

The Eli Cohen Files

Part IV: Aftermath, Legacy, and Appendices

By Wesley Britton

[Abstract: Describes the after-effects of the Cohen affair in Israeli intelligence and within Syria. Explores the ongoing quest by Israel and the Cohen family to have Eli Cohen's body returned. Describes the later years of the Cohen family and the place of Eli Cohen in film, literature, and especially his role in espionage history. Includes three appendices – Appendix I: Maurice Cohen's petition to the Syrian government for the release of his brother's body; Appendix II: The text of a letter sent by Maurice Cohen to Syrian President Hafez Assad on September 11, 1998; Appendix III: Letter from Avraham Cohen to *Pope Benedict XVI, March 2009.*]

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"I want my brother's bones, if there's anything left. Perhaps it's only dust. If we must give back Golan for him, I would say 'no.'"—Maurice Cohen

Aftermath

While the events in Damascus were public for all the world to see, the Cohen family learned about Eli's final moments in private. According to Avraham Cohen, "The day of May 18th 1965 was the climax of 100 days of a horror story with no happy end. My mother was attached to the Transistor radio and we all were awoken at dawn from our doze by her screaming, 'They murdered him, the Syrian cruel beasts, they murdered him, the Syrian cruel beasts!' we all were paralyzed, we couldn't say anything." (A7)

Then, early in the morning representatives from the Mossad arrived with "the chief rabbi of the Israeli Army, General Goren and made the mourning ceremony." While the family had hoped the execution had been a staged "camouflage," the truth was impossible to miss. "We tried to grasp the illusion that it was only a camouflage and we started to examine the photos published in the morning news papers if it's really Eli's photos." (A7) In years to come, various sources would claim Nadia Cohen smashed out windows and tried to commit suicide. Avraham says this wasn't the case. "We were listening to the radio broadcasts from Damascus. She didn't try to kill herself and of course wasn't taken to any Hospital. The next day, in a small private ceremony in his

office, Meir Amit paid tribute to Eli Cohen. Then he went back to the business of running his second prized agent.” (A7)

Throughout the rest of Israel, there was a period of national mourning. Inside the intelligence community, there was both a sense of loss – and a need to continue the fight. Shortly after Cohen’s execution, his handler left his unit. He met with Cohen’s family several times in the ensuing months. The emotional weight of the affair, he said, has always lain heavily on him. (Florsheim and Shilon) Years later, it was revealed there had indeed been a second spy inside Syria, sent in a year or two after Cohen had first infiltrated Damascus, about whom Cohen had known nothing. Immediately after Cohen’s capture, the second spy was summoned back to Israel. “He was told to get out of there as quickly as possible . . . and he didn’t understand why.” Only when he returned to Israel and learned of what had happened to Cohen did he understand that his hasty withdrawal from Syria had probably saved his life. (Florsheim and Shilon)

Within months, Israeli intelligence was hit with another disaster. Their masterspy in Egypt, Wolfgang Lotz, was captured by the Egyptians, and the Mossad faced another high-profile spy trial. Often compared to Eli Cohen, German-born Lotz had also lived in elite circles, ultimately dubbed “The Champagne Spy” for his lifestyle of horse-breeding and marrying two wives. His son, Oded Gur Arie, was among many who saw the newspaper reports and feared his father would meet the fate of Cohen. But Meyer Amit was determined Lotz would not be abandoned. After Lotz was sentenced in August 1965 to life in prison, in 1973, he was traded back to Israel along with veterans of the botched Unit 131 “Operation Suzanna” agents. While Israel paid a high price for him, Lotz’s freedom was in large part inspired by Amit’s determination not to have a repeat of the Cohen affair.

However, in 2006, Amit made a point of revealing that even as Cohen’s trial was under way, fresh agents were being sent on missions, including to Syria. “You can gather electronic intelligence and all kinds of things like that,” he said, “but there’s nothing like human intelligence.” Notwithstanding the tragic end to the Cohen affair, G agreed: “There is no substitute for human intelligence. At the end of the day, men like Cohen will still have to be sent” into the field. (Florsheim and Shilon) Israel’s enemies knew this as well. At the time of Cohen’s trial and execution, an Egyptian spy, Ra’fat al-Hajjan, planted by the Egyptian intelligence, was infiltrating Israel to provide Egypt with intelligence information that was exploited by Egypt against Israel in the 1973 war. (M1)

