15 fires in Gaza border communities, IDF strikes targets in Gaza in response

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An Israeli Air Force drone struck near a Palestinian terrorist cell using incendiary balloons in the southern part of the Gaza Strip weekend as fires continued to rage across the South from incendiary devices launched from the Hamas-run coastal enclave.

Palestinian media said two men were wounded in the strike.

IDF policy up until now had been to fire warning shots and prevent incendiary balloons and kites from entering Israeli airspace.

On Friday the IAF attacked two Hamas observation points in retaliation for explosive rigged balloons, which caused fires in fields in southern Israel.

“The IDF views with great severity the use of incendiary kites and balloons and will act to prevent their use,” the IDF said on Friday, just hours after another aircraft fired warning shots at a group of Gazans who were launching incendiary kites and balloons close to the security fence.

Amid the ongoing launching of incendiary aerial devices from Gaza and high temperatures, more than 20 fires broke out across the South on Saturday.

One broke out between Ein Hashlosha and Kissufim in the Eshkol Regional Council because of an incendiary balloon that landed in the area. Another fire broke out close to an IDF post due to an incendiary kite flown from Gaza, and a Molotov cocktail attached to a balloon caused a fire near Sderot.

Additional fires were reported near the Kerem Shalom area, in the Kissufim-Re’im area, Erez and surrounding outposts. Road 232 was blocked in the Be’eri area early on Saturday. There was also a large fire in Mavki’im, a town just north of the Gaza Strip. Firefighters worked to protect the town and gain control over the fire.

One explosive balloon with the lettering “I love you” landed on an Israeli road in the Sha’ar Hanegev Regional Council and was neutralized in a controlled explosion by the Israel Police.

Gazans have been protesting along the border with Israel since March 30 as part of what organizers have called the “Great March of Return.”

Demonstrators have been throwing stones, Molotov cocktails and rocks toward Israeli troops and flying incendiary kites into Israeli territory, destroying over 1,000 hectares of forest, nature reserves and agricultural fields.

On Thursday, reports out of Gaza said Palestinians planned to launch 5,000 incendiary balloons and kites toward Israel to mark Eid al-Fitr.

Last week for the first time Palestinian demonstrators launched kites and helium balloons (which can fly farther) with explosive devices, such as pipe bombs, attached to them that are set off by cellphones once they approach troops. Last Friday, one of dozens of these devices exploded in the air above troops, causing no injuries.