

MY WEIRD PROMPTS

Podcast Transcript

EPISODE #353

The Art of the Leak: Psyops and Military Censorship

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EPISODE SYNOPSIS

In this episode of My Weird Prompts, hosts Corn and Herman explore the paradoxical world of Israeli military censorship and strategic leaks. They dissect why headlines often highlight security vulnerabilities—ranging from border gaps to base security—and whether these reports are genuine failures, domestic lobbying efforts for bigger budgets, or sophisticated psychological operations designed to mislead adversaries. By examining concepts like "reflexive control" and "information laundering," the duo uncovers how the line between transparency and deception is thinner than it seems in the modern information age.

DANIEL'S PROMPT

Daniel

I've been following the news in Israel and often see reports about military vulnerabilities—like on the Jordanian border or at certain bases—that don't seem to make sense to release publicly, especially given our strict military censorship. It makes me wonder if some of this news is actually disinformation or "psyops" intended to mislead. Why would the military reveal such sensitive information in real-time unless it was a strategic move? I'd like to hear your thoughts on disinformation, psyops, and why what we read in the news might not always be what it seems.

TRANSCRIPT

Corn

Hey everyone, welcome back to My Weird Prompts. I am Corn, and I am sitting here in our living room in Jerusalem with my brother.

Herman

Herman Poppleberry, at your service. And man, what a beautiful Jerusalem afternoon it is. Although, listening to that audio our housemate Daniel sent in, it sounds like he was having a much noisier day out in traffic.

Corn

Yeah, Daniel was definitely in the thick of it. But he raised such a fascinating point. He is looking at the news here in Israel and seeing these reports about military vulnerabilities, like the security gaps on the Jordanian border or issues with base security, and he is asking the million dollar question. Why is this being reported?

Herman

It is a total paradox on the surface, right? We live in a country with a very active military censor. We have strict rules about what can and cannot be published regarding national security. So when you see a headline that basically says, hey, we have a massive hole in our fence right here, you have to wonder if it is a mistake, a leak, or something much more calculated.

Corn

Exactly. Is it a genuine failure of the system, or are we looking at a psychological operation, a psyop, designed to mislead an adversary? Daniel mentioned that in the world of tech, you do not disclose a vulnerability until the patch is ready. But in the world of geopolitics and kinetic warfare, the rules seem a lot more... blurry.

Herman

Blurry is an understatement, Corn. It is more like a hall of mirrors. I have been digging into the history of strategic deception and how it has evolved, especially with the way social media has changed the speed of information. We are going to go deep today on the mechanics of disinformation, the role of the military censor, and why sometimes, the best way to hide the truth is to shout a version of it from the rooftops.

Corn

I think a good place to start is the actual mechanism of the Israeli military censor. For people listening outside of Israel, this might sound like something out of a spy novel, but it is a very real part of daily life here for journalists. Herman, can you break down how that actually works in practice?

Herman

Right, so it is officially called the Tzumzura. It is a unit within the military intelligence directorate. By law, any news report that touches on state security, certain aspects of foreign relations, or sensitive military operations has to be submitted to the censor before it is published. Now, it is not as heavy handed as it was in the nineteen fifties, but it is still very much there. In fact, just last June, the censor issued new directives specifically requiring prior approval for anyone broadcasting the aftermath of missile attacks on military sites. They even extended this to individual social media accounts.

Corn

And that is what makes Daniel's observation so sharp. If the censor is looking at every major story, then a story about a vulnerability on the Jordanian border did not just slip through. It was allowed.

Herman

Exactly. There are three main reasons why the censor would allow a report about a vulnerability to go public. The first is what we might call the safety valve. If a problem is so well known to the public or has been reported abroad, the censor often realizes they cannot stop the tide. But the second and third reasons are where it gets interesting. One is internal pressure, and the other is strategic deception.

Corn

Let's talk about that internal pressure first. Sometimes, high ranking officials feel that the only way to get the military to fix a systemic problem is to shame them in the public eye. There have been reports of security breaches at Israeli airbases that have raised serious questions about access control and vetting procedures.

Herman

Right. If you are a military inspector and you have written ten classified reports saying the bases in the south are easy to break into, and nothing changes, you might leak that information to a journalist. In that case, the censor might allow it because it is seen as an essential part of a democratic discourse or because the political pressure to reveal it is too high. It is a way of forcing a patch, to use Daniel's tech analogy.

Corn

But that assumes the goal is actually to fix the problem. What about Daniel's other theory? That the news itself is a psyop? This is where the concept of reflexive control comes in, right?

Herman

Oh, I love that you brought up reflexive control. It is a Soviet era concept, but it is deeply embedded in modern military strategy. The idea is that you feed your adversary information that causes them to make a decision that is actually in your interest.

