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AP News

Iran kicks off 5-day air defense war games

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11/16/2010

Iran kicked off five-days of air defense war games Tuesday to display the country's capabilities in protecting its nuclear facilities from possible attack, state television reported.

The drill, which comes as Iran is locked in a standoff with the U.S. and its European allies over Tehran's disputed nuclear program, aims to "upgrade the combat preparedness" of Iran's air defense system, an Iranian air force general said.

"These large-scale military maneuvers ... will further improve preparedness to confront possible threats to Iran's air space and the very populated, vital landmarks and nuclear centers," Gen. Ahmad Mighani was quoted as saying by state TV.

The U.S. and its Western allies accuse Iran of seeking to develop atomic weapons, while Tehran says its nuclear program is only for peaceful purposes. Israel has hinted it might take military action against Iran if international efforts to curb its nuclear program fail.

During Tuesday's exercises, Iran activated its air defense system at nuclear facilities across the country, said Gen. Hamid Arjangi, a spokesman for the maneuvers. He said that Iranian forces successfully repelled hypothetical enemy planes from reaching nuclear and industrial sites.

Iran's air force said it also conducted drills earlier this year at several of the country's key nuclear sites, including its main uranium enrichment plant at Natanz and the nuclear power plant at Bushehr.

Separately from the drill, Arjangi said that Iranian radar detected real foreign reconnaissance planes that allegedly approached the country's air space before the exercises began.

The official IRNA news agency quoted Arjangi as saying Iranian air defense systems "intercepted and warned" the planes to turn back, and they did. He did not elaborate.

Arjangi said the incident was reported to Khatam-ol-Anbia, the headquarters responsible for air defense under the control of the powerful Revolutionary Guard.

During the five-day exercise, Iran has said it would unveil a locally made radar system with a range of some 1,800 miles (2,900 kilometers).

Iran's armed forces conduct several war games every year and frequently unveil new weapons and military systems during those exercises. The capacity and effectiveness of these locally manufactured weapons and systems often cannot be independently verified.