# Episode Book

EPISODE #5527

## Seven Ways to Measure a Country's Isolation

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### SYNOPSIS

Benjamin Netanyahu flew to New York for a few hours at the UN General Assembly — no meeting with Trump, no Musk, a walkout reportedly planned, and wheels up before Sukkot. But is this really Israel's worst diplomatic moment since 1948? Rather than answer from feeling, this episode builds an instrument first: seven operational heuristics for measuring a country's global integration, from travel freedom and bilateral meetings to sanctions, UN votes, and diaspora security. Then we read the meter — and test the historical claim against 1975 and 1982.

# TRANSCRIPT



**Corn**

Benjamin Netanyahu addresses the UN General Assembly today, and the visit is short even by his standards. A few hours on the ground in New York, wheels up before the festival candles are lit.



**Herman**

And Daniel's been watching this one closely.



**Corn**

He has. Here's what he wrote in. The Prime Minister won't be meeting President Trump, won't be meeting Elon Musk, and a significant walkout is apparently being planned ahead of the speech. Netanyahu's office says he has to get back for Sukkot, which begins Friday evening, and that's a real deadline. But much of the world media is reading the same-day dash as evidence of what they're calling Israel's unprecedented diplomatic isolation.



**Herman**

And Daniel says he tends to agree.



**Corn**

He does. His words, roughly: whether the data supports it or not, he feels Israel's international reputation is probably at its lowest point since the founding of the state. And he's careful about why. It's not just that American public sentiment turned after Gaza. It's that the world, for Israelis, is starting to feel like a hostile place. Videos of Israelis being harassed, sometimes attacked, in Europe and the US, becoming routine enough that they're in danger of becoming too mundane to notice, even here.



**Herman**

That's the part that stuck with me.



### Corn

Then he makes the pivot that makes this an episode instead of a rant. He says the question of whether the current isolation is the greatest ever is tempting to answer from feeling and hard to answer empirically. So: if you wanted to gauge a country's isolation by reference to its global integration, or lack of it, at a specific point in time, what heuristics would you use? And by those heuristics, how would you rate the claim?



### Herman

So let's try to build the instrument before we read the meter.



### Corn

Start with the peg, because the details matter more than the headline. He landed Thursday morning at Stewart International Airport, in the Hudson Valley, about sixty miles north of Manhattan. Not Kennedy. Not Newark. Stewart.



### Herman

Which is a cargo and general aviation field with a terminal attached, not a place you land a head of government by accident. The Wing of Zion took off overnight from a southern Israeli airbase, for security reasons, and the PMO didn't release a departure video. That's the detail I keep circling back to.



### Corn

He's scheduled to speak around two in the afternoon Eastern, nine at night Israel time, and fly back the same day. No meeting with Trump. No meeting with Musk. His office listed no US official meetings at all, though two Israeli officials speaking anonymously said talks with senior US officials, Rubio included, were being discussed. Nothing was set.



### Herman

Who is he actually meeting? The presidents of Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay, Panama, and Ethiopia. The vice president of Colombia. The prime ministers of Greece, Slovenia, and Papua New Guinea.



**Corn**

His office says many world leaders wanted to meet with him and he couldn't fit them in before Sukkot. That's the PMO's characterization and nobody's verified it. Worth flagging as a claim, not a fact.



**Herman**

And last year, September twenty-sixth, dozens of delegates walked out as he approached the lectern while supporters in the gallery cheered. A similar or larger walkout is reportedly planned this year.



**Corn**

So here's the shape of the episode. There are two different things being described with one word. There's the feeling of isolation, which Daniel describes honestly and which a lot of Israelis share. And there's measurable integration, which is a different animal. We're going to build the instrument first, then read the meter, then test the historical claim.



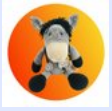
**Herman**

The first thing we need is a set of heuristics. Operational definitions of what isolation actually looks like when you try to measure it.



**Corn**

Heuristic one. Can the head of government physically travel?



**Herman**

That's the hardest measure on the board because it's binary. The ICC issued an arrest warrant in 2024 for Netanyahu and his then-defense minister on war crimes charges, alongside warrants for Hamas leaders. That means there are countries he simply cannot set foot in without an arrest risk. That's not a vibe. That's a constraint you can put on a map.



