Soldiers and civil power: supporting or substituting civil authorities in peace operation during the 1990s
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MAKING SENSE OF THE MISSION

UNTAC’s Military and Civil Mandates

In 1992 the UN embarked on the most complex and ambitious peace operation in its history. The United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) was more than a peacekeeping operation. Not only was the aim to put an end to over two decades of civil war, it intended to place the country under virtual trusteeship and give the Cambodians a crash-course in democracy. For the first time in the United Nation’s history a peace mission was supposed to take over the administration of an independent member state. UNTAC was an early example of a new type of “complex peacekeeping”, that moved far beyond the mere separation of belligerent parties along a status-quo line, and was hoped to be a model for future settlement of civil wars. With almost sixteen thousand troops and some six thousand civilian personnel at its height, it was the biggest and most expensive operation under UN command up to that time. UNTAC had two principle missions to accomplish in merely eighteen months time. The military was to observe the cease fire and demobilise and disarm most of the four belligerent parties, while the civilian components had to control the four factions’ civil institutions and eventually organise democratic elections. As the military and civilian components deployed in mid-1992 and set out to perform their separate missions they discovered that, faced with obstructionism from the two main factions and with the means, organisation and mandate provided to them—it was impossible to perform either mission as planned. Nevertheless, eighteen months later UNTAC had successfully held elections that resulted in a democratically elected government. The following three chapters explore how the civil and military sides discovered how their missions—which had been envisaged and planned as sequential and largely segregated were intricately entangled.

Peacekeepers in the Post-Cold War Disorder

In late May 1992 a small group of Dutch Marines assembled on the Thai border with Cambodia. As part of one of the UN peacekeeping force’s twelve infantry battalions, the Marines were tasked to deploy in one sector in the western region of Cambodia. The largest part of their assigned sector was jungle area controlled by the Khmer Rouge, the most notorious of the four belligerent parties in a country that been involved in war for most of the previous twenty years. Civil war had officially come to an end with the signing of a comprehensive peace agreement by all four parties in Paris on 21 October 1991, but seven long months had passed since the factions had agreed to disarm and demobilise their forces and sporadic fighting had erupted throughout the country.
As the Dutch tried to cross into Cambodia they were instantly confronted with the new realities of soldiering in the post-Cold War era. At the border post the Dutch battalion commander Lieutenant Colonel Herman Dukers and his advance party were stopped from reaching Pailin, the heart of Khmer Rouge territory, by three Khmer Rouge border guards. Dukers made another attempt to cross the border, this time with thirty-five heavily armed Marines and an eleven-vehicle UN convoy, but also this failed to impress the guards in flip-flops. The Thai trucks drivers who were involved in a lively cross-border trade in Cambodian tropical timber and gems, seemed to have no such problems. After some negotiations involving the exchange of stacks of banknotes and some Coca Cola cans the Khmer guards raised the flimsy bamboo pole for the Thai drivers and returned to their hammocks.¹ From Phnom Penh the Australian UNTAC Force Commander Lieutenant General John Sanderson instructed Dukers to continue his attempts and to keep up the pressure. The Marines set up camp in no-mans land. The Dutch probed in various ways until there was no other possibility left than to use force—an option clearly ruled out at this point by the Australian veteran of the Vietnam War.

Although they were thoroughly aware of the need for restraint, the inability to act during their new mission was difficult to digest for the Marines. They were trained to take the initiative. “They are good, and they know it”, German General Klaus Reinhardt would note in his diary seven year later when he encountered the Marines in Albania, as the Force Com-
mander of NATO’s massive Kosovo Force. “Everything is geared towards efficiency.” Not only were the Marines the best light ground forces the Dutch could offer at the time, they were the only sizeable infantry unit the Netherlands had available for overseas deployment in 1992. The Netherlands government, traditionally a strong proponent of the UN and supporter of the international rule of law, was eager to play its part in the “New World Order.” To this end the Foreign Minister, Hans van den Broek, and the Minister of Defence, Relus ter Beek, joined hands, the former primarily to raise Dutch prestige in the international arena, the latter also to create a new raison d’être for the Dutch armed forces. The end of the Cold War made all Western European governments eager to cash in the so-called “peace dividend” by slashing their defence budgets. After the threat from Moscow had dissolved, participation in peacekeeping was regarded as the best way to demonstrate the continued value of the armed forces.

In the UN-sanctioned war in Iraq the Dutch military, like most of its European counterparts, had been incapable of contributing ground forces to the predominantly American war effort. The lack of expeditionary military capacity, a major drawback of a conscript army, and the vast technological gap in military equipment had become painfully clear to most European militaries in 1991. Only the British Army proved willing and able to projecting sizeable force overseas. Even for the British Army, however, providing a full armoured division had meant cannibalizing four divisions from its Army on the Rhine. The French light armoured division that participated in Operation Desert Storm performed reasonably well, but its capabilities were limited as it was manned, organized, and equipped much more like an American brigade than a division. The vast Dutch army of conscripts, although relatively well equipped in the course of the 1970s and 1980s to defend the German plain, was not at all suited to long and distant overseas deployments. Conscripts could only be deployed outside NATO territory if they volunteered and the armed forces totally lacked strategic lift capacity. Even to contribute substantially to peace operations, the army would have to reform drastically in the years to come.

Unlike the Royal Dutch Army, the Royal Dutch Marine Corps consisted predominantly of professional soldiers. As a unit trained for amphibious warfare in distant locations its battalions were light, easily deployable and trained for both arctic and tropical conditions. It associated more with the British Royal Marines than with the Dutch Army, whose military doctrine the Marines did not use. In fact, the Marine Corps prided itself on having no official doctrine at all and for being a flexible force with much emphasis on personnel initiative. It had one major drawback: the Corps was only three thousand strong and consisted of no more than two active battalions and one reserve battalion. With budget cuts around the corner, the Dutch Marine Corps played its cards skilfully. Although it had just contributed over four hundred troops to Operation Provide Comfort in Northern Iraq, the Corps had eagerly offered its battalions for deployment in Cambodia. Their effort would pay off. The Marine Corps turned out to be the only element of the Dutch armed forces unaffected by several rounds of budget cuts in the 1990s and was even hoping to expand to three active battalions.
During the refugee crisis in Kurdish Northern Iraq in the aftermath of the liberation of Kuwait, the Marines had their first taste of soldiering in the “New World Order.” Although the military intervention was sold as a peace operation, and later categorized as a “humanitarian intervention”, it was in fact nothing less than a UN sanctioned temporary military occupation of Northern Iraq by an American-led coalition. The aim was to protect the insurgent Kurds from Saddam Hussein’s bloody revenge. The Marines learned many lessons that would help them cope with the unexpected in Cambodia. Major Jaap Bijsterbosch was a company commander in Iraq and would serve as the operations staff officer in the second battalion that relieved Dukers’ troops. He learned about the importance of cooperation with humanitarian organisations and close relations with the local population. As a thirty-two year old major in charge of a small Kurdish sector he also learned that when entering an area where there was no government with a substantial military force, you in fact become the government—whether you liked it or not.

Iraq was a very exciting experience. We had been provided with a rather vague mission, but after the return of the first refugees we became the de facto authorities. We also had to act when there were property disputes, for instance over houses. If a dispute threatened to get out of hand I would call the local town elders, the local Peshmerga [Kurdish insurgent] leader and the religious leader together for a meeting. I would tell them to sort the problem out amongst themselves, but that I would have the final word if they had not reached a solution in two days. I made that very clear, but luckily it never came this far.5

In early 1992, only a few months after the Marines returned from Northern Iraq, the Dutch government decided to contribute to the mission in Cambodia. It was the most high-profile peace operation the United Nations were gearing up for until the Security Council became consumed by the rapid disintegration of Yugoslavia.6 The stakes were high for the United Nations, because UNTAC was a test case for “post-conflict peace building”, the most ambitious of four types of international action to prevent or control conflicts. The new UN Secretary General, Boutros Boutros Ghali, had made this categorisation for future multinational interventions in An Agenda for Peace. The paper, presented on 31 January 1992 to the Security Council, provided an analysis and recommendations on ways to improve the UN’s capacity to establish peace.7 The era of predominantly “thin-blue line” peacekeeping that started in 1948 had come to an end and the development of peacekeeping doctrine now centred on interventions in civil wars instead of conventional, inter-state conflict. An Agenda for Peace combined older peacekeeping principles and more recent experiences in Namibia to define four consecutive phases of international action to prevent or control armed conflict: preventive diplomacy, peacekeeping, peace making—including the possibility of peace enforcement when consent of one or more of the warring parties was lacking—and post-conflict peace building. This division in linear stages found its way into peacekeeping doctrine of most Western armies and would remain the prevailing conceptual framework during the 1990s.8
Throughout 1992, despite some early setbacks to the new interventionism, optimism prevailed over “second generation peace operations” and the opportunities presented by the use of military means—not force—to bring peace and relieve human suffering. At the end of that year, the UN was engaged in three massive operations that involved many tens of thousands of troops: one in Cambodia, another in Yugoslavia and one started under U.S. leadership in Somalia. Many more operations with a lower profile were conducted in other corners of the globe.

