

FBI Found Partner Lacking in 1997 Investigation

BY DOUGLAS GILLISON
THE CAMBODIA DAILY

In the six weeks they were present in Cambodia to investigate the 1997 grenade attack, the three-man team of US Federal Bureau of Investigation agents found their Cambodian colleagues to be both unwilling and unable to take even minor steps to identify the perpetrators of the attack on an opposition rally, according to newly declassified records.

Generated in the weeks and days before a power struggle between Cambodia's two prime ministers culminated in pitched battles in the capital's streets, the FBI documents

The Grenade Attack

SECOND IN A THREE-PART SERIES

also record the extreme tension and volatility within a factious Cambodian government and the ubiquitous potential for violence that ultimately caused the FBI to withdraw from the country.

In his first public remarks about the investigation, retired FBI Special Agent Thomas Nicoletti, the case agent assigned to lead the investigation, claimed he was informed both by then-US Ambassador Kenneth Quinn and by the Cambodian police that he was personally marked for

assassination by two "hit teams" in Phnom Penh.

Mr Quinn has strongly denied relaying such information to Agent Nicoletti. The Interior Ministry did not respond to written requests for interviews for this article.

The declassified files also show that at least one FBI official responsible for establishing cooperative relations with the Cambodian authorities felt that the grenade attack investigation was problematic because it might implicate elements in the CPP when the FBI was trying to cooperate with the party.

The attack occurred at 8:25 am

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BODYGUARD UNIT PROVED TERSE UNDER QUESTIONING

When they went to meet the FBI for questioning on May 9, 1997, three of the senior-most men responsible for protecting then-Second Prime Minister Hun Sen came to police headquarters with a coterie of armed guards.

The usual crowd of Cambodian police officials, who had attended other FBI witness interviews related to the grenade attack, cleared the interview room.

"Surprisingly, only three police generals were present and three junior police investigators. All prior meetings and interviews had at least 20 Cambodian police officers present," FBI Special Agent Thomas Nicoletti wrote in a May 14 summary of the interviews included in the declassified documents.

"A fully-armed, combat-equipped 'bodyguard' squad was positioned immediately outside the door, even though the interview was conducted at police headquarters," Mr Nicoletti wrote

In a recent e-mail, Mr Nicoletti said he believed that "the [bodyguard] squad was there to intimidate me and should not have been permitted within police headquarters."

Videotapes of previous opposition-organized rallies and witness interviews indicated that the 1997 demonstration was the first time the Cambodian military had ever been deployed to such a rally, according to the FBI.

The interview with the bodyguards, Mr Nicoletti said in his e-mail, "was intended to lead into certain direct accusations." But when the bodyguard unit refused to cooperate and left the interview room at police headquarters, Mr Nicoletti's "immediate line of ques-

tioning and investigative plan was abruptly terminated."

Parts of Mr Nicoletti's summary, including names and titles, were blacked out when the case file records were declassified by the FBI.

However, in a 1999 letter to the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, FBI Assistant Director Neil Gallagher said that at the May 9 interview with Mr Nicoletti, Huy Piseth, then commander of the second prime minister's bodyguard unit, had confirmed that his unit, known as the 2nd Battalion, 17th Regiment, was removed from the military chain of command and answered directly to Mr Hun Sen.

Mr Piseth could not be contacted for comment on this story. However, in a 1999 interview, Mr Piseth told The Cambodia Daily that he had been thoroughly questioned by the FBI regarding the events of March 30.

"The FBI is quite clever and has expertise, especially psychological skill," Mr Piseth said. "They questioned me and my soldiers from the top to the grass roots but they could not find any traces to accuse me of being involved," he said.

According to Mr Nicoletti's May 14 summary, when he asked one of the bodyguard commanders "why he felt that this small political rally posed a threat" and "who in the police department or Ministry of the Interior notified him of the upcoming demonstration, and at what time was he notified," things went sour.

The US "embassy translator was abruptly interrupted [...] and ordered to stop translating."

