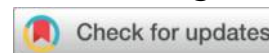




Randon's Campaign in Kabylia: a Case Study of French Colonial Violence in Algeria



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Received: 01/04/2026

Accepted: 02/08/2026

Published: 20/09/2026

Abstract

This article examines General Jacques-Louis Randon's 1857 campaign in the Kabylia region, viewing it as a pivotal moment in the trajectory of French military expansion in Algeria. The study begins by briefly introducing Randon and his role in shaping colonial policy, then outlines the situation in Kabylia prior to the campaign—a period characterized by limited French influence, the cohesion of tribal confederations (*arouch*), and the difficulty of penetrating the mountainous terrain. It further details the preparations preceding the operation—ranging from troop mobilization to the identification of strategic locations—and describes the course of the campaign itself, which relied on encircling the Djurdjura Mountains and the simultaneous advance of military columns to subdue key tribal centers. Finally, the article analyzes the campaign's impact on the region, establishing the 1857 expedition as a turning point in the history of Kabylia and the progression of French colonial control.

Keywords: Randon, Kabylia, colonial policy, 1857 campaign.

Introduction

General Jacques Randon's 1857 campaign against the Kabylie region stands as a pivotal event that clearly reveals the nature of French colonial policy in Algeria during the nineteenth century—a policy characterized by systematic violence, widespread repression, and direct targeting of the indigenous population's social and economic structures. Representing the final stage in the subjugation of these formidable mountainous areas, the campaign was the culmination of a long period of military expansion pursued by France since the occupation began in 1830—an expansion grounded in the principle of subduing both the land and the people to establish the foundations of a comprehensive colonial system.

The significance of studying this campaign lies in its revelation of the genocidal dimension inherent in French military operations—manifested through the systematic destruction of villages and hamlets, the burning of crops and property, the displacement of populations, and the mass confiscation of land. These practices were not merely situational reactions but integral parts of a colonial strategy aimed at dismantling the social fabric of the Kabyle tribes and stripping the local community of its means of

resistance, livelihood, and independence. This was accompanied by the use of brutal military tactics—including sieges, starvation, surprise raids, and the deployment of specialized mountain warfare units—making Randon’s campaign a telling example of the organized nature of colonial violence.

The subject gains further depth through an examination of Randon himself—one of the key architects of French military policy in Algeria during this era—and through an analysis of the unique characteristics of the Kabylie region, which served as a theater of sustained resistance thanks to its cohesive social structure and rugged terrain. This analysis sheds light on the reasons behind the French leadership’s insistence on subjugating the region, the mechanisms employed to achieve this, and the resulting consequences.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to provide an in-depth examination of Randon’s 1857 campaign in the Kabylie region. It explores General Randon’s background and military career, his role in shaping colonial policy, the preparations for the campaign, its execution, and the factors that contributed to its success.

Ultimately, the study seeks to demonstrate how Randon’s campaign epitomized French colonial violence, served as a pivotal milestone in the subjugation of Algeria, and acted as a watershed event that reshaped life in the Kabylie region during the second half of the nineteenth century.

1. Profile of General Randon

General Jacques-Louis-César-Alexandre Randon—known as Marshal Count Randon—was one of the most prominent French military commanders of the nineteenth century. He hailed from a distinguished Protestant family long established in the town of Ganges (in the Gard department), a lineage that persists to this day. Born in Grenoble on March 25, 1795, (1) he grew up in an environment deeply connected to France’s political and intellectual life. He had two notable uncles in the Dauphiné region: Barnave, an orator and politician who sought to reconcile the French Revolution with the monarchy and paid with his life for his moderate stance; and Marchand, a high-ranking officer in Napoleon’s army whose renown rivaled that of the marshals. Although Randon was not a contemporary of Barnave, he continued to regard his uncle’s legacy as a symbol of the balance between liberty and order. His uncle Marchand left a profound mark on his development, treating him like an adopted son and accompanying him throughout his military career. Marchand was originally a lawyer, but the Prussian invasion of the Champagne region drove him to enlist as a volunteer; he commanded a reconnaissance battalion of the 4th Isère Regiment and earned a widespread reputation for courage and integrity, becoming, in effect, Randon’s first mentor. (2)

In 1812, at the age of sixteen, Randon left his studies and voluntarily enlisted in the 93rd Infantry Regiment—part of his uncle Marchand’s division—joining him in Warsaw. Thanks to his enthusiasm and competence, he was promoted to sergeant on April 11, 1812. He participated in the Battle of Borodino (Moskova), displaying exceptional bravery that earned him a promotion to second lieutenant in Moscow on October 12, 1812. He endured the hardships of the Great Retreat from Russia without faltering, sustained by his mental and physical resilience.

