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HISTORICAL OFFICE

August 10, 2007

Honorable William S. Cohen
Cohen Group
1200 19th Street, NW
Suite 400
Washington, D.C. 20036

Dear Secretary Cohen:

Enclosed is an edited copy of the transcript of the oral history interview done in your office on June 21, 2007. We have edited the transcript for clarity and consistency. Please review it and make whatever changes, corrections, and additions you wish. When the transcript is returned to us we shall prepare a final version incorporating your changes, and send you a copy for your files. A self-addressed envelope is enclosed for your convenience.

Please let us know your choice of access for the interview. Our categories are: (1) open; and (2) closed, permission of interviewee required to cite or quote. We shall follow your wishes in this matter.

We very much appreciate your continuing participation in our oral history program. I look forward to receiving the transcript of the June 21 interview. If you have any questions, I can be reached at 703-588-7899.

Sincerely,

Alfred Goldberg

Alfred Goldberg
OSD Historian

Enclosures
As stated

Interview with William Cohen
June 21, 2007

Smith: This is an interview with former Secretary of Defense William Cohen, in the offices of the Cohen Group, on June 21, 2007. The interviewers are Drs. Alfred Goldberg and Louis Smith.

Goldberg: At the time of our last interview you had just come back from India. How much time do you spend at home?

Cohen: Very little.

Goldberg: That was true when you were secretary, too, wasn't it?

Goldberg: Yes, but at least my wife would travel with me.

Goldberg: You don't take her with you now?

Cohen: It's too hard, going commercially, one day per country, etc. For me it's easy.

Goldberg: You could buy yourself a jet.

Cohen: One is always hopeful.

Smith: When we talked to you before, you talked about the circumstances of your appointment as secretary of defense. What you didn't discuss is why you feel that Clinton offered the job to you, a Republican senator from a small state.

Cohen: It would probably be best to ask him about that. I can only base it on what he said to me; that he was concerned that there needed to be a bipartisan consensus on national security. He had watched me during my years on Capitol Hill and felt, I assume on the recommendation of Bill Perry, who had given him a list of names including mine, that I could serve effectively in that capacity. The first time I met with him it was a lunch, very casual, general, and philosophical, and had nothing to do with defense but was an opportunity to get to know each

other better. We had met on several occasions at ceremonial events—going through the White House line, at Christmas dinner for members of Congress at the White House, etc.—but we had never had a conversation to speak of. The next time I met him was over in Thailand. I was there to give a speech to the U.S.-Thai Business Council; he was there for the king's birthday. I saw him during the day. He was up on a platform, I was in the audience. He stepped down from the platform at the end of the ceremony, and spotted me in the audience. I had on a yellow tie with white elephants, a Jim Thompson silk tie, and he asked if they were Republican elephants or Thai elephants. I said that this day they were Thai elephants. We didn't have further conversation until a couple of days later. He came back from that trip and I went on to Malaysia. I got a second call to come to the White House. We talked specifically about Defense and he indicated that he wanted to try to have a bipartisan consensus on Capitol Hill for defense policy. We had some conversation to the effect that he wanted to know if I would accept the job if he offered it, obviously wanting to know in advance. I said I would on one condition, that I would never be involved in a political discussion. I would run the Defense Department and not engage in any of the Democratic Party's activities, discussions, or strategies. He said fair enough, and the next conversation we had was at a White House Christmas reception for Congress. My wife and I were in line and at one point Vice President Al Gore pulled me out of line very inconspicuously and asked me to take a call the next day between 8:00 and 8:30 a.m. I said of course, and got back into line. The call didn't come through by 8:30 so I decided to take my dog for a walk, to my wife's astonishment. We had talked about it, and I was prepared for the news that it might not work out. The call came while I was out, and when I got back I returned the call and we had a brief conversation. He offered me the job and I took it on the agreed conditions. He said "absolutely," and kept his word, and never involved me in any kind of political business.

Goldberg: This was after Christmas?

Cohen: This was after the Christmas party, but before Christmas.

Goldberg: Before Christmas but in December.

Smith: He obviously prized the expertise that you developed in the Armed Services Committee, but clearly, and he even said so when he was nominating you, he was looking for bipartisan consensus on his defense policy.

Cohen: He basically was co-opting the Republican Party. In terms of key issues, balanced budgets were always Republican issues, as was reforming welfare. In the realm of defense, he had come under a lot of criticism, in terms of what had happened in Somalia and elsewhere, and I think he looked at that and decided that he couldn't afford to have this be a divisive issue. So based upon Bill Perry's recommendation that I should be one of those that he consider, he felt it was important to take that step.

