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FROM : Amembassy Tel Aviv DATE: July 10, 1965

SUBJECT : BIOGRAPHIC: Asher BEN-NATHAN, Israel Ambassador-  
Designate to Federal Republic of Germany

REF

Enclosed herewith are two newspaper "profiles" of Asher BEN-NATHAN, recently designated as Israel Ambassador to the Federal Republic of Germany. The first--and most informative--of these studies of the former Director-General of the Ministry of Defense is written by Shmuel SEGEV, Military Correspondent of MAARIV, while the second is an unsigned article in the March 12 edition of the JERUSALEM POST.

It should be noted that Mr. Ben-Nathan speaks German, English, and Hebrew fluently. He is married and he and his wife Erika have two children.

FOR THE AMBASSADOR:

*G. B. Lambrakis*

George B. Lambrakis  
Second Secretary of Embassy

Enclosures:

1. June 25, 1965 MAARIV  
"Profile of Ben-Nathan"
2. March 12, 1965 JERUSALEM POST  
"Profile of Ben-Nathan"

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MAARIV, June 25, 1965 - "Profile of Ben-Nathan"

Shmuel Segev presents a profile of Ben-Nathan, noting that he was to have been parachuted into Germany in World War II in the uniform of an American officer, and will now go to Germany "in a top hat." In a certain respect Ben-Nathan's history symbolizes the tragic link between Israel and Germany in recent decades. When he was 18, and the Nazis' purpose in Austria became clear, during the Anschluss, he left his home in Vienna and came to Palestine on a small Betar ship. He joined the Zrain group undergoing agricultural training at Ein Harod. When the reports of the holocaust reached Palestine, "Artur" was called up to help save the survivors. The plan for parachuting into Germany was called off, and he was roped in by Gideon Rafael, collecting data on the Nazi war criminals; this material was used at the Nuremberg trials, and by Ben-Nathan himself when he sought after Eichmann and other Nazis after the war.

He returned to Vienna in 1945 (seven years after he had left it for Palestine), in a small boat which sailed from Palestine, and passing as Artur Fier, the correspondent of HATZOFEH. He began organizing the Breikha ("flight" evacuation of Jewish survivors of the camps-A.H.) in Austria. During the next two years over 100,000 people passed through his hands and settled in Palestine. This operation brought him up against the Western occupation authorities in Austria, and several times he was nearly arrested or deported. But he always managed to get out of these tight spots, inter alia by passing himself off as his wife's chauffeur (she worked for UNRWA).

Often he had to use a daring approach. When the Anglo-American Commission visited the camps, he organized demonstrations by the Jewish inmates, acting on orders from the Haganah. He called on the Austrian Foreign Minister at the time, Gruber, and demanded the file with the record of Eichmann's secret talks with the Mufti of Jerusalem on the extermination of 500,000 Hungarian Jews. When Gruber claimed he didn't know where the file was, "Artur" gave him its number and told him where it was kept. He also obtained from Vera Eichmann the only existing photograph of her husband, which was used by the Israeli security services and served to identify him when he was tracked down in the Argentine.

When he finished his duties in Vienna, Reuven Shiloah appointed him "Liaison Officer with International Bodies." He helped to form the Political Department (the embryo Foreign Ministry - A.H.) and visited Western Europe on its behalf. In 1951 he took two years leave in order to study at the Institute of International Affairs in Geneva. In 1953 he became the manager of the Incode meat-packing plant in Eritrea - "more for the political possibilities

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than for the professional angle." At this period the Bat Galim operation was planned from Eritrea--the ill-fated attempt to send an Israeli ship through the Suez Canal.

He stayed in Eritrea until the middle of 1956. After the Suez Canal was nationalized, he was called upon to join a Defense Ministry mission to Europe, under Yosef Nahmias. These were the days of intensive arms purchases, and Ben-Nathan spent most of his time shuttling up and down between Paris and Tel Aviv.