**Corn**

And it's asymmetric in a way that matters. A country can have full diplomatic relations with Israel, vote the right way in forums, trade normally, and still be legally obliged to arrest the Prime Minister if he lands. So you get this strange situation where the relationship is formally intact and the top of the government can't visit.



**Herman**

Which is why travel freedom is a good proxy. It captures the gap between what a state says and what its courts and treaty obligations will actually let happen.



**Corn**

Heuristic two. Bilateral meetings on the margins of the General Assembly.



**Herman**

This is the cleanest natural experiment in diplomacy. Once a year, every head of state and government is in one building in one city. If you want to meet someone, you can. There's no logistical excuse. So who will and won't take the meeting is close to a pure readout.



**Corn**

And this year the readout is: no Trump, no major Western allies, and a list that runs Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay, Panama, Ethiopia, Colombia's vice president, Greece, Slovenia, Papua New Guinea.



**Herman**

Which is not nothing. Greece is a real relationship, Ethiopia matters, Argentina under Milei has been warm. But you notice what's missing. No Germany. No France. No UK. No Canada. Not even a courtesy pull-aside with the President of the United States a month before an Israeli election.



**Corn**

Heuristic three. Audience treatment at multilateral forums. Walkouts, boycotts, applause versus silence.



**Herman**

This one is softer than it looks. A walkout is theater, and theater can be staged for domestic audiences on both sides. But it's still data, because it tells you what a delegation thinks its own voters want to see. Last year dozens walked out. If this year's is bigger, that's a signal about the direction of travel, not just the temperature.



**Corn**

Heuristic four. Allied sanctions and trade restrictions.



**Herman**

This is where it gets concrete. Britain, France, and Canada, once-steadfast allies, announced sanctions targeting Israeli settlements in the West Bank in early September. Norway has sanctioned settlements too, and its foreign minister said the world that helped establish Israel now wants to see this problem solved. Senate Democrats are pushing sanctions over the E1 settlement plan.



**Corn**

And the American response to all of that was muted. A UK-led West Bank trade ban drew a US memo condemning it, but the memo was drafted and never released.



**Herman**

That unreleased memo is the most interesting document in this whole story. Somebody wrote it. Somebody decided not to send it. That decision is the signal.



**Corn**

Heuristic five. UN voting patterns. General Assembly resolutions, the standard metric for decades.



**Herman**

And here I have to be honest, we don't have current voting data in front of us. So I'd name it as a heuristic and flag the gap rather than assert numbers. Historically it's the metric everyone reaches for, and it's also the one with the least information content, because the General Assembly has passed hostile resolutions on Israel for fifty years regardless of what else was happening.



**Corn**

Which is itself a finding. A metric that never moves can't measure change.



**Herman**

Right. Which is why the interesting votes are the ones where the margin shifts, or where countries that normally abstain start voting yes.



**Corn**

Heuristic six. Diaspora security as a proxy for societal hostility.



**Herman**

This is the one that connects to what Daniel actually described. Attacks on Jewish and Israeli individuals abroad. And the cases are specific. On Yom Kippur, September twenty-first, a gunman opened fire outside the Sons of Jacob Synagogue in Belleville, Ontario. A police officer was seriously wounded. The gunman died of gunfight wounds. Community leaders said they were saddened but not shocked, and pointed at anti-Israel and anti-Zionist discourse.



**Corn**

Saddened but not shocked. That's the sentence.



**Herman**

And the Manchester attack on October second last year, at Heaton Park Hebrew Congregation. UK police later arrested two people over a suspected plot targeting the Manchester Jewish community.



**Corn**

The reason diaspora security works as a heuristic is that it measures something the other metrics miss. It's not about what governments do. It's about what ordinary people feel licensed to do. And that's downstream of elite discourse, but it's not the same thing.



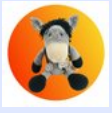
**Herman**

It's also the metric with the weakest causal chain back to Israeli policy. Antisemitic attacks have their own dynamics and their own history, and tying them mechanically to this government's decisions is a stretch. But as a measure of the ambient environment Israelis are reading, it's real.



**Corn**

Heuristic seven. The closest ally's backing.



**Herman**

Is the US still publicly defending Israel? And here the answer is complicated. Rubio said on September twenty-third that Trump doesn't think the world needs a West Bank crisis right now. That's not a defense of Israel. That's a request for quiet.



