Firefighters tackle over a dozen arson blazes in Gaza border region

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<https://www.timesofisrael.com/firefighters-tackle-over-a-dozen-arson-blazes-in-gaza-border-region/>

Firefighters worked throughout Thursday to extinguish 13 blazes caused by incendiary balloons landing in Israeli communities near the Gaza Strip, a spokesman for the Israeli Fire and Rescue Authority said.

Since March 30, southern Israel has experienced hundreds of fires as a result of incendiary kites and balloons flown over the border by Palestinians in Gaza. Over 7,000 acres of land have been burned, causing millions of shekels in damages, according to Israeli officials.

Recently balloons have been found farther and farther from the Gaza Strip, landing as far away as the southern city of Beersheba.

Israel has struggled to counter the arson assault, and has in some cases fired at Palestinians preparing to launch incendiaries, killing or injuring those involved.

On Wednesday Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman [froze all fuel and gas shipments](https://www.timesofisrael.com/defense-minister-orders-stop-to-gaza-fuel-shipments-over-fire-balloons/) into Gaza through the main goods crossing into the Palestinian enclave, citing continued arson attacks as his reason. Officials said the closure of the Kerem Shalom Crossing would continue until further notice.

Israel closed the crossing on July 9 in response to ongoing violence from Gaza and has blamed Hamas, an Islamist terror group that seeks the destruction of Israel.

Over the past two weeks, Liberman and other Israeli officials have signaled that Israel is prepared to go to war in order to stop the day-to-day border violence.

For over three months there have been near-weekly violent border protests organized by Gaza’s Hamas rulers. In addition to the airborne incendiaries, deadly clashes along the Israeli-Gazan border have seen Israeli security forces facing gunfire, grenades, Molotov cocktails, and efforts — sometimes successful — to damage or penetrate the border fence. An Egyptian-brokered informal ceasefire has so far prevented the tense situation from escalating into all-out war, but has not ended the arson attacks.

On Sunday the security cabinet will reportedly [discuss a truce proposal](https://www.timesofisrael.com/security-cabinet-to-meet-sunday-as-gaza-ceasefire-takes-shape/)being brokered by United Nations envoy for Middle East peace Nickolay Mladenov, who has met with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry, and Hamas leaders in the Gaza Strip.

Mladenov’s proposal envisions Israel removing recent restrictions on the Kerem Shalom crossing for goods into Gaza, and both sides agreeing to a ceasefire which would include the cessation of airborne arson attacks, according to recent Egyptian media reports.

The envoy has been shuttling between regional leaders in an effort to defuse the situation before explodes into full conflict. His proposal for calming tensions has reportedly been worked out in cooperation with Egypt and other Arab states.