



# TEA

A soldier in camouflage gear with a large pack on his back, looking out from a transport vehicle. The background shows a cloudy sky and the interior of the vehicle.

*A Soldier from the 114th Transportation Company, Minnesota Army National Guard, awaits transportation to Transit Center MK in Romania to redeploy to the United States from Afghanistan. (Photo by Sgt. Brandon Hubbard)*

# Setting a Theater: Establishing Transit Center MK

■ By Maj. Gen. Jack O'Connor and Maj. Craig A. Daniel

# MI21

**On the western shores of the Black Sea sits a bustling tourist resort, port complex, and one of Romania's largest and oldest cities, Constanta. Just 30 minutes inland, the tiny commune of Mihail Kogălniceanu houses the Department of Defense's sole operational passenger transit center, Transit Center Mihail Kogălniceanu.**

**T**ransit Center Manas (TCM), Kyrgyzstan, proved to be a reliable platform for force projection into Afghanistan for more than a decade. However, as 2013 approached and plans began to gain traction for an Afghanistan without the International Security Assistance Force, the ability to continue conducting force projection and retrograde operations at TCM was increasingly unclear.

Military planners, spanning multiple combatant commands, began the arduous task of planning retrograde operations around TCM and simultaneously sought a replacement location.

The site they identified for the new transit center is near the tiny commune of Mihail Kogălniceanu, Romania, about 15 miles inland from the Black Sea. In 2014, Transit Center Mihail Kogălniceanu (MK) became the Department of Defense's single operational passenger transit center.

#### **The Road to Romania**

Negotiations between the United States and Kyrgyzstan failed to extend the U.S. lease agreement at TCM beyond July 2014. Consequently, joint planning sessions involving the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), the U.S. European Command (EUCOM), and the U.S. Transportation Command (TRANSCOM) sought to transfer TCM's passenger transit mission to MK Air Base, Romania.

EUCOM began planning to support CENTCOM's termination of operations at TCM while ensuring the following:

- Uninterrupted support to forces in Afghanistan.
- Support for the planned drawdown of U.S. forces.
- Support for a continued U.S. presence in Afghanistan after 2014.

EUCOM's vision for the establishment of a strategic passenger transit movement hub at MK Air Base had to achieve the following:

- Support a timeline for transfer-

ring onward movement passenger transit operations from TCM.

- Support the concurrent deployment of the U.S. Marine Corps Black Sea Rotational Force.
- Remain expeditionary.
- Minimize an enduring large-scale footprint.

In October 2013, Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel and the Romanian Minister of Defense Mircea Dușa established an agreement for Romania to support the movement of cargo and personnel into and out of Afghanistan. Romania's support to future operations at its MK Air Base signaled Romania's dedication to International Security Assistance Force operations in Afghanistan and commitment to its NATO allies.

Once Romania formally agreed to support personnel and cargo movements into and out of Afghanistan, EUCOM proceeded with plans to locate a passenger transit center at the Romanian air base. With an agreement in place between the United States and Romania, CENTCOM planners began to develop and execute a planned drawdown to conclude U.S. operations at TCM.

The formalized agreement enabled planners from TRANSCOM, EUCOM, U.S. Army Europe (USAREUR), and the 21st Theater Sustainment Command (TSC) to take the actions required to establish a passenger transit center in Romania. Less than 100 days after the formalized agreement was signed, the first aircraft transporting U.S. forces arrived at MK.

#### **Setting Multiple Theaters**

EUCOM rapidly designated USAREUR as its lead service component command for future operations at MK. USAREUR delegated the 21st TSC to provide mission command for passenger transit operations at MK. Ninety days before the first transiting passengers set foot in Romania, the 21st TSC began planning to execute this mission, focusing on strategic and operational



*Soldiers unload from a C-17, operated by the Air Force's 780th Expeditionary Airlift Squadron, after a late night flight from Afghanistan into Mihail Kogălniceanu Air Base, Romania. The U.S. transit center at the base has become a major air transportation hub for movement in and out of Afghanistan. (Photo by Sgt. Brandon Hubbard)*

sustainment management.

Team 21, which is the 21st TSC, all of its direct subordinate units and organizations, and its strategic and coalition partners, was chosen as the ideal unit to establish and operate EUCOM's new transit center. Team 21 was ideal because of the strategic sustainment focus and structure inherent in a TSC.

### **TSC Strategic Partners**

As one of only three active duty TSCs, the 21st TSC provides the commanders of both EUCOM and USAREUR with a sustainment management capability not found in the structure of an expeditionary sustainment command (ESC), a sustainment brigade, or a combat sustainment support battalion.

During the initial stages of Transit

Center MK mission analysis, Team 21 integrated elements from the Army Materiel Command and the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) into operational planning teams. Given a truncated timeline for planning and execution, Team 21 relied heavily on the functions and services provided by its national strategic partners.

