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**Dan Segre**  
**Can Israel Ever Trust Europe?**

Dan Segre was born in 1922 into an assimilated Jewish family in the Italian village of Rivoli, where he grew up on his mother's family farm. His father was the country's youngest mayor in the village of Govone.

After Mussolini enacted anti-Jewish legislation in 1938, Segre fled to Palestine, without any Zionist awareness. He has described this period in the bestselling first part of his autobiography, *The Memoirs of a Fortunate Jew*, which has been translated into nine languages. Segre has started work on a sequel, which will cover the post-World War Two period.

He served in the British army during World War Two, and later became a paratroop officer in Israel's War of Independence. Soon thereafter, he became cultural and press attaché at the new Israeli embassy in Paris.

In 1952, he graduated in law from Turin University. Next, he studied political science at Sciences Politiques, and oriental languages at the Sorbonne, both in Paris. He served in various functions at the Israeli Foreign Ministry until 1967, when he accepted a senior research fellowship in Middle Eastern studies at St. Antony's College at Oxford. From 1967-1969, he also was Ford Visiting Professor of Comparative History at MIT.

In 1972, he became a full professor of international relations at Haifa University. Later, he assumed the post of Reuben Hecht Professor of Zionism. After his retirement in 1986, he was Visiting Professor at Stanford University for several years. He has written a number of books in a variety of fields, most recently a biography of the Italian general Amedeo Guillet.

Segre's other books include *Israel, Society in Transition* (1970), *The High Road and the Low, Technical Cooperation and African Development* (1974) and *Israel and Zionism, A Crisis of Identity* (1980).

Along with his teaching activities, Segre has always been involved in journalism. For many years he was the Israeli correspondent of both *Le Figaro* and *Corriere della Sera*. In 1974, he became a co-founder of the Italian daily *Il Giornale*.

“In order to understand how future links between Europe and Israel can develop in a more harmonious way,” Segre says, “I prefer to look at how the roads of Europe and the Jews have crossed in the past.”

The European position toward Israel has changed substantially over the decades. After Israel became independent in 1948, he explains, many Europeans were enthusiastic, because they saw in it the realization of an ideal state. They thought that it was a replay of the American revolt against Britain which led to US independence. A second, not less important, reason for the positive attitude of many Europeans toward Israel derived from the shock of the Holocaust.

So why did this attitude change? Segre sees four reasons. The dream of the ideal state, unrealistic from the beginning, had to break down. Israel refused to be the only vegetarian state in a world of predators. To this came the sudden increase in Arab wealth as a result of the inept way the West handled the oil crisis in 1973. A third factor was the conjunction of Arab and communist propaganda against Zionism. A fourth factor was Israel's ties with the United States or, in leftist propaganda terms, American imperialism.

For Segre, the central thread running through European attitudes toward Jews – and today toward Israel – consists of long-held historical prejudices, complexes and frustrations. “Anti-Semitism has not disappeared,” he says. On the contrary, Segre states that it has been broadened to include anti-Zionism.

Segre sees in today's not-so-united Europe a modern version of the Holy Roman Empire, in which Jews always were strangers: first because they were different but not pagans, later because they were not Christians.

This European perception of the Jews as outsiders took different forms: traitors who opened the door of Spain to the Moslems; carriers of the

plague in the 14<sup>th</sup> century; “quislings” for the Turks who threatened to lay siege to the Italian city of Ancona to help the Jewish community there; African slaves for Voltaire; dangerous revolutionary agents for Napoleon; liberal bourgeois, communists and capitalists; and “just bacteria” spreading social and racial contamination for the Nazis and their followers.

To many Europeans, Jews remain strangers to this day. To be an American Jew today is a legitimate way of being an American even if it is perhaps not the best way to be so in the eyes of that country’s majority. For the Europeans, the perception of the Jew has remained that of a stranger, but more so after World War Two and the creation of Israel.

Segre maintains that the predominant historical stereotype of the Jew in the eyes of the modern European is that of anti-Semitism, a word invented in 1874 by Wilhelm Marr, a German journalist and parliamentarian. This European attitude has profound motives. Jews have on many occasions been the test case of failed European ideas and ideals. The Dreyfus case, ending with the condemnation of the innocent French officer simply because he was Jewish, both symbolized and demonstrated the failure of the European enlightenment.

