Soldiers and civil power: supporting or substituting civil authorities in peace operation during the 1990s

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THE KOSOVO FORCE

Entering the Wasteland

Three years separated NATO’s first peace operation in Bosnia from the Alliance’s first war over the fate of Kosovo in the spring of 1999. After the protracted bombing campaign forced Milosevic’s security forces to leave the Albanian-dominated Yugoslav province, NATO inserted a large ground force that was to keep the peace, but that found itself exercising de facto military governance in the ensuing power vacuum. Just as NATO officially never called it a war, however, it would not refer to the takeover as an occupation. Its Kosovo Force (KFOR) was mostly planned, perceived, and referred to as a peacekeeping force. After all, by separating and controlling Serb security forces and the Albanian insurgents, soldiers were to create the military conditions for the parallel civilian mission, the UN interim administration for Kosovo. Just as previous civilian missions, however, it would take many months before the civilian mission was able to execute the civilian side of the UN mandate for Kosovo, which was the most ambitious project of truly international administration in the history of the United Nations. Military operations by IFOR and SFOR in Bosnia were the primary point of reference, but for the troops on the ground, such as a Dutch artillery battalion, the initial months of the operation bore closer resemblance to the anarchy found by the American-led force in Somalia. Apart from avoiding military entanglement in such a situation altogether, few lessons had been learned—or at least applied—in America and Europe from this early experience of ad hoc vacuum filling. While focussing on the journey of the Dutch battalion in the provincial town of Orahovac in the second half of 1999, the following chapters explore how NATO failed to prepare for the power vacuum, how its forces improvised, and how they eventually performed in the fields of public security and civil administration by substituting and supporting civilians.1 Any discussion of the problems involved in matching civil and military mandates and capacities must begin with the background of the Kosovo crisis and what was subsequently indentified as the KFOR’s primary military mission.

Stepping into the Void

By 12 June 1999, D-Day as it was inevitably called, a substantial NATO force of infantry, tanks and artillery was assembled on the Macedonian border with Kosovo. Amongst the troops was a Dutch field artillery battery attached to a German Panzer Brigade for which they would provide fire support. Together with four other multinational brigades under British, American, French, and Italian command they made up the KFOR that was to deploy in Kosovo with the capacity to enforce the peace. Before crossing the Macedonian border into Kosovo the gunners had already gotten a taste of what the Allied liberators must have felt
like in some European towns forty-five years earlier. From a nearby refugee camp harbouring 40,000 Kosovar Albanian refugees, which the soldiers had helped to build in the previous months, crowds of people gathered by the road, cheering “NAH-TOE! NAH-TOE!”, and waving as the troops passed by. Their tracked artillery pieces rumbled towards Kosovo in what seemed an endless column of troops and armour. When the troops crossed the Kosovar-Macedonian border they were dazzled by the lamps of TV-cameras and floodlights from the international press, but then the road turned pitch-dark. Electric power and other infrastructure in former Yugoslavia’s poorest province were badly damaged after more than a year of civil war, followed by almost four months of NATO bombing.

While rattling and shaking badly behind the turret machineguns of their noisy M-109 howitzers, 36 hours in total, the soldiers witnessed the chaos and destruction in the war-torn province. Entering a potentially hostile situation was at first a thrilling experience for the troops. It was everything that being a soldier was about, but the harsh realities of war soon sunk in. As the soldiers pushed into Kosovo they spotted large numbers of civilian cars standing about on the side of the road with opened suitcases and clothes lying around. They had been abandoned at gunpoint by the thousands of refugees during the preceding weeks. A few Albanians came out of hiding to applaud the troops, but the soldiers soon found out that war was still close. In their headlights a body appeared on the road, part of its head missing. The victim, it later turned out, was a German journalist who had taken the risk of advancing into Kosovo ahead of KFOR. When the column Shortly halted an anti-tank shell flew right overhead and exploded nearby.

As the Dutch and Germans advanced on the town of Suva Reka at dawn, they saw the first Yugoslav troops casually standing around in the tree line. They were not nearly the demoralised soldiers NATO troops had expected after listening to their own propaganda in the previous weeks. There were clear signs of recent heavy fighting around Suva Reka and the Albanian population was obviously still terrified. Some people briefly lifted their curtains in order to wave, but of the few people that had stayed behind no one came out to greet the KFOR troops. It soon became clear why. Just around the next corner the Dutch troops encountered the dreaded MUP casually standing around their armoured vehicles. The Yugoslav special police were armed to the teeth and one of the policemen casually made a throat-slitting gesture to the KFOR soldiers as they drove by.²

In many ways, the tragic Yugoslav disintegration began and temporarily seemed to have ended in Kosovo. Close to two million Kosovar Albanians, Muslims by faith, made up almost ninety percent of the province’s population and wished for greater autonomy from the Serb-dominated remainder of Yugoslavia. In 1989, Slobodan Milosevic had rudely revoked the autonomous status granted to the Kosovar Albanians by Marshall Tito in 1974. After disbanding its institutions of local government and police, direct control from Belgrade was imposed and the Albanian language was banned from schools and for other official purposes. Milosevic was clearly unwilling to yield on the province that, with its approximately 250,000 strong Serb minority, had been central to the radical nationalism that brought him to power in
the late 1980s. In the eyes of Serb nationalists Kosovo had historic significance as the cradle of Serb civilisation. This belief went back to the medieval struggle between the Ottoman Turks and the Serbs over Kosovo that culminated in the infamous battle of Kosovo Polje on 28 June 1389. The battle was lost by the Serb Kingdom, followed by five centuries of Ottoman rule over the area. The Albanians argued that they had been present long before Serbs arrived in the region in the seventh century. It had been the 600-year anniversary of the battle on 28 June 1989 that Milosevic had used to take centre stage and promise to an estimated crowd of one million Serbs “never again will they defeat you.” Within that same year Kosovo’s autonomy was stripped.3

During most of the 1990s the Albanians in Kosovo practiced an impressive form of passive resistance. Serbs formally ruled over Kosovo and held almost all positions as mayors, judges and police, but the Albanians organised their own elections and created parallel administrative structures, schools, universities and medical clinics. As traders and migrant workers in Western Europe, the Albanians quite often fared economically better than most Serbs, who were on civil-servant wages from Belgrade. But after years of non-violent resistance to this form of apartheid, the moderates under the elected Albanian leader, a modest academic named Ibrahim Rugova, lost out to more extreme nationalist forces. An increasing part of the Albanian population supported an armed insurgency by the Kosovo Liberation Army, or Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës (UCK), a group that had emerged in 1997. The following year the world witnessed a rapidly escalating armed conflict between this guerrilla force and the Yugoslav Army, the Ministry of Interior Special Police (Ministarstvo Unutrašnjih Poslova, or MUP) and Serb paramilitaries that Milosevic deployed in increasing numbers. Prior to the summer of 1998, Milosevic was never seriously challenged by the western powers for the brutality of his regime in Kosovo and neither NATO nor the UN addressed the legitimate fears of the Serb minority in Kosovo. In February that year, Robert Gelbard, the American special envoy to the Balkans had actually continued to praise the Serb leader for his support of the Dayton accords in Bosnia and denounced the UÇK as “without any question a terrorist organisation.”4

The methods used to suppress the revolt reminded one of those previously used in Croatia and Bosnia. Albanian fighters were guilty of kidnappings, mostly Serb civilians or what they considered collaborators, and attacked Serb police stations. Serb security forces burned down entire villages suspected of supporting the UÇK. As the news of atrocities in yet another Balkan civil war flooded western newspaper front pages and TV-screens, the call to do something about the human suffering again became louder. In the second half of 1998 tens of thousands of Albanians were driven from their villages into the hills. NATO stepped up the pressure on Belgrade as the number of internally displaced persons and refugees reached 200,000. There were lingering regrets that the province had not been brought into the Dayton process in 1995. Richard Holbrooke, quite understandably at the time, thought this would unnecessarily complicate the negotiations with Milosevic who held the key to ending the war in Bosnia. Clinton’s heavyweight diplomat was again called upon to broker a peace
and with the threat of NATO air-strikes against Milosevic to back-up his diplomatic efforts, he succeeded in the fall of 1998. However, the armistice Holbrooke mediated failed to hold and the conflict continued under the eyes of 1,500 OSCE monitors from the Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM).

