

Iranian foreign minister says U.S. playing very dangerous game



Tehran, May 22 (RHC)-- Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has warned that the United States is “playing a very, very dangerous game” by beefing up its military presence in the region.

In an exclusive interview with the CNN, Zarif criticized the United States for sending military reinforcements, including the USS Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier strike group, a squadron of B-52 bombers, and a battery of patriot missiles to the Middle East.

“Having all these military assets in a small waterway is in and of itself prone to accident, particularly when you have people who are interested in accidents. So extreme prudence is required and the United States is playing a very, very dangerous game,” the Iranian foreign minister said.

The U.S. says it is deploying an aircraft carrier strike group and a bomber task force to the Middle East in a “clear and unmistakable” message to Iran. Tensions mounted between Tehran and Washington last May, when U.S. President Donald Trump pulled his country out of the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), and re-imposed harsh sanctions against the Islamic Republic in defiance of global criticisms.

The tensions saw a sharp rise on the first anniversary of Washington’s exit from the deal as the U.S. moved to ratchet up the pressure on Iran by tightening its oil sanctions and building up its military

presence in the region.

Zarif further emphasized that Iran was “not interested in escalation,” adding: “We have very clearly said that we will not be the party to begin escalation, but we will defend ourselves.” He warned that there “will be painful consequences if there is an escalation for everybody.”

Elsewhere in his interview, Zarif said Iran would never negotiate with President Trump unless Washington shows “respect” to Tehran by honoring its commitments under the JCPOA.

Trump said Monday that he was willing to engage in negotiations with Iran “if they are ready” amid Washington’s unilateral pressure against Tehran. “If they call, we would certainly negotiate but that's going to be up to them. I’d only want them to call if they’re ready. If they're not ready, they don't have to bother,” he said.

Zarif, however, rejected Trump’s offer of talks, which comes only after Washington ditched the Iran deal and unleashed a campaign of pressure against the country, adding: “We acted in good faith. We are not willing to talk to people who have broken their promises.”

The top Iranian diplomat emphasized that the Islamic Republic would never bow to the threats and said: “Iran never negotiates with coercion. You cannot threaten any Iranian and expect them to engage. The way to do it is through respect, not through threats.”

He also called for an immediate end to the “economic warfare” waged by the U.S. on Iran, saying that Washington was in no position to impose such sanctions, which are “depriving citizens of their means of livelihood.”

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