Segre contends that Jews also symbolize the European left’s failure. They have shown its ideology’s inherent contradictions as well as those between ideology and practice. For some of their precursors in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, such as the Frenchmen Proudhon and Fourier, the Jew and the banker are the same. According to a popular syllogism, since the Jew has the money and money dominates the world, the Jew dominates the world.

In the first version of *Das Kapital*, which was changed after his death, Marx wrote, “all merchandise is intimately circumcised Jewish money.”

The second International and Lenin officially rejected anti-Semitism, but that didn’t change the rank and file prejudice against Jews in the communist camp as shown, for instance, by the 1952 Slansky trial in Czechoslovakia and the “doctors’ plot” engineered by Stalin in 1953.

Segre has no doubt that Marxist anti-Semitism has had a profound impact on the European left. “It accepted the principle that Third World peoples were by definition proletarian, while Israel was an imperialist stooge,” he says. “Communism, which claimed that it had immunized itself against anti-Semitism, did not raise its voice against the delegitimization of Israel as a state by the Palestinian National Charter.”

It did worse than that, he notes, when it used the whole arsenal of anti-Semitic weaponry against Zionism. “Thus, it upheld the principle, wrongly attributed to Hegel, that when facts do not agree with ideology they should be discarded.”

The left and its opponents each had contrasting stereotypes: on the one hand that of the rich Jews, on the other those of the subversive anarchists, God’s killers and world conspirators.

As far as European nationalism goes, Segre says that Jews have been both its promoters and its victims. For those familiar with the history of modern Italy, it is striking that between 1835 and 1870 the Jews were a considerable factor in the Italian Risorgimento – the fight for Italian unity – despite their small numbers.

People who demonstrate, through no fault of their own, the failure of the ideas of others are unlikely to be loved by those whose ideological balloons they have deflated. Segre says that Israel continues the Jew’s traditional role as test case for the failure of European ideas.

Israel is effectively dealing with many problems Europe has difficulty facing, let alone solving. So, for instance, Israel is confronting the challenge of integrating immigrants with reasonable success. Proportionately, it has absorbed more Third World immigrants into a Western-style society than any other country. Europe has a lot of good and bad experience in dealing with immigrants, Segre notes, but it lacks an adequate approach to the integration of non-Europeans.

It is subconsciously difficult for many Europeans to accept that Israel is dealing in a realistic way with the return of the “sacred” into politics, in the ongoing struggle between theocracy and democracy. This is an issue of vital importance for contemporary international society.

The element of the “sacred”, which the French Revolution expelled from European politics, is returning in various ways with a vengeance in Europe. One example is Bosnia, which was part of a territorial national state and now is divided into religious enclaves. Segre expects other examples to follow in due course.

In this respect, Israel is the only country in the Middle East in which democracy and theocracy coexist, so far, without brutal confrontation

between them. Yet it seems difficult for the Europeans to appreciate the universal value of an experience which no Third World country has been able to develop peacefully.

“Even worse,” he adds, “Israel has shown in the 45 years of its history how an underdeveloped country can modernize, whereas many of the former European colonies are collapsing. This is another irritant for European leaders, though this is never explicitly said.”

During its first years of independence, Israel embodied the only viable messianic socialist state in history, based on solidarity and voluntarism, Segre says. There are many examples in European history where attempts to establish such states failed. Among them, Bavaria and Hungary after World War One, and the republican regime in Spain.

“You cannot be liked by the leaders of Europe’s leftist parties while rubbing in their faces successes in fields where they have failed miserably,” he says with a note of irony.

Israel may even solve another problem Europeans are having major problems confronting: the crisis between state and nation. The Italian nation today is experiencing difficulties maintaining an Italian state. The Basque countries do not want to be part of the Spanish nation. We are seeing an ongoing breakdown of the Belgian nation. The United Kingdom is in the process of becoming disunited. The disintegration of Yugoslavia is the worst example, he says, especially considering that the European Community has encouraged its breakup.

“While most European countries cannot solve this kind of problem, in Israel the state may create a nation from what is still a society made up of Jewish tribes,” Segre says. “These ‘tribes’, despite what many like to believe, have little common language or historical experience. Their language, Hebrew, started out mainly as an Esperanto.

