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

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THE UÇK’s SILENT COUP

KFOR in the Civil Administrative Vacuum

After UN Security Council Resolution 1244 had practically suspended Yugoslav sovereignty over Kosovo, the distribution of governmental power in Kosovo was a highly complex matter. There were several competitors in the ring. All hopes were vested in Bernard Kouchner’s United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) to rapidly assume full governmental responsibility, but for reasons similar to those hampering previous civilian missions the UN was unable to deliver in the short term. There was no UN administrator ready to walk into the municipal building in Orahovac and take up office there, the way that civil affairs Major Joppolo had positioned himself behind the desk of the Fascist mayor of the Sicilian town Adano in the wake of the Allied invasion in 1943. In the administrative void that emerged all over Kosovo, two competing Albanian factions claimed to represent their Kosovar majority, while most Serbs refused to cooperate with the international community and created their own structures. The UÇK, clearly the most muscular Albanian player, was rapidly assuming administrative control over most of the province, thereby threatening NATO’s proclaimed plans for a multi-ethnic and democratic Kosovo. In this murky arena of competing and overlapping claimants to power, KFOR was clearly the strongest player with tens of thousands of heavily armed soldiers on the ground. However, in a merely supportive role to UNMIK, the force had a very limited mandate to influence administrative matters and was unprepared and untrained to address the issues that arose in the vacuum. Haphazardly and grudgingly KFOR progressed from the public security vacuum into the wider civil administrative vacuum, since more than community policing was needed to keep the UÇK from becoming “Kosovo’s next masters” as New York Times journalist Chris Hedges had predicted in the magazine Foreign Affairs two months prior to the international intervention on the ground. Early warnings such as these apparently had little impact on the preparedness of either KFOR or the United Nations for the task ahead.¹

The Failure to Address Local Administration

Alexandros Yannis, who arrived in Pristina as Kouchner’s political advisor in July, called the UN’s potential for keeping the peace and building stability in Kosovo rather dim that summer. Never had a power vacuum emerged as suddenly as after the Serbs’ withdrawal from Kosovo and for a task as massive as the assumption of full governmental responsibility over a territory by the deployment of an international administration of colonial proportions, the UN had neither the capacity nor the experience.² The only comparably broad administrative mandate fol-
lowed several months later in East-Timor, where the Australian-led military intervention force (INTERFET) faced a power vacuum frightfully similar to that in Kosovo after the Indonesian government agreed to cede this territory in September 1999, after 24 four years of occupation and suppression of its people. Also here, the UN committed itself to the interim administration while also assuming control over the military component from the Australians after five months. The previous administrative roles performed by the UN in post war societies such as Cambodia and Bosnia had been limited to monitoring and sometimes reforming an existing local government during a transition period. Assuming full executive authority in Kosovo and East-Timor were missions of a totally different order. What made the task in Kosovo even more daunting was that it had been Yugoslavia’s most backward province and was “not only entangled in war and history but also in the legacy of fifty years of communism and ten years of virtual apartheid.”

The organisational and logistical problems facing the UN-interim government were indeed massive and there had been little time to plan for the execution of this unprecedented mandate. First, there was an acute lack of manpower. International administrators, like international police officers, were not on standby waiting for a crisis to erupt like the military and had to be rallied from every corner of the world. Sergio Vieira de Mello recalled how his mission in Kosovo “resembled an under-budgeted, high school outing” when he arrived the day after Mike Jackson’s impressive military force in Pristina.

We had to borrow vehicles from a Swedish NGO. We depended for accommodation on the hospitality of an Albanian family, for food on the generosity of NATO, for water and fuel on the charity of UNHCR, and for communications on the good will of the British Government’s Foreign Aid Department, DFID. Staffing in both missions has proved to be slow and unsatisfactory. Few UN staff from Headquarters in New York, Geneva and Vienna are willing to go on missions. Staffs who do go, receive no reward and miss out on promotion possibilities. A standard clause in UN contracts allows the Secretary General to send staff wherever he wishes. Unfortunately this clause is seldom, if ever enforced. The UN has a large pool of potential candidates for field missions. Most of them however, are diplomats or generalists, who don’t make the best administrators or managers. The UN has had great difficulty in finding candidates with the vital skills in public administration, law and order, power, water, agriculture, finance, procurement, audit, border-control, tax, -the skills actually required to run a country. The UN Secretariat could learn a lot from the military and from some of the UN humanitarian agencies, who upgraded their emergency response capacity in response to criticism in the early nineties.

When Bernard Kouchner relieved De Mello as UN Special Representative in Pristina in July, he had no more than thirty people at his disposal. One year into the operations the UN Civil Administrative component numbered 292 professional personnel deployed in Kosovo out of
itss authorised total of 435. The Frenchman would end up competing for personnel with De Mello, who took up the job of Special Representative in East Timor. As usual, when the administrators first started to appear in the field, the UN had to deploy “the best people available, rather than the best people imaginable.” Most of the UN administrators had no experience in running a sizeable town. The civilian mission was also hampered by personnel changes at the top, such as the sudden disappearance of the original French head of civil administration in August. Luckily, Tom Könings, an experienced local administrator from Frankfurt, was able to take charge on short notice. Lack of funds and logistical means were the second biggest obstacle to successfully establishing international governmental control over Kosovo. A third problem to emerge as the mission took shape was the complexity of the combined UN, EU, OSCE and UNHCR structure under the UNMIK umbrella. “Unity of effort” within the civilian component suffered with four separate organisations in charge of administration, economic reconstruction, institution building and humanitarian aid. Each international group had different management structures, work ethos, accountability to separate bureaucratic chains and obviously their priorities diverged.

Organisational problems were constantly harassing UNMIK while performing its mission. The fundamental problem facing the international administration—and therefore also its main supporter KFOR—was its lack of a clear strategy for vacuum filling. There were two serious gaps in UN Security Council Resolution 1244 that hampered the international effort to install an interim administration and eventually transfer administrative responsibility to the Kosovars. First there was the overriding problem of the future status of Kosovo. Despite the many flaws in the Dayton agreement, the Bosnian agreement at least provided a clear picture of the political future of the former Yugoslav province, or rather, of what it was supposed to become. Kosovo’s final-status had yet to be determined so there was no goal, or what the military would call “end-state”, for the interim administration. Though KFOR committed itself to supporting the UNMIK to “set the conditions for the development of a lasting settlement within the Province” before allowing itself to withdraw, it was pretty much in the same boat. Part of the explanation for the failure to address Kosovo’s final status can be found in the unexpectedly swift end to hostilities in June and the subsequent haste with which the Security Council resolution was written. Most of all, however, it had been a conscious decision by the major powers involved in drafting the resolution at the G-8 summit in Cologne to leave the issue of sovereignty unaddressed. Clearly, no peace accord would have been acceptable to Milosevic and the Serbs if even a hint of genuine independence was given to the Albanians. Belgrade was not even prepared to concede a restoration of the privileges under the autonomy status granted by Tito—privileges that had been revoked in 1989. The UÇK and the Albanians, on the other hand, would not countenance anything more than de jure sovereignty by Belgrade for the moment. The compromise was the international protectorate defended by tens of thousands of NATO troops.

There already had been little doubt about the rigidity of the Albanians in their dismissal of any degree of Serbian rule over Kosovo. Their war had been fought over independ-
ence, not over what form of democratic government should be installed. So while UNMIK devoted its energy toward interim government and democracy-building, human rights and civil society, the vast majority of the Albanians were only interested in one thing. This was made abundantly clear when the first contours of political parties emerged in the fall of 1999. Although there were no less than 24 such parties at the time, it was almost impossible to differentiate between their agendas. An UÇK political advisor explained: “They all have three key issues: number one, independence; number two, independence; number three, independence.” A Kosovar Albanian human rights monitor added: “People need to learn that democracy is a process. One election does not make a democracy. Ninety-nine percent of the population had no idea what democracy is. People do not understand that they themselves must be responsible, that human rights are connected to democracy.”

