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The Associate Press

Iran says it has plan to close Strait of Hormuz

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Iran will block the strategic Strait of Hormuz at the mouth of the Persian Gulf, the passageway through which a fifth of the world's oil flows, if its interests are seriously threatened, a senior Iranian military commander said Saturday.

"We do have a plan to close the Strait of Hormuz," state media quoted Gen. Hasan Firouzabadi as saying Saturday. "A Shiite nation (Iran) acts reasonably and would not approve interruption of a waterway ... unless our interests are seriously threatened," Press TV quoted him as saying.

The comments by Firouzabadi, the chairman of Iran's Joint Chiefs of Staff, come days after the European Union enforced a total oil embargo against Iran for its refusal to halt its uranium enrichment program.

A halt in crude oil imports from Iran is intended to increase pressure on the Islamic Republic to stop enriching uranium to the 20 percent level, an issue at the center of an international dispute.

Western powers fear material produced at that level -- well above the 3.5 percent enrichment needed for energy-producing reactors -- can be turned into weapons-grade material in a matter of months. Iran insists its reactors are only for energy and research.

Iranian lawmakers have prepared a bill that would order the country's military to stop tankers headed to countries that have joined the oil ban.

But Iran's parliament speaker, Ali Larijani, was quoted by Iranian media on Saturday as saying that the proposed bill has not yet been studied by parliament.

Iran's powerful Revolutionary Guard has warned in the past that Tehran would order the closure of the Strait of Hormuz if the country's oil exports are blocked.