The escalating ethnic conflict raised concerns amongst Western politicians that the conflict would spread to Macedonia and possibly even engulfing Greece and Turkey. Following the murder of 45 Albanian inhabitants of the village of Raçak, in response to the slaying of four Serb policemen by the UÇK in January 1999, the international community headed by the United States made a last attempt to solve the conflict. NATO’s credibility was felt to be at stake. In February 1999 the parties were ordered back to the negotiating table in the French town of Rambouillet. A cease-fire agreement and the withdrawal of Serbs forces were to go hand in hand with the deployment of an international peacekeeping force under NATO leadership. The options for a ground force in Kosovo had already been under consideration at SHAPE, NATO’s military headquarters, since the summer of 1998, but planning was accelerated in the lead-up to the negotiations at Rambouillet. However, Operation Joint Guardian, as the mission became known, appeared to be short-lived. It was shelved as NATO’s dominant role in the peacekeeping force proved unacceptable to Milosevic in Rambouillet. The Serb delegation’s fatal decision not to sign up to the Agreement was at the time primarily ascribed to their attempts to emasculate the proposed peacekeeping force. However, some well informed sources have since claimed that an annex to the Rambouillet Accord—which provided for unrestricted freedom of movement for NATO troops throughout the territory of Yugoslavia and not just Kosovo—was inserted by Western negotiators to provoke rejection by Belgrade. “I think the terms put to Milosevic at Rambouillet were absolutely intolerable”, British Defence Minister of State, Lord Gilbert, later conceded. “How could he possibly accept them? It was quite deliberate.”

Some political leaders within the Atlantic Alliance had grown increasingly determined to bring its force to bear for the sake of the latest breakaway mini-state on the Balkans—although those favouring armed intervention were not sure what the next step would be. Champions of a more interventionist policy, such as Madeleine Albright and Tony Blair, seemed quite eager to draw a line in the sand with Milosevic, who was again seen as a thoroughly destabilizing factor in the Balkans. They found their military exponent at SHAPE. “Kosovo was simply an extension of Bosnia in the mind of Wesley Clark”, Holbrooke said. “For Clark, Kosovo was the logical next step in his liberal interventionist attitude toward the use of force.” The diplomat seems to have concurred. In the preceding years, the defensive Alliance had sought and found a new purpose and began to transform into an organisation willing to project power across its boundaries and intervene to promote regional stability. Geopolitical motives, new-found confidence and a new sense of purpose certainly made NATO’s reaction swifter and far more decisive than it had been in the first half of the nineties.
After Milosevic refused to bow to Western pressure, NATO opened a bombing campaign on 24 March 1999. Russia and China had blocked a resolution in the Security Council and therefore the Alliance went to war without UN approval. NATO never called it a war. Instead the term “humanitarian intervention” was often used to emphasize the official aim of intervening within the borders of a sovereign state in order to end widespread and grave violations of fundamental human rights. Hopes were vested in a limited punitive air campaign similar to the one against the Bosnian Serbs in the fall of 1995. Instead, the bombing campaign against this more formidable opponent drew on for weeks, then months and caused much friction between NATO members over the scope of the offensive and even the specific targets selected for destruction. It could even be argued that the air-offensive was counter-productive, since Milosevic used it as a pretext to expel some 863,000 Albanians from Kosovo. Several hundred thousand more had already been internally displaced in the previous year.

The endless stream of refugees flooded neighbouring Albania and Macedonia and it was feared that it would destabilize the ethnically diverse region as a whole. When the refugee crises in April and May surprised and overwhelmed the UNHCR and Western governments, NATO military forces played a humanitarian support role unequalled in size and scope since the end of the Second World War. Several thousand troops assembled in Macedonia under the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps (ARRC), commanded by Lieutenant General Sir Mike Jackson. By late May this force had grown to approximately 10,000 troops. By then its mission had changed from preparing for the possible extraction of OSCE monitors, to preparing for deployment into Kosovo as a peacekeeping force to possibly enforce the Rambouillet agreement on humanitarian support. The force had not yet received an official name but was tentatively called the Kosovo Force (KFOR). During the bombing campaign General Jackson and his staff had spent a long time planning and preparing for the unknown. The Force Commander had five brigade commanders under his authority and sufficient logistical units, “but what we didn’t have was anybody much to do the fighting.” On one occasion Mike Venables, Jackson’s political advisor, drew out a roots and branches diagram which suggested seven possible outcomes to the conflict. “We all reckoned that the actual outcome would be the eighth that he hadn’t spotted”, Jackson recalled. He tried to plan for each of these different outcomes. “It was a period of great uncertainty which highlighted that uncertainty is absolutely a part of a soldier’s job. He clearly addressed a generation of officers that often still longed for the certainties of the Cold War years, when he added: “not only should we not resent it but we should learn to embrace it.”

Another NATO force called AFOR assembled in Albania. Its primary and official mission was to support the local Albanian authorities and the UNHCR to manage the refugee crises by providing security, logistical means and manpower. When the air-war failed to render any result, the assembly of more troops on Kosovo’s border was also a prelude to, and pretext for, preparations for a larger ground force in order to increase the pressure on Belgrade. However, the ground attack option was a card that NATO initially played poorly in its
dealing with Milosevic, primarily because the Clinton administration had already ruled out this possibility publicly for domestic political reasons. There was still little enthusiasm for Clinton's interventionist, multilateral foreign policy within the Republican-dominated Congress. William Cohen, also a Republican and conservative in his view of the role of the U.S. military, was still at the helm in the Pentagon.

Early June 1999 a combination of factors convinced Milosevic to concede to NATO’s demands. The prolonged and gradually escalating air-campaign, although insufficient to win the war alone, had certainly been taking its toll on Serbia proper. According to Wesley Clark the signs of preparations for a ground attack played an important role in convincing the Serbian autocrat to bow, even though such an effort would have taken many more months to organize. In the end, however, his capitulation would have been difficult without Russian-backed diplomacy during May and pressure by Moscow on the leaders in Belgrade. At that point, the sudden quick ending to the conflict actually came somewhat unexpectedly, since NATO had been bracing itself for the long haul. The Dutch NATO Ambassador Nick Biegenman called the diplomatic accord forged by Finnish former President Martti Ahtisaari and Russian special envoy for the Balkans, almost “too good to be true.” Under NATO pressure Belgrade had agreed to withdraw all its security forces from Kosovo. The signing of the Military Technical Agreement (MTA) by Jackson and Serb military leaders on 9 June prepared the way for a coordinated Serb withdrawal and KFOR’s deployment in its wake.

