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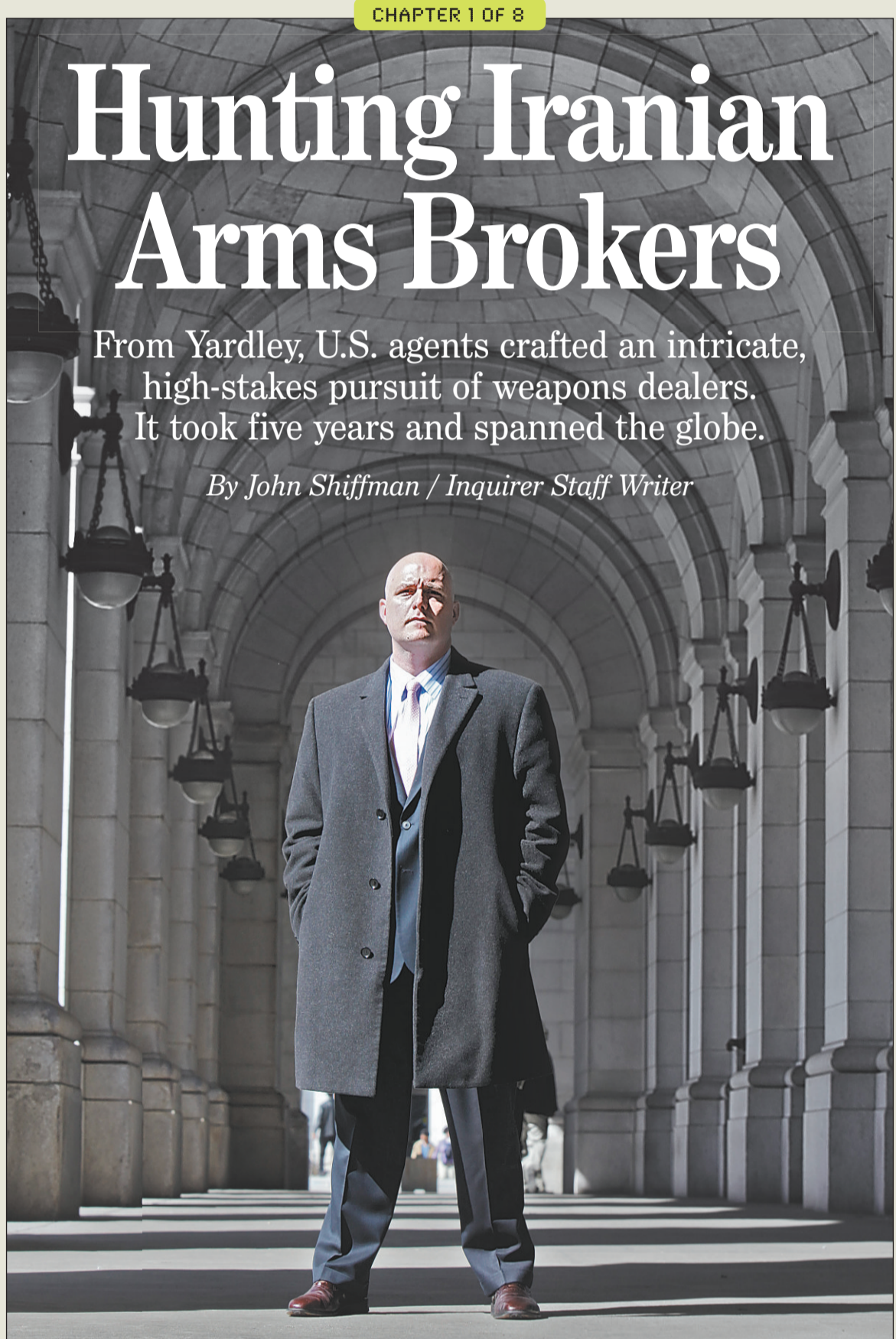
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The Philadelphia Inquirer

181st Year, No. 111 • City & Suburbs Sunday, Sept. 19, 2010 ★ Locally Owned & Independent Since 2006 ★ \$1.75 \$2 in some locations outside the metro area

SHADOW WAR AN ELITE PHILADELPHIA SQUAD'S SECRET MISSION AGAINST IRAN



CHAPTER 1 OF 8

Hunting Iranian Arms Brokers

From Yardley, U.S. agents crafted an intricate, high-stakes pursuit of weapons dealers. It took five years and spanned the globe.

By John Shiffman / Inquirer Staff Writer

YARDLEY, APRIL 2004

To capture a global arms smuggler, you can't just throw up a website, install some phone lines, and expect everything to fall into place.

Brokers buying sensitive weapons and technology for the Chinese, North Koreans, and Iranians are too smart for that. You need a bricks-and-mortar shop, a place buyers can eyeball, an office where foreign scouts and spies can wander in

the front door unannounced — or at least view via satellite on Google Earth.

In 2004, undercover agents from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), a division of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, created such a storefront along a tree-lined road in the Philadelphia exurb of Yardley.

The leased office, sandwiched between a chiropractor and a dentist, would become the launching point for one of the most ambitious national security investigations in ICE's brief history.

The mission was risky, rare, and expensive. Over the same years, even the CIA failed repeatedly with similar endeavors.

The agents decorated the Yardley office

See **SHADOW WAR** on A16

Homeland Security's Patrick Lechleitner of South Jersey worked undercover from Yardley in 2004, chasing elusive arms dealers overseas. One day, he hit a hot one.

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Find additional videos, images, and interviews at www.philly.com/ShadowWar

DAVID M WARREN / Staff Photographer

PHA's setup blocks mayor, abets abuses

Critics cite the board's unique autonomy in Greene scandal.

By Jeff Shields and Jennifer Lin
INQUIRER STAFF WRITERS

The Philadelphia Housing Authority is the only public housing agency in a major American city with a board that doesn't answer to the mayor.

It's a state agency using federal dollars to serve city residents. Its five-member board, thanks in large measure to its dysfunctional structure, shares much of the blame for a widening scandal centered on the agency's suspended executive director, Carl R. Greene, according to Mayor Nutter and other critics.

"Only in Philadelphia," Nutter said last week in an interview. "A couple of people have responsibility, but no one has ultimate authority. It's stunning."

Two of PHA's five board members are appointed by the city controller, and two are appointed by the mayor, with those four picking a fifth to represent

See **BOARD** on A18



"A couple of people have authority, but no one has ultimate responsibility."

Mayor Nutter on the Philadelphia Housing Authority's board structure

Showdown looms in Harrisburg. A gush of lobbying over Marcellus tax

By John P. Martin
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

Over coffee and cantaloupe in Horsham on Thursday, an environmentalist beseeched three dozen people to support a tax on natural-gas drillers.

"I can't stress strongly enough how important it is for you to reach out to your legislators and make sure this

See **LOBBYING** on A19

"There are very few things that you can compare to the hysteria or frenzy, or whatever you want to call it," Pitzarella said later, "around all things Marcellus."

Time and again, officials have heralded the natural gas in the Marcellus Shale as the state's most promising source of revenue in a generation. Pennsylvania's Gold Rush, they say.

But with three weeks left for legislators to reach a deal on taxing the gas, a furious scrap has ensued over how big the nuggets will be — and who will receive them.

See **LOBBYING** on A19

"Everybody sees a pot of money."
State Rep. Kate Harper

Pope reaffirms sorrow over abuse

By John F. Burns
NEW YORK TIMES NEWS SERVICE

LONDON — On a day when he faced the largest protests of his four-day state visit to Britain, Pope Benedict XVI used an address at a Mass in Westminster Cathedral on Saturday to reiterate his deep sorrow for the unspeakable crimes of child abuse within the Roman Catholic Church.

The pope's remarks followed others in recent times in which he has struck an increasingly remorseful tone about the abuse scandal. But they took on an added weight because the pontiff made them in front of 2,000 worshipers in the mother church of Catholicism in England, and ahead of a protest march on a scale rare in the recent history of the papacy.

"Here, too, I think of the immense suffering caused by the abuse of children, especially

See **POPE** on A18



GREGORIO BORGIA / Associated Press
Pope Benedict XVI chats with young people after celebrating Mass at Westminster Cathedral in London.

WEATHER

10 NBC

High 81, Low 61

Sunny and pleasant with some clouds. Air quality: Good. Full report and exclusive NBC10 EarthWatch forecast, **B11**.

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The site of the undercover storefront on a tree-lined road in Yardley, where Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents built black-market credentials and ferreted out arms brokers.

DAVID M WARREN / Staff Photographer

A risky sting, a roll of the dice

U.S. agents had never brought to justice an insider with knowledge of Iran's military needs and plans.

CAST OF CHARACTERS



Patrick Lechleitner, undercover agent, U.S. Homeland Security/Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Philadelphia.



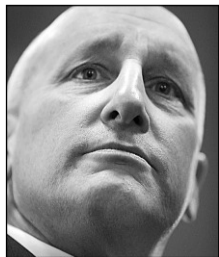
Amir Hossein Ardebili, arms broker, Shiraz, Iran.



Negine Ardebili, Amir Ardebili's wife, Shiraz, Iran.



Darius, undercover pseudonym of ICE agent, Frankfurt, Germany.



David Hall, assistant U.S. attorney, Wilmington.

Location photos by: HORST FAAS / Associated Press (Shiraz); RABIH MOGHRABI / AFP/Getty Images (Dubai); ANDREAS RENTZ / Getty Images (Frankfurt).

SHADOW WAR from A1 like any import-export business. Beside computers and desks they scattered fliers and business cards with the company logo. They hung military posters, and stacked copies of Jane's Fighting Ships and other encyclopedias of modern warfare.

They created a public-records trail, complete with backdated state and tax documents. They left fake invoices strewn across a desk. They wired the place with cameras and microphones, and staffed it with two undercover Homeland Security agents, including a 32-year-old agent from South Jersey named Patrick Lechleitner.

A former Virginia cop, Navy analyst, and National Security Agency investigator, the affable Lechleitner floated easily among the law enforcement, military, and intelligence communities.

Now, he played two roles. In Yardley, he was an undercover arms broker, trolling Internet bulletin boards for smugglers and fielding queries from shady foreigners. Elsewhere in the Philadelphia area, he interviewed American contractors who called in tips about suspicious overseas requests.

On April 20, 2004, a cool, cloudless morning, Lechleitner looked into such a tip. He met a local factory owner who'd received a query, supposedly from Dubai, for jet-fighter parts.

"He seemed almost offended by the bluntness of the e-mail," Lechleitner recalled, especially the dubious point of origin. "We both knew that it had to be Iran."

Lechleitner studied the owner, a first-generation American. The agent needed his help. But could he trust him? Could he risk letting him in on the undercover operation? Yes, he decided, he'd have to, if he wanted to catch the Iranian.

Lechleitner told the owner to string the guy along.

"Tell him to contact me," the agent said, handing up a card from the Yardley undercover company. "Tell him we might have what he needs."

On any battlefield, the most ominous threats to U.S. soldiers, sailors and pilots are American-made weapons and military technology in enemy hands.

America's foes have long deployed clandestine networks of spies and black market dealers to acquire U.S. technology.

Iran, bordering Iraq and Afghanistan and within striking distance of Israel, has long posed a serious threat to U.S. national security.

Since the 1980s, the United States and Iran have engaged in a dicey cat-and-mouse game: law enforcement agents chasing a murky cast of middlemen secretly arming what the White House regards as a rogue nation.

Iran is desperate for American-made weapons and technology because its crumbling military infrastructure is largely American — the legacy of billion-dollar U.S. arms sales during the 1960s and '70s. Its F-4 and F-14 fighter jets, for instance, remain hobbled by outdated avionics.

Iran isn't on the prowl merely for spare parts. The country seeks to outfit its military with all the vital components required to fight a 21st-century war — radar, sonar, Kevlar vests, night-vision scopes, cockpit computers, and missile-guidance technology.

On a modern battlefield, high-

tech components the size of a silver dollar can tip the balance of power.

Without precision U.S. gyroscopes and accelerometers to run internal navigation systems, Iran's missiles — which may someday carry nuclear weapons — can't hit their targets. Without U.S. microchips, Iran's radar can't see American and Israeli fighters in the sky.

U.S. officials say Iran is already furnishing America's enemies, funneling military gear to the Taliban, Hezbollah, and Iraqi insurgents. According to U.S. documents and officials, American-made electrical components purchased by Iranian middlemen have been discovered in weapons used by Hezbollah against Israel and inside a handful of the roadside bombs, or IEDs, responsible for so many deaths in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"It seems like no matter where you turn — IEDs, technology, missiles — you can see Iranian fingerprints," said Sen. Bob Casey (D., Pa.), who chairs the Foreign Relations subcommittee for the Mideast region. "It is a clear and present danger, a real urgent threat."

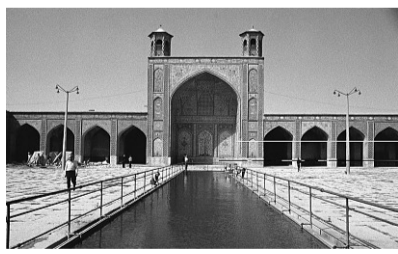
Since the 1980s, federal agents have arrested dozens of people smuggling arms to Iran. Still, they've struggled to understand more than the broad outlines of the Iranian procurement network.

When the Yardley case began in 2004, U.S. agents had never nabbed an insider — someone living in Iran with intimate knowledge of the country's military needs, plans, and suppliers — and brought him to the United States to face justice.

"A case like this, it's a roll of the dice — dealing with people you can't even see, halfway around the world, not knowing what you have," said ICE Special Agent in Charge John Kelleghan. "But it's a roll you need to take, because Iranian arms brokers are going to keep buying what they're buying — and eventually cause U.S. soldiers to die."

شیراز

SHIRAZ, IRAN, JUNE 2004



The man looking to buy U.S. military components came from the Iranian city of poets, wine, and flowers.

Amir Hossein Ardebili lived in Shiraz, a sprawling southern city of 1.2 million people with grand public gardens, not far from the great Persian ruins of Persepolis and the Zagros Mountains.

A freelance arms broker, Ardebili used the Internet to buy and smuggle embargoed commercial and military technology from U.S. companies. He had but one customer: the Iranian government.

Ardebili was no patriot, no political ideologue, no religious radical. He was a capitalist. A businessman.

At 29, he was unmarried and lived with his parents, a symbol of his commitment to family but also of his struggling finances. His parents, a retired bureaucrat and a stay-at-home mom, had sold the family jewelry to pay his tuition at

WANTED: WEAPONS OF MODERN WAR

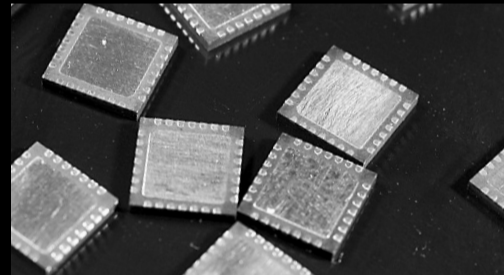
On the battlefield, technology can tip the balance of power. Iran uses middlemen like Amir Ardebili to buy sensitive American equipment:



Night vision. With third-generation, American-made night-vision equipment, Iran could neutralize one of the U.S. Army's greatest advantages — an ability to see and fight in the dark.



Nuclear components. The triggered spark gap, left, has medical and military applications. It can be used to break up kidney stones or to detonate a nuclear weapon.



Advanced radar. State-of-the-art microchips would dramatically improve Iran's air defenses against U.S. or Israeli jets, making it easier to track incoming aircraft.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Shiraz University.

Ardebili had come of age with the Islamic Republic. He was too young to remember the 1979 revolution, but old enough to have lost friends during the eight-year war with Iraq, a conflict that began when he was in elementary school.

"I'm a person who hates war," he said years later. "I'm coming from a country which had a lot of sacrifice."

Ardebili and his friends did not necessarily like Iran's leaders, but they feared what they viewed as U.S. warmongers. Conspiracy theories abounded in Shiraz — most pressing, that President George W. Bush and Israel had engineered the 9/11 attacks. After all, Bush had lied about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

After graduation, Ardebili had taken a good job with the state-run Shiraz Electronic Industries (SEI), placing orders with Iranian brokers who bought embargoed military goods from U.S. and European companies.

The arms black market followed a complex path called transshipping. The contraband moved from the United States to a trusted port in Europe or the Mideast, perhaps Amsterdam or Dubai, then was relabeled and re-shipped to a dealer inside Iran, and from there to SEI and the Iranian armed forces.

Ardebili excelled at the work, but earned just \$650 a week. In early 2004, he struck out on his own, hoping to make more money. "And it is better to be your own boss," he recalled.

Ardebili opened a tiny office in Shiraz. SEI and other state-run companies began faxing requests, and he began querying U.S. companies.

Online, Ardebili gave himself an Americanized name, "Alex Dave," and used a forwarding address in Dubai. He rarely told U.S. companies where he was, and they rarely asked. Sometimes, American companies would stiff him. They'd realize he

was in Iran and keep his deposit money. What he did not fear was the U.S. government. He was, after all, living in his own country. What right did the United States have to enforce its laws in Iran?

Ardebili e-mailed hundreds of U.S. companies, from Boston to San Diego. He sought all kinds of military gear: night-vision equipment, gyroscopes, state-of-the-art microchips, and stealth technology. Most firms ignored him, but enough responded. By spring, Ardebili was negotiating with a dozen U.S. manufacturers.

By midsummer, Ardebili was closing his first \$1 million deal — for a radar-cloaking system from an unwitting North American company. To get around the U.S. embargo, the paperwork falsely set the destination as Ukraine.

Ardebili began corresponding with an arms salesman named Patrick in Yardley, Pa. The Iranian wrote that he was looking for radioisotopes. Patrick sent him price quotes.

DUBAI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, NOV. 20, 2005



Undercover storefronts are fine for establishing black market bonafides, but a vouch always helps — an associate who can assure the criminal that you can be trusted.