Syria has felt the reach of Eli Cohen long after the execution. As Nadia Cohen put it in 2007, her husband “revolutionized the Arab world, he made an earthquake in Syria.” (Nahmias “Syrian”) For one matter, the executioners of Eli Cohen did not all fare well. A coup d’etat was initiated by radical elements in the Baa’th party on February 23, 1966. The Government of El Hafez was overthrown. 60 military officers were dismissed from the army, and 17 among them were secretly executed. Colonel Dally, the judge of the Cohen trial, was accused himself of betrayal of his country and brought to trial in front of a special court martial in March 1966. Major Salim Khatoum, a member of the court who judged Eli Cohen, fled to Jordan after his participation in a counter-coup. After the Six Day War, in June 1967, the leaders of the Baa’th party announced general amnesty. Khatoum returned to Damascus, but was arrested immediately after his arrival, condemned to death and executed on June 26, 1967. while discussing Israeli- Syrian espionage

during the 1980s, Ian Black and Lenny Morris write, the Syrians had been “traumatized” 20 years before by the Cohen case. Fears of Mossad penetration had never subsided and impacted their dealings with then-current problems, including hanging six Syrian nationals convicted of spying for Israel. They note a Syrian journalist who'd written a book about the Cohen case during the 1980s was forced to leave the country and settle in Iraq.

Following Eli's capture, according to “A,” new limitations, including strict curfews and property and employment laws all but economically strangled much of the Jewish community in Syria. A four-kilometer limit on travel wasn't lifted until 1976. Yet the Syrian Jewish community, says A, was “proud of Eli Cohen and for Israel.” The Jews harbored no animosity against Eli; but rather “were happy for what he had done. It gave us hope.” (“A”) (note 1)

Over the years, the Syrian government has offered its own spin on the Cohen affair, in the main trying to downplay his success. Amin el-Hafez, for instance, then president of Syria, claimed some years ago that Cohen had been caught because he was not well versed in the secrets of the Koran. Cohen once let it slip, he said, that he was going to pray in “a Muslim mosque,” an expression that immediately aroused suspicion. Of course, el-Hafez had a clear interest in minimizing the extent of Cohen's ingenuity. (Florsheim and Shilon)

In 2007, Mounzer Mously, once bureau chief of former President Amin Hafiz, said he'd spoken to Cohen shortly after his arrest for about 15 minutes. After supposedly apologizing for his betrayal, Eli allegedly “told me that espionage was not his profession and that he did not work for any authority in Israel or elsewhere. He said that he was an Egyptian Jew from Alexandria and that he had been recruited to work in Syria.” Incredibly, Mously denied that President Hafiz had personally known Cohen and explained that “the president himself, being a former intelligence officer, doubted [Cohen being Argentinean] because he had Jewish features.” (Nahmias “Syrian”) Mously added, “His story had been exaggerated to undermine Syria, as if he was a spy who had transmitted Syria's deepest secrets. I call upon those who say otherwise to publish Cohen's reports so that people can read them and see for themselves.” (Nahmias “Syrian”)

Unfulfilled Quest

Strange stories have become part of the Cohen legacy. Adding details to Avraham Cohen's account of the family being told Eli's execution would be a “camouflage,” Maurice said in a television interview that Mossad told his family a deal had been struck between Israel and Syria, that Syria would stage an execution, inject Eli with a sleeping drug, and then bring him to the Israel border after a plastic surgeon had altered his face. At first, Maurice claimed, the family was certain this had happened as early pictures of the hanged man looked like the CIA spy that had been executed a month earlier. But later photos showed clearly that Eli Cohen was indeed the dead man dangling on the noose. (M5)

Stranger still, Maurice Cohen claimed, in the months after the hanging, the Mossad forbid him from leaving Israel. He said they feared the Syrians might wish to capture him for interrogation. He said he got one phone call telling him his brother was still alive and if he wanted to see him, he could come to a certain city. Not believing the call, Maurice didn't go. (M4) And even much

stranger is a story told to Harvey Chertok that was confirmed by Maurice Cohen, although with different details.