Smith: In your previous interview you said that you never initiated contact with former colleagues on the Hill unless you were authorized to do so by the president or senior officials. How did you manage social contacts? Substantive issues must have come up for discussion in social gatherings with your former colleagues.

Cohen: What I said to the president at that second luncheon at the White House was that if I accepted the position he would never have to worry about me going back door to Capitol Hill; that was something I would never do. There might be some apprehensive feelings on the part of others in the cabinet about me sitting there, whether I would be loyal to the administration, and I assured him he wouldn't have to worry about that.

Goldberg: Did he really hold cabinet meetings?

Cohen: Yes, sure.

Goldberg: Regularly?

Cohen: Yes. The big full cabinet meetings were not a regular event, those were a couple of times a year.

Goldberg: I knew that had pretty much gone by the board with most presidents.

Cohen: It's so big, there were so many people in the cabinet. Obviously the national security team, and from time to time Treasury—Bob Rubin and others would be involved—those meetings were pretty regular. What I represented to him was in fact how I carried out my responsibilities. I would initiate contact with key committees on Capitol Hill. I would invite Armed Services Committee members to come to the Pentagon to breakfast or luncheon meetings. I would invite them to our dinners, but it was always on a bipartisan basis. I could get on the phone and call Senator Lott or Senator Stevens or anyone else; it was always on a committee basis. I would invite them to have a discussion. There wasn't much time for social contact; what contact I did have came when hosting a visiting counterpart, and I hosted a lot of those events. Any time a minister of defense came from any country I would put on a dinner and invite key members from Capitol Hill to come from the leadership of the Armed Services or Appropriations Committees. That's the only contact I had, and it worked out fine.

Smith: You testified often and on a variety of subjects and were very comfortable going to the Hill. Do you think you were effective in supporting the national security policies of the administration?

Cohen: I do, because I enjoyed going up. I found that many members in any administration look forward to going to Capitol Hill as the equivalent of a visit to the dentist for a root canal. But I spent much of my life on the Hill, 24 years, and knew pretty much what kind of questions members would have and how one could anticipate the direction they were likely to go. I knew

how to relate to them, being forthright and giving them as much information as I had, treating them as a co-equal branch, not looking down with any kind of condescension, which happens from time to time depending upon which individual is testifying. I liked going up there. It gave me an opportunity to renew friendships. I was always welcome and was treated as still one of theirs. It was always a happy occasion for me to go up there.

Goldberg: Some of your predecessors used to take stiff drinks before going up to testify.

Cohen: I never felt that to be necessary. In fact, the only time there was really a question of any hostility was during the Desert Fox operation. What happened was that we were planning in November to launch a limited strike against Saddam Hussein.

Goldberg: This was in 1998?

Cohen: Yes. I was on my way to Hong Kong and I was over Wake Island. I had gone out to give an address in California and to visit our troops in Hawaii, and six hours away from Hong Kong I got a call from the White House to come back. We went down and refueled and flew back to Washington. We got a briefing there that we were preparing to go after Saddam and I had to brief all the countries involved. I visited something like 11 countries in 2 1/2 or 3 days to let them know what we were planning and to coordinate things.

Goldberg: Including Middle Eastern countries.

Cohen: Yes, all the Gulf states, plus the British, French, Israelis, about everybody that might be impacted by this. We finally got agreement; they weren't all happy about it but they finally agreed that if we were to take this action they would be supportive. We came back, got everything organized and ready to go, and Saddam sent signals that he was prepared to cooperate. As I recall, we actually had a plane ready to launch on the runway, gearing up ready to go.

Goldberg: He knew this.

Cohen: Saddam sent a signal back saying he was prepared to let the inspectors back in and would cooperate fully. The president had made a speech, as I recall, a day or so before saying that if Saddam agreed to cooperate there would be no military action. We felt we had to abide by that, so we called the operation off.

Goldberg: How extensive was the operation?

Cohen: It was a fairly focused air strike. It was geared to be limited to less than a week, but heavy in terms of the targets we were going to take out.

Goldberg: Military targets, you mean?

Cohen: All military, his special production facilities, his republican guard, whatever we thought posed a threat at that time.

Goldberg: Had that occurred we might not have had another war in Iraq.

