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# Could The Israelis Really Drop A Massive Ordnance Penetrator Bomb On Iran? The Answer May Be Yes.



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A B-2 Spirit drops one of two GBU-57 Massive Ordnance Penetrator bunker-busting bombs as seen in a... [+] U.S. AIR FORCE

Two members of the House of Representatives are preparing to introduce legislation that would make it possible for the U.S. to supply its 30,000 pound GBU-57 Massive Ordnance Penetrator (MOP) to Israel, according to [Politico](#). Developed in the early 2000s, the MOP is a powerful bunker-busting bomb that could penetrate Iran's underground nuclear facilities should it pursue nuclear weapons which Israel considers a mortal threat.

The 20-plus foot long, 2.6 foot wide munition was declared operational in 2011 and its acquisition has [reportedly](#) been repeatedly requested by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government. The legislation would overturn current U.S. federal law which bars the sale of such bunker busters and in allowing for the transfer of MOPs, help Israel maintain its qualitative military edge in the Middle East.

But if this bipartisan legislation passes, there's a glaring question: How would the Israeli Air Force deliver such a massive bomb?

## Big Bomb, Big Bomber

The IAF fields American strike aircraft including the F-35A, F-15E/I, and F-16I but, as far as we know, none of these could carry the large, long MOP.

The GPS-guided weapon with its 5,300-pound warhead required the U.S. Air Force to adapt one of its own platforms, the B-2 Spirit stealth bomber, to lug it aloft. Refitting of B-2s for the purpose started in 2007. The modifications allow the B-2 to actually haul two GBU-57s, a capability the Air Force confirmed in a widely viewed video of a B-2 MOP drop it released in 2019.

The video was obviously a reminder that the USAF has such a capability and a stockpile of GBU-57s at the ready. Israel does not, nor does it appear to have an airplane capable of carrying an MOP unless you look beyond its strike fighters to its fleet of C-130s.

Some may recall that in 2017 President Trump approved a strike on ISIS tunnels and personnel in the Achin district of the Nangarhar province, Afghanistan. It was executed by an MC-130 Talon carrying a GBU-43 Massive Ordnance Air Blast (MOAB) bomb. Though not a penetrator like the MOP, the MOAB weighs 22,600lb and is over 30 feet long, dimensions not that far off from the GBU-57. It too, is a precision-guided weapon.

Could the IAF adapt a C-130 to carry the MOP? Quite possibly, but the skies over Iran are heavily defended as opposed to the wide open airspace over Afghanistan.

### **A Message Within A Message**

In 2014, retired USAF Lieutenant General David Deptula proposed transferring MOPs and a small number of B-52Hs to Israel in an op-ed he co-wrote for the *Wall Street Journal*.

Deptula, who's currently dean of the Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies and a fellow Forbes contributor, notes that when he wrote the op-ed the U.S. was in negotiations with Iran over its nuclear aspirations. The suggestion that Israel receive MOPs and B-52s was meant to be read with more than a literal interpretation, as he says the new legislation should be.

The House bill could surely be seen as messaging but it would have significantly less value if a realistic possibility of the use of GBU-57s by the Israelis didn't exist.

Successfully delivering MOPs to Tehran would be a tall order, requiring multi-domain, multidimensional operations with a variety of effects. However, the IAF has done what many considered impossible before, taking out the Osirak nuclear reactor in Iraq in 1981 and the partially completed al-Kubar reactor near Deir ez-Zor, Syria in 2007.

But could the IAF drop GBU-57s?

"Yes, the IAF could deliver an MOP," Deptula says. He declined to elaborate but his answer would put teeth behind any transfer of MOPs to Israel.



An IAF F-15I Ra'am of the No 69 "Hammers" Squadron maneuvers away after receiving fuel from a KC-135.. [+] U.S. AIR FORCE

The Israeli version of the F-15E Strike Eagle, the F-15I Ra'am (Thunder) is what Israel calls its "strategic aircraft." Officially, it can only carry about half the payload (18,000 pounds) it would need to haul a 30,000 pound GBU-57. However the Strike Eagle is cited as having an **81,000 pound maximum takeoff weight** and a 31,700 pound empty weight by the U.S. Air Force. That's 49,000-plus pounds to play with potentially. Mounting a GBU-57 on the Ra'am's centerline would present dimensional difficulties but as noted, the IAF has pulled off the "impossible" before.

The U.S. Air Force declined to comment as to whether the F-15E could carry an MOP and if the USAF has contingency plans for such an eventuality.

Certainly, the Ra'am's indigenous weapons systems, AESA radar and data sharing/electronic warfare suite could allow it to operate with multi-domain assets and it can be refueled in the air.

Or, could the message within the message of the proposed legislation be that Israel could have access to something like the Air Force's new penetrating munition, the Global Precision Attack Weapon (GPAW)? Developed for the Air Force's stealthy new B-21 Raider bomber, the GPAW is characterized as **"capable against hard and deeply buried targets."**

GPAW is likely an outgrowth of the decade-old Next Generation Penetrator (NGP) munition concept for which the Air Force requested research proposals via a Broad Agency Announcement in late 2010. Former Air Force Lieutenant General Philip M. Breedlove reportedly said the service desired that the NGP be one third the size of the MOP, making it compatible with the F-35. While the GPAW will not be ready for several years, NGP R&D may have yielded a black program and a smaller bunker busting

weapon that already exists.

The "Adir" as Israel calls its version of the F-35, could carry such a weapon and would be stealthy enough to penetrate Iran's layered air defense.

But if, as Deptula says, the Israelis could drop an MOP - not a GPAW - that suggests they would use what they have - a Hercules or a Strike Eagle. It's worth noting that there is another Eagle they could soon procure, the F-15EX.



Boeing's new F-15EX can carry 29,500 pounds of weapons according to the company. [BOEING.COM](https://www.boeing.com)

Israel has [reportedly expressed interest](#) in the advanced F-15, which Boeing touts as [offering greater payload](#). In fact, the EX can carry 29,500 pounds of weapons, pretty close to the MOP.

If Israel can deliver a Massive Ordnance Penetrator with an existing airplane or a nearly ready new one, they have a qualitative military edge to be sure.

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