In one version, after his hanging, Eli Cohen “was buried in a graveyard outside Damascus where the Israelis sent a Mossad team of five agents to dig up and bring back the body for burial in Israel. While one of the Mossad agents waited in a truck, the others dug up the body and were carrying it back in the middle of the night. A dog started to bark, woke up a shepherd, and just by coincidence, a Syrian security van was alerted and started to chase the four who were carrying the body as they were running to the van. While they got close, the agents had to drop the body and race as fast as they could over the border. That, as far as I know, is the only attempt made to recover the body by the Mossad.” (Britton 2006)

According to Syrian businessman Yousef Jajati, the attempted abduction of the casket between 1965 and 1967 was true. A contact in Syrian Intelligence told him Eli was buried near a Jewish cemetery. He believes the failure to get the coffin out was a result of missed timing and that the first crew was waiting for the transport crew. Unlike other versions, he heard nothing about barking dogs but that a Sheppard supposedly saw strangers and alerted local police. As a result, the body was reburied in or near the Golan town of Fiq. (Jajati)

Yani Harid adds Eli Cohen is now buried on a Syrian army post, probably El-Mazzih. “The grave is covered with tons of concrete because a few years after the execution, a former Israeli intelligence officer, acting on his own, made a botched attempt to bring Cohen’s remains to Israel. (Yarid) Since that report, Avraham Cohen has been told one reason the family cannot visit the grave is that a building now covers the site. Most recently, in 2007, Mounzer Mously, the former bureau chief of Syrian leader Hafez al-Assad, said that Cohen had been buried in the Mazzeh quarter of Damascus. “His burial place has since become a built-up area with streets and parks. Nobody can ever reach him.” (Nahmias “Syrian”) (note 2) In August 2008, Motsley added that Eli Cohen's burial site is unknown, claiming that the Syrians buried the executed Israeli spy three times, being scared that the remains would be brought back to Israel via a special operation.

Responding to the comments, Nadia Cohen said, “His statement does not sound credible to me . . . Syria is trying to exclude Eli from [peace] negotiations, so they are claiming these things. I don't think that residential neighborhoods are built on top of cemeteries. I don't believe what he said. No country would build buildings and pave roads over a grave yard. They have Eli, and if they don't know where he is they should look for him.” (Nahmias “Syrian”)

To this day, attempts continue to ask Syria to return the body of Eli Cohen, or at least allow the family to say Kaddish at his grave. For the government of Israel, this matter is more than symbolic. For one example, in the Israeli-Syrian peace talks of 2000, Prime Minister Ehud Barak said the return of Cohen’s body would be a gesture to the Israeli public of Syria’s desire to be a partner in peace. “That Syria has so far been reluctant to discuss the question of Cohen’s remains is seen here as a measure of the damage he did as a secret agent. Like Chaara’s refusal to shake hands before the cameras, it is also taken by Israelis as a sign of Syria’s reluctance to change the atmospherics and build confidence for peace.” (Hockstader) The same month, after a meeting between Barak and Nadia Cohen, a stamp bearing Eli Cohen’s picture was released.

On February 1, 2004, Nadia Cohen spearheaded a new campaign to press Syria for the return of her husband's body. Reports from the AP, *The Jerusalem Post*, *Israel Insider* and other media outlets announced the campaign, including expectations that Pope John Paul II would send a letter to Syrian President Bashar Assad. Israel's Disaster Victims Identification organization (Zaka) joined the worldwide effort. Nadia Cohen was quoted as saying, "Israel paid a high price for the bodies of the Israeli soldiers and for Tannenbaum, but we've also paid a high price." ("Counterintelligence News")

But this campaign bore no fruit. Then, commemorating the 40th anniversary of Eli Cohen's execution, on June 27, 2005, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon appeared with Nadia Cohen and her children, Sophie, Irit and Shai, and told the world:

Over the past year, the President of Syria has made a series of statements in which he presented himself as one who desires peace with Israel. It is hard to take these statements seriously when Syria continues to encourage terror against Israel. Giving permission to return Eli Cohen's remains to Israel is the simplest humane step the government of Syria must undertake. To date, Damascus has refused all requests on this subject – but we are not despairing. ("PM's Speech")

Later the same year, in November 2005, Nadia sent a letter to Syria's president via Israeli Arab Knesset Member Talab el-Sana. This coincided with a meeting between Nadia and Prime Minister Sharon after she requested Israel offer to trade 10 Syrian captives for Eli's body. "Alon Rihan, a lawyer representing the Cohen family, said that none of the prisoners had 'blood on their hands.'" (Sofer "MK") Strangely, in her letter, Nadia said, "I'm not asking you do take this step for me, but for my children who didn't get to know their father. My daughter, Sofi, who has also signed this letter, has never seen her father. She hopes, like you, and like all the young people who run the world, that peace will reign between us." Of course, Sophie had indeed "met" her father, although she clearly would have known little of him. Two years later, in February 2007, yet another prime minister, Ehud Olmert said he was relying on the mediation of the Turkish Prime Minister to appeal to Syria due to the close relationships between the two countries. Before his diplomatic visit to Ankara, he visited Nadia and "got her blessing" for the request. (Sofer "Olmert") Still, no change in the Syrian's disposition.