Cohen: What happened was that the air strike was called off. We then sat down with the president and National Security Adviser Sandy Berger, Madeleine Albright and others, and we agreed that if for any reason Saddam failed to cooperate we would go after the same sites we had planned to hit, and reduce the time frame. Usually roughly 72 hours was needed to get the pilots ready, to have everything in place in order to launch an attack. We would reduce it to 24 hours or less so that if Saddam thought he was gaming it and had plenty of time to do things, he would not have that time. Frankly, neither the chairman nor I expected that we would ever have to launch the attack because we looked at the calendar and saw that Ambassador Butler was going over between December 1 and 14 for an investigation to see whether Saddam was really going to open up and let the inspectors go in. He would report back to us at the end of that time. President Clinton was scheduled to go to Israel and visit Gaza around December 14. I looked at

it and thought that Saddam would cooperate at least 60 to 70 percent, enough to satisfy us and the international community that he was cooperating, and he knew we wouldn't launch an attack during those first two weeks while Butler was there. He also knew the president would be in Gaza and we wouldn't launch strikes while the president was out of the country. Ramadan was coming up around December 18th or 19th, so from Saddam's point of view, if he got by that period in December the issue would come up for review by the UN Security Council and they would decide whether to ease the sanctions. So looking at it from his perspective, we thought he would cooperate enough to get by this time frame. The president went to Gaza, got a terrific reception there, the Palestinians were out waving and welcoming him. I got a call Sunday night to inform me that Butler's report was coming the next day, and it would be very negative. I called the chairman of the Joint Chiefs and said we were going to get a negative report, the president was coming back the next day and we should start gearing up. The president flew back, we had a meeting, and the agreement was that if Saddam did not cooperate we were going to go. We launched on December 14th or 15th. The attack started, and I got a call from Newt Gingrich followed by a call from Bob Livingston, who was later slated to succeed Gingrich as Speaker of the House. They said the place was boiling over. They were furious with us, the Pentagon and the White House. I asked why and he said that the attack was done to divert attention from the impeachment proceedings. I had not followed this and was not concerned about this, but the judiciary committee was preparing to report out the impeachment resolution the day we launched the attack. They said I needed to come up there. I went up that night at 7:00 o'clock. It was a closed session of Congress. The place was filled, no press; Chairman Shelton went with me, George Tennet was there as well. I spoke for three hours that night to a visibly hostile Congress on the Republican side. You may recall the film Wag the Dog, starring

Robert de Niro and others, in which you had a satiric movie where wars were started to avert attention; they cited Wag the Dog. I spent three hours from 7:00 to 10:00 that night making a presentation and answering questions. By the time we left we had pretty strong approval across the board, from both Republicans and Democrats. It was pretty hot for a while, because they felt it was done politically, but it had nothing to do with politics.

Goldberg: Suspicion is always rife.

Cohen: We laid out the entire time line and made it clear that it was my recommendation and the chairman's that this was how it was to be conducted; we emphasized that the timing was such that we really had to go because Ramadan was coming up. It was clear that we could not be bombing Saddam during that time. They finally accepted that. That's the only time I recall any contention at all.

Smith: Your testimony in that instance was obviously critical for the administration.

Cohen: There was some irony to it, because you'd have to go back more than 20 years earlier when I stood in the well of the House to urge the adoption of articles of impeachment, for a Republican president. Coming back in 1998, 24 years later, it had nothing to do with impeachment, and they were asking whether anything we were doing would impede their going forward. I said it was their choice, the attack had nothing to do with anything on the domestic side. They finally were satisfied.

Smith: Were there any other national security issues on which you felt your testimony or your contacts on the Hill were really important in advancing the agenda of the administration?

Cohen: Budgets went up significantly. The procurement budget went up. When I took over we got roughly $43 billion for procurement, the goal was to get to $60 billion, that was the level we needed to be at. We were able to achieve that. We got the biggest pay raise since the Ronald

Reagan days; NATO expansion, that was important. When it came time for the South Korean economic crisis, I may have been the first secretary of defense to testify before a banking committee in order to try to overcome reluctance on the part of Congress to provide any kind of bail-out assistance. Alan Greenspan, Bob Rubin, Secretary Albright and I went up to testify. I urged them to look at it from a national security perspective, and that was helpful, given that we were not quick off the mark in dealing with the Thai economic situation, which we paid a penalty for in jeopardizing our relationship with the Thai government. I think my role was also helpful in dealing with South America, where we made a real effort to build relations with Argentina, Brazil, and Chile. And we focused on Africa. I made several trips to Africa and brought that testimony back to the Hill. I think that overall, in terms of moving forward on the modernization of the forces, the revolution of military affairs, the revolution of business affairs, trying to move to a paperless society, procurement issues, we made great strides.

