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Iran to hold new maneuvers in Persian Gulf

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In the second military show in less than a month, Iran will hold a new set of maneuvers in the strategic waters of the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman, Iranian media reported on Tuesday.

Iran regularly holds such military exercises but they are likely to heighten tensions, coming at a time of a deepening standoff between the West and Tehran over the country's controversial nuclear program.

"The massive maneuvers dubbed Velayat-89 will show (Iran's) defensive and deterrent naval power," Iranian Navy chief Adm. Habibollah Sayyari was quoted as saying by the official IRNA news agency. Submarine and air force units are also due to participate, he added.

Sayyari also confirmed a recent flyover by an Iranian surveillance jet and its close encounter with a U.S. Navy aircraft carrier, the semi-official Fars news agency reported.

Iran "has the right to conduct routine surveillance flights," Fars quoted Sayyari as saying. He said the F-27 jet flew over the U.S. vessel and "despite their objection, we persisted on our right" to carry out the surveillance.

Sayyari did not elaborate on the time and location of the flyover.

But a U.S. military official said last week the U.S. Navy had a close encounter in international waters of the Gulf of Oman. The official said the jet buzzed the USS Eisenhower, coming within about 1,000 yards (meters) of the ship on April 21. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak publicly on the matter.

Iran's new war games are to start Wednesday, said IRNA. Fars said the exercise will last for eight days and cover a span of about 97,000 square miles (250,000 square kilometers) of Iranian territorial waters.

Iran's Revolutionary Guard held five-day maneuvers in late April in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz — the waterway for around 40 percent of the world's oil and gas supplies.

The exercises are intended to show off the country's military might and act as a warning, should U.S. or Israel consider a strike on Iranian nuclear facilities. The West suspects Iran's nuclear programs is aimed at building an atomic bomb. Iran denies the charge, saying it's for peaceful purposes, such as power generation.