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Participants – non-Commission: David Cohen, Deputy Police Commissioner, NYPD

Participants – Commission: Gordon Lederman

(U) This interview was done only by Gordon Lederman because it was conducted by STU III.

(S/NF) Cohen started at CIA in 1966. He was in the DI and at one point ran the Office of Global Affairs. He established the first analytic effort in the DI on terrorism, in the 1980s. That analytic unit (which was part of the Office of Global Affairs) eventually migrated to CTC. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] In 1991, DCI Gates asked him to be the ADDI, and he served for 2 years under DDI Helgeson and was a deputy to DDI MacEachin as well. In July 1995, a Blue Ribbon Panel was created to choose a new DDO, and he was asked to be the DDO (more on that, later). He served from July 1995 – July 1997, and was replaced by Jack Downing. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] In February 2002, NYPD Police Commissioner Kelly asked him to join the NYPD.

(S/NF) Regarding DDOs who were not from the DO, John McMahon went from the DS&T to be DDO. No one had ever gone from the DI to be DDO before Cohen did it. But Cohen had had 5 years in the DO already, so the DO was not completely new to him. The DO has a natural distaste for outsiders, so he suffered a little from that as DDO. The DDO cannot have the objective of having people love him. The DO respects clear decisionmaking and the energy to follow implementation – the DO is a paramilitary organization. The key to the DO is to understand its needs, have the willingness to make a decision, to make it, and then have the energy to implement it.

(S/NF) He was brought in as part of the DCI Deutch team. During his confirmation hearings, Deutch was explicit that he was going to clean house at the DO. That was a

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mistake – a smart leader would just clean house, not announce it beforehand and publicly. Deutch made public statements that the DO was incompetent (Dec. 1996), and his statements poisoned the well. To be a changemaker, you cannot do it via the New York Times.

(S/NF) The DO was in a state of disrepair when Cohen took over. Every DDO says that the DO is in a state of disrepair and is right about it, but the DO was particularly in trouble when Cohen took over. There were there events considered near-scandalous:

(S/NF) First, the DO was suffering in the aftermath of the Ames affair. That affair was devastating. No one knew what to do. There was a lot of introspection.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Guatemala affair – an asset had either killed or covered-up the killing of an American. The Administration and the Congress felt that CIA had lied to it. There was an attitude that CIA's house needed to be cleaned – that no one from the DO could be trusted to be the DDO. Hence the desire to bring in a non-DO person to be DDO, and the formation of the Blue Ribbon Panel.

(S/NF) There was continuous downsizing. When Cohen took over, there were still [REDACTED] slots slated to be cut from the DO. And the DO had already been sharply reduced. Case officers who joined in the 1980s were leaving in droves [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] And recruitment came to a halt. When he became DDO, there were [REDACTED] officers in the CT (new recruit) program. At the time, there were [REDACTED] DO officers, depending upon how you counted them. The recruitment of [REDACTED] people in one year sent a signal to the rest of the DO that the organization had no future.

(S/HCS/NF/OC) There were two other core issues. First, the need to recognize that the Cold War was over, and that traditional tradecraft practices from the Cold War needed to be changed. The Cold War was a "benign" period – if you got caught spying, it was not a big issue. You could always blame your spying in a country on the exigencies of the Cold War. The Soviet Union was the excuse for spying around the world. But when the Cold War ended, it all changed. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] There needed to be more rigorous tradecraft.

(S/NF) Second, there was a Cold War hangover – the DO's asset base was stilted toward the Cold War. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The DI had a publish or perish atmosphere, where you had to publish a lot to get promoted, even if it was worthless academese – the DO had its equivalent, namely that you got promoted for recruiting a lot of people even if it was

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worthless. And the DO played games because of that, listing more people as having done a recruitment that was actually the case. Cohen stopped that mentality – he changed the precepts and standards for advancement. He made the focus be more on expertise, and promotion became more competitive as a result. He tried to instill excellence and professionalism. On the other hand, promotion rules disadvantaged the DO overall by one-third vis-à-vis other CIA directorates), so he changed those rules in order to help the DO.