Smith: A signal success was the expansion of the defense budget that you pushed through the bureaucracy and Congress in 1999. When President Clinton signed that expansion into law in October 1999 it was the largest expansion of defense spending in 15 years, $112 billion. Can you talk about engineering that?

Cohen: The chiefs had come back and we looked at the budgets and they said that we needed $148 billion. I said, "OK, but what's the bottom line? That's what we need, but what can we get?" It was tough sledding going over to OMB because when I took over at Defense the representation was made that the Defense budget was the top figure that OMB and the Republican Congress would sign off on, there would be no increases. I said I would do the best I could to see how we could achieve all of the objectives we had set out within that budget. After spending less than a year, 8 months or so, we said it couldn't be done. I worked with the chiefs

and the service secretaries and we came to the figure of $148 billion. I had to go over and work the Office of Management and Budget and we finally agreed to $112 billion. I went to Capitol Hill, and it was one of those happy circumstances where if you are a member of an administration you are seen as a team player. I couldn't on one hand agree to be part of that team and then go back door to Capitol Hill, or during testimony say this is what they are asking, but this is what we really need. I couldn't do that. So it was a happy circumstance where I went up to ask for increases and had members who said I hadn't asked for enough. I would simply indicate what we needed at a minimum in order to achieve the objectives, and they would add on. I was probably the only secretary of defense throughout the world where people were adding more money to a budget request. I think a lot of it had to do with the fact that members on the Hill knew that we needed more. I would point out the minimum that we needed without any sense of breaking with the administration.

Smith: There was a meeting at the National Defense University in the autumn of 1998, where you, deputy secretary Hamre, the JCS, and the commanders in chief all made a presentation to President Clinton about the need to expand the budget.

Cohen: I remember being over there. He listened and took notes. I think he was very receptive, that was an important meeting.

Smith: We interviewed John Hamre and he said in the course of the interview that the military took advantage of a president politically wounded by the impeachment process at that time to ask for a large expansion of military defense spending. How would you react to that?

Cohen: There were a number of those sessions. We met periodically with the CINCs, and at the CINCs conference they would come in and the president would attend. In the chain of command they would report under Goldwater-Nichols directly to the president. They would never hold

back. I don't know if they saw this as an opportunity to press him because he had been wounded by the impeachment. What I tried to do and what chairman Shelton tried to do was to say that for the meetings to be meaningful they had to be open, and it was a chance to make their pitch. I think they took advantage of that; I always tried to send the signal that they should not be inhibited, that I wanted a full and open exchange. I assured them that they could say what they felt without fear of retribution. Did they take advantage of that? I think the answer is yes. If they had needs this was the time to speak up. I never got the feeling that they were trying to maneuver him into a corner or to take advantage by extracting more than what they were entitled to. My advice always was this is your chance, take advantage of it.

Goldberg: It is normal for them to take advantage of any situation, it's their job.

Smith: Was there an emerging budget surplus that facilitated Clinton's willingness to consider more money for Defense at that point? He probably would have done it in any case.

Cohen: Absolutely. He was very sensitive to that, and no doubt he was responding to what happened in Somalia; he felt wounded by that. There were some heavy discussions with the family members. I remember one time we went to the White House, they had a reception, and some of the family members were there. It got pretty heated at one point. One man had lost a son. Clinton was very sensitive to that. He also wanted to show, I think, that contrary to the reputation that he had initially as being anti-military, going back to Vietnam, he wanted to show that as commander-in-chief he was supportive. He didn't always agree with the military's position. We certainly had issues relating to de-mining. We had Capitol Hill and Leahy pushing to get rid of all our mines; we had discussions on that. We disagreed, but he was basically very responsive and relied on me a great deal. He delegated most of that responsibility to my judgment. If I made a recommendation he would basically accommodate it.

Goldberg: He was pretty well generally informed militarily.

Cohen: He was one of the best studies I've ever seen. Given all that was going on in his world, his ability to come in, sit down, and focus on an issue, was terrific. His comprehension was phenomenal.

Goldberg: That was true of McNamara, you know.

Cohen: I would say Bill Clinton has one of the biggest and best brains that I have ever encountered.