In an e-mail, Mr Nicoletti confirmed that he had been questioning the bodyguard unit when this

series of events occurred.

In his investigative summary of the events of that day, Mr Nicoletti wrote that one of the Cambodians present in the interview room then took over from the US Embassy translator.

"Due to the sensitive nature of your line of questioning, I will perform the translation for you," said the person whose name is redacted from the FBI files.

However, with this person translating, "no answer was given to any of my questions," Mr Nicoletti wrote.

On May 9, Mr Nicoletti also questioned Chhin Sovann, a soldier who was present at the scene of the grenade attack and which the FBI identified to US lawmakers as the "on-scene commander" of the bodyguards.

According to Mr Gallagher's letter to Congress, Mr Sovann became angry when the FBI showed him a picture of himself at the scene of the attack.

According to the summary of the interview, when Nicoletti asked a member of the bodyguard unit to indicate where on a crime scene map the 15 members of the unit had been deployed, he was told this was "a military top secret."

This member of the bodyguards "then pretended for over ten minutes that he could not understand the crime scene map," Mr Nicoletti wrote, adding that the interview subject also said he had not been briefed on any security threat that day and that, when the grenades exploded, he "immediately fell to a prone position and saw nothing."

Mr Nicoletti wrote in his report that he then said four eyewitnesses on the morning of the attack said

they had seen the grenade throwers run toward the line of bodyguards, "pass through and escape towards the wat and CPP residence area," according to the FBI files.

The apparent attackers were separated as they fled from the scene of the explosions by "50 yards of clear, open ground, totally devoid of vegetation and personnel."

When Mr Nicoletti recounted to the bodyguard unit member a witness statement according to which a person in pursuit of the grenade throwers "was intercepted as the grenade throwers passed through and beaten by several troops."

The bodyguard unit member responded: "That did not happen. We saw nothing."

Then the bodyguard unit member "pretended that he did not understand the question."

"I laid down when I heard the blast. After the blast I stand up. I let no one pass," said the interview subject.

"It should be noted that not one question was asked by any representative of the Cambodian investigation commission during the entire interview!" Mr Nicoletti wrote.

In an e-mail, Mr Nicoletti said that after his interviews were over, the Cambodian police present asked no further questions.

"The commanding general stated: 'You were very hard on us. How did you get that information? I wish I had you in my unit.' We shook hands and the general departed with his entourage. No one from the Police questioned the departure or spoke to the general outside," he wrote.

—Additional reporting by Phann Ana

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on March 30, 1997, when unknown assailants lobbed four US-made M33 fragmentation grenades into a Khmer Nation Party rally staged by party leader Sam Rainsy in the park opposite what was then the National Assembly on Sothearos Boulevard.

At least 16 peaceful demonstrators were killed and more than 100 others injured.

Though a small police contingent appeared to withdraw shortly before the attack, a line of combat-ready RCAF troops, which the FBI identified as personal bodyguards to then-Second Prime Minister

Hun Sen, had been deployed to the rear of the rally along Street 7.

Unlike the investigations of the 1996 Khobar Towers bombing in Saudi Arabia and the 1998 bombings of US embassies in Africa in which dozens of Americans died, the FBI investigation into the 1997 attack in Cambodia involved only a single, wounded US citizen.

As they have for many of the unsolved assassinations of political activists, union leaders, journalists and celebrities, Cambodian police immediately formed an investigative commission staffed by both Funcinpec and CPP police officials.

The initial assessment of US Embassy and FBI officials as the investigation began in mid-April 1997 was

that the CPP component was opposed to any independent investigation, according to the FBI records.

Mr Nicoletti also came to believe that the investigation commission, nominally led by Funcinpec Deputy National Police Director Yeng Marady and CPP Police General Hok Lundy, then National Police director, had doctored evidence for presentation to the FBI.

