



Evacuation Watch

# Lebanon

**Evacuation Watch Level has been raised to EVACUATION (Level 4) due to likelihood of Israeli ground invasion**

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# Executive Summary

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- Tensions between Israel and Hezbollah have sharply risen since 27<sup>th</sup> July, raising the likelihood that an Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon starts within one-to-two weeks.
- Israel has been planning a ground offensive in southern Lebanon since at least June. Such an operation was not expected to start before mid-August, but the alleged-Hezbollah rocket attack on Majdal Shams shortens the potential timeline of the military operation.
- We will lower the Evacuation Watch Level to CONSIDER EVACUATION (Level 3) by 1<sup>st</sup> September if the security environment improves, but a near-term improvement and de-escalation of hostilities is HIGHLY UNLIKELY.

## Developments

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### **Tensions between Israel and Hezbollah, which were already elevated, have risen significantly since 27<sup>th</sup> July.**

The rise in tensions started when a rocket, which Israel attributes to Hezbollah, hit Majdal Shams in the occupied Golan Heights. The attack killed twelve people, all of whom were under the age of 20. Hezbollah denies responsibility, stating that it was Israel's Iron Dome interceptor that hit Majdal Shams.

### **The Israeli Foreign Ministry has stated that Hezbollah has crossed 'all red lines' with its alleged attack in Majdal Shams, and that Israel will exercise its right to act in self-defence to respond to the attack.**

Lebanese media reported retaliatory raids by Israel on Hula, Markaba, Aita al-Shaab, Khiam, Shaheen, Yaroun, Meiss el-Jabal, Kfar Kila, and Bourj al-Shamali. Iran has warned Israel that if Israel engages in new military 'adventures' in Lebanon, it will see 'unforeseen consequences', sparking fears of an all-out regional war.

### **The biggest escalation since 27<sup>th</sup> July occurred overnight on 30<sup>th</sup> - 31<sup>st</sup> July, when Israeli airstrikes assassinated a Hezbollah commander in Beirut and Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran.**

Israel claims the strikes in Beirut killed Fuad Shukr, also known as al-Hajj Mohsin, a Hezbollah commander considered to be very close to the group's leader, Hassan Nasrallah. Hezbollah maintains Shukr is still alive. Israel claims that Shukr was the person responsible for planning Hezbollah's attack in Majdal Shams. Hezbollah has stated it intends to retaliate to the Israeli airstrikes targeting Shukr. Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has said that Israel has "paved the way for [its] own harsh punishment" following the assassination of Haniyeh.

### Evacuation Watch Levels

4 Evacuation	Terminate operations and evacuate all staff
3 Consider Evacuation	Conditions warrant scaling down non-essential operations and consideration of evacuation
2 Warning	Conditions warrant monitoring developments on a weekly basis and preparatory stance regarding possible evacuation
1 Increased Monitoring	Conditions warrant monitoring developments on a monthly basis for a potential deterioration
1 No Level	Conditions are stable to the point that country/territory is not on 'Evacuation Watch'

## Trend

**Israel and Hezbollah have been inching towards war since June, with the Israeli government increasing the length of mandatory conscription and training reserve forces.**

For Israel, the displacement of its citizens from northern Israel due to consistent Hezbollah rocket attacks since 8<sup>th</sup> October 2023 is an untenable situation. Israeli citizens have increasingly questioned the Netanyahu government's ability to keep them safe since the Hamas attack in Israel on 7<sup>th</sup> October. The government feels it is compelled to undertake a military offensive in southern Lebanon to push Hezbollah, particularly its elite Radwan Forces, north of the Litani River. Hezbollah seeks to continue rocket strikes targeting northern Israel in response to Israel's invasion of Gaza to maintain domestic popular support.

**An Israeli ground invasion of southern Lebanon was unlikely to start before mid-August, but the recent escalation of tensions between Israel and Hezbollah since 27<sup>th</sup> July means it is likely to start within one-to-two weeks.**

An Israeli military operation in south Lebanon before mid-August was unlikely due to Israel's military and armament depletion owing to its prolonged war in Gaza. It was also possible, though unlikely, that the US or France successfully brokered a deal between Israel and Lebanon that would render an Israeli ground invasion unlikely. The escalation since 27<sup>th</sup> July makes such a deal nearly impossible.

**While highly unlikely, we will lower the Evacuation Watch Level to CONSIDER EVACUATION (Level 3) by 1<sup>st</sup> September if the security environment improves.**

A lowering of the Evacuation Watch Level is contingent upon a commitment from both Israel and Hezbollah to a de-escalation of hostilities. Should the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) begin a ground invasion of southern Lebanon within one week as expected, we will maintain our Evacuation Watch Level at EVACUATE (Level 4).

# Actions On

Stay abreast of developments and monitor reliable news sources weekly.

Ensure access to reliable information. Dedicate resources to monitor local media outlets actively and cross-check information alongside official directives and embassy advice. Follow output from local media, as they are more likely to pick up more granular and location-specific intelligence that global media may miss. Travellers are also advised to download the Healix Travel Oracle app and add 'Lebanon' to their 'watchlist' to receive push notifications.

Ensure that communication with employees is frequent and effective; prioritising important information.

Prioritisation is critical given the volume of information being disseminated by local media as well as by local authorities, alongside internally produced updates. Ensure that essential directives are communicated separately from more routine updates - particularly relating to government directives that are being introduced, such as legislation or potential curfews.

Maintain close embassy relations in Lebanon.

As a basic precaution, ensure that employees are enrolled on any travel security information programmes led by embassies of their respective countries. Ensure that all staff maintain up-to-date travel documents and that they are in communication with their diplomatic representations. Stay abreast of development and be aware of an alternative Point of Contact (PoCs) should operations at the diplomatic facilities be impacted. Government directives should be relayed accurately and efficiently to employees, including details of movement restrictions, in case of further violence. Consider using instant messaging groups to disseminate information to employees in a timely manner.

Monitor the viability of outbound travel.

Remain cognisant of the operational status of airports throughout the country. Keep in mind that operations at Beirut–Rafic Hariri International Airport (BEY) have the potential to cease at short notice.

Ensure that employees have the necessary provisions to stand fast for an extended period.

Conduct medical/health risk assessments on in-country staff to identify any underlying conditions that could cause hospitalisation. Defer all non-essential medical treatments. Ensure stand-fast locations have been reliably evaluated beforehand.

Identify triggers for escalation and de-escalation.

As part of the evacuation planning process, organisations should identify internal triggers in line with the company's risk tolerance that would signal that the situation is improving or deteriorating enough to warrant a change to their evacuation posture.

Liaise with the Healix Security Operations Centre (GSOC).

Should support be required with any of the above, or for confidential discussions about evacuation planning and risk mitigation, please contact the Healix GSOC.

At Healix, we work with organisations to proactively mitigate risks before they happen and expertly manage them when they do, protecting your people, operations and assets wherever they are.

Discover more about how we can support you

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