Not surprisingly, civil wars and the military interventions dominated much of the international media. In *Time Magazine*’s last issue of the year 1992, Cambodia was called “the UN’s Biggest Gamble.” The image used in *Time* to portray the military’s new role, that of a burly but friendly peacekeeper with a child in his arms, would soon become a cliché. “Ethnic cleansing” was still written between quotation marks and the American Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger spoke of an international court of justice, “a second Nuremberg” to deal with war crimes in Bosnia. However, the Bush administration cautiously avoided the commitment of American military forces in the Balkan war. Instead the United States eventually opted for military intervention in Somalia, where the president was told there would be fewer risks. *Time*’s editorial in the early days of the military intervention in Somalia, titled “On the Road with the U.S. Marines” had a profoundly optimistic tenor that would never again be associated with that mission after eighteen U.S. military personnel were killed in Mogadishu only ten months later. The subtext to the yearly “unforgettable pictures of the year” captured the optimist mood of that year, while simultaneously revealing one of the underlying causes for the failures to come:

Images like that of a Somali child in Baidoa, “too weakened to stand, grasped by a mother whose arms were barely stronger”, and that of a four-year old boy killed by shellfire from Serbian guns triggered a public outcry in the western world that “something must be done” about the massive human suffering.

The problem was that the “international community”, led by the United States and Western Europe and operating through the United Nations, chose to act upon those public calls impulsively, without a well thought out peace plan or the will to offer long-term solutions. The wish to remove the images of suffering from the TV screens prevailed over the question of whether outside solutions, providing the will was there, were even feasible. In the Balkans and the Horn of Africa the international community thus entered the murky arena of what soon became know as “humanitarian operations.” In Somalia and Bosnia these interventions in sovereign states involved the use of military means with the initially limited aim of helping secure the provision of humanitarian aid and assistance in order to alleviate the suffering of civilians, without the actual intention to end the conflict. “Peacekeepers” were injected
in a combat zone without a peace agreement to implement or uphold. These operations would criss-cross diagonally across the consecutive doctrinal phases and categories distinguished in *An Agenda for Peace*—while simultaneously combining elements of them all—as the mission inevitably moved beyond the limited, but vaguely defined humanitarian goals. None of the operations appeared to exist in its pure form in the real world and even in Cambodia *An Agenda of Peace* soon appeared to be of questionable use.¹⁰

The United Nations, while in the process of reinventing peacekeeping to meet the new post-Cold War challenges, was called upon to intervene in two types of intrastate conflicts. The first category originated in the peripheral battlegrounds of the Cold War. As the United States, the crumbling Soviet empire, and the regional powers lost interest in areas such as Namibia, El-Salvador, Mozambique and Cambodia, these bloody civil wars tended to dry up. Simultaneously, a second type of conflict emerged from the end of Superpower rivalry. The end to the Cold War made the superpowers lose interest and thus their grip over other areas of the world where their rivalry had traditionally created stability—most often at the loss of citizen’s individual freedoms. These new civil wars tended to erupt in regions with mixed ethnic populations, such as in some of the former Soviet republics and in the Balkans, but also in Africa. Particularly in Yugoslavia, former communist leaders tapped ethnic nationalist sentiments in an effort to hold on to power, fueling confrontations between ethnic groups that soon erupted into full-scale civil wars. The traditional principles of peacekeeping—thoroughly anchored in consent of the parties involved, neutrality and the use of force restricted to self-defence by lightly armed forces—proved reasonably successful in ending the first type of conflict. Here, both the factions and population were war-weary and the warring parties tended to be susceptible to outside pressure and imposed solutions. However, applied to the latter type of conflict, peacekeeping under a Chapter VI peacekeeping mandate proved insufficient to deal with stirred-up nationalist sentiments and unruly warlords who profited from chaos rather than order.

**The Paris Peace Agreement**

Cambodia’s civil war clearly belonged to the category of Cold War relics. After the young Prince Norodom Sihanouk won Cambodia’s independence from France in 1953, he tried to maintain his independence from the United States, China and the USSR. This proved impossible, as the war in neighbouring Vietnam was raging and the United States adopted a policy that boiled down to “either you are for us, or you are against us.” This drove Sihanouk towards China and USSR for aid, while Thailand on his Western border was firmly in the American camp. In 1965, Sihanouk assumed that communist North Vietnam would win the war against the U.S.-backed regime in Saigon and allowed the regime in Hanoi to move troops and supplies through Cambodia to the South. The Prince was deposed in an American-backed coup in 1970, but the new government under General Lon Nol—a thoroughly corrupt and regressive regime—soon came under siege from the Party of Democratic Kampuchea (PDK). This Maoist insurgent organisation, better known as the Khmer Rouge, rapidly gained new recruits in rural Cambodia. This was partly due to the relentless American bombing
campaign in support of its war effort in Vietnam and in defence of Lon Nol. In 1975, only
days before the fall of Saigon, the Khmer Rouge’s armed forces, the National Army of De-
mocratic Kampuchea (NADK), entered the capital victoriously. Immediately, the new regime
under Pol Pot started its reign of terror in an effort to produce a classless Marxist agricultural
society. Between one and two million died as a result of mass executions, forced labour,
malnutrition and disease in a widely accepted estimate of what has been called a form of
“autogenocide.”

Although the invasion was a liberation for most Cambodians, it was widely condemned by
both Western and Asian powers. Meanwhile, the Khmer Rouge continued to receive massive
Chinese aid. Hanoi installed a new communist government headed by Hun Sen that relied
heavily on Vietnamese and Russian military support. As a result of geopolitical considerations
the United Nations recognised the Khmer Rouge government-in-exile during its continued
war against the State of Cambodia (SOC). In order to create a broad coalition to fight the
government army, the Cambodian People’s Armed Forces (CPAF), the United States and
China resurrected Sihanouk, who still had wide appeal amongst the Cambodians. His royalist
party, Funcinpec, and a small middle class republican movement called Khmer People’s
Liberation Front (KPNLF), both supported by the western powers, joined the Chinese-backed
Khmer Rouge in 1982. With the Cold War coming to an end, however, China decreased its
support of the Khmer Rouge and the U.S. was no longer focused on opposing communist
Vietnam. Meanwhile the Soviet Union was eager to withdraw its support to Vietnam. As the
patrons lost interest the civil war reached a stalemate and the parties realised by the late
1980’s that outright victory was impossible for either side.

Rather than stumbling into this peace operation, as was the case in interventions in
“new” conflicts, a long period of negotiations and planning preceded UNTAC. In 1989 the
Vietnamese government suddenly announced its intention to withdraw from Cambodia. It did
so within six months, leaving behind the feeble Hun Sen regime that was nevertheless in
control of the vast majority of Cambodian territory. Bereft of its Vietnamese benefactor and
still faced with a coalition of three insurgent factions, the SOC was under serious pressure to
reach an agreement, if only to ensure its very own survival. Meanwhile, several Western
nations flirted with the idea of recognising the Hun Sen regime, forcing three opposing fac-
tions to reach some agreement with the government in Phnom Penh in order to share a piece
of the pie. Unable to find their way out of the stalemate, the parties turned to the international
community to mediate a settlement. In 1990, Australian foreign minister Gareth Evans, initi-
ated a plan for “an international control mechanism” that would rule Cambodia temporarily.
During the internationally sponsored negotiations in Paris the use of the former patrons as
leverage proved crucial, as it became clear that the parties would never settle if left on their
own. Remarkably, in October 1991 all four parties agreed to “a system of liberal democracy,
on the basis of pluralism,” as the framework for the new Cambodian constitution in The
Agreements on Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodia Conflict, better known as the Paris Peace Agreement.  

Although the factions were running out of steam at the Cold War’s end, the Cambodian conflict still proved very difficult to solve within the traditional perimeters set on peacekeeping. What complicated the implementation of the peace agreement was the compromise made in the peace agreement on sovereignty in the interim period. In the transitional phase there were two bodies representing Cambodia’s sovereignty. First, during the negotiations in Paris the Cambodian Supreme National Council (SNC) was formed. This quadrupartite body was composed of thirteen members, six from the SOC and two from each of the other three parties. It was chaired by Prince Sihanouk, who was also its thirteenth member. Under the Agreements, the SNC was recognized as “the unique legitimate body and source of authority in which, throughout the transitional period, the sovereignty, independence and unity of Cambodia [were] enshrined.” Second, the UN was declared to be the interim transitional authority for eighteen months, and was formally given the power to run the government until elections could be held. Although the SNC delegated to the United Nations “all powers necessary” to ensure the implementation of the Agreements, making UNTAC the official interim authority, Special Representative Yasushi Akashi delegated most important decisions back to the SNC. The Japanese UN diplomat stuck to his role of the honest broker, more than becoming an administrator.

The ambiguous provisions in the Paris Peace Agreement concerning the crucial question of who held the final authority in Cambodia during the interim period proved to be one of UNTAC’s largest stumbling blocks. The mission was envisioned as an operation under a Chapter VI mandate rather than a Chapter VII mandate, which would have allowed Akashi to enforce measures. This meant that decisions would be based on consent of all parties involved and that the interim “authority” could do little to coerce the parties to comply, neither in military terms, nor in the administrative sphere. Akashi once said that having lived in post-war Japan, he refused to be “a MacArthur of Cambodia”, who ruled like a proconsul. Some would later argue that this was what the mandate effectively required, but the means at Akashi’s disposal would not allow him to rule like a colonial overlord.

