Balloon launches into Israel continue, as Hamas threatens escalation

August 18, 2020

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The Jerusalem Post

<https://www.jpost.com/arab-israeli-conflict/balloon-launches-into-israel-continue-explosion-in-sderot-639041>

Terrorists in the Gaza Strip continued to launch incendiary and explosive balloons towards Israel and threatened to intensify the launches, as Egypt continued attempts to prevent an escalation on Tuesday.

An incendiary balloon landed in the yard of a house in Sderot on Tuesday morning, causing light damage and no injuries. Police sappers arrived at the scene to deal with the device.

Shmulik Friedman, the commander of operations of the Fire and Rescue Service in southern Israel, conducted a situation evaluation in the Be'eri Forest on Tuesday.

Some 18 fires were sparked by incendiary balloons in southern Israel on Tuesday. Most of the fires were small and not dangerous.

Earlier on Tuesday, an explosive balloon detonated as police sappers arrived to the site where it landed in the Hof Ashkelon Regional Council. No injuries or damage were reported.

"This incident again illustrates the danger inherent in the balloons and suspicious items," said Israel Police in a statement. "We once again appeal to the public that in any case that raises suspicion, contact the [police] hotline [by dialing] 100 and leave the handling [of the issue] to the police forces who are trained for this."

Defense Minister Benny Gantz warned that Hamas was "playing with fire" and that he would "make sure that the fire would be turned on them."

"This equation will need to be stopped immediately," warned Gantz.

On Monday, an Egyptian envoy met with Hamas in Gaza to attempt to prevent an escalation. Hamas gave the envoy a list of demands, which included extending the fishing zone to 20 nautical miles, permitting the import of dual-use materials, increasing work permits and a number of industrial and infrastructure projects, according to the Lebanese pro-Hezbollah Al-Akhbar news.

Gaza's electricity company will halt operations on Tuesday due to a lack of fuel caused by the ban on fuel imports through the Kerem Shalom Crossing, implemented by Israel after continued violence from Gaza. Electricity will only be available in the Strip for about three to four hours per day, according to Palestinian reports.

The terrorist group warned the Egyptian envoy on Monday that "Palestinian patience has run out" and that the groups in Gaza are "ready to escalate and not afraid."

The balloon units warned on Tuesday that they would not stop the launches "for free" and that the "old understandings are useless and there are new demands," stating later that the launches would not stop until the blockade on Gaza was lifted.

"Today we are talking about balloons, and we are not afraid to bring in the [rocket] launchers," warned the units on a Telegram channel reportedly run by the Sons of Al-Zawari balloon unit. In response to Gantz's threats, the units stated, "We are not playing with fire. We are the fire that burns you every day and you are unable to stop it!"

The Ahfad Al-Nasser balloon unit warned that they would not stop launching balloons on Tuesday until they caused 70 fires.

The "night confusion units" that threw explosives and burn tires in riots near the border fence cancelled their planned operations on Monday evening due to the "security situation," but a wire cutting unit and the Kushuk tire burning unit were ordered to prepare to return to operations on Tuesday afternoon, according to the Telegram channel.

IDF carried out airstrikes on targets in the Gaza Strip in the pre-dawn hours of Tuesday morning, hitting Hamas targets and infrastructure. The military stated that the strikes were carried out in response to incendiary balloons sent from the Gaza Strip into Israeli territory throughout the day, causing fires in which a children's preschool and some 150 of hectares of agricultural land were burned.