Concentrating on the shorter term military role in vacuum filling in the early days of the peacebuilding effort, this chapter focuses on the second weak spot in the Security Council resolution. UN Civil Administration was to assume executive administrative responsibility in order to freeze the situation and create some form of order from chaos. Its mission was “to provide transitional administration while overseeing the development of provisional democratic self-governing institutions.” The overarching issue of the political future of Kosovo was only to be addressed after international control had been fully established. To that short-term end, however, the UN resolution failed to address local transitional administration in its own right. Close reading showed that the mandate gave UNMIK no absolute responsibility to impose control over the Kosovars on the regional and municipal levels of government. Two days after the resolution’s approval on 12 June 1999, Secretary General Kofi Anan presented his first report on the mission, outlining the structure to implement it and assigning tasks to the four organisations participating in UNMIK. The report defined the responsibility of the first of the four pillars, UN Civil Administration, as “overseeing and, where necessary, conducting a number of civil affairs functions, such as the civil service and economic and budgetary affairs, as well as supporting the restoration and provision in the short run of basic public services, such as public health, education, utilities, transport and telecommunications.” However, the Secretary General made no reference to local government.

The mandate was therefore criticized for only prescribing the outcome, while failing to address the method of establishing control over local institutions. Translated into a military operation, this may have been the apogee of “mission command” or Auftragstaktik—cherished yet hardly practised within Western armies—it was hardly appropriate for a trusteeship-type mission unequalled in complexity since the occupation and democratic reform of Germany and Japan in the aftermath of the Second World War. As mentioned earlier, there was one vital difference between international rule over Kosovo and the mission faced by Civil Affairs and Military Government in liberated and occupied territory in Europe and Asia more than fifty years earlier. While the magnitude of the Allied effort then was of course incomparable, the presence of local administrative structures in most liberated and occupied territory—and
therefore the possibility to install indirect rule—made the job of British and American Civil Affairs personnel during and after the Second World War easier in this respect.

While the official responsibility for filling the administrative void clearly rested with UNMIK, NATO’s failure to recognise the problems and adequately plan for an interim solution that was very likely to follow the civilian component’s slow deployment would seriously complicate the mission of its military commanders on the ground. As was the case with preparations for the public security vacuum, the expectations of a rapidly deployable UN civil administration were raised to the point where it is likely that the problem was consciously being ignored.\(^{16}\) With the clarity of hindsight, it is also hard to imagine there was a genuine belief in higher military and policy circles that the Serb administrative institutions would remain in place. It was even more unlikely that these Serb mayors and other government employees would be able to effectively preside over the vengeful Kosovar Albanian majority population until relieved by international administrators and police.

The higher up in NATO hierarchy, the more conscious the effort to ignore possible military involvement in governing Kosovo appears to have been. In his operational orders General Jackson had clearly mentioned avoiding a power vacuum to emerge. NATO Supreme Commander Wesley Clark also was aware of the challenges posed by the absence of local government. Predicting “a very, very trying period,” he conceded in an interview two weeks prior to deployment: “There is no government there, this is going to be very challenging.”\(^{17}\) Although the Generals would certainly have been no enthusiasts for having their broad mandate formally expanded into the administrative sphere, the strongest desire to avoid reference to anything resembling “military government” came from the Pentagon—although an equal share of the blame fell on European policymakers. U.S. Defence officials went to great lengths to rule out the establishment of a temporary military government in Kosovo. Nevertheless, the *The Washington Post* predicted on its front page that “[f]rom the minute they arrive in Kosovo, NATO troops will become the police, town council and public works department” and “run what will be essentially a military government.”\(^{18}\) If two well-informed journalists could touch upon the essence of the mission to come, so could the generals and the responsible policy-makers.

The Pentagon ignored the likely occurrence of a civil administrative vacuum primarily because of its inclination to keep peacekeeping missions as limited and purely military as possible. It also made it easier to deflect the blame for chaos in a power vacuum that NATO had forced by waging an air-war on Milosevic. The American Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee Senator John W. Warner stated during Senate Hearings on 1 July 1999:

> “[T]he United Nations in a sense is a partner with KFOR NATO at this time. This Senator always wants to keep a clear definition of the guidelines of what KFOR does or NATO and the UN. I never want them to blend too much. I think they should be independent.”\(^{19}\)

Six weeks after the end of the war, the finger pointing began. While answering for the breakdown in law and order and the administrative chaos in Kosovo during a U.S. Senate Hearing,
Secretary of Defense William Cohen told the senators in July that “[t]he more we do, the less incentive there is for the UN to come in and assume that burden. This is a mission that doesn’t belong to NATO forces.” In his effort to put the blame on the UN, Senator Warner even suggestively asked Cohen if U.S. forces were being put at risk as a result of the UN’s failure.20

The political leaders most often forgot to mention that the military mandate expressly assigned to KFOR the responsibility for public security in Kosovo.

The Struggle for Local Administrative Control

The most harmful effects of the reflexive commitment to limit the military mission as much as possible was that it left the troops on the ground without proper orders, instructions and the right force composition to address the problems they faced in Kosovo. Local administrative matters were low on the list of primary concerns of the average battalion commander upon entering a potentially hostile environment, but he and his troops on the ground were the first to face the political vacuum in the towns and villages they entered in June 1999. Expecting the UN administrations to arrive “soon”, the Dutch battalion therefore envisioned a liaison function to the UN in the planning phase.21 However, until mid-July there would hardly be a functioning civil administrative presence to support on the central level in Pristina, let alone in a rural municipality such as Orahovac. The other point of contact the battalion planned for was the Serb municipal administrator. But other than that, few plans were made.

The humanitarian implications of over 800,000 displaced persons returning to Kosovo overshadowed all other concerns of civilian and military planners for the immediate post-war chaos in Kosovo. Most of the effort concerning the vaguely defined concept CIMIC was oriented towards supporting this humanitarian effort. For the KFOR units assembled in Macedonia and Albania this was a tangible problem, because the refugee crisis took place under their very noses. According to Van Loon, he and his brigade commander Von Korff had gone further than most of their colleagues by contemplating at least some of the administrative implications of those refugees returning and reclaiming property. Having supported the Kosovar Albanians in the camps in Macedonia, they had witnessed how the refugees were often bereft of identity papers and other official documents and thus could hardly prove their existence. To that end they planned to safeguard archives after entry and even intended to collect phonebooks for the purpose of dealing with the property claims.22 No direct orders or instructions had been issued by KFOR to prepare for such matters that were so alien to the concept of military peacekeeping.

The intensive and closely held negotiations that ended the war had left no time for combined planning sessions between UN and KFOR officials. Once on the ground in Kosovo, coordination meetings between Jackson and the UN Special Representative were filled with the most immediate concerns of raising central governmental institutions and humanitarian matters and failed to touch upon the issue of local administration. Therefore, ahead of any formal or technical agreement between KFOR and UNMIK and completely lacking guidelines from within NATO on how to address the administrative vacuum, some local commanders
too kk  th e  first  steps toward s  administering  Kosovo.  A s  was  the  case  with  policing,  some  con-

tingents would do so more energetically than others.

In order to come to terms with the administrative situation in Orahovac, Van Loon at-
tempted to create some rudimentary form of a multi-ethnic representative committee in the
early days of KFOR’s presence. Approaching leading figures from the local community as a
point of contact had been part of his general training and education in peacekeeping, which
had gradually been added to the military curriculum in the Netherlands. For a brief period he
harboured an almost romantic idea of assembling Albanians, Serbs and Roma at one table
with him at the head, working towards a solution of the most imminent problems facing the
community. 23 A committee of four Serbs, led by the former mayor Andjelko Kolasinac, had
already approached KFOR one day after the Dutch arrived. Van Loon was most satisfied since
this matched his plans and expectations. It soon became apparent, however, that the mayor
would not represent more than the 3,500 remaining Serbs in the city and the neighbouring vil-
lages Velika Hoca and Zociste. As a representative for the Albanian majority there was ini-
itially no alternative for Skender Hoxhaj, the local UÇK commander who had marched into
town twenty-four hours after the withdrawal of Serb troops and police. As a military com-
mander who was not from the area, he was not exactly the ideal spokesman.