Another weakness embedded in UNTAC’s mandate was that it had been largely envisioned along separate military and civilian lines. UNTAC’s military mandate gave the peacekeeping force four tasks that were to be performed largely before the pivotal electoral process could start. On 9 May 1992, UNTAC announced that Phase One of the peace process, the cease-fire, which had been in effect since the signing of the Paris Agreements, would be followed by Phase Two on 13 June. During this second phase UN soldiers were to demobilise and disarm seventy percent of all four factions in designated cantonments, continue to supervise the cease-fire and verify the withdrawal of “all foreign forces”, meaning Vietnamese troops. They would also support the enormous effort to demine the Cambodian countryside. After the military component had established a “stable and secure environment” the civilian side of the mission could truly get underway.
UNTAC's civilian mission consisted of six distinct components: Civil Administration, Civilian Police, Human Rights, Electoral, Repatriation and Rehabilitation. Civil Administration was supposed to assume control over the administrative institutions of the four parties in order to ensure that they would behave neutrally in the electoral process. Controlling them—it was anticipated—would prevent the factions, most of all the Hun Sen regime, to use its governmental apparatus to tilt the electoral contest in its favour. UNTAC's emphasis was on controlling administration in the areas of national defence, finance, public security, information and foreign affairs.\(^{14}\) The UN Civilian Police (CivPol) was to monitor the four factions’ police forces to ensure that they would behave neutrally. The Human Rights component was charged with tempering Cambodia's authoritarian institutions, such as the judiciary. The Electoral Component had to organise and run—and not merely monitor as in previous UN missions—free and fair elections planned for May 1993. These four components all had to be built up from scratch. The UN delegated two additional civil tasks to two existing UN subsidiary organisations. The repatriation of 360,000 refugees from the Thai border camps was left to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Benefiting from the UNHCR's existing operational capability, the repatriation effort had already gotten underway. The infrastructural and economic reconstruction of Cambodia was to be coordinated by UN Development Project (UNDP). The small Education and Information Branch, although not a separate component, performed the crucial task of explaining to the Cambodian people what the UN was planning to achieve. Each of the civilian components set out to recruit personnel and created its own structures, aimed at achieving its own specified objectives with little prior coordination. Coordination was concentrated primarily on the operational level at UNTAC headquarters in Phnom Penh in the person of Akashi, to whom all component directors reported.

**The Unworkable Military Mandate**

Five long months elapsed between signing the Paris Peace Accords on 23 October 1991 and the moment when UNTAC became operational on 15 March 1992. Its battalions would only gradually arrive and it was not until June before the force was fully deployed. All this time was consumed assembling the peacekeeping force and drafting operational plans which, in an ideal world, would have been ready once the ink on the Agreement had dried. The Force Commander and Special Representative, as well as most other key personnel, were only appointed in early 1992 while others received their commission after June. Akashi and Sanderson arrived in Phnom Penh as late as March. The UN Advance Mission in Cambodia (UNAMIC) had already become operational on 9 November 1991 after the signing of the agreement and eventually consisted of civilian and military liaison staff, a military mine-awareness unit, and logistics and support personnel. However, it was according to one diplomat involved, “a major screw-up in this whole process.”\(^{15}\) The mission was no more than an afterthought when the Peace Agreement was drawn up and failed to act as UNTAC's military advance party. UNAMIC nevertheless “appeared to lull the UN bureaucracy into a false sense of security”, Sanderson concluded, even though all parties in the SNC—including the Khmer
Rouge—had appealed to the UN on 30 December for an accelerated deployment of UNTAC’s peacekeepers. No one had expected that it would take this long.

UNTAC’s delayed deployment had a devastating effect on the peace process as a whole. The parties may have agreed during negotiations, but the more time they were given between their signatures and executing the agreements, the more room they were granted to change their minds in the field.16 Having worked for UNTAC at the time Jarat Chopra wrote:

There was a window of opportunity following the October 1991 signing when factions were unsure of what to expect of the U.N.’s arrival. The last time a western power entered the country, U.S. B-52s carried out the largest bombing campaign since World War II. A decisive deployment by the U.N. would have overcome many of the hurdles that plagued the process thereafter.17

Even after Phase Two of the mission finally got underway in June 1993 an additional four months were needed to complete the deployment of civilian and military personnel. In the meantime the Khmer Rouge had decided to boycott those elements of the peace agreements it saw as conflicting with its interest. There appears to have been a rift in 1991 between the pragmatic technocrat forces within the party that had been dominant during the negotiations and the orthodox hardliners, who regained the upper hand after November of that year, when their nominal leader, Khieu Sampan, was almost lynched by an angry mob when he attempted to install himself in Phnom Penh to take part in the SNC. The insistence on rapid UNTAC deployment later that year was probably a last attempt by the more moderate forces to save the process. In assessing the Khmer Rouge motives throughout the mission the difficulty was that the inner core of the Khmer Rouge, Pol Pot, Nuon Chea and Tha Mok, never revealed themselves to UNTAC. Sanderson always felt they were fully engaged, but they preferred to pull the strings from their jungle hideouts.18 Although not necessarily capturing what Akshi called their “unfathomable” minds, several documents retrieved from captured Khmer Rouge territory in September 1993 do reveal how party policy towards UNTAC was sold to the inner party members. By the time the UN finally started to deploy in sizable numbers in May 1992, the Khmer Rouge was internally denouncing UNTAC as the “new enemy.” The old enemy was of course the State of Cambodia that was mostly referred to as “the Vietnamese puppet government” of “the contemptible puppets.” The State of Cambodia and the UN peacekeepers were described by the Khmer Rouge as colluding in allowing the Vietnamese troops to remain in Cambodia, thereby keeping the Hun Sen government in power.19

The reasons for the tardy military deployment were many. Other missions in Croatia, Bosnia and eventually also Somalia constantly distracted the UN Secretariat in New York. Even before this surge in commitments, however, the Secretariat simply did not have enough qualified staff to act as a strategic headquarters. “The truth is”, the Force Commander concluded, “that discounting the much smaller Namibia mission that was ten years in gestation, Cambodia, as the first large complex post Cold War mission of a multi-faceted nature, was too complex for the Secretariat.” Sanderson soon accepted that, as the operational com-

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mander, he was tasked to run the largest peace operation in history without the support from a strategic headquarters. The Force Commander therefore had to produce his own plan, although this did not stop the Secretariat’s staff members from “interfering in the planning, politicising if you like, and attempting to claim the output as their own.” 20 Even when the Secretariat created a “situation room” in the spring of 1993 this state of affairs hardly improved. Although the phone was finally picked up outside New York office hours in the final phase of the mission, this did not yet mean that anyone able to make decisions would answer it. 21

What further complicated Sanderson’s work, and that of other UN Force Commanders, was the United Nations’ reliance on an ad hoc international operational staff. For the purpose of command unity it was important to have all major troop contributors have a representative at all staff levels, but this resulted in massive linguistic and cultural barriers in a force dominated by Indians, French, Chinese and Pakistani’s. Sanderson, who for a soldier possessed remarkable diplomatic skills, took these and many other hurdles very well and his decisiveness would prove instrumental in compensating for the lack of planning and preparations at the strategic level. As Australia’s stake in UNTAC success was large, he was provided with an Australian Army command support unit, from which he “benefited mightily” and “the staff duties of the operation thereby took on a distinctly Australian hue, and was the glue that held the entire operation together.” 22

Nevertheless, for a tactical commander such as Dukers, used to working within a predictable NATO environment, “Phnom Penh”, as headquarters was referred to, stood for chaos in the early days. He was amazed by the order in which the operation was conducted. “Normally you first send the scouts, than logistics and subsequently the infantry. Now infantry was sent in first, without serious recce or logistical support.” 23 The headquarters was forced to plan much of the details of the operation as it deployed and was extremely hard to reach in this phase from Thailand due to poor communication. The different elements of UNTAC’s international staff were located in dozens of villa’s dispersed across Phnom Penh and lacked communications and transport. Logistical arrangements were scanty, which proved particularly harmful in a country with almost no infrastructure and left the poorly equipped battalions virtually immobilised in the early phase of the operation. The Dutch were lucky to have arranged much of their supply lines independent of the UN and received most of their materials straight through Bangkok.

While UNTAC was trying to get its act together in Phnom Penh the Dutch Marines were still stranded at the Thai-Cambodian border. Meanwhile hundreds of Dutch troops, 150 vehicles, thousands of tons of other equipment and supplies were in the pipeline between Rotterdam and the Thai harbour of Sattahip. Time pressure was rising as all twelve UN infantry battalions were to deploy by 13 June 1992. The Marines at the border were confronted with a steady stream of different Khmer Rouge colonels, but soon found out that military ranks had been subject to serious inflation within all Cambodian faction forces, whose army divisions were often under one thousand strong—less than one tenth that of their western equivalent. It
was abundantly clear that orders to halt the Dutch deployment came from the highest levels in the Khmer Rouge hierarchy. "They are bound to have seen the pictures of the UN in Yugoslavia", a Dutch Marine told a Dutch reporter "they know they have nothing to fear from UN-soldiers." "

The Dutch government did not contribute to UNTAC credibility when they announced that they would halt the influx of troops from The Netherlands. The Dutch battalion commander and foreign minister clashed with Sanderson and Boutros Ghali respectively over this decision. Sanderson wanted to build up a sizeable force on the border to keep the pressure on Khmer Rouge. Stopping the build-up gave the wrong political signal, but the Dutch—losing sight of the larger picture—were thinking in more practical terms. Dukers advised The Hague to stop flying in troops on the basis of potential "disciplinary problems" in Thailand. The Marines were quartered in a holiday resort near Pattaya, a coastal town in low season, where hotel managers were bringing in a steady stream of prostitutes. This and the presence of Dutch reporters and TV-crews in the very same hotel made the battalion staff nervous and the Minister of Defence, concerned with wives and families back home as well as his program to launch the Dutch military as a credible peacekeeping force, was equally jumpy. Remarkably, the press showed relative restraint in covering this story.