The next day the Security Council passed Resolution 1244, which endorsed the situation NATO had created by means of force. Temporarily, the Security Council de facto suspended Yugoslav sovereignty over Kosovo and authorized a military force and civilian mission to deploy in Kosovo and assume these sovereign rights for an indefinite period of time. When KFOR troops entered Kosovo, there was no political settlement. The final status of Kosovo was left undecided and the NATO powers would not back the overwhelming desire amongst Kosovar Albanians to become an independent republic. An independent Kosovo, it was feared, would set a poor example for the dysfunctional multi-ethnic government of neighbouring Bosnia. Moreover, there were serious concerns that an independent Kosovo would have a destabilising effect on Macedonia with its large Albanian minority.

The assembly of military forces on Kosovo’s borders prior to June enabled KFOR to enter the province swiftly. Rather than the usual months for the deployment of peacekeeping forces, the first 20,000 troops were inside Kosovo in two weeks. Nevertheless, the initial force entering Kosovo consisted of no more than nine battalions, four of which were British, and they were very thin on the ground for the wide array of tasks they were to perform. KFOR initially had no more than forty tanks while the Yugoslav armed forces had survived the air campaign with the vast majority of their heavy equipment still intact—including four hundred tanks, according to Jackson. Eventually KFOR would comprise some 45,000 troops, almost twice the size estimated in the Rambouillet plan and two-thirds of NATO’s initial force in Bosnia three years earlier. The British were dominant in the force in KFOR,
especially at the early stage when for a short time they provided two full brigades, one armoured and one airmobile, to assume control of the capital Pristina and its surroundings. With Jackson’s ARRC in charge, KFOR took on a British hue, just as NATO operations in Bosnia in 1996 had been American-dominated. After having taken the lead in Bosnia and in previous months during the air campaign, the American government wished to minimize its own role and maximize European responsibility for both military operations on the ground and for Kosovo’s reconstruction and proposed democratisation.

On the military side, KFOR’s primary mission was to deploy in Kosovo with the capability to enforce the peace and to deter renewed hostilities. Thus, its first task was to secure the withdrawal of Yugoslav military, paramilitary and police forces and prevent them from further presenting a threat to the Kosovar population. The second part of this main military task was to demilitarise the UÇK, the details of which were left to be agreed upon at a later stage. It would not be until 21 June that an agreement with the UÇK was reached on its disarmament. Negotiations on its transformation into something other than a military force dragged on until August. Securing the withdrawal of the Serbs and demilitarizing the UÇK were KFOR’s two strictly military tasks and can be seen as the first two layers of a complex security mission that was threefold. They were performed in order to “establish a secure environment in which refugees and displaced persons can return home in safety, the international civil presence can operate, a transitional administration can be established, and humanitarian aid can be delivered.” These military tasks were thus defined as creating a framework of military security for the population and international civilian organisations to live and operate. Subsequently KFOR’s mandate moved into the civilian sphere within that framework and inevitably became more vague. For the first time in history, the UN military mandate officially included the establishment of a secure environment “ensuring public safety and order until the international civil presence can take responsibility for this task.” Public safety, the third layer of security for which KFOR bore responsibility—temporarily but for an unspecified period of time—soon proved to be KFOR’s biggest challenge.

Civil implementation of the military peace agreement and UN Resolution 1244 were to be performed by the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), headed by the Secretary General’s Special Representative. This role was temporarily performed by Sergio Vieira de Mello, a United Nations veteran from Brazil. UNMIK had powers never before vested in a UN body. The Special Representative had full executive and legislative authority, with no representative body to control him. His powers included the administration of the judiciary, and the Special Representative was further empowered to appoint or remove any person within the civil administration, including judges. UNMIK’s powers were, however, inversely opposed to the means initially at its disposal and thus its ability to achieve them. In early July UNMIK was composed of just thirty officials, the majority of whom were based in the capital Pristina. They were by no means able to assert any control in the districts and municipalities. As in previous missions, such as in Cambodia and Bosnia, the deployment of civilian components tasked with a less ambitious mandate turned out to be an arduous and
time-consuming process. Given the short time that UNMIK had to plan for the establishment of nothing less than full trusteeship over a province with no governmental infrastructure, it was not too surprising that it took months to raise personnel that—other than the military—had to be recruited on an individual basis.

The civil component’s organisational structure was like a classic Greek structure. UNMIK was the tympanum supported by four columns representing four major international organisations. The UN Secretariat was put in charge of the civil administrative component. This pillar included the essential international police force that eventually was to comprise of 3,100 constables with unprecedented executive policing authority. For the next two of its pillars UNMIK could build on local European organisations. The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) took on institution building and democratisation while the European Union (EU) took charge of economic reconstruction. As in previous peace building operations, the UNHCR took responsibility for coordinating the humanitarian effort in Kosovo. This fourth pillar was in charge of the return of hundreds of thousands of Kosovo-Albanian refugees. While profiting from the extended infrastructure and expertise of these three subcontracted organisations, UNMIK as an interim government would also suffer from their large bureaucracies.

Compared to previous UN military mandates Resolution 1244 on Kosovo was relatively generous in ascribing military support for the civilian component. Lessons had been learned from Bosnia, but the mandate was hardly specific on this point. Soldiers were to support “as appropriate” the international humanitarian effort and coordinate and backup the international civil presence under UN leadership. The meaning of “as appropriate” would be determined by the military commanders on the ground and the usual caveats “within means and capabilities” and “on a case to case basis” were added in military orders. Apart from the public security clause, that specifically tasked KFOR to temporarily substitute the UN civilian police force that was eventually to deploy, there was no mention of the military force substituting UNMIK in other fields of administration. Anything resembling military government was officially ruled out. The degree of support was largely left to the commanders on the ground to determine. The Force Commander would react to instructions and more informal signals he received from his political and military masters in NATO and national military and political lines of authority. His subordinate brigade and battalion commanders from different nations would do the same, reporting to their capitals and national military headquarters as well as to the Force Commander. As in all previous peace operations, the levels of military support to the civil power would therefore vary substantially between different national contingents. Support to the civilian side of the operation or substitution thereof, however, was hardly prominent in the minds of the first NATO forces entering a potentially hostile environment.

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Task Force Orahovac

A small advance party of the Dutch artillery battalion had been among the first troops to enter Kosovo on D-Day, 12 June. They entered Kosovo’s second largest city Prizren early the next morning with the first elements of the German brigade. Prizren would be the centre of operations for the southern zone assigned to Multinational Brigade South. The Dutch had planned to establish their main fire-base on a small airfield north of Prizren near the town Suva Reka in order to cover the German deployment while the Serb forces retreated. The other four brigades under British, American, French and Italian command fanned out in all directions in close coordination with the withdrawing Serbian forces.

*KFOR’s Five Multinational Brigades*
Upon entering Prizren, KFOR’s vanguard was confronted with the joy and the anarchy of what was a liberation to most and an occupation to some. In a momentous occasion in post-Second World War German history, its soldiers were welcomed with flowers and cheering by crowds of Albanians. However, confrontations between the oppressed and their former oppressors were inevitable. The few available NATO soldiers faced heavily armed and frustrated Serbs wanting to leave town and an Albanian population in a buzz of emotion and alcohol. Some were involved in looting and rampaging. In the process, German troops killed two Serbian soldiers who had opened fire. In Pristina two armed Albanians were shot dead in their moving car when British soldiers mistook their celebratory fire for a threat to KFOR. Overall, the Serbian security forces complied with the military agreement and despite several incidents, the UÇK refrained from harassing retreating Serb security forces, as promised to NATO. The most pressing problem would turn out to be imminent confrontation between the Albanians and the Serb civilians, some of who left and some of who which stayed behind in fright.

