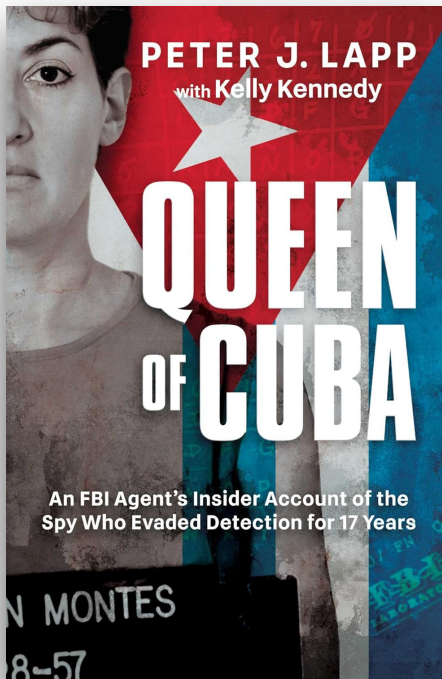# Weekly Intelligence Notes
Exclusive Book Review
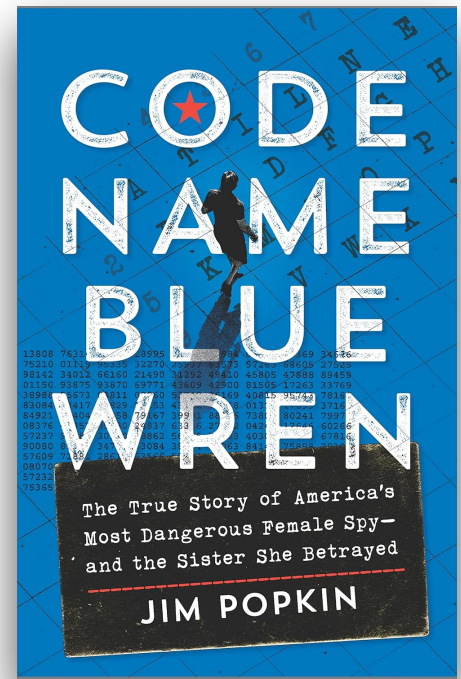## (November 2024)

A Comparative Review

Queen of Cuba: An FBI Agent's Insider Account of the Spy Who Evaded Detection for 17 Years

by Peter J. Lapp
Post Hill Press (2023)

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Code Name Blue Wren: The True Story of America's Most Dangerous Female Spy and the Sister She Betrayed

by Jim Popkin
Hanover Square Press (2023)

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Review by Baker Institute for Public Policy Non-Resident Scholar
Richard J. Killroy, Jr., PhD.*

W hen Ana Montes was released from the federal corrections facility at Ft. Worth, Texas after having served over 20 years for spying for Cuba, very few Americans had ever heard of the *Queen of Cuba,* the title of Peter Lapp's book. Jim Popkin, in *Code Name Blue Wren* calls her "America's most dangerous female spy." News of her arrest for spying for Cuba for 17 years was overtaken by other events in September 2001. Yet, it was the initiation of U.S. military operations in Afghanistan as part of George W. Bush's Global War on Terrorism which allowed the FBI to finally arrest her after a year-long investigation.

Peter Lapp was one of the lead FBI counterintelligence (CI) investigators of Ana Montes. His book provides a detailed description of the actors and agencies involved in the investigation and eventual arrest of Montes for espionage. Since she worked for the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), that agency had the initial responsibility for initiating a formal CI case. Since Montes was a model analyst and did not fit the typical profile of an insider threat, it took a lead from NSA to allow DIA to piece together enough evidence to take the case to the FBI.

While Lapp provides unique insider information on the investigation of Montes, his book spends too much time on his own background and how he became an FBI CI agent, contrasting his patriotism with Montes' treachery. He also takes a "victory lap" for catching Montes; despite the poor FBI surveillance techniques and almost blowing the case numerous times.

On the other hand, Jim Popkin is an accomplished journalist who provides a more nuanced narrative of Montes. In Code Name Blue Wren, Popkin provides a deeper understanding of Montes' past and her family relationships than Lapp. Popkin sees Montes' family as the true victims of her deception. He does discuss the actors involved in the CI investigation of Montes; however, he is much more interested in recounting the human side of espionage and the impact it has on those closest to the convicted spy. It is Popkin's interviews with Montes' family, and particularly her sister Lucy, (who worked for the FBI) which provide some of the most poignant comments in the book. Lucy's love for her sister, but also her revulsion of what she did in betraying her family as well as her country, is a reminder of what Ana also noted, "espionage always hurts someone." Ironically, less than a year after Montes's release, a senior U.S. diplomat, Manual Rocha, was arrested for spying for Cuba for over 40 years.

Anyone who has served in the U.S. Intelligence Community will find it hard to reconcile Montes' actions as an intelligence professional, regardless of her motives and justifications. However, it is much more troubling to see more senior former intelligence officers and prior service military members supporting violent acts of insurrection on January 6th against the nation and the Constitution which they took an oath (like Montes) to defend: a reminder that the most dangerous threats to the nation's security are more often domestic, rather than foreign.

* **Richard J. Kilroy, Jr., PhD.** is a retired Professor of Political Science from Coastal Carolina University. He is also a non-resident scholar in the Baker Institute for Public Policy's Center for the United States and Mexico at Rice University. He received his Ph.D. in Foreign Affairs from the University of Virginia. He spent 23 years on active duty as an Army intelligence and Latin America foreign area officer. The author can be reached at rkilroy@coastal.edu.