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U.S. intelligence analyst charged with spying for Cuba

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WASHINGTON – FBI agents on Friday detained a 44-year-old senior analyst with the Defense Intelligence Agency, a vital part of the U.S. national security establishment, and charged her with providing U.S. national secrets to Cuba.

The information relayed to the Cuban government, according to papers filed in federal court in the District of Columbia, included the identity of a U.S. intelligence officer operating undercover in Cuba.

The woman, Ana Belen Montes, was arrested around 10 a.m. at Defense Intelligence headquarters in the southern part of the capital, FBI spokesman Chris Murray said.

Montes began working at the agency, which provides political and military intelligence to the Pentagon, in 1985 and had risen to a level that gave her access to a wide variety of intelligence, according to a criminal complaint filed in Washington, D.C., federal court.

"Since 1992, she has specialized in Cuba matters. She is currently the senior analyst responsible for matters pertaining to Cuba," the complaint said.

Montes, among more than a dozen arrested by U.S. law enforcement since September 1998 and charged with spying for Cuba, had greater access to secrets than the others. As a senior analyst, she participated in inter-agency meetings involving discussion on Cuba and the rest of Latin America, Capitol Hill sources said.

The criminal complaint said Montes was born in Nuremberg, Germany, and graduated from the University of Virginia in 1979. She also held a master's degree from the prestigious School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University.

An FBI official, who asked to remain anonymous, said she was Puerto Rican.

According to the court document, Montes maintained contact with her Cuban intelligence agency handlers by calling their beepers from pay phones and punching in coded numerical sequences.

On May 25, brandishing a court-authorized warrant, law enforcement officials secretly entered Montes' second-floor unit at the Cleveland Apartments off Connecticut Avenue in northwest Washington, an area of tony restaurants and stores. They found a portable computer, the complaint said.

"The agents electronically copied the laptop's hard drive. During subsequent analysis of the copied hard drive, the FBI recovered substantial text . . .," it said, adding that 11 pages of material was recovered.

Among the contents, it added, were instructions on how to erase material from the computer, tips for radio reception, and references to "the numbers that you receive via radio." A short-wave radio was also found. The complaint said that the FBI identified text consisting of 150 sets of numerical groups.

"The text begins, '30107 24624,' and continues until 150 such groups are listed. The FBI has determined that the precise same numbers, in the precise same order, were broadcast on February 6, 1999, at AM frequency

7887 kHz, by a woman speaking Spanish, who introduced the broadcast with the words "Atención! Atención!" the complaint said.

It asserts that the technique of receiving coded data over short-wave radio is common with Cuban intelligence, and is the same method that 10 convicted Cuban spies arrested in South Florida in 1998 used to contact their handlers.

Montes followed other patterns used by convicted South Florida spies, it added, such as exchanging computer disks with Cuban intelligence agents and frequently calling from pay phones to send coded pages to beeper numbers.

The text lifted from her hard drive, it said, included praise from Montes' alleged Cuban handler for her unmasking "a U.S. intelligence officer who was present in an undercover capacity, in Cuba, during a period that began prior to October 1996.

"We told you how tremendously useful the information you gave us from the meetings with him resulted, and how we were waiting here for him with open arms," the text said, according to the complaint.

The ultimate fate of the intelligence officer was not disclosed in the court papers.

As recently as Sunday, surveillance teams spotted Montes making calls from pay phones to beeper numbers and punching in pre-assigned codes, the complaint said.

The FBI said it had pending search warrant requests for Montes' apartment, her red Toyota Echo, her office at Bolling Air Force Base, and for a safe deposit box.

Friday's arrest came three weeks after FBI agents detained two Cuban intelligence agents in Florida, husband and wife George and Marisol Gari, and charged them with trying to infiltrate the U.S. Southern Command military facility in Miami, which oversees military operations in Latin America.

The Garis also conducted surveillance of the Cuban American National Foundation offices. They pleaded guilty Thursday to acting as unregistered agents for Cuba.

Members of the Cuban-American community said they suspected that FBI agents moved in to arrest Montes, who had been under surveillance for four months, to stop leaks to Cuba as U.S. forces mount a war on the Osama bin Laden network.

"It was critically important that this spy be stopped now as we embark on the worldwide war against terrorism," said Rep. Lincoln Díaz-Balart, a Miami Republican.

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