2 balloon batches carrying suspected Gaza bomb, incendiary device land in Israel

January 25, 2020

The Times of Israel

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/suspected-balloon-borne-bomb-from-gaza-found-near-sde-boker/>

A bunch of balloons tied to a suspected bomb was found Saturday morning near Kibbutz Sde Boker in the Negev. The airborne device likely came from the Gaza Strip, from which numerous balloons carrying incendiary and explosive packages have been launched in recent days.

Images of the suspected explosive shared on social media showed a device similar in appearance to a rocket-propelled grenade.

The balloon was discovered by security staff at the Midreshet Ben-Gurion educational center. Police sappers were called to the scene and neutralized the device.

Sde Boker is located some 40 kilometers (25 miles) from the Strip.

A second batch of balloons connected to an incendiary device was later discovered in the Ramat Negev Regional Council. It was neutralized by sappers as well.

Terror groups in the Strip have continued to launch incendiary devices attached to balloons into Israel in recent days, undeterred by Israel’s threats to respond forcefully to such incidents.

On Thursday five suspicious balloons were floated into Israel, including a soccer ball attached to an explosive device that landed in an open area of the Sha’ar Hanegev Regional Council.

Soldiers from the IDF’s Engineering Corps were called to the scene and defused the device. No was injured by the explosives-laden ball, which appeared to be another attempt to target children. Many of the attacks have been launched via brightly colored balloons and local children have been warned not to approach them.

On Friday another suspicious object apparently flown from Gaza with balloons was found in the Sha’ar Hanegev Regional Council. Police officers were dispatched to a field where the device landed.

On Thursday evening, a rocket warning siren sounded in a community near the Gaza border. The army said it was triggered by an unexplained explosion inside Gaza, and not a rocket launch.

The siren raised tensions in the south amid threats from Gaza’s Hamas rulers to escalate violence in order to pressure Israel during informal truce talks now underway via Egyptian mediation.

Israeli television this week reported that Egypt is involved in “intense efforts” to get Hamas to end the arson balloon attacks on Israel from Gaza amid fears of a return to violence.

There was no official confirmation of the report from Egypt or Hamas.

A senior Hamas official said Tuesday that the recent spate of balloons was a signal to Israel to accelerate unofficial “understandings” meant to ease the blockade on the territory ruled by the terror group.

Speaking to journalists, Hamas official Khalil al-Hayya said the balloons had been launched by disgruntled individuals, not Hamas. But he said his group was “satisfied” with the launches and is ready to send more “if the occupation doesn’t pick up the message.”

The UN’s Mideast envoy, Nickolay Mladenov, called the renewed balloon launches “concerning and regrettable” in a briefing to the Security Council on Tuesday. “These actions are a risk to the civilian population,” he said.