Within 24 hours of the attack, Ralph Horton, the FBI legal attache at the US Embassy in Bangkok, was on the telephone with the FBI's Honolulu Division in Hawaii, where the special agent in charge was John Schiman. The following day, Horton faxed a copy of a US Embassy cable describing the attack both

to Honolulu and an FBI office at headquarters in Washington then known as the National Security Division.

In the cover letter, Mr Horton incorrectly stated that "one US citizen was killed."

"Neither US property, nor persons appeared to be the target," wrote Mr Horton.

Ron Abney, the country director in Cambodia for the US International Republican Institute who had in fact survived with shrapnel wounds to the hip and was evacuated for treatment at Mount Elizabeth Hospital in Singapore, "was in the wrong place at the wrong time."

On April 2, the FBI officially
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opened an investigation. Two days later, Special Agent Nicoletti interviewed Mr Abney at his hospital bed, where he recalled reaching to shake someone's hand before being knocked to the ground by the first explosion. Apparently, Mr Abney "was injured due to his close proximity to assassination target," according to a narrative printed in an FBI "case information" record, the first document in the case file.

The day of that interview, lawyers at the US Justice Department's terrorism and violent crimes section in Washington rendered an opinion that, due to the injuries to Mr Abney, the FBI had jurisdiction to investigate under an antiterrorism statute. On April 9, five days later, the US Embassy received an official request from the Cambodian government for the FBI to provide a sketch artist to draw composite portraits of the assailants.

During the investigation in Phnom Penh, investigative reports and summaries were written in teletypes marked "priority" and routed via Bangkok to the Honolulu field office and to the National Security Division in Washington.

They were also sometimes copied to the Investigative and Prosecutive Graphic Unit and to Deputy Assistant Director Alan Ringgold, head of the International Relations Branch and an expert in Italian organized crime who rose through the Bureau's ranks as a career liaison to European police forces.

On April 17, Mr Horton and Mr Nicoletti arrived in Phnom Penh. They were briefed the following day by the US Embassy's Deputy Chief of Mission, Robert Porter, and Regional Security Officer Phil Whitney.

"Bureau representatives were advised of a highly volatile political situation changing on a daily basis," they reported to headquarters in a message dated April 21. "Funcinpec generated this request [to supply a sketch artist], which was begrudging[ly] agreed to by CPP," the agents recounted in the declassified files.

"Funcinpec requested that the FBI representative not arrive prior to April 21," they added. Funcinpec "agreed to 'massage' the CPP and obtain acquiescence. The CPP views any international role in investigating the March 30 terrorist attack on the KNP demonstration as a violation of Cambodian sovereignty."

"The CPP, under heavy suspicion of involvement, denies in the media and through diplomatic channels any prior knowledge of the incident" and "opposes any FBI investigation other than the sketch artist assistance," the message reads.

In a May 6 investigative summary



Left: A police officer stands in a truck with people wounded in the explosions. Below: A sugar cane juice cart hides a pile of corpses as police and military stand in the distance.

Saing Soenthrith/
The Cambodia Daily

transmitted to headquarters, Mr Nicoletti reported that he began meeting with witnesses to the attack on April 24, the night before the first scheduled meeting with the Cambodian police.

The following day, Mr Nicoletti, the US Embassy's Mr Whitney and an FBI sketch artist attended a brief meeting for introductions to the Cambodian police.

That evening, according to the May 6 summary, a source whose identity is blacked out in the FBI documents provided a photograph of an individual who the source said was one of the grenade throwers and who appeared to be standing about 10 meters behind the protesters: "a single, heavysset, muscular Asian male of Cambodian ethnic features."

"The subject is scowling and standing alone, seemingly having no part in the rally," Mr Nicoletti wrote. "He is wearing a standard military-style olive drab field jacket with civilian clothing beneath. He is wearing a light blue colored shirt; but the lower half of his body is obscured by protest banners."

According to the same summary, a witness the FBI team interviewed claimed to have seen a line of then-Second Prime Minister Hun Sen's bodyguards allow two of the alleged assailants to pass by and flee the scene by running to the entrance of Wat Botum on Street 7.