Corn

So, for example, if I report that the Jordanian border is weak, I might be trying to bait an adversary into attempting a crossing at a specific point where I have actually set up a massive, hidden ambush.

Herman

Exactly. You create a perceived vulnerability to funnel the enemy into a kill zone. It is like the old Trojan Horse, but instead of a wooden horse, it is a headline in the evening news. If an adversary thinks they have found a gap in your armor, they are going to focus all their energy on that gap. We saw this recently with the IDF drills simulating Houthi infiltrations from Jordan. By making those drills public, you are signaling to the Houthis that you are watching that specific route, which might force them to change their plans or walk right into a trap.

Corn

That is fascinating, but it also feels like a very dangerous game to play with your own public's trust. If the citizens of Israel keep reading that their borders are porous, they get scared. They lose faith in the military. Is the tactical advantage of a psyop worth the strategic cost of a terrified population?

Herman

That is the ultimate trade off. And we have seen this play out in real time. There is always this tension between what the people living on the border see with their own eyes and what the official narrative is. If the government tells you the border is secure, but you can see the fence is down, you stop trusting the government. But if the government says the border is weak as part of a ruse, you still stop trusting them.

Corn

It reminds me of the Iranian missile attacks we have been seeing over the last year or so, especially that twelve day conflict back in June. Daniel mentioned the government advising people not to share photos of landing sites or missile trails. That makes perfect sense from a security standpoint. You do not want to give the enemy a free damage assessment or help them calibrate their GPS coordinates.

Herman

Right, that is basic operational security, or OPSEC. But then you see these reports that seem to contradict that. You see official sources releasing very specific details about where things landed or what was intercepted. Sometimes that is because they want to project a sense of transparency, but other times, it is to mask the actual damage. If you admit to ten minor hits, people might not go looking for the one major hit you are trying to hide. During that June war, there were reports of cyber vulnerabilities being exploited. Reporting that vulnerability might have been a way to warn the public, or it might have been a way to feed adversaries false information.

Corn

It is a layer of noise. You provide just enough truth to make the lie believable. I am curious about the Jordanian border specifically though. That has been in the news a lot lately, especially with the rise in smuggling attempts and the changing regional dynamics we have been following here in early twenty twenty-six. Why would the IDF allow reports about vulnerabilities there specifically?

Herman

Think about the audience. It is not just the adversaries. Sometimes the audience for a reported vulnerability is the parliament, the Knesset. Budget negotiations between the military and finance ministry are ongoing, and the military is always seeking resources for border security infrastructure and new military capabilities. If the military wants public support for increased funding, they need the public to be worried. A headline about a vulnerable border is a very effective way to secure support in budget discussions.

Corn

So it is not a psyop against the enemy, it is a lobbying effort directed at the treasury.

Herman

Precisely. It is a domestic psyop. And this happens in every country, but in Israel, because the military is so central to our identity and our survival, those headlines carry a lot more weight. When a military official goes on the national broadcaster and says we are not ready for a multi front war, he might be telling the truth, or he might be trying to shock the system into action.

Corn

But how is a regular person supposed to tell the difference? When I open my phone and see a report about a security breach, how do I know if I am looking at a genuine leak, a budget plea, or a trap for a foreign intelligence agency?

Herman

That is the hardest part. But there are clues. You have to look at the timing and the source. If a vulnerability is reported right before a budget vote, it is probably financial. If it is reported in the middle of a period of high tension with a specific group, it might be bait. And if it is reported by a foreign news outlet first, it is usually because the Israeli censor blocked it here, which suggests it is a genuine secret they wanted to keep. There have been various reports about concerns regarding foreign technology in military use. Was that a real security move, or a signal to Washington that we are aligning with their tech policies?

Corn

That is a great point. We see that a lot, where the local news says, according to foreign reports. That is the classic workaround for the censor. If the censor won't let you say it, you leak it to the New York Times or the Guardian, and then you report on what they said.

Herman

Right, and the censor usually lets that through because the cat is already out of the bag. But even then, you have to wonder. Did the military intelligence branch leak it to the foreign press themselves? We have seen instances where the Mossad or the IDF will feed a story to a foreign journalist specifically so it can be reported back into Israel. It gives the information a sense of external validation.

Corn

It is like laundering information. You take a piece of propaganda, run it through a reputable international news organization, and it comes back out looking like an objective fact.

Herman

Exactly. And that brings us back to Daniel's point about disinformation. We live in an era where the barrier to entry for creating a convincing narrative is zero. With generative AI, which we have talked about so much on this show, an adversary can create thousands of fake reports about vulnerabilities that look and sound just like the ones we are discussing.