Smith: Was he able to focus during all of his personal problems in 1998?

Cohen: Yes; that's what was so extraordinary. He would come to a meeting, sit down, and go immediately to the center of an issue. We tried very hard, and Sandy Berger deserves a lot of credit as NSC adviser, to minimize the disagreements that are inevitable between State, DoD, and others who have issues involved. Sandy would try to hammer out an agreement before it ever got to the president. We always had the power to say "I want to speak to the president on this," but we also knew that we didn't want to impose on his time. If we could reach an agreement we would do so. The interagency process worked very well. There were issues on which we disagreed; the president would say, "Let's have it." His ability to focus on issues was extraordinary. I never saw him at a moment when he was distracted. When we dealt with a national security issue, it was total focus and comprehension on his part. He was always well briefed, but he had an ability to really cut to the chase very quickly.

Smith: What was your relationship with Clinton like? What sort of access did you have to him?

Cohen: Basically, the job of SecDef is so all-consuming that you don't have much time for a personal relationship. I always felt that I could call him at any time or that he felt free to call me at any time. It was very warm and genuine when we were together. He would invite me from

time to time to travel with him on Air Force One. I felt close to him in terms of being able to talk to him any time, but I tried to treasure his time as president of the United States. I knew how limited it was and I tried not to impose on it. I never abused the privilege I had. I would go to Camp David from time to time when we had discussions we had to sort out, but it was always very friendly, very warm. He had a good relationship with my wife as well. She was doing extraordinary things over at DoD, in terms of quality of life issues for the troops. He saw us, I think, as a team.

Goldberg: Did his wife, Hillary, play any kind of a part in this?

Cohen: No, not really.

Goldberg: Her interests were elsewhere.

Cohen: She was not involved in national security issues.

Smith: What were the advantages and disadvantages of being a Republican in a Democratic administration?

Cohen: I have to go back and sort this out. There was some resentment on the part of the Republicans for me taking the position. I anticipated that would be the case. Throughout my career I had demonstrated that where there was an opportunity to reach an accord with the Democrats, I was willing to do so. I thought it was important, I didn't think the Republicans had a monopoly on good ideas. I worked very closely with Democrats on the Hill. Senator Nunn and I worked together on a number of key issues: creating a Special Operations Command; Assistant Secretary of Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict; other issues dealing with START; a variety of issues. I worked closely with Senator Sam Nunn; I worked with Senator Gary Hart during the military reform caucus, which was not a caucus, but we tried to look at defense issues way back in the early '80s. My own reputation was that I was willing to work

together with people on both sides. The party itself, of course had moved significantly to the right. Moderate Republicans were pretty much in the minority. I couldn't say that I enjoyed great favor with the party. To begin with, they associated me with the impeachment proceedings going back to 1973-74. On the other hand, I was a New England Republican, put it that way, and they were pretty much out of favor within the party itself. There was a built-in kind of resentment that Maine Republicans were fairly liberal on social issues, quite conservative on other things, still true. And yet you see what has taken place. There is only one Republican congressman from New England left in the House, the rest are all Democrats. You still have Olympia Snow and Susan Collins from Maine, but the party has shifted south and west. There was resentment to begin with. They wanted more solidarity on every issue, social issues. They couldn't get much more solidarity from me as regards defense issues, something I felt very strongly about, but I wasn't too concerned about that. My only concern was, if I accepted the position, could I be effective. I felt that given my ability to work with Democrats as well as key Republicans, such as my friends Senators Warner and McCain, and others I had worked very closely with in the Senate and in the House, I could do a good job. For me it was very beneficial to be able to serve in a Democratic administration and still have the support of Republicans. It didn't get much better. I didn't see any downside to it at all. I had no higher political ambitions, I knew it would be my last position in politics for all practical purposes. I felt that if I could make a contribution to national security by doing this I was eager to do so.

Smith: In your confirmation hearings you testified that you would resist any further budget cuts and that you wanted to support an increase in procurement funds from about $43 billion to around $60 billion to pay for the modernization of weapon systems. How did you expect to be able to do that, given that you were limited to a flat budget of about $250 billion?

Cohen: One of the first things I did, I went to the Tank and met with the Chiefs, and said we had a limited budget and that we had to start redirecting some of the resources into procurement. We were short on procurement so I called on them all to help me go through and analyze their budgets and see what we could squeeze out of them to put into procurement. I had the support of General Shalikashvilli to begin with. He was there only about eight months, as I recall, and then General Shelton. I had the benefit also of having General Joe Ralston, the vice chair of the Joint Chiefs, and he was very much in line with this. We worked very hard to squeeze the budgets. We squeezed as much as we could. We found that we couldn't do all that we needed to do and that's when the budget surpluses were there and we went back and made the pitch.