(S/NF) Cohen fought to get relief from downsizing. The CIA Executive Committee agreed not to cut [] positions, and stations slated for closure [] were not closed. On the tradecraft issue, he put new lifeblood into training. Training had always been headed by a very senior official with decades of experiences but who thus was mired in the old ways. Instead and unprecedented, Cohen appointed an excellent GS-15 [] to head training and update it to the new post-Cold War world.

(S/NF) There were several priorities for the DO, all basically at the same level:

(S/NF) First, rebuilding CI. CIC was dysfunctional. When he left, the quality of the people there was better than it had ever been. CIC caught Nicholson 18 months after he first accepted money from the Soviets, while it took 10 years to get Ames and 20 years to get Hanssen. Getting Nicholson was a huge achievement.

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[] He started a counterproliferation division in the DO. No one in the DO wanted it because it was cross-cutting and issue-oriented – the DO felt it took away from its core expertise, which was regionally-oriented. The division was headed [] It still needed to get its sea legs, though.

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(S/NF) Cohen had a personal interest in counterterrorism because of his having founded the CT analytic program at the Office of Global Affairs in the DI. When Cohen was ADDI, an analyst who was sent to CTC was punished career-wise by not getting promoted – that analyst was seen as leaving the DI's main work. Cohen tried to make sure that analysts sent to CTC did not suffer promotion-wise, and that the DI did not pass-the-trash to CTC. CTC was run in 1995 by Winston Wiley, who had worked for Cohen. Their relationship had some tensions but in general was very good. Cohen insulated CTC from downsizing.

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(S/NF) The 1995 OPM/SANG bombing led to the first infusion of cash into CTC. The DO tried to play with the resources, but Cohen made sure that the resources earmarked for terrorism actually were moved to CTC.

(S/NF) In January 1996, there were terrorist attacks by Hizballah in Israel. Terrorism was spiking (eg, OPM/SANG). [redacted] Terrorism at the time was seen as targeted to Americans and Israel by Hizballah and Iran.

(S/NF) Regarding the exchange of deputies between FBI and CTC, there was the backdrop on the Ames case, in which FBI put together a redbook of how CIA screwed-up and sent it to the Hill, arguing that if the FBI had been in charge of CI, Ames would have been caught long ago. CIA was furious. The Gang of 8 was useless – what was really needed was for operational people to break-bread together. [redacted]

(S/NF) Although there were the above-referenced efforts to build CIA/FBI relations, the exchange of deputies was generated in the context of improving CT, not in the context of improving CIA/FBI relations. The first CIA person to go to FBI was [redacted]. [redacted] The purpose of the exchange was to explain to FBI's counterterrorism people what CIA does, how it does it, and to build the relationship. [redacted] helped the FBI [redacted]. And an FBI person in CTC would help CTC understand the FBI. He does not remember there being anything on paper – like an MOU – regarding the exchange. [redacted] At the last minute, [redacted] CIA tried to back out, but Cohen forced it through.

(S/NF) UBL station was set up in 1996. Wiley came to him and said that we need to know more about this guy! When UBL was brought up with Cohen by Wiley, it was not in the context of terrorism finance issues, rather that CIA needed to know more about UBL in general. Cohen supported Wiley's request. Regarding UBL being a virtual station, it was not set up this way because of the available funding, at least from Cohen's perspective. [redacted] if UBL station was part of CTC, then the station would have been consumed by meetings within CTC and would have not been able to get anything done. Mike Scheuer was selected by Wiley to lead it – Scheuer was the best, arrived at work at 4am, was the go-to guy for getting information. Cohen noted to Wiley that putting Scheuer in charge of it was a big investment – ie, a big loss for CTC – but Wiley wanted to do it and Cohen supported it. UBL station was supposed to be able to task other stations and also be the repository for all information

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known about UBL. The regular stations hated UBL station. Organizations function by tradition – but it is the job of the leader – of the DDO – to break traditions.

