

# *Iranian president warns Tehran will respond if U.S. interferes with Venezuela-bound oil tankers*

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Tehran, May 23 (RHC)-- Iran's President Hassan Rouhani warns of retaliatory measures against the United States should Washington make "trouble" for Iranian tankers carrying fuel to gasoline-starved Venezuela.

"If our tankers in the Caribbean or anywhere in the world face trouble [caused] by the Americans, they (the U.S.) will also be in trouble in kind," Rouhani said in a phone conversation with Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani on Saturday.

He added that Iran attaches special significance to regional security and emphasized that some U.S. measures in different parts of the world have led to "unacceptable conditions" but "we will never initiate any tension or conflict at all."

Iran reserves the legitimate right to defend its national sovereignty and territorial integrity and secure its own interests, Rouhani said, adding: "We hope the Americans do not make a mistake."

The Iranian president stressed the importance of strengthening joint cooperation amid the current coronavirus pandemic and said: "However, the United States of America continues to make wrong decisions and keeps it inhumane approaches." He once again emphasized that regional security should be maintained by countries in the region, noting: "We have always expressed our readiness for more cooperation with neighboring countries."

According to Refinitiv Eikon tracking data, a flotilla of five tankers carrying Iranian fuel for Venezuela is approaching the Caribbean, with the first expected to reach the South American country's waters on Sunday.

The shipments have infuriated the United States as both Iran and Venezuela are under US sanctions. Washington has threatened to take measures in response especially against Iran, according to a senior US official, who did not provide further details.

In a letter to United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres last week, Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif issued a stern warning against the provocative acts by the US which has dispatched its naval forces to the Caribbean Sea with the goal of disrupting the course of the Iranian tankers heading to Venezuela.

Venezuela's Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino Lopez said Wednesday that Caracas will send planes and ships to escort Iranian tankers arriving with fuel to the country in case of any U.S. aggression. He added that Venezuela's navy and air force will welcome the Iranian tankers bound for the Latin American country, seeing them through the nation's maritime territory and into port.

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