To break the deadlock Akashi, joined by Sanderson, decided to travel from Phnom Penh to Pailin on 30 May and use their moral authority to demand access to Khmer Rouge territory in front of the assembled world press. Dukers, with whom they were in radio contact, was to try once more from Thailand, several kilometres to the West. The Khmer Rouge leaders proved quite determined. The High Representative of the Secretary General of the United Nations was offended by a couple of young Khmer Rouge soldiers who refused to lift their thin bamboo pole. This story, which soon became know as "the bamboo-pole incident", was broadcast all over the world and demonstrated the limits of UN power in a way "which was both humiliating and portentous." While aware of the embarrassment suffered by the UN force as a whole, the incident caused a slight feeling of relief amongst the Dutch Marines. At least the world could now see that is had not been due to their lack of effort. Moreover, it increased recognition for the harsh conditions in the sector to which they had been assigned.

Not everybody was willing to accept the limits on the use of force in the peacekeeping mission. The Deputy Force Commander French Brigadier Jean-Michel Loridon, who had arrived in Cambodia in November 1991 as the commander of the advance mission for UNTAC, wanted the peacekeeping force to call the Khmer Rouge’s bluff and take more direct action than his superiors Sanderson and Akashi would allow. "It is not a question of troop strength", he argued in an interview with the Far Eastern Economic Review. The veteran from the war in Algeria, where he served as a Foreign Legion company commander, claimed to have done "a lot more with 300 troops than is now being done with 14,000." The General was frustrated that UN troops were "just sitting and waiting for the Khmer Rouge leaders to agree to disarm their troops." He was convinced that the Khmer Rouge would not dare shoot at UN troops, but added: "It is possible ... at some point they will try to block the UN move by force.
If it comes to that one may lose 200 men—and that could include myself—but the Khmer Rouge problem would be solved for good." The Brigadier was not alone in overestimating the willingness of the troop contributing nations to take such risks. In January 1993, Gerard Porcell, chief of the Civil Administration Component, saw this as a crucial failure of UNTAC’s will.29 He explained: “we don’t have the will to apply the peace accords. This absence of firmness with the Khmer Rouge was a signal for the other parties who saw there the proof of UNTAC’s weakness towards the group that from the start eschewed all cooperation.”30

Sanderson felt that the proponents of enforcement, both within and outside UNTAC, were “moved by the passion of the immediate events” and argued that enforcement was never a realistic option. It was “beyond UNTAC’s legitimate authority and practical ability.”31

The Military Component lacked a proper force structure, equipment and mind-set to take on the Khmer Rouge, an organization that had successfully resisted the mighty Vietnamese Army for ten years. Moreover, he felt that enforcement might destroy the peace process as well as the international consensus and he knew very well that most countries contributing troops would not have permitted their soldiers being sent into battle against the Khmer Rouge. Early August Loridon was dismissed, and became known as “UNTAC’s first high-ranking casualty.”

Within the Khmer Rouge party cadre there had been a discussion in May on whether or not to grant UNTAC access to its territory. A report on this meeting, which only came into the possession of UNTAC more than a year later, did not reveal who were present during this meeting, but the language used showed little room for compromise. It was concluded then that if the peacekeepers were let in, they would take over these areas, gain intelligence which would be used against them, and try to prevent the Khmer Rouge from carrying out “their activities.” UNTAC soldiers were described as “parasites” and the analogy of a worm entering a healthy body was used.32 Although their colourful rhetoric appeared to UNTAC analysts as an attempt to conceal a fundamental lack of relevant ideas within the Party, the animosity in the descriptions used of UNTAC seems to prove that the Force Commander was right in not calling their bluff. An important motive for Khmer Rouge leaders not to grant the peacekeeping access was that “their activities” were first and foremost the extremely lucrative trade in tropical timber and gems with Thai merchants on the other side of the border. This trade relationship had made the communist insurgent organisation very rich in the previous years. UNTAC’s success would mean that their resource-rich territories would be opened up to all. Revenues would have to be shared within the new government that, it was feared, would be dominated by the hated SOC.

Even though Akashi publicly ruled out the possibility of enforcement, he instructed Sanderson to engage in contingency planning for this option in September. The Special Representative was reacting primarily to outside pressure, mostly from the civilian side. Since the Khmer Rouge power base was in its area of operations, the Dutch battalion would bear the brunt of this operation. Dukers became aware of these preparations when the UNTAC Chief of Plans, his compatriot Colonel Willem Huijssoon, inquired about the heavy arms in the units
regular equipment. The plan, euphorically called *Operation Dove Tail*, involved no more than a company of Dutch Marines and some Malay and Pakistani units. The Dutch were to be flown to the Thai side of the Cambodian border by four large UN helicopters to two border crossings and demand access to Khmer Rouge territory from the Thai border. Indicative of the fact that the operation’s effect was supposed to be founded on moral authority rather than combat-capability, was the plan to have the operation executed in concert with UNTAC civilian, electoral component, civil administration and Information and Education Branch. All components were to demand the Khmer Rouges cooperation simultaneously.

Dukers considered *Operation Dove Tail* “a ridiculous plan.” 33 He and his men were equipped for a peacekeeping operation and although the plan included some extra support in the form of armoured personnel carriers, the peacekeepers would have been extremely vulnerable in their white vehicles. It remains unclear how the element of surprise was to be attained. First of all the plan was classified under “UN Restricted”, which guaranteed little secrecy in a multi-national setting under UN flag. Second, cooperation from the Royal Thai Army manning the border crossings was required. It had by then become common knowledge that its local commanders were in cahoots with the Khmer Rouge on the other side of the border. When asked to brief Akashi about his options, Sanderson and Huijssoon both strongly advised against the plan.

A force equipped for peacekeeping and widely dispersed could not easily upgrade to combat capability. Prior to the embarrassment suffered by peacekeepers at the hands of warlords in Bosnia and Somalia, it was not appreciated that an intervention force needed “escalation dominance”, the capability and will to take a military confrontation at least one step further than the adversary, for enforcement to succeed. Peace enforcement after all, was not much different from going to war against one of the parties. Even if the UNTAC military would have had anything resembling the military capability to confront the Khmer Rouge, enforcement measures were likely to result in retaliation against UNTAC’s soft underbelly—the thousands of UNTAC civilian staff and NGO workers that the military would have been unable to protect. Although fully agreeing with Sanderson’s arguments, one of the Dutch battalion commanders nevertheless wondered ever since the bamboo-pole incident what would have happened if Akashi had just walked on at Pailin in front of the assembled world press and not have allowed himself to be sent off “like a schoolboy.” He seriously doubted whether the Khmer Rouge would have opened fire. “UNTAC would then have showed determination, instead of just taking another beating.” 34

The bamboo-pole incident became symbolic of the UN’s inability to operate without all the parties’ consent. On the other hand, its aftermath was a manifestation of UNTAC’s primary strength: its capacity to improvise despite serious setbacks, move forward around the obstacles raised by both the Khmer Rouge as well as the State of Cambodia and use its military component creatively. Initially this flexibility meant embarking upon the planned demobilisation process without the Khmer Rouge, while keeping all lines for negotiations open. This proved wise, for although its representatives refused to cooperate militarily and eventu-
ally decided to boycott the elections, the Khmer Rouge remained sporadically engaged at the political level.

The crisis surrounding the Dutch battalion’s deployment forced UNTAC headquarters to find alternative locations for them from which to operate. Huijssoon came up with a plan that satisfied Sanderson. The primary intent was to contain the Khmer Rouge in the jungle area around Pailin and deny them the possibility to infiltrate and support operations in the rest of Cambodia. The Khmer Rouge was known to keep its supply lines open between Pailin in the west and Anlong Veng, its secondary power base on the northern border with Thailand. These two areas had previously been joined in the so-called Free Liberated Zone, a lengthy patch of territory hugging the Thai border, which had been conquered through a joint effort of the three insurgent factions. Compliance with the peace agreement by the two non-communist factions allowed UNTAC to monitor and control their areas within the Free Liberated Zone. After international pressure had made the Thai bar the Khmer Rouge from using its territory as a supply route, Pailin was forced to fully rely on a complex pattern of foot-paths through the jungle and country-side to reach the north.

