

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- An aide to Iran's president said Friday he doesn't see "any reason" for talks between Donald Trump and Hassan Rouhani at the next United Nations General Assembly.

Majid Takhti-e Ravanchi, a member of the presidency's political bureau, told the ISNA news agency that Iranians have no expectations from Trump after he pulled America out of the landmark nuclear deal between Tehran and world powers. Ravanchi told ISNA: "I do not see any reason for talks between Rouhani and Trump."

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- Iran has strongly condemned a Saudi airstrike that mostly killed children in Yemen Thursday, calling on the world community to stop the kingdom's crimes in the impoverished country.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qasemi said the hike in Saudi bombardment of residential areas and non-military targets indicates the kingdom's consecutive defeats on the battlefield. He said countries providing the Saudi regime with military equipment "are complicit in their crimes and should be held to account."

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Truth Dawning on the Free World Vis-a-Vis the Evil Empire

Iranian Woman Tours Across World on Motorbike

Iran Down South Korea in FIBA Under-18 Asian Championship

For 'National Battle' Turkish President Calls on Turks to Buy Lira

Russia to View New U.S. Sanctions ‘Declaration of War’

MOSCOW (Dispatches) -- Russia warned the United States on Friday it would regard any U.S. move to curb the activities of its banks as a declaration of economic war which it would retaliate against, stepping up a war of words with Washington over spiraling sanctions.

The warning, from Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, reflects Russian fears over the impact of new restrictions on its economy and assets, including the rouble which has lost nearly six percent of its value this week on sanctions jitters.

Economists expect the economy to grow by 1.8 percent this year. But if new sanctions proposed by Congress and the State Department are implemented in full, something that remains uncertain, some economists fear growth would be almost cut to zero in future.

In a sign of how seriously Russia is taking the threat, President Vladimir Putin discussed what the Kremlin called "possible new unfriendly steps by Washington" with his Security Council on Friday.

Moscow's strategy of trying to improve battered U.S.-Russia ties by attempting to build bridges with President Donald Trump is backfiring after U.S. lawmakers launched a new sanctions drive last week because they fear Trump is too soft on Russia.

That in turn has piled pressure on Trump to show he is tough on Russia ahead of mid-term elections.

On Wednesday, the State Department announced a new round of sanctions that pushed the rouble to two-year lows and sparked a wider sell-off over fears Russia was locked in a spiral of never-ending sanctions.

Separate legislation introduced last week in draft form by Republican and Democratic senators, dubbed "the sanctions bill from hell" by one of its backers, proposes curbs on the operations of several state-owned Russian banks in the United States and restrictions on their use of the dollar.

Medvedev said Moscow would take economic, political or other retaliatory measures against the United States if Washington targeted Russian banks.

"I would not like to comment on talks about future sanctions, but I can say one thing: If some ban on banks' operations or on their use of one or another currency follows, it would be possible to clearly call it a declaration of economic war," said Medvedev.

"And it would be necessary, it would be needed to react to this war economically, politically, or, if needed, by other means. And our American friends need to understand this," he said, speaking on a trip to the Russian Far East.

Officials in Moscow had already made clear they did not want to get drawn into what they describe as a mutually-damaging tit-for-tat sanctions war.

The threat of more U.S. sanctions kept the rouble under pressure on Friday, sending it crashing past two-year lows at one point before it recouped some of its losses.

The Russian central bank said the rouble's fall to multi-month lows on news of new U.S. sanctions was a "natural reaction" and that it had the necessary tools to prevent any threat to financial stability.

Republican Senator Lindsay Graham said the bill's proponents wanted to "impose crushing sanctions and other measures against Putin's Russia until he ceases and desists meddling in the U.S. electoral process, halts cyberattacks on U.S. infrastructure, removes Russia from Ukraine, and ceases efforts to create chaos in Syria."

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Airstrike Hits Bus in Response to Houthi Missile: Saudis Massacre Kids, Call Them Legitimate Targets



Residents carry an injured boy hit in a Saudi airstrike at a busy market area in Majz District in Saada province, Aug. 9, 2018.

DAHYAN, Yemen (Dispatches) -- The remains of victims and children's clothing were strewn across a market in northern Yemen on Friday, as the UN called for an investigation into a Saudi airstrike the previous day that killed at least 50 people, including 30 children, on a bus.

Yemen's Al-Masirah TV, quoting the Health Ministry, reported that 77 others were wounded, "mostly children," when the bus traveling through a market was targeted in Yemen's Saada

province.

