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Lawyer Who's Hard to Defend

By Leonard Levitt
STAFF WRITER

The Arab terrorist Osama bin Laden is not the only wanted man in New York City.

Take Stanley Cohen, a former Bronx Legal Aid attorney who now represents Arabs suspected of links to the World Trade Center attack and who at the very least stretches the limits of tolerance.

A group calling itself the Jewish Defense Organization has pledged to "drive him out of New York." In a recorded telephone message, the group says Cohen "defends the terrorist organization Hamas and is offering to represent bin Laden."

After giving out Cohen's address and telephone number, the recording calls him "a traitor to the Jews, a traitor to America and a traitor to Israel" and describes him as "garbage that needs to be swept into the bag and run out of town . . . driven from New York legally and effectively."

Cohen is no stranger to controversy or to the Police Department. In 1986, after a citywide manhunt led to the arrest of Larry Davis in the shooting of six police officers, Cohen represented him.

With co-counsels William Kunstler and Lynn Stewart — Stewart now represents Sheik Omar Abdel-Rahman, convicted of conspiracy in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing — Cohen devised Davis' defense strategy, suggesting that Davis shot in self-defense to protect himself against a rogue-cop drug operation. There was no substance to this, but a Bronx jury acquitted Davis. He was later convicted and sentenced to 30 years to life in the killing of another drug dealer.

Cohen, 47, with a full beard and long gray ponytail, works from a third-floor loft on Avenue D on the Lower East Side. He represents Moataz Al-Hallak, a former Arlington, Texas, imam with suspected ties to the bin Laden organization.

The most notable of them is Wadih el-Hage, who was convicted of conspiracy in the 1998 twin U.S. Embassy bombings in East Africa and whom Cohen says prosecutors have described as bin Laden's professional secretary.

Cohen says that three years ago at el-Hage's home in Kenya, the CIA found a mailing list that included the Arlington mosque.

"Did my client get faxes from bin Laden or Waleed [sic] at his mosque? Perhaps. The list has 10,000 mosques around the world. Bin Laden sends a lot of faxes," Cohen said.

But in 1999, says Cohen, the same grand jury that indicted bin Laden for the embassy bombings cleared Al-Hallak.

Another Cohen client is Mousa Abu Marzook, who heads the political wing of Hamas, the Palestinian-based organization that conducts suicide bombings in Israel. When Israel tried to extradite Marzook from the United States to stand trial for bombings, Cohen represented him. Marzook went to Jordan. He now lives in Syria, Cohen says.

Cohen views himself as "among the few Jews in the United States capable of bridging the gap between the west and the militant politics of the Middle East."

"I spent a day with [Yasser] Arafat in Ramallah on the West Bank," he says. "I had lunch with the alleged mastermind of the Achille Lauro ship hijacking." In that incident more than a decade ago, Palestinian terrorists stormed a cruise ship and threw Leon Klinghoffer of Manhattan, a man in a wheelchair, overboard.

When Cohen's cousin was killed in a suicide bombing in Israel, Marzook, then in detention at the Metropolitan Correction Center in Manhattan, offered his condolences, Cohen says. When Yitzak Rabin, then Israel's prime minister, was assassinated, Cohen says Marzook's wife, Nadia, called to express her and her husband's condolences.

Cohen says Nadia Marzook repeated that call last week from Syria after the World Trade Center attack.

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Ground Zero and Celebrity. The Police Department escorted Rupert Murdoch, owner of the Post and other media interests too numerous to enumerate, to Ground Zero on Tuesday.

The next day, the Post in an editorial endorsed Bernard Kerik as police commissioner "for life." Murdoch is one of the many personages the Police Department is escorting through the rubble. Others include Muhammad Ali, the fight promoter Don King and wannabe celebrity detective Billy Stanton.

Kerik, meanwhile, is becoming a personage himself, so much so that his spokesman Tom Antenen does not return calls asking about his television appearances these days.

Last week, Kerik appeared on "Judith Regan Tonight" on Fox News television, which Murdoch also owns. Regan heads ReganBooks, a subsidiary of HarperCollins, which Murdoch also owns.

Later this year, Regan is to publish Kerik's autobiography, "The Lost Son."

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Spokesman Found. The FBI's New York office spokesman, Joe Valiquette, has surfaced. Unlike Your Humble Servant, who couldn't find him last week, three other Newsday reporters had no trouble locating him, Valiquette reports.

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