It soon dawned on the Dutch commander that it had been a delusion to have Albanians
and Serbs sitting at one table and talking reasonably on any subject, at least at this point in
time and certainly with these representatives. During the first attempt at such a conference,
accusations such as “you murderer” flew across the table and only the presence of armed
troops in the room is likely to have kept the delegations from attacking each other physically.
Some of the accusations may have approached the truth. Apart from the former Serb mayor
who would later be charged for contributing to the deportation of Albanians, the local bar
owner Stanko Levic was suspected of having been “a shooter” during at least one of the mass
killings of the previous year. Hoxhaj also turned out to be “a crook”, according to Van Loon.
The UÇK was widely known to be guilty of kidnappings and murders of Serbs and Albanian
“collaborators.” 24 Nevertheless, an Albanian civilian present at the meeting later joked that
despite its failure, Orahovac probably had the distinction of hosting the first inter-ethnic meet-
ing in Kosovo since the end of the war. During this Serb-Albanian meeting and the few that
followed with other representatives in the coming six months, the Albanian population was
always extremely suspicious. There was always talk in the streets of the Albanian representa-
tives reaching “a secret deal with the Serbs”, while inside the conference room quite the con-
trary would be going on and little to no progress was made in rapprochement. 25 Instead, both
sides would wear down the KFOR and UNMIK intermediaries by spending most of their time
and energy making endless speeches on the grave injustice done to their side in the recent, and
more than often not so recent history.

It will be recalled that hardly any intelligence had been made available to the battalion
that could have helped in selecting the right community leaders in Orahovac. Apart from the
information provided by the German Navy officer who had worked in the area as an OSCE
monitor, Van Loon is likely to have profited most from reading about Kosovo's history to comprehend that with which he was confronted. A lack of interpreters complicated the early search for reliable representatives in local society. Despite ample warning time the Dutch unit had not been provided with any interpreters prior to entering Kosovo. The Dutch Army had failed to use the many Kosovar immigrants in the Netherlands for this purpose, although the Kosovar diaspora did produce some locals with knowledge of English and German who were used as translators. The Dutch thus profited from their command of these languages enabling them to engage in basic conversation with some of the local inhabitants in the streets. However, only after local interpreters had been hired could a serious attempt be made to trace and approach those holding leading positions prior to the war and who hopefully continued to wield influence in local society. Throughout the mission all translations were performed in English or German by local interpreters, which is unlikely to have contributed to either the quality or the secrecy of information exchanged. Both the Dutch and the Albanian translators were mostly no more than adequate in these languages.

Further difficulties were created by a cultural environment that was traditionally very closed to outsiders. Even when working with interpreters the foreign soldiers and international policemen everywhere in Kosovo would find it hard to investigate crime and local internal power-struggles, especially when it concerned a crime which the population felt was “theirs” rather than one “against them.” The good relations developed with the Albanian population as a result of the overall honest and transparent manner of operating—and of course the close security they provided—would seriously enhance the openness and trust displayed by the majority of the local population of Orahovac.

Two of the key figures the Task Force initially found were the former director of the local wine factory, Agim Hasku, and the local lawyer, Qazim Qeska. Both had held the position of mayor prior to 1989, but neither seemed to aspire to that position now that the Serbs had gone. Both initially seemed weary of the UÇK. After being blocked from formal positions of power by the Serbs in 1989, the former mayors were active in the underground or “parallel” Albanian government structures and although they were probably supporting the UÇK in its role as a “liberation army”, neither of them supported its claims to political power. After Dutch plans for a multi-ethnic council were temporarily scrapped, a separate Albanian “interim city council” came forward, with Qeska as its chief representative. Hoxhaj’s redeployment to neighbouring Suva Reka was likely to have made it easier for non-UÇK notables to come forward and Van Loon pushed them to get organised. At this point the Dutch harboured the somewhat exaggerated expectation that this body would be “responsible for governing the area of Orahovac.” Qeska, who was generally referred to by the Dutch as “interim mayor”, took a moderate stance and it was hoped that he could improve Albanian-Serb relations in the near future. Van Loon was satisfied with the situation. He even called on the relatively co-operative new UÇK commander Ismet Tara—whose unit had replaced Hoxhaj—to join the council for security related matters. As a resident of Orahovac in charge of the local UÇK unit, he was after all still the most powerful local figure. Depending on the subjects ad-
dressed during these meetings that varied from humanitarian problems to improving the water supply, a factory or a school running again, other locals joined. For the moment, their most important role was to convey to the local populations directives given by the Dutch forces while providing KFOR with basic information on the problems facing the Albanian community.

Early enthusiasm about the creation of an Albanian representative committee proved premature. What seemed to be a positive development in Orahovac was suddenly disrupted by the nation-wide emergence of the UÇK in the guise of the unofficial “Provisional Government of Kosovo” (PGOK). Lead by “Prime Minister” Hashim Thaci, this self-styled government had been established in exile on 2 April 1999, during the second week of the NATO air-campaign. During the fighting it had prepared for its future role as the government of Kosovo on both a central and a local level, knowing that the municipal government level was the key to de facto control over Kosovar society. Consequently, it positioned itself to establish these authorities in the course of June and early July. Directed from Pristina the Provisional Government emerged in all twenty-seven predominantly Albanian municipalities out of the total of twenty-nine. On 15 July, a former local UÇK officer Agim Thaqi presented himself to Dutch KFOR as the mayor appointed by the Minister of Internal Affairs of Hashim Thaci’s Provisional Government. He simply claimed that there had been a grave misunderstanding concerning Qeska’s role of interim mayor. At the time, the sudden “change of mayors” was a mystery to Van Loon, who had been far too busy keeping Orahovac from descending into anarchy to notice a similar and even quicker political development in other municipalities throughout Kosovo. There had been no warnings from KFOR headquarters about this phenomenon and no orders on how to deal with the self-styled authorities. Nevertheless, Thaqi was immediately told that the Provisional Government he claimed to represent was not recognised by UNMIK or KFOR and that he was therefore not acceptable as the new mayor.

Although UÇK leader Hashim Thaci derived some authority from his role as the leader of the Albanian delegation at Rambouillet, where Secretary of State Madeleine Albright had championed him as the Kosovar Albanian representative, he leaned primarily on his popular authority as leader of the armed struggle. His claim to administrative power ran counter to the international interim administration’s plans for municipal and national elections. Ballots were to precede any form of Kosovar administrative body, to enable other political parties to organise. The most important Albanian counterweight to Thaci’s claim to power was “President” Ibrahim Rugova’s Government of the Republic of Kosovo, also known as the “Parallel Government.” The unofficial elections of the early 1990s gave his Liberal Democrat Party of Kosovo (LDK) some sort of legitimate claim to represent the Kosovar-Albanian people and it maintained a residual, yet still substantial, grassroots network developed over a decade. After fleeing Kosovo to Italy during the war and after an infamous meeting with Milosevic—forced by the Serb leader—Rugova’s position was seriously weakened. However, the somewhat vague and unpredictable leader still had substantial appeal to many Kosovar Albanians for whom he had been the leader of the peaceful resistance movement. For the West, he was
the best hope for a multi-ethnic Kosovo and for serious opposition to the UÇK. Thaci was aware of this and asked Rugova to join his Provisional Government in July. Merely wanting to strengthen his illegitimate government, he proved more eager to co-operate than Rugova. The leader of the LDK clearly saw no reason to play second fiddle to Thaci and refused to join or recognise the Provisional Government on any level.33 Rugova is unlikely to have displayed such confidence if UNMIK and KFOR had not shown the willingness to at least attempt blocking the UÇK from power. Just as with policing, KFOR turned out to be the only organised body ready to challenge the UÇK in their attempt to gain complete administrative control at this point. It would prove an arduous task to keep Thaci’s organisation from assuming control of political and—as it soon turned out—economic life.