Sanderson’s attempt to disrupt Khmer Rouge operations from Anlong Veng proved to be based on the right calculations. From there, the Khmer Rouge was hoping to strike at the heart of Cambodia in the populous Kampong Thom province. Subsequently it hoped to enlarge its influence in the north and east. The Khmer Rouge called this struggle for central Cambodia the “first battlefield.” The second battlefield was “waging of guerrilla warfare throughout the country in cooperation with the population in order to get rid of the Vietnamese puppet Government.” The third battlefield was at the negotiating table in Phnom Penh, where they would continue to demand that all de facto sovereign powers vested in the SOC were to be transferred to the Supreme National Council and that all Vietnamese had to withdraw from Cambodia. During a “Leadership Meeting” held in August 1992 this threefold strategy was re-stated, but it was acknowledged that the real results would only come as as result of the armed struggle.35

In order to cordon the Pailin area in an attempt to cut the Khmer Rouge’s lines of communications to Anlong Veng, Sanderson positioned one of his strongest battalions to the north and north-west of its territory.36 He gave the Dutch parts of the Malay and Bangladeshi sectors, including Sisophon, the provincial capital of the province of Banteay Meanchey, where the Dutch posted one company and their headquarters. They were also put in charge of controlling the strategic Route Five between Sisophon and the border town of Poipet, which connected Cambodia with Thailand. A second company was positioned at Phum Nimit, where the Dutch succeeded in demobilising some of the government forces, and a third operated from Phum Bavel. Finally, a Dutch unit had been able to take control of Sok San, a small KPNLAF enclave surrounded by Khmer Rouge territory. Like Funcinpec forces, the KPNLAF was pleased with the UN presence and was fully cooperative with the Dutch.

Huijssoon knew that the Marines would patrol intensively around the clock when he assigned them their new area of operations. He knew them to be eager to dominate their
ground and that they were highly mobile with many vehicles. The Dutch were clearly one of the “rich-man’s” contingents within UNTAC. Apart from large numbers of Land Rovers, they were equipped with forty Haglund BV’s, a snow-vehicle used for operations in the arctic region. With their extremely wide rubber tracks this proved to be the perfect vehicle for patrolling and supplying distant locations during the wet season, when the jungle roads often turned into mud-pools with which even regular tracked vehicles would have had difficulty with. They also had constant support from four light helicopters from the Royal Dutch Air-force and were equipped with night-vision equipment—that allowed them to operate effectively at night. These were luxuries that were not possessed by the Bangladeshi and Pakistani, who had to reach most of their destinations on foot.

The new position chosen for the Dutch companies would also enable them to reach their original locations if the Khmer Rouge leaders were to change their minds and come on board. For several months, hopes within UNTAC headquarters were vested in the “departing train-effect.” Initially, Sanderson remained optimistic, hoping that the Khmer Rouge were merely keeping their options open and that Thai, Chinese, Japanese and UN political pressure would eventually force them to join the peace process and allow UNTAC to enter their territory. During a visit by the Dutch Naval Commander in August, Sanderson estimated that despite a delay of two months, the election could be held on the planned date in May and that
the Khmer Rouge would join the peace process in four to six weeks. However, the Khmer Rouge did not jump aboard the departing train and the UN force was never able to exert its authority in areas under their control.

Sanderson decided nonetheless to begin the disarmament on 13 June, with only eight and a half infantry battalions at his disposal. By late September UNTAC had cantononed some 52,000 troops, approximately 40,000 of which were government forces. The remaining 12,000 belonged to the two smaller factions that soon withered away as military and administrative organisations. Much of these non-communist forces were disarmed in the northwest of Cambodia, where the Dutch were stationed. However, by refusing to enter Phase Two of the peace process and disarm, the Khmer Rouge also prevented its nemesis, the State of Cambodia, from fully dismantling the CPAF. Under SOC pressure Sanderson acknowledged the right of self-defence for the other factions, which gave them the freedom to delay their cantonment. The number of cease-fire violations in this period was rapidly rising. The total of the demobilised troops amounted to no more than a quarter of the country’s regular fighting forces, and did not include over 200,000 local militia that UNTAC was eventually also required to disarm. The UN force seized some 50,000 arms, a mere fraction of the number of weapons in circulation in Cambodia. Nevertheless, the playing field had become somewhat less complex as there were only two credible military forces left in Cambodia. Some 100,000 government troops now faced approximately 30,000 Khmer Rouge forces, with its core of some 10,000 seasoned fighters.

Sanderson desperately wanted to keep all factions on board, but paradoxically, the Khmer Rouge obstinacy probably saved the UN from serious embarrassment in the second half of 1992. Within UNTAC military headquarters, the Khmer Rouge’s departure from the peace process was greeted with mixed feelings. Those UNTAC officers aware of the implications and side effects of the cantonment of over 140,000 troops knew the whole military demobilisation plan had probably been a fiction from the outset. Already in late 1991 Sanderson predicted after a UN survey was conducted amongst the factions that there were massive obstacles to the demobilisation process. Two problems stood out. First, the Paris Agreement had made the provision of the demobilised soldiers’ primary needs, such as food, shelter and medicine the responsibility of the four factions. They were clearly incapable of meeting these obligations. Second, there was much fear of a serious deterioration of public safety following the demobilisation.

Of those disarmed regular forces the vast majority was sent on so-called “agricultural leave.” This was a yearly routine for every faction at the beginning of the wet season when fighting was not an option and when some of the troops needed to work their fields. The only difference this time was that the soldiers would not return to fight during the dry season. For the State of Cambodia and the two smaller factions, it was an elegant way of ridding themselves of troops they could not afford to keep on the payroll anyhow. However, the crucial question was how many of the unemployed war veterans were going to earn a living for them-
selves and their families. Banditry proved to be the easier option for many of the former soldiers.

In the northwestern corner of Cambodia, where a relatively large number of these troops had been demobilised due to KNLPF and Funcinpec cooperation, the Dutch battalion commander was convinced that the security situation in Cambodia in late 1992 would not have been fundamentally better, had the overall cantonment and disarmament process been successful. In fact, “[w]e would have been in serious trouble if the cantonment process had succeeded.” As Chief of Plans, Huijssoon was put in charge of planning and finding sponsors for the retraining and reintegration of these demobilised troops. He feared that the security situation would have even been notably worse had seventy percent of the forces been suddenly released from their faction’s military control. The vast majority of the soldiers eligible for demobilisation wanted to become farmers, but there was already a shortage of demined agricultural land. By the summer of 1992, there was still no serious UN program for retraining and reintegration after cantonment. A program for 25,000 demobilised soldiers was hastily being prepared, but this was all UNTAC had the funds and organisational capacity to set up. Even this would have been phased over many months. Releasing 140,000 unruly veterans into a thoroughly gutted and lawless Cambodian society was as likely to have resulted in even more chaos. “Add to that the planned withdrawal of half the UN force by the end of 1992”, Huijssoon said, “and we would have headed for outright disaster.”

The Segregation of Military and Civilian Spheres

The success of UNTAC’s civilian mission had been perceived to be dependent on the military’s ability to demobilise the four factions. However, no reciprocal dependency between the two missions had been foreseen. The inseparability of the two missions became apparent as one of two key arguments used by the Khmer Rouge to refuse cooperation with UNTAC’s military was the lack of UN control over SOC civil administration. The Khmer Rouge was not prepared to lower its “protective shield”, its armed forces, as long as the SOC was allowed to hold on to administrative power in close to ninety percent of Cambodia and thus survive the transitional period virtually intact. The only reason the Khmer Rouge had accepted the compromise on disarmament in Paris the previous year was because of the inclusion of the administrative control provision in the Paris Peace Agreement. A second prerequisite to any further participation in the peace process for the Khmer Rouge was the verified and permanent withdrawal of Vietnamese forces to their homeland. Although UNTAC was convinced that the Vietnamese troops and military advisors had left, the Khmer Rouge was—or pretended to be—unconvinced as its members tended to see a disguised Vietnamese soldier or infiltrator in every single member of the Vietnamese minority in Cambodia.

Although the Khmer Rouge could rightfully claim that UNTAC had not lived up to its promise to control and dismantle the Hun Sen government structures, the speed with which Khmer Rouge wrote off UNTAC’s interim administration made their argument less credible and fuelled the impression amongst UN staff as well as many Cambodians that Pol Pot’s
representatives had not signed the Agreement in good faith. It also invited the State of Cambodia to retaliate. Hun Sen countered by claiming his government had obviously surrendered far more of its sovereignty than the Khmer Rouge had done and further hampered administrative control by the UN. While the Khmer Rouge was generally seen as the prime “spoiler” of the peace process, increasingly over the months both UNTAC officials and the Cambodian people came to regard the SOC as equally culpable. Although the UN Chief of Civil Administration Gérard Porcell argued that “UNTAC was reduced to negotiating with rather than controlling SOC because it negotiated rather than controlled the Khmer Rouge”, it could also be argued that the insurgents were correct in estimating in the course of 1992 that UNTAC would never be capable of effectively controlling the State of Cambodia.44

Asserting control over the SOC government structures was far more complex than had been envisaged. Nothing of the sort had ever been attempted by the UN. At the central level in Phnom Penh, the SOC simply administered around UNTAC in the areas of policy making where its central administrative apparatus was still functioning.45 UNTAC officers were kept busy watching an official without function while the real decisions were made out of UNTAC’s sight in concealed parallel structures.46 The political party representing the State of Cambodia at the elections, the Cambodian People’s Party (CPP), was thus able to rely fully on service of officials on the public payroll and access to public assets while obtaining revenue from sales of those assets.47 In the course of October, UNTAC attempted to strengthen its monitoring and supervision capacity, but its major weakness remained the civil administration component’s corrective action—a combination of legal difficulties and lack of political will according to Lyndal McLean, deputy director of civil administration in the Phnom Penh province.48