“Still, these ‘tribes’ have created a state which most likely is creating an Israeli nation. Paradoxically, much of the credit goes to the Arabs. They have forced Israeli society to maintain unity in the face of hostility. Other societies have experienced external pressure, but they have not been able to translate this into creative internal unity. The case of European states faced by Soviet danger is a case in point. If Israel is not a miraculous example, it is at least spectacular.”

To make matters continuously worse in the eyes of the Europeans, Segre says, Israel is a modern victorious state, whereas they would have been defeated in World War Two by an ideology of darkness had it not been for the military efforts of two nations that the Europeans regard as rather uncivilized – the Americans and the Russians. Modern European historians have begun to realize that the two world wars were, in fact, European wars which Europeans spread to the rest of the world.

According to a certain type of European historical determinism, a state like Israel, created by Zionism, the only national movement ever branded by the United Nations as racist, should lose wars against the Third World Arabs the same way the Europeans lost their colonies. No Western power has been able to withstand wars of liberation, as the Indian, Indonesian, Algerian and Vietnamese examples seem to prove. In the case of Israel, many Europeans – obviously not all of them – who start with such a false premise are very disappointed if this does not lead to the expected false conclusion.

The prostration of the Europeans before the Arabs – and their oil wealth – in the 1970s and 1980s has blinded them to the dangers of justifying terrorism, mainly of Arab origin. Despite the facts, Israel was blamed for many of the West's major problems.

The United Nations, in one of its many perverse statements, declared Israel the main danger to world peace and the Middle East conflict the most serious one at the end of the century, Segre recounts. Israel was also blamed by its Western detractors for the entrance of Russian influence in the Middle East and Chinese influence into Africa to balance the success of Israeli cooperation policies.

“Nowadays the castle of mixed European, Arab, community and United Nations lies has collapsed in an embarrassing way, resulting in a paradox,” Segre says. “Israel, which was accused of threatening peace, is there, for everybody to see, as a major ally in the world fight against Moslem terrorism, a pluralist democracy in the midst of authoritarian, non-democratic, violent regimes.

“The Palestinian problem is certainly a severe test of Israel's moral and political values,” Segre says. “It has caused many distortions to Jewish ethics and democratic behavior, for which Israel deserves criticism from both friends and foes. But this does not justify those critics who demand that Israel behave as a democracy in peace and not, for example, as a

Western democracy at war. Furthermore, European foreign policy is far from ethical, and it is not inspired by purely progressive democratic principles.”

He points to Europe’s ongoing commercial ties with Iran as prime evidence that European governments have not learned much from the past. Although they could easily bring the Iranians to reason by cutting purchases of their oil – and thus strengthening their Arab allies – Segre says, the Europeans have made no such moves.

When one asks Segre where this all leads, he replies, “According to an ancient Jewish saying, since the Temple was destroyed prophecy is reserved for babes and fools. I am not a babe and do not want to look a fool. I cannot make prophecies. All I can do is indicate trends, which may or may not be realized.”

He identified three major trends. The first is geographical. Israel is the only modern state halfway between Washington and Peking. This has many implications and creates multiple opportunities.

“Until a new satellite was launched recently, a TV satellite farm in Herzliya supplied TV stations all over the world with recordings from central Asian stations,” he says. “Now, following the political changes in Eastern Europe, a sort of new silk road has opened up for Israel to India and China.”

One paradoxical result of the Arab boycott has been that Tokyo and Mexico City are closer to Tel Aviv than Damascus or Cairo, at least in economic terms.

He notes that the boycott has cost Israel billions of dollars, but has forced it to diversify its production and to enter competitive markets, while Arab economies have remained mainly either agricultural or oil-dominated.

Today, he says, the economies of Israel and the Arab countries are not complementary. One possible beneficial consequence of the agreements between Israel and the PLO may be to increase the present low flow of trade, manpower and technology between Israel and the Arab countries. Although a Middle East common market may not emerge tomorrow, Segre says, the breakdown of economic barriers between Israel and the Arabs may turn out to be an energizing factor for both sides.

The second trend identified by Segre is a political one. “There may or may not be peace,” he says. “If peace comes, it will not be a lengthy process. It will have rapid, explosive results. Many foreign companies will open offices in Israel. Israel will fast become an international business center.”

