

A high-angle, close-up photograph of a white Predator Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) on a concrete tarmac. The aircraft's long, slender wing dominates the foreground, extending from the left towards the right. The nose and cockpit area are visible in the upper right corner. The tarmac surface is marked with grid lines and shadows cast by the aircraft and other objects. In the lower left, a small, colorful toy-like vehicle is visible on the ground. The overall scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

Striking Back

US and coalition air and ground elements press the war against Taliban and al Qaeda forces in Afghanistan.

Members of Air Combat Command's 11th Reconnaissance Squadron, deployed to Operation Enduring Freedom from Indian Springs AFAF, Nev., perform pre-flight checks on a Predator Unmanned Aerial Vehicle in early November.



USAF photo by TSgt. Scott Reed

Fighters and bombers are the front line of airpower, but none gets to the fight without air refueling. USAF tankers, crewed by active duty, Guard, and Reserve troops, had flown about 2,500 missions for Enduring Freedom as of November.

Here, a KC-135R tanker of the 319th Air Expeditionary Group from Grand Forks AFB, N.D., takes off from its forward operating location.

Below, two British VC-10 tankers sit on the ramp near a USAF C-5, unloading cargo at a forward location.



USAF photo by TSgt. Mark Buchter

USAF photo by SrA. Matthew Hannen



USAF photo by SSgt. Pamela J. Farlin

Above, ground crews prepare to unload a C-5 cargo aircraft at Moron AB, Spain. Airlift crews have delivered more than 43,000 tons of cargo for the operation.

More than 50 nations have been engaged in the campaign against terrorism. At MacDill AFB, Fla., the home of US Central Command, there are more than 230 representatives from more than 20 nations—"a very visible sign of the international commitment to our overall effort," Army Gen. Tommy Franks, commander in chief of CENTCOM, said Dec. 7.

Here, an RAF VC-10 tanker refuels two US Navy F/A-18 fighters in late October for Enduring Freedom.



US Navy photo by Lt. Steve Lightstone



USAF photo by TSgt. Scott Reed



Coalition forces on the ground in Afghanistan include airmen such as this USAF special operations staff sergeant in the photo above and, here, in the small photo.

Above, members of the 16th Special Operations Wing, normally based at Hurlburt Field, Fla., off-load personnel and equipment at a forward location.

US Special Forces working with Northern Alliance opposition members in Afghanistan adopt a local mode of transportation: the horse.



DOD photo

USAF has used Predator UAVs for reconnaissance since the start of Enduring Freedom in October. The newest UAV, Global Hawk, which is still in research and development, got orders to join the fight in early November.

Here, SSgt. Todd Gargac (left) and A1C Chad McManus, from the 11th RQS, fuel a Predator at its deployed location.



USAF photo by TSgt. Scott Reed



USAF photos

The Predator is shown above and left with Hellfire missiles. The UAV had only recently begun tests with the missiles, when it was pressed into action for Enduring Freedom. Its primary role is still to provide battlefield awareness.

The UAVs are working in concert with manned Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance assets, like the E-3A Airborne Warning and Control System, E-8 Joint STARS, EC-130E Commando Solo, RC-135 Rivet Joint, and U-2 aircraft. ISR forces have been in action every day.

Here, an E-8 from Robins AFB, Ga., gets a checkover at its forward deployed location.



USAF photo by SSgt. Tiffany Page



USAF aircraft flew some 4,600 sorties in the first 50 days of Enduring Freedom. Among the fighter aircraft in use was this F-15E, here getting prepared by crew chiefs from the 332nd Air Expeditionary Group.

At right, an F-15E takes on fuel from a KC-10.

Below, more 332nd AEG crew chiefs working or waiting on their F-15Es.



Here, "Pugs," an F-15E weapons system officer, preflights a Strike Eagle before a sortie over Afghanistan.

USAF members, transported to an undisclosed location, set up this forward base, ready to house more than a thousand troops.

Below, a 16th SOW airman at a forward location.



USAF photos by SSgt. Cecilio M. Ricardo Jr.

USAF photo by MSgt. Dave Nolan



Air Force Reserve Command fighter pilots from Hill AFB, Utah, have flown F-16Cs on strike missions into Afghanistan. Here a pilot preflights his Fighting Falcon before a sortie.

Air National Guard and AFRC members have supported Enduring Freedom with strike aircraft, airlifters, and tankers.

During nighttime operations for Enduring Freedom, an F-16 moves up to refuel from a KC-135R from the 319th AEG.



USAF photo by TSgt. Scott Reed



A munitions loader from the 28th AEW preps Joint Direct Attack Munitions to load on a B-1B. Air Force B-1B bombers have dropped more than 3.8 million pounds of weapons and more than 60 percent of the JDAMs used.

At left, B-1B pilots and a crew chief discuss the bomber's maintenance log before the aircrew flies its next mission over Afghanistan.

USAF photo by Gary Ell



At left, about 50 reservists returned to McGuire AFB, N.J., after a month overseas—the KC-10 flight crew shows the colors as they taxi in.

At right, a B-1 takes off from Diego Garcia for a combat mission. ■