At the provincial level UN civil administrative control was “spotty at best and almost nonexistent in some places.” When the administrative component was fully deployed no more than 170 UN officials were assigned to control 21 provinces and a total SOC civil service numbering 200,000. This left no more than five to eight civil administration officials to be deployed in each province.49 This was particularly harmful since much of the central SOC administration had collapsed and a large share of government control slipped to provincial governors and generals. Controlling SOC ministries that themselves were unable to control their nominal areas of responsibility meant little. The Paris Accords had not paid any special attention to control at the sub-national level, an omission in the overall mandate that would also hamper other operations such as that in Kosovo seven years later. In many provinces UN officials arrived only in July “because they said accommodations were not good enough”, journalist William Shawcross commented scathingly. Once in place in the provinces, the envisaged role of the international officials towards the provincial administration was that of a shadow administration, monitoring and controlling the governor and his local government apparatus. However, two out of three UN civil servants found themselves “powerless in the face of entrenched local officialdom backed by all the government’s resources, including police and troops.”50 The lack of UN Civil Administrative control over the provincial gov-
ernment was partly the result of the character and limitations of SOC administration. In Banteay Meanchey, the province where the Dutch headquarters was located, Woong Kaa was the governor. He controlled several provincial departments, but due to a lack of financial means these departments amounted to little. The governor’s primary means of control were his provincial police and the provincial CPAF-troops under his command, institutions over which the UN Administrator and his five administrators had in practise little or no control. The military component, on the other hand, was able to wield some influence in this field. A prerequisite to any effective UN control on the provincial level would therefore have been a strong mechanism of civil-military cooperation. This, however, turned out to be one of UNTAC’s greatest deficiencies.

Limited coordination between civil and military components at the tactical or provincial level was the result of a mandate and planning process that foresaw very little contact between the two. While the military and civil aspects were supposed to be carried out under one UN umbrella, the Paris Accords were envisaged to be implemented by two parallel but separate organisations. “If one makes a strict interpretation of the Paris Accords,” Porcell told a room full of UNTAC officers:

At first glance, one realizes that the Military Component and the Civil Administration Component have little chance for contact, and the same conclusion can be drawn from a reading of the Report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations of 19 February 1992, which formed the basis of resolution 745 creating UNTAC. Therefore, according to the Accords as structured, the military personnel and the civilian administrators would not have had contacts other than those involving official ceremonies or mundane receptions.

In Cambodia, both military and civilian components reported to the civilian UN Special Representative, but there was no joint military-civilian staff initially to help coordinate their activities. It was not appreciated that, as Sanderson rapidly came to realise, “all operations are now a blend of military and civilian objectives.” He much regretted the lack of integrated strategic planning within the UNTAC mission:

From the very beginning each component conducted a separate survey mission and prepared a plan of sorts. Some component heads were not even appointed before the deployment commenced. Unfortunately, this planning shortfall was never corrected in Cambodia, except in the case of the military and electoral components which forged a necessary planning and control alliance to see the election through.

Since the implementation plan viewed disarming and demobilising the factions as quite distinct from much of the civilian activity, it initially called for a withdrawal of half of the military component from October 1992, months before much of the civilian activity was to take place. In case the soldiers were to run into their civilian counterparts, the Lieutenant Colonel Rakesh Malik, from India advised his fellow UNTAC peacekeepers in a document entitled
“Do’s and Don’ts for the Peacekeeper in Cambodia” to “limit your liaison with the NGOs/civil departments UNTAC”, adding that “there will be a few of them around.”

The military and civilian components had no matching geographic zones of responsibility, which seriously hampered civil-military cooperation. Military contingents were deployed in twelve geographic zones based on areas controlled by each of Cambodia’s four factions. The military sectors varied in size as they depended on the number of cantonments and therefore the concentration of Cambodian troops. This gave the Dutch a relatively small sector in the militarily contested west, while the Uruguayan contingent controlled an enormous sector in the more stable eastern part adjoining the Vietnamese border. The civilian component based its operations on the country’s twenty-one provinces, with twenty-one civilian administration directors assigned to these provinces. For the Dutch this meant coordinating their efforts with three provincial governments and an equal number of UN provincial teams. This situation was revised in December 1992, when the second Dutch battalion commander Lieutenant Colonel Patrick Cammaert took control over the single province of Banteay Meanchey. However, ten years after completing his mission in Cambodia, Cammaert had no recollection of a provincial UNTAC Civil Administrator working in Sisophon, the provincial capital. There had been one, but he had arrived long after Dukers’ battalion had deployed. As early as September 1992, to the first commander’s surprise, the Civil Administrator was suddenly replaced by a new official, Anders Roejkjer. Cooperation with the new director was reasonably good, but generally considered of little importance as his formal tasks of controlling the administration of the province amounted to little. Most of the dealings with the provincial SOC governors would be direct instead of through the UN Civil Administrator.

Coordination between the military and civil components was poor, but cooperation between the various civilian components was overall not much better. The Director Civil Administration for Banteay Meanchey had a coordinating role towards CivPol, the Human Rights Component, and the Electoral Officers, but these organisations with their own priorities and agendas tended to be very independent minded. Each reported to its own headquarters in Phnom Penh, where UNTAC’s civilian and military headquarters were initially deployed over 29 different locations throughout the city. Lack of integrated planning and poor communication in the initial phase hardly facilitated the integration of operations. Each organisation operated in a stovepipe fashion, reporting and communicating only vertically. The “managerial stovepipe” was a problem that would haunt UN operations throughout the 1990s. In Cambodia, the wheel had to be reinvented and it would be reinvented over and over again in future multi-dimensional peace operations. UNTAC’s components did not even have joint coordination meetings until March 1993. When he finally called for them, Akashi regarded these meetings as opportunities for the components to “harmonize” their various priorities “rather than to engage in hard-headed strategic coordination under his leadership.” The Japanese career UN official had a similar approach towards his own organisation as he would display toward the Cambodian parties. He tended to rely on the art of persuasion and never
probed for the outer boundaries of the powers vested in him as an interim administrator by the Security Council.59

In Banteay Meanchey the Director of Civil Administration hosted a weekly coordinating meeting on Thursdays by January 1993. All four components which he formally coordinated, as well as the UNHCR, UNDP and the few NGOs operating in the sector were usually present. “Dutchbatt” was also represented at these meetings by its “civil-operations officer.” The staff officer in charge of personnel performed this newly created staff-function, for which no official name or separate position existed within the Dutch military. He became a “double-hatted” battalion staff member simply because he happened to have most time on his hand—a relative luxury in a place where the military generally worked seven days a week for long hours. This ad hoc arrangement was the result of the unforeseen prominence of contacts with international and local civilian organisations. Laura McGrew, in charge of the Human Rights component in Banteay Meanchey, remembered the Dutch as “great on a personal level and professional, they helped with computer problems, and were polite and friendly. I remember one of them saved me once from an embarrassing situation in an official meeting, when the UNTAC Director of Civil Administration asked me to sit on his lap.”60 Few decisions were made in these meetings. However, as the elections approached and the security situation deteriorated rapidly in 1993, the role of the military sector commander, his staff and company commanders in coordinating the operation would increase to a point where the military was running a large part of the operation.

Winning the Hearts and Minds
Little remained of UNTAC’s original military mission by August 1992. The “pure military” tasks had dwindled down to “stabilizing the military situation” by monitoring the factions and the cease-fire as far possible. Apart from monitoring a small number of demobilised forces and guarding the surrendered armaments, a remaining method of containing the sporadic but increased fighting from erupting in war was bringing the four factions in contact with each other in “Mixed Military Working Groups.” In the Dutch sector it would take until October for the Khmer Rouge to show up and on the few occasion where the Khmer Rouge were present, some new colonel would do little more than repeat the demands for UNTAC to evict the remaining Vietnamese forces and assure that the Hun Sen government transfer all powers to the Supreme National Council. Dukers wanted to stop the usually futile meetings, but he was not allowed to do so. In the course of time he saw the use of continuing the meetings, if only to keep a line open to the Khmer Rouge, most of all on the company level where his local units were in harms way. Sanderson’s experiences in the Mixed Military Working Groups in Phnom Penh were no more encouraging at the time, but the meetings at the central level would also regain importance over time as the elections approached.61

In September voices were raised in Dutch parliament to withdraw the Marines from Cambodia. It was an expensive and still dangerous mission and the representatives were questioning the use of keeping their troops in the jungle of Cambodia after the collapse of the cantonment process.62 Many were eager to contribute troops to the UN Protection Force
(UNPROFOR) in Bosnia, in Europe’s backyard, in a conflict that was receiving far more media attention. In August the pictures of internment and refugee camps shook the world by evoking memories of Nazi concentration camps. They triggered an emotional outcry and a wide call for more forceful intervention.\(^6\) However, with its Marines Corps fully committed in Cambodia, the Dutch had to wait until their new Airmobile Brigade was operational before their armed forces were able to contribute any combat troops for deployment on the Balkans.\(^6\) This was not likely to happen before 1994, so in the meantime the Dutch government had to settle for a communication and a transport unit in Bosnia.