Brigadier General Fritz von Korff flew in from Macedonia to join the vanguard of his units and set up brigade headquarters. Dutch battalion-commander Lieutenant Colonel Anton van Loon accompanied him on this flight and functioned as his “advisor and witness.” For a number of reasons the German commander engaged the Dutch commander intensively in the planning for operations in Kosovo. He liked to highlight the multinational character of his operation, but at this stage the Dutch were the only non-German element in the brigade. Van Loon had been head of the Operations Division of the combined German-Dutch Army Corps in Münster in 1995 and had spent a year attending the British Army Staff College in 1993. This gave him added value for Von Korff, whose staff was less familiar with the English language and the distinct manners at the British-dominated KFOR headquarters where Van Loon knew people personally. 

In February the Dutch government had pledged to provide Van Loon’s artillery battalion to supplement the German armoured brigade, which lacked artillery support. Since the Dutch were involved in the planning for the mission quite early, there was a relatively large number of Dutch staff officers at the German brigade headquarters. In April the Germans asked if the Dutch were willing to take on an additional role and assume responsibility for an area within their sector in an infantry-type role. Van Loon and the Dutch government agreed to play this part and engaged their gunners in extra infantry drills. Patrolling and manning checkpoints were therefore part of the mission-oriented training that also included various scenarios played out to prepare them for possible situations in Kosovo. Von Korff needed the Dutch gunners to perform this role of a “manoeuvre battalion” because his brigade was initially seriously under strength. Upon entry it consisted of no more than one reinforced scout battalion and one reinforced mechanized battalion. He pledged to strengthen Van Loon’s unit with one of his own infantry companies, since an artillery battalion was only five hundred strong rather than the seven to eight hundred personnel in an infantry battalion. In the following months the Multinational Brigade South would gradually be enlarged with a
German airborne battalion and with two reinforced engineer battalions, one German and one Dutch. Later that summer a Turkish battalion, two Russian battalions, an Austrian battalion and a one hundred strong German CIMIC-company would raise its total strength to some 8,000 personnel.23

For the time being, however, Von Korff was lucky if he could field one thousand men. Upon his arrival in Prizren he immediately made himself available to local representatives of all ethnic groups, but was overwhelmed by those airing their concerns such as the local abbot, the prefect. He placed static guards at the cathedral and at the Christian Orthodox monastery, where a large amount of Serbs had sought refuge and concentrated the few available troops in areas where minorities lived, but often he could do no more than promise to do his best. Already, the speed of events was much faster than he and Van Loon had anticipated in Macedonia. For the Dutch, events took an even swifter and more surprising turn as Van Loon recalled:

Amidst the haze of people that approached Von Korff with requests for support and protection appeared the local MUP commander with a couple of his officers in uniform. He declared that in accordance with the MTA he was ready to withdraw his convoy of armoured vehicles, trucks and busses, some of which were known to be packed with looted goods. His unit was positioned on the ‘wrong’ side of town, the Albanian side, and he made clear that he would drive straight through the city centre. Von Korff suggested that he drive his column around the city under German armoured escort, but the MUP commander bluntly said ‘no, can’t do, if you cannot provide adequate escort I will fight my way through.’ After some serious discussion he suddenly gave an opening by demanding that, in return for an organised withdrawal around the city, KFOR send troops to the provincial town Orahovac that very day. He was concerned about the large Serb minority there and the high concentration of UÇK forces around the city. Von Korff did not have much choice and said: ‘OK, I will send troops to Orahovac today.’24

For Van Loon this pledge had serious implications. Orahovac, twenty kilometres north of Prizren, was the Dutch area of responsibility, but his force had not planned to deploy and assume area control for another two weeks. Until late June they were to concentrate primarily on their fire-support role from nearby Suva Reka. Van Loon said he would go, but wondered with what troops. The first Dutch platoon had not even crossed the border and was only to arrive the next morning, while the battalion would not be complete for another nine days.25 Von Korff therefore gave him a small force of predominantly German troops with some armoured vehicles and two Leopard II tanks. It would prove the beginning of a successful Dutch-German integrated operation in what became known as Task Force Orahovac.26

Intelligence gathering prior to deployment in Kosovo had been poor and approached primarily from a military perspective. It was of course quite natural that the troops awaiting deployment in an uncertain and potentially hostile environment concentrated on the military aspects of things to come, but even from a traditional military perspective, intelligence gath-
erring prior to entry into Kosovo was difficult. In Bosnia, with the UN on the ground, substantial transfer of knowledge had taken place between UNPROFOR and NATO troops in December 1995. As they entered Kosovo in June 1999, soldiers faced the unknown. The operational environment had been conceived in a traditional military way, emphasising the terrain, infrastructure, weather and friendly and enemy forces. However, even this sort of military information was scanty.

The only form of “human intelligence”—information from people actually on the ground—was provided by a lieutenant from the German Navy, who had served as an OSCE monitor in Orahovac in the previous year. With his first hand knowledge of the area he proved invaluable as a scout. Quite a few of the OSCE monitors had been military officers in civilian guise. Both Jackson and the German brigade commander used them extensively. Preceding the entry, Jackson had them assembled in his headquarters in Macedonia, while the Germans ordered every national under their command, who had been serving the Prizren area to join them on deployment. However, having left Kosovo in late 1998, they were primarily useful as scouts. They knew the UÇK positions from six months earlier and were knowledgeable about facts about the major military confrontations in 1998, but unable to provide information on recent developments. Most of the up-to-date military information available would have been provided by several German unmanned aerial vehicles, or “drones”, that had photographed and filmed the area. Although there was almost certainly some extra information available from talks with UNHCR workers, recently arrived refugees and special forces operating behind enemy lines, NATO intelligence failed to warn the Task Force of the presence of a full combat ready Serb tank-battalion around Orahovac. This was what Van Loon and his men ran into that first evening as they arrived on the airstrip where they had planned to deploy. If they had known, they would probably not have gone. They would certainly not have arrived in the dark with only two tanks, because in a possible confrontation they would not have stood a chance against the twelve Yugoslav built T-72 tanks they encountered to their surprise. However, the Serbs turned out to be quite helpful and were very well aware of one of the NATO force’s biggest fears by constantly saying “neme mine, neme mine” (no mines) as they showed the Dutch and Germans around the little airfield. The airstrip was surrounded by wineries and had previously been used by crops-dusting airplanes in the local wine industry.

The nature of the looming power vacuum was conceived as a matter of troop deployment and KFOR spent little time considering the implications of being the sole authority in an unruly province. The two weeks the Dutch had expected to spend in Kosovo prior to assuming control of Orahovac would have allowed them to do some of their own reconnaissance. They had no such luck. As far as information on local society was concerned, such as the composition of the population, the Dutch relied on some preparatory lectures on local culture back in The Netherlands. The commander further explored some general information from open sources. Having read the excellent short history Kosovo: The Postponed War by the Belgian historian Raymond Detrez “a number of times”, Van Loon is likely to have been
relatively informed on the complexities of Kosovar society and politics as far as the sources of conflict were concerned. Nevertheless, the overall information about the sector was almost as scanty as that of the Dutch marines entering Cambodia seven years before in the early days of modern peace operations. More information was made available about the sort of animals the Dutch soldiers were likely to encounter in the hills around Orahovac than about the community leaders and the distribution of power and influence in the region they were tasked to secure and control.