Smith: You had some tough trade-offs to make, didn't you, in that initial budget that you were dealing with? I was reading about some significant cuts that were proposed or did actually occur so that you could have the money for weapons.

Cohen: There were. It was not easy, and frankly, we were not able to do what we needed to do, that's why we went back for the request of 148 and finally agreed on 112.

Smith: I read about cuts that included almost 62,000 active duty service members; 54,000 reserve forces; and 80,000 civilians department-wide. They were pretty hefty cuts.

Cohen: If you are going to get savings, it has to come out of personnel. It's the biggest pay out you've got, in terms of today's dollars. If you are talking about procurement you can look out five years or more into the future and say we can cut a system, but it doesn't pay any immediate benefits. Personnel, you pay out every year, and if you reduce the pay out you can shift—

Goldberg: They are more than 50 percent of the budget.

Cohen: About 60 percent.

Smith: To what extent was what you were able to do initially circumscribed by the Quadrennial Defense Review that was happening at the time and by the budget that had been proposed by your predecessor?

Cohen: The QDR was practically over by the time I came in.

Goldberg: Did you have much regard for it?

Cohen: I had to defend it.

Goldberg: In terms of what it was going to do?

Smith: Was it too late to put something of your own stamp on it?

Cohen: Yes. I came in January and insisted that the QDR not be delayed.

Smith: It was released in May.

Cohen: I remember having a discussion with the Chiefs at that point, and the question came up as to whether I wanted to delay this, to have more time to have greater input into it. I said no. We would make the scheduled release date. I would get up to snuff as quickly as possible, make it work, defend it, and get ready for the next one.

Smith: There was an assessment at the time it was released that the QDR did not significantly alter the budget, structure, or doctrine of the military. Do you agree with that?

Cohen: That's right. That was part of the frustration. It was something that was practically done, and I had three months or less to actually devote to it. There were other inhibitions. You ask for the pros and cons of coming in. On the one hand, it was very beneficial to be a Republican in a Democratic administration. On the other hand, I had to also work within the confines of not coming in as a Republican and saying "By the way, we are going to do a different take on this." Then the Democrats would say "What's he doing over there?" So it was one where I had a limited time frame in which to deal with this. I had enormous respect for Bill

Perry, so it was not as if I felt that a lot of analysis had not gone into it with oversight by him. But there was no way that I could make any fundamental changes in such a short period of time. So that was a bit of a frustration.

Goldberg: I had the impression from the series of QDRs we had that many people involved in them or affected by them didn't feel they were of any great value or that a great deal of beneficial things resulted from them.

Cohen: Well, what is a QDR? It is really an opportunity every four years to ask what are the threats that are out there? What do we have to do to deal with those threats? What are the procurement requirements?

Goldberg: That's going on all the time.

Cohen: Yes, but it forces you to consolidate those viewpoints and to reach some kind of a consensus, and I think it is a helpful thing to do. You can say the same thing about the most recent QDRs.

Goldberg: Do you think that the congressional committees are pleased with the QDRs?

Cohen: Probably not, but it does give you some coherence as to the direction we need to go. Does it alter the budgetary impact? I don't know.

Smith: The Quadrennial Defense Review released in May 1997 endorsed the concept that U.S. forces should be able to fight two regional conflicts simultaneously. Were you presented with any alternative to that strategy? Was this something that the Joint Chiefs had a problem with?

Cohen: No, I think the Joint Chiefs were prepared to deal with two major regional conflicts. But there was also the question of dealing with some brushfires elsewhere, so it's a bit more than just the two major regional conflicts. Les Aspin went through a series of analyses and I think that Chiefs came back and said they could live with the two MRCs, but understand that the second

one would be at a higher cost and would take longer. I think it was more notional than reality, because you have a smaller force with greater commitments. They were saying, "We can do it, but we will pay a bigger penalty, the second one will take longer."

Smith: With regard to the smaller force, were you at all concerned about the force levels authorized, let's say, in the '98 budget?