(3)

Randon continued fighting in 1813 as a lieutenant and aide-de-camp to his uncle, participating in the battles of Lützen, Bautzen, and Leipzig; he was wounded by gunfire twice but refused to leave the battlefield. On November 28, 1813, he was promoted to captain and continued his duties with the *Chasseurs de la Meuse* regiment. During the general withdrawal from Moscow to the Rhine, Marchand assumed command of the 7th Military Division and organized the general mobilization in the Isère region. Despite the public exhaustion resulting from prolonged wars, he managed to recruit new troops and defeated the Austrians near Chambéry before being forced to retreat to Grenoble to defend it.(4)

He gained further experience between 1815 and 1830 while holding the rank of captain; in 1838, he was appointed colonel commanding the 2nd Regiment of African Chasseurs in Oran. Not only did he develop his regiment during various campaigns, but he also sought to implement the concept of military colonization advocated by Bugeaud.(5)

General Randon was considered one of the prominent French military commanders associated with the policy of military and settler expansion in Algeria during the first half of the nineteenth century. He arrived in Algeria in 1838 and participated in most military campaigns between 1838 and 1847, thereby gaining extensive experience in warfare tactics against the Algerians.(6)

The report prepared by Randon regarding the agricultural activities undertaken by the 2nd Regiment of African Chasseurs between 1839 and 1840—along with the accompanying memorandum on methods for establishing organized military colonies—earned special praise from the Minister of War, Marshal Soult. Following his appointment as Field Marshal in Bône in September 1841, Randon continued to apply the same principles: pacification through military campaigns and support for the colonial project via works linked to the military establishment. When he left Bône upon his promotion to Lieutenant General in April 1847, his departure was met with widespread regret; the experience he had gained during his long tenure in North Africa had provided him with valuable expertise that he would later leverage in higher-ranking positions. After the Revolution of 1848, he became Director of Algerian Affairs at the Ministry of War and subsequently commanded the Metz Division, before being appointed Minister of War in January 1851. (7)

However, he was dismissed from that post in October of the same year; in an effort to appease him and acknowledge his standing, he was appointed Governor-General of Algeria. He was granted broad powers to implement his projects, which aimed to expand the scope of French settlement and consolidate control over the interior regions. (8)

During his tenure, Randon led two major military campaigns: the first in 1853 against the region spanning Sétif, Béjaïa, and Jijel, and the second in 1857 against Greater Kabylia. The latter campaign is considered the pinnacle of his military activity in Algeria and his most significant achievement from the perspective of French colonial policy. His name was long preserved in the urban memory of Algiers; a street in the Lower Casbah bore his name—Rue Randon—until 1962, and some elderly residents still refer to it by that name today (9).

He later served as Minister of War between 1867 and 1870, reflecting his prominent status within the military administration of the Second French Empire (10).

In general, Marshal Randon shares certain similarities with Bugeaud—not in terms of personality, but regarding ideas and actions. However, he is far less famous than his predecessor, as he did not achieve victory in Algeria over formidable adversaries like Emir Abdelkader, nor did he face the fierce attacks in France that Bugeaud had to contend with (11).

2. The Occupation of the Kabylie Region Prior to Randon's 1857 Campaign

General Thomas Robert Bugeaud played a pioneering role in paving the way for French control over Algeria during the second decade of the occupation. He laid the initial foundations for a military and administrative policy based on the "scorched earth" principle and the subjugation of tribes through force and collective punishment. However, this colonial project was not fully realized until the third decade, when General Jacques Louis Randon assumed leadership of the general administration of Algeria. He worked to carry forward Bugeaud's course through intensive campaigns in the Greater Kabylie region, seeking to consolidate the French presence and subdue the remaining centers of Algerian resistance (12). In April 1844, Marshal Bugeaud resumed the military campaign he had been planning for two years against the Iflissen tribes. The campaign lasted from April 27 to May 25, during which the French army succeeded in securing the Sebaou Valley; Bugeaud established his camp at

Tadmit (which came to be known as *Le camp du Maréchal*). Following the surrender of the Iflissen tribes, French forces moved to subdue the inhabitants of the Sebaou Valley, which had become a strategic launchpad for the invasion of the entire Greater Kabylia region. From the Tadmit camp, French officers used telescopes to monitor the tribes' key defensive positions, which stretched from Feraoun—near Draâ Ben Khedda—to Mount Sidi Ali Bounab (13).

After the fall of Lower Amraoua (referring to a tribal settlement in Greater Kabylia, located east of Tizi Ouzou between the Sebaou and Dellys areas) (14),

it became clear that Bugeaud's next objective was to subdue Upper Amraoua. This area was under the leadership of Belkacem Ouacassi, alongside Ahmed Tayeb Ben Salem—Emir Abdelkader's *khalifa* (deputy) in the region. In September of that same year, preparations were made for a new campaign led by General Comman. The force set out from Dellys on the morning of September 28 toward Bordj Sebaou. On September 30, the troops passed through Sebt El-Qadim (near Draâ Ben Khedda), Ouled Boukhalfa, and Bordj Tizi Ouzou, continuing to the confluence of the Oued Aïssi and Oued Sebaou rivers. The campaign's objective was to reach Tamda, the seat of the Ouacassi family; the French army succeeded in storming the location on October 2 and destroying it completely, while also burning Belkacem Ouacassi's farms and mills near Mekla. (15)

French forces continued their advance toward the Jumaa Saharij center; however, a delegation of local notables took the initiative to negotiate in order to avert the destruction of their village. By October 6, General Comman believed the region had come fully under colonial authority.