See **SHADOW WAR** on A17

CHAPTER 2 OF 8

SHADOW WAR: AN ELITE PHILADELPHIA SQUAD'S SECRET MISSION AGAINST IRAN

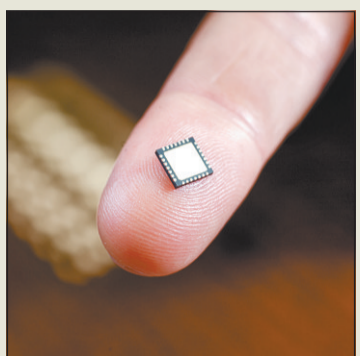
The Setup

Now that they had an arms broker on the hook, how would agents acquire the goods that they needed to lure him out of Iran? *By John Shiffman*

PHILADELPHIA, JULY 2007

U.S. Homeland Security agents faced a serious problem. It was a good problem to have, but nonetheless a problem. After months of haggling, an arms broker inside Iran had surprised the undercover agents by wiring a deposit for 1,000 phased-array radar units — lightning-fast microchips that help target attacking jet fighters. Such dime-size weapons of war, so tiny, so deadly, were highly coveted by America's enemies.

Now the agents had to come up with the goods to complete their sting. Where would they get 1,000



DAVID M WARREN / Staff Photographer
A phased-array radar chip, a tiny engine of war, helps pinpoint attacking fighter jets. Amir Ardebili sought to buy 1,000 of them for Iran's military.

radar chips? And how would they pay for them?

They couldn't just borrow them from the Pentagon. The ones the U.S. military owns are already installed inside weapons systems, not stored separately.

They decided to reach out to the closest manufacturer, a New England company. The task fell to Special Agent Michael Ronayne because he was a Boston native who still spoke with a thick accent.

Ronayne dialed and was transferred to a woman who answered curtly, "How can I help ya?"

The agent started describing pro- See **SHADOW WAR** on A8

THE STORY SO FAR
Attempting the first sting of its kind, U.S. Homeland Security agents create undercover storefronts in Yardley and Europe to lure a prolific arms broker from his base inside Iran.

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Find additional videos, images, and interviews at www.philly.com/ShadowWar

Afghan election: Mixed outlook

Observers were concerned about fraud reports, but Karzai called the vote a big success.

By Heidi Vogt
ASSOCIATED PRESS

KABUL, Afghanistan — The main Afghan election observer group said it had serious concerns about the legitimacy of the weekend's parliamentary vote because of reported fraud, even as President Hamid Karzai commended the balloting as a solid success.

The conflicting statements underscored the difficulty of determining the credibility of the vote, which triggered militant attacks that hurt the turnout. Afghan officials started gathering and tallying results Sunday in a process that could last weeks if not months.

The country's international backers praised those who voted Saturday despite bomb and rocket attacks and voiced hope for a democratic result. A repeat of the pervasive fraud that tainted a presidential election a year ago would only further erode the standing of the Karzai administration — at home and abroad — as it struggles against a Taliban insurgency.

While the first vote counts are to be made public in a few days, full preliminary results are not expected until early October, and then there will be weeks of fraud investigations before winners are officially announced for the 249 parliamentary seats, which were contested by about 2,500 candidates.

The election commission said it hopes to release final results by the end of October. But there are likely to be a host of fraud complaints in each province that could drag the process beyond that time. The resolution of last year's vote took months.

On Sunday, the independent Free and Fair Elections Foundation said **AFGHANISTAN** on A13

Family Court's Vine St. saga

Ambitious plans to redevelop the building went nowhere. The goal was to impress Rendell.

By Joseph Tanfani and Mark Fazlollah
INQUIRER STAFF WRITERS

As he worked on securing \$200 million in state funds to build a new Family Court, lawyer John H. Estey pursued an ambitious plan to redevelop the court's historic home at 1801 Vine St.

Estey reached out to two former clients of his law firm, held dozens of phone conferences and meetings, and billed the courts more than \$100,000 — at more than \$650 an hour — to put together the plan to build a luxury hotel and museum at the classically styled courthouse on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway. The effort, spread over seven months of private talks last year, was mainly designed to win over one person: Gov. Rendell.

Estey, Rendell's former chief of staff, was hired by state Supreme Court Justice Ronald D. Castille to persuade Rendell to release the \$200 million. But Rendell made it clear that would not happen until he was satisfied with the plans for 1801 Vine.

The effort produced a plan that intrigued city officials as well as Rendell. But the proposal itself went nowhere. One of Estey's former clients involved in the pitch, a venture capital firm, walked away. Another one, developer Daniel Keat- See **FAMILY COURT** on A12

The joy of Werth



YONG KIM / Staff Photographer
Jayson Werth is greeted by teammates after hitting a two-run, walk-off home run in the ninth inning to give the Phillies a 7-6 win over the Washington Nationals. The Phillies, who have won seven straight, kept a three-game lead over Atlanta. The Braves are here for a three-game series starting Monday night. Coverage in **Sports, E1**.

Pa. legislature has little time, major issues

By Angela Coulombis
INQUIRER HARRISBURG BUREAU

HARRISBURG — *Hope* is a word uttered often these days in the halls of the Capitol.

There is *hope* that Republicans and Democrats in the legislature can agree on how to tax the extraction of natural gas from the Marcellus Shale. *Hope* that they can

strike a compromise on establishing an independent office to review the state's revenue projections. *Hope* that they can seal a deal on lowering pension costs.

The problem: They have only a few weeks to resolve deep divisions to get the work done.

The Senate returns Monday to the Capitol for the first time since

it broke for the summer in July. House members came back last week. Yet they are in Harrisburg only until early October, when they will recess once again to be able to campaign for the November election. And the Senate is not expected to return after that.

Though legislators have pledged to resolve these complex, big-ticket

items, many inside and outside the Capitol say there is little incentive to make decisions that could be politically risky before an election.

And doing nothing has few ramifications.

"The pressure is just not there," said pollster and political analyst G. Terry Madonna of Franklin and See **SENATE** on A12

Hiker talks about her arrest

She called it "a huge misunderstanding" and said there was no spying, no crimes.

By Karen Matthews
ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — Sarah Shourd, the American woman held in Iran for more than 13 months and accused of espionage, said Sunday that she and two men detained with her never spied or committed any crime, calling their arrest "a huge misunderstanding."

Discussing her experience at the most length since her release Tuesday, Shourd, 32, underscored her gratitude at being released, but she said she felt only "one-third free" because her fiancé, Shane Bauer, 28, and friend Josh



STEPHEN CHERNIN / Associated Press
Sarah Shourd (left) stands with (from left) Cindy Hickey, Shane Bauer's mother; Laura Fattal, Josh Fattal's mother; and her mother, Nora Shourd. Bauer and Fattal are still held in Iran.

Fattal, 28, of Elkins Park, Pa., remain in Tehran's notorious Evin Prison.

"This is not the time to celebrate," Shourd said at a New York news conference.

"The only thing that enabled me to cross the gulf from prison to freedom alone was the knowledge that Shane and Josh wanted with all

See **HIKERS** on A4

WEATHER



High 76,
Low 52

Cool breeze Monday. On Wednesday, the first day of fall, the high will hit 90. Air quality: Good. Exclusive NBC10 EarthWatch forecast, **B11**.

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CHAPTER 3 OF 8

SHADOW WAR AN ELITE PHILADELPHIA SQUAD'S SECRET MISSION AGAINST IRAN

The Magic Show

Agents needed an illusion so convincing the Iranian would tell them anything. Could they pull it off? By John Shiffman

THE STORY SO FAR

Using undercover companies in Yardley, Pa., and northern Europe, U.S. Homeland Security agents believe they have lured an Iranian arms broker to a sting in the Republic of Georgia.

თბილისი

TBILISI, REPUBLIC OF GEORGIA, OCT. 1, 2007

Darius stood in the Tbilisi International Airport arrivals lounge, scanning for Iranian countersurveillance.

Though he towered above the Georgian crowd, his 6-foot-5 frame was unlikely to betray him. He shared his parents' Baltic cheekbones, spoke Russian, and wore the slacks of a wealthy German.

Few would suspect that "Darius" was an undercover agent of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.



U.S. agents set up a sting in the Republic of Georgia, a new American ally with lingering ties to the dark arts of the KGB.

He checked the monitor again. The flight from Baku, Azerbaijan, had just landed. Passengers were moving through customs.

A dour Georgian from the Ministry of Internal Affairs pulled close and slipped Darius the flight manifest. The American saw a name he recognized and suppressed a smile.

Some undercover agents approached their work as a science, closely following a script. Others considered themselves artists, actors at an improv.

Darius liked to think of himself as a magician, creating an illusion so convincing his target would reveal See SHADOW WAR on A10

BRT is kept alive by court

It said only the legislature could abolish the board. But the city can strip it of the power to assess, leaving it to hear appeals.

By Miriam Hill and Joseph Tanfani INQUIRER STAFF WRITERS

Philadelphia residents may have voted to abolish the Board of Revision of Taxes in May, but the Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruled Monday that the board could continue to exist and hear property tax appeals.

However, the court said, the city is able to take from the BRT control over setting property values.

In a 27-page opinion written by Chief Justice Ronald D. Castille, the court said the city could not get rid of the appeals board because only the General Assembly has the authority to do so.

The legal victory for the BRT throws a roadblock into Mayor Nutter's effort to eliminate the agency, which has been plagued by accusations of corruption and insider dealing.

But it did allow Nutter to hang on to a major piece of his effort, upholding the city's right to split the board's assessment and appeals duties. This means the mayor can move forward with creating more accurate assessments.

In the spring, Philadelphians by a wide margin voted to abolish the BRT and replace it with two agencies, the Office of Property Assessment and the Board of Property Assessment Appeals.

The move to change the BRT came after an Inquirer investigation last year exposed widespread mismanagement at the agency, whose decisions directly affect the pocketbook of every property owner in Philadelphia.

BRT Chairwoman Charlesretta Meade and members Robert N.C. Nix III, Russell M. Nigro, Alan K. See BRT on A16

philly.com EXCLUSIVE

Watch never-before-released surveillance footage of the Tbilisi sting operation at www.philly.com/ShadowWar

Casino opening to hoopla, heartache

After a long fight, a Philadelphia first.

By Jeff Gammage INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

On the casino battleground that is the Delaware River waterfront, this is what victory looks like:

A school of cool blue lamps hovering over a brand-new blackjack table, surrounded by a metal sea of blinking slot machines, with the music of Smash Mouth on the sound system: "All that glitters is gold. ..."

The much-debated, long-delayed SugarHouse Casino is set to open Thursday, the first gambling hall in Philadelphia.

All that's left is to cut a ribbon.

That reality holds joy or sadness for the people, neighborhood groups, and city organizations that have for years fought for or against the coming of the casino.

At the Northern Liberties Neighbors Association, so staunchly opposed that at one point it refused even to meet with casino representatives, there was resignation.

"There's really nothing more we can do right now. It's here," said Matt Ruben, the group president. "We're going to closely monitor it, and hope the worst predictions of the impacts won't come true."

Others exulted at the opening of a 24-hour-a-day casino that's expected to draw two million visitors a year.

"We're all real excited," said Joe Rafter, chairman of the Penn Treaty Special Services District, created to disburse casino money to Fishtown, Northern Liberties, and parts of Kensington. See CASINO on A12

Obama's taste of local flavor



RON TARVER / Staff Photographer

President Obama, who was in town Monday to raise money for Rep. Joe Sestak's Senate campaign and for the Democratic National Committee, made a stop at Reading Terminal Market. He ordered two cheesesteaks — giving one away — before picking out four apples at the Fair Food Farmstand. Story, B1.

Short of health repeal, GOP eyes a Plan B

By Robert Pear NEW YORK TIMES NEWS SERVICE

WASHINGTON — Republicans are serious. Hopeful of picking up substantial numbers of seats in the congressional elections, they are developing plans to try to repeal or roll back President Obama's health-care law.

This goal, although not fleshed out in a detailed legislative proposal, is

Republicans may want a full dismantling of the Obama law, but odds are long. So they prepare to chip away at it.

much more than a campaign slogan. That conclusion emerged from interviews with a range of Republican lawmakers, who said they were determined to chip away at the law if they could not dismantle it.

House Republicans are expected to

include some specifics in an election agenda they intend to issue Thursday. Although they face tremendous political and practical hurdles to undoing a law whose provisions are rapidly going into effect, they are laying the groundwork for trying.

For starters, Republicans say they will try to withhold money that federal officials need to administer and enforce the law. They know that even if they managed to pass a wholesale repeal, Obama would veto it.

See HEALTH on A8

Some key provisions of the overhaul take effect Thursday. D1.

INSIDE

PHILADELPHIA Winfrey's \$1 million grant

TV diva honors Mastery Charter Schools for outstanding work. B1.

BUSINESS Is the recession over?

Panel: Yes, but it was the longest one since the Depression. D1.

WEATHER High 77, Low 63

A cool start Tuesday, but then sunny and pleasant. Wednesday's high will hit 90. Air quality: Good to moderate. Full report, B11.

INDEX Marketplace...E10 Comics...C6 Obituaries...B9 Express...E12 Rally...B9 Lotteries...E12 Television...C5



MAGAZINE Two views of Mumia

Tigre Hill's film, The Barrel of a Gun, makes a case for murder. Another documentary differs. C1.

Mystery clinic is linked to abortion doctor

By Marie McCullough INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

For more than a year online, "Grace Medical Care" has advertised abortions up to the last few weeks of pregnancy. It said it's located in a Philadelphia suburb, yet kept the address secret. And it has operated without the knowledge of state regulatory authorities.

Now, for the first time, the New Jersey Attorney General's Office says the person behind the clandestine enterprise is Steven Chase Brigham, the physician being investigated by New Jersey and Maryland on suspi-

cion of licensing and criminal offenses.

Brigham's attorney, Joseph Gorrall of Roseland, N.J., did not return a call or e-mail requesting comment.

Steven Chase Brigham is being investigated in N.J. and Md.

Brigham, 54, who has been in and out of trouble for much of his two-decade career, operates at least a dozen abortion clinics in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia under the name American Women's Services.

He has many other "entities," including Grace Medical Care, also See CLINIC on A14

philly dealyo Today's Deal Philly Dealyo, a deal-of-the-day website, offers specials on goods and services. Today, get half off at Cape May Stage. Go to phillydealyo.com to get yours.

Were Iranians wise to the sting?

SHADOW WAR from A1 everything. In 24 hours, the American would know whether his magic show would work, or if he would go home a fool.

The traveler from the Baku flight stepped forward and presented a brown Iranian passport bearing the name *Amir Hossein Ardebili*. The border guard studied the passport, its pages empty save a visa admitting the bearer to Georgia. The guard stamped the visa and shooed the traveler along to baggage claim.

In the arrivals lounge, John Richards loitered 30 paces behind Darius. He held a Georgian-language newspaper and an ice cream cone. It was an undercover trick he'd learned decades ago as a Philadelphia police officer. What looked less like a cop than a guy eating an ice cream cone? Richards — not his real name — was a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement supervisor, a Girard College grad and former hockey player, a man always in motion. To stop arms from flowing across America's most porous border — Canada — he'd set up ICE's first office there, in Toronto.

To help persuade Dubai officials to do more to thwart arms smugglers, he'd flown them to New York to see ground zero. Richards was a get-stuff-done kind of guy. At the Tbilisi airport he stood beside U.S. prosecutor David Hall. Prosecutors and supervisors rarely ventured into the field under cover, and certainly not so far from home. But Richards and Hall felt compelled to stick close to the action. Operation Shakespeare had consumed them for three years.

To lure the Iranian arms broker outside Iran, the Americans had created an undercover arms company in Europe, a rare and difficult endeavor for a U.S. law enforcement agency.

International undercover counterproliferation cases were always fraught with risk, and often fell apart for no apparent reason, even after months or years of engagement. Even now, prosecutor Hall put the odds of success below 50-50.

As Hall and Richards waited for the plane, they mulled worst-case scenarios: Were they about to meet the arms broker they'd been negotiating with by e-mail and phone for three years? Or was this all a setup?

Were the Iranians wise to the U.S. sting? Would they send a spy in his place? Or a team of agents to disrupt, embarrass, or even harm the U.S. agents?

When the plane arrived, the plan called for Darius and two Georgian cops posing as bodyguards to drive the Iranian into town, where they'd consummate the deals in an undercover hotel suite. To impress the arms broker, they'd rented an armored Mercedes SUV, complete with tinted windows and gray curtains.

Over meetings in the hotel suite, Darius and two other U.S. undercover agents planned to deliver the promised radar, missile guidance, and F-4 equipment, and to get the buyer to reveal as much as possible about Iran's covert arms effort.

That was the plan. Things never go according to plan.

The Iranian emerged wheeling a suitcase, a laptop bag slung over his shoulder. An old man shuffled beside him.

The effusive Darius moved to greet them, shaking hands vigorously. Amir Ardebili introduced himself and his surprise traveling companion, "Nasrollah Ardebili, my father."

Darius didn't know if the old man was Ardebili's dad or an Iranian intelligence operative. He looked to be 70, weak. At least he wouldn't pose a physical threat.

Darius led the two Iranians to the Mercedes, and the three squeezed into the backseat. As the SUV pulled out onto George W. Bush Avenue toward downtown, Ardebili and Darius joked about their language differences.

A camera hidden in the rearview mirror captured every word. Darius' cell phone rang and he silenced it, using the ruse to launch his next gambit.

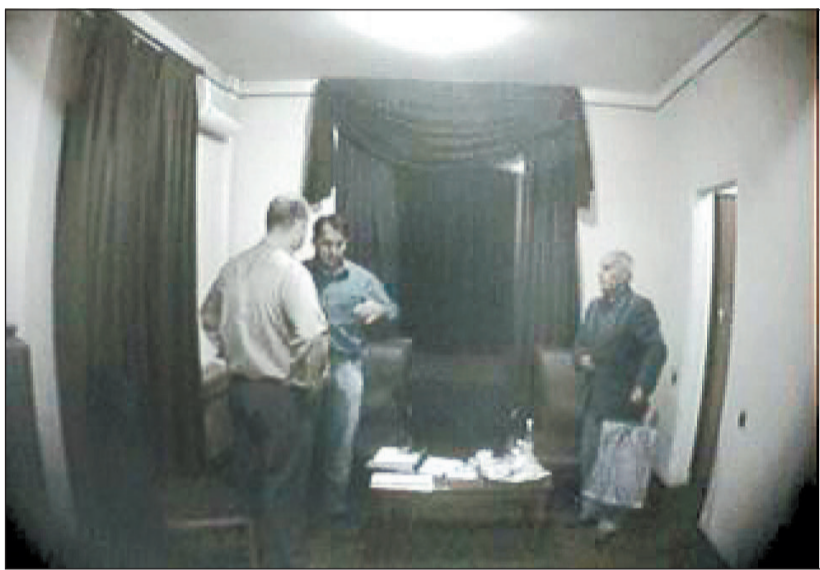
"Oh, this reminds me," Darius said in Russian-accented English. "I have for you a SIM card for your phone." "I can use here?"

