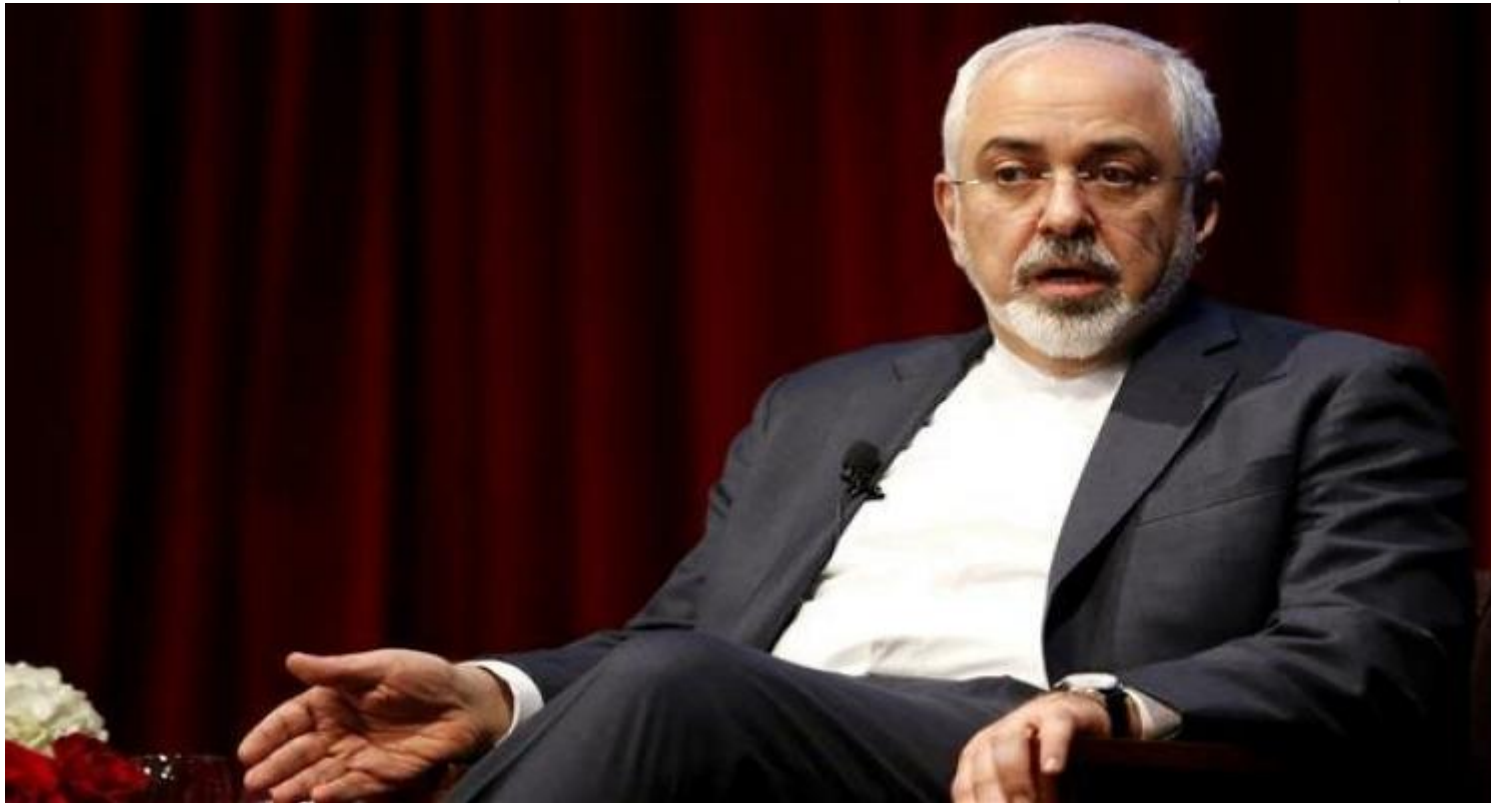


Iran accuses West of backing Israel on scientist assassination



Rome, December 3 (RHC)-- Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has accused Israel of killing its top nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh amid the silence and complicity of the West and also called on Iran's Gulf neighbours not to support Israel against Iran.

"Why is the West supporting Israeli terrorism? Why is Israel committing acts of terror against Iran, including [killing] our nuclear scientist, without condemnation and consequences from the West?" said Zarif addressing Med2020, an international forum held in Rome, on Thursday.

"I want to ask our neighbours, are they ready to fight Israel's fight with Iran?" said Zarif in reference to the recent agreements to normalise diplomatic ties between Israel and the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. "We are neighbours we will be in this region together, I don't think they will allow Israel to bring the fight here."

It was the first time Zarif spoke on an international platform after Fakhrizadeh's killing last week, which caused outrage in the country and prompted the Iranian Parliament to demand its government to ramp up its nuclear program.

While no party has claimed responsibility for the killing of Fakhrizadeh – viewed by Western powers as the architect of Iran's abandoned nuclear weapons programme – Iran has accused Israel. The assassination may complicate U.S. President-elect Joe Biden's intention to restore the Iranian nuclear deal. Outgoing President Donald Trump walked out of the agreement, signed by the previous administration, in 2018.

Zarif warned that the decision of the parliament would soon become law but could be reversed if sanctions against Iran were lifted and the US rejoined the nuclear deal without preconditions. But the US needed to take the first step, Zarif said. "We did not withdraw, the U.S. did," said Zarif.

"Iran will go back to full compliance but the U.S. must implement their obligations without preconditions. They must go back to full compliance and normalize Iran's economic relations with the world. Stop making new conditions and outrageous demands. We showed the West our bona fides, now it's time for the U.S. to show theirs."

Zarif said the killing of the scientist was an act of "international aggression" and that Iran had a right to suspend its compliance with the nuclear deal and restart enrichment since European countries were giving in to U.S. pressures and not implementing their part of the agreement.

"Despite claims to the contrary, since Trump walked out Europeans were not able to implement their part the deal ... for instance, they keep freezing our assets because of US sanctions. They are not buying our oil or setting up companies in Iran," Zarif said.

Asked if he would re-engage with the new U.S. administration after Biden expressed his willingness to restore the nuclear deal, Zarif said Iran would do its part but the U.S. was no longer in a position to dictate conditions. "Iran's proposal [for re-engagement] has been on the table for a long time, but unfortunately it's the blank check the US has given to its clients in the region that is preventing the restoration of peace."

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