Gaza terror group unveils first-ever incendiary ‘blimp’ bound for Israel

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A Gaza terror group said it launched the first-ever incendiary “blimp” towards Israel during Friday’s riots and demonstrations along the Gaza border.

A video circulating in Palestinian media on Saturday showed members of the “Sons of Zouari” group launching the approximately 5-meter device, essentially a large balloon designed to look like a blimp or dirigible, over the border east of the al-Bureij refugee camp in central Gaza.

The balloon carried a message in Hebrew that said: “If our fate is to be doomed to suffer, then we will not suffer alone.”

It was not clear if the “blimp” made it across the border, or started any fires inside Israel.

The device was said to have been launched amid intense clashes with Israeli security forces Friday afternoon in one of the deadliest days in months of mass protests along the Gaza border.

The Hamas-run health ministry said seven Palestinians were killed by Israeli fire in the clashes, and over 140 other injured. The ministry said four were killed in one location, where the IDF said it opened fire on 20 rioters who blew a hole in the border fence with a bomb and rushed an army post. No Israeli troops were harmed, the army said. The three Gazans were “meters” away from the troops when they fired, Hadashot TV news reported on Saturday.

Two other Palestinians were killed in other protest locations, according to the health ministry. On Saturday morning, it announced that a seventh protester shot in the intense clashes had succumbed to his injuries.

Israel said 14,000 Palestinians thronged the border fence areas Friday afternoon, burning tires and throwing bombs, grenades, rocks, and firebombs at soldiers stationed on the other side of the barrier.

Since March, Hamas, an Islamist terror group that seeks to destroy Israel, has orchestrated near-weekly protests along the fence, which have seen repeated violent clashes between Palestinian rioters and IDF troops. Some 150 Palestinians have been killed, according to AP figures; Hamas has acknowledged that dozens of the dead were its members.

The protests have also seen Palestinians sending incendiary devices attached to balloons into Israeli territory, sparking fires that have scorched over 7,000 acres of land and caused millions of shekels in damage.

On Friday, 10 fires broke out in southern Israel that were sparked by incendiary balloons launched over the border from Gaza as part of the ongoing protests.

On Saturday one fire broke out near Kibbutz Be’eri. Three incendiary balloons were also found in the Ashkelon Regional Council, the Eshkol Regional Council, and Jerusalem’s Ein Kerem [neighborhood](https://www.timesofisrael.com/for-third-time-in-a-week-incendiary-balloons-found-in-jerusalem/).

In response to Friday’s violence, Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman ordered a halt to the transfer of fuel into Gaza, just days after Israel began allowing fuel to be pumped into the Strip to allow increased power for residents.

“Israel will not tolerate a situation in which fuel is allowed into Gaza while terror and violence is used against IDF soldiers and citizens,” a statement from his office said.

Four Israeli tanker trucks had delivered fuel to Gaza on Friday morning before the riots broke out, Liberman said.

The suspension comes just days after a United Nations-brokered deal to supply the territory with Qatari-bought fuel came into effect, in a bid to alleviate conditions in the blockaded Palestinian enclave.

A Qatari official told the Reuters news agency that the $60 million fuel donation came “at the request of donor states in the United Nations, to prevent an escalation of the existing humanitarian disaster.”

Israel facilitated the delivery over the objections of the Palestinian Authority, hoping it would help ease months of protests and clashes.

Hamas seized control of Gaza from Abbas’s Palestinian Authority in a 2007 near civil war. Multiple reconciliation attempts aimed at restoring the PA to power in Gaza have failed.

Abbas says that making deals with Hamas amounts to recognizing their control over Gaza in place of the PA and has sought to block the fuel deliveries. He has reportedly threatened to cut off funds to Gaza in response to the fuel transfers.

Israel fears further deterioration in Gaza could lead to another round of war on the southern border.

Both Israel and Egypt enforce restrictions on the movement of people and goods into and out of Gaza. Israel says the blockade is necessary to keep Hamas and other terror groups in the Strip from arming or building military infrastructure.

On Saturday, Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh attended a funeral of one of the Friday fatalities, and pledged the terror group would keep up the near-weekly protests until the Israeli-Egyptian blockade is lifted.