

MY WEIRD PROMPTS

Podcast Transcript

EPISODE #354

From Partners to Rivals: The Israel-Iran Paradox

Published January 29, 2026 • Runtime: 21:40

<https://myweirdprompts.com/episode/israel-iran-geopolitical-evolution/>

EPISODE SYNOPSIS

In this episode, Herman and Corn dive deep into the complex history of Israel and Iran, tracing a relationship that has swung from strategic partnership to existential enmity. They explore the early days of the "Periphery Doctrine," the secret military collaborations of the 1970s, and the seismic shift brought about by the 1979 Islamic Revolution. From the "Axis of Resistance" to the direct escalations of April 2024, this discussion unpacks the ideological and geopolitical drivers behind one of the world's most intense rivalries and asks whether the deep cultural ties of the past can ever be reclaimed.

DANIEL'S PROMPT

Daniel

I'd like to discuss the history and evolution of the Israel-Iran relationship. Before the revolution, relations were positive, but they have since turned extremely hostile. Why does Iran target Israel with such unique intensity compared to other regional conflicts? Has this relationship passed a point of no return, or is there potential for a return to the alliance that once existed between the Jewish and Persian people?

TRANSCRIPT

Corn

Hey everyone, welcome back to My Weird Prompts. I am Corn, and as always, I am joined by my brother.

Herman

Herman Poppleberry, at your service. And today we are tackling a topic that feels particularly relevant given where we are sitting right now. Our housemate Daniel sent us a voice note earlier today, and you could really hear the curiosity, and maybe a bit of that lingering tension, in his voice. He was asking about the history and evolution of the relationship between Israel and Iran.

Corn

It is a heavy one, but a necessary one. Daniel was specifically reflecting on the transition from the golden era of relations before the revolution to the extreme hostility we see today. He mentioned the technical side of the conflict, like the missile speeds and the interception systems, which we have touched on before, but he really wanted us to dig into the why. Why does Iran target Israel with such unique intensity compared to other regional conflicts? And is there any way back?

Herman

It is a fascinating paradox, Corn. If you go back sixty or seventy years, these two nations were not just at peace, they were strategic partners. It is one of the most dramatic geopolitical shifts in modern history. We are talking about a relationship that went from secret military projects and oil pipelines to what we saw in April of twenty twenty-four, with hundreds of drones and missiles being fired directly from Iranian soil toward us.

Corn

Right, that April twenty twenty-four attack, Operation True Promise, really changed the calculus. It was the first time Iran attacked Israel directly from its own territory, moving past the shadow war that had been going on for decades. But to understand how we got to that point, we have to go back to the beginning. Herman, you were looking into the early days of the state. Most people assume the hostility has always been there, but that is not true at all, right?

Herman

Not even close. In fact, after the State of Israel was established in nineteen forty-eight, Iran was actually quite early to the table in terms of recognition. Turkey was the first Muslim-majority country to recognize Israel in nineteen forty-nine, and Iran followed shortly after, granting de facto recognition in nineteen forty-eight and then full de jure recognition in March of nineteen fifty.

Corn

Nineteen fifty. So, just two years after independence. That is a detail that often gets lost. Why was Iran so quick to engage when so many other regional players were moving in the opposite direction?

Herman

It came down to a strategy that Israel's first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, called the Periphery Doctrine. The idea was simple but brilliant. Israel was surrounded by hostile Arab neighbors, so it sought to build alliances with the non-Arab states on the outer circle of the Middle East. That meant Turkey, Ethiopia, and most importantly, Iran. At the time, Iran was under the rule of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. The Shah saw Israel as a useful partner for a few reasons. One, they shared a common concern about the rise of pan-Arab nationalism, led by Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser. Two, Israel was a gateway to Washington. The Shah wanted closer ties with the United States, and he believed a strong relationship with Israel would help facilitate that.

Corn

And it was not just a diplomatic handshake. This was a deep, functional relationship. I remember reading about the oil.