Corn

So the military might be releasing real vulnerabilities to distract from the fake ones, or vice versa. It becomes an information saturation strategy. If you provide a thousand different versions of the truth, the actual truth is just as hidden as if you had said nothing at all.

Herman

It is the firehose of falsehood. It is a technique we have seen used extensively in modern conflicts. The goal is not to make people believe a specific lie, but to make them doubt that the truth is even discoverable. When Daniel sees those reports and feels that they don't make sense, he is actually having the correct, healthy reaction. He is sensing the inconsistency in the matrix.

Corn

I want to go back to the idea of the military inspector and the national broadcaster. Daniel mentioned concerns about how easy it might be to break into certain bases. I remember that. They had a journalist literally just walk through a gate or climb a fence that should have been guarded.

Herman

Yeah, those are always viral moments. And they are deeply embarrassing for the military. But here is the thing. Most people look at that and think, wow, we are so incompetent. But a more cynical analyst might look at that and say, if they are showing us this base, which is probably a secondary storage facility, what are they not showing us at the high security sites?

Corn

It is a distraction. Look at the shiny vulnerability over here so you don't notice the fortress over there.

Herman

Or, even more subtly, it creates a sense of overconfidence in the enemy. If I am a commander of a commando unit in a hostile country and I see a video of a journalist walking into an Israeli base, I might think, oh, this is going to be easy. My soldiers are much better than that journalist. I will send them in. And that is exactly when they walk into a highly sophisticated, automated defense system that was never shown on camera.

Corn

That is a very Sun Tzu approach. All warfare is based on deception. When you are strong, appear weak. When you are weak, appear strong.

Herman

Exactly. And in twenty twenty-six, that deception happens on the screen of your smartphone. It is not just about camouflaging a tank in the desert anymore. It is about camouflaging the truth in a news feed.

Corn

I think we should talk about the consequences of this. If we accept that a significant portion of the news we consume might be strategic deception, how does that affect the social fabric? We live in a small country. Everyone knows someone in the army. Everyone has a brother or a cousin or a friend who is serving. When the news says the border is weak, but your cousin on the border says it is fine, you start to feel like you are living in two different realities.

Herman

It creates a massive amount of cognitive dissonance. And we see this in the polls. Trust in traditional media and even in military spokespeople has been fluctuating wildly. People are turning more to these underground Telegram channels or private groups because they feel like they are getting the raw, unvarnished truth there. But of course, those channels are even easier to manipulate with disinformation.

Corn

It is a perfect environment for conspiracy theories to thrive. If you can't trust the official report, then any alternative explanation, no matter how wild, starts to look plausible.

Herman

Right. And that is a huge win for our adversaries. One of the primary goals of psychological warfare is to destabilize the home front. If you can make the Israeli public lose faith in their institutions, you have done more damage than a thousand missiles. So, in a way, the reporting of vulnerabilities, whether they are real or fake, plays right into that.

Corn

So, why do it? Why would the military or the government take that risk?

Herman

Because sometimes the short term tactical need outweighs the long term social cost. If I am in the middle of a conflict and I can save a hundred soldiers' lives by tricking the enemy with a fake news report about a vulnerability, I am going to do it every single time. The commander on the ground does not care about the social fabric five years from now. He cares about the objective today.

Corn

That is a grim way of looking at it, but probably accurate. It reminds me of Operation Fortitude in World War Two, where the Allies created an entire ghost army with inflatable tanks and fake radio traffic to trick the Germans into thinking the D-Day landings would happen at Pas-de-Calais instead of Normandy.

Herman

Exactly! And they even used a dead body with fake documents, the famous Operation Mincemeat, to mislead them about the invasion of Sicily. Those were massive, coordinated efforts of disinformation. Today, we don't need inflatable tanks. We just need a few well placed leaks to a couple of influential journalists and a bot network to amplify them.

Corn

And the speed of it is what changed. Back then, it took weeks or months for a deception to take hold. Now, it happens in minutes. If a report comes out at six p.m., it is being analyzed by intelligence agencies and discussed by the public by six-oh-five.

Herman

And that speed actually makes the deception more effective. It leaves less time for fact checking. It forces the adversary to make a snap decision. In the heat of a crisis, you don't have time to wonder if the report about the Jordanian border is a budget plea or a trap. You have to react to the information you have.

Corn

So, what is the takeaway for our listeners? When Daniel or anyone else sees a report that just doesn't seem to make sense, what should be the first question they ask themselves?

Herman

The first question should always be: Cui bono? Who benefits? Who benefits if I believe this information? If the answer is the military treasury, it is probably a budget move. If the answer is an enemy commander, it might be a trap. If the answer is a politician, it is probably an election tactic.