The witness, dubbed "source #2," "pursued but was prevented from heading towards the wat and nearby CPP headquarters. As he turned, he was kicked by the soldiers and knocked to the ground."

As the alleged assailants passed the soldiers, a witness dubbed "source #5" attempted to escape the explosions by running to the west and overheard one of the soldiers yelling at the fleeing men: "Run quickly! The Funcinpec soldiers are



going to attack soon!"

At a second meeting with the Cambodian police on April 26, Mr Nicoletti was told that the KNP had given police only 24 hours to prepare for the rally, by obtaining a permit on March 29.

"On 4/27, I obtained the permit copy from a Funcinpec police official clearly stamped 'received at 1500 on 3/26.' Investigation revealed a three-day discrepancy," Mr Nicoletti wrote in his notes.

The Cambodian police then screened two video recordings of the attack, which showed no timelines and ended abruptly.

"Investigation on 4/27 revealed that the videos were edited for this presentation," wrote Mr Nicoletti.

The same FBI summary report recounts the statements of another witness, "source #6," who also said he "observed the grenade-throwers pass through the military line."

"He [witness #6] was told by the soldiers to: 'leave now or we will 'destroy' you,'" according to the FBI.

"Source #7," a soldier in the same military unit as the one deployed to the park, said that though he had not witnessed the attack, the night prior, the soldiers had been wakened at 2 am and told: "Something

will happen. Do not go back to sleep."

Another soldier, wounded at the scene of the attack, was "extremely angry," the FBI file states.

The soldier said he had "no prior knowledge of the attack. He was instructed to move away from the demonstrators but did not understand fully what that meant. After being treated at the hospital, he later met with superiors who stated: 'we told you to move back.'"

In the FBI records disclosed to The Cambodia Daily, the names of US officials and the names and titles of Cambodian officials are all blacked out.

US officials can often be identified from their titles, however, and in an unclassified report to US lawmakers in 1998, now freely available on the Internet, the FBI disclosed the names and titles of Cambodian officials who dealt with the FBI.

According to the 1998 report to Congress, the FBI case agent, later revealed to be Mr Nicoletti, met on May 2, 1997, with US Ambassador Quinn.

The May 6 investigative summary of that meeting describes a private meeting earlier on the same day, in

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which Mr Nicoletti, apparently speaking with US Ambassador Quinn, said that "deliberate, deceptive and delaying actions were being directed at the FBI representatives in Phnom Penh.

"At that time, and to this day, the entire investigative reporting results presented to the writer are a crime scene sketch and eight related photographs depicting keyed areas on the sketch," the FBI said of the contribution from their Cambodian colleagues.

Mr Quinn told Mr Nicoletti at their meeting "that only the Funcinpec party requested the Bureau's assistance, believed by the writer as a continued 'finger-pointing' ploy to expose their arch rival CPP to negative scrutiny," Mr Nicoletti wrote.

Mr Nicoletti then told the ambassador that, "at great personal risk" to his sources, he had secretly obtained all police photos and videos and access to four witnesses who were questioned without the knowledge of the Cambodian police.

A May 9 interview of officers from Mr Hun Sen's bodyguards ended when they refused to properly answer questions regarding their deployment on the morning of the attack. According to the 1998 report, the interview was conducted with Huy Piseth, who had given the early morning order to members of the bodyguard unit to deploy to the park, and Major Chhin Sovann, who was at the scene.

On May 13, the FBI agents interviewed a witness who said he saw military personnel exit the rear of Wat Botum and proceed into the restricted-access CPP military compound adjacent to the then-second prime minister's Phnom Penh residence.

Another witness claimed to have overheard soldiers discussing the attack and to recognize the suspect depicted in an FBI composite sketch as a soldier based at the compound. Previous witnesses had only seen the assailants run into Wat Botum and had lost sight of them after that.

