

Securing the City: Inside America's Best Counterterror Force—The NYPD

By Christopher Dickey. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009. xi, 321 pp., including endnotes, bibliography and index.

Reviewed by Stephen J. Garber

A surprise in reading this book is that it isn't really a study of a ground breaking organization per se, as one might be led to believe by the title. Rather, it is a book that glorifies its two protagonists: the New York Police Department (NYPD) Commissioner Ray Kelly and David Cohen, a rough-hewn CIA veteran who Kelly tapped to run the NYPD's Intelligence Division.

Setting the scene, Dickey describes how CIA personnel who worked with David Cohen often referred to him with an epithet instead of his first name. Dickey also relates a story of how an FBI veteran Cohen had lured to join the NYPD quit—before he ever formally started working for Cohen—after Cohen unleashed an excessively profane tirade. Yet Dickey's version of Cohen comes across as an irascible, heroic rebel who is rough around the edges but knows what's best for the security of New Yorkers and Americans.

In 1995, David Cohen was pulled from leadership of the Directorate of Intelligence and put in charge of the Directorate of Operations (DO). Dickey notes that under Cohen's watch at the DO in 1996, the CIA established its Alec Station to hunt down Osama bin Laden. In 1997, Cohen left the DO to represent the Agency in New York. There he met Kelly. Cohen retired from the CIA in 2000. Shortly after the 11 September 2001 attacks, Kelly recruited Cohen to lead the NYPD's fledgling Intelligence Division. While Cohen certainly could be very abrasive, Kelly recognized his worth.

Dickey stresses the innovative thinking of both Kelly and Cohen. The author notes that while the NYPD was vastly larger than any other local police force, it was sailing in uncharted waters by trying to establish its own international intelligence network. *Securing the City* is engaging and edifying when describing details of how this unique expansion of a local law enforcement agency was envisioned and carried out. Unfortunately, Dickey doesn't do that often enough.

While Cohen and Kelly's efforts to expand the NYPD's presence overseas may seem remarkable, Dickey explains that over a century ago, when Theodore Roosevelt was police commissioner, a New York cop named Giuseppe Petrosino was actually the first to be posted abroad. He was also the only one killed abroad in the line of duty. There was also history in the NYPD's blurring of jurisdictional lines to

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combat terrorism. In 1914, the NYPD went across the Hudson River to conduct undercover operations amid anarchists in New Jersey. As is well known, anarchist terrorists struck in downtown Manhattan as early as 1920.

Dickey draws out an interesting facet of the NYPD in recent times, its foreign language capability. Cohen wisely tapped into New York's cultural richness by hiring cops of many ethnic and national backgrounds. While it is very difficult for somebody who was born abroad to get a Federal security clearance, local law enforcement has been a traditional bastion for immigrant labor. Going a step beyond this tradition, Cohen and Kelly view foreign nationals as invaluable tools in acquiring ground-level intelligence among tight-knit immigrant communities and thus were eager to hire immigrants.

The major inadequacy of *Securing the City* is that Dickey virtually omits treatment of the deep-seated conflicts between the NYPD's Intelligence Division and its Counter Terrorism Bureau. In fact, one has to be a rather careful reader of the book even to understand that these are two separate organizations—even the book's subtitle obscures this critical point. One of the reasons Kelly wanted to establish counterterrorism and intelligence units is because the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF) had dominated the NYPD's efforts in these areas, even though the JTTF included NYPD personnel. Yet two succinct *New York Times* articles explain the deep rifts between the NYPD's own intelligence and counterterrorism units much more clearly than Dickey does.¹

Other problems with the book include its language, which at times veers toward the hackneyed. Dickey begins his first chapter with "He had seen war, Ray Kelly." (9) A few chapters later, he writes that "You have to be a real aficionado of Muslim Bad Guys in America" to know certain details. (56) The chapter titles and subtitles read too much like tantalizing headlines (e.g., "Cops on Dots," "Surges and Scuba," "Red Cells," and "Green Clouds") without providing much information.

Dickey, a journalist who has worked for *Newsweek* and *The Washington Post*, obviously set out to write a popular, mass-market book. While his writing is clear, this book has no apparent organizational scheme. In addition, the sparse endnotes are employed virtually randomly. Much of Dickey's source material apparently came from subjective discussions with Cohen and Kelly, and from anonymous interviewees.

Overall, this flawed book addresses a fascinating topic with potential implications for readers interested in law enforcement, intelligence, and homeland security. Perhaps Dickey's work will inspire another, more analytical treatment of this topic.

¹ William K. Rashbaum and Al Baker, "How Using Imam in Terror Inquiry Backfired on New York Police," *The New York Times*, 23 September 2009 and Rashbaum and Baker, "Police Official in Terror Unit is Removed," *The New York Times*, 24 September 2009. The latter article cites a blog, www.nypdconfidential.com, <http://www.nypdconfidential.com/print/2009/090209p.html>, for more information on this topic. The blog also contains a somewhat critical review of Dickey's book entitled "'Securing the City' Secures Kelly's Reputation" (accessed 30 December 2009). *The New York Times* published two reviews of this book that were somewhat more positive; see Jonathan Mahler, "Cops and Bombers," 1 February 2009 and Dwight Garner, "How to Beat Terrorists: Use Big Stick and Brains," February 4, 2009.

It's been more than four years since I first wrote in detail about the way the New York City Police Department and the Central Intelligence Agency work together in *Securing the City: Inside America's Best Counterterrorism Force* the NYPD. Since then, some new facts have emerged, most recently in The New York Times report Wednesday about the CIA's internal investigation of the links. What fascinated me about the NYPD's approach to fighting terrorism was that it developed what was, essentially, a third way that combined the power of law enforcement and the reach of a global intelligence network. But the results obtained in New York, he concludes, are almost a miracle. Dickey knows terrorism. For more than 20 years, from Paris and the Middle East where our assignments often overlapped and we shared not only a friendship but a publisher he has reported on Islamic terror. In this well-crafted account, Dickey weaves strands of various threats abroad the fanatical plotters and their often bizarre, seemingly inept plots into New York's vast, complex urban landscape. *Securing the City: Inside America's Best Counterterrorism Force* The NYPD. by Christopher Dickey. Simon & Schuster. *Securing the City* NPR coverage of *Securing the City: Inside America's Best Counterterrorism Force--The NYPD* by Christopher Dickey. News, author interviews, critics' picks and more. *Securing the City*. Books. *Securing the City: Inside America's Best Counterterrorism Force--The NYPD*. by Christopher Dickey. Hardcover, 321 pages, Simon & Schuster, List Price: \$26 |. *Securing the City* details some of the counterterrorism unit's most prominent successes, including the foiling of a plot hatched in Brooklyn to bomb the heavily trafficked Herald Square subway station. Relying partly on intelligence from an undercover Muslim agent in Bay Ridge, the Police Department arrested the two men responsible days before the 2004 Republican National Convention. The subsequent trial garnered a lot of attention in the press, and not all of it reflected well on Kelly and Cohen. Some civil libertarians argued that the department had exaggerated the seriousness of the plot,