



William S. Cohen (left) with Zhang Gaoli, Executive Vice Premier of the People's Republic of China

# Navigating Global Challenges

An Interview with The Honorable William S. Cohen,  
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, The Cohen Group

**EDITORS' NOTE** Prior to founding *The Cohen Group* in 2001, William Cohen enjoyed a nearly 30-year career in the public sector, serving as a member of the United States House of Representatives (1973-1979), the United States Senate (1979-1997), and as Secretary of Defense under President Bill Clinton (1997-2001). During his tenure in the Senate, Cohen served as Chairman of the Committee on Aging, the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Seapower and Projection Forces, and the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management. He also served as a member and Vice Chairman of the Select Committee on Intelligence and the "Iran-Contra Committee." An acknowledged leader in environmental issues and champion of small businesses, Cohen has also demonstrated influence in international circles, encouraging dialogues between governments and launching the William S. Cohen Institute for International Business at the University of Maine. He serves on the board of CBS and is a Trustee at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

**COMPANY BRIEF** Founded in 2001, *The Cohen Group* ([www.cohengroup.net](http://www.cohengroup.net)) is headed by a roster of influential leaders from the world stage. With an objective to help multinational companies explore opportunities both domestically and abroad, the firm provides its clients with tools for understanding and shaping their business, political, legal, regulatory, and media environments.

## Would you provide an overview of The Cohen Group and how the company has evolved?

Companies hire The Cohen Group to increase their revenue and market position. We help companies execute long-term strategic market entry campaigns through hands-on assistance in a number of emerging markets, such as China and India. We also help companies identify and win government and commercial contracts around the globe. Our product is a result, not a list of recommendations.

Our core team comprises an accomplished group of professionals who have deep experience in the U.S., U.K., Chinese, and Australian governments, as well as in the private sector. Our expertise spans a wide range of key countries and sectors. For example, our clients are counseled by four highly-respected former U.S. Ambassadors: Marc Grossman, Nick Burns, Jeff Davidow, and Jim Smith, who possess expertise across many regions of the world.

Since our founding in 2001, we have rapidly expanded our client base and our team. We

have grown from one office in Washington D.C. with five colleagues to over 60 individuals in Washington, San Diego, Boston, London, Delhi, Beijing, Tianjin, China and an enduring presence in Abu Dhabi and Dubai, UAE.

Our client base has expanded and diversified as well. Today, our firm represents Fortune 500 companies in a diverse set of sectors such as pharmaceuticals, manufacturing, energy, professional services, health care, telecommunications, and information technology. We are proud to have helped many American companies expand abroad and generate jobs in the U.S.

## What are the key markets and regions that you are focused on for growth?

As with much of the business world, we have largely focused on the emerging markets in Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America. We maintain offices in China and India, and regularly visit Brazil and the Middle East. I also serve on the boards of the U.S.-China Business Council and the U.S.-India Business Council.

While these markets justifiably command a considerable amount of interest among our clients, we also guide our clients to overlooked opportunities in other countries that have specific requirements that fit their products or have greater purchasing power.

Increasingly, we are also assisting foreign companies seeking to enter the U.S. market through acquisitions of sensitive technology or infrastructure that requires U.S. government approval. We advise both foreign companies seeking to make acquisitions in the U.S. as well as U.S. companies being acquired by foreign interests on how to meet the U.S. regulatory requirements, including the Committee on Foreign Investment in the U.S.

## Would you provide your views on the turmoil in Egypt, as well as U.S.-Russian relations and the North Korea nuclear threat?

Egypt has long been a friend to the United States and a lynchpin of U.S. policy in the Middle East, but we must also be clear that a strong democratic process in Egypt is not only good for the United States and the world, but for a strong and prosperous Egypt.

Russia's political and economic significance cannot be discounted, but their resistance to change and economic reforms have implications beyond their borders. The country continues to stifle what we would consider basic political freedoms, which ultimately weakens its civil society and will be a sticking point in U.S. relations for some years to come.

While the North Korean pariah is a potential threat to the United States, it is a very real threat to our allies South Korea and Japan. Couple this with the significance of East Asia to our economy and the global economy, and we have a very worrisome situation on the Korean Peninsula.

I do not believe the North Korean regime to be foolish enough to even consider significant military action unless they believe themselves to be facing a true existential threat. Regardless, even the slightest bit of sabre rattling can reverberate throughout the world and can affect everything from financial markets to military mobilization, and this poses a more serious threat to global stability than any far off notions of North Korea using a nuclear weapon.

The North Korean threat can be mitigated by the right balance of sanctions and negotiations. The United States first and foremost seeks peace, and I think we would be willing to come to the negotiating table if certain concessions are made. Until this happens, however, I fear that we will continue to see episodic flare-ups on the Korean Peninsula.

## What are the biggest security concerns and challenges facing the world today?

The continued conflicts in many parts of the Middle East will pose a challenge for a long time to come. The varying interests throughout the region are often viewed as a zero sum game for all sides, where the outcome continues to be more and more instability. While I am hopeful for resolutions to all of these conflicts soon, I fear that it may well be decades before we see any lasting peace in the region. This unfortunate reality makes our friends and allies in the region all the more important, as they have the unique ability to act as arbiters of a long overdue peace.

Recent developments in our negotiations with Iran may lead to a lasting breakthrough, but underscore the tenuous nature of Iran's true commitment to forswearing a nuclear weapons program. The period we are entering now might actually be the most dangerous and potentially destabilizing as a host of players are likely to seek to torpedo any real and long-term progress.

I am also worried about the uncharted territories of cyber warfare and espionage. Given the relative youth of these technologies and the lack of any real international standards to govern responsible use of cyberspace, I fear we will continue to see cyber threats from all corners of the globe. ●