Soldiers were not warned about the corpses they would find around every street corner as they approached Orahovac. One Dutch soldier advancing from Prizren to Orahovac on June 13 described the road as the most dirty, foul-smelling place he had ever travelled. The ferocity with which the civil war had struck this particular area soon became apparent. Driving through the destroyed village of Velika Krusa, he was confronted with the penetrating stench of death for the first time in his life. Decaying cadavers were everywhere. The area of operations assigned to Multinational Brigade South had been the scene of some of the conflict's most violent clashes between Serb security forces and the UÇK. Within the southern sector, Orahovac was the municipality with the highest concentration of mass graves. While they knew they would be assuming control over an area with a substantial Serb minority, there was little indication that the Dutch—either at the Ministry of Defence in The Hague or at various levels of military command—considered the explosive nature of the area and its ethnic composition. Both within NATO and in The Hague, planners had been preoccupied with the Serb security forces and the humanitarian aspects of returning hundreds of thousands of Albanians.

The municipality of Orahovac was like a scale model of Kosovo and can be seen as a microcosm of the conflict as a whole. Its population of approximately 65,000 was roughly divided along the same ethnic lines as that of the whole of Kosovo. Before the war the city of Orahovac was populated by 25,000 Albanians, 3,500 Serbs and eight hundred other minorities, mostly Roma. This latter group had always been discriminated against in Kosovo, but they were now accused by the Albanians of collaborating with the Serbs and lootin their property. Another 1,500 Serbs had lived in a nearby village called Velika Hoca. Over the first two weeks, as the returning Albanian refugees found the majority of the municipality's thirty villages burned to the ground, the population concentrated in the city would rise to 60,000, which certainly added to the tension. The number of inhabitants and the quantity of refugees made the town comparable to Baidoa during the Australian operations in 1993 and to Sisophon during the UNTAC operations. However, the provinces the Australians and Dutch Marines had to control were much larger. The city of Orahovac was largely unscathed, like the province's larger cities except the western city Peć, which was systematically demolished and burned. The number of Serbs in the area had dropped to approximately 4,000 during the civil war and were concentrated primarily in one quarter in the higher part of the city and Velika Hoca. Outside the northern areas of the province bordering the Serb Republic, where

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the vast majority of the Serbs concentrated, this was still one of the larger concentrations of Serbs.

Upon their arrival in Orahovac, Dutch and German troops faced a tense situation. Serbian military and police forces left the zone under escort on 15 June, which meant one less worry. It also meant, however, that KFOR was the only internal security force present. Intense patrolling, both on foot and mounted, was crucial to convince the locals that the force was in control. At times this meant seventeen-hour working days, since it took nine days for the battalion to be complete. Task Force Orahovac relied heavily on the German company under its control. Getting in touch with the locals was important in showing that KFOR was there to protect both Albanians and Serbs. One of KFOR’s most important missions at this point was protecting the Serbs and keeping them from fleeing the province—a 180 degree reversal from the original mission. Compared to other parts of Kosovo it was relatively quiet around Orahovac those very first days. Murder, assault, looting and arson were flaring up all around the country as tens of thousands of refugees crossed the border into Kosovo every day. With the majority of the population of Orahovac still absent, it was obviously the lull before the storm.

Taming the KLA

KFOR was an immediate success as far as performing its first, purely military task was concerned. The Serbs were supposed to withdraw their 40,000 security forces and six hundred pieces of heavy equipment and numerous other vehicles within eleven days. They impressed NATO commanders by achieving this in good order and with about eight hours to spare. KFOR had prepared a contingency plan for the conventional defence of Kosovo, but renewed hostilities between the formerly warring parties were unlikely to occur in Kosovo. Deploying with sufficient force and with the appropriate means and military mandate deterred renewed hostilities, as it had been more than three years earlier in Bosnia. Nevertheless, Jackson admitted that this was not just due to his or his force’s excellent planning and execution. While evaluating the operation some months later, he emphasized that “this operation took place in an uncertain but largely benign situation. Our potential adversaries were largely compliant and took no particular action to frustrate our plans.” After IFOR and KFOR, he was afraid that NATO would produce a generation of commanders, staff and, crucially, also political leaders who expected everything to go right. This would leave them mentally unprepared for the sort of reverses that “can so easily befall those involved in military operations.”

Although Serb security forces were for the most part compliant, the other former warring party would cause more difficulties. Taming the UÇK—NATO’s erstwhile informal ally—became Jackson’s primary challenge. While plans for the Serb withdrawal had been carefully drawn out, plans for this second part of the military security task had only just reached the drawing board. For the UÇK, the peace agreement contained two rather distasteful elements. It called on them to disarm and to accept autonomy rather than their
stated goal—Independence for Kosovo. It would prove hard for the freedom fighters to give up their position of power—and the guns by which they tried to secure this position. From the perspective of many Kosovo Albanian fighters, their war was won and the victors should enjoy the spoils of victory as an army, police force or administration. However, with a multi-ethnic and democratic Kosovo as the proclaimed goal for armed intervention and the underpinning of Resolution 1244, there was little place for a vengeful guerrilla organisation at the helm.

As German troops followed where Serb forces withdrew, several hundred UÇK fighters descended from the mountains into the urban Prizren. There, they fanned out into the streets, reminding NATO troops that they were bent on asserting a role in a new Kosovo. German troops in armoured vehicles occasionally passed through a checkpoint that had been set up by the UÇK. They obviously had no intention of stopping and instead high-fives and salutes were exchanged good-naturedly. For the time being the newly installed UÇK headquarters in various cities around Kosovo were left alone.³⁴ It was not deemed opportune to remove the national heroes from the improvised local headquarters in schools and police stations—at least not yet.

Several days into the operation, with their two principal battalions on the ground, the Germans felt strong enough to start showing who was in charge in Prizren. However, clear
instructions from Jackson on how to deal with the UÇK were still lacking as the general was still in the process of reaching a formal agreement with its political leader, Hashim Thaci. Von Korff was complaining that the oral instructions he had received were unclear and were not confirmed in writing. The general message up to then was not to confront the Albanian fighters too harshly. 35 Von Korff issued his own orders not to co-operate with the UÇK in the streets. Checkpoints set up by the Albanian fighters were to be disbanded and the arms of those manning them would be confiscated. Buildings occupied by the guerrillas, such as police stations and a border station, were to be taken over and foot patrols on the streets of Prizren were ordered for day and night. 36 It was vital to show the Albanians as well as the Serbs and other minorities that NATO took a much broader approach towards the establishment of a secure environment than the IFOR had done in Bosnia. The reports of harassment and murder of Serbian civilians started to pour in from different corners of the province, but a shortage of military manpower would remain a serious problem in the next month. In Prizren this led the Germans to use air defence personnel to man checkpoints. Even cooks and mechanics were used for infantry support. 37