Over the years, Nadia Cohen has appeared at countless public memorials for her husband. In May 1998, Nadia spoke at a special performance of the play, "Eli Cohen," by Gadi Tzadaka, an Israeli Theater Production. It was later adapted into an internet play posted at the Friends of Eli Cohen website. Part of her speech demonstrated her feelings about Mossad:

A few days ago, Meir Amit, who was Eli's boss, was interviewed on television. I truly feared this moment. Indeed, I was sick and felt that I was under tremendous pressure; such a boss did not deserve someone of Eli's caliber, someone who truly served the State.

I did not sleep for nights after watching Meir's response to a question from the journalist, Aharon Barnea. Barnea said to Meir, "Let's talk about Eli Cohen," to which Meir answered with a flip of his hand, as if he had no interest at all in

remembering Eli. I will not forget that minute and will not forgive it either.

(note 3)

In December 2006, Nadia attended the Annual congress of World Union of Jewish Students in Beer Sheva, Israel. WUJS leaders decided to send a letter to Syrian President Bashar Assad asking him for the return of Eli Cohen's remains. ("WUJS") One exception to her quest took place on December 14, 2000, when Nadia Cohen attended the Honorary Doctorate Ceremony at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, this time to honor her brother, writer Sami Michael, one of the four recipients of an honorary doctorate. The honor was for Michael due to his "enriching Hebrew Literature in his writings." (Press Release) As it happened, Michael's 1995 novel, *Victoria*, was based on the life of his mother Victoria, one grandmother of the children of Eli Cohen.

But, in the main, Nadia Cohen's visible presence is as the national embodiment of Israel's grief and pride in the work of her husband. She has never remarried and still wears her wedding band. (Hockstader) After Eli Cohen was posthumously promoted to the rank of lieutenant colonel, significantly increasing the pension and benefits Nadia and her children received, it's been reported she went to Mossad asking for the rank to be made retroactive to increase the pension further. She has always yearned for one last memorial at Eli's grave. "I'd like them to sing a [patriotic] song of the Land of Israel," she said. "I'd prefer not to hear the prayer of the dead again . ." In 2000, she said, "For 35 years I've been accompanying him, and the [public adulation] has never diminished. It's hard for us. I'm the wife of the hero, and they're the kids of the hero. But my pain is real pain, and the kids don't even remember him." (Hockstader)

Eli's mother, Sophie, passed away in 1994 at the age of 87, thirty years after Eli's death. For much of this time, her son Maurice said, she "shed burning tears, endured a long period of strong pains and soreness, and suffered deep grief and agony. She wore on her chest a medallion bearing the portrait of her beloved son until her last day." (M1) On her deathbed, Sophie Cohen asked Maurice to ensure Eli's remains would return to Israel, and he made this a mission of his life. (M5) For example, Maurice and his second wife, Belle Cohen, established the website, www.EliCohen.org, to share information about Eli, including a petition any visitor can sign to request Syria to release the body. (See text in Appendix I below.) One issue, however, Maurice remained firm on. He was never willing to give up the Golan Heights in negotiations with Syria:

My brother gave up his life for this. My brother's soul is already in heaven, his body has become dust, and nothing remains of him. I would not want to give back the Golan Heights to Syria. They hurt their own country, and kill their own brothers. So we have to protect ourselves and keep the Golan Heights. Nobody else will protect us. My brother and other soldiers gave their souls and bodies to get this place. Syria is the worst enemy we ever had. ("Family")

But on December 1, 2006, Maurice Cohen passed away at the home of Helene Fragman Abramson in Princeton, New Jersey. In October of that year, Maurice had arranged with Helene, Wes Britton, and others to work on his memoirs that have evolved into these articles.

And the name of Eli Cohen has surfaced in a number of more non-political venues. Beginning with a February 23, 2006, screening at the International Spy Museum, Harvey Chertok's *The Impossible Spy* began a second life renewing interest in the story of Eli Cohen in America. Throughout 2006 and 2007, the film was shown at the National Television Academy, Jewish Film Festivals in Palm Beach (FL), Scranton (PA), and Rockland (NY), and at various New York libraries. On March 4, 2007, the film was screened at the Intelligence Summit in St. Petersburg, Florida, as part of a memorial to both Eli and Maurice Cohen, who had been scheduled to attend. After another showing at a Washington D.C. temple, on June 3, 2007, Harvey introduced the film at the Beth Am Temple in Pearl River (NY) as part of a Memorial Service for the 40th Anniversary of The Six-Day War and Elie Cohen. Such screenings continued into 2009 with appearances by actors John Shea and Eli Wallach.

