Israel struggles to handle latest threat from Gaza: Fire-starting kites

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The Israel Defense Forces has learned how to protect the country from rockets, attack tunnels and stealthy Iranian drones, but since Friday the military has been stymied by a children’s toy: kites.

For the past five days, Palestinians in Gaza have made attempts to fly kites carrying burning cans of fuel into Israeli territory. The first attempt on Friday failed and the kite landed inside Gaza, but the rest have sparked fires in southern Israel.

On Tuesday, one such kite started a fire in a grassy grove outside Kibbutz Be’eri, an Israeli community located some seven kilometers (4.3 miles) east of Gaza’s Bureij refugee camp.

As of Tuesday afternoon, four teams of firefighters were working to bring the blaze under control, a spokesman for the local fire department said. The Kan news broadcaster reported that the fire had spread over almost 100 dunams (25 acres). This could not be immediately confirmed.

Gazans filmed the kite crossing the border and starting the blaze, in a video shared on social media.

The kites seem to be the latest phase in the ongoing tension on the Gaza border, as Palestinians have rioted and protested along the security fence almost daily since March 30.

Fridays have been by far the most active days, with over 40,000 people taking part in the first protest, nearly 30,000 taking part in the second and approximately 10,000 participating in the third and most recent, according to the IDF’s figures.

These violent demonstrations have often included the burning of tires and Israeli flags, as well as Molotov cocktail attacks and rock-throwing.

As this month also marks the beginning of Israel’s dry season, an IDF spokesperson on Friday said the military was prepared for the possibility that fires might break out and had therefore coordinated with local fire departments and put firefighting planes on standby.

However, when asked specifically about the low-tech threat posed by kites carrying incendiary devices, the army offered scant details about its ability to combat the threat.

“The IDF is prepared and ready for various scenarios during the riots organized along the Gaza fence,” the army said in a statement.

On Monday, the local Eshkol regional council issued a stark warning to residents, telling them to be on alert for these airborne arson attacks.

“In the last 24 hours, there have been several cases of kites flying with Molotov cocktails from the Strip to our territory,” the council said in a statement. “The public is asked to be alert and to report on any unusual incident of fires in the area.”

Last month, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) [organized a “Kites of Hope”](https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/press-releases/unrwa-students-fly-kites-memory-japanese-earthquake-and-tsunami-victims) festival for over 1,000 Gazan schoolchildren from Khan Younis.