In early September the Minister of Defence, Relus ter Beek, accompanied by the Minister of International Development, Jan Pronk, visited the troops in Cambodia. For a brief period UNTAC and the Marines made the headlines again. The Dutch public needed to be convinced that the Marines were not “humming around in the jungle.” Initially, there was some scepticism in the Dutch press, mainly as a result of complaints by Marines about not being able to perform the task they had come for. One Marine was quoted as saying the battalion performed “primarily social work.”\(^6\) This image was rapidly replaced by a certain amazement at what had been accomplished thus far. Soldiers could do more of a peacekeeping operation than separating, disarming and cantoning factions.

The battalion had started giving free medical care to Cambodians and despite UN policy guidelines from New York—which stated that medical treatment was to be confined to UNTAC personnel out of fear of medical supply shortages—from August the number of civilian visiting medical facilities increased sharply.\(^6\) Eighty percent of the patients treated by the Dutch Field Dressing Station and the two company medical facilities were Cambodians. At the company medical post in Phum Nimit alone, around one hundred locals were treated per week at what an UNTAC information officer called a “very impressive medical facility.” The battalion commander was even convinced that his Field Dressing Station was the best medical facility in Cambodia at the time. The information officer witnessed how medical treatment “seriously contributed to the good relations between the company and the local population.”\(^6\) In turn, these relations facilitated military operations and even the contacts with the Khmer Rouge, as some of the families of its soldiers received medical care. Moreover, the experience for the medical staff was considered extremely useful, as the Dutch had never been confronted with real bullet wounds and mine-related amputations in real life.

Medical aid was given with the battalion commander’s explicit support as well as that of the Dutch authorities—once they became aware of its value. It did not hinder the treatment of its own personnel, since the battalion was amply supplied with medicine.\(^6\) However, while there was an abundance of medicine for the general treatment of able bodied men and women, there was a lack of medicine for the treatment of babies and elderly people. This was particularly painful for the medical staff, as some of those patients died under their care. Cooperation with other organisations was usually a way out of such problems. Under the supervision of a company doctor, a special facility run by three medics from former refugee camps was created 300 meter from the Dutch post. The supply of medicine and other equipment to this
facility was provided by the UNHCR, which had been arranged through intervention by the members of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The UNHCR would not always deliver on its promises and little support was forthcoming from the local authorities, but with help from UNICEF a borehole was created and the Dutch built a latrine for the medical post. It was planned that a local doctor would gradually take over the facility. Helicopter support was also provided to the ICRC for emergency cases in the isolated post in Sok San.

Compared to other regions, there were relatively few humanitarian organisations active in the Dutch area of operation. Apart from the international governmental organisations incorporated in UNTAC, the UNHCR and UNDP and the other UN subsidiary organisations Unicef and World Food Program, the ICRC and the non-governmental organisations Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), Care and Danish Cambodia Consultants (DCC) were operating in the area. Most organisations had their offices in Battambang or Phnom Penh, while only a few had field offices in Banteay Meanchey. Cooperation with the humanitarians was fairly good. Some humanitarian organisations, such as MSF, harboured principle objections to cooperation with the military, although the Marines noticed that they tended to drop their inhibitions once the security situation worsened. Cooperation with the UNHCR was essential as the Dutch and other contingents were providing military escort to refugee convoys. The Marines would also play a role in the protection of refugee reception centres in Siophon. Escort jobs from the Thai refugee camps gave the Marines enormous satisfaction, and were a much sought after job.

Dutchbatt was also supporting the work of UNTAC’s Information and Education Branch. The branch, largely staffed by Khmer-speaking academics, was tasked to spread UNTAC’s message. It used various techniques, including videos and hired actors to explain the purpose of the massive international presence, but first and foremost to teach the public about the election and the merits of democracy. The Marines erected bulletin boards for UNTAC in the villages and distributed the printed material provided by information officers. For many Cambodians, especially those in distant locations and most of all for the Khmer Rouge rank and file, it was often still a mystery what those people in their big white terrain vehicles, soldiers and civilians, Europeans, Asians and Africans, had come to do in their country. UNTAC’s ability to communicate its message to the Cambodians was seriously impeded by Boutros-Ghali’s decision to withhold funds for Radio UNTAC in the initial months. The information component’s director, Tim Carney, an American diplomat with long experience in Cambodia, failed to convince the Secretary General that a Radio station was the best way to spread the UN’s message free of interference from the factions. Eventually the radio station was allowed, but the lack of this most effective means of providing information in a rural society with terribly poor communications was felt in the initial period and much enhanced the importance of rehabilitation projects by the military.

Various small projects were initiated spontaneously to bring immediate improvement to the living conditions of the people. The Dutch initially called them “Community Relations Projects”, a term taken from the British Army Field Manual that was circulating in the battal-
ion staff. The manual from the 1980s was on “Counter Revolutionary Warfare”, the term then in vogue for what had previously know as counterinsurgency. Apart from medical aid, the Marines constructed small bridges in order to make villages more easily accessible and created a small market place near their compound to stimulate local trade. Elsewhere in Cambodia, engineers built roads and constructed Bailey bridges. While this was often done for operational reasons, it worked both ways with the Cambodians profiting from the improvement of the country’s devastated infrastructure. For the military a favourite “civic action” activity, as the projects became known, was support to the resurrection of schools and medical clinics. The Indonesians had their particular way of “nation building”, which they were used to performing in their own country. As the military guardians of national unity of Indonesia this had traditionally been one of their less coercive methods of strengthening national cohesion in the archipelago. “I would not argue that the Indonesians were spreading the word of democracy and freedom of speech,” UNTAC’s Chief of Plans recalled, “but they were doing a fine job lecturing on schools and giving physical education to school children, using funds and materials from Indonesia.”

Meanwhile, the French picked up where they left off after decolonization, and eagerly taught French to a generation of Cambodians that had no memory of French rule. Various UNTAC military units initiated similar projects elsewhere in Cambodia and civic action was certainly not limited to the “rich” contingents, with their lavish logistical means and funds. According to the journalist William Shawcross, the Uruguayans and Pakistanis were particularly praised “for doing fine work in bringing public health and other services to villages.”

As a major in the Royal Australian Engineers, Sanderson had commanded a construction squadron during the war in Vietnam. Experience here and in other counter-insurgency operations such as Malaysia had made the Australian military thoroughly aware of the importance of “winning the hearts and minds of the people” when performing military operations in their midst. The General had therefore proposed that the military component should have a mandated “civilian side” with a specific budget. However, much to his regret, the UN secretariat did not provide him with a budget for civic action programs, arguing that this was the responsibility of other UN agencies and NGOs. Sanderson therefore heartily endorsed the local military initiatives and propagated the need to build “an alliance with the people” as “an essential part of the military component’s method of operation.” In March 1993, headquarters in Phnom Penh tried to coordinate some of these initiatives by national contingents by creating a small Civic Action Cell headed by a U.S. Army officer experienced in Civil Affairs. Battalion commanders were instructed to set up a medical program, use engineering capacity if available for the benefit of the local population and appoint a staff officer as the coordinator for civic action. By then, UNTAC had already been under way for one year and most civic action continued to be local initiatives.

Altogether, the UNTAC military was able to establish a reasonable program through the generosity of voluntary donations from individual countries, and according to Sanderson “close co-operation with other UN agencies and effective use of the skills that many of the
United Nations soldiers brought to Cambodia. Coordination between the civilian rehabilitation program and the military initiatives was not always flawless, and according to a U.S. government report this resulted in a clash of interest at times.

For example, UNTAC’s civilian components planned several projects, such as road building and water sanitation, with private voluntary organizations working in Cambodia. Due to the lack of coordination, some of these projects, which were intended to provide income and skills to the local population, were pre-empted and completed by the military as part of its civic action campaign. According to the Force Commander, providing security and proceeding with the civic action campaign were crucial to the success of the mission and could not be delayed until the civilians were in place to begin planning and coordinating rehabilitation.

Sanderson replied that “[o]n the question of military civic action versus rehabilitation, every effort was made to coordinate engineering tasking including with UNDP. The truth of the matter was that the Military Component had to get on with the task for operational reasons and could not wait.”

Construction work performed by the military for operational needs was not to be confused with civic action. However, it was becoming increasingly difficult to draw the line as the military steadily advanced into the humanitarian and rehabilitation sphere during peace operations in the 1990s. The confusion over the purpose of civic action became widespread, simply because it was not always clear whether aid was an “end” or used a “means.” Was “doing some good” a means of winning the hearts and minds and thus facilitating military operations, or was relief and reconstruction a military purpose of its own? Were the peacekeepers there to “do good” or simply to provide a secure environment for others to work in, by engaging in humanitarian work, rehabilitation, peace building, institution building, state building, or “nation building”—the most confusing as well as ambitious of all terms used for such activity?