In addition, Harvey remains active in the quest to have Cohen's remains returned. He's written Secretary Of State Condoleezza Rice and Speaker Of The House Nancy Pelosi in advance of their trips to Syria asking for their help. "Speaker Pelosi wrote me a letter of support and asked that I work with New York Congressman Eliot J. Engel (who is on the Foreign Affairs Committee)." (HC1) As a result of this contact, "on July 14, 2008 Congressman Engel wrote to President al-Assad a strong appeal on humanitarian grounds. No reply. On April 23, 2009 Congressman Engel wrote again, this time to the Syrian Ambassador, Imad Moustapha, urging him to please now try to get a positive reply from his President." Again, no reply. These letters have dovetailed with the ongoing efforts of the Cohen family who created a new website about Eli Cohen in June 2009, www.elicohen.org.il. By coincidence, the visit of Pope Benedict XVI to Israel was in March 2009, the 44th anniversary of Eli's execution. The text of Avraham Cohen's letter to the Pope is Appendix III below. In addition, the Eli Cohen story was remembered that year in new videos on the internet; a short list is in the "Works Cited" at the end of this article.

Beyond *The Impossible Spy*, Eli Cohen continues to be a source of inspiration for creative writers. Edward Whittmore's 1987 *Jericho Mosaic* was based on the exploits of Eli Cohen, notably the organization run by master agent Yossi/Halim (Sydenham). The novel, in a sense, was a "what if" story as Cohen is not captured and remains an agent long after 1965. In 2004, reports began circulating in entertainment journals that a new Cohen bio-pic was in the pipeline. Writer/director Kimberly Peirce (*Boys Don't Cry*) was said to be set to direct the film for Columbia Pictures with a script by Andrew Davies, responsible for the "Bridget Jones" series. At least one other producer is also considering the idea.

And, perhaps no longer surprisingly, new controversies continue to emerge. In May 2006, Masoud Buton, who had been an Israeli spy in Syria and Lebanon under a fabricated identity between 1956 and 1962, called for an investigation committee to look into finding the truth behind the story of Eli Cohen. "I call for an investigation committee to be set up. I warned my commanders a number of times that if they don't use the cover I prepared for my replacement, Eli Cohen, he would certainly die. My commanders did not heed my clear warnings." (Nahmias "Spy") At the age of 82, Buton now claimed, "From the moment I heard that Eli Cohen was standing trial in Damascus, I swore to myself that I would not rest until I investigate the truth." On the other hand, senior defense officials from that time, including Meir Amit, said that Buton is a "pathological liar" who is interested in money from the State. Not surprisingly, Nadia Cohen was reported to emphatically believe Buton's version of events. (Nahmias "Spy")

Legacy

In late 2002, writer Gordon Thomas and Meir Amit walked together through Mossad's "own unique memorial in Tel Aviv to the dead – a concrete maze shaped in the form of a brain. Each name engraved on the concrete was of an agent who had been killed while trying to destroy Israel's enemies." According to Thomas, Amit told him, "We did all we could to protect them. We trained them better than any other secret service. Sometimes, out on a mission, the dice is against you. But there will always be brave men ready to roll the dice." (Thomas "Mossad")

Many of these agents, of course, are unknown, faceless in the history books. As Cohen's handler said, spies who became household names are the ones who were caught, and it is important to emphasize that there were others who did crucial work who were never publicly acknowledged. (Florsheim and Shilon) When agents are sent out, there's no way to know what will happen in the field. In the case of Eli Cohen, for but one example, "Initially, we didn't even intend for him to be an agent in the Syrian upper echelons. An agent is like a cholent [stew]. You know what you're putting into it, but you don't know what you're going to get out." (Florsheim and Shilon)

What Israel got when it rolled the dice with Cohen was far more than anyone expected, and for this the work of Eli Cohen should be ranked very high in espionage history. Further, his legacy is almost as important as what he did before 1965. He is a figure representing all the nameless agents who have put their country first, and as the decades have gone by, represents the best of spycraft even as the reputation of Israeli intelligence has become increasingly an organization more known for ruthless efficiency more so than gathering Intel on unfriendly neighbors. (note 4)