In a May 19 message to FBI headquarters, Mr Nicoletti explained that efforts to cooperate with the Cambodian police in the investigation of the attack had been a failure.

"Every investigatory question posed to any witness has been generated by the FBI representative," said the message. "There has been no joint investigation."

Now that the FBI agents had developed three suspects and nine composite sketches, "the three bureau representatives could not



Saing Soenthrith/The Cambodia Daily

A crater from one of the M33 fragmentation grenades, which have a 'casualty radius' of nearly 16 meters.

understand the police's reluctance to utilize them."

At a "solidarity dinner" held by the Cambodian police commission on the evening of May 14, the FBI officials were the "guests of honor." The Americans announced that their preliminary inquiry was over and that "it was the duty of the Cambodian police to apprehend the subjects in Cambodia, not the FBI."

One Cambodian police official said: "We do not know what to do regarding this investigation. We did not do any investigation until the FBI arrived. We have our suspicions what happened; but it is too political to point fingers now. We are in a hard situation and we look bad," according to the FBI files.

"We move very slow in Cambodia," the official, whose name is blacked out from the records, continued. "The FBI came too fast. We are unprepared. The FBI has done more investigation than the police because we must obtain authority first. [...] We do not have the training to do this."

The FBI then made 10 suggestions, including: that media be told the US investigation is over but classified as secret and only publishable jointly by the US departments of State and Justice; that the FBI continue on in an advisory role and give written instructions to the Cambodian police on how to conclude the investigation; that Cambodian police reports be regularly submitted to an FBI representative, Mr Nicoletti, whose presence was to be kept secret; that, in the absence of "significant progress," the representative should leave Cambodia in 30 days; and that the investigative commission publish the composite sketches of the three suspects.

In a series of e-mails in September, Mr Nicoletti, who retired from the FBI in 2002 after 24 years of service, said he had been warned at the

time both by Cambodian police and US Ambassador Quinn, that his life was in danger.

"I was advised by both the National Police and Ambassador Quinn that two 'hit teams' were in Phnom Penh with orders to kill me," Mr Nicoletti wrote in an e-mail.

However, Mr Quinn, who retired in 1999, wrote in an e-mail on Sept 20 that he had communicated no such thing to Mr Nicoletti. Noting that it was against State Department tradition to comment on matters in a country after leaving a diplomatic posting there, Mr Quinn nevertheless delivered a lengthy defense of his own actions.

"I absolutely did not bring to the attention of Agent Nicoletti any death threats against him," Mr Quinn said. "It was just the reverse. Agent Nicoletti asked to see me at the embassy on Tuesday May 27 (11 days AFTER the FBI had ended its investigation), and at that meeting in my office, Agent Nicoletti told me that he had received two separate reports of possible attacks against him that week from two separate Cambodian police officials (one CPP and one Funcinpec)."

After photos of Mr Nicoletti appeared in the Cambodian press and compromised his safety, Mr Horton, the FBI's Bangkok legal attache, directed Mr Nicoletti to leave Cambodia immediately on May 28, according to Mr Quinn, who said that he had insisted that an FBI representative remain in Cambodia to preserve the chances of a successful investigation of the attack.

"I want to stress that I have provided this information to various elements of the US government including members of Congress and their staffs," wrote Mr Quinn. "Furthermore I have volunteered to testify under oath on several occasions about the accuracy of this information. I would be happy to do so now."

"I trust you can see from the above that the FBI would have been completely gone from Cambodia on May 17 had I done nothing," he added.

On June 2, 1997, Mr Horton sent a message to Deputy Assistant Director Ringgold to say once again that he was opposed to any direct FBI investigation, which he said jeopardized police cooperation and risked getting the FBI "embroiled" in Cambodia's internecine party politics.

"The incident, while perhaps technically a violation of US law, was a major atrocity committed in Cambodia and targeted at Cambodian citizens. The incident is part of a long, violent struggle for the leadership of Cambodia and involvement of the FBI would risk embroiling the FBI in the middle of this violent, politically-charged struggle," he wrote.

