

Defense Analyst Signs Up Veteran Espionage Lawyers

Team Represented Hanssen and Ames

By Bill Miller
Washington Post Staff Writer
Friday, October 5, 2001; Page B02

Ana Belen Montes, the Defense Intelligence Agency analyst accused of acting as a spy for Cuba, appeared in U.S. District Court yesterday with a new legal team.

Montes, 44, of Northwest Washington, has hired veteran lawyers Plato Cacheris and Preston Burton to represent her in a case that could carry the death penalty. Montes, the DIA's senior analyst for matters involving Cuba, is accused of providing classified information to Cuba for at least five years. She was arrested at her office at Bolling Air Force Base on Sept. 21.

Cacheris and Burton have extensive experience in espionage cases. They represented FBI counterintelligence agent Robert P. Hanssen, who pleaded guilty in July to 15 counts of spying for Moscow, and CIA officer Aldrich H. Ames, who pleaded guilty in 1994 to selling secrets to the Russians. Hanssen and Ames both received life prison sentences.

Until yesterday, Montes had been represented by a federal public defender. But because she could afford to hire her own lawyer, she was required to do so. Burton joined her at the defense table yesterday; Cacheris did not come to court.

Montes had been due in court for a hearing to determine whether prosecutors have enough evidence to present her case to a grand jury and keep her locked up. But at the request of Burton and Assistant U.S. Attorney Ronald L. Walutes Jr., those issues were postponed until Nov. 5. Burton said he wanted more time to assess the case. U.S. Magistrate Judge Deborah A. Robinson ordered that Montes remain jailed.

Burton also agreed to give prosecutors more time to obtain an indictment. Under speedy trial laws, prosecutors faced an Oct. 21 deadline. Now they have until Nov. 21.

Defense lawyers typically request extra time in espionage cases because they need security clearances and must make special arrangements to review evidence. In a joint court filing, Burton and Walutes said they wanted a delay because of "the complexities involved in this case and the classified nature of the underlying material involved."

Montes, wearing a black and white jail uniform, appeared calm but said nothing during the 10-minute hearing. Prosecutors have said she provided information about military exercises and other sensitive operations to Cuban intelligence officers in coded messages sent by telephone and computer diskette. Her arrest followed several months of FBI surveillance.

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