"Of course, why not?" Ardebili wedged the SIM card into his phone, oblivious that Americans would now be able to monitor his every call and movement in Georgia.

"You are kind," he said. Darius waved his hand and said, "So, you were with the Iranian government in a security position?"



DAVID M. WARREN / Staff Photographer



Darius wanted to get as much background as possible on camera. "Yes, I was in this business when I was with the government, eight years," Ardebili said. "I got a lot of knowledge in the government and decided it is better to work private, on my own."

Darius nodded. "I'm hoping we will come together for a very profitable relationship."

As they rode on, Darius talked about the fun they'd have at a Black Sea resort once the deals were done. Ardebili was all business. "The goods are here?"

Darius explained that his American cousin, Patrick, had arrived with the radar microchips, but that a second American, the one bringing gyroscopes, had been delayed a day. This was a lie: The U.S. agents wanted time to extract as much information as possible. "He will bring it to you tomorrow," Darius said.

Ardebili nodded. Darius said, "These gyros are [used for] military, yes?" "Yes."

They were nearly at Ardebili's hotel now, and Darius wished the ride from the airport hadn't been so short. Ardebili was blathering on about how he'd made arrangements to have the gyros shipped through Azerbaijan to avoid U.S. laws.

It was late afternoon, and Ardebili asked if he and his father could take a nap at his hotel, before traveling on to meet at Darius' hotel to talk business.

Sure, Darius said. At the Ardebilis' hotel, the bodyguards unloaded their bags, continuing the red-carpet experience. As Darius led Ardebili inside, they joked with the familiarity of old friends.

Ardebili and his father checked in. When they reached their room, Ardebili phoned Iran, boasting to his wife of the grand reception he'd received.

At 8:04 p.m., Ardebili and his father entered Darius' wired hotel suite, carrying two tins of Iranian pistachios and excitement for a bright future.

Darius introduced Patrick Lechleitner, an affable ICE agent posing as a Yardley, Pa., arms broker. "Patrick is cousin," Darius said, "more like brother to me. If I die, I don't know if he will cry, but he gets to wear my shoes."

Ardebili chuckled, and Darius directed his guests to two chairs by the window. "Seats for the guests of honor," he said. Seats facing the hidden surveillance cameras.

As Lechleitner and Ardebili chatted about their hometowns, Darius studied the Iranian's eager face. A former military-trained interrogator, Darius searched for clues that might betray a lie: Did Ardebili's neck muscles tense? Did his eyes flicker? Did he pick lint from his clothing?

So far, Darius thought, the Iranian was smooth, either a master

Video obtained by The Inquirer shows Iranian Amir Ardebili, who traveled to Tbilisi, discussing arms deals with undercover U.S. agent Patrick Lechleitner. Ardebili's father is at right. Above, his passport.

ments, including the deposit Ardebili had wired to a Delaware bank for the microchips. Darius acted impressed. "How did this happen? I am confused."

Ardebili took the bait. "As you know, there is no way to transfer funds from Iran to the United States. But we have an exchange in Tehran." "Money comes from Iran?"

"Yes... My friend is an expert, and he can do it. I never say to our sources that I am Iranian. I always say United Arab Emirates..." Awareness of the law, money-laundering, conspiracy.

Darius posed his next question as innocently as possible. "When I send e-mail, it is only me, Darius, sending you e-mail. Is it same with you?"

"Yes, only with me," Ardebili said. "And always you?"

"Yes," Darius said. "And every Yahoo chat, only you?"

"All of them, yes," Ardebili replied. The Iranian was so unaware of the setup — that this confirmation would seal his fate — he threw out a joke: "And when you made an angry message to me, I would shut down the computer."

Everyone laughed. They spoke of future deals. Of sonar and night-vision goggles. Of contacts and a secret Tbilisi warehouse.

Thinking big, the Iranian proposed a partnership: "You will ship here to Georgia and I will transship to Iran and I will pay you commission." They could use state-owned Iran Air. "Free shipping!" Ardebili joked.

It was nearly 10 p.m., and Darius began going over the next day's agenda: a morning meeting, a nice lunch, a tour of historic Tbilisi, and a final meeting to receive the gyroscopes. Then they'd visit a warehouse and drive to a Black Sea resort.

Oh, one last thing, Darius said. He handed the Iranian a list of every query for military goods Ardebili had made during their years of e-mails.

"Please review tonight," Darius said. Let us know if you still need any of these.

Ardebili didn't sense the trap. Such a list would tell the Americans what Iran's military had obtained, what it still needed, and which U.S. companies were supplying it.

"OK," Ardebili said. As they rose to leave, Ardebili reminded the undercover agents of the first e-mail he'd sent, back in 2004: "An inquiry from Iranian government for radioactive material."

The reference to nuclear technology, though years old, caught the attention of the Americans listening in the next room.

They were thrilled that Ardebili had admitted so much on tape and that he'd naively promised to help them put together a list of Iran's current needs.

But as the evening wound down, prosecutor Hall and Homeland Security supervisor Richards were not smiling.

They were busy worrying about two alarming developments, either of which could ruin Operation Shakespeare.

Contact staff writer John Shiffman at 301-320-6655 or jshiffman@phillynews.com.



CAST OF CHARACTERS

Darius, undercover pseudonym of ICE agent, Frankfurt, Germany.

Amir Hossein Ardebili, arms broker, Shiraz, Iran.

John Richards, pseudonym of undercover ICE supervisor, Philadelphia.

David Hall, U.S. prosecutor, Wilmington.

Patrick Lechleitner, undercover ICE agent, Philadelphia.

Request for the Extradition of Alex Dave, from Georgia
Tbilisi:
... pursuant to the Joint Declaration of the U.S. and Georgia on the rights of U.S. citizen Amir Hossein Ardebili
... law.

HOW THIS SERIES WAS REPORTED

Shadow War is based on nine months of reporting, including U.S., Iranian, and Republic of Georgia documents; e-mail messages; medical files; undercover video; wiretaps; and other digital media obtained by The Inquirer.

It also draws on extensive interviews with:

- Amir Ardebili; his wife, Negine; mother, Zahra Ahkami; and lawyers Edmund Lyons and Ross Reghabi.

- Assistant U.S. Attorney David Hall and U.S. Attorney David Weiss of Delaware.

- U.S. Homeland Security/Immigration Customs Enforcement agents John Kelleghan, Andrew McLees, Clark Settles, Michael Ronayne and Patrick Lechleitner. Two ICE agents — "Darius" and "John Richards" — asked that their true names not be published, because they still work undercover.

- Defense Criminal Investigative Service agents Ed Bradley and Robert Lerario.

An Iranian diplomat in Washington spoke informally, but his government declined an interview.

In the interests of safety, Ardebili and the undercover ICE agents agreed to be interviewed only on the condition that certain details be omitted from this series.

Learn more at www.philly.com/ShadowWar

The Philadelphia Inquirer

philly.com

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Reid calls audible: Vick is starter



PAUL SANCYA / Associated Press
Michael Vick led the Eagles past Detroit on Sunday.

In a stunning move, the Eagles' coach went with "the hottest" QB.

By Jeff McLane
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

In a stunning reversal Tuesday evening, Eagles coach Andy Reid named Michael Vick the team's starting quarterback — and the new face of the franchise — just a day after he had declared it was Kevin Kolb's job.

The Eagles coach said the decision — on one of the most intensely debated topics in Philadelphia and around the NFL — was made because Vick, who is just 16 months removed from an 18-month stay in federal prison, showed "accelerated play" over the last two games. Reid said Kolb's struggles through the pre-season and the season opener were not the reason for the change.

Vick is "sitting there as possibly the hottest quarterback in the National Football League."

See **VICK** on A16

Voices on the Vick Decision

- **Bob Ford:** Maybe it's not a rebuilding season, after all.
- **Ashley Fox:** Kolb's career in Phila. is in jeopardy.
- **John Gonzalez:** Reid has created a comedy of errors.

Sports, Section E

Rizzo's ride goes on the block.

1980 Caddy, low miles, Sunday driver

By Melissa Dribben
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

The car, like the legendary politician who once owned it, is imposing.

Nearly 19 feet long from chrome bumper to bumper, the black 1980 Cadillac Fleetwood Brougham with hand-painted red pinstriping and a monogrammed R has just received a final buffing at a detail shop in Manayunk. Only 16,170 miles have been clocked on the odometer. The sole owner, who lived in Chestnut Hill, kept the car garaged and only drove it to visit his sister-in-law for Sunday dinners in Plymouth Meeting or to take his Irish

terrier, Casey, to the park.

On Saturday, when the car goes on the auction block at the Wildwood Classic Car Auction with a reserve of \$40,000, prospective bidders need not worry if it was ever in a fender bender.

No one would have dared. For this baby belonged to none other than the late Mayor Frank L. Rizzo.

"There it is, like the day it was built," said Rizzo's son, Frank, circling his daddy's Caddy with reverence.

To wrap his fingers around the wood-trimmed tilt-and-telescoping wheel, sink into the plush dual-comfort lico-

See **RIZZO** on A16

Medal of Honor for Berks hero



ALEX WONG / Getty Images

Richard Etchberger receives a Medal of Honor from President Obama on behalf of his late father, Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Richard L. Etchberger. The airman, killed in action in Laos in 1968, is shown below in a photo taken that year.

A tribute to airman slain at secret base

By Kathy Boccella
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

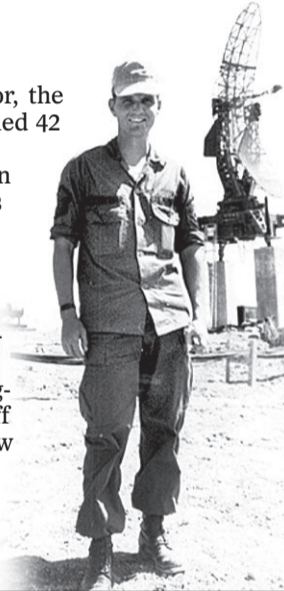
President Obama awarded the country's highest honor, the Medal of Honor, to the family of a Berks County man killed 42 years ago in a secret CIA mission in Laos.

"Today, we present the Medal of Honor to an American who displayed such gallantry more than four decades ago: Chief Master Sgt. Richard L. Etchberger," the president said Tuesday at a White House ceremony. "This medal reflects the gratitude of an entire nation."

Etchberger's sons, Cory and Richard Etchberger and Steve Wilson, and his brother, Robert, attended the ceremony.

The president detailed the dramatic story of Etchberger's actions on the night of March 11, 1968, as he fought off enemy fire, called in air strikes, and loaded three fellow servicemen into a rescue helicopter.

Etchberger, 35, an Air Force chief master sergeant from See **MEDAL** on A16



Commentary By Karen Heller

After 57 years, a juvenile lifer speaks

That Friday night in February, Joe Ligon went drinking.

He tore through the neighborhood, South Philadelphia, with five other teenagers looking for money to buy wine. One boy carried two switchblades.

Something went wrong. By night's end, eight men had been knifed. There's no question Ligon was involved. He admits stabbing Clarence Belvey. Two men, Charles Pitts and Jackson Hamm, died before midnight.



Joe Ligon, sentenced to life without parole at 15, sees hope.

Ligon was 15. The lawyer instructed him to plead guilty to the murders at the one-day trial. Ligon was sentenced to life with-

out possibility of parole.

In 1953. Since then, the other defendants have been released or died.

Not Ligon. He's lived the last 57 years in prison, four decades in Graterford.

In all those years, Ligon never spoke to a reporter. Until now. When he starts, he cannot stop, and talks himself hoarse. Five See **HELLER** on A12

CHAPTER 4 OF 8

SHADOW WAR: AN ELITE PHILADELPHIA SQUAD'S SECRET MISSION AGAINST IRAN

The Sting

The deception was working. But would sluggish bureaucrats and eager politicians in Washington spoil everything? By John Shiffman / Staff Writer

THE STORY SO FAR

U.S. Homeland Security agents from Philadelphia have lured an Iranian arms broker to the Republic of Georgia and created a convincing illusion to get him to open up about his dealings.

თბილისი

TBILISI, REPUBLIC OF GEORGIA, OCT. 1, 2007

In the Sheraton hotel lobby, U.S. Homeland Security supervisor John Richards raged.

"Don't let them effing do it!" Richards screamed at U.S. prosecutor David Hall, who was on the phone with a political appointee back in the States. "Don't let them!"

After a stressful but wildly successful day — after luring an Iranian arms broker here and capturing great evidence on hidden camera — Hall was receiving bad news from Washington.



DAVID M. WARREN / Staff Photographer

U.S. prosecutor David Hall, in Wilmington. Besides trouble from Washington, a snag in Georgia also threatened to scuttle much of their hard work.

Some Justice Department idiot wanted to throw a news conference immediately after Amir Ardebili was in handcuffs. The political appointee hoped to make a splash, offering up Operation Shakespeare as the start of the Bush administration's "new" counterproliferation strategy.

Richards — not his real name — knew this was foolish, nearsighted, even dangerous. It would blow their cover, waste hard-won leads that might unearth other smugglers. They might not get another chance like this for years.

At this point, the agents couldn't know who else Ardebili might implicate. See **SHADOW WAR** on A8

INSIDE



STYLE & SOUL

Help for mothers-to-be

Some are hiring concierges to prepare for baby's arrival. **D1.**

REGION

State funds for developer

Bart Blatstein is poised to receive nearly \$100 million for projects. **B1.**

WEATHER

High 88, Low 68

Sunny and warmer Wednesday. Chance of an evening thunderstorm. Air quality: Moderate. NBC10 forecast, **B11.**



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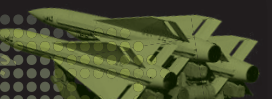
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EXCLUSIVE

Watch the Tbilisi sting unfold in secret video footage obtained by the Inquirer. Only at www.philly.com/ShadowWar

Today's Deal

Philly Dealyo, a deal-of-the-day website, offers specials on goods and services. Today, get \$9 for \$20 worth of eats at Frank's Time Out in Berlin, N.J. Go to phillydealyo.com to get yours.



SHADOW WAR ■ AN ELITE PHILADELPHIA SQUAD'S
SECRET MISSION AGAINST IRAN

With each tale, another revelation

SHADOW WAR from A1 cate as the hidden cameras rolled. They couldn't know what they would find once they searched his address book, cell phone, and laptop. That would take time — months, maybe longer.

"You tell them we didn't do all this to make a single arrest, like this is some kind of traffic stop," Richards told Hall. "You effing tell them that."

Hall didn't need any encouragement.

"Unbelievable," the normally composed prosecutor screamed into the phone, red-faced. "Simply unbelievable. Do I have to explain what's at stake here?"

Hall and Richards found themselves battling more than politicians that night.

They were alarmed to learn of a bureaucratic screw-up, one that also threatened to scuttle much of their hard work.

Incredibly, a critical piece of Georgian paperwork, the official authorization for the hotel sting, had not yet been signed by a local judge.

It wasn't the Georgians' fault. The judge had been waiting for a key U.S. document, and had only received it that day. Apparently, State Department bureaucrats had dithered for weeks drafting the document — as one agent recalled, "They kept making mindless changes, like changing the word *happy* to *glad*."

This delay was no minor matter. Without the judge's signature, the sting wasn't legally authorized.

In other words, everything they'd done in Tbilisi so far — the videos from the car ride and hotel sting, the radar microchip delivery — could be challenged in the Georgian and American courts.

Once they got the judge's signature, they'd have to find a way to start from scratch.

The Iranian arms broker returned to the undercover suite the next morning at 9:48.

He eagerly greeted the two undercover U.S. agents — the effusive "Darius," posing as a Russian arms broker, and the affable Patrick Lechleitner, posing as a dealer from Yardley, Pa.

Ardebili immediately raised a prickly subject, the Iranian president's recent remarks about homosexuals and the Holocaust at Columbia University in New York.

The agents weren't sure how to respond. Was Ardebili just making conversation? Or revealing a political affinity for hard-liners?

Who was he, really?

Half-joking, Darius tried to take his measure. "Does Mr. Ahmadinejad know you are here?"

Ardebili laughed. "This is important matter. All the governments affect our work. At present, it's the worst situation for Iran. It's the world against Iran. ... U.S. is going to push Iran. I think this is good for us."

"More profit for us!" Lechleitner said.

"Yes, it's good."

With nearly every story, Ardebili revealed something the agents hadn't known.

A tale he told them of a \$1 million sonar system was illustrative. The purchase demonstrated that he was no amateur, but it also disclosed a routine challenge the Iranians faced, one that the agents hadn't considered.

Like any complex software, this system had arrived with technological bugs. And, as Ardebili explained, he couldn't very well call the manufacturer for assistance.

"Because they don't know [the sonar] is in Iran?" Lechleitner asked.

"Right," Ardebili said.

In other words, no help desk.

Ardebili didn't work directly for his government. But, as he explained, Iranian officials stood ready to lend a hand.

If Darius could ship U.S. gear to Iranian diplomats in Third World countries, the diplomats could use their immunity to skirt customs.

"I was thinking of the embassy in Baku," Azerbaijan, Ardebili said. "It's not necessary to go and knock on the [embassy] door. We could arrange a meeting in a special hotel. ..."

"Does this really work?" Darius said. "You've done this?"

"Yes."

Delicately, Darius tried to repair the damage caused by the delayed paperwork. Whenever possible, he circled back and got Ardebili to repeat admissions he'd made the previous night about the radar. This was awkward and time-consuming, but Ardebili appeared not to notice.

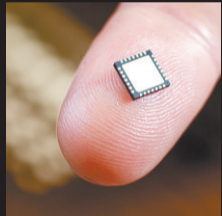
Next, Darius revisited a critical topic left hanging the night before. "On the nuclear issues, you said a couple of years ago you were look-



Undercover surveillance video recorded Ardebili and his father lunching in a private room at a posh restaurant with Patrick Lechleitner (right).

WHAT ARDEBILI WAS AFTER

When Iranian arms broker Amir Ardebili met undercover U.S. agents in Tbilisi, Georgia, he was shopping on behalf of the Iranian military.



