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INFO: Berlin, Bonn, Cairo, Jerusalem, London, Moscow, Paris

FROM : Amembassy Tel Aviv DATE: AUGUST 7, 1966
SUBJECT : Israeli Ambassador to Bonn Speaks Out
REF : Our A-53, July 21, 1966

ANALYSIS BRANCH: *File Ben Nathan*

It will be recalled from the communication under reference that in the wake of the local criticism stirred up by a recent address of West German Ambassador Dr. Rolf PAULS the voice of the Israeli Ambassador to Bonn, Mr. Asher BEN-NATHAN (currently in Israel on personal business), was heard in outspoken defense of the idea of Israel-German rapprochement in general, and of Dr. Pauls' freedom of speech, in particular. A rather clear and detailed exposition of Ben-Nathan's position was recently carried in the form of an interview (see enclosure) in mass-circulation Maariv (independent). Among the more striking points he made are the following:

1. Ben-Nathan would like to see Israel-German relations develop in such a fashion that the Germans would continue to remember their moral debt to Israel, without at the same time being subject to constant Israeli reminder "day and night", and the Israelis would realize that a new generation has come into being in Germany, and that West German-Israel relations are a "matter of mutuality."
 2. While the Germans greatly regret Israel's stand on the Oder-Neisse border, they understand the motivation and don't press the problem. "All they ask is that we should not keep harping on that subject..."
 3. In Ben-Nathan's opinion, the influence of the right-wing National-Partei Deutschlands (NDP) is limited, and it encounters strong
- Enc: "Interview with Asher Ben-Nathan", Maariv, July 22, 1966

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opposition since the Germans are well aware of the dangers of anti-Semitism.

4. Those Israelis who suggest the establishment of diplomatic relations with East Germany are unfamiliar with the situation in East Germany and with the insulting posture it holds towards Israel.

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Asher Ben-Nathan, Israeli Ambassador in Bonn
Interviewed by Raphael Bashan

Maariv, July 22, 1966

Question: Mr. Ben-Nathan, have you come to Israel in order to correct the bad impression which the speech of the German Ambassador Rolf Pauls made?

Answer: I have come on home leave which was planned some time ago. I was on board ship in mid-sea when Pauls made his speech. Particulars of it I only learned when I arrived at Haifa.

Q: Did you then interrupt your leave?

A: Officially I did not. My place of work is at the Israel Embassy in Bonn, not here.

Q: Did the speech of Ambassador Pauls surprise you?

A: To some extent perhaps. On the whole I would say that one ought to leave the judgment of his speech to history--not to hysteria!

Q: Don't you think that Dr. Pauls exaggerated somewhat?

A: I would prefer to add no more to what I said on that subject.

Q: How do you regard your task as Israeli Ambassador in Germany? Is there anything special in it? How does it differ from representation in another country?

A: There is still something special in our relations with Germany. From the beginning I was received there in a way different from that to which any other Ambassador is used. The very appearance of an Israeli Ambassador in Germany has perhaps again brought to the consciousness of the Germans that which is special in the relations of the two countries, and has given food for thought to many people. We have to remember that for many years we had a representation in Germany, and Dr. Pinhas Shinaar had the personal rank of Ambassador, but the symbolism inherent in the actual opening of an Embassy has created special interest among the general public. The press, radio, and television have shown great interest in the Ambassador himself, and public opinion wanted to know who is that first Ambassador that Israel has sent to Germany. Without actually entering into any comparison, this situation is perhaps similar to the one that may exist, from the point of view of public interest, when the first Israeli Ambassador is accredited to Damascus after peace has been established between us and the Arabs.

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Q: What about the rumors according to which you behave with the Germans with "a soft hand" and in rather an appeasing manner?

A: So far I have only heard the opposite! Whoever said that I am too appeasing towards the Germans belongs to a group of unstable persons, I would say, those who do not speak out of knowledge but, to put it mildly, out of malice. I for one do not think that one always has to speak strongly with the Germans, but at public appearances I say exactly what I think, even if the things are hard, sometimes. And I assume that among those listening there are always those ^{who} do not particularly like what I have to say. A short time ago I spoke at the inauguration meeting of the "German-Israel Association" in Berlin, and there I said that in Germany one occasionally uses such terms as "forgetting" and "forgiving", while it is still impossible to forget, and that I advise them not to forget either! Gentlemen, I said, you cannot pull out leaves from the book of history, and there is nothing to talk about forgiving. What one can try to do is build a bridge of mutual understanding for the future. Among the audience there were some religious notables sitting, to whom the concept of "forgiving" has a special meaning. What I said was not pleasant for them at all, but I said it just the same!"

When Germans ask me about our attitude to the border problem Oder-Neisse, I explain to them the stand of the Government of Israel, which one does not enjoy hearing about in Germany, although there are many important politicians of all parties in Germany, who have openly declared that the border Oder-Neisse is the border of Germany, and that at the peace conference there will be room for a formal concession on that subject in a general settlement. I have to point out that what worries the Germans much more is the problem of reunification of Germany.

