**Iran to Conduct War Games**

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DUBAI—Iran said Wednesday its Revolutionary Guard Corps would conduct large-scale air, land and sea exercises in the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman, apparently including the strategic Strait of Hormuz, at a time of heightened tensions between Tehran and the West over Iran's nuclear ambitions.

The Guard's deputy chief, Brig. Gen. Hossein Salami, said the five-day exercise would begin Thursday, according to Iran's IRIB news agency. He said the exercises were aimed at showing Iran's "strength, will and national resolve to defend independence and territorial integrity."

The Strait of Hormuz, a transit way for about 20% of the world's daily oil supply, is the relatively narrow passageway between Iran and Oman that connects the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. Iranian commanders have from time to time threatened to obstruct the strait in retaliation for any attack.

Oil prices appeared little affected by the announcement, reported by Iranian media late morning Wednesday. Prices of U.S. benchmark crude were higher in Asian trading, but analysts attributed the move to strong corporate profit reports and reopened commercial air space in Europe.

The Iranian navy and Revolutionary Guard frequently patrol the Gulf. But U.S. and other Western naval officials have long described the Guards' naval units as more erratic than Iran's regular navy. Analysts have worried that provocation from Guard units in the Gulf-which is also heavily patrolled by American and allied warships-could quickly escalate.

"It's the IRGC navy ... that will be more provocative in their maneuvers and in their potential interaction with shipping," said Theodore Karasik, director of research and development at the Dubai-based Institute for Near East & Gulf Military Analysis, a think tank.

The war games come as Tehran ratchets up what appears to be a public diplomacy push aimed at thwarting Washington-led efforts at the United Nations to impose fresh economic sanctions to punish Iran for its nuclear program. The U.S. and many of its Western and Arab allies accuse Iran of pursuing nuclear weapons. Tehran says its program is peaceful.

In recent days, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and other Iranian officials have floated anew a counter-proposal to a U.N.-backed draft deal, hammered out last year, for providing nuclear fuel to Iran for use in a medical-research reactor. That deal would have seen Iran sending off the bulk of its lower-enriched nuclear fuel to be upgraded overseas and sent back to Iran.

Iranian negotiators helped draft the deal, but the country's leadership never backed it. Instead, officials have offered several, sometimes-contradictory alternatives, including most recently a proposal to swap the fuel simultaneously and on Iranian soil. Earlier this year, Iran began enriching its lower-grade fuel on its own, further alarming Western officials.

Ali Akbar Salehi, head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization, said Wednesday that Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki would be reaching out to U.N. Security Council members to discuss the U.S.-led sanctions effort. He will also be talking to officials in other countries about Iran's proposed fuel swap, Iranian media reported Mr. Salehi saying. Meanwhile, however, Iran's own enrichment efforts were going well, he said.