



The Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security

Israel's Stakes in Kabylia's Declaration of Independence

Kabylia's peaceful and institutionalized independence movement highlights the international double standard on self-determination, offering Israel a chance to reinforce norms linking statehood to legality, responsibility, and non-violence

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Executive Summary

On December 14, 2025, representatives of the Kabyle people will proclaim the independence of Kabylia at a public ceremony in Paris. This declaration represents the culmination of more than two decades of political mobilization, institutional consolidation, and legal advocacy undertaken by the Kabyle national movement,

principally through the Movement for the Self-Determination of Kabylia (MAK) and its government-in-exile (*Anavad*).

This policy paper argues that Israel should move beyond cautious observation and adopt principled political support, leading over time to diplomatic recognition, of Kabylia's claim to independence. Such a course aligns with Israel's historic periphery strategy, reinforces Israel's normative position on self-determination and political violence, and entails limited diplomatic cost. More broadly, it positions Israel as a state willing to support lawful, non-violent national liberation movements in the Middle East and North Africa.

The Kabylia issue is complex. It involves Morocco's internal Amazigh dynamics, Western reluctance to generate precedents in matters of secession, and the ever-present Palestinian context in which Israeli foreign policy is interpreted. These constraints, however, do not outweigh the strategic and normative rationale for Israeli engagement and eventual recognition. Rather, they underscore the importance of analytical clarity and policy leadership in an international environment marked by inconsistent application of norms and increasing tolerance of authoritarian repression.

Kabylia: An Authentic Nation and a Blocked Political Horizon

Kabylia is a mountainous region in northern Algeria inhabited predominantly by Amazigh (Berber) populations, estimated at between three and four million people. The Kabyles constitute a people in the sociological, cultural, and historical sense. They possess a distinct language, a continuous collective identity, shared historical experiences, and durable communal institutions, most notably the *tajmaât*, or traditional village assemblies based on deliberation and collective responsibility.

Following Algeria's independence in 1962, Kabylia was progressively marginalized within a centralized state model grounded in Arab nationalism and administrative uniformity. Over time, linguistic exclusion, political centralization, and suspicion of regional identity transformed Kabylia from a contributor to the anti-colonial struggle into a region viewed by the authorities as politically threatening.

The violent suppression of protests during the "Black Spring" of 2001 marked a critical turning point, profoundly eroding trust between Kabylia and the central state. Subsequent efforts to secure autonomy, decentralization, or constitutional recognition of Kabyle identity were consistently rejected. The designation of MAK as a terrorist organization in 2021, despite its declared commitment to non-violence, effectively eliminated remaining avenues for internal political expression.

From the standpoint of international norms, Kabylia therefore presents a clear case of denied internal self-determination, in which peaceful and institutional routes for political participation have been systematically closed.

Institutional Maturity and Representativeness

As with any national movement, Kabylia exhibits diversity of opinion regarding strategy and final political status. While support for cultural rights and resistance to Algerian centralism is broad, support for full independence has evolved over time and has been reinforced by sustained repression.

Significantly, the Kabyle movement has pursued an institutional rather than insurgent strategy. Since 2010, *Anavad* has functioned as a government-in-exile. A representative parliamentary body (*Imni*) was established in 2020, and a constitutional framework outlining a secular, democratic political system has been developed. This institutionalization distinguishes Kabylia from many self-determination claims and provides the basis for evolving political legitimacy.

For Israel, the relevant question is not whether MAK currently represents all Kabyles (a criterion seldom applied to comparable movements) but whether it demonstrates organizational continuity, internal coherence, and adherence to democratic and non-violent principles. On these measures, Kabylia compares favorably with movements that have received broader international engagement.

The Legal Case: Precedent-Consistent Self-Determination

Kabylia's independence claim is grounded in widely recognized principles of international law, including Article 1(2) of the United Nations Charter, General Assembly Resolutions 1514 and 2625, and the 2010 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice regarding Kosovo. The Court's opinion clarified that unilateral declarations of independence are not, in themselves, prohibited under international law.

The doctrine of remedial self-determination, invoked by Kabyle representatives, holds that when a people is systematically denied internal self-determination and subjected to sustained repression, recourse to external self-determination may become legally and politically justified. This reasoning has underpinned international responses in cases such as East Timor and South Sudan, even if applied cautiously and unevenly.