Mr Horton also said the investigation risked targeting the very people with whom the FBI was meant to cooperate in Cambodia.

"Another problem with FBI involvement is that one obvious group with the motive, ability and opportunity to commit such an act is the CPP, which control the police and much of the military. Typical FBI involvement entails working closely with the police. In this case, the police force consists of two groups loyal to the CPP or Funcinpec which are at odds with each other," Mr Horton wrote.

While traveling in Malaysia on May 22 that year, Mr Horton said he had been contacted by the FBI's National Security Division and again recommended that Mr Nicoletti be withdrawn from Cambodia, according to the FBI files. On May 23, Mr Horton called Mr Nicoletti and told him to take no further actions in the grenade attack investigation.

Mr Horton also said at the time that the prospects of a prosecution in the US for one injured American man, when most of those killed and injured were Cambodian, were not enticing.

"It should be noted that if subjects are identified and if sufficient evidence is obtained, the subjects face 16 counts of murder in addition to prosecution for over 100 injured in Cambodia, as opposed to potential prosecution in the United States for one injured person," he wrote.

He also recommended that future FBI investigations outside the US should not be undertaken solely on the basis of whether US law was technically violated but also with considerations for those responsible for cooperating with officials in the country in question.

FBI headquarters "should
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True Commitment Must Follow Anti-Graft Law, NGOs Say

BY EANG MENGLANG
AND FRANK RADOSEVICH
THE CAMBODIA DAILY

Human rights workers marking International Anticorruption Day yesterday said they had high hopes for Cambodia's impending anticorruption law, but stressed the legislation must follow through on its promises to curtail graft.

On Nov 21, Prime Minister Hun Sen announced that the Council of Ministers will formally consider the approval on Friday of the long-awaited draft law on corruption. If approved by the Council, the legislation can be passed to the National Assembly for adoption.

"I encourage and hope this law will make an independent organization against corruption," Director of the Cambodia Defenders Project Sok Sam Oeun said yesterday. "I believe government leaders know it is time to make Cambodian society free from corruption for our next generation."

Speaking during a public forum in Phnom Penh on the UN-created observance day, Mr Sam Oeun said stopping corruption is in the government's best interest since excessive bribery and fraud helped to topple the regimes of General Lon Nol and the Khmer Rouge.

"If we let corruption increase in our society, injustice, poverty and land disputes will increase and Cambodia's young democracy could be forced into conflict," he said.

Yong Kim Eng, executive director

of the People's Center for Development and Peace, said the law must offer protection to whistleblowers in corruption cases, and oblige government leaders to divulge their property holdings and other interests.

In Transparency International's latest global corruption index, Cambodia's 2009 ranking slightly improved over last year's figure, although the nation still places among the most corrupt countries in the world. Burma was the only Asean nation with a poorer score.

Spokesman for the Council of Ministers Phay Siphon said copies of the long-awaited draft law would be available to the public once it is sent to the Assembly for approval.

SRP lawmaker and spokesman Yim Sovann said the government has not made enough efforts to combat corruption. He said the government must include the recommendations from civil society in the draft law, and must make certain that the body handling corruption allegations is not constrained in its work.

"If this institution is not independent from the ruling party...then the law will become useless," he said.

The law is only one weapon in the fight against graft and nepotism, Mr Sovann said, adding that legislation granting citizens access to government documents and records is also needed to keep government rule transparent and trustworthy.

City Gives Permission for Parade To Mark Int'l Human Rights Day

BY KUCH NAREN
AND JULIA WALLACE
THE CAMBODIA DAILY

Over 10,000 people in 19 provinces will mark International Human Rights Day today with village forums, marches, parties, discussions and other activities sponsored by a coalition of 18 organizations.