For example, by 1990, it was clear Eli Cohen was no longer "Israel's Most Famous Spy." That title, largely for the worse, was claimed by Victor Ostrovsky when he published his questionable and self-serving exposes, *By Way of Deception: The Making and Unmaking of a Mossad Officer* (1990) and *The Other Side of Deception* (1994). (note 5) By then, the Mossad was far more known for missions like the revenge unit sent out to avenge the Munich Olympic massacre as in George Jonas's 1984 *Vengeance*, the inspiration for the 1986 HBO production, *The Sword of Gideon* which, in turn, inspired Steven Spielberg's 2005 *Munich*. Defending such actions, Meir Amit insisted in 2002, "we are like the official hangman or the doctor on Death Row who administers the lethal injection. Our actions are all endorsed by the State of Israel. When Mossad kills it is not breaking the law. It is fulfilling a sentence sanctioned by the prime minister of the day." (Thomas "Mossad") When Amit announced on February 12, 2007, that he felt Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad should "be made to disappear from the arena," Amit admitted he had argued against such assassinations back in the 1960s (Kline). Clearly, times had changed.

Against this backdrop, it isn't surprising the name of Eli Cohen is invoked when commentators, reporters, and governmental officials need a face of heroism to counter-balance public impressions of intelligence communities gone amok. For but one example, in 2004, Roger L. Simon noted, "In recent years the once vaunted Mossad has had its reputation slightly tarnished. But now with the assassination of Hamas leader Iz a Din al-Sheikh Khalil in Damascus, it is certainly back." The kill was, Simon opined, an embarrassment for Syria . . .

it's someone from Hamas who was targeted – after Hamas ostensibly ceased operating in Damascus.” Was there a new Eli Cohen in the Syrian capital? (Simon “Is There”) The columnist clearly thought such agents are what brings success in covert actions, unlike the names of CIA officers who are rarely figures of praise. Two years after his speculation about a new Eli Cohen in Damascus, Simon commented on the case of Valerie Plame in the U.S. He simply stated Plame “was no Eli Cohen.” (Simon “Plame”) An interesting comparison to make – is there no American spy that represents the best espionage can offer?

Simon was not alone looking to Cohen to offer lessons for American intelligence. In the view of Jamie Weinstein, “Cohen's story is significant not only because of its harrowing tale of courage and cunning, not to mention its importance to Israel, but what it reveals for America’s modern struggle against terrorism. While we may become more technologically advanced, and while our satellites may be the best in the world, nothing replaces human intelligence.” In the aftermath of 9/11 and revelations of the CIA being an often toothless tiger, “The United States must remember Cohen’s story, and the stories of countless other secret agents from our country, and rapidly rebuild and revamp our human intelligence community.” (Weinstein)

Clearly, Israel knows these lessons. As of 2006, under the directorship of Meir Dagan, Mossad’s operations in Syria have led to dramatic successes. These include hits against high-profile Hizballah, Hamas and Jihad Islami operatives in Syria and Lebanon. In particular, on February 12, 2007, Mossad operatives took out the head of Hizballah’s special security apparatus, Imad Mughniyeh, in Damascus. The hit “followed similar methods in the preceding two years – usually explosives planted under a driver’s seat or headrests of vehicles driven by Hizballah, Hamas and Jihad Islami operatives. Neither Hizballah nor Syrian intelligence has been able to prevent these liquidations or catch the hit-teams.” (“Mossad Chief”)

The best-known operation took place in September 2007 against Syria’s plutonium reactor, “one of the most complex operations ever performed by the Mossad. For the Israeli raiders to put the facility out of commission and lift out the evidence of a working nuclear collaboration between Syria, Iran and North Korea, they needed from the Mossad precise data on the facility’s inner and outer defenses. It had to include the air defense systems in place across Syria, the whereabouts of the materials and equipment the Israeli team was assigned to appropriate from the site and transfer to the United States, and the nature and numbers of the Syrian, Iranian and North Korean personnel present.” (“Mossad Chief”)

When the CIA saw the reports after the strikes, they realized one or more agents had been planted “solidly enough in the Syrian nuclear project to have photographed the different stages of the reactor’s construction and the North Korean equipment installed there – a feat which drew the respect of Dagan’s undercover colleagues in the West. The other outstanding feature of the Al Kebir operation was one that has come to be associated with the spy chief’s method of operation: No leads or clues were left for the Syrian, Iranian and North Korean investigators to find – even after the photos were published. His spy or spies proved untraceable.” (“Mossad Chief”)

In short, new Eli Cohens are indeed at work. The measure of their success is – we don’t know their names. By honoring Eli Cohen, we honor them all—at least those on the side of the angels.