These concerns were hardly raised at this point in time by the politicians visiting the Dutch sector in Cambodia. While civic action was a traditional and well-known recipe in military operations, especially low intensity conflict, and had been practiced by their own UN peacekeepers in Lebanon during the 1980s, the Dutch tended to treat it as a new magic potion. The two Dutch ministers were thoroughly impressed with what they saw the Marines were doing to benefit the Cambodians and set out to stimulate their efforts, while using the positive image it created. During his stay in Cambodia the Ministry of Development promised Marines half a million guilder to use as they saw fit on reconstruction and rehabilitation projects. With the use of the so-called Potje-Pronk (Pronk-funds), the “Community Relations Projects” thus became “Dutch Development Projects.” With this money at their disposal the civic action campaign seriously got underway in the Dutch sector. The Marines were now able to take on larger projects such as building or renovating schools and hospitals, drilling wells, digging shallow water reservoirs and establishing a malaria prevention programme. The civil-operations staff officer coordinated civic action, but much of the initiative for and execu-
tion of the projects was delegated to companies in the field. In 1993 the minister raised the total amount to be used by the Marines to one million guilders, the equivalent of over half a million dollars. "You cannot underestimate the importance of the Potje Pronk on the success of our mission as a whole," the second battalion's operations officers would concede.\textsuperscript{84}

Winning the heart and minds, it soon appeared, worked three ways. Not just the Cambodians had to be won over. Civic action seriously contributed to the improvement in troop morale, as it gave the Marines a sense of purpose in a country where they saw more extreme poverty and suffering than many had ever considered possible. Winning the hearts and minds back home turned out to be an unforeseen advantage, and allowed the Ministers of Defence and Foreign Affairs to trumpet the accomplishments of the Dutch troops in parliament. The visit and the sudden wide media coverage assured that those who had doubted the use of keeping the Marines in Asia were now overwhelmingly in favour. How the remainder of their eighteen-month mission would evolve, however, remained somewhat of a mystery.

UNTAC map of Khmer Rouge territory in early 1993. Shaded areas were controlled by the Khmer Rouge. Cease-fire violations and other major incidents are marked with an asterisk (*).
1 Carolien Bais, *Het Mijnenveld van een Vredesmacht: Nederlandse Blauwhelmen in Cambodja* (Den Haag 1994) 33-34. This excellent short journalistic account by Carolien Bais, based on extensive interviews with the key players as well as her personal observations in Cambodia, gives a lively picture of the UNTAC mission as a whole and the Dutch battalion in particular.


5 Interview with Lieutenant Colonel Jaap Bijsterbosch, Willemstad (Curacao), 28 January 2004.

6 In March 1992 the Security Council created the UNPROFOR to put an end to the fighting in Croatia. This force would soon expand into a much larger mission Bosnia.


10 What the Secretary General could not have anticipated at the time was that Bosnia and Somalia, as a result of their eventual dramatic failure, would come to dominate the UN agenda as well as the popular perception of peace operations for the years to come. UNTAC on the other hand, while launched as the showcase for “second generation peacekeeping” and “peace building”, would soon fade away from public memory.

11 Agreements on Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodia Conflict, Paris, 23 October 1991 (Published in UN Department of Public Information, DPI/1180, Jan. 1992); Michael W. Doyle, *UN Peacekeeping in Cambodia: UNTAC’s Civil Mandate* (Boulder 1995) 29.

12 The UN “transitionary authority” was an Australians proposa when negotiations had reached an impasse. The smaller parties feared during the negotiations that the SOC, controlling almost ninety percent of the Cambodian population, would be able to manipulate the elections if not properly controlled.


14 Article 6 of the Paris Peace Agreement concerned UNTAC’s administrative control over Cambodja.


18 Sanderson, “Command at the Operational Level”, Presentation to the Australian Command and Staff College (Queenscliff, 26 June 2000) 8.

Regrettably, no Khmer Rouge documents were recovered from the period between August 1992 and May 1993. See also W.A. Huijssoon, “United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia: Een Nabeschouwing van een Groote VN-Missie (part II)”, Mitaire Spectator, Vol. 164., No. 1 (1995). Huijssoon refers to UNTAC analysts who also estimated that the Khmer Rouge had decided in early 1992 to implement only the parts of the Paris Peace Agreement that suited its purposes.

20 Sanderson, “Command at the Operational Level” (Presentation, 26 June 2000).


22 Sanderson, “Command at the Operational Level” (Presentation, 26 June 2000) 8.

23 Bais, Het Mijnenveld van een Vredeschacht, 45.


28 “Ter Beek stelt vertrek vredeschacht Cambodja uit wegen Rode Khmer”, Trouw, June 1, 1992; Bais, Het Mijnenveld van een Vredesschacht, 35.

29 Also Michael Doyle suggests that “UNTAC could have pushed through Khmer Rouge lines.” He also acknowledges, however, that history showed that the mighty Vietnamese army never succeeded in defeating Khmer Rouge. Michael W. Doyle, “UNTAC—Sources of Success and Failure”, in: Hugh Smith (ed.), International Peacekeeping: Building on the Cambodian Experience (Canberra 1994) 90-91.


33 Bais, Het Mijnenveld van een Vredesschacht, 53. He said that he would have followed Sanderson’s orders in it had come this far, but obviously not without permission from The Hague.

34 Ibid., 54.

35 “This argument was justified with the traditional Communist line that armed struggle was necessary to support the diplomatic and political struggle to succeed. See: Force Commander to Deputy Force Commander, Subject: Analysis of Document Recovered From HQ 519 Division, 16 September 1993, ADFA, Sanderson Papers, box 7, folder 35.

36 Interview with Colonel (retd.) Willem Huijssoon, Amsterdam, 4 May 2004. Huijssoon’s account was confirmed in conversation with Peter Bartu (Canberra, September 2001).

37 Two of the locations, Sok San and Phum Nimit were originally planned as platoon locations, but now harbouring a full company. Dukers, “Peace-keeping in Cambodja”, 2850.


39 Force Commander, Subject: Disarmament in the Cantonments (10 June 1992), ADFA, Sanderson Papers box 31, folder 81.

42 Interview with Huissoon, Amsterdam, 4 May 2004. The “Training Cell” within the Plans Branch was responsible for providing vocational alternatives for demobilized soldiers, with a view of preparing them for integration with the Cambodian society. After the Khmer Rouge refused to cooperate militarily with UNTAC, the Training Cell was dissolved in December 1992. Sanderson to Akashi, “Preliminary Study of Lessons Learned by the Military Component” (31 August 1993) 11, ADFA, Sanderson Papers, box 7, folder 34.
43 Doyle, “UNTAC—Sources of Success and Failure”, 88.
44 Doyle, *UN Peacekeeping in Cambodia*, 43.
45 Ibid., 35.
46 Ibid., 43-44.
47 Doyle, “UNTAC—Sources of Success and Failure”, 89.
49 Doyle, *UN Peacekeeping in Cambodia*, 42.
51 HQ Sector 1, Maj C.B.J.E. van den Berg, “NLBATCAMB 1: De Wapenolie in de Civiele en Militaire Component van UNTAC”, IMH, UNTAC, 099, inv. 62.
52 Porcell asked himself why this was so far from the reality in January 1993. Speech by Gérard Porcell (Director CivAdmin) at UNTAC Force Commander Conference, 22 Jan 1993, ADFA, Sanderson Papers, box 7, folder 35.
53 Sanderson, “Command at the Operational Level” (Presentation, 26 June 2000).
55 Lieutenant Colonel Rakesh Malik (teamleader UNMLO NADK, Indian Army), “Dos and Don’ts for the Peacekeeper in Cambodia,” IMH, UNTAC, 099, inv. 31. On the relationship of the military with the local population Malik advised UN soldiers to “remember at all times that the locals are not enemies; be friendly but firm with them; respect their customs and traditions; do remember to avoid any affiliations with their women; don’t keep pets; don’t trust any of them—rely on your own judgement.”
57 Findlay, *Cambodia*, 125. Trevor Findley refers to an interview he held with Akashi.
58 Ibid., 109-110; See also Shawcross, *Deliver us From Evil*, 54.
60 E-mail correspondentie between author and Laura McGrew, 24 April 2004.
64 Ibid, 706.
66 Dukers, “Peace-keeping in Cambodia”, 2853.
68 Dukers, “Peace-keeping in Cambodia”, 2854.
Periodieke Rapportage FDS (Field Dressing Station) Dutch Bat UNTAC, 7 aug - 30 sep 1992, Centraal Archievendepot (CAD), Ministerie van Defensie, Archief Tijdelijke Commissie Besluitvorming Uitzendingen (TCBU) van de Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal (1999-2000), Archiefmateriaal betreffende United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia, 1989-1994, box 11, folder 3. (Hereafter cited as CAD, TCBU, Documents UNTAC, followed by box number and when possible folder number. The box numbers are those specifically provided to author by the CAD archivist).

Periodieke Rapportage, FDS Dutch Bat UNTAC, 22 January 1993, CAD, TCBU, Documents UNTAC, box 11.

Dukers, “Tussentijdse Rapportage UNTAC” (8 October 1992), IMH, UNTAC, 099, inv. 37.

Bais, Het Mijnenveld van een Vredesmacht, 103


Shawcross, Deliver us From Evil, 59.

Interview with Huijssoon, Amsterdam, 4 May 2004.


United States General Accounting Office (GOA), Report to Congressional Requesters, “U.N. Peacekeeping: Lessons Learned in Recent Missions” (December 1993) 49.


Lieutenant Colonel F. Hoogland, “Experiences of a Battalion Commander”, Lecture at NATO School’s (SHAPE) third peacekeeping course (19-4-1994), CAD, TCBU, Documents UNTAC, box 4.