Phnom Penh authorities have also permitted the coalition—which includes the human right organization Licadho and the coalition Cambodian Human Rights Action Committee—to hold a large march along the city's riverside to mark today's 61st anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

As many as 3,000 people will participate in the march, which is set to end at the park in front of Wat Botum, where 2,000 other people will join the crowd to listen to speeches about the importance of freedom of expression.

Suon Sareth, executive secretary of CHRAC, said yesterday that the coalition decided to emphasize freedom of expression this year because of a spate of recent disinformation and defamation cases, including those of Hang Chakra, a newspaper editor jailed for disinformation in June, and Moeung Sonn, the chairman of the Khmer Civilization Foundation, who was sentenced to two years in jail for criticizing a lighting system at Angkor Wat.

In a statement released yesterday,

the Sam Rainsy Party took the occasion of Human Rights Day to call upon the government to set up an "independent, neutral national mechanism for tracking human rights violations."

The SRP also criticized the government for failing to respect land rights, citing recent violent forced evictions. Also in advance of Human Rights Day, the European Union announced a donation of \$1.3 million to fund human rights projects in Cambodia.

The donation "signifies our recognition of the work and contribution of Cambodian NGOs in promoting human rights and democracy in this country," said Rafael Dochao Moreno, charge d'affaires for the European Commission's delegation to Cambodia.

Speaking at a lecture and debate organized by the EC yesterday at the Royal University of Law and Economics, Mr Dochao Moreno said that the funds would go to a number of groups that promote human rights, good governance and legal and judicial reform, including Legal Aid of Cambodia and the National League of Communes and Sangkats.

"Cambodia has passed through a tragic history," Mr Dochao Moreno said. "We need to make sure that this past will not repeat itself and that Cambodians will work together to promote respect for human rights."

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establish a clear policy which provides the [Legal Attache] with authority over all FBI personnel assigned to work [extraterritorial] cases in their respective country. Furthermore this policy should be made clear to all such personnel," he wrote.

Mr Horton wrote that on May 28 he met with Mr Nicoletti and US Embassy officials in Phnom Penh and informed them of the FBI decision to withdraw Mr Nicoletti to Honolulu while physical evidence gathered so far was examined and legal opinions were written.

Media leaks of details from the FBI investigation and remarks attrib-

uted to Mr Nicoletti were being used for political ends and endangering both Mr Nicoletti and FBI cooperation in Cambodia, Mr Horton said.

Mr Nicoletti vocally objected to plans to withdraw him from the country, and at one point openly argued about this with Mr Horton in front of Cambodian officials, according to Mr Horton's communications with FBI headquarters.

But after the Khmer-language newspaper Rasmei Kampuchea Daily printed a front-page article on May 29, 1997 titled, "FBI Says They Are Cheated By Sam Rainsy," Mr Nicoletti "changed his mind about the situation," according to Mr Horton.

"Ongoing regular FBI presence will only lead to further politicization and potentially increased

threat to official Americans," Mr Horton wrote.

Mr Horton did not respond to requests for comment submitted via the Society of Former Special Agents of the FBI, a professional body in Dumfries, Virginia.

Mr Nicoletti said in an e-mail message that he "pushed to remain in Cambodia" but the ultimate decision to withdraw him resulted both from the apparent rising level of danger and from miscommunications at higher levels.

According to Mr Nicoletti, he received congratulations from FBI Director Louis Freeh and a cash incentive award in recognition of his work in Cambodia.

He went on to direct similar investigations in the Philippines and Pakistan.

But, at the time of his departure

from Cambodia in 1997, the evidence gathered so far was "not to the US standard of prosecution," he said.

"That is why the original plan was to wait two weeks and return to Cambodia to complete the investigation," he added.

"Ralph Horton did not want the investigation to continue and viewed it as a threat to the liaison/rapport he was responsible for developing with the police in Cambodia."

"Conflicts often arose at that time between extraterritorial investigative squads, of which there were only 4 in the entire FBI at that time, and a legat's office weighing the desires of the ambassador and liaison efforts against potentially controversial investigations."

(Additional reporting by Phann Ana)