Israel has consistently emphasized that questions of sovereignty should be addressed through legality, process, and responsibility. Kabylia's non-violent, law-based approach aligns with these principles and therefore reinforces arguments Israel has advanced in other international contexts.

Strategic Rationale for Israeli Recognition

4.1 Updating Israel's Periphery Strategy

Israel's historic periphery strategy sought partnerships with non-Arab states and minority groups marginalized by dominant regional orders. The Abraham Accords have significantly enhanced Israel's regional integration, yet they have not eliminated the strategic relevance of peripheral actors that are secular, pro-Western, and opposed to political Islam.

Kabylia represents such an actor in North Africa. Its leadership articulates a secular and democratic vision, rejects political violence, and has expressed solidarity with Israel, including following the events of October 7, 2023. Kabyle representatives have also signaled interest in eventual participation in the Abraham Accords framework, indicating an external orientation aligned with regional cooperation rather than ideological confrontation.

Israeli recognition of Kabylia would thus constitute a contemporary adaptation of the periphery strategy, responding to post-Abraham Accords realities rather than reviving earlier frameworks in a mechanical manner.

4.2 Diplomatic Costs and Regional Considerations

The diplomatic costs associated with Israeli support for Kabylia are limited. Algeria already maintains a hostile posture toward Israel, including in multilateral forums, and recognition of Kabylia would not significantly alter this dynamic.

Morocco's position is more complex. Rabat has integrated Amazigh identity within a centralized political framework while maintaining opposition to separatism. It also competes strategically with Algeria. Israeli engagement with Kabylia would therefore require careful dialogue with Morocco, but Moroccan caution should not be assumed to translate into substantive opposition, particularly given the depth of Israel-Morocco strategic cooperation.

Europe, the United States, and Precedent Management in Western Policy

Western responses to claims of self-determination are not governed by a uniform doctrine, but by a combination of precedent sensitivity, regional stability concerns, and strategic interest. Kabylia falls into a category of cases that Western governments typically manage cautiously rather than resolve decisively.

5.1 France and the European Union: Risk Containment over Norm Enforcement

France's posture toward Kabylia is shaped by a dense matrix of historical, domestic, and strategic constraints. The legacy of the Algerian War of Independence continues to influence French political discourse, while a large Algerian-origin population within France heightens sensitivities around identity politics and potential radicalization. French security cooperation with Algeria, particularly in relation to the Sahel, and Algeria's role in Europe's energy diversification following the war in Ukraine further reinforce Paris's preference for stability and discretion.

Consequently, France treats Kabylia less as a normative claim than as a political variable requiring containment. Paris tolerates civil-society activity and parliamentary debate concerning Kabyle rights but avoids any step that could be perceived as endorsing independence. The result is a posture of managed ambiguity that prioritizes bilateral relations with Algiers over consistency in the application of self-determination norms.

The European Union broadly mirrors this approach. While EU institutions emphasize minority rights and cultural inclusion, they remain structurally reluctant to engage with external self-determination claims. This reluctance is compounded by Europe's own internal territorial challenges, from Catalonia to Scotland, which discourage the establishment of precedents that might reverberate domestically. In practice, EU policy privileges conflict avoidance over principled engagement.

5.2 The United States: Pragmatic Case-by-Case Assessment

The United States approaches self-determination claims through a pragmatic, interest-based framework, rather than through categorical support or rejection. U.S. policy has consistently avoided endorsing a general right to secession, while simultaneously recognizing that particular cases may warrant support under specific conditions.

Historically, Washington has supported independence or statehood claims when three criteria are substantially met: a. Sustained internal denial of political rights; b.

Disciplined reliance on non-violent or primarily political means; c. A reasonable expectation that independence would enhance, rather than undermine, regional stability.

This logic informed U.S. positions in cases such as Kosovo, South Sudan, and East Timor, each treated as distinct rather than as precedents to be universally replicated.

In the Kabylia case, Washington is unlikely to lead recognition efforts. Algeria is not a central U.S. strategic adversary, but neither is it a crucial partner. As a result, Kabylia does not register as a priority issue for U.S. policymakers. The default American posture is therefore one of observation rather than intervention.

However, U.S. restraint should not be misinterpreted as opposition. The United States has generally refrained from actively discouraging peaceful, institution-driven self-determination efforts, particularly when these efforts do not involve armed conflict or regional destabilization. Moreover, Washington has historically tolerated early recognition decisions by close allies when such decisions were framed as principled and carefully sequenced.

