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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
AIRGRAM POL 17 ISR-FR

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FILE DESIGNATION

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TO : Amembassy PARIS

INFO: BONN, TEL AVIV

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 AUG 28 5 10 PM '70

FROM : Department of State

DATE:

SUBJECT : Israeli Ambassador to Paris, Asher Ben Natan

REF : Tel Aviv's A-276 of August 5, 1970

The following information on Asher Ben Natan is submitted in reply to referenced airgram.

Asher Ben Natan, named Ambassador to France in August 1970, has been referred to on occasion as a living legend. He has had a varied career in intelligence and diplomacy. Just prior to his present assignment he served as Israel's first Ambassador to West Germany.

Ben Natan was born in Vienna on February 15, 1921. There he attended the Hebrew Hayut Secondary School. At the age of nine he joined the Maccabi Hatzair youth movement and at 18 left in a small boat for Palestine with other members of the organization. He settled first in Ein Harod, where he received agricultural training. He later moved to Davrat in Lower Galilee. At the outbreak of World War II he joined the Haganah. Ben Natan worked with the information service of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency in 1944. In that capacity he gathered intelligence information from East European immigrants.

In October 1945 Ben Natan returned to Europe with several other young men in a small boat. His mission was two-fold: to look for Nazi war criminals and to help Jewish refugees immigrate to Palestine. Disguised as an English journalist, Ben Natan traveled under the name of Arthur Feier. In post-war Europe the mysterious "Arthur" became

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the subject of much interest. Ben Natan was reputedly responsible for the emigration of 100,000 Jews from Austria, Germany, Poland and Hungary. He also managed to secure a picture of Adolf Eichmann which contributed to the capture of the war criminal.

Ben Natan returned to Israel in 1947 and lived for a time on a kibbutz. When statehood was declared, he became responsible for the formation of the Political Division of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. In 1948-49 he served as the Political Department's representative in Europe. He attended the College of International Relations in Geneva from 1951 to 1953. Upon his return to Israel he was named to the Administrative Council of Incode, a meat packing company operating in Africa. He used the position to establish ties between Israel and the states of sub-Sahara Africa.

Ben Natan became chief of the Defense Ministry mission in Europe in 1957. Stationed in Paris, he clandestinely purchased arms from both the French and West Germans. Ben Natan was named acting director general of the Ministry of Defense in June 1959 and director general of the Ministry in February 1960. From July 1965 to December 1969 he served as Ambassador to Bonn. He was quite popular with the Germans. On various occasions he was heckled by radical student groups and Arab residents of West Germany.

The tall, silver-haired Ambassador is considered a perfect gentleman who has a talent for interpersonal relations. He has an enormous capacity for work, a quick grasp of detail and great powers of persuasion. Ben Natan enjoys music, art, literature and sports (tennis and skiing). His wife, Erika, was born in Vienna. In the late 1940's she worked with the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. The Ben Natan's have two children. Ben Natan smokes cigars. He speaks fluent Hebrew, English and German.

The Department would appreciate any information which may become available during Natan's assignment in France.

JOHNSON, ACTING

15 SEP 1970

15 SEP 1970