

A CUFI PRIMER: Incendiary Balloon Threat

When one thinks of terrorism in the Middle East, rockets, mortars, and suicide bombers may come to mind. But weapons of terror that are often overlooked, yet increasingly dangerous, used by Palestinian terrorists in Gaza are airborne incendiary and explosive devices. From explosive kites to crude balloon-laden bombs, these weapons wreak havoc on Israeli lives, causing devastation to innocent civilians' livelihoods and psychological wellness, as well as the ecology. The use of these weapons, launched indiscriminately and devised for maximum devastation, is terrorism and must not be tolerated.

History

The incendiary devices and airborne explosives came into wide use against Israel in 2018 when Hamas orchestrated so-called Great March of Return protests at the border with Israel. During the scorched earth campaign, Israel was pummeled by a barrage of incendiary devices and explosives for over 100 days, resulting in the loss of thousands of acres of land.¹ Heartrending photos of the charred remains of animals, including gazelles and tortoises, depict the real damage inflicted by these weapons upon living things, not merely land, and highlight the danger they pose to humans.



Masked Palestinians attach explosives to balloons

Since 2018, during conflicts with Israel, Palestinian terrorists in Gaza have launched countless incendiary balloons into southern Israel, destroying thousands of acres of woodland and agricultural crops in a region where agriculture drives the economy. An IDF spokesperson reported that over 10,400 acres have been destroyed by these devices since 2018.²

Agroterrorism is Terrorism—and the Goal is to Destroy Israel

The use of these devices, often made by attaching explosives to ordinary helium balloons which are carried from Gaza by the Mediterranean wind into southern Israel, amount to war crimes. Fired indiscriminately into Israel, the deployment of these incendiary balloons and airborne explosives are acts of terror that must be condemned.



Field in southern Israel scorched by incendiary balloons launched from the Gaza Strip

The damage caused by these attacks to woodlands, nature reserves, fields, and crops should not be understated. Moreover, the attacks imperil and harm wildlife and ecosystems in the area. At least twice, Hamas has even attached incendiary devices to birds, calling them “fire falcons,” demonstrating yet again the terrorist organization’s complete lack of regard for the sanctity of life.³

The media often stresses that the incendiary barrages have not caused a loss of life, but this fact is a miracle, not an inevitable outcome. The reality is that Hamas’s goal in

alighting southern Israel with a steady deluge of scattered fires is just another tactic to advance its vendetta to destroy the Jewish state. Whether by rockets or fire, Hamas’s goal is the same: to wipe Israel and the Jewish people off the map.

Incendiary Devices are a Threat to Israel in More Ways than One

While some terribly misguided individuals view these incendiary devices as legitimate “distress signals,”⁴ this cheap yet effective strategy is just another element of guerrilla warfare and seeking the destruction of the world’s only Jewish state.

Meanwhile, Israeli children in the southern region are being taught to “associate balloons with danger” and warned not to touch them.⁵ Moreover, the loss of agricultural harvests is not only a blow to farmers’ ability to make a living and provide for their families but also takes a toll on their psychological health. Firefighters work, at times, around the clock to minimize the devastation caused by these acts of terror, but even a small fire can spread and cause exceptional damage.

The threat to Israel posed by the increased use of incendiary balloons and airborne explosives is real and rising. As the Jewish state wards off terrorists on nearly every border, we stand with Israel and the Jewish people against those who seek her destruction.



Israeli firefighters extinguish fires caused from incendiary devices sent from Gaza

¹ Matan Tzuri, “Kite, balloon terrorism continues scorching Israel’s land” (10 July 2018), <https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0.7340.L-5307517.00.html>.

² Hadas Gold, “Why balloons strapped to explosives are the latest flashpoint in Israel-Hamas tensions” (17 June 2021), <https://www.cnn.com/2021/06/16/middleeast/israel-gaza-incendiary-balloons-cmd-intl/index.html>.

³ “Hamas incendiary balloons are ecoterrorism” (16 August 2020), <https://www.jpost.com/opinion/hamas-incendiary-balloons-are-ecoterrorism-638873>.

⁴ See, for example, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/8/21/gaza-incendiary-balloons-are-distress-signals>.

⁵ Hamas incendiary balloons are ecoterrorism” (16 August 2020), <https://www.jpost.com/opinion/hamas-incendiary-balloons-are-ecoterrorism-638873>.