Meanwhile in Orahovac, the Dutch hastily started gathering information among the local population on the self-appointed mayor Thaqi. Being an outsider from a village elsewhere in the municipality he seemed to have very little popular support amongst local Kosovar Albanians. Moreover, many considered him an “incapable UÇK marionette.” Several days later the Dutch again informed Thaqi that he was not acceptable as the local mayor. He could join the existing Kosovar Albanian committee if he wished and if the other representatives had no objection. Since he had already installed himself in the municipal building, Thaqi was warned that KFOR would remove him. In the meantime, the Dutch stepped up efforts to bolster the committee to become something like an interim city council.34 Van Loon pushed Qeska to assume responsibility as the head of this body, but the lawyer was reluctant to confront Thaci’s Provisional Government in Pristina.35

The situation surrounding the two local mayors remained tense for some three weeks. On 2 August the Prizren-based regional administrator visited Orahovac to conduct talks with Kosovar Albanian and Serb communities to lessen ethnic tensions in the potentially explosive region. When the Dutch commander asked him if UNMIK should continue talks with Thaqi, the administrator failed to take a position.36 Several days of uncertainty and rumours followed. On 6 August, the Dutch reported that Thaqi was allegedly removed from office “by KFOR.”37 Rumour continued to indicate that besides lacking popular support, the so-called mayor also had failed to hold on to UÇK support. Qeska, who clearly remained the candidate preferred by the Dutch, had supposedly replaced him. Besides having far more popular support in both Orahovac and the surrounding villages, there were indications that he could even count on some sympathy amongst Serbs. The overly positive rumours continued to suggest that even the UÇK considered him the preferable candidate. The Dutch suddenly had high hopes for an improvement in relations between the parties in the future. However, Tara would later state that he had never dropped his support for Thaqi. The connection between the military leader and the civilian UÇK leader was not as obvious as it seemed. While officially one of Tara’s battalion commanders, this rank did not imply that he was a fighter. “Tara had been involved in combat, we knew that, but Thaqi certainly was no warrior”, Van Loon recalled. Instead, “Thaqi was a bureaucrat, a small time civil-servant.”38 He appeared to fit the picture of the average Provisional Government mayor:
The typical mayor has a background in public administration and originally became active in the mainstream of Kosovar Albanian political, usually within the LDK. He (they are all men) joined the UÇK late, leaving the LDK after February 1998, and often worked in the UÇK in an administrative rather than a weapons-bearing capacity. He owes allegiance to the provisional Ministry of Local Government in Pristina/Pristina, but has appointed local people with relevant experience to head the various departments in his administration. The town hall has little or no income, unless it controls and has managed to re-start former state industries, and officials are working without salary. 39

As a result of Thaqi’s failure to quickly establish effective control over Orahovac and his inability to collect taxes for his central government, his relationship to the Provisional Government in Pristina became somewhat strained. In anticipation of the Hashim Thaci’s visit to Orahovac for the celebration of the one-year anniversary of the two-day “liberation” of the city by the UÇK, Thaqi asked KFOR if he could carry a side-arm. The Dutch officer that refused him this important symbol of might in Kosovo, noticed that the self-styled mayor was very nervous about something that day. In front of the international press-corps, as a large crowd cheered on “president” Thaci that day, it was military commander Tara who was standing next to him on the balcony. Thaqi was nowhere in sight.

It proved hard to concentrate the Task Force’s effort on the problem of the two mayors at this point. After the Dutch Defence Minister and Foreign Minister and two visits by Wesley Clark in July, the battalion was rolling out the carpet for Mike Jackson and the Dutch Army Commander in Chief, Schouten. Many “VIPs” would follow. Clearly not every local KFOR unit received this much attention. The primary reason for the overwhelming attention was the impending Russian deployment and the Albanian protests that were receiving increasing media attention. Meanwhile the Task Force was fighting its battle for control of the streets by keeping the UÇK from policing Orahovac. In early August, everything seemed to go wrong simultaneously. Just when the Dutch and German troops and Military Police seemed to be gaining the upper hand on the streets, a crisis in inter-ethnic relations erupted. An attack by Albanians on three Serbs in their quarter left one dead and two wounded, causing tensions to rise even further in the city.

These distractions and UNMIK’s weak negotiating position made it possible for Thaqi to hold on to his position. His reported removal from the municipality building suddenly proved invalid. Although the Task Force continued to refuse recognition of him and the Provisional Government of which he appeared to be the choice, Thaqi came out on top. The UNMIK representative visiting the town accepted the committee the Albanians had come forward with under his leadership. It was a compromise in a conflict over administrative power the locals obviously wished to avoid. 40 Although a majority of the Albanians in Orahovac supported Rugova, in the end it was clear that they did not want to confront Thaci’s Provisional Government in Pristina. Officially under UNMIK leadership, Thaqi would become “acting mayor” and Qeska would assume the position of “acting deputy mayor.” 41
After UNMIK had reached a deal with the local Kosovar Albanian representatives in Orahovac and thus endorsed the self-styled administrator, the Task Force “seized its activities to create an integrated council” with Serb participation. It left the initiative in matters related to administration and institution building to the UN and the OSCE. The provisional government mayor in Orahovac would not be as influential as in other municipalities, although with Tara’s support he was a force with which to reckon. According to Van Loon, he was “a little fish.” He was known to leave town every day around three in the afternoon, while Qeska was always there for people to approach him as he resided in the city. Furthermore, a very influential local movement in these days was the “blockade council” chaired by Hasku, who was on good terms with the Dutch officers. This council was outside direct UÇK control. Eventually Thaqi, Qeska and several other interim delegates would be working under the directions of the UNMIK administrator, Kharrass Kane. However, the international administrator, a UN diplomat from Mauretania, proved to be a not very powerful figure and lacked the necessary skills of an interim manager.

UNMIK’s compromise in Orahovac was an example of the inevitable ad hoc policy followed by the UN in Pristina at this point. Characterised as “pick and choose”, the approach was to leave the local structures in place as long as it appeared to be responsible and included a reasonable mix of local interests. If the local administration was too clearly UÇK-dominated, the local UN official would push the Provisional Government to replace some individuals or attempt to remove the existing structure altogether. If the Dutch commander had his way, Thaqi would have been marginalised immediately and certainly not have become the chief representative of the Albanian community. The commander did not see the need to accommodate the weak and unpopular mayor. Obviously annoyed that day, Van Loon painted a gloomy picture in his daily situation report. With the new interim mayor and the murder of a Serb, he had given up his vestigial hopes of an integrated Serbian-Albanian city council for the near future.