**Corn**

So we have seven heuristics. Travel freedom, bilateral meetings, forum treatment, allied sanctions, UN voting, diaspora security, and great-power backing. The instrument is built. Now let's read the meter, and then test whether this is really the worst it's ever been.



### Herman

Run the current moment through it and the unprecedented-isolation thesis picks up real support. Travel freedom: severe. The ICC warrant is a hard constraint and it's the kind that doesn't lift on its own. Bilateral meetings: severe. A month before an election, no meeting with the President of the United States, and no major Western ally taking a slot.



### Corn

Allied sanctions: severe, and novel. Britain, France, Canada, Norway sanctioning settlements is a category break. These aren't adversaries. These are the countries that armed and traded with Israel for decades.



### Herman

Diaspora security: severe. Belleville, Manchester, and the routine harassment Daniel describes. Forum treatment: severe, if the walkout is as large as reported. Great-power backing: degraded, but not broken. The US is still the US. It's just quieter than it's been in living memory.



### Corn

Which brings us to the actual hard question. Is this the greatest isolation since 1948?



### Herman

And here I want to be careful, because we don't have detailed historical comparison data in front of us. So this is my own historical framing, and I'd flag it as such. The standard benchmarks are 1975 and 1982.



### Corn

1975 is UNGA Resolution 3379, Zionism is racism.



### Herman

Right. And that one is easy to underrate because the resolution itself was symbolic. But look at what surrounded it. The Soviet bloc was not just voting against Israel, it was arming and training Israel's adversaries, and it had severed relations. The non-aligned movement, which was most of the world by headcount, was solidly in the other column. Israel in 1975 had almost no diplomatic presence across Africa, Asia, and much of Latin America.



### Corn

And the US was not the US of today in terms of willingness to shield. The relationship was real but it was colder, and the oil shock had rearranged everyone's priorities.



### Herman

Then 1982. The Lebanon war, and after it the Sabra and Shatila massacre and the domestic Israeli reaction to it. That period produced a level of international revulsion that I'm not sure the current moment matches on the cultural axis. Israel was being condemned by people who had been sympathetic. The word pariah started showing up in mainstream Western press, not just in hostile outlets.



### Corn

So on the historical comparison, the honest answer is mixed. On travel freedom, 2026 is worse than anything in the seventies or eighties, because the ICC warrant is a new instrument. On allied sanctions, 2026 is worse, because Britain and France sanctioning settlements is without precedent. But on the sheer breadth of states with no relations at all, 1975 was worse. Israel today has relations with India, with the UAE, with Bahrain, with Morocco, with Azerbaijan, with a set of countries that would have been unthinkable in 1975.



### Herman

Which means unprecedented depends entirely on which heuristic you weight. If you weight the Western alliance system, this is the worst it's ever been. If you weight the total number of states willing to deal with Israel, this is the best it's ever been, which is a strange thing to say in the same breath as unprecedented isolation.



### Corn

And there's a third reading. The Gulf normalization ties have held up better than anyone expected. UAE intelligence cooperation is still functioning. That's not nothing, and it's the kind of thing that doesn't show up in a walkout count.



### Herman

Now the domestic frame, because I think it reframes the whole trip. Israeli elections are October twenty-seventh. Five weeks away. Netanyahu's leading rival is Gadi Eisenkot of Yashar. More than half the electorate wants Netanyahu gone.



### Corn

Michael Oren, who was ambassador to the US, said the thing that makes the speech legible. He's not really speaking to the UN, he's speaking to the Israeli public. Oren expects the address to look like a campaign speech, attacking New York's mayor, Zohran Mamdani, who called Netanyahu the architect of a horrific genocide, and attacking Iran, to peel wavering voters away from Eisenkot.



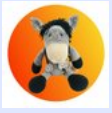
### Herman

Which is a feud that highlights the Prime Minister's growing isolation ahead of elections. The audience in the room is not the audience he's playing to.



### Corn

Nimrod Goren, who runs Mitvim, the foreign policy think tank, put the cost side plainly. A lack of any encounter with the president, a month before an Israeli election, will indicate that Trump is keeping a distance from him and will be negative for Netanyahu's campaign. So the missing meeting isn't just a diplomatic fact. It's a campaign liability.



