

The Jumblatt of Lebanon

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Lebanon, a country located in the Middle East, is heterogeneous. The majority of its population is Arab, but there are also Circassian, Armenian, and other Middle Eastern communities. Similarly, in terms of religion, apart from Islam, which consists of Sunni and Shia, some Lebanese people adhere to Druze, Catholic, Orthodox Christian, Maronite Christian, and other Christian denominations. Despite the diversity, religious communities in Lebanon do not live intermingled. They reside in specific areas, such as the Shia community in Southern Lebanon, the Sunni community in Northern Lebanon, and the Maronite community in the Keserwan region. In these areas, they are led by community leaders from each religion, whether they are landowners who have inherited their positions over generations or nobility. For instance, the Druze community, which mainly resides in the Central Lebanon region known as Jabal Druze, is led by the Jumblatt family, a noble family that has led the Druze since the 15th century, during the Ottoman occupation.

Although the people in Lebanon are geographically separated, as part of Lebanese society, they sometimes form alliances between religious communities and even between cross-religious groups, such as socialists and communists. Like other politicians, the maneuvers carried out by these community leaders, known as *zaim*, aim to achieve political goals that sometimes change and are adjusted to the situation. The Jumblatt family, for example, has had to survive in Lebanon as a minority community, trying to balance their interests with the survival of the Druze community alongside Ottoman and French interests until Lebanon became an independent country in 1943. This article will discuss the Druze leaders, specifically the Jumblatt family, from the leadership of Fouad Jumblatt to his grandson Walid Jumblatt, who is still in power in 2024.

Fouad Jumblatt: A Pillar of Druze Leadership in Early 20th Century Lebanon

Fouad Jumblatt, born in 1885 in the Chouf region of Lebanon, emerged as a central figure in the Druze community and Lebanese politics in the early 20th century. As the patriarch of the influential Jumblatt family, Fouad's life and leadership significantly shaped the socio-political landscape of Lebanon during a turbulent period marked by both internal strife and the broader geopolitical shifts of the time.

Fouad Jumblatt hailed from the historically significant Jumblatt family, whose roots in the Druze community extended back centuries. The Jumblatts were not only prominent landowners but also wielded considerable political influence. Growing up in Mukhtara, the family's traditional stronghold, Fouad was immersed in the responsibilities and expectations that came with his lineage. His upbringing instilled in him a profound sense of duty towards his community and a keen understanding of the political nuances required to navigate Lebanon's complex multi-sectarian environment.

Kamal Jumblatt: A Visionary Leader and Advocate for Social Justice in Lebanon

Kamal Jumblatt, born on December 6, 1917, in Mukhtara, Lebanon, was a pivotal figure in Lebanese politics and a revered leader within the Druze community. As the scion of the influential Jumblatt family, Kamal's life was marked by a commitment to social justice, secularism, and political reform. His intellectual pursuits, political activism, and profound impact on Lebanon's socio-political landscape have cemented his legacy as one of the most significant leaders in Lebanese history.

Early Life and Education

Kamal Jumblatt's upbringing was deeply rooted in the traditions and responsibilities of the Jumblatt family. Following the assassination of his father, Fouad Jumblatt, in 1921, Kamal was raised by his mother, Nazira Jumblatt, who played a crucial role in his early education and political development. Kamal pursued his studies at the University of Paris, where he studied law and psychology, gaining a broad perspective on social and political issues that would later shape his ideology.

Political Ideology and Activism

Kamal Jumblatt was a fervent advocate for socialism and secularism. In 1949, he founded the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP), which aimed to address the socio-economic inequalities in Lebanon and promote social justice. The PSP became a major political force, advocating for land reforms, better education, healthcare, and social services. Although the PSP visions seemed universal, but in reality the majority of the Party members are Druzes and the patriarchal system that was established by the Jumblatt family, play significant role in the Party's leadership.

As a Druze leader, Kamal Jumblatt sought to integrate the Druze community into the national framework of Lebanon. He worked tirelessly to ensure that the Druze were not marginalized and that their rights and interests were protected. His leadership emphasized the importance of national unity and the rejection of sectarianism.

Kamal Jumblatt was a proponent of Pan-Arabism and supported the idea of Arab unity against foreign intervention. He was a vocal critic of Western influence in the Middle East and supported various Arab liberation movements. His vision extended beyond Lebanon, encompassing a broader aspiration for Arab solidarity and independence. As nationalist he reject the idea of sectarianism, in his book he wrote that he believes in a secular Lebanon, which Lebanese would be accessed by their merit, not from which religious background they came from.

Political Career and Achievements

Kamal Jumblatt held various ministerial positions in the Lebanese government, where he implemented several progressive reforms. His tenure was marked by efforts to modernize Lebanon's social and economic policies, reflecting his commitment to improving the lives of ordinary Lebanese citizens.