Although the Task Force was clearly the strongest player in the municipality, without the authority of a military governor, the commander’s powers to influence matters in the administrative sphere were limited. Even with those powers, the situation would probably not have been as manageable as Van Loon might have liked. Despite the lack of a consistent Kosovo-wide KFOR-UNMIK policy towards the self-styled authorities, however, he and his staff would certainly have been relieved that UNMIK was officially taking the lead in the complicated and politically sensitive area of institution building and administration from August onward. In choosing what local representatives to accept and work with, the Dutch had relied on common sense rather than training and education in such delicate matters while being completely deprived of political guidance from KFOR headquarters on this matter. There was another reason for welcoming the official transfer of these responsibilities. Although the commander may have desired to wield his influence for the sake of a multi-ethnic Orahovac, his political and military taskmasters would not have been keen on their contingent’s involvement in such highly political decisions. They would certainly not have been enthusiastic about ha-
The UN flag flying over Pristina. Elsewhere in Kosovo, Albanian protesters were successful in their demand to have the Albanian double-eagle flown from government buildings, either alone or alongside the UN flag (Photo: ARRC).

ving their troops remove illegitimate mayors from town-halls in the Balkans. Although the administrative lead of the UN had the positive effect of relieving the Dutch commander of such politically sensitive responsibilities, its actual ability to govern amounted to little in the following two months. A single administrator representing the international interim government was present for merely two days a week until late September. It would take several more months before UNMIK in Orahovac would reach its eventual strength of five permanent international staff, complemented by another five OSCE-personnel assigned to institution building and the organisation of municipal elections. The Dutch would thus remain heavily involved in the day-to-day management of the municipality in the coming months.

The most important result of KFOR’s relatively assertive posture in Orahovac was that it prevented the UÇK and its political wing from entrenching themselves as they did in several other sectors in Kosovo. By patrolling the area intensively and by acting as a credible police force, the Provisional Government was unable to assume local authority backed by armed force the way it did elsewhere in Kosovo. The neighbouring municipality, Suva Reka was an example of how the Provisional Government took charge if there were no substantial counterweight in place. Here, the “mayor” had taken up office in the municipal building on 17 June and—supported by the UÇK Military Police (PU) commander—basically ran the city. In October this resulted in the hardest line yet taken by UNMIK. The mayor was expelled from his office by force with help of UN police while the UÇK Military Police division was closed
As in Orahovac, the population was not unequivocally loyal to the local mayor. The demonstrations that followed in Suva Reka were not so much in favour of the deposed mayor as against the removal of the Albanian flag from the municipal building. Eventually, these popular protests led to a strategic retreat by the UN and eventually resulted in the Albanian double-eagle flying alongside the UN flag. After several such “flag incidents”, the same compromise was reached in Orahovac and the other municipalities with a predominantly Albanian population. Only in the capital Pristina would the UN flag fly alone outside the city hall.

The confrontational approach taken by the UN in Suva Reka temporarily appeared successful, but as Dutch troops took over control of Suva Reka in November, the UÇK still proved more influential than in Orahovac. The city had clearly suffered from the initial lack of an active KFOR presence to act as a stopgap to UÇK control. However, an international military presence was by no means a safeguard against the predominance of self-appointed local structures in this early phase of the operation. In the Southwest, the Italian brigade was reported to have “encouraged” the UÇK-led structures to help fill the power vacuum in some villages. In those villages near Peç, the UÇK had established police forces and even a municipal court. It was also reported to be running a health clinic, a grain store, a weapons factory and an agricultural co-operative in the Italian sector. Although there is no proof for the allegations of actual encouragement of the UÇK by the Italians, the Italian brigade’s aloofness thwarted effective control by KFOR and UNMIK. The result of their generally passive posture was that of all Kosovar regions control of the Provisional Government was strongest in the Peç region. The Mexican regional administrator gave up his post after nine days, as he was unable to bear the Kosovar Albanian tendency to ignore his existence. The OSCE characterised Djakovica, the second largest city in the Italian zone, as “the most obvious example of the power of the self-styled authorities and the ability of the […] UÇK to maintain control of a town.” Here, the local structures went as far as issuing auto license plates. The obvious lack of KFOR and UNMIK control over Djakovica was only surpassed by the situation in the Serbian parts of the French sector, where radical nationalist elements seized de facto control of the northern part of Mitrovica. However, whereas the French were facing a large Serb population hostile to KFOR, and reportedly infiltrated by paramilitaries directed from Belgrade, the Italians could have more easily capitalized on NATO’s heroic status amongst the primarily Albanian population.

Also Prizren proved a difficult case in the struggle for administrative power. Other than the Italians, the German brigade commander Von Korf and his successor Sauer did not take a laissez faire attitude to control over the city. However, the speed with which the Provisional Government got its act together in this city made it virtually impossible to block the UÇK officials from exerting a very strong influence over the local administration. Former teacher and UÇK warrior-spokesman Kadri Kryeziu had been waiting in Albania to assume the job of regional administrator over Kosovo’s second city on Hashim Thaci’s instructions. In fact, he had been assigned to this post one year before, his proud secretary told a reporter. A
Council of Europe team of experts visiting the city in June had found the administration firmly entrenched "in a vibrant working city", that contrasted with all the other places the team had visited. In Kosovo's second largest and certainly most beautiful city, the street cafes were busy, food-merchants were offering fresh fruit and every hour a shop seemed to open its doors. A German journalist concluded that two weeks after KFOR's entry in Prizren there was no more trace of a Stunde Null, or "zero-hour" in Prizren. To challenge Kryeziu's control over the city late June there were no more than three staff in the UNMIK regional office temporarily headed by the Canadian Mark Baskin. The deputy regional administrator's first encounter with Kryeziu was a fiasco. After the Canadian rejected the legitimacy of his claim to administrative power the Albanian mayor walked straight out of the session.

Upon his arrival in Kosovo the Swedish regional administrator Lennart Myhlback, who took over from Baskin, set out to confront the UÇK mayor over his unauthorised exercise of powers. Attempting to dissolve the Provisional Government structures in Prizren, he steered a course closer to that in Suva Reka than that by UNMIK in Orahovac, where a compromise was reached. In August Myhlback established a ninety-day Provisional Municipal Council in Prizren with himself at the head. His scheme soon started to go awry as the local deputy he had envisioned never showed up. From the twelve local representatives he attempted to assemble in weekly sessions, a maximum of six appeared. The German liaison officer who joined these council meetings as a KFOR representative witnessed many of these somewhat embarrassing sessions, none of which led to any practical results. One of the international administration's most imminent problems prior to September was the lack of finances to pay employees who attempted to provide basic services. This left him with little leverage. In the meantime the six missing municipal council members were elsewhere conducting business as usual under the UÇK Provisional Government mayor Kryeziu. According to the OSCE, the critical UNMIK insider, the many functions being performed under his direction included "tax collection, issuing birth certificates, marriage licenses and certificates, issuing decrees and using a vigorous public information campaign to advertise their services and achievements."

As a consequence, Myhlback rapidly fell out with Kryeziu and discouraged contacts with him while trying to empower the UN-organised structure. The Albanian mayor then publicly denounced UNMIK as amik, a fanciful variant of the Albanian word for "enemy."

Prizren turned out to be a "sad case." It confronted the UN and KFOR with the limits of what the international presence could do after the momentum was lost to the UÇK and in the absence of a clear policy towards the self-appointed administrators. Neither the UN nor NATO was willing to use the military to enforce international rule over a people it had sought to free from oppression. UNMIK did not repeat its forcible removal by its police of the mayor of Suva Reka and elsewhere. KFOR was not enthusiastic to trade the image of the liberator it had amongst the Kosovar Albanian majority for that of an occupying force. General Jackson was anxious about alienating the Kosovar Albanian population as a result of KFOR's rather harsh treatment of the UÇK military in the demilitarisation effort. Maintaining consent of and thus military compliance by the UÇK was far too important for the execution of his primary
military mission to risk a confrontation with Thaci’s Provisional Government. There was a firm recognition in both KFOR and UNMIK that the Kosovar Albanians had run parallel systems in the face of a much stronger and more oppressive government than the UN. The alternative, however, a formal recognition of his government on a Kosovo-wide basis, was out of the question. The ensuing attempt to selectively sideline the self-styled leadership provided no solution. In the absence of a formal agreement on the status of the different claimants to power, Kosovo remain practically ungoverned for several months. In October 1999 Bernard Kouchner started negotiations to break the deadlock by creating a consensual interim government acceptable to all parties involved. Since Thaci was clearly sticking to an obstructionist line, UNMIK and KFOR would have to wear down the influence of the Provisional Government over the Kosovar Albanian population. To accomplish this, the civilian and military components would have to provide the Kosovars with a viable alternative.