Corn

And I think we also have to accept that we might never know the real answer. We are living through history as it happens, and the fog of war has moved from the battlefield into our living rooms.

Herman

That is a great way to put it. The fog of war is now digital. And just like a soldier in the fog, you have to move carefully, check your surroundings, and not believe everything you think you see.

Corn

I also think it is worth mentioning that sometimes, a vulnerability is just a vulnerability. We shouldn't fall into the trap of thinking everything is a master plan. Sometimes, the fence really is broken, and the military really did mess up, and the journalist really did just find a way in. Incompetence is often a much simpler explanation than a complex psyop.

Herman

Ha! You are absolutely right. There is a name for that, Hanlon's Razor. Never attribute to malice that which is adequately explained by stupidity. Or in this case, never attribute to a brilliant psyop that which is adequately explained by a lazy guard and a broken gate.

Corn

It is the tension between those two things, the brilliant deception and the mundane failure, that makes following the news here so exhausting and so fascinating at the same time.

Herman

It really is. And I think that is why Daniel's prompt resonated with us so much. We all feel that tension every time we open a news app. Is this real? Is this a play? Am I being used?

Corn

It makes me think about the role of the journalist in all this. Are they willing participants, or are they being used as pawns in these games?

Herman

It is a mix. Some journalists have very close ties to the military establishment and are happy to run a story if they think it helps national security. Others are fiercely independent and want to expose every failure they find. But even the most independent journalist can be fed a leak that is actually a plant. If a source you trust gives you a document that looks real, you are going to publish it.

Corn

And once it is published, the journalist has done their job, but the person who leaked it has also done theirs. The information is out there, and the effect is achieved, regardless of the journalist's intent.

Herman

Exactly. It is a symbiotic relationship. The journalist gets a scoop, and the leaker gets their narrative into the world. It is a win-win for them, but a confusing mess for the rest of us.

Corn

I want to touch on one more thing before we wrap up. The idea of the Jordanian border specifically. We talked about it as a potential trap or a budget move, but there is also a third possibility: deterrence.

Herman

Oh, tell me more.

Corn

Well, if you report a vulnerability, but you also report that you are now fixing it with some incredible new technology or a massive troop surge, you are sending a message to the other side. You are saying, we know you know about this gap, and we have already closed it. Don't even try. It is as much about psychological defense as it is about physical defense.

Herman

That is a classic move. It is like putting a sign on your house that says this home is protected by a high tech security system, even if you don't actually have one. The goal is to change the adversary's cost-benefit analysis. You make the perceived cost of an attack higher than the potential gain.

Corn

So, even the reporting of the vulnerability is a form of defense. You are controlling the narrative of your own weakness to prevent it from being exploited.

Herman

It is all about control. Control of information, control of perception, and ultimately, control of the adversary's actions. And in a place as small and high stakes as Israel, that control is everything.

Corn

Well, this has been a deep dive. I feel like I need to go read the news now with a magnifying glass and a healthy dose of skepticism.

Herman

Just remember the magnifying glass might be part of the psyop too, Corn!

Corn

Ha! Fair point. Before we sign off, I want to say thanks to Daniel for sending this in. It is exactly the kind of thing that keeps us up at night, and it was great to finally talk it through.

Herman

Definitely. And hey, if you are listening and you are enjoying these deep dives into the weird and the wonderful, 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.

Corn

Yeah, it makes a huge difference. You can find all our past episodes, including the ones we mentioned today, at our website, myweirdprompts.com. We also have a contact form there if you have a prompt of your own you want us to tackle.

Herman

This has been My Weird Prompts. I am Herman Poppleberry.

Corn

And I am Corn. We will be back next week with another one. Until then, keep questioning what you read.

Herman

And stay curious. Bye everyone!

Corn

See ya.

Herman

You know, I was just thinking about that military inspector again. If he really did get that base security fixed, he deserves a medal, even if he had to embarrass everyone to do it.

Corn

Or maybe that was the plan all along. Give him the medal, make him look like a hero, and then nobody questions the next thing he says.

Herman

Oh, man. You are getting good at this. The layers never end.

Corn

They really don't. Alright, let's go get some coffee. I think my brain is officially fried.

Herman

Coffee sounds like a plan. I promise I won't try to deceive you about who is paying.

Corn

We will see about that.

Herman

Ha! Fair enough. Thanks for listening, everyone. We will catch you in the next one.

Corn

Take care.

Herman

Goodbye!

Corn

Bye.

Herman

Seriously though, who is paying for the coffee?

Corn

We will flip for it.

Herman

A fair game of chance. I like it. Or is it?

Corn

Just walk, Herman. Just walk.

Herman

Going! I am going.

Corn

Good.

Herman

See you guys.

Corn

Bye.