(S/NF) The Kanshi effort was not a major effort, and it was segregated. No one really expected to get him.

(S/NF) There was no CT strategy. Cohen wanted to [redacted] But he did not really think about what new tradecraft was needed to go after terrorism – he admits it was a failing on his part. But coming up with a strategy to recruit new CIA personnel with skills for counterterrorism was basically irrelevant given how few new employees were being brought into CIA in the first place. Cohen was a hero for getting the number of new case officers for the DO raised [redacted]

(S/NF) Regarding the Deutch guidelines: there was a human rights scrub of assets before Cohen became DDO, but that was a feckless exercise. The Bremer Commission claimed that the Deutch guidelines were a problem, but Cohen was skeptical because every station needed HQ approval to recruit a new source, regardless of human rights concerns, so what difference should it make if HQ was also reviewing for human rights concerns as well? Instead, the Deutch guidelines were a handy excuse for risk aversion.

(TS/HCS/NF/OC) Regarding risk aversion: When you take an action on the edge and you don't think leadership will stand with you, you soon decide to stay far from the edge. The DO had many years in which they thought that the White House endorsed action, only to find out that the White House was not supportive in the end. CIA is as risk-taking as the policy environment will support. Just having case officers asked by senior officials, "why did you do this?" sends a message that risk-taking is not supported. To do covert action, you need to pass through a battery of lawyers – "the bureaucratic form of body language" to convey that an action is not supported. The aftermath of the Iran-Contra affair fostered risk aversion as well. Risk Aversion was not a matter of lore – there were specific examples of case officers not being supported. For example [redacted]

(S/NF) Regarding stations and bases, there was a strategic plan for the DO which prior DDO Ted Price had authored [redacted]
[redacted] The plan called for reducing the number of stations and bases. But on Cohen's watch, he did not shut stations, although stations were shut under Price's watch. The only thing Cohen did was [redacted]

(S/NF) Basically, Deutch wanted to clean house. Cohen was trying to temper it. Cohen was consumed with the day-to-day, practical things, remedying problems like CI, and did

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not have the time to come up with a strategy for the DO for the future. I came from the DI, Cohen said – the DO thought I had dropped in from Mars. I focused only on practical things. I have a HPSCI presentation that was the closest that I came to an overall plan. I focused on morale and tradecraft issues. Price's framework was good enough – it took Price 18 months to come up with it, including a year of focus groups! There was no way I was going repeat that, Cohen indicated.

(S/NF) Regarding integration with other INTs, Price sent [redacted] to NSA as a special assistant, but Cohen did not really do much on that score.

(S/NF) The NSC would micromanage, particularly by letting loose its lawyers to slow-roll things. Congress did not really micromanage the DO, rather it used its oversight to pummel the Administration (recall the sharp partisan divide between the Republican Congress and Pres. Clinton).

(S/NF) Lederman asked Cohen about DCI Tenet's "rising tide will lift all boats" approach to resource allocation, and whether that made sense. Cohen rejected it, saying that CT needed an executive agent – CTC – to run things; all parts of the DO were not equal vis-à-vis CT (cf. Tenet interview; Joan Dempsey interview). CTC can deploy people overseas. CTC has the responsibility for terrorism.

(S/NF) CTC reported to the DCI and to the DDI. But CTC was a DO entity. It was "my responsibility." It was so because of the importance of accountability.

(S/NF) No DDO should want to be loved.

(S/NF) Regarding judging how well the DO is working today, Cohen suggested the following analysis: how many intelligence-producing assets, of a certain quality, are there, and where are they located? [redacted]

[redacted] We need to avoid focusing on mere numbers of recruitments, although getting lots of assets is important so that some pan out to be great.

(S/NF) To measure information-sharing, you need to look at how well information is flowing to the key places that have the greatest need, like NYC, which is the most important target. A police chief in Peoria only cares that he is told if there is a direct threat to Peoria. NYC's needs are much greater – and that should be the test for the IC.

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