Providing Public Services

During his time as administrator in Prizren, Mark Baskin came to recognise that one of the key problems in the political reconstruction of post-war societies was generally posed by the elaborate ambitions involved. The “putatively cosmopolitan values” promoted by these international operations—such as multi-ethnicity, political diversity, economic liberalism or democratic development—were not so deeply rooted internationally as the predominantly western interventionists would have liked to believe. However, these high-minded goals were the prime motivation for the international community to deny the UÇK and its Provisional Government direct access to power, since it represented the exact opposite of most of these values. For the time being, however, in order for UNMIK to succeed in elbowing aside the parallel Albanian structures and establish itself as the only formal governmental authority in Kosovo it had to lure the Kosovars to its side by far less elevated means. Apart from public security, the quintessential government function, the battle for political control was fought over basic public services rendered to a population in need. UN administrators or the UÇK mayors could hold all the claims to legitimate power they wanted, but controlling Kosovo was all about who the people could rely on and would turn to for their basic necessities. KFOR would play a crucial role in providing these basic services pending the establishment of a working UN administration.

By mid July, British engineers were working with NGOs to restore the local water supplies in Pristina. British engineers were also responsible for keeping the two main power stations running in what Jackson called “a rather desultory way.” To support them in their effort to keep the electricity flowing, the General flew in civilian specialists straight from Britain. KFOR thus chaired the boards of three electric power companies (power generation, transmission and distribution) and was refurbishing the main telecommunications transmitter. Overall, these were unrewarding tasks. Although more than a year of civil war and the recent attacks with NATO’s precision-guided munitions had done the facilities not much good, Kosovo’s public services had been in a deplorable state long before the bombing campaign. While new facilities such as a mobile telephone network would be up and running in 2001, daily
power-failures were still a common feature throughout Kosovo in 2002. KFOR temporarily had to operate several other facilities such as the Trepça mines and the Mitrovica lead-factory, which turned out to be an ecological disaster. In addition technical advice was provided for the Water Board and the new Police Academy, run by the OSCE. Border control duties were temporarily performed by KFOR, but were limited mainly to checking traffic entering Kosovo for weapons. It made no pretence of addressing customs or other economic issues since it was far too busy with more pressing matters. Besides, legislation in this field was lacking. Of all these tasks, only the improvement of the Pristina airport and perhaps border control duties could be clearly linked to KFOR’s own military operation, and were therefore CIMIC in a classical sense.

In Prizren the German brigade was heavily involved in running the Southern part of Kosovo. Apart from the usual aid provided to the returning refugees, the reconstruction projects such as the winterization programme for destroyed housing and the refurbishment of schools, a German and a Dutch engineer battalion were working on road construction, snow-clearance during the winter, the organisation of garbage disposal and augmenting the insufficient local fire-fighting capacity. In Prizren a military field kitchen company provided more than 600,000 hot meals to refugees over the first few months and even livestock such as sheep and chickens were distributed amongst farmers. Lack of confidence in UNMIK’s capabilities in the initial months caused the many Kosovars to approach the German brigade directly for all sorts of aid. The Germans noticed a change in the behaviour of the local population. The immense gratitude towards KFOR outlived the initial phase of cheering and flower throwing crowds. However, Colonel Ulrich Kilch saw the mood gradually change from “can you help us” to “we need something” to “you have to.” Well-intentioned initiatives geared towards mobilising the local volunteers to clean the intensely dirty streets failed, only to take off after locals were being paid to do the job. Since UNMIK was unable to pay other public employees, the German brigade even went as far as paying stipends to this local staff using donations from the German government. This situation lasted until the middle of September when the UN took over these financial obligations.

On the local level, Task Force Orahovac was facing a similar situation. Most of the city’s public services were either already being run by KFOR, operated in coordination with international governmental agencies or NGOs, or delegated to local staff after having been initiated by the Dutch. In order to operate effectively and assure access to all ethnic groups, basic public services such as the fire department and the hospital were under military control for the time being. The fire department was operating two fire trucks and employing ten people, but was hardly functional unless under KFOR direction. On the Task Force’s initiative the hospital, which had been in a deplorable state, was cleaned and returned to medical service. Thereafter Dutch doctors managed the hospital together with local medical staff under KFOR protection. With support from the battalion, the organisations Médecins du Monde and the Johanniter Unfallhilfe, which were also operating in the hospital, medical aid was made available
inside the Serbian quarter and Velika Hoca. The more severe cases would receive military escort either to the Orahovac hospital or even Prizren or Pristina.

As in every city and town in Kosovo, garbage disposal in Orahovac was problematic that summer, leading to serious fears about the outbreak of disease. It was tackled in cooperation with the German governmental technical aid organisation Technisches Hilfswerk (THW), using local Albanian employees, who initially had to be escorted when working in the Serb quarter. Through its two liaison officers, the Task Force was coordinating the reconstruction of several other elements of civilian life. Together with the THW and the UNHCR a temporary school was established in a refurbished supermarket in the Serb quarter.60 Through an effort by the battalion’s non-commissioned officers, learning materials and toys were collected in the Netherlands and handed over to elementary schools in Orahovac, while a schoolyard was refurbished with money provided by the city of Arnhem, the home base of the Dutch artillery unit.

The Dutch government had been providing substantial sums of development money to its units on peacekeeping duties since the Marines had been operating in Cambodia. However, the artillery battalion in Kosovo received no such funds. The logic behind this decision was that by sending a thousand strong engineer battalion for humanitarian and reconstruction duties to Prizren, the Netherlands government was already doing enough in this field. Since the battalion was heavily involved in running a municipality, this seemed a rather odd decision. It did result though in making the Dutch troops creative and stimulated cooperation with civilian organisations, thus ensuring a rapid transfer of responsibilities. Yet, creativity was again not stimulated from The Hague. During the very first weeks, the Serbs in the area were faced with the likelihood of serious food shortages. Since initially no humanitarian organisations were around to perform the job, the commander offered a local flour factory in Zrze the lucrative contract of providing the battalion with its daily bread supply, on the strict condition that it would also deliver bread to the Serbs. To that end the Dutch provided ten tons of flour. Deliveries by the Albanians were initially under military escort. It took the commander some serious haggling to get authorisation for this initiative from the Ministry of Defence. While providing millions for reconstruction and aid project performed by the military in Bosnia—where stability had long since been restored—it now feared the “dependency reflex” despite the acute food crisis amongst Serbs in Orahovac under the noses of its own soldiers.

In August 1999 the UN administration started its first payments to the city’s medical personnel, firemen and garbagemen, who had all been operating under the direction of the peacekeepers. That month, with the increasing amount of international humanitarian organisations operating in the municipality, people finally stopped approaching the Task Force directly for basic needs such as of food-supplies, water and medicine. The Dutch expected, or rather hoped that the NGOs and IGOs would succeed in providing most of the necessary humanitarian aid before winter set in. However, two problems hampered the humanitarian effort. First, there was lack of coordination on all levels between the humanitarian organisations, governmental or non-governmental. Aware of the mutual dependency of their success, the Dutch ex-
pressed their concern that lack of effective collaboration was damaging to local confidence on all parties involved, NGOs, UNMIK and KFOR. Second, a drop in humanitarian aid suddenly occurred as the Albanian population erected the blockades against the Russians in late August. It was also difficult to estimate if the “shelter project”, a program to improve houses destroyed during the war performed by UNHCR and several NGOs with KFOR engineer support, would be finished in the months to come. As winter drew closer, this became an ever more pressing problem.