Notes

1—Syrian Jews. Certainly, many other factors were involved in the circumstances of Syrian Jewry after 1967. By the early 1970s, the conditions of Syrian Jews were:

Jews were required to live in ghettos and not permitted to travel more than 3 or 4 kilometers from their homes . . . Anyone attempting to flee the country could be jailed and tortured for three months or more. Jews were required to carry identity cards with the word Mussawi (follower of Moses) broadly scrawled in red ink. In Al-Qamishli, Jewish homes and stores were required to bear a red sign (the color connoting uncleanness). Under a law drafted February 8, 1967, all government employees and members of the Syrian armed forces were barred from trading with any Jewish establishment in Syria. A list of boycotted businesses was supplied by the government. In some instances, Jews were barred from making food purchases themselves and had to rely on Syrian friends to keep them from starving. Jews could not own or drive automobiles or have telephones. (Bostom)

2—Eli's body. Not surprisingly, "Fareed" has yet another spin on the legend:

"I got the following information from two friends. They are reliable ones but I am not sure if the information is 100% true.

"Few days after his hanging, a shepherd found a covered body on the mountain between Zabadani and Lebanon. He reported this to the police. Crime investigations were done. At the same time, it was reported that the grave of Elie is tempered with and empty. The corpse was that of him.

"Knowing that there was an attempt to smuggle his corpse to Israel through Lebanon, the body was sent to the College Of Medicine to be in the pool of corpses used for surgery training. A friend in that college assured me he trained on Elie's corpse." (A5)

3--. In Maurice Cohen's *Reminiscences* collection of documents, one was entitled "A Wife's Story – Nadia Speaks Out." It was apparently the text of Nadia's address at the Knesset in May 1998 as an introduction to a special performance of the play "Eli Cohen" by Israeli Theater Productions. Her comments ring true and credible, but I've been unable to find the name of the publication of this English translation.

4--. Another unusual incident was the fact Israeli spy Jonathan Pollard had expressed admiration for masterspy Eli Cohen. To butter up Pollard, his handlers gave him a false passport with the name "Danny Cohen" in light of this. (Raviv and Melman 312)

5-Ovstroski. According to Victor Ostrovsky and Claire Hoy's *By Way of Deception* (1990), the former Mossad officer in the '80s claimed there was no real need to invest much time in studying Syrian military matters as they bought all their equipment elsewhere and manufactured none of their own. "If you want to recruit a Syrian diplomat, you don't have to do that in Damascus. You can do that in Paris." So he claimed there is no Mossad office in Damascus. "At one time, the Mossad had people working for long periods of time in Arab countries but often they were there too long and got burned. They used to rely on 'Arabists' for that, Israelis who could speak and pose as Arabs." In the early days, he says there was no shortage of Arabists coming from other countries but this is no longer true. One of his interesting stories is an elaborate account of the Mossad working to have a table filled with listening devices sent to the Syrian government, only to find out they couldn't use it.

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A2. Avraham Cohen interview with Helene Fragman Abramson, May 2007.

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A4. Avraham Cohen telephone interview with Wes Britton and Helene Fragman Abramson, Aug. 2, 2007.

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Many photos at:

www.elicohen.org.il

Appendices

Appendix I: Maurice Cohen’s petition to the Syrian government for the release of his brother’s body.

Appendix I

Written by Maurice Cohen, to Release Eli Cohen's body to his family for proper burial Petition to Dr. Bashar al-Assad, President of Syria was created by

www.elicohenspy.com

and is posted at

www.PetitionOnline.com

and

www.EliCohen.org

To: Dr. Bashar al-Assad, President of Syria

Eli Cohen was tortured, tried and convicted as a Mossad Agent by the Syrian Military Court, without legal representation, despite the intervention and protests of the international community. He was hanged in Syria on May 15, 1965.

For 38 years the Cohen Family has been waiting and suffering, unable to visit Eli's graveside nor pay their last respects, as his body remains imprisoned somewhere within Syria. To this date, no last rites have been performed for Eli Cohen after his death, a right that every human being deserves.

