**Incendiary, explosive balloons from Gaza continue to hit southern Israel**

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Balloon units in the Gaza Strip warned on Wednesday that they would continue launches of incendiary and explosive balloons in response to IDF strikes against terror infrastructure in the Strip on Tuesday night, as Israeli officials warned of a forceful response to the launches.

The Sons of Al-Zawari balloon unit warned in a reportedly direct Telegram channel that they would be "beginning a new battle" on Wednesday morning in response to airstrikes conducted by the IDF in Gaza. Other balloon units echoed the statement, saying that they "are not afraid of [Israel's] threats or planes."

Many of the statements by the balloon units in recent days have referred to the launches as the "Battle of the Lion's Roar."

On Wednesday, at least eight fires were reported in southern Israel in the Hof Ashkelon Regional Council and near Sderot. It is still unclear whether the fires were caused by incendiary balloons.

A large fire was reported between Kibbutz Or HaNer and Sderot. A large number of firefighters and security forces were present at the scene. Police closed a number of roads nearby, according to KAN news.

An incendiary balloon landed in the yard of a house in one of the towns in the Sha'ar HaNegev Regional Council and was extinguished immediately. No injuries or damage were caused.

An explosive balloon landed in a Border Police base in the Hof Ashkelon Regional Council on Wednesday and was neutralized by a sapper, according to Ynet.

On Tuesday, over 68 fires were sparked by incendiary and explosive balloons throughout the Gaza envelope, burning about 2,000 dunam of land.

"We won't allow Israel to change the rules of the game, we will respond to every attack by it," said the Palestinian Islamic Jihad terror group on Wednesday. "Balloon launches are part of the national operations and this will continue in order to place pressure on Israel to carry out what was agreed upon concerning lightening the siege [on Gaza]."

Hamas spokesperson Fawzi Barhoum warned on Wednesday that the terror group's silence concerning the blockade on the Gaza Strip "will not continue."

The Tax Authority in Ashdod announced on Wednesday that it had thwarted an attempt to smuggle tens of thousands of balloons into the Gaza Strip last week. The Tax Authority in Ashdod deals with 90% of the imports into the Gaza Strip.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Alternate Prime Minister and Defense Minister Benny Gantz warned that Israel would respond forcefully to the balloon launches.

“I want to make clear to all of Iran’s proxies, including Gaza – there will be a heavy price to the balloon terror,” Netanyahu said. “We will act and exact a heavy price. We’ve done it in the past. Remember that, because we will do it again now."

"The plague of Gaza terror is still here!" said Itamar Revivo, Head of the Hof Ashkelon Regional Council, on Wednesday. "This is not the first wave or the second wave, but years upon years of continued terror!"

Revivo stressed that balloons should be treated like rockets.

"The Israeli government knows how to bring together the best minds in the fight against a mysterious virus, and it is time to mobilize the best minds to find an effective solution for terrorism in general and balloon terrorism in particular," added Revivo. "The residents of the [Gaza] envelope deserve to live in peace and quiet and receive an appropriate response to the security challenges that are often imposed on them."

IDF fighter jets, helicopters and tanks struck a number of Hamas terrorist targets in the Gaza Strip on Tuesday night, targeting a military compound, underground infrastructure and observation posts.

On Monday night, the Defense Ministry announced that it would close the Kerem Shalom crossing except for fuel and humanitarian aid transfers.

The Lahav-Or laser system was deployed along the Gaza border on Tuesday to try and down incendiary and explosive balloons before they enter Israel. The system is currently operated by Border Police, Professor Amiel Ishaaya told KAN Reshet Bet radio on Wednesday

The laser system takes out each balloon individually and aims to drop the balloons as early as possible within Gaza or at least make sure that security forces know where they fall in Israel.

The balloon launches were renewed last week, after over a month during which only a few incendiary and explosive balloons were reported. The last round of consistent balloon launches were in June.

Countless incendiary and explosive balloons have been launched by Gaza's terrorists in recent years. They sometimes have books or toys attached to lure children, and some have sparked large wildfires in the past, mainly damaging crops.