The Dutch battalion also initiated various projects aimed at restarting the local economy. An attempt was made to jump-start production in the local wine factory and the plastic factory by using some of the military’s vast logistical capabilities. The wine factory in Orahovac was the largest in Kosovo and had been the economic backbone of the region. One of the CIMIC officers located missing machine parts and other items in the main factory to be replaced by those from subsidiary factories in the neighbourhood. While the most obvious goal of such aid was to accelerate the return to normal life, there was an additional incentive for the Dutch to wield at least some influence in this field. Thaci’s Provisional Government made its next move to gain administrative control over Kosovo in the economic sphere. In order to extend its influence in Kosovar society and attract the population to its side, his Provisional Government would have to gain control of the financial resources needed to provide basic community services. At the higher levels of the economy this effort was clearly orchestrated, but there was also the problem of ordinary crime and extortion performed by local UÇK-members. Some of these forces were clearly outside Thaci’s control and some of these criminal elements were no more than gangs operating under the name of the UÇK. But while denouncing these practises by renegade elements, his Provisional Government issued a directive to have all factories transferred to a shady company in the Virgin Islands. In Peć the UÇK was already capitalising on the local beer brewery. In Orahovac the prime targets were the wine factory and the plastic factory.

In order to make clear that these assets certainly did not belong to Thaci’s self-styled government, the Task Force proclaimed that all state owned factories were to be transferred to UNMIK in due time. Acting on information and recommendations provided by the local community in the first weeks, Van Loon had appointed Agim Hasku to his former position as director. The two had developed good rapport which would later prove important in the management of the crises surrounding the Russian deployment and the blockades. The return by a Dutch officer of his stolen car from the Serb quarter certainly helped to seal good relations early on. The commander authorised other former Albanian directors to resume their positions at the head of several enterprises and public utilities. After receiving the letter from Thaci’s government, Hasku was seriously worried that his position in charge of the largest economic asset of the area would put him in danger. He therefore temporarily received direct protection from the Dutch soldiers. It would prove crucial to providing the population with a sense of protection by addressing public security, thus enabling them to place their bets on the international interim authority rather than giving into pressure from the UÇK or non-political crimi-
nal elements. As long as they felt safe doing so, it was simply more profitable for the directors as well as the general public to turn down the UÇK and count on KFOR. Moreover, the peacekeepers wielded substantial influence through good relations with the some of the NGOs and IOs that were flocking to the high-profile area of Orahovac to provide economic and humanitarian aid.

The Task Force made a relatively successful attempt at thwarting illegal taxation and extortion by local Provisional Government and common criminals. People came directly to KFOR with complaints about local thugs asking people for taxes and trying to make them pay rent over real estate not in their possession. In larger cities such as Urosevac in the American sector the local mayor was renting out public property, of which the UN was in fact the legal custodian, while the Germans in Prizren were faced with UÇK-orchestrated attempts to issue building permits. This proved a lucrative business in a province that had seen a large proportion of its housing gone up in flames. Shop owners in Orahovac who became victims of “protection-rackets” would also turn to the Task Force. All such information would be entered in the ever-expanding database, run by the Dutch intelligence officer in charge of policing, and acted on if possible. At one point, a local Albanian man had even taken control over the key power-switch to the city. He considered it quite normal that someone had to be paid for such a service and in order to harass the Serbs he switched off power to the Serbian quarter whenever he had the chance. Although the Task Force dealt with this situation by taking over control of the power supply, the battered electrical power system would remain a problem. The water-supply in Orahovac was a similar problem, compelling the Dutch to run water trucks to the Serbs. The location of the Serb quarter of Orahovac in the highest part of town aggravated the situation because it made the Serbs lose pressure first. Although there were frequent complaints the Task Force found itself “incapable of checking all houses of the Albanians in the lower part of town that were leaving their taps running.” Only in August the water-supply of Velika Hoca was restored to three hours a day, which turned out to be the pre-war level in summer.

Organised crime also popped up in the area under Dutch control, although the problem was nowhere near as problematic as in Kosovo’s larger urban centres. It mainly spilled over from Albania, but had obvious links to elements within the UÇK. Most visible were the exuberantly expensive BMW’s and Mercedes’ that suddenly visited the largely rural area. After reports from elsewhere in Kosovo of kidnappings of young girls became more frequent, the Task Force started to search the most expensive cars extensively at KFOR-checkpoints. Instructions were given that these specific searches were to take at least half an hour. “That’s harassment, all true”, Van Loon later admitted, “but it was surely effective because they soon stopped appearing in our area.” He further argued: “When a society stabilises at a certain point and people resume normal forms of interaction, these forces have a much harder time getting a grip on that society. They were all people that had lived together normally before hell broke loose and who also now regarded it abnormal that a certain criminal would suddenly tell you that you had to pay.” In the early days there were many who simply wanted to profit from
the money that was likely to be made in the chaos that followed the war and the Serb withdrawal. All such initiatives made an active posture by KFOR necessary.

Many of the civil administrative responsibilities were taken on by the military not on UNMIK’s specific requests but on KFOR’s own initiative at a local level. After all, when UN administrators were still struggling to find their way in an unknown society, soldiers had been operating in the civil administrative vacuum for weeks and sometimes even months. Their motives for stepping in the void were many. In Orahovac, apart from the mandate that prescribed broad support and the soldier’s basic humanitarian concerns for the Kosovar population, the main driving force behind many of the ad hoc decisions to assume civilian tasks was the need to thwart local aspirants to positions of political and economic power. While performing the police tasks that—other than civil administration—KFOR had officially resigned itself to, it became clear that public security was often inseparable from other primary government functions. Any mayor of a sizeable town in the world could have told this to the military commanders.

Where KFOR would draw the line in the assumption of these responsibilities was all but clear. As far as support to the civilian presence was concerned, to the military’s great relief the caveat of “support within means and capabilities” ensured that there was no blank cheque. However, KFOR was overall forthcoming with support to UNMIK recognising, as in Orahovac, that it was in their own interest not to relinquish too much influence to the UÇK. After his tour a commander of NATO’s forces in Kosovo, General Klaus Reinhardt would state that “we ran the country, not the civilian organisations. The military were the kings, they make it happen.” He added that, although the military needed the civilian organisations, “at times I would have preferred to be a military governor.”71 It would have been interesting to see what would have happened in the early phase of their mission if KFOR would have occupied town halls throughout Kosovo—as was hesitantly done with the police stations. Pending the arrival of UNMIK this would have been a powerful signal to the UÇK or other factions that any meddling in the interim government of Kosovo would not be tolerated. Especially in the predominantly Kosovar Albanian areas this would undoubtedly have been accepted and maybe even expected by a population which had welcomed the troops as liberators. However, the formal responsibilities this would have entailed were shunned in western democracies and the military were hardly prepared. At the close of the twentieth century, such measures were never seriously considered at the political level. The military and civilian activities were officially still neatly segregated at a time when war was conducted under the guise of humanitarian intervention and a de facto occupation was sold in the western media as peacekeeping. Those ventures made by soldiers into the civilian sphere were performed under the name of CIMIC.
Chris Hedges, “Kosovo’s Next Masters,” Foreign Affairs (May/June 1999) Ahead of NATO deployment in Kosovo, Hedges portrayed the potentially destabilising role of the UÇK in Kosovo. Two Washington Post reporters wrote two days before KFOR’s entry that U.S. officials were fully aware of the risk of future UÇK predominance in Kosovo: “Many U.S. officials worry that the rebel force will seek revenge against the Serb civilian population, will turn increasingly to criminal activity and will, once the Serb troops are gone, try to undermine the development of civilian political rule and seek instead to become a dominant political force.” Dana Priest and Bradley Graham, “NATO Faces Daunting Task of Governing Kosovo”, Washington Post (June 10, 1999) A1.


