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Organisers say the night protests aim to force the Jewish state to ease its crippling decade-long blockade of Gaza/AFP

GAZA: It's nearly 10 p.m. when young Palestinian men begin banging drums and chanting songs, while others attach incendiary devices to balloons — all closely watched by Israeli snipers on the border.

For six months, Palestinians have gathered regularly along the fence between the Gaza Strip and Israel for often violent daylight demonstrations against Israeli policies.

But in recent weeks they have deployed a new tactic: "Night confusion units."

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## BACKGROUND

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**The night protests come amid a resurgence in border demonstrations following a brief lull as Egypt and UN officials pursued a long-term truce between Hamas and Israel.**

Protests can go on until the early hours.

Organizers say they aim to force the Jewish state to ease its crippling decade-long blockade of Gaza, but residents in nearby Israeli communities say their lives are being destroyed.

An Israeli military official, who did not want to be named, said the night protests do not pose a new challenge. "Our soldiers, including our snipers, have night vision equipment," he said.

"There are a few dozen, sometimes a few hundred demonstrators (at night)... they burn

tires, throw incendiary bottles and sometimes grenades and do not represent a more important threat than the daytime demonstrations.”

[embedded content]

One recent night, AFP watched as several hundred protesters gathered a few dozen meters from Israeli soldiers — separated by the fence — near Rafah in southern Gaza.

In a tent slightly further into the strip, young men inflated dozens of white balloons inscribed with “I love you.” They then attached flaming devices to the balloons and launched them toward Israeli territory. Others hurled primitively built sound grenades; the booms resonated across the border.

“We will not stop launching incendiary balloons until we break the siege on Gaza,” said Abu Anas, one of the orchestrators of the night’s activities.

Anas insisted the movement was independent of Hamas.

Saqer Al-Jamal, 22, said he and fellow protesters believe Israeli soldiers fear their actions.

“The goal is to confuse the occupation and send our message to the settlers nearby that there is no sleep until we achieve our demands of lifting the siege and returning to our country,” he said.

Rony Kissin, the spokeswoman for the Israeli community of Kerem Shalom located next to the Gaza border, called the night protests a “nightmare.”

“Now they’ve started to throw sound bombs and it’s very, very scary,” Kissin said.

“The children are very afraid of it. It’s very dangerous. It is really like a weapon.”

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