We, the undersigned voices from all nations, without distinction of race or beliefs: religious or secular, beseech you to rectify this tragedy. Return the remains of Eli Cohen to his family in Israel for proper burial. This would be a humanitarian gesture of good will, understanding, and another step towards world peace on behalf of Syria.

Sincerely,
The Undersigned

Appendix II

In the name of Allah the merciful

Below is the text of a letter sent by Maurice Cohen to Syrian President Hafez Assad on September 11, 1998.

*His Excellency the Syrian President
The Honorable Mr. Hafez Assad, may God protect him,*

Dear Sir,

I, the undersigned Maurice Cohen, brother of the late Eli Cohen, who was, regrettably, executed and buried in Damascus in 1965 after he was charged with espionage for the sake of Israel

Venerable Mr. President, I seize this favorable opportunity to request from your Excellency, on my behalf and on behalf of the other members of the family, to allow me to visit the tomb of my brother Eli Cohen, and to permit me to be accompanied by a Rabbi and local and Israeli clergymen or from elsewhere to fulfill our religious duties and pray for his soul. We pray Almighty God to forgive and pardon him.

As you know, Mr. President, a long period has passed away, 34 years since his death. A period full of sorrow, grief and strong pains, during which I suffer and feel remorse. I pray our Lord to give us patient and compassion to remove this strong pain.

Esteemed President, as a leading Moslem leader and a father who lost his beloved son, you undoubtedly understand the importance of burial with dignity, a theme that finds expression in Greek tragedy. It is a universal tenet that respect be paid of the departed so that the soul finds rest, enabling the mourners to complete their grieving.

For the family of Eli Cohen, the mourning has not ceased. The horror of Eli's death is still with them. They cannot find peace until the body of their son and brother receives a proper Jewish burial.

The humanitarian need for a family to bury their dead is essential and recognized in every culture and faith. As the nations articulate their desire to live in peace and harmony, a humane gesture on the part of H.E. President Assad would be regarded as a true overture in requesting such an act of mercy.

Whatever things can be and despite the actual political situation existing in this region, I have a strong belief that Your Excellency will not object this big emotional and humanitarian request, that will surely provoke positive and favorable highest reactions from all over the world, especially here in Israel, which will again be a proof of your courage, your good intention and

your generous personality who will, finally, bring, the expected rapid and just peace, with the help of God as soon as possible.

May the Almighty rewards your interest and concern on behalf of my brother and God grant you long years of health and happiness.

*Wishing you great success, I am
Respectfully yours,*

Maurice Cohen

Appendix III

Letter from Avraham Cohen to *Pope Benedict XVI*, March 2009

11.05.2009

*His Holiness
The Bishop of Rome
Pope Benedict XVI
Your Holiness,
Benedictus qui venit in nomine domini!*

Your visit to Jerusalem in the spirit of the brotherhood and the peace, happens to coincide with the Forty-fourth year of the execution of my brother Eli Cohen who was hanged from a hook in Martyr's Square, in Damascus, so I will take this opportunity to acquaint Your Holiness with certain facts.

In the early 1960's Eli Cohen volunteered to become a spy for Israel, in Syria, who endangered the existence of the new-born state of Israel. He gained the confidence of many prominent government officials in Syria. Cohen learned many military secrets before he was caught, tortured and hanged in the El Marja square in Damascus, in 18th May, 1965. Two years later during the Six Day War, Israel used Cohen's information to easily defeat the overconfident Syrian army.

All efforts made by Israel to convince Syria to overturn the verdict and let Eli Cohen go in exchange for Syrian captives failed. The Syrians also rejected begs for mercy from different countries, as well as from the pope himself. Ten days after his showcase trial, many residents of Damascus gathered to watch the hanging of the Israeli spy. Syria still refuses to transfer his bones for burial in Israel. He left a wife and three children behind.

His widow Nadia, and his children has been campaigning for release his remains for proper burial in Israel.

Eli Cohen was a courageous man who sacrificed his life on behalf of maintaining the existence of Israel. He became a symbol of heroism in Israel. Returning of his remains for proper burial in Israel will be a step of reconciliation and real peace between Syria and Israel.

Your Holiness, You will be fondly remembered among us, if you will succeed convincing the Syrian president to accept to carry up his bones to be buried in Israel.

Allow me to bring a quotation in this regard from - Genesis Chapter 50 Phrase 25:
"And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence"

On behalf of Nadia and the family,
Faithfully yours,

Abraham Cohen.

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For more on the life of Eli Cohen, check out:

www.elicohen.org.il

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