over a conventional army. A conventional army is a bureaucracy with a massive digital footprint. Hamas and Hezbollah operate more like a cult or a secret society. Hezbollah, for instance, has Unit nine hundred, which acts as their internal secret police. They are responsible for thwarting espionage and monitoring their own members. Hamas has a similar wing called the Majd. They monitor phone calls, track social interactions, and the penalty for suspected collaboration is often death. It is a high-pressure, high-consequence environment that creates a very tight lid on information. The planning for major operations has reportedly relied on low-tech methods to avoid digital interception.

Corn

So, it is security through terror within their own ranks, combined with very low-tech methods. We spent the last twenty years becoming so good at intercepting digital signals that we forgot how to track a guy walking through an alleyway with a piece of paper in his pocket. It is a sobering reminder that advanced does not always mean effective. I want to shift to psychological warfare for a second. Daniel mentioned this, and it feels like a huge part of their strategy. The use of body cams and the immediate uploading of footage.

Herman

It is a total departure from traditional military P R. A conventional army has a Spokesperson's Unit with lawyers and censors. They want to look professional and disciplined. Non-state actors like Hamas have a different goal. Their psychological warfare is two-pronged. For their supporters, the goal is to show victory and strength through raw violence. For their enemies, the goal is to spread terror and demoralization. By using body cams and even hijacking the social media accounts of their victims to post footage of the attacks, they turn every fighter into a content creator. It creates this immersive, terrifying reality that a traditional news report just cannot replicate. They have professionalized the insurgency video into a sophisticated information operations wing.

Corn

And it works on a global scale, too. They are able to control the narrative in real-time. Before the I D F can even confirm an event happened, there is already edited footage on Telegram and X, often framed to suit their political goals. They have essentially replaced air power with information power.

Herman

That is a brilliant way to put it, Corn. Information is their asymmetric air force. It travels over borders, it bypasses missile defenses, and it lands directly in the minds of the target audience.

Corn

So, looking at these functions, it seems like they have taken the manual of a state army and stripped away all the parts that require a billion-dollar budget, then doubled down on the parts that require human capital and discipline. But there is a darker side to this professionalism, isn't there? When we talk about the gap in morals that Daniel mentioned.

Herman

That is the most significant gap of all. A conventional army, especially in a democracy, is bound by the laws of armed conflict. There are things you simply cannot do, or at least, things you are held accountable for if you do them. For Hamas or Hezbollah, the lack of that professional constraint is actually a tactical choice. They do not see it as a lack of professionalism; they see it as a total war where every civilian is a target and every civilian building is a shield. It is a professionalism of nihilism. They are very, very good at things that a conventional army is specifically trained not to do.

Corn

It is a chilling realization. But even within that, they have a hierarchy. They have a promotion system, they have uniforms, they have ranks. Why do you think they bother with the trappings of a regular army? If you are an insurgent group, why wear a uniform or have a General Staff?

Herman

It serves several purposes. First, it provides internal cohesion. If you want a group of young men to follow orders that might lead to their death, giving them a sense of being part of a real army is a powerful psychological tool. It elevates them from militants to soldiers in their own minds. Second, it is for the international stage. When they release statements from their military wing, it gives them a veneer of legitimacy. And third, it actually does help with organization. Having a clear chain of command, even if it is shadowy, is necessary to manage thousands of fighters across an urban landscape. Look at Hezbollah's Radwan Force, also known as Unit one hundred twenty-five. They are a highly trained commando unit that wears distinctive patches and follows a strict military hierarchy. They were the model for the elite Nukhba forces that Hamas used on October seventh.

Corn

So it is about the structure of power. But what about the training? You do not just wake up and know how to conduct house-level intelligence mapping. Where does that knowledge come from?

Herman

This is where the state-like emulation becomes very literal. They have mentors. Groups like Hezbollah have been trained by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps for decades. And then Hezbollah, in turn, has trained Hamas. They have military academies in Gaza and Lebanon. They send their promising officers abroad for post-graduate training in places like Iran. They are students of history, too. They study the Vietnam War, the battles in Iraq, and even the I D F's own tactics. They are a learning organization. Every time there is a skirmish, they analyze what worked and what did not. They are constantly iterating.

Corn

That is a key phrase. A learning organization. I think that is what shocked people the most. The idea that these groups are not static. They are evolving, and they are doing it by watching us. It is like a dark mirror of a conventional military. We develop a new defense, they find a way to bypass it. We move to digital, they move to physical.

Herman

And they use our own technology against us. Think about the use of paragliders or commercially available drones. They took things that are essentially toys and weaponized them through professional tactical planning. They did not need to develop a stealth fighter; they just needed to know exactly where the blind spots were in the radar and fly a five-hundred-dollar drone through them.

Corn

It really highlights the vulnerability of high-tech systems to low-tech professionalized thinking. But let's look at the internal security part again. Daniel mentioned this specifically. How do they manage the security of the security? If you have an intelligence wing, you need to make sure that wing isn't compromised.