Alan Ryan, Primary Responsibilities and Primary Risks: Australian Defence Force Participation in the International Force East Timor, Land Warfare Studies Centre Study Paper No. 304 (November 2000)


The number of thirty UNMIK officials mentioned in lecture by Bernard Kouchner his time of UN Special Representative of the Secretary General (Harvard University, 16 May 2001; notes taken by author). Other figures from: UN Doc. S/2000/538, 6 June 2000, par. 31; Koenraad van Brabant wrote on the basis of information provided by UN staff: “During the first year on the ground, when UNMIK had relied on New York administered recruitment procedures, only 50% of its staffing table had been filled. After starting to hire staff through UNMIK directly, the staffing problem had been redressed within a few months.” Relief and Rehabilitation Network briefing by Koenraad van Brabant, “Peace-Making Through Protectorate: Six months in Kosovo” (29 November 1999) 32.


KFOR G-5 Branch, “KFOR CIMIC Handbook” (September 1999). The military end-state was defined as the point when UNMIK able to operate without KFOR support.

Koenraad van Brabant, “Peace-Making Through Protectorate: Six months in Kosovo”, 5.2


UNSCR 1244. Paragraph 10.


Both Rambouillet and UNSCR 1244 failed to address the issue of local government in its own right. The International Crisis Group concluded that the mandate did not give UNMIK absolute responsibility to impose “powerful communal administration upon the Kosovars if the necessity does not arise.” Instead, the report concluded that the UN’s responsibility was rather to ensure that an acceptable and eventually democratic administrations were created. ICG, “Waiting for UNMIK”, 4.

Publicly, the expectation that the was the line policymaker adhered to. “[U.S.] Defence officials have ruled out establishing a military government in Kosovo. Instead, civil authority is to rest initially with an international group of professional administrators.” Bradley Graham and Dana Priest, “Troops Are Ready to Enter Kosovo”, Washington Post (4 June 1999) A29.

As cited in: Richard Norton-Taylor and Stuart Miller, “Mines stand in the way of allied troops: Peacekeeping Ground forces prepare for the biggest military operation in Europe since 1945, Guardian (5 June 1999); Bradley Graham and Dana Priest, “Troops Are Ready to Enter Kosovo”, Washington Post (4 June 1999) A29. Ten days prior to entry the American Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee Senator John W. Warner had said that “[m]ilitary men are going to be challanged to perform tasks unlike any they have ever faced before.”

19 U.S. Congress, Hearing of the Senate Committee on Armed Services, Subject: “U.S. Policy and NATO Military Operations in Kosovo”, Introduction to question by Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee Senator John W. Warner, 1 July 1999.


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

22 Interview with Colonel Anton van Loon (The Hague, 13 February 2003).

23 Ibid.

24 Although Levic never faced trial as a result of the prison break from Mitrovica in 2000, the Dutch had serious indications he was amongst those guilty of murder. Interview with Colonel Anton van Loon (The Hague, 13 February 2003); Interview with Captain (rtd.) Wim Speth, CIMIC officer for Task Force Orahovac in 1999 (‘t Harde, 28 November 2002).

25 Interview with Agim Hasku (Orahovac, 11 September 2002).


27 Based on interview with Colonel Anton van Loon (The Hague, 13 February 2003). However, Qeska would eventually align himself with the PPDK, the political wing of the UÇK (later PDK). See: OSCE/UNMIK, Municipal Profile: Orahovac/Rahovec (1 April 2000)

28 Interview with Colonel Anton van Loon (The Hague, 13 February 2003).

29 CAD, 1 (NL) Arty Bn KFOR I, Structurelle rapportages, box 2, 4.1 Daily Sitrep, 30 June 1999. The council had conferred with UNMIK chief De Mello, who was in Orahovac that day for talks with both entities, thus giving the council some legitimacy.


35 According to Van Loon, Qeska might even have feared for his life. Interview with Colonel Anton van Loon (The Hague, 13 February 2003).

36 CAD, 1 (NL) Arty Bn KFOR I, Structurelle rapportages, box 2, 5.1 Daily Sitrep, 3 August 1999: “UNMIK has failed to mention whether they want to continue talks with Mr Thaqi.” At another occasion an UNMIK representative told Dutch diplomat from the Dutch Embassy in Skopje that the UN would locally not counter self-styled local administrations, “but when they monopolize and exclude others, the UN will intervene.” CAD, Contco KFOR I&II, Werkarchief, box 2. Pim Kraan, DCH/HH, Sitrep no 1. Verkenningsmissie in Kosovo (6 July 1999).

37 CAD, 1 (NL) Arty Bn KFOR I, Structurelle rapportages, box 2, 5.1 Daily Sitrep, 6 August 1999, Commander’s assessment: “Positive developments concerning the start of a dialogue between Serbs (and Roma) and Albanians. The UÇK mayor has left the town hall again and is now replaced by previous mayor [Quazim Qesku] who has large percentage of Albanians support and even Serbs.”

38 Interview with Colonel Anton van Loon (The Hague, 13 February 2003).


40 Interview with Colonel Anton van Loon (The Hague, 13 February 2003).

41 CAD, 1 (NL) Arty Bn KFOR I, Structurelle rapportages, box 2, 5.1 Daily Sitrep, 7 August 1999.

42 Interview with Qazim Qeska (Orahovac, September 2002). When visiting Orahovac the author noticed how people were generally avoiding having to answer questions about the initial struggle for administrative power in the second half of 1999.

43 Qeska appears to have been co-opted by the PPDK/Provisional Government. In 2000 he appeared on their PPDK (later PDK) list in the OSCE Municipal Report for Orahovac. Lacking popular support in Ora-
hovac, Thaqi appears to have fallen from grace. He later joined the more radical Albanian party LKCK. See: OSCE/UNMIK, Municipal Profile: Orhovac/Rahovec (1 April 2000)

Correspondence with Astrid van Genderen-Stort (Letter received on 3 August 2004).

ICG, “Waiting for UNMIK”, 11

OSCE/UNMIK, Municipal Profile Suhareka/Suvak Reka (April 2000).


OSCE Report, Kosovo/Kosova, As Seen, As Told, Part II: Regional Overviews of the Human Rights Situation in Kosovo (June to October 1999), 113


OSCE Report, Kosovo/Kosova, As Seen, As Told, Part II Regional Overviews of the Human Rights Situation in Kosovo, June to October 1999, 113


ICG, “Waiting for UNMIK”, 2. In this influential report on the lack of progress by the international administration in Kosovo the International Crisis Group therefore advised to co-opt the mayors in the municipalities and leave most of the executive functions to them, while keeping the political leadership firmly in UN hands. The report denounced the allegation that the mayors were simply a bunch of thugs and criticized UNMIK for holding them and the Kosovar population on a leash, failing to bring in the resources to provide a viable alternative “but always telling them to wait just a little longer.”

Lieutenant Colonel Ulrich Kilch (G-5, MNB South, July 1999-December 1999) Lecture at Allied Forces Northern Europe (Powerpoint Presentation). In one of its situation reports the Dutch battalion mentioned the need for similar funds to pay local personnel in the hospital, the firemen and garbage collectors. There are no indications, however, that these were ever paid by Dutch KFOR. CAD, 1 (NL) Arty Bn KFOR I, Structurelle rapportages, box 2 4.1 Daily Sitrep, 30 June 1999.

CAD, 1 (NL) Arty Bn KFOR I, Structurelle rapportages, box 2, 5.2 Daily Sitrep, 4 September 1999.

Ibid., Folder 4.2 Daily Sitrep, 20 July 1999.

Ibid., Folder 5.1 Daily Sitrep, 5 August 1999.

ICG, “Waiting for UNMIK”, 3. The ICG report stated that “UCK leaders issued public proclamations deploring crimes carried out in their name, but do not appear to have taken any action against them.”

Interview with Colonel Anton van Loon (The Hague, 13 February 2003).

Ibid.