

## Blinken urges De-escalation in Middle East with UK, French Diplomats

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- **Focus on De-escalating Middle East Tensions**
- **Emphasis on Gaza Cease-fire and Hostage Deal**

WASHINGTON: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken held phone discussions on Saturday with British Foreign Secretary David Lammy and French Foreign Minister Stephane Sejourne, emphasizing the urgent need to de-escalate rising Middle East tensions following the assassination of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran.

State Department spokesman Matthew Miller stated that Blinken and Lammy reaffirmed their commitment to calming the situation and preventing the conflict from expanding. They

highlighted the importance of swiftly finalizing a Gaza cease-fire and a hostage-prisoner swap deal.

In his call with Sejourne, Blinken also stressed the need for a cease-fire in Gaza and discussed the broader challenges posed by Iranian threats. The talks come in response to Iran's vow of "severe punishment" for Israel following Haniyeh's assassination.

The Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) claimed on Saturday that the assassination was planned and executed by Israel with US support, using a short-range projectile. The US announced the deployment of additional fighter jets and navy warships to the Middle East on Friday.

Haniyeh was killed early Wednesday at his Tehran residence, where he was attending the inauguration of new President Masoud Pezeshkian. His bodyguard also perished in the attack, which Iranian officials have attributed to Israel.