DAVID M WARREN / Staff

PHASE SHIFTER

The microchips are used in sophisticated radar systems that make it easier to detect enemy fighters.



DAVID M WARREN / Staff



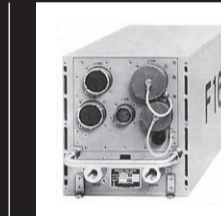
DAVID M WARREN / Staff

GYROSCOPE

Gyro components can be used in state-of-the-art guidance systems for weapons, including missiles.



Astronautics



DIGITAL AIR COMPUTER

To modernize Iran's fleet of aging F-4 fighter jets, its air force seeks cockpit computer upgrades.

Radar, missile photos from Iranian Defense Ministry / Associated Press; F-4 photo from Fars News Service / Associated Press



ing for radioactive something or other. Is that still something that people are trying to find?"

"I can check it. Are you able to provide?"

"Are you looking for the nuclear-weapons-making or just nuclear power?" Darius said. "Or everything?"

"Everything," the Iranian said. "I am a dealer as you are a seller. I can do anything. I can make a contact. But sometimes I think maybe it's not good to work on the parts that kill people."

"OK," Darius said. "I think you should only do what you are comfortable." The agent didn't want to overplay his hand. If the case went to trial, he didn't want a jury thinking he'd bullied a naive foreigner.

The conversation shifted to helicopters, to radar, night vision, and Kevlar vests. Ardebili confirmed that Iran often orders samples of U.S. components, never intending to buy more. Instead, they reverse-engineer the American technology to make their own products.

"We have good specialists now in Iran," Ardebili said.

"Like you did with the Iranian Toofan," Lechleitner said, referring to the antitank missile. "It's very similar to the American TOW missile. Same principle."

Ardebili smiled. "You have very good information."

Now, Darius believed, it was time to push things. Be direct, explicit, leave nothing to interpretation. Take a chance, say things a real arms dealer might not say.

"Let's talk about planning," he said. "One way to look at it is: What is Iran planning to buy in the next five years? Another way to look at it is your connections. What is this called in English?"

Darius picked up a pocket Russian-English dictionary. He thumbed it and pointed to a page.

"It's conspiracy!" he said. "When all are agreeing. You have a big conspiracy, and they are all trying

to get weapons and parts for Iran."

Ardebili listened intently. "So," Darius said, "we look at what Iran is going buy in the next five years. Mines, sonar. ... Write down your conspiracy ... to see where we can make most profit."

"Yes."

"Can you sketch out the people you are connected with and you are working with?"

Ardebili took a pen and began to write, outlining the Iranian military-procurement network, the conspiracy, which subsidiaries could be trusted, which could not.

When Ardebili finished, he paused, realizing the magnitude of what he'd done. "This is a very secret list, please. Have it in your pocket. Or customer will kill me."

"Let me tell you why we are asking so many questions," Darius said, in a confiding tone. "Since this 9/11 in America, many American companies are crazy patriots, and this is so illegal what we are doing. ..."

Ardebili nodded. "Yes."

"So ... Patrick can start making relationships. ... He must very gently sell out the side door or under the table." For emphasis, Darius waived his hand under the table. "Because we are right now under the table — black market."

Ardebili laughed. "Yes."

Darius hopped up and flipped off the lights. "Black market!"

Ardebili roared. "It is a good demonstration."

"I want no misunderstandings," Darius said.

"Oh, I really know," Ardebili said. "It's a dangerous business." But im-

portant work also, he said. Tehran had a sense of urgency. America had invaded Iraq and Afghanistan. Iran believed it might be next, he said, adding:

"They think war is coming."

Darius and Lechleitner treated the Ardebilis to lunch, chauffeuring them to a private room at a posh restaurant, one local police kept prewired with hidden cameras.

After plates of rice and kebabs, Ardebili's father said, "You are rich men, and soon you will be very rich men!"

Ardebili broke out his camera, and they all took pictures, arms around each other, smiling.

Prosecutor Hall and Richards, the ICE supervisor, were not smiling.

It was early morning back in Washington, and soon they'd be getting more calls pushing for a news conference on Ardebili, spoiling much of their hard work.

To counter this, they'd come up with a diabolically simple response, one that would block the politicians from going public. They'd say: *The case is sealed, by order of a U.S. judge. You're not suggesting we violate a judge's order, are you?*

The judge, of course, had sealed the case at Hall's request. But regardless, unsealing it would take a few days of paperwork — enough time, the agents knew, to put together a compelling, face-to-face argument that it ought to stay sealed.

The final play began that evening at 6:17.

Outside the suite, a third undercover U.S. agent gripped a black leather bag. It held a box of gyroscopes, poker-chip-size avionics components the Iranians needed to help guide surface-to-air missiles.

The third agent, posing as a New England electronics salesman, rapped twice on the door, and Lechleitner escorted him inside. Ardebili, full of confidence, stood to greet the newcomer. "Patrick and Darius are my friends," the Iranian said. "They are agent for my company."

The third agent acted cautious, a ruse to gather more evidence on tape. Almost sheepishly, he explained that before he could hand over the chips, he needed to confirm Ardebili's identity with a list of questions.

Ardebili shrugged and smiled. By now, he was used to silly American procedures.

Third agent: When did you first request the gyros?

Ardebili: About three years ago.

Third agent: Was there a problem with customs?

Ardebili: Yes, because of the export license.

The Iranian seemed to enjoy the game. To move things along, he opened his laptop to display e-mails he'd exchanged with the U.S. company.

The third agent took a look, then handed the laptop back. He laid the gyros on the coffee table and said, "OK, I'm going to have you sign for it." He needed a receipt for his bosses, he explained. And one for the jury.

Ardebili did so. "Nice doing business with you," he wrote. "Thank you for the gyros, Amir."

Satisfied, Darius stood and stretched. The Americans had more than enough.

Darius walked to the painting on the wall, looking directly into the pinhole camera. He nodded twice, the signal.

There was a knock at the door.

Ardebili was too busy talking about sonar to notice, until Georgian police officers burst into the room, pinning him to his chair.

Contact staff writer John Shiffman at 301-320-6655 or jshiffman@phillynews.com.

THURSDAY: TREASURE TROVE



Hours into the sting, Georgian police burst into the room and gave the Iranian arms broker an unpleasant surprise.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

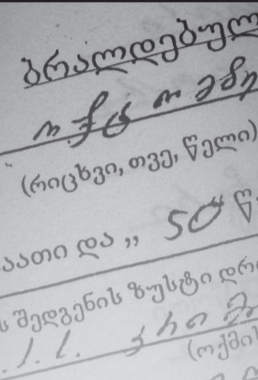
John Richards, pseudonym of undercover supervisor, U.S. Homeland Security/Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE), Philadelphia.

David Hall, U.S. prosecutor, Wilmington.

Amir Hossein Ardebili, arms broker, Shiraz, Iran.

Darius, undercover pseudonym of ICE agent, Frankfurt.

Patrick Lechleitner, undercover ICE agent, Philadelphia.



HOW THIS SERIES WAS REPORTED

Shadow War is based on nine months of reporting, including U.S., Iranian, and Republic of Georgia documents; e-mail messages; medical files; undercover video; wiretaps; and other digital media obtained by The Inquirer.

It also draws on extensive interviews with:

- Amir Ardebili; his wife, Negine; mother, Zahra Ahkami; and lawyers Edmund Lyons and Ross Reghabi.

- Assistant U.S. Attorney David Hall and U.S. Attorney David Weiss of Delaware.

- U.S. Homeland Security/Immigration Customs Enforcement agents John Kelleghan, Andrew McLees, Clark Settles, Michael Ronayne and Patrick Lechleitner. Two ICE agents — "Darius" and "John Richards" — asked that their true names not be published, because they still work undercover.

- Defense Criminal Investigative Service agents Ed Bradley and Robert Lerario.

An Iranian diplomat in Washington spoke informally, but his government declined an interview.

In the interests of safety, Ardebili and the undercover ICE agents agreed to be interviewed only on the condition that certain details be omitted from this series.

Learn more at www.philly.com/shadowwar

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Watch the exclusive videos obtained by the Inquirer at www.philly.com/ShadowWar


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Tests of heart valves lift hope

Trials at Penn and elsewhere, on people too ill for open-heart surgery, saw higher survival rates.

By Josh Goldstein

INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

In 2008, Ralph Miller's heart was failing from a faulty valve. Walking upstairs left him gasping for air. The retired railroad worker from Chester County had run out of options and would likely die within two years.

Mammogram questions

■ A new study finds exam's benefit is a close call. **A4.**

On Wednesday, Miller, now 72, was back in his barn working on one of the lawn tractors he repairs and resells, thanks to an experimental surgery at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania.

Miller was among several hundred patients in a clinical trial at Penn and other medical centers focusing on valve patients who were too sick for traditional open-heart surgery. Instead, Miller and some others received experimental heart valves that significantly improved survival rates after a year. The results were published Thursday in the See **HEART** on A14

Constitution Center show highlights the human face of combat, as seen by the Army's own artists.



CHARLES FOX / Staff Photographer

"Marines Call It That 2,000 Yard Stare," by Tom Lea, hangs at left as a visitor walks through the exhibition. "I painted my way through the war," said New Hope's Paul Rickert, whose work from Vietnam is on display.

War through painter's eye

By Art Carey

INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

Working in oil and watercolor, New Hope artist Paul Rickert paints luminous scenes of the Maine coast and moody streetscapes of Chestnut Hill, where he once lived. He is fascinated by the mysteries of fog and hidden narratives beneath "the subtle drone of ordinary life."

But 44 years ago, when he was 19,

Rickert's subject matter was altogether different — soldiers under fire rushing for a chopper, a soldier helping evacuate a wounded comrade, a soldier on a gurney linked to life by an IV line.

Rickert was a combat artist in Vietnam, one of dozens assigned by the Army to create a visual record of that long, inglorious war. His paintings and drawings are among more than 250 works

of art in a magnificent new exhibition at the National Constitution Center, "Art of the American Soldier," opening Friday and continuing through Jan. 11.

Drawn from the Army's rarely seen collection of nearly 16,000 paintings, watercolors, drawings, and cartoons, the show is an extraordinary sampling of the artistic impressions of soldiers from World See **WAR ART** on A16

Report: Greene should be fired

The internal PHA document cites a plot to hide sex claims.

By Jeff Shields, Jennifer Lin, and Nathan Gorenstein

INQUIRER STAFF WRITERS

Philadelphia Housing Authority Executive Director Carl R. Greene should be terminated immediately for engaging with subordinates in a conspiracy to conceal four sexual-harassment claims, according to an internal report obtained by The Inquirer.

The 12-page document, expected to be presented to the PHA Board of Commissioners in a closed-door session Thursday, called Greene "a serial sexual harasser" who "mentally tortured, physically assaulted, and professionally damaged" four female employees.

It described a "modus operandi" in which Greene would pick a target, change her job so that it brought her in close professional and/or physical contact with him, then insist on going out socially "under the guise of discussing work with her."

He would then offer raises and promotions, the report states, "then See **PHA** on A15

■ A suit says an ex-PHA official paid a price for confronting Greene. **A15.**

Food delivered fast? There's an "app" for that.

Now, takeout at the ball game

By Michael Klein

INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

Bottom of the first, two on, one out, Howard at bat, and you're 10-deep in Ashburn Alley, behind a sea of people, your head whipping back and forth to home plate, as you stand in line awaiting a roast pork with long hot from Tony Luke's.

Wouldn't it be great if you could order food from your seat and

someone would bring it to you?

That day has come.

In an arrangement touted as the first of its kind in professional sports, the Phillies, Major League Baseball, and stadium concessionaire Aramark are allowing fans to skip the lines and wirelessly order premium sandwiches and beverages, and delivery is promised in less than 30 minutes.

Even in the cheap seats.

In theory, the only hitch is that you must use an iPhone or an iPad 3G running a new release of Major League Baseball's At Bat 2010 or At Bat 2010 Lite "app," which the league, the Phillies, and Aramark modified for Citizens Bank Park.

In a pregame demonstration Tuesday, the technology worked fine.

See **BALLPARK** on A10



DAVID M WARREN / Staff Photographer

Food delivered to his seat, Paul Sandmeyer had his hands full at the Phillies' game Wednesday.

A hot start to fall may herald a mild season.

No frost in sight for the pumpkin

By Anthony R. Wood

INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

The sunlight is becoming ever more oblique, the nights are about as long as the days, and, officially, the seasons have changed.

Apparently, however, the atmosphere hasn't noticed.

The extraordinary warmth that characterized the hottest summer on record in Philadelphia and the related intensifying dryness have lapped into the brand-new season.

On Wednesday, when the last gasp of summer expired at 11:09 p.m., the temperature hit 90 for the 54th time this year, beating the record of 53 set in 1991.

On the first day of fall Thursday, the temperature is headed to the July-like mid-80s, then back to the familiar low 90s on Friday.

Although early speculation suggests a winter on the mild side, informed sources believe that eventually, it will get cooler.

Whether it will get wetter is a whole other matter, and the rapid browning throughout the region is a See **WEATHER** on A16

CHAPTER 5 OF 8 SHADOW WAR: AN ELITE PHILADELPHIA SQUAD'S SECRET MISSION AGAINST IRAN

Treasure Trove

After the sting, U.S. agents began to probe the Iranian's laptop. What would it reveal of Iran's military plans? By John Shiffman

თბილისი

TBILISI, REPUBLIC OF GEORGIA, OCTOBER 2007

The Iranian arms broker Amir Hossein Ardebili found himself locked in Tbilisi's notorious Prison No. 5. The crumbling, filthy facility, a 19th-century factory converted to a desolate jail, was largely shuttered in darkness, crammed with sweaty, shirtless prisoners. They slept in shifts, up to 74 inmates in a holding pen.

"We washed in the toilet," Ardebili recalled.

Human Rights Watch and the

European Commission for the Prevention of Torture had repeatedly cited Prison No. 5 for inhumane conditions. A year earlier, guards killed seven inmates during a riot.

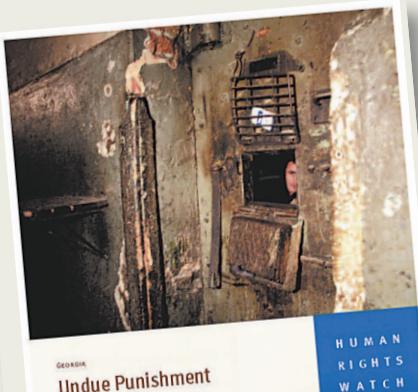
And yet, what Ardebili feared most was extradition.

If sent to the United States, his lawyer argued to the Georgian courts, this would violate Ardebili's human rights — for sure, he would be tortured.

PHILADELPHIA, OCTOBER 2007

Although Ardebili fought extradition, his laptop was already in U.S. hands. See **SHADOW WAR** on A12

A 2006 Human Rights Watch report on Tbilisi Prison No. 5, where Ardebili was held.



Undue Punishment

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

THE STORY SO FAR

An Iranian arms broker is arrested in the Republic of Georgia after a sting by U.S. Homeland Security agents. As the Iranian sits in a Tbilisi prison, the U.S. agents scramble to extradite him to Wilmington.

philly.com

Find additional images, videos, and interviews at www.philly.com/ShadowWar

ONLINE SPOTLIGHT

Follow the candidates and the issues in key November races — and submit a question to the candidates — at www.philly.com/Election2010

Today's Deal

Philly Dealyo, a deal-of-the-day website, offers specials on goods and services. Today, get half off B-52 tickets at the Electric Factory. Go to phillydealyo.com to get yours.

WEATHER

High 88, Low 69

Mostly sunny and very warm Thursday. Temperature climbs into the 90s Friday. Air quality: Moderate. Full seven-day forecast, **B11.**

MAGAZINE

Passion for jazz resonates

Center City's lone live jazz room keeps Philadelphia sound alive. **E1.**

FOOD

The Jewish Thanksgiving

Trends favoring locally grown food spark new interest in Sukkot. **F1.**



REGION

Brave battle for former pro

Tom Schafer, the Moonlight Graham of the NFL, is putting up a mighty fight against cancer. **Daniel Rubin, B1.**

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A flow of raw data, a worrisome delay

PHILADELPHIA

TBILISI, GEORGIA
SHIRAZ, IRAN



DAVID M WARREN / Staff Photographer

After the Iranian's arrest, his bulky Gigabyte-brand computer was hand-carried to Homeland Security offices on Chestnut Street. Its contents would keep U.S. agents around the world busy with investigations for years.

SHADOW WAR from A1
After his arrest, the bulky Gigabyte-brand computer was hand-carried to the U.S. Homeland Security/Immigration and Customs Enforcement offices on Chestnut Street.

Once a judge signed a search warrant, ICE computer experts got to work. In a windowless room, they cracked open the laptop shell, removed the hard drive, and copied it. They pasted the copied data onto the hard drives of six clean computers and returned the laptop to the evidence vault.

On two computers, they placed complete copies of Ardebili's laptop. These would be searched and analyzed by a sophisticated program called Forensic Toolkit, software that allowed agents to search every file, every e-mail, every website visited, even those Ardebili had deleted.

A rudimentary search for the word *missile*, for example, returned hits in 1,498 files.

To sort data in a different way, the agents put the same material onto the four other computers, dividing it by file type, such as PDF or JPEG.

The techies easily broke the passwords. Most were as simple as "1111," even "123."

The agents began sifting through years of data, 101,000 files in all. They found PDFs of brochures from American companies, Excel spreadsheets of price quotes, PowerPoint presentations from U.S. and Canadian weapons manufacturers, and Word documents of correspondence and shipping information.

The files clearly incriminated Ardebili. They provided hard evidence that he'd bought millions of dollars worth of military-grade technology. More important, the files revealed what the Iranians were asking for — what they needed to upgrade, resupply, and expand their army, navy, and air force.

For example, agents discovered evidence that the Iranian navy planned to wrap 40 vessel hulls with stealth technology designed to avoid U.S. radar.

And they discovered a deal with an unwitting Arizona firm for at least 124 microcompressors, the very make and model of a component used to trigger IEDs in Iraq and Afghanistan — creating an indirect but startling link between Ardebili and some roadside bombs responsible for more than 2,000 U.S. troop deaths.