Herman

Oh, the oil was the lifeblood of the alliance. After the Suez Crisis in nineteen fifty-six, Israel needed a reliable energy source. Iran became Israel's primary oil supplier. They even built a joint venture, the Eilat-Ashkelon Pipeline Company, to transport Iranian oil from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean. It was a massive piece of infrastructure that benefited both economies. But here is the part that really blows my mind, considering today's context. They were also deep into military and intelligence cooperation.

Corn

You mean Mossad and SAVAK?

Herman

Exactly. The intelligence agencies worked hand-in-hand. But even more striking was Project Flower. This was a joint military project in the late nineteen seventies where Israel and Iran were actually working together to develop a surface-to-surface missile system. Iran provided the funding, and Israel provided the technology. Think about the irony of that for a second. The very foundations of the missile technology that the two countries now use against each other were, in part, born out of a collaborative effort forty-five years ago.

Corn

That is incredible. It is like a different timeline altogether. But even during that golden age, it was never a public romance, was it? It was more of a secret affair.

Herman

Precisely. It was often described as a marriage without a marriage certificate. The Shah was always mindful of his own public opinion and the broader Muslim world. So, while the cooperation was intense, it was kept mostly under the radar. There was an Israeli mission in Tehran, but it did not have a formal flag or embassy sign. It functioned like an embassy, but without the title.

Corn

So, we have this decade of cooperation, shared enemies, and shared economic interests. Then comes nineteen seventy-nine. The Islamic Revolution. How quickly did the floor fall out?

Herman

Almost overnight. When Ayatollah Khomeini came to power, the geopolitical map was set on fire. The revolution was not just a change in government; it was a total reordering of Iranian identity. Khomeini's ideology was built on three pillars: anti-imperialism, anti-Zionism, and the export of the Islamic revolution. He famously labeled the United States the Great Satan and Israel the Little Satan.

Corn

The terminology is so specific. Why the Little Satan? Why did Israel become such a central target for a revolution that was primarily about domestic Iranian issues?

Herman

That is the million-dollar question Daniel was asking. Part of it was about legitimacy. By taking a hardline stance against Israel, Khomeini could claim the mantle of leadership for the entire Muslim world, bypassing the traditional Arab-Persian divide. It was a way to say, we are more committed to the Palestinian cause than the Arab leaders themselves. But there is also a deep theological component. In Khomeini's worldview, the existence of a Jewish state in the heart of the Muslim world was an affront to the divine order. It was seen as a colonial implantation that had to be uprooted.

Corn

So it shifted from a pragmatic, state-to-state relationship based on national interest to an ideological struggle where one side viewed the other's existence as inherently illegitimate. That is a hard gap to bridge. But even after the revolution, things did not go to zero immediately, right? There was that weird period in the nineteen eighties during the Iran-Iraq war.

Herman

Right, the nineteen eighties are such a fascinating, messy chapter. Even though the rhetoric from Tehran was incredibly hostile, the old logic of the Periphery Doctrine did not die easily in Jerusalem. When Iraq invaded Iran in nineteen eighty, Israel actually saw Iraq as the greater immediate threat. Saddam Hussein was the one with the massive conventional army right on the doorstep of the Arab heartland. So, believe it or not, Israel actually sold arms and spare parts to the Islamic Republic during the early eighties.

Corn

This is the era of the Iran-Contra affair, right?

Herman

Exactly. Israel acted as an intermediary, shipping American-made weapons to Iran in exchange for the release of hostages in Lebanon and, from Israel's perspective, to keep the two regional giants, Iran and Iraq, busy fighting each other. It was the ultimate realpolitik. Israel hoped that the pragmatists in the Iranian military would eventually take back control from the clerics and restore the old alliance.

Corn

But that was a miscalculation.

Herman

A huge one. Instead of the pragmatists taking over, the hardliners used the war to solidify their grip on power. They also used that period to start building what they now call the Axis of Resistance. They saw a vacuum in Lebanon during the civil war and the nineteen eighty-two Israeli invasion, and they filled it by helping to create Hezbollah. That was the moment the shadow war really began. It moved from state-level diplomacy to proxy warfare.

