

## Introduction

The US Army has a global area of responsibility and deploys to accomplish missions in both violent and nonviolent environments. The contemporary strategic environment and the scope of US commitment dictate that the US Army be prepared for a wide range of contingencies anywhere in the world, from the deserts of southwest Asia and the jungles of South America and southeast Asia to the Korean Peninsula and central and northern Europe. The multiplicity of possible missions makes the likelihood of US involvement in mountain operations extremely high. With approximately 38 percent of the world's landmass classified as mountains, the Army must be prepared to deter conflict, resist coercion, and defeat aggression in mountains as in other areas.

Throughout the course of history, armies have been significantly affected by the requirement to fight in mountains. During the 1982 Falkland Islands (Malvinas) War, the first British soldier to set foot on enemy-held territory on the island of South Georgia did so on a glacier. A 3,000-meter (10,000-foot) peak crowns the island, and great glaciers descend from the mountain spine. In southwest Asia, the borders of Iraq, Iran, and Turkey come together in mountainous terrain with elevations of up to 3,000 meters (10,000 feet).

Mountainous terrain influenced the outcome of many battles during the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s. In the mountains of Kurdistan, small Kurdish formations took advantage of the terrain in an attempt to survive the Iraqi Army's attempt to eliminate them. In the wake of the successful United Nations (UN) coalition effort against Iraq, US forces provided humanitarian assistance to Kurdish people suffering from the effects of the harsh mountain climate.

Major mountain ranges, which are found in desert regions, jungles, and cold climate zones, present many challenges to military operations. Mountain operations may require special equipment, special training, and acclimatization. Historically, the focus of mountain operations has been to control the heights or passes. Changes in weaponry, equipment, and technology have not significantly shifted this focus. Commanders should understand a broad range of different requirements imposed by mountain terrain, including two key characteristics addressed in this manual: (1) the significant impact of severe environmental conditions on the capabilities of units and their equipment, and (2) the extreme difficulty of ground mobility in mountainous terrain.