A laptop deal revealed an indirect but startling link to roadside bombs — microchips used to trigger IEDs.

The computer files were also filled with technical spec sheets and complex drawings the Homeland Security agents did not understand or recognize.

The agents doubted that Ardebili

dabbled in nuclear technology, but they couldn't be certain. They needed help.

They called Washington.

شیراز

SHIRAZ, IRAN, NOVEMBER 2007



Negine Ardebili was no fool. She was a college student majoring in genetics, the daughter of a biophysics professor, wife of the successful Shiraz businessman Amir Ardebili.

Yet she had believed her father-in-law's lame lie.

When he'd returned from Tbilisi in October — arriving in Shiraz without his son — he'd explained it this way: Amir had been required to stay behind as a witness to the arrest of an American charged with illegale arms sales. He'd be back soon.

But as days became weeks and now a month with no word from her Amir — no calls, not even an e-mail — Negine grew angry and frustrated. What was happening? Where was her new husband?

In the customs of her culture, Negine could not confront her father-in-law. So she waited for the right moment and went through his things. She found a Georgian court document that revealed the truth.

Negine was incredulous with rage. Her husband was in prison in Tbilisi. Worse, the Americans wanted him to stand trial in the United States.

She sat in their new home, thinking: Will I ever see Amir again?

WILMINGTON, NOV. 8, 2007

The American prosecutor was beginning to wonder the same thing: Would he ever see Ardebili again?

Without an extradition treaty between the two nations, things were moving slowly.

Assistant U.S. Attorney David Hall was optimistic, but knew extradition was never a sure thing. In recent years, U.S. agents had arrested Iranian arms dealers in Hong Kong, France, Germany, and Austria, friendly, stable nations with established court systems. Yet none had been extradited, and a few had even been released and returned to Iran.

The situation in Georgia was also becoming far more complex. Iran was allegedly applying pressure, warning of dire repercussions if Ardebili were extradited to the United States. According to a report from the U.S. Embassy in Tbilisi,

Iran was threatening to cut off Georgia's natural-gas supply in the middle of a bone-chilling winter.

What's more, U.S. agents learned of an alleged Iranian plot to have Ardebili poisoned before he could be extradited to the United States.

Georgian officials, meanwhile, were grappling with tense domestic affairs, including increasingly violent protests against the government. In early November, riot police bearing batons and tear gas beat back protesting crowds, injuring hundreds, damaging Georgia's reputation as a post-Soviet democracy and straining relations with the United States.

"The situation in ROG [Republic of Georgia] is worsening," a U.S. Embassy official reported to Hall on Nov. 8. "A state of emergency has been declared. The army has closed main highways. Commercial air traffic is expected to be suspended. Deputy ICE attaché is locked down at embassy. Ominously, Ministry of Justice has not been able to reach the prison by phone."

Georgia's president ultimately eased tensions by calling for early elections in January. Shortly thereafter, Hall learned that the Georgian Supreme Court was expected to take up Ardebili's case soon.

Start making plans now, the Georgians hinted. Once the court rules, you will have 24 hours to pick up Ardebili. The Georgians, it appeared, were eager to wash their hands of the whole messy affair.

PHILADELPHIA, NOVEMBER 2007

The squad from the Department of Energy specialized in high-tech weapons of war.

These included seemingly harmless but critical parts needed to build a nuclear bomb.

The DOE team arrived soon after the call from Philadelphia, setting up at the Holiday Inn on Pattison Avenue. After scanning Ardebili's laptop for 48 hours, the scientists emerged with good news: no evidence of nuclear weapons.

What they found surprising, however, was the sheer volume of military-grade trading going on.

"They told us they'd never seen a prolific Iranian buyer," an agent recalled. "The guy seemed to be working all the time, trying to buy stuff from American companies 24/7."

To help the agents dig through the data, including 26,000 e-mail messages, the Pentagon and Department of Homeland Security sent help — experts on 14-day and month-long assignments. Raw data flowed to Washington; intelligence officials visited Philadelphia.

From Ardebili's laptop, agents traced 33 bank transfers — money sent from Tehran via Germany to the U.S. accounts of American manufacturers. They also found transactions involving 70 American companies, 16 of which held large Pentagon contracts.

Homeland Security agents identified two dozen Iranian procurement agents — men just like Ardebili — as well as 50 Iranian government subsidiaries buying weapons and components for the Islamic Republic's military.

Ardebili's laptop would keep U.S.



agents around the world busy with investigations for years. Now all they lacked was Ardebili.

CHANTILLY, VA., JAN. 21, 2008

On a cold, clear morning, prosecutor Hall and the ICE team strode toward an unmarked Gulfstream IV jet at Washington Dulles International Airport.

Tipped that the Georgian Supreme Court was poised to deliver a ruling, the Americans needed to be in position. They would fly to central Europe and wait for word from Tbilisi.

For such a time-sensitive extradition, the ICE team couldn't rely on a commercial flight. And a marked U.S. plane might make a fat target if the Iranians were lying in wait.

The G-IV wasn't cheap. A week-long rental would run \$250,000, perhaps more.

The team boarded the jet carrying laptops and business clothes, no weapons. The team leader, undercover supervisor agent John Richards (not his real name), believed they should arrive dressed for a legal prisoner transfer, not a covert rendition.



U.S. agents board the plane to Tbilisi.

As they settled into the plush seats, someone from the charter company approached Richards.

Sorry, he said, there's been a change. The plane will have to refuel in Amsterdam, complicating costs. The new tab will be closer to \$300,000.

Normally, such a major change would delay the flight or even scuttle it, jeopardizing the case. But by a stroke of luck, one of the three undercover agents who had stung Ardebili in Tbilisi now worked in Washington, for the very official supervising overseas operations.

Richards called the agent, Patrick Lechleitner. It was Martin Luther King's Birthday and ICE offices were closed. Richards reached Lechleitner out shopping with his wife.

"We're on board, getting ready to close the doors here and take off," Richards told Lechleitner. He didn't have to explain that this opportunity might represent the only chance to grab Ardebili.

Lechleitner called HQ. The middle managers on holiday duty balked. Lechleitner called Richards to apologize: Clearly, the bureaucrats didn't understand the stakes.

Taking this in, the restless Richards glanced down the cabin, his ICE squad ready to go. The former Philly street cop knew what to do. Shouting into the phone at his friend, Richards said, "What's that, pal? I can't you hear you. Sorry, you're breaking up. You're breaking up..."

Richards snapped the phone shut and shrugged. "I guess we're OK," he said. Take off, he told the pilot. As the plane taxied, Richards hoped Lechleitner had his back, but he wouldn't know until they got to Amsterdam.

He needn't have worried.

Lechleitner could guess what Richards was up to. He took a deep breath. He might lose his job for this, Lechleitner thought, but his guys were operational. He couldn't abandon them. He called HQ back.

"The flight change is authorized," he said.

"Who's authorizing it?" the duty officer asked.

"Put my name on it."

Contact staff writer John Shiffman at 301-320-6655 or jshiffman@phillynews.com.

FRIDAY: A SECRET FLIGHT

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Amir Hossein Ardebili, arms broker, Shiraz, Iran.

Negine Ardebili, Amir's wife, Shiraz, Iran.

David Hall, U.S. prosecutor, Wilmington.

John Richards, pseudonym of undercover supervisor, U.S. Homeland Security/Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Philadelphia.

Patrick Lechleitner, ICE agent, Washington.

(three) months as a...
Ardebili, born on July 3...
the Islamic Republic of...

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In the interests of safety, Ardebili and the undercover ICE agents agreed to be interviewed only on the condition that certain details be omitted from this series.

Learn more at www.philly.com/shadowwar

REPORTER ON THE RADIO

Listen in as reporter John Shiffman discusses this series at noon Thursday on "Here and Now" on WHYY-FM (90.9).

HOW LIDGE GOT HIS GROOVE BACK

Closer gave up speed for location.



TEMPLE'S SAVIOR

Golden's football revival.

The Philadelphia Inquirer

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PHA Chief Greene Fired by Board

An internal report led to a 4-1 vote to end his 12 years here. Chairman Street called him a "flawed genius."

By Jeff Shields and Nathan Gorenstein
INQUIRER STAFF WRITERS

The Philadelphia Housing Authority's Board of Commissioners on Thursday fired Executive Director Carl R. Greene for his alleged sexual harassment of four female subordinates, ending his 12-year reign as the city's autocratic yet highly acclaimed public-housing czar.

Former Mayor John F. Street, the PHA chairman, described Greene as a "flawed genius" moments before the board voted, 4-1, to terminate his \$306,000-a-year contract. An internal investigation had concluded that Greene was a "true serial sexual harasser" and had engaged in a cover-up with at least four key aides.

"He is like a great athlete with a drug problem. He is the Tiger Woods of public housing," Street said of Greene, whom he had staunchly supported before news of three secret sexual-harassment settlements worth \$648,000 broke in August. A fourth settlement, for \$250,000, had also been agreed upon without the board's knowledge, but not signed.

"He has a fundamental character flaw that will forever obscure his work as the greatest executive director in the histo-

ry of the Philadelphia Housing Authority," Street said.

Greene, lauded here and across the country for revitalizing entire neighborhoods and remaking the face of public housing in Philadelphia, was suspended by the board in August with pay pending its review, which is now complete.

Greene initially went into seclusion. See **GREENE** on A15



Carl R. Greene is accused of sexual harassment.

■ Ex-PHA worker speaks for the first time about 2004 harassment claim. **A15.**

Convention Center mulls new path to labor peace

Its latest proposal calls for a "core workforce" of union members who would get special hospitality training.

By Marcia Gelbart
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

The Pennsylvania Convention Center Authority is abandoning plans to eliminate any of the six labor unions that work in the building, conceding that it has no legal power, for now, to do so.

Instead, the state-appointed authority, seeking to reduce costly work rules, is looking to draw members from the unions to create a "core workforce" that would undergo special hospitality training before being allowed to set up and dismantle convention exhibits.

The authority embraced the strategy during a closed-door meeting last week, according to several people who were there, although no formal action occurred.

The new approach reflects the authority's goal of restructuring the workforce to adjust to stiffer competition. Major meeting planners complain that labor practices in Philadelphia are unnecessarily difficult and costly, such as having to pay union workers to hang signs in 300-square-foot exhibit booths.

But questions remain about the extent to which fundamental change can occur at the Convention Center, especially before the fast-approaching March opening of the building's \$786 million expansion. See **UNIONS** on A12

SugarHouse rush



Within 10 minutes of its grand opening Thursday, the 45,000-square-foot SugarHouse Casino was packed with people seeking to be part of Philadelphia history and maybe to beat the odds at the tables and slots.

MICHAEL S. WIRTZ / Staff Photographer

A mix of Philly and Vegas

By Suzette Parmley
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

Philly tradition (Ben Franklin and Mummers) and Vegas glitz (sequined showgirls) ushered in the city's first casino together Thursday, as SugarHouse officially flung open its glass doors for a grand opening along the Delaware River waterfront.

At 1:30 p.m., Franklin (portrayed by Ralph Archbold) arrived by carriage to deliver the key to a giant

More Coverage

- More than 1,000 gamblers lined up for the opening. **A6.**
- Inga Saffron: A sweet path by an asphalt sea. **F1.**

padlock, saying he was there to fulfill one of Americans' inalienable rights after life and liberty. "The pursuit of happiness. I'm

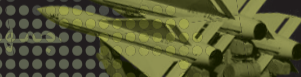
here for happiness," he told a rambunctious crowd that by just after noon had swelled to more than 1,000 and snaked around the entire front of the casino facing Delaware Avenue.

Some endured the nearly 90-degree heat for several hours so they could be among the first to get in — like Rosalina Martinez, 56, of North Philadelphia, who arrived at 10:30 a.m.

See **CASINO** on A6

CHAPTER 6 OF 8

SHADOW WAR: AN ELITE PHILADELPHIA SQUAD'S SECRET MISSION AGAINST IRAN



A Secret Flight

The Americans had mere hours to grab the Iranian arms broker. Would anyone try to stop them? By John Shiffman / Staff Writer

თბილისი

TBILISI, REPUBLIC OF GEORGIA, JAN. 26, 2008

On his 116th day in custody, the Iranian arms broker Amir Ardebili was rousted before dawn.

Something important is happening, the prisoner thought. Tbilisi Prison No. 5 was normally quiet on weekends. Where are you taking me? he asked the Georgian guards. They didn't answer.

"They brought me to a room which was full of police and asked me to take off my clothes," Ardebili



In Tbilisi, arms dealer Amir Ardebili is whisked from prison to the courthouse to the airport — where U.S. agents waited. His greatest fear: Extradition.

recalled. He was strip-searched, handcuffed, and brought to a car. "I expected to see an Iranian embassy official."

Instead, they took him before a judge for a brief hearing conducted in Georgian, a language he didn't know.

They locked him, until nightfall, in a courthouse holding room with four officers. None spoke his language, Farsi. He was not fed, he recalled, nor told what was happening. Around midnight, an interpreter appeared.

"Time to go!" "Where are we going?" Ardebili See **SHADOW WAR** on A14

THE STORY SO FAR

As the Georgian Supreme Court prepares to rule on extraditing an Iranian arms broker arrested during a U.S. sting in Tbilisi, agents from Philadelphia arrive in an unmarked jet.

philly.com

Find additional videos, images, and interviews at www.philly.com/ShadowWar

Phila. leads in recovery movement

By Don Sapatkin
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

Nine months and nine days after she pushed beyond the alcohol and crack cocaine that consumed a decade of her life, April Steele is doing homework online for a college she never expected to attend.

Steele does not own a computer. Her world is still far from stable. So she spends six hours a day at the Philadelphia Recovery Community Center, where people a few years ahead on the same journey teach her the software, invite her to Friday game nights (with cola, not coke) and Thursday movies (*Clean and Sober*), and ask how she's feeling, every day.

"When you are starting over, it really helps. You have no idea," said Steele, 44.

Apparently, some people do have an idea, and their name may surprise you: the City of Philadelphia.

The city has been making sweeping changes in how it deals with behavioral health, embracing See **RECOVERY** on A16

Today's Deal



Philly Dealyo is a deal-of-the-day website that offers specials on goods and services. Today, get half

off at BounceU. Go to phillydealyo.com to get yours.

OBITUARY

Eddie Fisher dies

The Philadelphia-born pop singer was known for his marriages to Elizabeth Taylor, Connie Stevens, and Debbie Reynolds. He was 82. **B10.**

WEATHER

High 93, Low 69



Mostly sunny and hot Friday. Cooler Sunday with a chance of rain. Air quality: Moderate. NBC10 forecast, **B11.**

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SHADOW WAR: AN ELITE PHILADELPHIA SQUAD'S SECRET MISSION AGAINST IRAN



U.S. agents had Ardebili in their custody. They debated which treatment of him would elicit the best result.

A 13-hour flight, a secret identity

TBILISI, GEORGIA

PHILADELPHIA



SHADOW WAR from A1 asked. “To the airport!”

“But what about court? I need to defend myself.”

“The decision has been made without you. You must go.”

Confused and disoriented, Ardebili began to cry. “I’m thinking about my family, my new wife, my father,” he recalled. “I could not believe it. I asked to call my family. I asked to see Iran embassy officials. They said, ‘No, you can’t.’”

Two guards cuffed themselves to Ardebili’s wrists. The three men, now chained together, climbed into a white police van. The driver headed out toward George W. Bush Avenue and the airport.

At the airport, seven Americans from Philadelphia stood by their idling Gulfstream jet.

“It’s freezing, dark, middle of the night, and we’re tired but keyed up,” recalled U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agent Michael Ronayne. “The airport is empty, and then you see a stray dog walking across the runway. And you’re thinking to yourself, ‘A stray dog on a runway? Where the hell am I?’”

The Americans — Ronayne, his restless supervisor John Richards, veteran prosecutor David Hall, and five others — had been poised in Vienna for the final extradition ruling, ready to reach Tbilisi in hours. Ronayne and his team worried about security, unsure what Iran knew or might try to do.

Their plane was unmarked, but a quick Google search of the tail number would reveal its Washington base. The Tbilisi airport was surrounded by deep woods, offering plenty of places to launch an anti-aircraft missile.

The pilot warned the agents to wear their seat belts. To evade missiles and light arms fire, the pilots had made a hard landing. Takeoff would be “near vertical.”

And if the prisoner got out of hand, the pilot reassured them, he would drop cabin air pressure until all passengers lost consciousness. “We did it once with an unruly rock band,” he explained wryly.

A scare in Vienna had only increased the tension.

While killing time with the rest of the guys in a hotel lobby, Ronayne caught the gaze of a Middle Eastern-looking man — gray hair, tan suit, no tie.

“He’s glaring right at me, like a laser putting a hole through my head,” Ronayne recalled. The ICE agent turned away briefly, then back. The guy was still staring.

It drew the agents’ attention because Ronayne himself looks intimidating: bald with scars, piercing sage eyes, the hulking physique of a professional athlete.

Then, as Ronayne crossed the lobby, another man bumped into him — deliberately, the agent thought, as if someone were trying to send him a message. Later, a third man clumsily followed one of the agents into a single-stall bathroom, which brought them awkwardly nose to nose. No words were exchanged, and the guy split.

The Americans never learned if the tails were Austrian, Iranian, or even Russian. But still. Someone was watching them.

As they waited on the Tbilisi tarmac, ICE agent Mike Rodgers asked Ronayne how he planned to treat Ardebili on the plane.

Keep him shackled and on a tight leash, Ronayne said. Let him know right away who’s in charge, that escape is impossible.

He didn’t plan to bind Ardebili

the way the military would — latched to the floor in black hood and ear plugs. But he’d keep him cuffed.

Well, Rodgers said, what if you took off the cuffs and treated him like a gentleman?

He’s not going anywhere. He’s just spent four months in a Georgian hellhole. He’s probably weak and hasn’t seen a decent meal in weeks. You never know what a little kindness might get you.

Ronayne promised to think about it.

The police van drove Ardebili directly onto the tarmac.

The Iranian strained to see through the windshield. They were driving toward a small, sleek, white jet.

The van stopped beside the plane. The guards uncuffed him. As Ardebili stepped out, he could hear people speaking English. Men in dark suits with close-cropped hair.

Americans!

He felt his head swirl, “like I would lose consciousness.”

Someone put a camera in his face and flashed a picture. An American guided him toward the stairs of the plane.

