Palestinians prep 5,000 kite bombs in Gaza to mark end of Ramadan

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The IDF struck a target in the southern Gaza Strip on Thursday, two hours after it fired warning shots in the same area toward Palestinians who were preparing airborne incendiary devices near the Bureij refugee camp.

“The IDF struck an infrastructure near the area where a squad had previously been preparing Molotov cocktails in the southern Gaza Strip,” the IDF said. “The IDF considers the use of incendiary kites and balloons to be severe, and will act to prevent their use.”

The announcement came shortly after Palestinians reported that a drone launched a missile at people near the border fence who were flying balloons with Molotov cocktails attached, and unconfirmed reports by Israeli media that Palestinians planned to launch 5,000 incendiary balloons and kites toward Israel from the Hamas-run Strip to mark Eid al-Fitr on Thursday night.

[Gazans have been protesting along the border with Israel since March 30](https://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Eight-weeks-in-Gaza-What-did-the-Great-March-of-Return-accomplish-557744) as part of what organizers have called the “Great March of Return.” Demonstrators have been throwing stones, Molotov cocktails and rocks toward Israeli troops and flying incendiary kites and balloons into Israeli territory, destroying more than 900 hectares (2,200 acres) of forest, nature reserves and agricultural fields.

On Thursday, several fires broke out near Kibbutz Be’eri and in the Sha’ar HaNegev Regional Council from incendiary kites flown from Gaza. Firefighting teams fought to put out the blazes.

Speaking at a conference at Bar-Ilan University on Thursday, Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman said that while Israel has managed to intercept more than two-thirds of the kites that have been launched toward Israeli territory, “It is impossible to hermetically seal the sky.”

“But we are looking for solutions and I am sure we will find a solution,” he said, adding that “the trick is to strengthen deterrence and prevent the launch itself.”

On Tuesday, Israel announced that it was limiting the entrance of helium into the Gaza Strip. Helium is used for various medical reasons such as MRI machines.

Israel has said that Palestinians have been using the gas to fill incendiary balloons in order to increase the distance they can travel. The decision to ban the transfer of helium was implemented by Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) Maj.-Gen. Kamil Abu Rokon following Liberman’s approval.

“The entrance of helium gas into the Gaza Strip will be limited in light of its use by terrorists to fill incendiary balloons,” he said. “The Hamas terror group does not hesitate to use any means, including humanitarian services and channels, in order to carry out terrorist activities. This is despite the efforts by Israel to prevent a deterioration of the civilian situation in the Strip.”

Last week for the first time, Palestinian demonstrators launched kites – and helium balloons, which can fly further – with explosive devices such as pipe bombs attached that are set off by cellphones once they approach troops. Last Friday, one of dozens of these devices exploded in the air above troops, causing no injuries.

“It looks romantic – a small boy is flying a kite, something that seems to be from a movie like Mary Poppins – but the truth is different. These are terror attacks, with IEDs, which are trying to harm Israel,” said IDF Intelligence Directorate head Maj.-Gen. Tamir Heyman on Wednesday at a closed-door forum at the International Homeland Security Forum in Jerusalem.