Cohen: I thought we had gone down too low in terms of the peace dividend that we were all looking for following the end of the Soviet empire. By the same token, we were also looking at systems that were going to require adjustment to platforms that would require less manning. Designs of ships might go down from 600 to 200 personnel. We were trying to work with modernized air forces that would be less manpower intensive. We knew that we were balancing increasing costs of personnel with the need to modernize. We would have to try to make that tradeoff at all times. One of the first choices I was confronted with had to do with three aircraft that we were procuring—the joint strike fighter, the F-22, and F-18. The first thing I did was cut the F-18 by half, and the Navy was not happy with that. I kept half of the buy in order to give me a bit of leverage with the joint strike fighter. If the joint strike fighter started to get out of control in terms of cost, we would go with more F-18s. It was a leverage issue that I was presented with. It was dealing with how to modernize this force, deal with the procurement issue, and find the money to fund all of it. We were dealing with changing tooth-to-tail ratios. You have three choices. If you look at the map and say we don't want to reduce our commitments, there are few options. You can do one of three things. You can increase the size of your personnel, your force levels; you can add a couple of divisions, with a sharp impact on the budget. You can reduce your commitments, which I think is a bad idea, or you can try to change the tooth-to-tail ratios. Every secretary has tried that. You can make some progress on

it, and get into outsourcing issues. We started to outsource everything to do with the generation of power and housing. Things we didn't need to be involved with we were putting in the private sector and privatizing them. Getting the private sector involved in building housing on military facilities, that was something we worked on very hard and were quite successful.

Goldberg: It's been going on ever since.

Cohen: Yes. You get into issues you see coming up now about outsourcing security issues, Blackwater and others. The issue is do you want your personnel doing guard duty at embassies and other functions or do you want to put them in the combat element. It's always balancing that. I thought we were outsourcing pretty well, and I had to do some of it myself.

Smith: Did the greater integration of the National Guard and Reserves present the best solution for maintaining force structure in a time of flat budgets?

Cohen: The Guard and the Reserves used to complain that they were treated like second cousins.

Goldberg: They still do.

Cohen: Not so much any more. It's a different issue now. When we went to the total force concept they were considered to be as much a part of the force as the active duty in terms of their obligations. They complain today because their equipment is eroded substantially by virtue of the commitment to Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere. I don't think they ever anticipated they would be used to the extent they are today. On the one hand they felt that they were weekend warriors with once a month training, with old equipment, and they were treated with disdain, etc. Now they are part of the total force and there is a different problem. They are as much engaged as the active forces with all kinds of consequences for them, including the erosion of equipment, including what has happened to their home life, to their jobs. All that has changed quite dramatically.

Smith: Taking casualties, just like active duty forces.

Cohen: It's one of those "be careful what you ask for." But we did that in order to take full advantage of the Guard and Reserve and integrate them fully into the total force concept.

Goldberg: They've always had powerful political backing. Previous presidents had wanted to cut them severely and were never successful because Congress wouldn't permit it.

Cohen: My own thought was that when we were talking about the role of the Guard and the Reserve, they are our first responders at home. When in 1997 or '98 the Joint Chiefs came to me and we talked about the need for a homeland security CINC, I wrestled with that for a period of time. When word got out the ACLU and everybody else jumped all over that. Capitol Hill was saying "What are you talking about here, are we getting into violations of the concept of the role of the active military in domestic affairs?" Even though I was inclined to support the Chiefs on that what we had to do was come up with a task force that we put down at the Atlantic Command, which became Joint Forces Command, of a group of 30-50 people who would be the coordinators to serve as the coordinating element in the event that we had attacks on our homeland. That's the way that we had to do that initially. I always felt that the Guard and Reserve should be primarily responsible for being first responders here at home, not only for natural disasters, but for the attacks that we believed were coming.

Smith: How did the expansion of the Defense budget in 1999 open up what you hoped to accomplish?

Cohen: It gave us more procurement money. It allowed us to continue the deployments that we had engaged in beyond what we normally did. We were still in Bosnia and Kosovo, and still are. It allowed for the pay raise, which was very important. It allowed for other types of quality of life issues in terms of upgrading some of the housing overseas and elsewhere.

Smith: In your confirmation hearings you said that you viewed the proliferation of the weapons of mass destruction as the most serious threat the country faced. Did you see it as a problem that could be contained?