Corn

Let's talk about that Axis of Resistance. It is a term we hear all the time now. It includes Hezbollah in Lebanon, various militias in Iraq and Syria, and the Houthis in Yemen. Why has Iran invested so much in this network specifically to target Israel?

Herman

It is about strategic depth. Iran realized early on that it could not win a conventional war against Israel, especially with Israel's technological edge and its alliance with the United States. So, they built a deterrent. By surrounding Israel with these proxies, they created what military analysts often call a ring of fire, though the Iranians themselves prefer the term Axis of Resistance. The goal is to be able to bleed Israel through a thousand cuts without ever having to engage in a direct, full-scale war that would put Tehran at risk.

Corn

Until April twenty twenty-four.

Herman

Exactly. That was the breaking of the glass. For years, the rule of the game was that Iran would use proxies, and Israel would hit Iranian targets in Syria or through cyber warfare, but they would never strike each other's sovereign territory directly. When Israel hit that building next to the Iranian consulate in Damascus, Iran decided the old rules no longer applied. They launched over three hundred drones and missiles. And while ninety-nine percent were intercepted, the psychological barrier was shattered.

Corn

It really brings home what Daniel was saying about the technical intensity. When you are looking at ballistic missiles that can travel from Iran to Israel in twelve minutes, the margin for error is zero. We talked about subsea fiber optics back in episode three hundred thirty-four, and how that infrastructure is the backbone of the modern world. In a similar way, the integrated air defense systems, the Arrow three, the David's Sling, these are the only things standing between a tense status quo and total regional catastrophe.

Herman

And that brings us to the core of Daniel's question. Why the unique intensity? Why does Iran care so much more about Israel than, say, the territorial disputes it has with its neighbors or the internal struggles in the Caucasus?

Corn

I think it is because Israel has become the central organizing principle for the Iranian regime's foreign policy. If you take away the enmity toward Israel, you take away a huge part of the regime's *raison d'être*. It is the one issue that allows them to project power far beyond their borders. But there is also a second-order effect here. Iran sees Israel as the primary obstacle to its goal of regional hegemony. As long as Israel is strong and allied with the Gulf states, through things like the Abraham Accords, Iran's path to being the undisputed leader of the Middle East is blocked.

Herman

That is such a crucial point, Corn. The realignment we have seen in the last few years, with Israel, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and increasingly Saudi Arabia finding common ground, is Iran's worst nightmare. It is the Periphery Doctrine in reverse. Instead of Israel reaching out to the outer circle, the inner circle is reaching out to Israel to contain the outer threat of Iran.

Corn

So, is there a point of no return? Daniel asked if we could ever go back to that alliance between the Jewish and Persian people. When you look at the history, the cultural ties are deep. There is a large community of Iranian Jews here in Israel who still feel a deep connection to their heritage. Cyrus the Great is remembered in Jewish tradition as a hero who allowed the return to Zion.

Herman

It is a beautiful sentiment, and I think it is important to distinguish between the Iranian people and the Iranian regime. From everything we see, especially with the protest movements inside Iran over the last few years, a lot of ordinary Iranians don't share the regime's obsession with destroying Israel. They are more concerned with their own economy, their own freedoms, and their own future. There is a famous slogan that has been heard in the streets of Tehran: Neither Gaza nor Lebanon, my life only for Iran.

Corn

That is a powerful statement. It suggests that the unique intensity Daniel mentioned is a top-down imposition, not a bottom-up sentiment. But the reality is, as long as the current structure of power in Tehran remains, a return to the nineteen sixties model seems impossible. The ideological investment is just too high.

Herman

I agree. But I don't think it is a point of no return for the peoples. If there were a fundamental change in the nature of the government in Tehran, the logic of cooperation would return almost instantly. The two countries are naturally complementary. Iran has the energy and the massive market; Israel has the water technology, the agricultural tech, and the high-tech sector. They are the two non-Arab powerhouses of the region. A partnership between them would transform the Middle East overnight.