As in Prizren, UÇK fighters left the hills and entered Orahovac soon after the Serbs withdrew. They staged a festive entrance into town on 15 June, with celebratory firing into the air and the planting of the Kosovo Albanian flag, the black eagle on a red surface, on the
local police station. A number of armed fighters took up positions on various street corners and tension soon rose as part of the Albanian force concentrated around the Serb quarter of town. In the absence of an official agreement between KFOR and the UÇK, the situation had to be defused by means of ad hoc arrangements that were left to the commander in the field to decide. Initially the insurgents were told to point their weapons to the ground at all times. Thereafter, ahead of an official commitment to disarmament the Dutch commander ordered the local UÇK commander, Skender Hoxhaj, to withdraw the bulk of his fighters behind the road between Malisevo and Suva Reka, clear of the city of Orahovac and the neighbouring towns with their Serb minorities. Anyone openly carrying arms north of that line would be disarmed and arrested. British paratroopers on the streets of Pristina and U.S. Marines in Gnjilane took similar interim measures and confiscated weapons prior to an official agreement on disarmament. A broad interpretation of the rules of engagement allowed such measures, but not all contingents did so equally. The French and the Italian, still short of troops and fearful of lacking backup in case of emergency, took a more standoffish posture in those crucial first weeks. While the general ban on openly carrying arms in the Dutch area of operations was more or less enforceable in town, this would prove impossible outside of town at this point in time. Task Force Orahovac was not yet fully deployed and still heavily outnumbered by some nine hundred local UÇK fighters. On top of that, it was officially not only in charge of Orahovac, but also temporarily in charge of the neighbouring municipality of Malisevo pending the arrival of Russian KFOR troops there.

Obviously, the ad hoc measures towards disarmament taken by local KFOR commanders had to be formalized soon. Talks towards this end between NATO and the Kosovar Albanians had already begun in Albania, prior to the entry into Kosovo, but Jackson had no policy and no direction as to how to treat the UÇK at that point. It could be argued that demilitarisation of UÇK should have been agreed upon before NATO took over. However, as long as the air campaign was ineffectual, propping up the local fighters for a possible ground offensive instead of disarming them had been at the top of NATO’s agenda. Alienating the UÇK at that point was clearly not an option. Moreover, having witnessed the quick and disciplined Serbian withdrawal, the UÇK leadership was likely to have been far more complaisant than in a possible disarmament deal before the end of the entry. On the night of June 21 an agreement was reached between Jackson and UÇK leader Hashim Thaci. This day, which became known as “K-Day”, marked the beginning of the demilitarisation. It had taken a combination of pressure and persuasion to the get the UÇK to surrender its arms and disband. It was made clear to Thaci that this was not to be considered an agreement between two equal entities, but a vow to NATO, listing a series of measures linked to a timetable that the UÇK committed to or “undertook” to carry out. The document, entitled “The Undertaking” foresaw this as both the demilitarisation of the UÇK and its transformation into a civilian organisation. Disarmament was to be a process of ninety days ending on 19 September. Within a week after K-Day, units were to report and register in assembly areas and thereafter

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only a limited group of officers and guards were allowed to carry arms and uniforms openly outside the secure weapon storage sites guarded by KFOR.

It would take until August 30 before the second vow of The Undertaking—the transformation of the UÇK—was agreed upon in detail by Jackson and the UÇK leaders. Although NATO had estimated the insurgents’ effective war strength at 10,000, the force now numbered 17,000 registered fighters. In the agreement the UÇK pledged to reorganise into the 3,600-strong Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC or TMK). The TMK would be under the direction of KFOR and nominally agreed to a mission limited to dealing with civil emergencies. It was to have no military or policing role. The civil defence force was supposed to be become multiethnic in composition with ten percent of the posts reserved for minorities. However, no Serb would ever serve in it. There was substantial criticism from international observers and Serbs that the TMK resembled a military or paramilitary organisation with a military command structure, as well as green-grey uniforms and insignia that bore close resemblance to that of the UÇK. As for the former guerrillas as well as the majority of the Albanian population there was little doubt about the expectations, or hopes. The TMK was to become the core of a future national militia or army of an independent Kosovo. The cigarette lighters, bumper stickers and red and black “TMK-UÇK” shawls sold in the streets of Pristina in the following years were a silent witness to such vestigial hopes. As KFOR was soon to find out, the formally demilitarised UÇK was still a force to reckon with. The political wing lead by Hashim Thaci was in an ambiguous position after demilitarisation. Its military commanders were still regarded as national leaders by a substantial part of the population and despite their commitment to a gradual handing-in of weapons, guns would still be readily available to those who sought to use them in this part of the world.

By late June, all efforts were concentrated on getting the guns off the streets. The temporary measures implemented by the Dutch in Orahovac were not revoked pending K+7. Ismet Tara, the local UÇK commander with whom Van Loon and his men had to deal from late June, was relatively cooperative. Tara had been commander of the 124th UÇK brigade since November 1998, when both his commanding officer and deputy commander were killed in a fire fight with Serb armed forces. He was born and raised in Orahovac, which made him more considerate of the interest of the local population. Skender Hoxhaj, whose 125th brigade had been operating in roughly the same area as Tara’s, was from elsewhere in Kosovo and had spent many years abroad in Switzerland. It was Hoxhaj who had been the first to enter the city after NATO forced the Serbs to withdraw. He claimed to be speaking for the population of Orahovac, but had in fact no popular support and was acting purely in his own interest and that of Thaci’s UÇK. No one seemed to regret the redeployment of his unit to neighbouring Suva Reka, where Dutch forces would run into him later in the operation. Although Tara had lost both his parents in the war, he had a less vengeful attitude than many other commanders. Overall, it would prove hard to generalize about the cooperative-ness of the UÇK. A large part of the force was made up of local farmers and labourers, who were glad to return to a more regular life. However, throughout Kosovo there was a body of
UCK-hard-liners operating outside their own environment. Getting this mixture of toughened guerrillas, soldiers of fortune and common criminals to give up their arms—and thus their position of power—proved much more difficult. Their aim was to hold on to their military status and as many arms as possible.

The Task Force Orahovac’s resolve was tested on June 24, at the KFOR checkpoint just outside the newly established Dutch main base in the vineyards of Orahovac. Tahir Sinani, the UÇK commander of the southern region that matched the German and Dutch area of responsibility caused quite a scene. Driving with his bodyguards on the main road between Prizren and Malisevo, he should have been aware that assault rifles were banned on all main routes according to the Undertaking that had been signed only three days earlier. At the checkpoint he refused to give up the firearms and hand grenades that he and his men were carrying. Having been faced with an UÇK soldier pulling out the pin of a hand grenade several days earlier, the KFOR soldiers closed the barbed wire around the car and made clear that disarmament was non-negotiable. As the Albanian commander started to rant and rave and still refused to give up his arms, backup was called in. Eventually a Dutch major, backed by a Leopard II tank that had pulled up and taken direct aim convinced the men to hand in their weapons.45

Early August General Jackson feared the “honeymoon period” that followed KFOR’s entry into Kosovo was coming to an end.46 That month, as the “K+60” deadline for handing in sixty percent of all the UÇK’s small arms was imminent, there was a serious concern at KFOR headquarters of at least some elements of the UÇK refusing to disarm and “going into the hills” and possibly start guerrilla-type activities. Operational analysts attached to Jackson’s staff witnessed how UÇK non-compliance increased sharply as the deadline to disarm drew nearer.47 KFOR’s robustness, Jackson explained to his brigade commanders, had been “a necessary and effective hallmark to success, allowing us to impose our will on a divided and irrational population.” However, the Force Commander warned his subordinate commanders and explained his overall intent:

[O]ur robust stance is beginning to be seen as indicative of an occupation army, particularly by the UÇK, and I believe that we would be foolish to ignore this. To be successful KFOR must retain popular support, and this implies that we must show a greater degree of cooperation and courtesy than has previously been desirable, or necessary. This is particularly true in case of the UÇK."

