

# Iran says 'No one can destroy our missile power,' not even the U.S. Military

A senior Iranian military official has warned the U.S. that his armed force's missile development and regional influence was too powerful to be dismantled even in the event of a direct conflict.

Brigadier General Hossein Salami, deputy commander of the elite Revolutionary Guards, criticized Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's 12-point plan for potentially reaching a new nuclear agreement with Iran after President Donald Trump withdrew from the 2015 deal earlier this month. In his first major policy speech as top U.S. diplomat, Pompeo said last week that any new agreement would have to include an Iranian commitment to end support for militant groups abroad and ballistic missile development, something Iranian officials have roundly rejected.

"They think Iran should end the development of its missile (program)," Salami said at a ceremony in Tehran, according to Iran's semi-official Tasnim News Agency. "Since they cannot force us, they ask us to do it, ourselves."

"No one can destroy our missile power and if they are afraid they can go to shelters," he added.



An Iranian military truck carries missiles past a portrait of Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei during a parade on the occasion of the country's annual army day on April 18, 2018 in Tehran. Iran's production of non-nuclear missiles and support for foreign groups were not covered by the 2015 nuclear accords reached under the administration of former President Barack Obama. ATTA KENARE/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

The Revolutionary Guards are widely considered to be Iran's top fighting force, and they have been involved in regional conflicts as well. Like the U.S., Iran is involved in the government-led battle against the Islamic State militant group (ISIS) in Iraq, but Iran also supports the Syrian government against ISIS and insurgents, whereas the U.S. backs a mostly Kurdish coalition that also includes

Arabs and other ethnic minorities operating mostly outside of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's control in Syria.

In both countries, Iran has backed Shiite Muslim groups considered terrorist organizations by the U.S., including the Lebanese Hezbollah movement in Syria and Kataib Hezbollah in Iraq. Iran's successful anti-ISIS campaigns in both Iraq and Syria have expanded its regional foothold, but have also produced a violent flare in hostilities between international-backed campaigns. In past months, U.S. and Israeli forces have conducted deadly airstrikes against Iranian and pro-Iran groups in Syria.

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While not listed as a terrorist organization by the State Department, Yemen's Zaidi Shiite Muslim Ansar Allah, or Houthi movement, has also been accused of receiving Iranian backing by the U.S. and its Saudi Arabian ally. The insurgents have fired missiles at Saudi Arabia as the kingdom leads a war to expel them from the Yemeni capital of Sanaa.

The U.S. has also alleged Iranian support for Sunni Muslim-designated terrorist groups such as the Palestinian Hamas, Afghan Taliban and Al-Qaeda. Iran has charged the U.S. with clandestine support of ISIS, which grew out of an Al-Qaeda-led insurgency following the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq and a 2011 Syrian uprising backed by the West, Turkey and Gulf Arab states.



A graphic shows the extent of Iran's ballistic missile program. The U.S., Israel and Saudi Arabia accuse Iran of destabilizing the region, but Iran has warned it will continue developing its weapons to defend its borders. CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES MISSILE DEFENSE PROJECT

Trump's May 8 withdrawal from the Iran nuclear agreement came despite pleas for the U.S. to remain by European allies and other leading powers. With U.S. nuclear-related sanctions going back into effect, Iran has expressed skepticism about staying a party to the deal, but Tehran's diplomats have met with fellow signatories China, France, Germany, Russia and the U.K. in an attempt to salvage it.

The U.S. and Iran have been deeply mistrustful of one another since the 1979 Islamic Revolution brought the current theocratic leadership to power in Iran, ousting a pro-West absolute monarch who was reinstalled by a CIA coup in 1953. The countries have not maintained formal relations for decades and U.S. allies Israel and Saudi Arabia have pushed Trump to adopt a tougher policy against Iran.

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