Corn

It is a hopeful vision, but the road there is incredibly dangerous. We are currently in a cycle of escalation where both sides are testing the limits of the other's deterrence. The technical aspects Daniel was curious about, the missile speeds, the cyber attacks, the drone swarms, these are the tools of a conflict that is moving faster than the diplomacy can keep up with.

Herman

One thing that really struck me in my research was how much the Iranian nuclear program has changed the stakes. In the old days, the rivalry was about regional influence. Now, it is existential. Israel sees a nuclear-armed Iran as a threat it simply cannot live with. And Iran sees its nuclear program as the ultimate guarantee of regime survival. When you have two sides that view the other as an existential threat, the room for compromise shrinks to almost nothing.

Corn

So, what are the practical takeaways for our listeners? First, I think it is vital to understand that this hostility is not ancient. It is a modern, political, and ideological construct. It was created, which means, theoretically, it can be uncreated. Second, watch the proxies. The relationship between Israel and Iran is rarely direct; it is played out in the streets of Beirut, the mountains of Yemen, and the digital corridors of the internet.

Herman

And third, don't ignore the internal dynamics of Iran. The regime's foreign policy is often a reflection of its domestic insecurities. The more it feels threatened at home, the more it tends to lash out abroad to rally support. And conversely, if the Iranian people ever manage to reclaim their government, the entire geopolitical map of the world will shift in a heartbeat.

Corn

It really makes you appreciate the complexity of where we live. You can be sitting in a cafe in Jerusalem, enjoying the sun, and at the same time, there are thousands of people in offices in Tehran and Tel Aviv whose entire job is to think about the trajectory of a missile. It is a strange, dual reality.

Herman

It is. And I think Daniel's prompt reminds us that we have to keep asking the why. If we just focus on the what, the missiles and the sirens, we lose sight of the fact that this is a human story. It is a story of a friendship that turned into a bitter rivalry, and potentially, a story of a reconciliation that hasn't happened yet.

Corn

I think that is a good place to start wrapping this up. We have covered a lot of ground, from the oil pipelines of the fifties to the drones of twenty twenty-four. It is a reminder that in history, nothing is permanent. Alliances shift, revolutions happen, and the enemies of today were often the friends of yesterday.

Herman

Exactly. And hey, if you are listening and you have been following our deep dives for a while, we really appreciate you being part of this journey. We have been doing this for over three hundred episodes now, and the engagement from this community is what keeps us going.

Corn

Absolutely. And if you have a second, leaving a review on your podcast app or on Spotify really does help other people find the show. We are just two brothers and a housemate trying to make sense of some pretty weird and complex prompts, and every bit of support counts.

Herman

It really does. You can find us, as always, on Spotify and at our website, myweirdprompts.com. We have the full archive there, including that episode on subsea cables we mentioned earlier.

Corn

Thanks to Daniel for sending this one in. It definitely gave us a lot to chew on. We will be back next week with another one.

Herman

Until then, stay curious. This has been My Weird Prompts.

Corn

Take care, everyone.

Herman

Goodbye.

Corn

So, Herman, do you think we will see an Iranian embassy in Tel Aviv in our lifetime?

Herman

That is a bold question, Corn. If you asked me ten years ago, I would have said no way. But after seeing how fast the world has changed since twenty twenty, I have learned never to say never. The Persian people have a history that spans thousands of years; the current regime is just a blip in that timeline.

Corn

A long blip, but a blip nonetheless.

Herman

Exactly. The geography hasn't changed. The mutual interests haven't changed. Only the ideology has. And ideologies, unlike geography, are notoriously unstable.

Corn

Well, on that note of cautious optimism, I think we are done.

Herman

Agreed. Let's go see what Daniel is cooking for dinner. I hope it is not just toast again.

Corn

Knowing him, it probably is. But hey, at least the conversation will be good.

Herman

Fair point. See you guys later.