

# B-52s Fighting ISIS Soon Will Carry More Smart Bombs

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## ***B-52: USAF***

AL UDEID AIR BASE, Qatar—The U.S. Air Force B-52 squadron fighting Islamic State terrorists in the Middle East soon will be the first to field a key upgrade that will allow the venerable “BUFF” to carry eight additional smart weapons into battle.

The Vietnam-era bomber that flies close-air-support, air interdiction and deliberate targeting missions in U.S. Central Command’s area of responsibility today is not your grandfather’s B-52, the airmen of the 69th Expeditionary Bomb Squadron (EBS) told *Aviation Week* during a visit here Nov. 6. The B-52s here came off the line in 1960 and 1961, but various avionics and weapon systems upgrades in recent years have allowed the aircraft to remain a critical contributor to the modern battlefield.

“How we operate as a crew, the interfaces we have with the avionics system, and the weapons themselves—it’s almost completely different than it was just a few years ago,” said Lt. Col. Paul Goosen, 69th EBS commander.

Sometime in the next few months, the 69th EBS will become the first B-52 squadron to complete a key upgrade of the aircraft’s internal weapons bay, adding both precision and firepower to the fight against militants in the Middle East. The addition of the conventional rotary launcher (CRL) and Mil Std 1760 interface will allow the aircraft to carry smart weapons in the internal bay for the first time, enabling it to drop eight additional smart bombs, Goosen said.

The upgrade is a matter of simply changing out the existing three-fingered bomb rack for a yoke in the front and aft of the bay that will connect to the CRL, a process that only takes a few hours per aircraft, Goosen explained. Some of the B-52s here are currently going through the upgrade, and the entire squadron is expected to complete the modification in the next few months.

The change will also allow the B-52s at Al Udeid to drop Lockheed Martin's AGM-158 Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile (Jassm), an advanced long-range, radar-evading cruise missile, from the internal weapons bay.

In addition to smart weapons, the B-52s still employ unguided "dumb bombs" such as the Mk. 82 for terrain denial purposes, such as collapsing mountain passes in Afghanistan, Goosen said.

But thanks to avionics and digital upgrades, the B-52 is more than just a bomb truck. The biggest change in recent years is the Combat Network Communications Technology (Conect) program, which brought the B-52's avionics into the digital age. Under the Conect upgrade, the B-52s received new computers and full-color, moving-map displays, key data links, and an advanced wideband satellite terminal. Conect enables the B-52 to record images and video of the battlespace, and transmit that data to ground troops.

This upgrade, combined with the advanced targeting pod that the B-52s have been using since 2006, allow the aircraft to provide commanders critical intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) support in addition to firepower, Goosen said.

Today, the bombers are a crucial asset both for ISR and target development. The squadron will often fly over an area ahead of ground troops to surveil the battlefield and report back to commanders, Goosen said. The aircraft is also slated to get Link 16, the tactical data link used by most U.S. Air Force and coalition fighters, which will provide additional capability.

"A picture is worth a thousand words, and a moving infrared video is worth a thousand pictures," Goosen said. "It really brought us into the 21st century in terms of the fighting capability of modern aircraft."