For Israel, this distinction matters. Israeli support for Kabylia, especially if articulated as phased, conditional, and grounded in legal reasoning, is unlikely to provoke serious friction with Washington. On the contrary, such an approach would be interpreted within the familiar American logic of case-by-case assessment rather than as a challenge to territorial integrity norms.

5.3 Implications for Israeli Policy Coordination with Washington

Israeli recognition of Kabylia would not require American endorsement to be strategically viable. However, it would benefit from prior consultation and transparent framing. Emphasizing Kabylia's non-violent strategy, institutional development, and civic orientation would align Israeli messaging with U.S. normative preferences.

Additionally, situating Kabylia within the broader context of post-Abraham Accords regional integration, rather than framing it as an isolated secessionist episode, would resonate with U.S. strategic priorities focused on stability, normalization, and countering extremist ideologies.

In this sense, U.S. policy does not constitute a veto on Israeli initiative. Rather, it sets parameters within which Israel can act confidently, provided that its actions are legally grounded, strategically coherent, and diplomatically prepared.

The Palestinian Context and the Normative Asymmetry

Any analysis of self-determination in the Middle East intersects with the Palestinian issue. This intersection should be addressed analytically rather than rhetorically.

A clear asymmetry exists in international engagement: Palestinian statehood receives widespread rhetorical support despite unresolved questions of governance, internal fragmentation, and extensive reliance on political violence. Kabylia, by contrast, presents a coherent national identity, structured political institutions, and a consistent commitment to non-violent methods, yet attracts limited international attention.

This pattern reflects a persistent international double standard in the application of self-determination norms, in which violent movements generate sustained diplomatic engagement while law-abiding, institutionalized claims remain marginal. This asymmetry shapes incentives in ways that are counterproductive to long-term stability.

For Israel, supporting Kabylia would reinforce the principle that self-determination should be linked to responsibility, legality, and peaceful conduct. Recognition of Kabylia would therefore strengthen, rather than undermine, Israel's normative positioning in relation to Palestinian unilateralism.

Policy Implications and Recommendation

Israeli policy toward Kabylia should proceed toward a clearly articulated objective. Initial declarations of political support for Kabylia's right to self-determination, grounded in international law and conditioned on non-violence and democratic governance, should be followed, subject to ongoing institutional consolidation, by diplomatic recognition.

Such a policy would:

- Reinforce Israel's strategic narrative as a supporter of minorities and non-Arab peoples;
- Provide incentives for non-violent political behavior;
- Highlight inconsistencies in international practice regarding self-determination;
- Potentially establish a future pro-Western partner in North Africa

Complexity warrants careful sequencing, not indecision.

Conclusion

After more than two years of intense conflict and sustained diplomatic pressure, Israel finds itself operating largely in a reactive foreign-policy posture. Much of Israel's diplomatic energy since October 2023 has been devoted to defending its legitimacy, rebutting accusations, and containing political damage in international forums. While this defensive effort has been necessary, it is inherently limiting. Over time, perpetual defensive diplomacy narrows strategic horizons and cedes agenda-setting power to others.

At this juncture, Israel has a clear interest in regaining diplomatic initiative, not through rhetorical escalation, but through strategic innovation. This requires identifying opportunities where Israel can proactively shape norms, redefine debates, and demonstrate leadership consistent with its values and long-term interests. Kabylia's declaration of independence presents such an opportunity.

By supporting and ultimately recognizing Kabylia, Israel would shift from reacting to international pressures to setting its own diplomatic agenda. Rather than contesting unfavorable frameworks imposed by others, Israel would advance a positive, coherent perspective on self-determination, one grounded in peaceful political action, institutional maturity, and legal argumentation. This would not merely defend Israel's position *ex post*; it would reframe the terms of discussion *ex ante*.

Kabylia offers a rare convergence of strategic and normative considerations. It embodies a non-violent national movement in the Middle East and North Africa that explicitly rejects political Islam, articulates a civic and secular vision, and seeks integration into regional frameworks such as the Abraham Accords. Supporting such a movement allows Israel to demonstrate that its approach to self-determination is principled rather than selective, and that peaceful pathways are more likely to earn international engagement than coercion or violence.

Supporting Kabylia's declaration of independence would reflect a transition from diplomatic defensiveness to strategic initiative. After years in which Israel has been compelled to explain itself, counter pressures, and respond to others' agendas, Kabylia provides an opportunity to lead and initiate.