Herman

They use a cell-based structure, which is classic insurgency, but they have layered a professional counter-intelligence unit on top of it. They have what is basically a secret police within the military. If a fighter starts showing signs of wealth or suddenly has a new phone they cannot explain, they are interrogated. They also use family ties as a form of security. In many of these communities, your family is your bond. If you betray the group, you are not just betraying a political cause; you are endangering your entire extended family. It is a very effective, if brutal, way to ensure loyalty.

Corn

It is almost like a feudal system mashed together with a modern military bureaucracy. It is fascinating and terrifying at the same time. But what does this mean for the gap in the future? Do you think the line between conventional and non-conventional is going to keep blurring until it disappears?

Herman

I think we are seeing the birth of what some call hybrid warfare on steroids. The gap isn't disappearing, but it is changing shape. The conventional army will always have more firepower and technology. But the non-conventional army is closing the intelligence and willpower gap. They are becoming so good at the soft parts of war, the psychology, the information, the urban camouflage, that it neutralizes a lot of the conventional hard power.

Corn

So, if you are an army like the I D F, how do you even respond to that? If your opponent is emulating your best practices but ignoring your moral constraints, how do you fight that without losing your own identity?

Herman

That is the million-dollar question, Corn. And it is the one that every major military is grappling with right now. The response seems to be a move toward more precision and even more intelligence. But there is also a realization that you cannot just tech your way out of this. You need to understand the human element, the social fabric, and the psychological landscape just as well as they do. You have to be as good at storytelling as you are at shooting.

Corn

It feels like we are moving into an era where professionalism in war is no longer about the size of your tanks, but the depth of your data and the speed of your narrative.

Herman

Exactly. And that is why Daniel's prompt is so relevant. By understanding how these groups emulate conventional armies, we can see where the next front line actually is. It is not just a border fence; it is a server, a basement, and a Telegram channel.

Corn

It is a lot to take in. Especially when you realize that this isn't just theory for us. We see it every day. The sirens, the news alerts, the tension in the air. It is the reality of living in a place where these two types of professionalism are constantly clashing.

Herman

It is. And I think it is important for our listeners to realize that when we talk about professionalism in this context, we aren't giving these groups a compliment. We are acknowledging their effectiveness and their danger. To underestimate your enemy is the first step toward defeat. Recognizing that Hamas or Hezbollah are highly organized, intelligence-driven organizations is necessary to understand why this conflict is so difficult and so devastating.

Corn

Right. It is about cold, hard analysis. Not they are just a bunch of guys in sandals, but they are a sophisticated military entity with a specific, deadly skill set.

Herman

Precisely.

Corn

Well, I think we have covered a lot of ground here. From the house-level mapping to the asymmetric air force of social media. It is a grim topic, but a necessary one.

Herman

It really is. And I think it leads us to some pretty clear takeaways for anyone trying to understand modern conflict. First, do not confuse non-state with unorganized. Second, realize that low-tech can often defeat high-tech if the intelligence behind it is superior. And third, the moral gap is not just a philosophical difference; it is a tactical reality that shapes how these wars are fought.

Corn

Those are solid points, Herman. And for our listeners, I think the big takeaway is to look past the surface level. When you see a news report about a clash, remember that behind that event is likely months or years of intelligence gathering, professional planning, and psychological maneuvering.

Herman

Well said. And hey, if you have been following My Weird Prompts for a while and you are finding these deep dives helpful, we would really appreciate it if you could leave us a review on your podcast app or on Spotify. It genuinely helps other people find the show and join the conversation.

Corn

Yeah, it really does make a difference. We are here in Jerusalem, trying to make sense of all this, and having a community of curious listeners makes the work feel a lot more meaningful.

Herman

Absolutely. You can find all our past episodes, including our earlier discussions on regional dynamics, at myweirdprompts.com. We have a searchable archive there, so if you want to dig deeper into any of the topics we have touched on today, that is the place to go.

Corn

And thanks again to Daniel for sending in this prompt. It was a tough one, but I think it is one of the most important discussions we have had in a while.

Herman

Definitely. Thanks, Daniel.

Corn

Alright, everyone. This has been My Weird Prompts. I am Corn.

Herman

And I am Herman Poppleberry.

Corn

We will see you next time. Stay curious, and stay safe.

Herman

Until next time.

Corn

We should probably mention that intelligence gathering isn't just about the enemy, right? It is also about understanding yourself. One of the things that conventional armies often struggle with is self-intelligence. Knowing where your own weaknesses are before the enemy finds them.

Herman

That is actually a great point to end on. The professionalization of the enemy often forces a conventional army to look in the mirror and realize they have become complacent. That mirror is often very painful to look into.

Corn

It certainly is. Especially when the reflection shows that you were outplayed by someone you did not take seriously enough.

Herman

A lesson for all of us, I think. Not just in war, but in life.

Corn

True that. Alright, let's wrap this up. I think I need a coffee and some fresh air.

Herman

I am right there with you. Jerusalem is beautiful this time of year, even with everything going on. Let's go take a walk.

Corn

Sounds like a plan. Thanks for listening, everyone.

Herman

Take care.