### Herman

Shalom Yerushalmi in the Times of Israel was blunter. Netanyahu's diplomatic and military miscalculations have helped make Israel an international pariah. The stealth trip to New York reveals the gulf between his self-image and reality.



### Corn

That's the sharpest framing available, and I think it's half right. The gulf is real. But the pariah claim is where the measurement problem bites, because pariah is a feeling word dressed as a category. Israel is not North Korea. It trades, it has relations, its currency functions, its citizens travel. What's actually happening is narrower and more interesting: the Western alliance system, which was the load-bearing wall of Israeli diplomacy for seventy years, is cracking.



### Herman

Which brings us back to Daniel's second question, about the feeling among Israelis that the world is hostile.



### Corn

I think that feeling is doing more work than the empirical record can fully carry, which doesn't make it wrong. It makes it a different kind of claim. Belleville and Manchester are real. The routine harassment is real. What's changed is not that the world became hostile. It's that Israelis now expect it to be, and that expectation is itself a political fact.



### Herman

There's one more data point that explains a lot of the current chill, and it's not Gaza. Trump and Netanyahu jointly launched a war on Iran on February twenty-eighth. Then the US and Iran agreed to an interim ceasefire that Netanyahu opposed, and the two leaders found themselves on a collision course. Many Israelis were angered, and polls showed they questioned Trump's commitment to Israeli security.



### Corn

The distance between Washington and Jerusalem isn't only about settlements or Gaza. It's about Iran, and about who decides when a war stops. That's a much more serious rift than a snub at a podium.



### Herman

Which gives us the honest verdict. The data supports a real and measurable deterioration. Unprecedented depends on which heuristic you weight, and the historical benchmarks of 1975 and 1982 may have been deeper on some axes and shallower on others. And the feeling of isolation among Israelis is real, politically consequential, and not fully captured by any of the seven measures we built.



**Corn**

The instrument works. It just doesn't give one answer.



**Hilbert**

Eleven hundred dollars, plus the fuel surcharge, and the surcharge was the part nobody would sign off on.



**Corn**

What's the eleven hundred for?



**Hilbert**

The motorcade. I did a stretch on the advance team for these visits, and the thing the press never reads right is the airport. Where a head of government lands is itself a diplomatic signal, and the protocol people read it before anyone reads the speech.



**Herman**

Stewart instead of Kennedy.



**Hilbert**

Sixty miles out, small field, no press riser, no arrival ceremony worth filming. That tells you more than the walkout does. And the departure video, the one the PMO usually puts out, the walk to the plane, the wave at the top of the stairs. That didn't happen. That's not a security necessity. That's a choice. The video is the one piece of the whole trip they control completely. When it doesn't appear, somebody decided the picture was worse than the silence.



**Corn**

The absence is the message.



### Hilbert

The absence is always the message. We had a rule on those trips, if the advance team can't get a clean shot of the arrival, you don't fake one, you just don't send anything. And the thing about the surcharge, that was a fuel levy on the backup vehicles, and the embassy wouldn't pay it, so it came out of the office budget, and I never got it back. Nineteen eighty-one. I've got a thing at four.



### Corn

The thing about Hilbert's airport point is that it cuts both ways. It's a signal, but signals can be read wrong. The PMO could be managing optics for a domestic audience, which is exactly what Oren says the whole trip is about.



### Herman

Which is the closing question, really. If the heuristics disagree with each other, travel freedom saying severe, US backing saying degraded but intact, diaspora security saying severe, then which one should we weight? And who decides?



### Corn

There's no clean answer, because the weights are a value judgment, not a measurement. Someone who thinks the Western alliance is the whole game reads this as the worst moment since 1948. Someone who thinks the total number of functioning relationships is the whole game reads it as the best.



### Herman

The October twenty-seventh election is five weeks out, so the walkout and the missing meeting will be read through that lens no matter what the speech actually says. The historical question stays open on the empirical record.



### Corn

Which leaves the thing I keep coming back to. The feeling of isolation and the measurable fact of isolation are not the same thing, and the gap between them is where the interesting politics lives. Daniel's instinct might be right about the feeling and unproven about the fact, and both of those can be true at once.



**Herman**

Thanks to Hilbert Flumingtop for producing, and for the eleven hundred dollars of context.



**Corn**

This has been My Weird Prompts. If you've got a minute, leave us a review wherever you're listening. It helps people find the show.



**Herman**

We'll be back soon.