Effective communication and direct coordination between Team 21 and its strategic partners proved paramount in the weeks leading up to Transit Center MK's initial operating capability. Strategic partners, including DLA Energy, DLA Distribution, and DLA Europe and Africa, the Army Materiel Command, the Expeditionary Contracting Command, TRANSCOM, and the Army Finance Command, exemplified the

eight principles of sustainment, most notably integration, anticipation, responsiveness, and improvisation.

### **Structure of the 21st TSC**

Team 21's diverse composition of active duty and Army Reserve Soldiers, including those in its subordinate brigades, was vital in establishing Transit Center MK. The following organizations participated in the mission analysis:

- The 21st TSC.
- The 16th Sustainment Brigade.
- The 18th Engineer Brigade.
- The 18th Military Police Brigade.
- The 30th Medical Brigade.
- The 7th Civil Support Command.

The modularity of the TSC's structure allowed for tailorable force pack-



*Spc. Francisco Ochoa, a carpentry and masonry specialist with the 902nd Engineer Company (Vertical), 15th Engineer Battalion, 18th Engineer Brigade, 21st Theater Sustainment Command, saws a wooden board during a construction project at Transit Center MK. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Warren W. Wright Jr.)*

aging to support the requirements of planners and those units assigned to execute the mission. Immediately following the mission analysis process, the 21st TSC staff and units shifted their efforts to transform guidance into reality.

### **Joint and Multicomponent**

The execution of the passenger transit mission at Transit Center MK is led by the 21st TSC and US-AREUR. However, the passenger transit center is actually a joint and multicomponent environment supplemented with NATO forces from the Romanian Air Force.

Elements from U.S. Air Forces in Europe (USAFE) and TRANSCOM work shoulder to shoulder with the 21st TSC. Romanian airmen and U.S. Navy personnel augment other aspects of support to

the passenger transit mission.

Because of operational requirements in Europe, not all capabilities required to operate and sustain this new transit center mission were available within the EUCOM area of responsibility. Through the request for forces process, members of Kansas and Illinois Army National Guard units integrated with active duty units from Fort Riley, Kansas; Fort Hood, Texas; Fort Bliss, Texas; Fort Bragg, North Carolina; Fort Campbell, Kentucky; Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri; and Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington, in support of the Transit Center MK mission.

### **Resourcing**

When the 21st TSC received mission command of passenger transit operations at MK with less than

100 days until execution, the 409th Contracting Support Brigade, US-AREUR's expeditionary contracting capability, stepped in to initiate contracting support.

A variety of options were available to unit supply personnel and contracting officers supporting the establishment of Transit Center MK. Services and support under contract at the center now range from base life support activities to construction equipment rentals to ministerial religious support for transiting personnel.

Prior to the establishment of passenger transit operations at MK Air Base, the USAREUR support contract (USC-II), a preexisting support contract, was used at the air base to provide basic base operations and support services to Department of the Army civilians and a contingent of U.S. Marine Corps personnel ex-

ecuting Black Sea Rotational Force missions.

The USC-II was later used to provide modified base operations and support services for the transit terminal. KBR, Inc., the USC-II, provided expanded base operations and support services, which allowed the Team 21 partners from the 21st TSC, the U.S. Air Force, and Romanian Armed Forces to focus on establishing and refining the policies and procedures required to execute large scale and continuous passenger transit missions.

### Regional Support Element

The 21st TSC Regional Support Element (RSE) is not a doctrinal organization. However, the RSE concept was adapted from Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 4-94, Theater Sustainment Command.

The concept of the theater RSE was modeled after the 2009 to 2012 U.S. Army Central support element found in Iraq and Afghanistan. Both U.S. Army Central and the 21st TSC provide their Army service component commands with a small capability to handle Army U.S. Code Title 10 support at a forward location.

As stated in ATP 4-94, the TSC headquarters may operate from outside an area of responsibility and may employ an ESC to provide forward mission command within an area of operations, or the TSC may echelon forward an early-entry command post. Lacking the capabilities associated with an organically assigned ESC, Team 21 applied the RSE concept at Transit Center MK in an effort to overcome forward mission command issues.

The strategic importance associated with establishing and operating a transit center led to the designation of a colonel from the 21st TSC headquarters as the RSE officer-in-charge. The political and military environment and frequent interaction with host-nation military and governmental members also required the senior leader pres-

ence and leadership at MK Air Base.

An accompanying support team of seven personnel (specializing in communications, operations, law, and contracting) with an ability to be flexible in size and composition based on mission requirements served as the nucleus of operations for the 21st TSC forward at Transit Center MK. The RSE integrated the activities of various organizations and elements (Army, Air Force, Marine Corps, Navy, and other governmental agencies) across MK Air Base.

The RSE remains the 21st TSC commanding general's eyes and ears forward; it is the face of Team 21 and demonstrates the command's commitment to Romania and to mission success at Transit Center MK. Additionally, the RSE can reach directly back to the 21st TSC headquarters and staff in Germany, to receive support from a national strategic partner sustainment network.

