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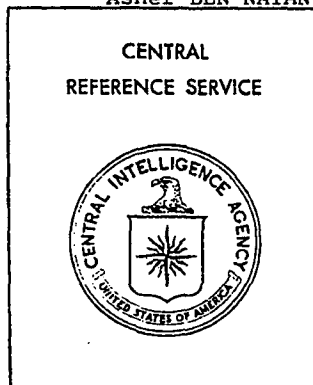
27 Feb 76

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NO CONTRACT

ISRAEL

Asher BEN-NATAN

Political Adviser to
the Defense Minister



Following a varied career in intelligence and diplomacy, Asher Ben-Natan (pronounced ben-naHTAHN) was named political adviser to the Minister of Defense in December 1975. As such he represents the Ministry in political forums and deals with its special foreign contacts in coordination with the Foreign Ministry. Ben-Natan had previously served as Ambassador to France since 1970. He came to that post after the imposition of the French arms embargo-- a period of deteriorating Franco-Israeli relations. Ben-Natan did not have good rapport with the French Government. As early as 1972 the French were expressing their dissatisfaction with him, and one high-level French official remarked at that time that relations between the two countries would improve if Israel changed Ambassadors.

Early Life And Career

Asher Ben-Natan was born on 15 February 1921 in Vienna. There he attended the Hebrew Hayut Secondary School. At the age of 18 he left for Palestine with other members of the organization. He settled first in Ein Harod, where he received agricultural training. He later joined a group of pioneers who set up their own kibbutz at Davrat in Lower Galilee. At the outbreak of World War II he joined Haganah (the Jewish underground). 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 Ben-Natan returned to Europe with several other young men in a small boat. His mission was twofold: to look for Nazi war criminals and to help Jewish refugees immigrate to Palestine. Disguised

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as an English journalist, Ben-Natan traveled under the name of Arthur Pier. In postwar Europe the mysterious "Arthur" became 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 Eichman that 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 information of the Political Division of the Ministry of 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, an Israeli meat packing company located in Eritrea. He used the position to establish ties between Israel and the states of sub-Sahara Africa. He stayed with the company until mid-1956.

In 1957 Ben-Natan became chief of the Defense Ministry mission in Europe, stationed in Paris. He was named acting director general of the Ministry of Defense in June 1959 and director general in February 1960. From July 1965 to December 1969 he served as Israel's first Ambassador to West Germany. Ben-Natan was "tough" in dealing with the Germans. Six months after his arrival in Bonn he told a German audience that he was aware of anti-Semitism in Germany, although it was cleverly camouflaged, and that he did not believe that the new generation of Germans was totally different from its elders. At one time he refused to meet the mayor of Würzburg because of his Nazi past. On the other hand, Ben-Natan vigorously protested against unfair, one-sided criticism leveled in Israel against Germany and against the widespread tendency to see only the negative side of Germany while ignoring many positive features. On various occasions Ben-Natan was heckled by radical student groups and Arab residents of West Germany.

Personal Data

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.

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Ben-Natan enjoys music, art, literature and sports (tennis and skiing). He smokes cigars. 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-Natans have a daughter, Miriam. Their 24-year-old son, Amnon, was killed in the Golan Heights during the October 1973 Arab-Israeli war. Ben-Natan speaks fluent English and German.

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Comments and questions on this report may be directed to
 DDI/CRS, code 143, ext. 6756

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