Cohen: Contained in the sense that I was a very strong supporter of the Nunn-Lugar legislation for containing the spread of nuclear weapons by getting better control over facilities having nuclear materials that were not safeguarded properly. That was part of reducing the spread of weapons of mass destruction. Having strong levels of cooperation with Russia was real important. I spent a good deal of time meeting with my Russian counterpart, whom I would meet with in Moscow or elsewhere. We spent time talking about how to control the leakage of nuclear materials and biological materials. That was the threat I saw then and I continue to see now as one of the greatest threats. This is why when the Bush administration came in one thing they did that I thought was inappropriate was to cut the funding on Nunn-Lugar. It got restored, but that cut was something I thought was not a good idea. We also spent a lot of time working with allies, finding ways in which we could contain the spread of these weapons. George Robertson, who is part of my firm now, an associate based in London, and I went on national television here and in Great Britain talking about anthrax, as an example. This was a threat that we saw to our troops, and also to our homeland, as there were tons, literally, of anthrax in existence. We needed to get control of that and lift the public awareness of those dangers. President Clinton was very impressed by a book that came out. It followed a non-fiction book called Hot Zone, and was a fictional book by the same author about what would happen were a biological agent to be spread throughout the United States and globally. He convened a conference in the White House bringing in experts to talk about how to prepare ourselves for

these weapons being used against our population and what we could do to control the spread. It was something very much on his mind and my mind during that time.

Smith: Did you view Iraq at that time as a threat in this regard?

Cohen: In my judgment we had Saddam pretty well contained by virtual no-fly zones in the north and south. We watched him very closely. We worried about whether he could convert any of his aircraft, even crop-spraying equipment, into aircraft that could carry biological agents. We watched every move that he made and made sure that nothing flew that presented a threat to us or to any of our allies in the region. I thought he was pretty weak in terms of his ability to launch strikes against anyone. I did not see Iraq as a source of spreading weapons of mass destruction. I did think Iran was; in fact, I have always felt that Iran was a much bigger threat to all of us than Iraq because I thought we had Saddam pretty much under control. Iran and North Korea had reputations for spreading weapons.

Smith: What was done by Defense to anticipate the threat of the development of weapons of mass destruction by Iran and North Korea?

Cohen: As defensive mechanisms, we tried to prepare our troops for having to fight in a chemical or biological environment. That meant mandating vaccinations of all of our troops, which we made some progress on and had some resistance to. For the forward deployed troops we tried to provide them with the equipment, the so-called biological identification and protection unit. We made sure that they were properly deployed, we provided them to our allies, like the Israelis, in times of stress. With respect to Iran, since we had no relations with Iran, we tried to constantly elevate the diplomatic effort, to say that if they gave up their spread of terrorist activities and support for the destruction of Israel, renounced weapons of mass destruction, we would have a better relationship. But frankly we had very little ability to control

what they were doing other than to watch them and get intelligence. The same applied to North Korea.

Goldberg: If Saddam hadn't gone into Kuwait we would still probably tolerate him today.

Cohen: We supported him. During the Iran-Iraq war, we provided intel and other support activities.

Smith: Did you favor the use of nuclear weapons in response to a chemical or biological weapons attack from another nation?

Cohen: I think we held out the threat of that. That was the signal we sent, that in the event they were able to use this, they should not rule out the fact that we might respond with nuclear weapons.

Smith: How do you plan a response to such an attack from a terrorist organization?

Cohen: You don't, unless it is state-supported, state-sponsored—that is one of the real issues that you have to content with. How realistic is it to say if you have a country like Iran, that has nuclear weapons, but you have a terrorist incident that takes place, a small craft that sets off a tactical nuclear weapon in the harbor of New York. How do you respond? It's very difficult.

Smith: You have thought and talked a lot about the challenge posed by asymmetric warfare. What do you see on the horizon for the country in terms of the evolving nature of warfare, and what does that mean for the structure of our forces?

Cohen: It's pretty clear that in asymmetric warfare the kind of force structure that we have is not well equipped to deal with it. One reason I was so insistent on creating the special operations command was that I felt that we really were not focused enough on utilizing smaller units that could be pre-deployed prior to any conflict that might develop. My vision for special forces is to have people who are well trained in the language, history, and culture of a number of countries

that we would anticipate might be problematic, and to deploy them so that they would blend in with the society, gather information, and be able to help in many ways shape the battlefield so we'd never have to fight a war. That was part of the concept I had for the special forces. It was more along the lines of the Sun Tzu philosophy of attacking the minds of the enemy, understanding the culture, history, and political dynamics, and gathering intelligence. The Pentagon was strongly opposed to my efforts to create a special operations command.

Goldberg: That's traditional.