“A voice pounded in my head,” Ardebili recalled. “The voice said, ‘Amir, you’re never going back to your country.’ And I wished I was dead, because at least then my body would go home to my family.”

An American stepped forward. He said he was from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. “We’re taking you to the United States. ...”

Ardebili didn’t believe him.

He figured he was headed for one of the CIA’s secret prisons in Poland or Thailand. Maybe Guantanamo.



Amir Ardebili on the flight to the U.S.

Slumped in a chair, Ardebili wasn’t going to put up a fight. “Uncuff him.”

Someone brought sandwiches, chocolates, and sodas to the nervous prisoner. Ronayne nudged the tray closer. “You hungry? Eat.”

The Iranian stuffed half a sandwich into his mouth.

The Gulfstream roared to take-off speed, jerking to a 60-degree angle, pinning the passengers to their seats. Once the plane leveled, Ronayne and his boss, Richards — not his real name — took turns explaining what was happening. They spoke in English:

We’re flying to Delaware, where you’re charged with violating the arms embargo, money laundering, and conspiracy. You’ll be brought before a judge in Delaware. If you don’t confess, you will stand trial. If you lose, you could spend the next 20 years in a U.S. prison.

You have a right to an attorney. While you can have an attorney paid for by the Iranian government, you should be careful, because that

lawyer will probably report everything you say back to Tehran. You tell the Iranian lawyer the wrong thing, and it might endanger your family.

On the other hand, we can provide you an American lawyer, free. This lawyer’s allegiance will be only to you.

Ardebili kept eating. Eventually, he picked up the Miranda waiver, skimmed it, and signed it. He looked up.

Ronayne began gently with background information and eased into the charges — the radar microchips, the F-4 computer, and the gyroscopes Ardebili had purchased in Tbilisi. Like most criminals, Richards observed, Ardebili shifted blame to others.

After 90 minutes, the agents let Ardebili take a break. He slept for two hours.

When the agents woke him, they fed him and went through the charges again.

As the plane drew close to the U.S. coastline, Ardebili began to recant much of what he’d said.

Richards, the ex-Philly cop, offered the advice he gave virtually everyone he’d ever arrested: Confess and we’ll work with you. Lie and go to jail for a long time.

“It’s your choice, pal,” he said. “The facts are the facts. You take the route you want to go.”

NEW CASTLE, DEL., JAN. 27, 2008

Thirteen hours after take-off, the secret flight from Tbilisi touched down at the tiny New Castle Airport.

It was 1:15 a.m. on a Sunday. As the G-4 taxied, the agents looked out and saw not just the expected security team in bulletproof vests, but also the brass in suits, even the U.S. attorney.

The big bosses never showed during operations. Certainly not so early on a Sunday. “I thought, ‘What have we done wrong?’” one of the agents recalled.

On the contrary, the supervisors had come to salute them, thrilled they were returning with their prize.

When the plane door opened, the agents emerged with Ardebili, hustling him into a U.S. marshal’s SUV, poised to deliver the Iranian to a waiting magistrate at the courthouse in Wilmington. The federal court there had jurisdiction because Ardebili’s deposit had been wired to a Delaware bank.

The exhausted agents joined the caravan. As they sped through empty streets, Special Agent in Charge John Kelleghan tapped a BlackBerry alert to Washington.

The reply came back in seconds: “Don’t have to tell you. This is huge!”

PHILADELPHIA, JAN. 27, 2008

After a quick 2 a.m. court hearing in Wilmington, Ardebili arrived at the federal government’s high-rise prison on Arch Street.

“Your name is now Hossein Shiraz.”

Ardebili looked quizzically at the agent delivering him.

“Hossein Shiraz,” the agent said. “This is for your protection.”

Also for your protection, the agent explained, your case will remain sealed, secret — for now.

Ardebili didn’t respond. If the Americans were trying to protect him from other prisoners or Iranian agents, the new name struck

him as clumsy.

Shiraz was his hometown. Hossein, his middle name.

Guards led him to the eighth floor, solitary confinement, where prisoners are locked down 23 hours a day.

“For your protection.”

WILMINGTON, JAN. 30, 2008

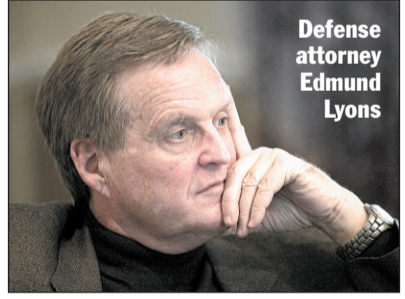
“Can the U.S. government really do this?”

The thought ricocheted around the defense lawyer’s mind: Can the U.S. government lure a foreigner from his homeland to a sting in a third country, then charge him with breaking U.S. law? Even if the “crime” isn’t a crime in his home country?

Can it then covertly extradite him to the United States? Fly him here and lock him up in secret, under a fake name?

Edmund D. “Dan” Lyons was a seasoned lawyer, one of Wilmington’s best, familiar with high-profile cases. Decades ago as a prosecutor, he’d put a few Hells Angels behind bars. As a defense lawyer, he’d lost a client on death row, witnessing Delaware’s first execution by hanging in a half-century. Lyons had also represented Gerard Capano, the key witness against his brother Thomas, who was convicted of killing a lover, Anne Marie Fahey, the gubernatorial aide.

A federal judge had called Lyons the day after Ardebili landed: Would he represent the Iranian? Lyons hadn’t taken a court-appointed case in years, largely because he’d become so disenchanted following his death-penalty experience.



Defense attorney Edmund Lyons

But this case seemed too intriguing to turn down.

Sworn to secrecy, Lyons dug into the legal research. To his surprise, he quickly saw that, yes, case law was on the government’s side. Fair or not, Ardebili was looking at a long stretch in U.S. prison.

PHILADELPHIA, JAN. 31, 2008

Ardebili’s first visitor was a tall, distinguished-looking man. He said that his name was Lyons and that he was the court-appointed defense lawyer.

Lyons explained his role, and said that bail was impossible and that they ought to figure out a defense. To begin, the lawyer asked about the arrest in Tbilisi.

“I don’t know what this is about,” Ardebili protested.

“Well, the U.S. government sure thinks you’ve done something. They’ve gone to a lot of trouble to bring you here.”

“Really, Mr. Lyons, I am a simple man.”

Lyons grimaced. “Oh, cut the crap, will you?”

Ardebili smiled. This guy was sharp.

Contact staff writer John Shiffman at 301-320-6655 or jshiffman@phillynews.com.

◆ SATURDAY: CONNECTIONS

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Amir Hossein Ardebili, arms broker, Shiraz, Iran.

Michael Ronayne, agent, U.S. Homeland Security / Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Philadelphia.

John Richards, pseudonym of undercover ICE supervisor, Philadelphia.

David Hall, U.S. prosecutor, Wilmington.

Edmund D. “Dan” Lyons, defense attorney, Wilmington.

HOW THIS SERIES WAS REPORTED

Shadow War is based on nine months of reporting, including U.S., Iranian, and Republic of Georgia documents; e-mail messages; medical files; undercover video; wiretaps; and other digital media obtained by The Inquirer.

It also draws on extensive interviews with:

◆ Amir Ardebili; his wife, Negine; mother, Zahra Ahkami; and lawyers Edmund “Dan” Lyons and Ross Reghabi.

◆ Assistant U.S. Attorney David Hall and U.S. Attorney David Weiss of Delaware.

◆ U.S. Homeland Security/ICE agents John Kelleghan, Andrew McLees, Clark Settles, Michael Ronayne, and Patrick Lechleitner. Two agents — “Darius” and “John Richards” — asked that their true names not be published, because they still work undercover.

◆ Defense Criminal Investigative Service agents Ed Bradley and Robert Lerario.

An Iranian diplomat in Washington spoke informally, but his government declined an interview.

In the interests of safety, Ardebili and the undercover ICE agents agreed to be interviewed only on the condition that certain details be omitted from this series.

Learn more at www.philly.com/shadowwar

**PHILLIES MAKE METS THEIR 11TH STRAIGHT VICTIM****OWLS AIM TO MAKE SOME NOISE OF THEIR OWN SPORTS**

The Philadelphia Inquirer

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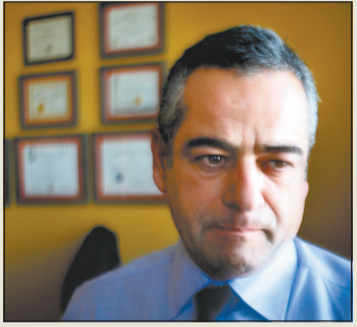
CHAPTER 7 OF 8 SHADOW WAR: AN ELITE PHILADELPHIA SQUAD'S SECRET MISSION AGAINST IRAN

Connections

The arms dealer's family had just one contact in the U.S. Was the Iranian in Guantanamo? Was he alive? By John Shiffman, Staff Writer**BEVERLY HILLS, MARCH 2008****T**he estimated one million Iranian Americans in L.A. joke that they live in Tehrangeles.

They use a Farsi-edition Yellow Pages and patronize Persian shops along Wilshire Boulevard. They follow Iranian politics, gossip about the CIA station in L.A., and whisper about Tehran's local spy network. The most successful live and work in the Iranian diaspora's financial capital, Beverly Hills.

Amir Ardebili's family had just one contact in Los Angeles. But it was a good one.

VICKI VALERIO / For The Inquirer **Beverly Hills lawyer Ross Reghabi** was contacted by the Iranian's family. Don't worry, he told them. This is America, not Iran. People don't just disappear.

Ardebili's wife's uncle was a fabulously wealthy Beverly Hills cosmetic surgeon. He lived with his new, Vietnamese wife in a mansion that offered panoramic views and a 30-seat theater. The home was so plush that the pop star Pink once shot a video there.

When Ardebili's wife called from Iran, the rich uncle turned to a Beverly Hills lawyer he trusted, Ross Reghabi.

The rich uncle told Reghabi that his nephew Amir had been arrested in Tbilisi, Georgia, and secretly snatched by the Americans. The family in Iran was distraught. See **SHADOW BOX** on A8**THE STORY SO FAR***As an Iranian arms broker is held secretly in a Philadelphia prison under a fake name, his frantic family searches for him. Meantime, U.S. agents mine data from his laptop to launch other investigations.***philly.com**See exclusive videos, images, and interviews only at **www.philly.com/ShadowWar**

Obama, Iranian leader wrangle

He accused Ahmadinejad of making "hateful" comments in saying at the U.N. that most of the world thought the U.S. was behind 9/11.

By Matthew Lee ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — President Obama and Iranian leader Mahmoud Ahmadinejad traded heated remarks Friday on the emotional subject of the 9/11 attacks, and hopes for a quick resumption of talks on Iran's suspect nuclear program appeared to fade.

Obama accused Ahmadinejad of making "offensive" and "hateful" comments when the Iranian leader said most of the world thought the United States was behind the attacks to benefit Israel. Ahmadinejad defended his remarks from a day earlier at the U.N. General Assembly and suggested that a fact-finding panel be created by the United Nations to look into who was behind the attacks.

"It was offensive," Obama said in an interview with the Persian service of the BBC that was to be broadcast to the Iranian people. "It was hateful."

"And particularly for him to make the statement here in Manhattan, just a little north of ground zero, where families lost their loved ones, people of all faiths, all ethnicities who see this as the seminal tragedy of this generation, for him to make a statement like that was inexcusable," Obama said.

Ahmadinejad's remarks would make the American people even more wary about dealing with his government, Obama said.

"For Ahmadinejad to come to somebody else's country and then to suggest somehow that the worst tragedy that's been experienced here, an attack that killed 3,000 people, was somehow the responsibility of the government of that country, is something that defies not just common sense but common decency." See **OBAMA** on A9

INSIDE

BUSINESS**NBC's Zucker is leaving**NBC Universal's top executive, Jeffrey Zucker, and Comcast will part ways when the cable giant takes control of NBCU. **A11.****SIDESHOW****Colbert goes to Washington**Staying in character, he testified on immigrant farm labor. **C1.****WEATHER****High 88, Low 60**Mostly sunny, breezy and warm Saturday. Clouds and light rain roll in late Sunday. Air quality: Good to moderate. Exclusive NBC10 EarthWatch forecast, **B5.****INDEX**Business **A11** Movies **C2**
Comics **C4** Obituaries **B4**
Editorials **A10** Rally **E10**
Lotteries **E12** Stocks **A12**
Marketplace **D1** Television **C6****ONLINE SPOTLIGHT**Follow the campaigns and the issues in key Nov. races — and help pick questions for the candidates — at **www.philly.com/Election2010.**

Gay Air Force major wins judge's ruling

TED S. WARREN / Associated Press **Margaret Witt** (right) with her partner, Laurie McChesney.

Military is told to reinstate nurse

By Hal Bernton SEATTLE TIMES

SEATTLE — A federal judge in Tacoma, Wash., has ordered the Air Force to reinstate a skilled flight nurse in a closely watched case involving the "don't ask, don't tell" policy on gays serving in the military.

Friday's ruling by U.S. District Judge Ronald Leighton in the case of Maj. Margaret Witt marks the first time since Congress approved the policy in 1993 that a federal judge has ordered the military to allow an openly gay service member to serve in the armed forces.

Leighton ruled that evidence showed reinstating Witt "would not adversely affect" morale or cohesion in her unit.

He also said, "There is no evidence that wounded troops care about the sexual orientation of the flight nurse or medical technician tending to their wounds."

Leighton hailed Witt for her role "in a long-term, highly charged civil rights movement," telling her, "Today, you have won." See **GAY** on A3

A highlight-reel catch

AKIRA SUWA / Staff Photographer **Frankford's Quynon Speller** pulls down a touchdown pass during the second quarter of the Pioneers' 33-8 victory over host Bartram on Friday. Teammate Aaron Allison also had a chance to make the grab, which was the first score of the game. For winning coverage of the region's football action, see **Rally**, **E10** and **11.**

Megabus says it's a safe line

The bus firm defended itself after crash, complaints.

By Diane Mastrull INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

The Toronto-bound double-decker Megabus that left Philadelphia the night of Sept. 10 would never reach its destination, slamming instead into a railroad bridge near Syracuse, N.Y., nearly three feet too low for the bus to clear.

Four of the 28 passengers would die, and 20 others would be injured along with the driver, in a trip that

went disturbingly wrong for reasons investigators still are trying to determine.

What that "horrible ... tragic" crash also did, said Dale Moser, president and chief operating officer of Megabus' parent company, CoachUSA, was put "a certain focus by the public on us."

Moser asserts — and federal transportation records seem to support — "that we are a safe compa-

ny. We're not a fly-by-night company."

The government's current rating of the low-cost bus line — derived from compliance-review results, random roadside-safety inspections, and its crash history before the crash — is "satisfactory," said Duane DeBruyne, spokesman for the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA), a divi- See **MEGABUS** on A5**An Appreciation Eddie Fisher**

A star eclipsed by his personal life

By Dan DeLuca and Michael D. Schaffer INQUIRER STAFF WRITERS

Before Fabian, Bobby Rydell, and Frankie Avalon — and *American Bandstand* — turned this city into the teen-idol capital of the world, another bushy-haired, baby-faced singer from Philadelphia made 1950s teenyboppers swoon: Eddie Fisher.

Fisher, 82, who died in Berkeley, Calif., on Wednesday of complications from surgery after breaking a hip this month, was a South Philly grocer's son whose voice carried

him to a stardom that his tumultuous personal life would eclipse.

More than his musical triumphs, Fisher these days is better known for his string of movie-star marriages — to Debbie Reynolds, Elizabeth Taylor, and Connie Stevens — and for being the father of the actress and writer Carrie Fisher.

But in the pre-rock early 1950s, Fisher was a constant hitmaker.

Fisher, known as "Sonny" to his family, began his musical career as a child, singing on WFIL-AM and See **FISHER** on A4

By 24, the South Philly grocer's son had sold 7 million records. But he's better known for his string of marriages.

Las Vegas News Bureau Archives **Eddie Fisher** with first wife Debbie Reynolds (right) and future wife Elizabeth Taylor in 1957.

SHADOW WAR: AN ELITE PHILADELPHIA SQUAD'S SECRET MISSION AGAINST IRAN

In secret isolation, with a fake name

SHADOW BOX from A1
Was he in Guantanamo? Was he even alive?

Reghabi was not a criminal lawyer. He specialized in family and business matters, and taught an advanced accounting class at the University of California, Los Angeles. But he knew enough to assure his friend that the U.S. government did not routinely hold people in secret confinement.

Don't worry, he said. This is America, not Iran. Laws and procedures must be followed. People don't just disappear.

PHILADELPHIA, APRIL 2008

Michael Ronayne, a bald Homeland Security agent with a body-builder's physique, pulled his black SUV up to a safe house on the city's western edge.

He slipped inside, gripping a laptop bag, ready for another day testing the patriotism of U.S. arms manufacturers.

Seven months after the Tbilisi sting, Ronayne and colleagues were still reaping a trove of intelligence and evidence from Ardebili's laptop.

With the Iranian secretly locked away in a Philadelphia prison, Ronayne and other agents had assumed his online persona, posing as the arms broker from Shiraz.

The agents had picked up where Ardebili left off, resuming negotiations with 150 U.S. companies — some of whom knew him by his business name, "Alex Dave." The U.S. agents used the Iranian's e-mail accounts and negotiating style, even his broken-English patois. The tech guys made the e-mails appear to come from inside Iran.

Operation Shakespeare, still secret, had broadened into one of Homeland Security's largest investigations.

So far, the U.S. agents had caught a dozen American companies agreeing to sell military or restricted technology. Soon, the number would grow to 20 — companies based in Arizona, Texas, New York, California, Dubai, and Europe, selling stealth technology, advanced radar, and avionics needed to pilot a Predator drone.

These stings relied on a simple lie: that Ardebili was still in Iran, doing deals.

To continue this deception, the agents would have to keep Ardebili out of the public eye, the charges against him sealed.

And with so many cases developing, the agents knew, the Ardebili case would need to stay secret for many more months, perhaps a year.

BEVERLY HILLS, MAY 2008

Reghabi figured that finding the missing nephew would take only a few phone calls or clicks on the Internet.

"Looking back," Reghabi recalled, "I had no idea what I was getting into."

He searched the national court dockets and prison websites. Nothing.