### Host-Nation Support

Most of the European theater allows the United States to leverage existing infrastructure and support facilities and establish formal support agreements with host-nation governments. During the establishment and execution of passenger transit operations at Transit Center MK, the Romanian government continuously demonstrated its strong alliance with

reduced the U.S. logistics footprint in Romania. For transiting service members, Romania provided buses for personnel transportation, cargo trucks to transport baggage, and several preexisting Romanian facilities for processing personnel.

The forward presence of the 21st TSC in Europe allows Team 21 to set multiple theaters in support of multiple combatant commands. The maturity of the environment in which the TSC operates, coupled with strong host-nation relationships and agreements, further allows Team 21 to support enduring USAREUR objectives in the region, including the following:

- Strengthening relationships with NATO, allies, and partners.
- Ensuring interoperability with NATO and allies.
- Enhancing partner capacity.
- Ensuring strategic access.

### Lessons Learned

Passenger transit operations are now being fully executed at Transit Center MK. At the time this article was written, more than 90,000 bidirectional passengers had processed through it. Several key lessons were learned from establishing a strategic-level operation on a compressed timeline.

The RSE concept works. The RSE is not an early-entry command post

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the United States and its NATO partners.

The Romanian government modified preexisting acquisition and cross-service agreements and inter-service support agreements through a series of political and military negotiations. The robust logistics support provided by the Romanian Air Force at MK Air Base significantly

or a liaison officer. The RSE is the commanding general's on-site integrator and serves as the nucleus for all passenger transit operations. It serves as a single point of entry and exit for information and action flow back to the command.

The RSE allows the headquarters to free up the commander of the Army service component command

*Spc. Jason Burns and Pvt. Keiffer Martin of 3rd Platoon, 902nd Engineer Company (Vertical), 15th Engineer Battalion, 18th Engineer Brigade, 21st Theater Sustainment Command, place girders to support a "pole barn" roof system during the early stages of construction of Transit Center MK in Romania. (Photo by 1st Lt. Jonathan Kasprisin)*



to focus on immediate operational requirements.

Although the RSE remains a non-doctrinal term and concept, the 21st TSC's has adopted the practice of creating and establishing an RSE for distant missions, allowing the commanding general to increase his span of control and mission command functions. Location matters, and there is no substitute for leadership presence as far forward as possible.

With no set organization for personnel, the RSE is tailored to fit mission requirements and its composition can be rapidly increased or decreased based on present and projected events.

Mission command versus command and control. Mission command is an Army command philosophy and a warfighting function. The joint community recognizes "command and control" and "command relationships," but the term mission command is just that—a term. The goal among the services is the same: a defined and functional command and support relationship structure, but the terminology and techniques to reach this goal may vary.

The principles of mission command defined in Army Doctrine Publication 6-0, Mission Command, remained at the forefront of planning cells and those principles continue to thrive today during the execution of passenger transit operations.

Although the Air Force implements "command relationships" and the Army implements "mission command," the importance of building cohesive teams through mutual trust, creating shared understanding, exercising disciplined initiative, and accepting prudent risk are principles that transcend the color and pattern of a uniform.

The establishment of Transit Center MK reinforced the importance of defining both mission command and support roles and relationships. Having three combatant commanders involved adds to the complexity of the command and control structure.

Request for forces units and the mobilization of Reserve personnel from across the United States also adds to the complexity. Actively capturing all involved individuals and organizations and clearly defining relationships is crucial.

Host-nation support. The relationships built with Romanian personnel (civilian, military, embassy, and

ship in the 21st century. Included in this document is the idea the "Army provides decisive landpower through a credible, robust capacity to win and the depth and resilience to support combatant commanders across the range of military operations in the homeland and abroad."

By shaping its operational environment, Team 21 has provided a

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By shaping its operational environment, Team 21 has provided a sustained presence, demonstrating enduring U.S. commitment to its allies and partners.

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customs) exceeded all expectations; Romanian agencies sought to provide 24-hour-a-day support to the U.S. forces-led passenger transit mission. Members of the Romanian Air Force were involved in all phases of planning and assisted in streamlining processes designed to expedite passenger throughput.

Relationships matter, and a single word can have strategic impact. In accordance with Joint Publication 3-17, Air Mobility Operations, USAFE designated an Air Force colonel to serve as the senior airfield authority between the U.S. forces operating on the Romanian air base and civilian officials operating a commercial civilian airport with co-located facilities.

On the ground, the senior airfield authority quickly adapted to his environment and shifted his title from "authority" to "adviser" because he had no true authority over a civilian airport and he understood the negative connotation authority might have with his Romanian counterparts. The subtle shift in titles was applauded by both Romanian military and civilian airport officials.

Training and Doctrine Command Pamphlet 525-3-0, The U.S. Army Capstone Concept, addresses some of the challenges the Army faces in an effort to sustain U.S. global leader-

sustained presence, demonstrating enduring U.S. commitment to its allies and partners. It has built partners and capacity with its host nation. And it has set a theater of operations for major contingencies, providing multiple combatant commanders with the ability to seize initiative and rapidly deploy in order to win the nation's wars.

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