

U.S. to sell Israel Air Force new bunker-buster bombs

Contributed by Aluf Benn and Amos Harel, Haaretz
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Despite reservations in Washington regarding a possible Israeli strike on Iran, the American administration will supply Israel with sophisticated weapons for heavily fortified targets, the U.S. administration announced.

The U.S. Department of Defense announced it would sell the Israel Air Force 1,000 new smart bombs, rumored to significantly enhance the IAF's military capabilities. The deal was approved amid public and secret messages from Washington, with the Americans expressing their reservations about a possible Israeli strike against the Islamic Republic's suspected nuclear sites.

The Pentagon's announcement, which came on Friday, said the U.S. will provide Israel with 1,000 units of Guided Bomb Unit-39 (GBU-39) - a special weapon developed for penetrating fortified facilities located deep underground.

The \$77 million shipment, which includes launchers and appurtenances, will allow the IAF to hit many more bunkers than currently possible. Although each bomb weighs 113 kilograms, its penetration capabilities equal those of a one ton bomb, according to professional literature.

Most U.S. Air Force aircraft are able to carry a pack of four of these bombs in place of a single one-ton bomb. The bomb's small size allows a single-strike aircraft to carry more of the munitions than is possible utilizing currently available bomb units, thus increasing firepower, or, alternatively, allowing the aircraft to fly longer distances to deliver a single bomb.

During demonstrations, the GBU-39 - labeled by the manufacturer, Boeing, as a Small Diameter Bomb (SDB) - has successfully penetrated more than 1.8 meters of thick reinforced concrete with a 23-kilogram warhead. The GPS-guided weapon is said to have a 50-percent probability of hitting its intended target within 5-8 meters, which should minimize collateral damage.

The estimated value for the bomb's GPS version, which military experts have called the latest development in the bunker-buster line, is around \$70,000 to \$90,000 for each individual bomb.

The U.S. has already supplied Israel with earlier versions of bunker busters. In 2005, the Pentagon authorized the sale of GBU-28 to Israel, in a move that commentators construed as a hinted threat aimed at Iran. Haaretz reported earlier this month that the U.S. was hesitant about selling Israel heavier busters.

The Pentagon's announcement also said that the U.S. would help upgrade the Israel Defense Forces' patriot anti-aircraft missiles - which Israel uses as part of its missile-interception array. Israel will also receive 28,000 LAW (Light Anti-Tank Weapon) tube launchers for land forces.

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