He called Iran's de facto embassy in Washington and got a copy of the two-page Georgian Supreme Court ruling. It included a reference to Massachusetts, a clue.

Reghabi called prosecutors in Boston, but was rebuffed. Can't help you, they said. No such case on file.

He began phoning the larger U.S. Attorney's Offices — New York, Philadelphia, Washington, Detroit. Again nothing. When he tried Boston once more, someone suggested Wilmington. That office gave him the brush-off.

Frustrated, Reghabi peppered the Justice Department with certified letters. The request was so basic, so fundamental, he believed.

How could they hold a man in secret, deny him access to a lawyer? Reghabi wasn't sure what to do next. He considered a lawsuit. But whom would he sue? Where would he file it?

Then, one day in June, he received a mysterious call.

The man refused to identify himself, except to say that he worked for the U.S. government. He seemed to be trying to figure out if Reghabi was an Iranian agent.

Reghabi explained that he was calling on behalf of Ardebili's family in Iran — and that he didn't work for the Islamic Republic and never had.



Edmund D. "Dan" Lyons

The answers must have satisfied the caller. A week later, a lawyer from Wilmington, Edmund D. "Dan" Lyons, called and identified himself as Ardebili's court-appointed defense lawyer.

Lyons arranged for Reghabi and Ardebili to speak by phone. It was Ardebili's first conversation in Farsi in six months. The Beverly Hills lawyer promised to visit soon. Please hurry, Ardebili said.

Reghabi called Ardebili's wife in Iran. Your husband is alive, he said, held under a false name in a prison on the East Coast. Reghabi did not add that the charges carried a likely sentence of 10 years.

At the end of the conversation, he threw out a surprise: "If you like, I have arranged with the Americans for you to visit your husband in prison."

Negine Ardebili quickly agreed and turned to logistics. Getting permission to leave Iran and enter the United States isn't easy, she said. "I think it is impossible."

Don't worry, Reghabi said. Arrangements are under way. Get yourself a passport.

WILMINGTON, MAY 2008

"Raise your right hand."

The Iranian did so.

"Do you swear or affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?"

Ardebili stood in a sealed courtroom, U.S. District Judge Gregory Sleet presiding, paper covering the courtroom windows. Lyons, his local lawyer, stood beside him.

Ardebili was prepared to plead guilty to the four charges against him — violating the arms embargo, money laundering, unlicensed arms export, and conspiracy.

To fight the charges and go to trial would be suicidal, Lyons had advised. The facts were terrible. Video and e-mail evidence were too strong; Ardebili had acted too eagerly to argue entrapment.

And while a jurisdictional protest might look promising on first glance — the Iranian citizen had committed his U.S. crimes while inside Iran — it wasn't a likely winner. Lyons' research showed that U.S. law generally applies to serious crimes against the United States committed outside its borders. He was surprised to find so many rulings supporting the prosecution. What's more, Ardebili had wired a deposit to a bank in Wilmington, creating jurisdiction in Delaware.

The way Lyons had explained it, Ardebili had two options: Make it easy on everyone and plead guilty — face two to eight years in prison. Put everyone through a trial and lose — face 10 to 15 years. That's how the American system worked.

Sleet led Ardebili through the series of questions every defendant is



asked before entering a plea. Do you understand you are giving up your right to trial? Are you pleading guilty because you are in fact guilty? Are you pleading guilty of your own free will?

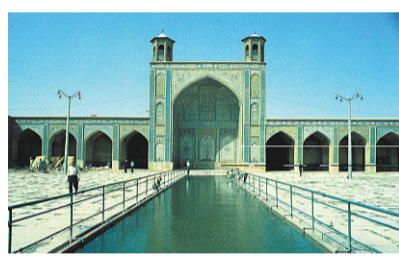
To each question, Ardebili answered yes.

The formal guilty plea that followed felt anticlimactic.

But as Ardebili left the courtroom, he was already regretting what he'd just done.

شیراز

SHIRAZ, IRAN, NOVEMBER 2008



To obtain a passport, the laws of the Islamic Republic of Iran require a wife to receive a husband's permission.

For Negine Ardebili, this was impossible.

She also faced the daunting challenge of obtaining a U.S. visa.

Details of what happened next are murky, but by mid-November, Negine was flying from Tehran to Europe, on to Philadelphia, and from there to Los Angeles.

She spent her first week outside Iran in a disorienting cocoon of jumbo jets and Marriott hotel rooms, guarded by large U.S. agents in polo shirts, unfailingly polite, with pistols on their hips.

Negine's rich uncle met her at Los Angeles International Airport and drove her directly to Beverly Hills.

تهران

TEHRAN, NOVEMBER 2008



The Beverly Hills lawyer approached the Iranian Foreign Ministry with a sheaf of legal documents, uncertain how he'd be received.

Like a lot of Iranian Americans his age, Reghabi had left Iran in the mid-1970s to attend college in the United States, intending to return after graduation. In 1979, his senior year, Shah Reza Pahlavi fell and Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini took power. Reghabi decided to remain in California. He married, raised a family, became a U.S. citizen, and built a law practice catering to Iranian Americans.

He'd returned to Tehran a dozen times, mostly to visit his elderly mother. He treaded carefully, always respectful of the Iranian authorities, keenly aware that because Iran did not recognize his dual citizenship, he could encounter unexpected legal problems.

An assistant foreign minister greeted Reghabi with businesslike detachment.

Reghabi told the minister that Ardebili wanted to rescind his guilty plea and go to trial. "The minister asked if we could win," he recalled.

Perhaps, Reghabi replied. Not based on the evidence — the video and e-mail were too damning. But if the case were argued on the fairness of the law, he'd have a shot at winning on appeal.

Reghabi explained that he disagreed with the court-appointed lawyer's assessment. He believed Ardebili had a good case. What right did the United States have to charge an Iranian for acts committed inside Iran? "This kind of case could go to the U.S. Supreme Court," Reghabi told the minister.

The minister asked how much the defense might cost.

"\$400,000 to \$500,000."

The minister didn't respond.

Come back in a few days, he said. "At the next meeting," Reghabi recalled, the minister said "the government is not in a position to spend that kind of money."

Reghabi pressed. If Iran wouldn't back Ardebili's legal challenge, then why not apply political pressure by making the case public, perhaps taking it to the U.N.? At a minimum, this would anger the Americans, who were trying to keep the arrest secret.

The minister said he'd think about it.

PHILADELPHIA, DEC. 22, 2008

Negine Ardebili stood in the teeming visitors' room inside the Federal Detention Center on Arch Street, surrounded by other inmates' relatives.

These people looked nothing like her uncle's friends in Beverly Hills. "Those families were very scary, everyone staring at me," she recalled. "It felt like the worst day of my life."

Negine was grateful that Reghabi had escorted her from Los Angeles. After an hour's wait, they rode the elevator to the solitary unit on the eighth floor.

A guard guided Negine into a closet of a room, alone. There was a phone by a Plexiglas window that looked into a similar empty room. The walls were concrete, the air stale. She shivered. She had not seen her husband in more than a year.

Ten minutes later, the door to the other room opened.

Amir Ardebili took a seat by the window in front of her. He looked gaunt and wore a baggy green jumpsuit over a bright-orange shirt. He'd grown a short beard. His eyes looked distant, angry.



Negine Ardebili



Amir Ardebili

He picked up the phone.

She didn't know what to say. "I was lost," she recalled. "I didn't want him to see me cry. I couldn't speak. I thought he looked strange. It was not my country."

Amir Ardebili was raging inside, but tried not to show it. He was happy to see her, but guarded, sure that with her visit, the Americans were manipulating him.

"For Amir, it had to be part of a conspiracy," Reghabi recalled. "He could not conceive that the visit was merely a humanitarian gesture by the Americans."

Ardebili and his wife spoke in Farsi. The connection was poor, the sound muffled.

He told her he would be OK. He warned that the guards would be listening. She said she didn't care, she was just happy to see him. He was alive.

After an hour together, he returned to solitary. She flew back to Beverly Hills.

PHILADELPHIA, SPRING 2009

The agents closely monitored Ardebili's few visits with his wife. But any sympathy the agents might have developed melted when they resumed sifting through his laptop.

By now, the agents had reviewed 101,000 documents — detailed evidence of Iran's covert effort to smuggle U.S. military technology, to buy weapons and systems for use against American soldiers and pilots.

The data showed that Ardebili supplied the Iranian military with night-vision goggles, sonar, radar, Kevlar vests.

Some things Ardebili purchased had dual uses, civilian and military. He bought, for instance, microchip components designed for such benign things as a remote-control car lock system. But U.S. officials say this very brand of microchip — made in Arizona and known by its part number, PIC16F84A — has been traced to IEDs used against U.S. soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The laptop data didn't prove why Ardebili bought the components, but it offered leads the agents used to launch more than 100 investigations of U.S. and Iranian companies. And by mid-2009, those clues and evidence had triggered undercover operations on three continents.

The most audacious one would take the agents from Philadelphia to Asia.

Contact staff writer John Shiffman at 301-320-6655 or jshiffman@phillynews.com.

◆ SUNDAY: GOING PUBLIC

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Ross Reghabi, defense lawyer, Beverly Hills.

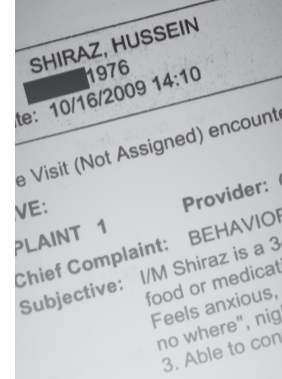
Michael Ronayne, agent, U.S. Homeland Security/Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Philadelphia.

David Hall, assistant U.S. attorney, Wilmington.

Amir Hossein Ardebili, arms broker, Shiraz, Iran.

Negine Ardebili, Amir's wife, Shiraz, Iran.

Edmund D. "Dan" Lyons, defense lawyer, Wilmington.



HOW THIS SERIES WAS REPORTED

Shadow War is based on nine months of reporting, including U.S., Iranian, and Republic of Georgia documents; e-mail messages; medical files; undercover video; wiretaps; and other digital media obtained by The Inquirer.

It also draws on extensive interviews with:

■ Amir Ardebili; his wife, Negine; mother, Zahra Ahkami; and lawyers Edmund Lyons and Ross Reghabi.

■ Assistant U.S. Attorney David Hall and U.S. Attorney David Weiss of Delaware.

■ U.S. Homeland Security/Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents John Kelleghan, Andrew McLees, Clark Settles, Michael Ronayne and Patrick Lechleitner. Two ICE agents — "Darius" and "John Richards" — asked that their true names not be published, because they still work undercover.

■ Defense Criminal Investigative Service agents Ed Bradley and Robert Lerario.

An Iranian diplomat in Washington spoke informally, but his government declined an interview.

In the interests of safety, Ardebili and the undercover ICE agents agreed to be interviewed only on the condition that certain details be omitted from this series.

Learn more at www.philly.com/shadowwar

Location photos by: HORST FAAS / Associated Press (Shiraz); HASAN SARBAKHSHIAN / Associated Press (Tehran)



Ross Reghabi searched federal court dockets and prison websites, and made calls looking for Ardebili. Then, one day, he got a mysterious call.

VICKI VALERIO / For The Inquirer

A&E

ON THE VERGE

A local band's long, winding road to success

SPORTS

COMPLETE EAGLES-JAGUARS PREVIEW

QB CONTROVERSIES

Dustups have plagued Eagles, other NFL teams

TRAVEL

LEAF-PEEPING

Fall foliage trips, from New England to North Carolina

The Philadelphia Inquirer

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SHADOW WAR AN ELITE PHILADELPHIA SQUAD'S SECRET MISSION AGAINST IRAN

CHAPTER 8 OF 8

Sting Revealed, Sentence Imposed

For two years, U.S. agents had held an Iranian in secret. Now, it was time to go public — and decide his fate.

By John Shiffman / Inquirer Staff Writer



Iranian arms broker Amir Ardebili in U.S. custody. In detention, he had pleaded guilty in a sealed courtroom. By law, sentencing had to be in open court — but that couldn't happen until agents finished one last sting.

東京
TOKYO, SUMMER 2009

At the airport bar, three U.S. Homeland Security agents from Philadelphia celebrated over sushi.

So far, the covert Asian leg of Operation Shakespeare appeared to be a roaring success. In a few months, they would know if their latest gambit would pay off. They toasted the prosecutor

traveling with them, David Hall of Wilmington. Nearly two years after they'd lured an Iranian arms broker named Amir Ardebili to the Republic of Georgia, the U.S. team was still exploiting a trove of evidence from his laptop, conducting stings on three continents. A dozen U.S. companies and Iranian brokers stood in the cross-hairs, suspected of violating the U.S. embargo designed to keep weapons and military technology from falling into enemy hands. To conduct these investigations, the U.S. agents and prosecutor had kept secret Ardebili's 2007 arrest in Georgia and his

THE STORY SO FAR

Following an unprecedented sting in Europe, U.S. agents secretly extradict an Iranian arms broker to Philadelphia, where he is held for nearly two years. Agents use files from his laptop to run new undercover operations to stop the smuggling of military technology to Iran.

philly.com
See exclusive videos, images, and interviews only at www.philly.com/ShadowWar

Lots of money, little fervor in governor's race

Wealthy insiders dominate the donor lists in the Pa. campaign. Public attention has been scant.

By Tom Infield
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

It has come in chunks of \$10,000 or \$20,000 — or \$100,000. Led by big business and big labor, the traditional powers in each party have paved the way for Republican Tom Corbett and Democrat Dan Onorato to collect a combined \$32 million — \$16 million each — in the race for governor. Campaign-finance reports released Tuesday show that 12 individuals and groups, not counting party organizations, have given \$100,000 or more to Corbett, whose financing has increased as his poll numbers have grown. Onorato's reports show that he has received donations of \$100,000 or more from 11 individuals or groups, not counting party committees. Corbett's leading donors are Terrence and Kim Pegula, who have given \$280,000. The Pegulas earned a fortune from East Resources Inc., a gas-drilling company with rights to Marcellus Shale. Now retired, they recently gave \$88 million to Pennsylvania State University for an ice-hockey program. See **DONORS** on A18

INSIDE

- Who gave how much to whom? Graphic, **A18**.
- Kevin Ferris: Quiet race may benefit Corbett. **Currents, C1**.

PHA now faces rebuilding itself

Checks and balances have been lost.

By Mark Fazlollah, Nathan Gorenstein, and Jeff Shields
INQUIRER STAFF WRITERS

From almost the moment he arrived in 1998, Carl R. Greene began dismantling the checks and balances at the Philadelphia Housing Authority. As his success as executive director grew, so did his control, records and interviews show. For years the agency was left without a permanent inspector general — a watchdog post now empty. PHA's internal legal staff was gutted, the lawyers replaced with outside firms selected by Greene. The human-resources staff was downsized. And although PHA for decades had regularly provided the city with the authority's audits, Greene stopped that, too. He also refused to testify before City Council, saying PHA was a state agency and Council had no authority over it. After firing Greene last week for allegedly covering up four sexual-harassment claims filed against him by female employees, the PHA See **GREENE** on A19

SATURDAY WEATHER

High 88, Low 60

Mostly sunny, breezy, and warm. Cloudy Sunday, high 72. Full report and exclusive NBC10 EarthWatch forecast, **B15**.

An Appreciation

Fisher's life eclipsed his stardom

By Dan DeLuca and Michael D. Schaffer
INQUIRER STAFF WRITERS

Before Fabian, Bobby Rydell, and Frankie Avalon — and *American Bandstand* — turned this city into the teen-idol capital of the world, another bushy-haired, baby-faced singer from Philadelphia made 1950s teenyboppers swoon: Eddie Fisher.

Fisher, 82, who died in Berkeley, Calif., on Wednesday of complications from surgery after breaking a hip this month,



Associated Pres. File
Philadelphia native Eddie Fisher and Debbie Reynolds in 1957 with newborn Carrie.

was a South Philly grocer's son whose voice carried him to a stardom that his tumultuous personal life would eclipse. More than his musical triumphs, Fisher these days is better known for his string of

See **FISHER** on A18

Street vs. Nutter, the sudden sequel

By Marcia Gelbart and Nathan Gorenstein
INQUIRER STAFF WRITERS

Promising to turn the city and City Hall again into honest places of business, Mayor Nutter three years ago campaigned for office as the antithesis of John F. Street — and

Analysis Street hasn't forgotten it. After two-plus years of holding his tongue, the former mayor is pouncing on Nutter as if the two were facing off in a next-day election. In several media interviews last week, Street attacked Nutter's budgets and handling of the recession, said the mayor had no governing priorities or principles, and insisted Nutter had little support among blacks and was ripe for a primary defeat. Then he questioned whether Nutter is black enough for Philadelphia's African American community.

See **STREET** on A19

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SHADOW WAR: AN ELITE PHILADELPHIA SQUAD'S SECRET MISSION AGAINST IRAN



“Earlier today, a judge unsealed documents related to Amir Hossein Ardebili, an Iranian national whose business was dedicated to the acquisition of military equipment for his sole customer, the government of Iran ...”

U.S. Attorney David Weiss at a Dec. 2, 2009, news conference with Homeland Security’s John Kelleghan (left) and John Morton

RON SOLIMAN / Associated Press

Fate of ‘a man without a country’

The U.S. judge cited Ardebili’s remorse, noted he was unlikely ever to return to Iran, then passed sentence.



“How could I be an international arms dealer when I was on a business trip for first time in my life with my father? What international arms dealer acts like this?”

Amir Ardebili

CAST OF CHARACTERS

David Hall, U.S. prosecutor, Wilmington.

John Richards, pseudonym of undercover supervisor, U.S. Homeland Security/Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Philadelphia.

Michael Ronayne, ICE agent, Philadelphia.

Amir Hossein Ardebili, arms broker, Shiraz, Iran.

Negine Ardebili, Amir’s wife, Shiraz, Iran.

Edmund D. “Dan” Lyons, defense lawyer, Wilmington.

Gregory Sleet, federal judge, Wilmington.

philly.com

“They think war is coming.” See the video released at the Dec. 2, 2009, news conference: www.philly.com/ShadowWar

Tehran photo by HASAN SARBAKHSHIAN / Associated Press

SHADOW WAR from A1 covert transfer to the United States. For 18 months, they’d held the Iranian under a fake name in a Philadelphia prison.