Wounded children, bloodied, bandaged and screaming, laid on stretchers as doctors treated them, friends and relatives having carried them in their arms to be treated.

An AFP photographer at the scene said the bus carrying the children had been turned into a mass of twisted metal, and that the remains of victims and their personal items were scattered across the ground.

"There are remains every-

where, we are still trying to confirm identities," Yahya Shayem, a health official in Saada, told AFP.

The International Committee of the Red Cross said on Twitter that its team at an ICRC-supported hospital in Saada received the bodies of 30 children, all under 15 years old. It also received 48 wounded people, including 30 children, it said.

A spokesman for the Red Cross in Sanaa told AFP the toll

was not final as casualties from the attack were taken to several hospitals.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres urged an "independent and prompt" probe.

The attack took place in the Dahyan market in Saada province, a Houthi stronghold. The province lies along the border with Saudi Arabia.

The bus was ferrying local civilians, including many children coming from summer school, according to the Saada health department and Yemeni tribal leaders who spoke on condition of anonymity.

"Our shops were open and shoppers were walking around as usual. All of those who died were residents, children and shop owners," witness Moussa Abdullah, who was being treated in hospital for wounds, told Reuters.

"We need blood," said Jameel al-Fareh, an emergency room doctor at Saada's Al-Jumhuri hospital, calling on local people to donate blood to treat the wounded.

Ahmed al-Mansouri, the hospital's director, condemned what he called the "massacre of children."

Saudi Arabia has been waging a destructive war on Yemen

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UN Official: War Nearing End Syria Begins Push for Liberation of Idlib

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) -- The Syrian government has called on what is left of Daesh and other terrorist groups in the country to surrender as the war against foreign-backed militancy in the country is "nearing an end."

Syrian armed forces carried out shelling attacks against terrorist positions in the Idlib province on Thursday as they dropped leaflets that warned them to lay down arms and accept the government's rule.

"The war is nearing an end... We are calling on you to join the local reconciliations, as many of our people in Syria did," read the leaflets, which were stamped with the military's seal.

"Your cooperation with the Syrian Arab Army will release you from the rule of militants and terrorists, and will preserve you and your families' lives," declared the leaflets.

After purging terrorists from most parts of the country and achieving several game-changing victories, the gov-

ernment of President Bashar al-Assad has been trying to negotiate evacuation deals with terrorists to save civilian lives.

The agreements grant amnesty to anti-Assad militants who are willing to live under state rule again, provided private lawsuits are not filed against them.

Damascus has been keen on scoring a similar deal with Idlib, which sits on the border with Turkey and is one of the last major militant strongholds in Syria.

Assad announced last month that government forces had turned their focus to Idlib, noting that the liberation of the northwestern province was one of the military's priorities.

Iran, Russia and Turkey, the guarantors of a countrywide ceasefire in Syria, have ensured the United Nations that they will try their utmost to prevent a battle for recapturing the city, which is home to over 2.5 million people.

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Taliban Raid City Near Kabul in Complex Operation

GHAZNI, Afghanistan (Dispatches) -- Afghan forces launched a clearing operation Friday, searching for Taliban fighters following a major assault on the south-eastern city of Ghazni.

Afghan special forces were deployed to Ghazni after the latest attempt by the Taliban to capture an urban center, with the assault coming as pressure builds on the insurgents to enter peace talks.

Ghazni - less than two hours by road from Kabul - has been under threat from massing Taliban fighters for months, with residents saying the complex nature of the attacks was unprecedented in its scale.

A spokesman for U.S. Forces in Afghanistan said the fighting had "ceased" as of Friday morning, hours after the insurgents began the assault late Thursday from several positions around the city.

However, sporadic gunfire continued to echo into the afternoon amid intermittent clashes, with officials telling resi-

dents to stay in their homes as scattered Taliban fighters roamed the streets.

Power has been cut to the area since fighting erupted.

Earlier, residents described heavy gunfire ringing out and government buildings set on fire during bouts of tense fighting. "We are scared for our lives. The Taliban are roaming everywhere in and around the city," shopkeeper Muhammad Haleem said.

Another resident, Yasan, said the Taliban were using loudspeakers at the mosque to warn residents to stay in their homes. "Heavy explosions and gunfire can be heard. We are terrified," Yasan wrote in a Facebook post.

Civilian houses and army checkpoints came under mortar attack and the bodies of dozens of Taliban fighters were in the streets, provincial governor spokesman Arif Noori said.

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