

Heightened tensions in Middle East after Hamas Chief's assassination

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BEIRUT: Middle East tensions escalated on Saturday following the assassination of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, attributed to Israel, raising fears of a regional conflict. The United States announced the deployment of additional warships and fighter jets to the area, while Western governments advised their citizens to leave Lebanon, home to Hezbollah, and airlines canceled flights.

Iran, promising retaliation, expects Hezbollah to target deeper into Israel. The Pentagon is bolstering its Middle Eastern military presence to protect US personnel and support Israel, including deploying the USS Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier strike group and additional missile defense assets.

In Beirut, 20-year-old student Diana Abu Aasel expressed her fear for her family's safety amidst growing tensions. The US embassy in Lebanon urged Americans to leave on any available flight.

Britain and Sweden also advised their citizens to exit Lebanon, with Sweden closing its Beirut embassy.

Air France and Transavia France have suspended flights to Beirut until at least Tuesday, with future operations subject to reassessment. German carrier Lufthansa has extended its flight suspension to August 12. Meanwhile, Israel and Hezbollah continue exchanging fire, further destabilizing the region.