Jackson continued to explain how the former guerrillas “rightly or wrongly” perceived themselves to be the victorious party. Although lawlessness, intimidation and criminal activity would not be accepted by KFOR, they had to be treated—like all sides of the community—“with the respect that they believe is deserved.”48

Jackson had reasons to spare the UÇK. The deal he and De Mello’s successor as UN Special Representative, the Frenchman Bernard Kouchner, had the UÇK military leaders agree to in August had moved a very long way from the Albanians’ original proposals. While
the UÇK would disappear as a military organisation within ninety days, the Undertaking explicitly stated that the international community gave “due consideration” to its aspirations to form a significant part of the future Kosovar police and civil administration, and to form “in due course” an organisation along the lines of the U.S. National Guard. Few of the Albanians’ aspirations were met. For police and administrative functions special consideration was given to UÇK members, but they still had to qualify on individual merit. As far as military aspirations were concerned the UÇK’s successor, the TMK, would become nothing near a U.S. National Guard. The TMK’s tasks were officially limited to disaster response, search and rescue missions, reconstruction duties, assistance to KFOR and UNMIK on request and the performance of ceremonial duties. The Corps was prohibited from playing a role in law enforcement, riot control, counter-terrorism or any other task involved in the maintenance of law and order. Most painful to the former Balkan warriors was the strictly limited amount of small arms to be carried by some staff officers and guards, which, according to the KFOR commander was the absolute minimum since an organisation without any weapons “would be viewed as sterile by the UÇK.” Nevertheless, Jackson credited them for being “very clever in the way that they got into The Undertaking the transformation of their irregular army into something which would bridge from where they were to where they want to be, which is of course the army of an independent Kosovo.”

Although Task Force Orahovac was lucky to be facing a relatively cooperative UÇK commander, there were obvious signs of non-compliance as in the rest of Kosovo that called for a substantial show of force. To maintain credibility in the eyes of his commanders and part of the population, UÇK brigade commander Ismet Tara had to assert himself as a credible leader. As KFOR’s grip over the city was increasing and the Dutch kept a close watch on his headquarters in the city he moved part of his activities to a building known as “the white house” outside of town. The UÇK commander was inclined to hold on to a military posture by erecting roadblocks on all the roads leading up to this somewhat remote and barren make-shift command post in the woods. Although it concerned dirt-roads leading up to a distant location in the woods the Dutch commander decided not to tolerate “no such rubbish” from the UÇK, which amounted to an impediment to freedom of movement. A couple of Leopard tanks moved in on the white house while an armoured engineer bulldozer shovelled aside the roadblocks. Tara could continue to use the building, but he had to abandon the pretence of running a military base.

A similar show of force was needed in Suva Reka in November towards the end of the tour of the first Dutch battalion. As the Task Force took control of the neighbouring town they ran into an old acquaintance, commander Skender Hoxhaj. Although “commander Skender” expressed his admiration for the “successes” of the Dutch contingent in Orahovac, he had clearly seized the opportunity presented by KFOR’s much looser grip on Suva Reka to assert himself as the local warlord. In his new position as commander of the local TMK branch he had turned his headquarters, the building of the former Environmental and Chemical School, into a fortress fenced off by barbed wire and with armed guards on the pavement.
in front of it. After several warnings to remove the guards and barricades the Dutch commander had his troops move in on the building backed by a M-109 tracked howitzer, which according to Van Loon was almost like doing him a favour. Showing up with a bigger gun made it far less embarrassing for a soldier in the Balkans, raised with a culture of arms, to hand in his weapon.\(^2\) In 1999, the M-109 carried the largest gun in Kosovo.

The UÇK was gradually disarming, but substantial arms caches were still found under dubious circumstances. In August a mini-van that appeared on the verge of collapsing under its payload was stopped by Dutch troops in Orahovac. One hundred and twenty AK-47s were found. Tara claimed that the van was heading for the Dutch base to hand in his arms as K+60 was approaching. Maybe it happened like that. Maybe the arms were planned to be moved to a more convenient place. That the UÇK was keeping its options open until the very last moment became clear again as German and Italian troops found no less than five hundred weapons in a private house near the assembly area of the 126th brigade one week prior to the final deadline for the demilitarisation and disarmament of the UÇK. Tara was also no saint. On September 14, only several days before that same deadline the commander was confronted with KFOR intelligence—a document carrying his own signature—in which he had agreed to the transfer of some heavy machine guns, rocket propelled grenades and explosives from the regional commander to his unit. Embarrassed by the evidence presented, Tara handed in the weapons without protest.\(^3\)

The closer the former guerrilla army came to the ninety-day deadline for its formal disbanding as a military organisation, the harder it became to control them. Colonel Van den Aker, a Dutch deputy brigade commander at Von Korff’s headquarters, felt that it was mostly the lack of any prospect of a credible position of power and influence after September—
either as army, police or as civil administration—that was causing frustration, non-compliance and was a potential source of conflict. As an additional source of frustration within the UÇK he pointed at the increasing stigmatisation by international officials as well as the international media as a criminal organisation, while the UÇK obviously still liked to be regarded as an army of liberation. Just prior to K+90 the UÇK staged several parades and demonstrations in Pristina and elsewhere as a last show of force.

The always judicious International Crisis Group, with its vast experience in monitoring the performance of military peacekeepers and their civilian counterparts around the world, called the demilitarisation of the UÇK “a major accomplishment”, which it was. Despite the critique of KFOR’s dealings with what many considered a bunch of thugs, the institutionalisation of the force prevented the guerrillas from going underground. Although nobody believed that the UÇK, now TMK, had completely disarmed, over 11,000 weapons and five million round of ammunition were turned in by November. Jackson admitted quite frankly that he had no idea how many weapons were undeclared, adding that “the UÇK probably doesn’t either. There are lots.” The number of weapons in circulation on the Balkans would remain massive, and seizing them was therefore not even the most essential part of demilitarising the former guerrillas. They would always have quick and easy access to new arsenals. Controlling the former guerrilla organisation by giving it a formal status and banning weapons from the streets would prove more important in controlling the UÇK as a military organisation.

Although the UÇK would gradually and grudgingly accept the inevitability of its military demise, rather than disappearing, it redirected its efforts towards other activities. As in Bosnia, NATO had raised the barriers sufficiently high with its credible military intervention force, causing the former belligerents not to pursue their goals by military means. The core of the UÇK, like ultranationalist “spoilers” in Bosnia would redirect its efforts into the policing and administrative sphere, while these activities tended to become entwined with organised crime that was already partly financing the insurgency on the Balkans. In order to stop the UÇK from attaining its strategic goal—an independent Kosovo dominated by Albanians—KFOR had to prevent the former insurgents from policing and asserting administrative authority over Kosovo. Therefore it had to move into the civilian sphere, supporting and even substituting the UNMIK administration and its police while it was being created and slowly deployed over the coming year. First it had to do so by becoming a police force.
During most of 1999 the official geographical names in Kosovo were all still written in Serbo-Croat. Eventhough it became common practise after 1999 to write geographic names in both Albanian and Serbo-Croat, I have chosen to use the Serbo-Croat names as it was common within the international community and amongst the NATO military to do so during the period analysed here. The names in Albanian and their Serbo-Croat equivalents that are most often used in the following chapter are: Rahovec/Orahovac, Velika Hoća/Hoçe e Madhe, Prishtinë / Pristina, Prizren / Prizren, Suharekë / Suva Reka, Gjakovë / Djakovica, Fushë Kosovë / Kosovo Polje, Gjakovë/Djakovica, Pejë / Pec, Mališevo / MaliSevo, Gjilan / Gnjilane, Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, Suharekë / Suv a Reka.