But Segre also sees reason for caution here. He quotes the hero of his most recent book: “An Italian ambassador, Amedeo Guillet, the Italian Lawrence of Arabia, told me more than 40 years ago that the Arabs are a body without a head and the Jews are a head without a body.”

“The problem is how to get the two together,” he continues. “Guillet is probably right even today. Arabs and Israelis are complementary in many fields. Their joining of forces will never put one in control of the other, but rather would be beneficial to both.”

Segre points to one of many examples. “Just think of the Palestinians. They have two science teachers for every vacancy in their schools, while Israel is short of such teachers.

“In a true partnership, we must be very careful not to see ourselves as a potential new Venice, the Italian state which for many centuries was only interested in commerce. Money is not the only thing that counts. Israel should not act in the Middle East with a European approach. Rather, it should see itself as an integral part of the Middle East, and as a neutral bridge between countries.”

The two trends mentioned so far combine as the opening of new Eastern European and Asian markets to Israel diminishes its dependence on Europe. In the past, he notes, the EEC has made many hostile declarations against Israel and even threatened it occasionally with sanctions.

It is again symbolic that the best-known of these declarations was one made in – of all places – Venice, in 1980. In it, Europe tried to impose its non-existent strength on Israel to please the Arabs.

In recognizing the right of the Palestinian Arabs to a homeland, the Venice declaration undermined the position of Jordan, which at that time was still the legal authority of the Palestinians – a fact the Europeans “forgot” to mention, thereby delegitimizing a country which had been a reliable European ally.

In the Venice declaration, Segre says, Europe rewarded the PLO for terrorism at a time when it refused to accept the existence of Israel. Later, the Europeans did not support the only peacemaking event in the Middle East, the Camp David agreements.

Segre has even stronger words of distrust for Europe: “Europe does not seem to have renounced some aspects of its Shylock policy,” he says. “It wants from Israel a pound of flesh in territorial concessions without paying attention to the damage these may cause to the whole body as far as the defense capabilities of Israel are concerned. To insist on unilateral concessions after the Yugoslav experience would look comic if it was not so tragic.”

The third trend Segre sees is even more difficult to define. It concerns religion, ethics and morality, and is linked to what he calls “the Machiavellian dilemma”. Machiavelli said that a Christian prince is a contradiction; either one is a prince or one is a Christian. Israel cannot solve this dilemma for Christian Europe, but Segre sees some light.

“Perhaps Israel can offer some suggestions,” Segre says. “One is to invite the Europeans to follow with some humility the efforts of a small state which is struggling with the problem of how to return to its sacred traditions without throwing away the modernization of which Jews have been major promoters in the last 150 years. One only has to think of Einstein, Freud and Marx.

“This is not just an Israeli problem,” he says. “It is a vital problem facing Europe, and a common problem shared with the Arabs. They are confronted with the challenge to find ways to modernize quickly without breaking with their very strong traditions. In this area, Europe could help break new ground that could lead to understanding.”

Only recently has Europe overcome religious and nationalistic wars and hatred which have filled its rivers with blood for centuries. If Europeans wanted to make a genuine contribution to a stable peace in the Middle East, they could distill certain useful elements from their own experience. Both sides could benefit by developing regional market institutions, he suggests. It could give preferential treatment – including full association with the EEC – to both Israel and the Palestinians on condition that they cooperate in specific fields such as energy, water, science and banking.

More importantly, the EEC should see itself as the international organization replacing the old European Hapsburg, Czarist and even Ottoman empires as an economic framework that could help many “tribes” find accommodation and reasons to cooperate by balancing traditions and modernization. This may be difficult, Segre acknowledges. It surely will be less exciting for newspaper and TV journalists than what is happening today. It is certainly, however, a civilized way to compensate for all the damage Europe has done to Israel in the past and create a space in which the two can work together in the future.

He insists that there are better European traditions than those established by the Dominican monks when they burned the Talmud, or by Napoleon, who wanted to civilize Egypt and proclaim a Jewish state to get supplies more easily for his army. The message of Europe, he says, should be that of Erasmus, which he sums up this way: “Rationalism, compassion, moderation and self-criticism, all of which have become scarce commodities in Europe.”