Ardebili had pleaded guilty in a sealed courtroom, but the law required that his sentencing take place in open court — and that couldn’t happen until the agents finished their Asian sting.

Now, that appeared imminent.

PHILADELPHIA, JULY 2009

Approaching his 18th month of solitary confinement, Amir Ardebili fought loneliness and boredom, but he also feared sleep.

Sleep brought a recurring nightmare: An earthquake levels Shiraz, his hometown. “I hear my mother’s voice from under destroyed buildings, calling me, Amir, Amir.”

Floodwaters rise and he flees. “I still see the huge river, which is coming from the top of the mountain.” Ardebili’s dreams were but one sign of his crumbling mental and physical state.

His few visitors witnessed his deterioration. “I’d ask him how he was holding up, and he’d say, ‘My brain is boiling,’” his Wilmington lawyer, Edmund D. “Dan” Lyons, recalled. “And I said to the government, ‘Guys, you’ve got to get him out. He’s going insane.’”

Ross Reghabi, his Beverly Hills defense lawyer, said Ardebili spoke of “evil spirits” haunting him at night.

“I begged the agents,” he recalled. “I said, ‘I’m telling you, this guy is losing his mind.’”

Making matters worse, according to medical records, Ardebili developed severe dental problems, creating searing pain. His dental hygiene had never been good, but now eight teeth were in full decay, several infected. A prison dentist told Ardebili two teeth had to be pulled. Suspicious, Ardebili refused.

In October, after 20 months in isolation, doctors prescribed antidepressants for the first time. Still, physical symptoms of mental decay worsened. A nasty, scaling rash broke out over both hands. He found it hard to eat. He hyperventilated.

“Inmate ... more depressed,” the prison doctor wrote on Nov. 18. “Intermittent palpitations, cannot get a full breath, feels that he must force to breathe deeply, numbness to face and hands. ...”

PHILADELPHIA, NOVEMBER 2009

The silence from the Asian contact worried prosecutor Hall, but it did not surprise him.

International undercover counterproliferation cases could be confounding. After months, even years, of good work, stings could come tantalizingly close to completion, and then, without explanation, a source, an informant, or a target would simply disappear.

It had been months since the Tokyo celebration, when Hall and the agents were confident they stood on the cusp of nailing a major arms smuggler. Now, the contact had vanished, refusing — or unable — to respond to e-mail.

Ominously, the Iranians were starting to break their silence about Ardebili. To what end, Hall couldn’t be sure. But the public references, though mysterious and fleeting, were



The Philadelphia Federal Detention Center, where Ardebili was held in solitary confinement for 22 months. His mental and physical health crumbled.

DAVID M WARREN / Staff Photographer

becoming more frequent, offered as a counter to the Western argument that Iran was a rogue nation lying about its nuclear ambitions.

The United States, Iranian officials insisted, was the real rogue nation — illegally kidnapping Iranians and secretly hauling them to America. Iran lodged a confidential U.N. protest over Ardebili and others; sketchy Middle Eastern news reports portrayed him as a “nuclear scientist.”

Hall couldn’t be sure what the Iranians were up to or why his Asian contact had vanished. But he knew what it meant: Keeping Ardebili’s detention secret was no longer necessary.

WILMINGTON, DEC. 2, 2009

The news conference was carried live on cable — breaking news.

“Earlier today,” said U.S. Attorney David Weiss of Delaware, “a judge unsealed documents related to Amir Hossein Ardebili, an Iranian national whose business was dedicated to the acquisition of military equipment for his sole customer, the government of Iran. ...”

Weiss laid out the charges: violating the arms embargo, smuggling, conspiracy, money laundering. He cited the Tbilisi sting, the covert extradition, and the secret guilty plea. He kept details vague.

John Morton, U.S. Homeland Security’s assistant secretary for Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), had come up from Washington for the announcement. “There’s no question there’s an orchestrated effort by Iran to acquire weapons. Unfortunately, there’s a whole network of these guys out there. ...”

Ed Bradley, special agent in charge of the Defense Criminal Investigative Service, followed. “This poses a significant threat to national security,” he said, putting “our most sensitive technology” in the hands of enemy soldiers fighting U.S. troops.

To drive home the Iran threat, officials released short video excerpts from the Tbilisi sting. One clip was sure to make headlines and a great TV soundbite. In it, Ardebili explains to undercover agents why Iran is so eager to obtain U.S. weaponry:

“They think war is coming.”

تهران

TEHRAN, DEC. 8, 2009



Days later, Iranian Foreign Minister Manuchehr Mottaki fired back, calling Ardebili’s arrest and secret detention illegal and political.

“They laid a trap in front of Iranian nationals and deceived them, an act which runs counter to the legal and judicial code of conduct,” Mottaki told reporters. “We urgently call on the U.S. administration to put an end to such illogical behaviors and immediately and unconditionally release Ardebili. ...”

In Shiraz, Ardebili’s mother felt blindsided by the way the Americans portrayed her son.

“Something dirty and very ugly happened,” she said later, speaking through a translator. “We’ve gone through hardship, but I want to say this with a loud voice, I hope even worse comes upon those who did this to him.”

WILMINGTON, DEC. 14, 2009

On the morning Ardebili was to be sentenced, the Wilmington authorities and the U.S. Marshals Ser-

vice ringed the federal courthouse with squad cars.

They closed two streets and positioned a command center on the plaza beneath a bright-blue tent. They sent up a helicopter and deployed an armored police car, the largest display of force in downtown Wilmington in years.

“There’s been information that the defendant’s life is in danger,” U.S. Marshal David Thomas cryptically told reporters. “Obviously, this is a case of national security.”

At 10 a.m., the chief judge in Delaware, Gregory Sleet, convened a closed hearing. Only the ICE agents, prosecutor Hall, defense attorney Lyons, and defendant Ardebili were permitted to attend.

When the doors were opened an hour later, it marked the first public court proceeding since Ardebili’s arrest in October 2007.

The Iranian turned slowly to scan the faces in the courtroom. Ardebili’s wife was not there, nor was anyone from the Iranian government.

“Mentally,” Lyons recalled, “that was devastating. He realized he was alone.”

Lyons stepped to the lectern to address the judge. “You know, this is one of those cases they didn’t tell you about in law school. ...”

“Or judge’s school,” Sleet said.

Lyons argued that the sentencing-guideline recommendation — 12 to 14 years — should not apply in this case. News accounts describing Ardebili as an “arms dealer” were misleading and unfair, Lyons argued.

“He was just a little guy ... a cog in the wheel. ...”

Ardebili had been punished enough, Lyons argued. He’d spent two years in solitary for acts that are illegal only because the United States and Iran are engaged in a cold war. The lawyer added, “He is a man who, in many ways, is caught between two nations.”

Lyons asked for a sentence of time served.

Now, it was Ardebili’s turn.

He shuffled forward in prison slippers and unfolded wrinkled, handwritten remarks. He looked up at the judge, who sat before the Great Seal of the United States.

“I am pleased to speak with your honor face-to-face —.”

Ardebili stopped midsentence. He gripped the lectern and began to sob. The judge ordered a break.

Minutes later, Ardebili tried again. “I hope I could give your honor some information which could change my horrible situation. ...”

He began slowly, confessing and accepting responsibility for his crimes. He didn’t wish to minimize what he’d done, he said, but he was no “international arms dealer.”

His pace quickened.

“How could I be an international arms dealer when I was on a business trip for first time in my life with my father? What international arms dealer acts like this?”

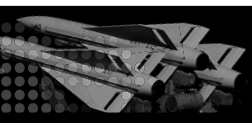
The things Ardebili bought for Iran were not weapons of war, he maintained. “I was working in company which supplies spare parts. ...”

Spare parts? No weapons? Assertions were bleeding into obvious lies. His lawyer realized he needed to correct Ardebili before he did too much damage to his credibility. Otherwise, the prosecutor and judge would hammer him.

The defense lawyer cut in. “Do you agree the computers you bought were for F-4 fighters?”

See **SHADOW WAR** on A17

SHADOW WAR: AN ELITE PHILADELPHIA SQUAD'S SECRET MISSION AGAINST IRAN



“They laid a trap in front of Iranian nationals and deceived them, an act which runs counter to the legal and judicial code of conduct. ... We urgently call on the U.S. administration to ... immediately and unconditionally release Ardebili. ...”

Manouchehr Mottaki
Iranian foreign minister
on Dec. 8, 2009

VAHID SALEMI / Associated Press

1. ROLL OF THE DICE
2. THE SETUP
3. THE MAGIC SHOW
4. THE STING

SHADOW WAR from A16

“Yes, sir.”
“All right. Did you, at one point, talk with the undercover agents and say the Iranians believe war is coming?”
“Yes, sir.”
“What did you mean?”
“Iranians think that when the U.S.A. targeted Iraq and Afghanistan, they think that the next target may be Iran.”
But war is not inevitable, Ardebili added. In fact, he told the judge, his case could make the difference. A just resolution could improve U.S.-Iranian relations. “Big and significant change come after a small spark. Your decision could be the spark to kindle. Turn on your light and wisdom. ...”
The judge was impassive.
Now, Hall rose to speak for the U.S. government.
“Mr. Ardebili has characterized himself as a businessman, and that is correct. He has objected to the term *international arms dealer*. We’re calling him an Iranian procurement agent.”
The prosecutor paused.
“But I don’t want to minimize the nature of what it is that he was doing. His offense is very serious, and this is why we do not join in the defendant’s request for time served.”
Ardebili’s business was international, the prosecutor said. It was sophisticated. Ardebili worked for a hostile nation involved in a 30-year cold war with the United States. He bought weapons of war. He flagrantly violated U.S. law.
Hall reminded the judge that the items Ardebili bought from the undercover agents could be used to direct ground-to-air missiles, to project state-of-the-art radar for target acquisition, and to fly the F-4 fighter. On video, Ardebili had said repeatedly his sole customer was Iran’s military.
Hall, a captain in the Navy Reserve, ridiculed Ardebili’s claim that he bought only defensive weapons systems: “I’m not sure it matters to

an American pilot whether the system coming at him was procured for defensive or offensive purposes.”
Ardebili, he said, was dangerous. “He might not be a blood-and-guts-type defendant. He is about invoices and spreadsheets. But what he is doing is very serious. He might not be the one with the gun in his hand, but he’s the one who put the gun in somebody else’s hand.”
Hall sat down and the judge began. Sleet summarized the charges, Ardebili’s background, and guilty plea. Then he summoned the Iranian to the lectern.
“You present somewhat of a paradox to this court,” the judge said. “On one hand, it seems that you were motivated by profit. Some would call it greed, and the money you made came from an illegal enterprise, [but] it seems you were working within the borders of your nation toward its government’s interest.”
“Regardless, your offenses could pose, if they haven’t already, a direct threat to the security of the United States. You procured whatever the Iranian government required to maintain and update its military capability. ...”
Sleet noted that he had considered “additional factors.” For one thing, Ardebili seemed to show genuine remorse — “the tears were not fake.” For another, he was unlikely ever to return to Iran — “You are effectively a man without a country.”
Sleet gave him five years.
Ardebili slumped, and Lyons put his arm around his client. “You’ll get credit for two years,” the defense attorney whispered.
Ardebili remained inconsolable. It meant three more years in U.S. prison.

PHILADELPHIA, FEB. 3, 2010

Two months later, prosecutor Hall read the latest news from Teh-

ran with great interest.
President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was proposing to trade three detained American hikers, including an Elkins Park native, for Iranians held by the United States.
“There are some talks under way to have an exchange,” Ahmadinejad said. “They [the U.S.] have sent messages, we answered ... to bring these people [the hikers]. We are hopeful that all prisoners will be released.”
A U.S. spokesman denied any trade talks, but, the Associated Press dispatch noted, Ardebili was among those Iran wanted back.
Hall doubted the United States would trade Ardebili for the hikers, but he found the gambit intriguing: What did it mean in terms of Ardebili’s value to the Iranians?
Iran’s schizophrenic reaction to the Ardebili case had long befuddled Hall. Iranian diplomats initially fought extradition from Georgia, then allegedly plotted to poison Ardebili. Once he arrived in the United States, Iran ignored him for months, then suddenly took an interest, filing a complaint with the U.N., but failed to follow up by appearing at his sentencing. Now, the president was proposing to trade him for the hikers.
Who was Ardebili, really?
Did it mean he was a bigger fish than they realized? Or was Ardebili merely a pawn in a cold war?

BEVERLY HILLS, FEBRUARY 2010

She took a seat at Circa 55, a chic restaurant inside the Beverly Hills Hilton.
Negine Ardebili wore designer jeans, crimson lipstick, and a preppy sweater. She looked like any other young, attractive, single Persian girl in Southern California. That was the point.
“Nobody here knows that I am married and that my husband is in jail,” she said, scanning the menu. “I don’t want to involve people in such things. It’s dangerous. People might think I am a spy.”
Her phone chirped, and she checked a text message.
“You see, I have a secret inside, and I am getting used to it. Even my uncle doesn’t know everything.”
She explained that she did not attend her husband’s sentencing because, really, it would have been too frightening. She had not even read the news accounts on the Internet. No, she had not spoken with him since the sentencing. It was best not to call him, she had decided, because she feared she might say something that would get him in trouble. Perhaps she’d write a letter.
“It’s really hard,” she said. “I think no one can imagine how hard it is. But it’s life. It’s my life. I have to take this problem as an experience as something to learn from, and transfer it to something else.”
Her cell phone buzzed, and she brightened. It was a painter friend, and Negine took the call. She spoke happily for a minute. When she hung up, her frown returned. “Sometimes, I just go and watch while he paints. It helps me.”
Negine had lived in the Beverly Hills area for 14 months now. She was a legal resident, owned a Volkswagen, carried a California driver’s license, and had moved from her rich uncle’s home to a rented place. But, like her husband, she remained in limbo. With the visa she held, she could not work or attend college.
So she spent her days just waiting, she said.
“I will wait if it takes 10 years.”



Negine Ardebili



Edmund D. “Dan” Lyons, the Iranian’s defense lawyer. “This is one of those cases they didn’t tell you about in law school,” Lyons said to the judge.



U.S. prosecutor David Hall (left) and his boss, U.S. Attorney David Weiss. Iran’s seesawing reaction to the Ardebili case long befuddled Hall.

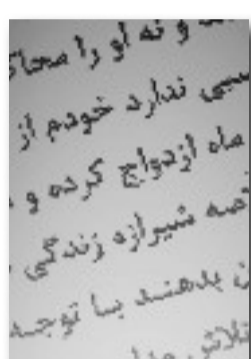
ROCHESTER, MINN., APRIL 2010

Immediately after Ardebili’s December sentencing, the U.S. marshals whisked him from the Wilmington courthouse.
The Bureau of Prisons delivered the Iranian to a maximum-security facility in Northeast Pennsylvania, the first stop in an eight-week journey that took him to five prisons, in New York, Ohio, and Oklahoma. The Bureau of Prisons called these transfers “routine.”
In February, he arrived at the Federal Medical Center in Rochester, Minn., a prison with psychiatric facilities. Ardebili was placed in the general population and was thrilled to have roommates.
The Rochester prison let him use his real name and granted him access to the telephone and e-mail.
Like a lot of freshly sentenced inmates, Ardebili was upset with the outcome of his case. He fired his trial lawyer and appealed his sentence.
He started writing new letters — imploring Iranian diplomats to get involved, searching for his wife, and seeking funds for his defense.
His projected release date is Feb. 8, 2012.
“And then I will go home to Iran,” he said recently. “Why not? I’ve done nothing wrong. I didn’t harm my people or my government. I just tried to help myself. ... They label me as an international arms dealer, which is really a big lie. I’m nobody, but these U.S. people didn’t understand, or they don’t want to understand. It’s propaganda.”

PHILADELPHIA, MAY 2010

From the U.S. Customs House, Homeland Security supervisor “John Richards” dialed an old friend.
He offered an Operation Shakespeare update.
Since Ardebili’s arrest, Richards had spent two years briefing senior officials and agents, making presentations nationwide, laying out Iran’s procurement network, urging others to set up their own undercover ops.
Meantime, his team had been busy exploiting Ardebili’s laptop. They’d identified 30 Iranian front companies and 20 Iranian brokers like Ardebili, and 100 suspect U.S. companies, many with Pentagon contracts.
Homeland Security and other agencies had launched 102 investigations, two dozen of them labeled *high priority*. Search warrants were executed in Arizona and New York. At least four cases led to indictments. More were pending.
Still, to date, only one minor case was public. The rest remain sealed — either because the indicted were fugitives, because they were cooperating as informants, or because the evidence had led to bigger fish, an investigation continuing in the shadows.
In an additional three dozen cases, prosecutors decided not to file charges because they couldn’t prove the American companies knew for sure that their products were headed to Iran. Instead of indictments, federal agents paid quiet visits to corporate executives, issuing informal warnings and soliciting help in the future.
And now, Richards explained on the phone to his friend, he was deep into a new sting, one that might top Operation Shakespeare. Could he come to Philadelphia to discuss it?
The friend, as always, answered with enthusiasm. The case sounded righteous. He promised to get there straightaway.
They’d figure out the paperwork later.

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HOW THIS SERIES WAS REPORTED

Shadow War is based on nine months of reporting, including U.S., Iranian, and Republic of Georgia documents; e-mail messages; medical files; undercover video; wiretaps; and other digital media obtained by The Inquirer.

It also draws on extensive interviews with:
■ Amir Ardebili; his wife, Negine; mother, Zahra Ahkami; and lawyers Edmund D. Lyons and Ross Reghabi.

■ Assistant U.S. Attorney David Hall and U.S. Attorney David Weiss of Delaware.

■ U.S. Homeland Security / Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents John Kelleghan, Andrew McLees, Clark Settles, Michael Ronayne, and Patrick Lechleitner. Two ICE agents — “Darius” and “John Richards” — asked that their true names not be published, because they still work undercover.

■ Defense Criminal Investigative Service agents Ed Bradley and Robert Lerario.

An Iranian diplomat in Washington spoke informally, but his government declined an interview.

In the interests of safety, Ardebili and the undercover ICE agents agreed to be interviewed only on the condition that certain details be omitted from this series.

Learn more at <http://go.philly.com/shadowwar>

5. TREASURE TROVE
6. SECRET FLIGHT
7. CONNECTIONS
CHAPTER 8