

Dangerous Crossroads: Iran War Games. US Navy Deployment in the Persian Gulf

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An Iranian warplane has spotted a US aircraft carrier during Tehran's ongoing navy drill in the Persian Gulf, reports IRNA news agency. The US fleet's maneuvers come after Iran threatened to block the oil flow through the Strait of Hormuz.

Tehran's surveillance jet has shot a video and pictures of the American carrier, which was later identified as John C. Stennis. The US Fifth Fleet keeps a military base in Bahrain, while the ship was spotted in the Gulf of Oman after crossing the Strait of Hormuz.

"An Iranian vessel and surveillance plane have tracked, filmed and photographed a US aircraft carrier as it was entering the Gulf of Oman from the Persian Gulf," said Adm. Habibollah Sayyari, Iran's navy chief, as cited by the official IRNA.

"The foreign fleet will be warned by Iranian forces if it enters the area of the drill," added Sayyari.

The US navy confirmed on Thursday the aircraft carrier John C. Stennis had indeed headed for the Gulf of Oman, accompanied by guided-missile cruiser Mobile Bay and several other vessels. But that was "a pre-planned, routine transit" as the group was to provide air support to allied troops in Afghanistan, said Lt. Rebecca Rebarich, the spokesperson for the US Fifth Fleet.

Since Saturday, Iran has been conducting a 10-day navy drill in international waters near the Strait of Hormuz, the gateway for up to 40 per cent of world's oil supply with the US and EU among major customers. Tehran has promised to block the strait if Washington sanctions Iran's oil exports out of suspicions it is developing nuclear weapons.

While Tehran seems to be reaffirming its naval might in the region, Reuters reports all of its marine capabilities cannot be compared with the US Fifth Fleet located in the Persian Gulf, which lists over 20 ocean-range warships and 15,000 personnel.

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