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Mountain division deployed

First regular Army unit to be sent to area

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WASHINGTON — The Army's 10th Mountain Division sent more than 1,000 troops Tuesday night on an unprecedented combat deployment to the former Soviet republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, bringing the total U.S. force amassed overseas for the war on terrorism to more than 30,000 uniformed personnel, defense officials said.

Victoria Clarke, the Pentagon's chief spokeswoman, said the U.S. military also has 350 combat aircraft, two carrier battle groups and a Marine amphibious ready group in a theater of operations that stretches from the Persian Gulf through Central Asia to Afghanistan in South Asia.

To pay for the deployments and cover other war-related expenditures, Clarke said, the Pentagon has received \$4.25 billion of the first \$8 billion allocated by the Office of Management and Budget in response to the Sept. 11 attacks.

"Clearly, we've been very pleased with the support and the cooperation we have been getting from the world," Clarke said, "and we want to make sure we underscore the importance we place on countries in that region."

The deployment of more than 1,000 troops from the 10th Mountain Division marked the first time a regular Army infantry unit has been sent on a mission to a former Soviet state, an Army official said. The 10th is a unit that was constituted in World War II at Camp Hale, near Leadville in the mountains of Colorado.

The unit being sent from the 10th Mountain Division, now based at Fort Drum, about 60 miles north of Syracuse, N.Y., is a reinforced battalion of light infantry.

It also is the first major deployment of a regular Army unit — as opposed to the small, elite Special Forces units — in the campaign against terrorism.

A small number of U.S. Special Forces troops are already operating around Afghanistan from positions in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. But they are on a liaison mission, meeting with representatives of the rebel Afghan group known as the Northern Alliance and assessing their needs and capabilities.

The new troops are expected to perform two basic missions in the Central Asian republics, the Army official said. Primarily, they will provide ground security for U.S. Air Force fighter and combat search-and-rescue units. In addition, they will form a "Quick Reaction Force" that will be on alert and ready to come to the aid of any U.S. Special Forces units that get in trouble while conducting raids in Afghanistan.