But he obtained the best training for his coming post in West Germany when he was made head of the Defense Ministry mission in Europe in 1957. He established contacts with diplomats and security officials in Western Europe, including Germany. This experience also stood him in good stead later, when he became Director General of the Defense Ministry. In this capacity he also came into contact with Afro-Asian affairs and visited the Far East together with the then Chief of Staff, Zvi Tsur.

Translation by FSL A. Hodes

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## DEFENCE MINISTRY CHANGE OF GUARD

Exit: 'Arthur' the near legend

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A-30 from Tel Aviv

THE outgoing Director-General of the Defence Ministry could do well writing or selling the rights to his memoirs. He has done a variety of jobs and has travelled widely and adventurously in the 21 years of his public career.

"But please remember to keep me respectable" Asher Ben-Nathan, known to all as "Arthur," says with a smile.

Mr. Ben-Nathan's quest for "respectability" emanates from his latest assignment. His country found an even harder nut to crack than the defence job he handled for the last five years: Representative to Bonn? Ambassador? Consul? Head of Reparations Mission? In a private capacity? It's all in the wind.

Mr. Ben-Nathan, born in Vienna in 1921, is a graduate of the Hebrew Hayut Secondary School there. He came here in 1933 and helped found the settlement group which later established Kibbutz Dovrat in Lower Galilee.

By that time Ben-Nathan was already busy interrogating immigrants (1944) on conditions inside Nazi-occupied Europe — initially to provide additional information for parachutists dropped into Europe and later to accumulate evidence on Nazi war crimes.

Immediately after the war Ben-Nathan, at that time with an unruly mustache and leather jacket in the best emissary style, went to Europe to head the "Bricha," the "underground railway" of illegal immigration.

Legendary name  
"Arthur" became almost a legend in Europe. It was also his code name. Nobody imagined that the young journalist by the name of Arthur Pier representing "Haborer" and "Hatzofe" of Tel Aviv was the real "Arthur" the British were so anxiously looking for.

"After the war we behaved as if we, members of Mosad Ha'aliya, were the fifth Occupation Power. And in a sense we were, doing pretty much as we pleased." In Vienna after the war, a note signed by Arthur would get you through all four Allied occupation zones of the Austrian capital.

In summer 1947 Mr. Ben-Nathan was ordered to return



ASHER BEN-NATHAN

home and spent the year as a special aide to the former chairman of the Jewish Agency, David Ben-Gurion.

Different appointments followed in rapid succession, including an assignment to the Foreign Ministry, "sabbatical years" spent studying at the Geneva Institute for International Studies (1951-53) and terms in East Africa and as Head of the Defence Ministry mission in Paris, and finally the appointment as Acting Director-General of the Ministry of Defence in 1959, when Mr. Shimon Peres became Deputy Minister of Defence. The following year Mr. Ben-Nathan became Director-General and served in that capacity until last week.

"It's a job I can't really say much about. Naturally I have my reasons for leaving the Ministry," he says. "But I cannot criticize nor comment on the past, present or future. All I can say is that it was a very tense job. No highlights. Just tense all the time."

There is one thing he wishes to add: the Defence Ministry is a much maligned department.

"I want to say that it is an exemplary establishment. Relations between its employees, and the general moral standard of its manpower force, are beyond reproach. This is not meant to imply that standards are lower in the other ministries. But it is of particular importance to achieve such level in a ministry entrusted with the heavy responsibility of ensuring our future survival."

## ISRAEL

### SEEKING THE NEW GERMANY

#### BENATAN ON THE PROBLEMS OF AN AMBASSADOR

from Amos Ben-Vered

Jerusalem:

There is none of the evasiveness often associated with diplomats about Asher Benatan, Israel's Ambassador Designate to the Federal German Republic, who is due to take up his post in Bonn next week. Tall and silver-haired, though only 42, cigar-smoking Benatan answered my questions either forthrightly or not at all. There were no half-hearted answers.