For a short history of the Kosovo conflict prior to the NATO intervention see Raymond Detrez, Kosovo: De Uitgestelde Oorlog (Antwerpen and Baarn 1999). Translated into Albanian by Mirela Shuteriqi and published by Skanderbeg, Tirana 2004. See also Noel Malcolm, Kosovo: A Short History (New York 1998).


The Independent Kosovo Commission chaired by Nelson Mandela concluded that the war was illegal for its failure to secure UN approval, but that it was legitimate on the bases of the gross human right violations.

For a first hand account of coalition warfare or “war by committee” see Wesley K. Clarke, Waging Modern War: Bosnia, Kosovo, and the Future of Combat (New York 2002).


The massive military effort in support of humanitarian operations in Macedonia and Albania, at times close to a military takeover, reaffirmed the predominant perception of the civil–military interface in peace opehumanitarian character of the at a time when CIMIC was rapidly becoming recognised as an important tool for the military.


Jackson, KFOR: The Inside Story, 15-16.

19 UNSCR 1244; UNMIK Regulation 1999/1 on the Authority of the Interim Administration in Kosovo (25 July 1999); Robert Oakley, Public Order in Kosovo: An Early Assessment (Paper prepared for UNA-USA Roundtable, 18 October 1999).

20 Lecture by Bernard Kouchner on UNMIK (Harvard University, 16 May 2001).

21 The role of “advisor and witness” is mentioned in Licht Boven of Orahovac. Colonel Peter van den Aker confirms that Van Loon was “intensively engaged in the operational decision taking process” within the brigade. P.J.E.J. van den Aker, “Kosovo Force – 1: Tussen Trauma en Militaire Effectiviteit, Multinationaaliteit en Militaire Effectiviteit”, Militaire Spectator, Vol. 169 (December 2000) 649.

22 Interview with Colonel Anton van Loon (First of two interviews; The Hague, 29 January 2003); Lecture by Lieutenant Colonel Anton van Loon, Commander 11th Artillery Battalion RNLA (SHAPE, 6 April 2000. Available online).


24 Interview with Colonel Anton van Loon (The Hague, 29 January 2003).


26 Interview with Colonel Anton van Loon (The Hague, 29 January 2003).

27 Abels, Licht Boven Orahovac, 21.

28 Raymond Detrez, Kosovo: De Uitgestelde Oorlog (Antwerpen and Baarn 1999).

29 Interview Colonel Anton van Loon (The Hague, 29 January 2003).


31 Compared to the area of operations of Australian peacekeepers in Somalia or Dutch Marines in Cambodia the municipality was small. While the whole of Kosovo measured approximately 11,000 square kilometres, the Bai region the Australian battalion group had to control six years earlier measured 17,000 square kilometres. The city Baidoa had a population comparable to that of Orahovac with 50,000 – 60,000 inhabitants, including 20,000 refugees.

32 Jackson, KFOR: The Inside Story, 15-16.


35 Centraal Archieven Depot, Ministerie van Defensie (Central Archival Depot, Netherlands Ministry of Defence), Archive 1 (NL) Contingentscommando KFOR I & II (Hereafter refered to as CAD, 1 (NL) Conco KFOR I&II), Structurele rapportages, box 1, Contingentscommando Situation Report, 19 June 1999; Interview with Colonel Anton van Loon (Second Interview, The Hague, 13 February 2003).

36 Centraal Archieven Depot, Ministerie van Defensie (Central Archival Depot, Netherlands Ministry of Defence), Archive 1 (NL) Artillery Battalion KFOR I (Hereafter referred to as CAD, 1 (NL) Arty Bn KFOR I), Structurele rapportages, box 1, folder 1.5, Situations and Missions MNB (S), 17 June 1999.


38 Abels, Licht Boven Orahovac, 27.

39 Ibid.
The KFOR ROEs said: “Disarming armed individuals or groups, which represent an actual threat to the security of Friendly Forces, is authorized.” CAD, 1 (NL) Arty Bn KFOR I, Correspondentie-archief, doos 7 (Diversen), Map: HQ KFOR, Doc no. 2001.


42 Jackson, “KFOR: The Inside Story”, 16.

43 Personal observations by author in Kosovo, September 2002.

44 Interview with Ismet Tara, commander 124th Brigade UÇK in 1999 (Rahovec/Orahovac, 12 September 2002); Interview Colonel Anton van Loon (Second interview, The Hague, 13 February 2003).

45 Abels, Licht Boven Orahovac, 94.


47 A trend analyses by KFOR’s Operational Analysis Branch showed a sharp increase in UÇK non-compliance and mentioned the fear of elements of the UÇK going “into the hills.” Presentation held by Mike Neighbour, head of this branch within ARRC Headquarters from 1998 to 2002, MORS Workshop Combat Analysis: Deploying Quantitative Support to the Combat Commander 28-30 January 2003. (Available online at http://www.mors.org/meetings/combat_analyst/ca_pres/WG4/Neighbour.pdf). In an interview with the author, Dutch Major Roy Abels also mentioned fear within KFOR of guerrilla-type activity around this time. Interview with Major Roy Abels (’t Harde, 3 September 2002).

48 CAD, 1 (NL) Arty Bn KFOR I, Correspondentie Archief, box 7, folder HQ KFOR, no. 10054, Michael Jackson (COMKFOR) to KFOR brigade commanders (Date unknown; estimated late August 1999).

49 Undertaking of Demilitarisation and Transformation by the UÇK (Signed 20 June 1999).

50 Jackson, “KFOR: The Inside Story”, 16.

51 CAD, 1 (NL) Arty Bn KFOR I, Structurele rapportages, box 5, Intsum 1 (NL) Arty Bn RA, no. 143/99, 12 November 1999. The intelligence summary said: “TMK 123 Bde commander seemed cooperative. He said to have met Van Loon and admires the ‘successes’ of Dutch contingent in Orahovac.” The remark about Hoxhaj as the “local warlord” was made by Van Loon in interview with the author (13 February 2003).

52 Interview with Van Loon (13 February 2003).

53 CAD, 1 (NL) Arty Bn KFOR I, Structurele rapportages, box 3, Commanders Assessrep 14 September 1999; CAD, 1 (NL) Arty Bn KFOR I, Structurele rapportages, box 3, Commanders Assessrep, 15 Sep 1999. The incident was also mentioned in Abels, Licht Boven Orahovac, 89.

54 CAD, 1 (NL) Conco KFOR I&II, Werkarchief, box 3, no.01901, Col. Peter van den Aker (DCOM MNB-South) to lt.col. Hans Damen (CS-CONTCO), Betreft: Kamervragen, 1 September 1999.

55 Mike Neighbour, Presentation at MORS Workshop Combat Analysis: Deploying Quantitative Support to the Combat Commander, 16.


57 Jackson, “KFOR: The Inside Story”, 16.