Explosive balloons continue to fly after Egyptian mediation attempt

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Explosive balloons continued to fly into Israel from the Gaza Strip after reports on Tuesday claimed that an Egyptian security delegation had convinced Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad to halt the launches.

The explosive balloon units continued to launch the explosive devices and make threats on Tuesday and Wednesday. Multiple explosive balloons landed in or detonated in the sky over Israeli communities.

Hen Greenberg, the spokesperson for the Hof Ashkelon Regional Council, stated on Wednesday that explosions were heard in the area near the towns of Nir Yisrael, Beer Ganim, Nitzanim and Nitzan after explosive balloons were launched over the area. Greenberg stressed that should residents spot an explosive balloon, they should report it immediately to Israel Police and distance themselves from the site.

Explosive balloons detonated over Kibbutz Zikim as well. A bundle of balloons with an explosive device attached landed in Kibbutz Nirim on Tuesday but was not identified as explosive balloons at first and as such was not handled until Wednesday morning, according to Yediot Aharonot. Remainders of an explosive balloon that fell in Kibbutz Gvar'am on Wednesday morning had a message written in Arabic on them reading "The soldier is on the way you sons of Judah."

No physical injuries or damage were reported in any of the incidents.

In recent days, Defense Minister Naftali Bennett and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu have warned that Israel will not tolerate the continuation of terrorist activity against Israeli citizens.

Netanyahu told Channel 20 on Tuesday that Israel was prepared to strike if the balloon launches don't stop. "We are preparing a big surprise for Hamas, and if they don't change, we'll use it," he said. According to Makor Rishon, Bennett has called for every balloon to be treated like a rocket.

In an interview with Army Radio on Wednesday, Netanyahu stressed that "either the rockets and balloons stop completely or there will be a different military action."

The prime minister added that he had warned PIJ a few months ago that Israel could surprise them and then Israel assassinated one of their commanders. The interviewer responded that even with that rockets and balloons continue to be launched towards Israel. Netanyahu responded that Israel is preparing additional measures, but stressed that he would not detail or reveal operational plans.

"There is no magic solution to the Gaza Problem because even after a military decision there are still two million citizens. There is an option to do a very strong and surprising operation and I won't detail it," said Netanyahu, assuring the interviewer that he would "navigate" and would do "what needs to be done" even if it needs to be done before the elections in March.

According to pan-Arab Al-Araby al-Jadid news site, Hamas and other terrorist groups in Gaza have raised their alert level due to fears of targeted assassinations and a possible military action against the Gaza Strip by Israel, despite the fact that elections are taking place in less than a month. The terrorist groups also fear that military action could be used to gain Netanyahu votes in the March elections.

Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar has also avoided public appearances in recent months. Sinwar did not meet with the Egyptian security delegation that visited Gaza on Monday, according to Al-Araby al-Jadid.

On Tuesday night, a mortar was fired from Gaza into Israel and landed in an open area near the Gaza border. An alert was activated in the open area. Unlike other incidents of rocket fire in recent weeks, the IDF did not carry out an attack in response to the rocket fire on Tuesday night.

On Monday, an Egyptian security delegation visited the Gaza Strip and warned Hamas to avoid escalating the military conflict with Israel and to stop supporting Iran, according to Al-Arabiya.

During the meeting, the Egyptians told Hamas to avoid supporting any militias that harm the region and expressed reservations about the relationship between Hamas, Iran and the Hezbollah terrorist group. Hamas was also warned against becoming involved with Iran in any military escalation.

The delegation left the Strip on Monday evening and headed to Israel to discuss stopping the recent military escalation with Gaza, according to Al-Arabiya. The Egyptians called on Israel to allow humanitarian aid into Gaza and to stop targeting the Strip.

According to Al-Arabiya, the delegation told Israel that they are working on a long-term armistice, but asked Israel to abide by the current ceasefire without any preconditions.

On Wednesday, a delegation of European officials entered the Gaza Strip. It is unclear what the aim of the visit was.

Over a dozen rockets and mortars as well as countless explosive balloons and condoms have been launched towards Gaza periphery communities in recent weeks.