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Is there a decline in

David Herman knows little history; but in 1973, he became part of history when he hurried back to Israel, at his own expense, to join his reserve parachute infantry regiment.

In the Yom Kippur, or October, War, Herman's unit formed the spearhead for the counterattack across the Suez Canal. His last days as a soldier went to sweeping Egyptian villages.

Eleven years later Herman was an expatriate; we edited documentaries together. During late and long hours spent locked up in a small room, I came to know the former Israeli paratrooper well. He learned his film and TV craft at home, and expanded his professional knowledge by work with the BBC and other European companies. Always he had returned; but no more, except to visit his aging father.

"The (bleeping) country lost its (bleeping) moral base," he said. He talked of other young Israelis moving out. "The government tries to cover up," he said, indicating there was no way to count the new exodus.

David Herman had no kind words for present Israeli leaders, but reserved a special bitterness for his former commander, Ariel Sharon. "The man is a (bleeping) Nazi," he said.

My sometime colleague comes to mind these days as I read the nation's newspapers. On the *New York Times*, the *Baltimore Sun* and *Wash-*

ington Post front pages this week were stories about the beating deaths of captured Palestinians, allegedly at the hands of the Shin Bet, Israel's security police.

The incident itself is not questioned; it happened in 1984, when the two Arabs were pulled from a hijacked bus in the Gaza Strip. It took two years for their brutal deaths to make the headlines, because Israel's government ordered a cover up. Yitshak Shamir was prime minister at the time; he is due to take over the government again this October in a deal worked out to form the coalition that presently rules Israel.

Monday this week, in a vote that strictly followed party lines, in a Jerusalem closed doors session, the cabinet voted to continue the Shamir cover up, by denying a judicial inquiry into the beating deaths. At that level, politicians could be questioned on their role in the incident.

Instead, the matter will be handled as a police investigation, limited to specific details. However, there was already an acknowledgment of official guilt when the Shin Bet's chief received an extraordinary presidential pardon for the deaths.

The beatings receive a rationalization in this country, as well as Israel, on the basis that sometimes security needs rise above the law. This dialectical exercise makes no sense when preached by South Africa. Can it be accepted from a nation whose right to existence derives from its adherence to the Mosaic tradition?

Israel's morality?

There has been no questioning in this column of the various acts of espionage against the United States. Israel has a right to see to its own defense. In our international climate, friends spy on each other. The U.S. Intelligence establishment must put its house in order. Perhaps the Israelis do Washington a favor when they show how easy it is to circumvent our laws.

In none of the reported espionage cases was a threat to human life directly involved; and that makes a big difference. Even the alleged theft of weapons technology is rendered bloodless by the knowledge that other arms and bombs exist. There arises no lack of means to kill in the Middle East, including Israel.

Amnesty International has documented numerous cases of Palestinians tortured and killed under circumstances that point toward Israel; in no instance I know has any outside investigation been able to pin the blame for mistreatment of Arab prisoners directly on the Tel Aviv government.

Here was the opening that permitted self-designated "friends of Israel" to offer a scathing defense: after all, police brutality can be charged against many nations, including the United States. Of course, that argument has nothing to do with morality; it derives from pragmatic need.

I question such "friends" when it comes to a concern for the long term survival of the Jewish state; they align themselves with the very ele-

ments rejected by Israel's founders, especially David ben-Gurion.

Since its self-wrought birth, the danger has always been that Israel would lose its capability to call on outside support. Its survival cannot be guaranteed by its army alone; its numbers are too few. The fear exists that, at some point in time, Israelis will have to face their enemies alone.

This fear produces the seeming paranoia that dominates much of the nation's policies and actions; it grips Israeli's supporters to such a degree that they overreact to any criticism. Particularly in this country, in the name of the Jewish democracy, fanatics seek to squelch the exercise of democratic processes, especially free speech.

America's media learned long ago — as far back as the 1967 June War to my personal knowledge — that any attempt at balanced reporting on the Middle East brings vitriolic allegations of "anti-semitism." The resultant suppression can create enemies out of allies.

No form of censorship can survive for very long, not in this free society. But while it exercises its tyranny, then it encourages acts which are themselves antithetical to Israel's reason for existence. The current scandal over the beating deaths is not a completely isolated example.

In its annual report on terrorism in the United States, the FBI lists seven incidents last

year; it attributes more than half (4) to what the report calls "Jewish extremists." The only American deaths (2) in America that resulted from terrorist action came from bombs planted by "Jewish extremists," according to the FBI.

If the report's findings come as a surprise, then blame the media; by caving in to radical voices, they abrogate their responsibility.

Americans who practice Judaism cannot be held responsible; except for their silence, most Jews play no role in creating the atmosphere which permits radicals and extremists freedom to commit their crimes.

I cannot agree with the former Israeli paratrooper; I simply cannot accept the apparent loss of morality as fact. Our Christian dominated society draws its root strength from the principles of Judaism; nothing in Christ's teachings contradicted Mosaic law.

I think David Herman looked into amoral and immoral acts committed by political leaders and mistook those men's human failings for the state of his nation. I believe Israel and its friends are going through a crisis — only temporary, I hope.

Much will depend on how the Israeli police handle their investigation of the beating deaths; and maybe more important, how the American Jewish community moves to expel from its midst those extremists who introduced Middle East terrorism onto American soil.