"My task will be not only to represent Israel in Germany, but also to try and explain the points of view of the government to which I shall be accredited to my government at home," he said in reply to my question. He referred to the view that an ambassador should be both the representative of the government despatching him and of the government receiving him.

"One of the ambassador's tasks is to promote a dialogue between two countries." He placed the stress on *dialogue*. "Unless each side understands the arguments and points of view of the other, the mutual relations will take the form of a conversation between two deaf people. This applies to the relationship between peoples as well as between states."

"Illegal immigrant": Benatan left his native Austria when he was 17 and joined a kibbutz in Palestine before he was drafted for national, and later, Civil Service. He arrived — as did so many Jews in the pre-State period — on a tiny immigrants' ship as an "illegal immigrant".

"Won't your German cultural background be a disadvantage in Germany, since you will after all be representing Israel?" I asked.

This was not quite accurate. Benatan pointed out, explaining he had attended a Jewish Secondary School in Vienna where Hebrew was taught as a major subject. As for the German language, so far from being a handicap, he thought "a knowledge of the local language is useful, if not a primary requisite for a diplomat who wants to understand the country in which he is serving."

Changed circumstances: Benatan has

twice visited Germany — once in the period 1945-47 when he was organising illegal immigration through Austria to Palestine, which was then still under the British mandate. The second time in the 1957-59 period, when he represented the Israel Defence Ministry in Europe and dealt among other things with the procurement of arms.

On both occasions he found little time to study the country. "But now I will undoubtedly spend some of my time outside the capital, getting acquainted with Germans of all walks of life."

My question what he would do first when he arrived, drew a bland look from Benatan and elicited an equally bland reply. "I shall present my Letters of Accreditation to the President of the Bundesrat (who serves as Acting President during Lübke's absence) and will then meet the personalities prescribed by protocol."

Understanding the demonstrations: "I would not demonstrate against Pauls in Israel," Benatan said in answer to my next question, "but in a democratic state demonstrations of this kind are not forbidden." After some reflection he added: "I do not justify these demonstrations, but so long as they are not simply exploitation of genuine emotions for party political ends, I can understand them as manifestations of personal bitterness."

Before the establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and Germany had been decided on, Benatan had already been offered a job in Germany as head of the "Israel Purchasing Mission" in Cologne. But he considers his new post more of a challenge, he says. For relations with Germany must now be viewed in the context of those with other countries and especially with those of the Arab world.

He recognises the importance of Germany as a major member state of such organisations as the European Economic Community, Nato, the O.E.C.D. and others, and it is these considerations, first and foremost, that govern his task.

An open mind: But, of course, there is the question of making contact with the German people and not only with the Government in Bonn. This, Benatan expects, can only be done by establishing closer links with Germany's younger generation.

He declined to answer when I asked him when the negotiations with the German Government on economic aid to Israel would get under way. "This has been laid down in the exchange of letters between Eshkol and Erhard."

Benatan (who at the end of World War II assisted Gideon Raphael of the Jewish



BENATAN AND HIS WIFE  
No confusion

Agency in preparing war crimes documentation which was used in the Nuremberg trials) said he approached his present task with an open mind. Of course this is a different Germany," he said. "The Federal Republic is not the Third Reich. Recognition of this simple fact is in itself sufficient to prevent confusion."

Benatan is a widely-travelled man. He has spent two years in Geneva studying International Relations. He served for three years in East Africa, where he was Director of an Israeli firm and then head of the Purchasing Mission in Paris. And until last year he was Director-General of the Israel Defence Ministry.

### POPULATION DISPERSAL IS VITAL DEVELOPING THE DEVELOPMENT AREAS

from Amos Ben-Vered

Jerusalem:

The plan to realise one of the long-standing objectives of the Israel government, dispersing the country's population published last week, is one of a series of important documents and decisions the importance of which is overlooked in the election fever which has seized the country.

The plan is the outcome of years of deliberations in interdepartmental ministerial committees, with the participation of experts. Nonetheless it was treated here last week as only another aspect of the election campaign.