Q: What is the opinion of the Germans about our attitude to the question of the Oder-Neisse border?

A: They have with deep regret taken due notice of our stand on that subject, they even understand the motivation that brought us to that, and they don't press us on that subject. All they ask is that we should not keep harping on that subject, because our attitude is quite clear to them.

Q: Is the assumption true, that the German Foreign Minister Gerhard Schroeder is hostile to the State of Israel?

A: That is not true! Mr. Schroeder is a man who is concerned first and foremost with the interests of Germany--and that is legitimate.

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Q: What is the position regarding relations between the Bonn Government and the Arab countries?

A: The position today is that the Arabs who severed relations with Bonn have to renew them, and only then will the conditions be discussed. It seems to me that to the extent that the Arabs will obtain a better political price, they will perhaps be willing to forego a high economic price.

Q: For instance?

A: Let us assume that for one reason or another a crisis may develop between us and the Bonn Government. That would be an opening for the Arabs to renew contact with Bonn at a somewhat lower price.

Q: How do we know that a renewal of German-Arab relations will not come in one way or another at our expense?

A: Chancellor Erhard himself said repeatedly that relations with the Arabs have nothing to do with relations between Israel and Germany. We claim and argue that all the time. We have no objections to the renewal of German relations with the Arab countries. We do not interfere in the affairs of other countries. All we want is that such relations should not be at our expense.

Q: What is your opinion about the idea entertained in certain circles in Israel that we ought to recognize also East Germany and establish relations with her?

A: That would be the worst thing to do. If we look into East Germany's relations to us, what do we find? Only insults and accusations and denunciations of the worst kind. There has not been a head of an East European State who expressed himself against Israel in such a vilifying manner as Walter Ulbricht! In East Germany there are the same Germans as in West Germany. Perhaps in the Government there no former Nazis have been discovered, but the people are the same and it must be measured with the same yardstick as to their good and their bad sides. Whoever speaks of East Germany had better check the subject thoroughly. Sometimes one speaks here about German militarism. If I recoiled from the show of German militarism, it was when I saw soldiers of the East German Army marching in goose-step in the best Wehrmacht tradition! More than once have I read in East German newspapers praise and hail to the Prussian military tradition!

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Q: We hear from time to time increasing number of revelations of anti-Semitism and about neo-Nazi parties which are gaining in strength in regional elections. How does that fit into the image of "the other Germany?"

A: I presume you mean first of all the NPD (National Partei Deutschlands). This is a nationalist party who claims that they are not Neo-Nazis. They even went to the trouble of sending me an invitation to their annual convention. It seems to me that about one-third of their members are veteran Nazis, but their true voice is not heard at public meetings in the big cities out of fear of arrest, only at small gatherings in villages. The NPD stresses in its propaganda that not only the Germans committed atrocities during the war, but other peoples as well, and demands that "the lost territory" be returned to Germany. In my opinion their influence is small and they encounter strong opposition. Recently most neo-Nazi organizations were united in the framework of the NPD. Their organ, the "Deutsche Soldatenzeitung", publishes strong anti-German articles quoted from the Israeli press, with the intention of proving: "You see! Not only we are extremist in our attitude!" In the Bundestag it has several times been proposed to outlaw the NPD and its paper, but as long as both are cautious in their expressions they will apparently continue to exist. As regards anti-Semitism: There are fascist movements in other Western States, and they are openly engaged in anti-Semitic propaganda. The Germans themselves are aware of that phenomenon, and the German Ministry of Interior publishes from time to time reports on such revelations. There are people who, instead of regarding such reports as a positive sign, have pointed out that they are proof of the continued existence of neo-Nazi and anti-Semitic movements in Germany. The NPD itself has understood the danger of such reports for its future existence and its paper came out with a sharp attack on the Minister of Interior.

Q: You have repeatedly stressed the point that we ought to receive German youth delegations with a smile of welcome. Are we actually under any obligation for the education of German youth? Why do you regard it as our duty?

A: It is not a question of duty. The Germans themselves want to send their youth to us, to see a democratic country. It is in our interest to meet and to talk with these young people, for in the long run we must be interested in the education of the new democratic generation in Germany.

Q: When will the meeting between Erhard and Eshkol take place?

A: Maybe this year.

Q: On German soil?

A: No!

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Q: In what direction would you like to see Israel's relations with Germany develop in the years to come?

A: I would like to see sober relations. Let's put it this way: The Germans must understand their moral debt to us, without our reminding them day and night. I would like to see them giving us support in all vitally important matters that concern us. At the same time I would like us to realize the difference between the old Germany and the new generation and the people of goodwill which they have in fact proved, that we should realize that a new generation has come into being in Germany, and that we should understand that relations are a matter of mutuality.

Q: Mr. Ben-Nathan: Isn't there a danger than an Ambassador who remains for a long time in a certain country, may become that country's Ambassador, and in the case of Germany, may become unwittingly a Germanophile?

A: Tell me, does every Ambassador who remains for a long time in Israel become automatically a philosemite?

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Translation: FSLMRavor

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