Israel reels in Gaza fishing zone as arson balloons scorch south

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Israel announced Tuesday it will further scale back the Gaza fishing zone from 10 nautical miles to six, in response to a number of arson attacks from the coastal enclave throughout the day.

“In light of the fires and the launching of incendiary balloons toward Israeli territory, this evening the permitted fishing zone for the Gaza Strip has been reduced to six nautical miles until further notice,” Israel’s military liaison to the Palestinians said in a statement.

Over the course of Tuesday, there were seven fires in southern Israel sparked by balloon-borne incendiary devices from the Gaza Strip, according to the local fire department.

The permitted fishing zone had been extended to 15 nautical miles last Tuesday, apparently as part of a ceasefire agreement between Israel and terror groups in the Strip. A day later, in response to incendiary attacks, Israel restricted the fishing zone to 10 nautical miles, where it had remained.

For the past several months, Israel has been extending and reducing the permitted fishing zone around the Gaza Strip as fewer or more incendiary balloons have been sent over the border.

Such arson attacks appear to violate the reported terms of an unofficial truce between Israel and terror groups in the Strip.

Recent months have seen heightened tensions in the Gaza Strip, including a massive two-day flareup last month between Israel and terror groups in the coastal enclave.

According to Israel’s Channel 12 news, the Egyptian-brokered agreement that ended that flareup included a Hamas obligation to halt violent incidents along the border fence, maintaining a buffer zone 300 meters (984 feet) from the border; an end to the launching of incendiary balloons at Israeli communities and nighttime clashes between Gazans and security forces; and a stop to flotillas trying to break through the maritime border between Gaza and Israel.

In return, Israel reportedly agreed to expand the fishing zone, enable United Nations cash-for-work programs, allow medicine and other civil aid to enter the Strip, and open negotiations on matters relating to electricity, crossings, healthcare and funds.

Though Israel does not formally recognize the ceasefire agreement, it has largely abided by the terms of it. Hamas, in turn, has also kept violence along the border to a relative minimum — with the exception of the ongoing balloon-based attacks.