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Ibrahim Chamas

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## Walid Jumblatt:

### Key Lebanese politico switches sides as war looms

Druze ‘kingmaker’ Walid Jumblatt has made yet another strategic turn in his long history of shifting alliances, throwing his considerable political weight – and that of Lebanon’s Druze community – behind Hezbollah as war with Israel heats up.



(Photo Credit: The Cradle)

Walid Jumblatt, the former leader of the Progressive Socialist Party, is a unique figure in Lebanese politics. Known for his ability to deftly maneuver Lebanon’s sectarian political divide, Jumblatt frequently shifts his alliances to protect his interests and those of his Druze community.

Jumblatt’s astute political intuition, which has him often described as Lebanon’s “weather vane,” has helped the Druze leader decide when to align with or distance himself from various political factions. His relationship with external powers – he is viewed as a close ally of the US – has also fluctuated over the decades.

In recent years, Jumblatt, aged 74, has tended to step away from the spotlight, once even expressing a desire to work as a New York City garbageman rather than continue to deal with Lebanon's never-ending political turmoil.

Today, however, he has stepped directly back into the ring and emerged as a key player alongside Hezbollah in opposition to Israel's regional aggressions. It is not a position that will fare well with his traditional allies in Washington, London, and Paris.

### **Supporting the resistance**

**Yes, I support the Lebanese resistance or the Islamic Resistance and Hezbollah.**

So said Jumblatt during a phoned-in interview on [Sky News Arabia](#) in response to Israel's deadly [shelling](#) of Beirut's southern suburbs on 30 July.

The bombing took place in the direct aftermath of an incident in the Israeli-occupied Syrian Golan Heights town of Majd Shams, in which 12 civilians – including 10 children – were killed. Tel Aviv immediately blamed a Hezbollah rocket for the deaths, while residents – mainly Syrian Druze – said the casualties were caused by shrapnel from an Israeli Iron Dome missile falling onto a football field.

On 19 July, Jumblatt even sent a letter to senior Druze Sheikh Muwaffaq Tarif in occupied Palestine, [shaming him](#) for receiving Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the aftermath of Majd al-Shams, and warned that Israel was attempting to create rifts between the Druze and Shia communities.

During his meeting with Netanyahu, Tarif talked about the Druze listed in the Israeli army as brave men who fought against “terrorists” in Gaza and “defended the settlements surrounding the Gaza Strip,” blaming Netanyahu for abandoning the Druze villages in the north. Tarif had also defended Israel after the Majdal Shams incident, saying that “no state can tolerate the ongoing aggression to its citizens and residents. This has been the ongoing reality for the past nine months in the northern settlements. Tonight, every possible red line was crossed.” This statement sparked a wave of anger against Tarif.

The Lebanese resistance immediately denied any involvement, and the Lebanese government sought to file a [complaint](#) to the UN Security Council following Israeli threats to retaliate.

But Tel Aviv used its version of the story as a pretext to launch a strike on Beirut, killing top Hezbollah war commander Fuad Shukr and six others, including three women and two children, and leaving over 80 civilians injured.

[Jumblatt weighed in](#) on the escalatory strike, saying that Tel Aviv's claims and justification for its attack on Beirut were false, noting that “it is time for Israel to understand that they will not be able to eliminate the spirit of resistance.”

Jumblatt's extraordinary stances [prompted](#) Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah to send him a letter of acknowledgment.

The Lebanese Druze leader's current position is consistent with his historical support for resistance movements. During a visit to Moscow on 11 February, he [likened](#) Hezbollah's resistance to the national movement led by his father, Kamal Jumblatt, which united leftist and Palestinian factions against right-wing Christian factions and Israeli occupation forces during Lebanon's 1975–1989 Civil War.

### **A complex relationship with Hezbollah**

Despite that long-standing support, Jumblatt's relationship with Hezbollah has remained fraught with tensions for at least two decades. After the 2005 assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, the rivalry between Jumblatt's socialist party and Hezbollah intensified, particularly after he aligned himself with the anti-Hezbollah, US-backed "March 14" political alliance and took frequent pot-shots at the resistance's military strategy.

Jumblatt went so far as to describe the arms of the resistance as a "weapon of treachery," to which Hezbollah [retorted](#): "If treachery embodied a man, his name would be Walid Jumblatt." During the war with Israel that same year, in 2006, Jumblatt took a hard line against the resistance, [blaming it for provoking Israel's 33-day war](#).

He controversially [displayed a 1962 map](#) that challenged the Lebanese government's claim to the disputed, Israeli-occupied Shebaa Farms, an area that Hezbollah insists must be returned to Lebanon. And his repeated demands for the resistance's disarmament further strained relations.

In 2008, tensions exploded when Jumblatt [supported](#) the government of prime minister Fouad Siniora's decision to dismantle Hezbollah's private fiber optics communications network, leading to violent clashes in Beirut and elsewhere. The conflict was temporarily eased only after a political settlement was hastily brokered by Qatar.

That agreement included provisions for forming a national unity government and establishing a more balanced power-sharing arrangement, which helped to restore some stability to the country.

In the aftermath of the 2008 clashes, Jumblatt renewed his frayed relations with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in 2010 and improved relations with Hezbollah, then flipped sides again months later by publicly supporting [the overthrow](#) of the government in Damascus. And again, in 2019, Jumblatt picked a fight with Hezbollah by reiterating that the Shebaa Farms was not Lebanese territory.

### **Jumblatt's political evolution**

Jumblatt's stance has now taken yet another turn, this time in response to Israel's brutal military assault on Gaza and its 10-month attacks on southern Lebanon. Despite his reservations about escalating the war, his renewed public support for Hezbollah underscores the Druze leader's pragmatic approach to Lebanese politics.

In a May interview, Jumblatt defended Hezbollah for "doing its duty" to defend Lebanon and criticized, in a recent Sky News interview, Lebanese Foreign Minister Abdallah Bouhabib's call for a proportional military response by saying that Hezbollah alone must decide on an appropriate reaction.

Jumblatt also took on US envoy Amos Hochstein, rejecting his proposal that Beirut needed to meet Israeli conditions to achieve peace, insisted that such demands were unrealistic, and affirmed his unwavering support for Hezbollah's resistance efforts:

**The ceasefire in Gaza has nothing to do with Lebanon, and that the war on Lebanon will continue until the Israeli conditions are met, namely the withdrawal of Hezbollah from part of southern Lebanon and other arrangements. We are telling him now and forever that this is impossible.**

Jumblatt's current alignment with Hezbollah is not just about short-term political gains. It reflects a broader strategy to maintain his influence in post-war Lebanon. By opposing Israeli actions and distancing himself from the controversial stance of Israel-based Druze leader Sheikh Akl al-Druze, Jumblatt seeks to preserve the national and Arab identity of the Druze community and reinforce his political clout.

Walid Jumblatt's political journey has been characterized by strategic shifts and occasional reversals. Rallying behind Hezbollah now proves only his knack for adapting to changing circumstances and aligning with powerful allies to protect his and his community's interests.