During the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990), Kamal Jumblatt played a crucial role as a leader of the Lebanese National Movement (LNM), a coalition of leftist and nationalist parties. He sought to challenge the traditional sectarian political system and promote a more equitable and secular state. His involvement in the civil war highlighted his unwavering dedication to his principles, even amid profound national turmoil. Since he was one of the Lebanese leaders that

supporting Pan-Arabism, during the civil war, the Druze militia under his leadership supporting the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) against the Lebanese Forces (LF) which led by the Gemayel family.

Intellectual Contributions

Kamal Jumblatt was not only a political leader but also a prolific writer and intellectual. He authored numerous books and articles on philosophy, politics, and social issues, contributing significantly to intellectual discourse in Lebanon and the Arab world. His writings reflect his deep philosophical insights and his vision for a just and progressive society.

Assassination and Legacy

On March 16, 1977, Kamal Jumblatt was assassinated, a loss that resonated deeply within Lebanon and beyond. His death marked the end of an era, but his legacy continued to inspire future generations. Kamal's vision of social justice, secularism, and national unity remains influential in Lebanese politics. His son, Walid Jumblatt, succeeded him, continuing the family's political legacy and leadership within the Druze community.

Kamal Jumblatt's life and career were characterized by a relentless pursuit of justice, equality, and national unity. His contributions to Lebanese politics and society have left an enduring legacy that continues to shape the country's socio-political landscape. As a visionary leader, intellectual, and advocate for social reform, Kamal Jumblatt remains a towering figure in the history of Lebanon, embodying the ideals of progress and justice that he championed throughout his life.

Walid Jumblatt: Successor to a Legacy

In 1977, after Kamal Jumblatt was killed, Walid Jumblatt succeeded his father as the leader of the Druze community. Walid Jumblatt also took over his late father's role as the leader of the PSP. Initially, the public saw Walid Jumblatt as an apolitical playboy, indulging in typical youthful activities such as riding motorcycles. However, he eventually grew into a leader worthy of his father's legacy.

Upon becoming the leader of the Druze community, Walid Jumblatt faced numerous challenges, including the survival of the Druze people, the Lebanese Civil War, and the intervention of other countries in Lebanese politics, particularly Syria and Israel. As a leader, he had to balance various interests while safeguarding the Druze's political interests in Lebanon. Politically, Walid Jumblatt followed in his father's footsteps as a supporter of Pan-Arabism. Moreover, he consistently promoted a secular Lebanon free from a religious-based political system. Consequently, the Druze militia under Walid Jumblatt supported Palestinian militias during the Lebanese Civil War due to their Pan-Arabism stance.

When Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982, Walid Jumblatt strove to defend his territory, which was seized and held by the Druze militia. Despite their efforts, the Druze militia only managed to maintain their territory against Israeli attacks with great difficulty. Israeli forces even occupied parts of the Shuf Mountains, the Druze militia's stronghold. This situation prevented Walid Jumblatt from aiding the Palestinian militias against Israeli forces. During the invasion, Israel collaborated with the LF militia, prompting Walid Jumblatt to seek an alliance with Syria to counterbalance Israeli forces in Lebanon. This alliance enabled the Druze militia to defend their territory, significantly aided by weaponry and ammunition from Syria. By 1983, the Druze militia under Walid Jumblatt had taken control of over 50 Maronite villages, which were LF militia strongholds. The alliance with Syria restored the Druze militia's formidable strength. Walid Jumblatt's decision to ally with Syria yielded positive results. After the Taif Agreement ended the Lebanese Civil War in 1990, Walid Jumblatt became a member of parliament and a minister in the Lebanese government. The Progressive Socialist Party consistently secured parliamentary seats.

Walid Jumblatt's alliance with Syria shifted when Bashar al-Assad succeeded his father, Hafez al-Assad, as President of Syria in 1998. Bashar al-Assad formed closer ties with Amal and Hezbollah, two Shia Islamic political forces often opposed to Walid Jumblatt's political interests. This development disappointed Walid Jumblatt, prompting him to distance himself from Syria. Since then, Walid Jumblatt and the PSP became part of the political faction in Lebanon striving to eliminate Syrian influence. To achieve this goal, Walid Jumblatt even allied with the Gemayel family, leaders of the Kataeb Party, and his former enemies during the civil war. The effort to expel Syria from Lebanon materialized after the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005. That same year, the anti-Syrian political groups in Lebanon, including the PSP,

succeeded in driving Syria out of Lebanon. Walid Jumblatt proved to be an adept zaim, maintaining the Druze community's political influence. Like his grandfather and father before him, he demonstrated that although the Druze are a minority, they cannot be politically underestimated in Lebanon.

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