Following the defeat French forces suffered at the hands of the Kabylie resistance—specifically the Ath Ouaguenoun, Iflissen El-Bahar, and Ath Djennad tribes led by Belkacem Ouqassi—Marshal Bugeaud decided to launch a massive campaign to definitively crush the resistance. On October 22, 1844, his ships docked at the port of Dellys; from there, occupation forces advanced into Ath Ouaguenoun territory, employing intimidation and a show of force to compel the tribes to submit. Faced with this overwhelming military superiority, tribal leaders and influential figures were forced to surrender, realizing the impossibility of withstanding the French war machine. Consequently, Bugeaud appointed new, loyal leaders over the Ath Djennad and Iflissen El-Bahar tribes, aiming to tighten control over the region and weaken the spirit of resistance within it. (16)

On July 23, 1845, Bugeaud led a second campaign into the Sebaou Valley to reinforce General Gentil's troops. He established his camp in the Stita Valley before launching an attack on the Ath Aïssa Mimoun tribes on the 26th of the same month, employing a scorched-earth policy that devastated villages and farms. Consequently, the Ath Ouaguenoun clan was forced to surrender on July 27, while Commander Ben Salem withdrew to Ath Irathen; Bugeaud issued a stern ultimatum to the latter, threatening reprisals if they continued to support the resistance. Having achieved his military objectives, Bugeaud left the region and returned to Algiers. (17)

These campaigns concluded on February 22, 1846. Roughly a year later, in January 1847, tribal leaders held a decisive meeting to discuss the future of the resistance, agreeing to cease hostilities and propose terms of surrender. On February 28, 1847, Ben Salem surrendered to Marshal Bugeaud at Sour El-Ghozlane (18), while Belkacem Ouqassi was appointed leader of the most prominent clans of the Djurdjura region—a move intended to win him over and secure the area's loyalty. (19) In this context, it is worth recalling the circular issued by Marshal Bugeaud on May 8, 1846—which reflects the commander's shrewdness—in which he wrote: "Circumstances require me to remind you of what I have repeatedly stated, both in writing and orally: that even in times of complete peace, all our forces and resources must be in a state of readiness and deployment as if we were in a period of intense warfare—specifically, the time when Emir Abdelkader was capable of mobilizing 12,000 to 15,000 men. For war could resume at any moment due to a sudden uprising across the country or a significant

part of it. If we were to be scattered and poorly supplied at such a time, we would offer the enemy numerous opportunities to inflict defeat upon us—an outcome that would entail grave material and moral consequences." (20)

3. Preparations Preceding Randon's Campaign in the Kabylie Region

During the Second Empire, the military regained its influence in Algeria under the leadership of General Randon (21), who was appointed Governor-General of Algeria.

On December 11, 1851, he issued orders to strike at the rebellion in the Djurdjura region, focusing on subjugating the Kabyle tribes (22). Earlier, upon his appointment as Minister of War in January 1851—and while working to reorganize the army in Paris—he had issued a decree in May to dispatch a campaign to the Lesser Kabylie region under the command of General Saint-Arnaud. The objective was twofold: to demonstrate that the fall of Louis-Philippe had not altered French policy toward the indigenous population, and to maintain the combat readiness of troops accustomed to hardship in anticipation of a potential European war. (23)

These orders were part of a plan to complete the occupation of Algeria securely. The occupation of the Djurdjura region and the Sahara was a priority for Randon (24), who had devised a campaign plan and presented it to the Minister of War immediately upon his appointment as Governor-General of Algeria. Although the campaign was originally scheduled for 1852, it was postponed twice for various reasons. (25)

After a period of relative calm in the Greater Kabylia region between 1848 and 1850, General Barral was killed in 1850 during a confrontation with the Beni Hamel tribes. Subsequently, Bou Baghla ignited a widespread uprising in 1851, calling for *Jihad* and threatening French influence in the area. Despite the Governor-General's request for permission to attack the tribes, the proposal was rejected; instead, he was limited to assembling a force of 8,000 men to support allied chieftains and extend French control toward Jijel. With the outbreak of the Eastern War in 1854 and the withdrawal of some French troops to Europe, Bou Baghla seized the opportunity to renew his call for *Jihad*. However, Marshal Randon acted swiftly, dispatching two divisions—commanded by MacMahon and Simon—from Algiers and Constantine toward the region situated between Dellys and Béjaïa. French forces occupied the territory of the Beni Yahia and subjugated the tribes located between the Sebaou River, Dellys, and Béjaïa. (26)

In 1853, Bou-Baghla's resistance persisted despite the hardships and the ferocity of certain battles, taking the form of lightning raids and ambushes against French forces. Governor-General Randon decided to invade the Djurdjura region, enlisting additional troops and relying on the assistance of local figures—such as Ben Ali Cherif and Belkacem Oukaci—who supported Bou-Baghla. Randon personally planned the offensive, dispatching two military units: the first set out from Oued Sahel and the second from Draâ El Mizan. They converged at Beni Yahia in the heart of Djurdjura, then united to attack and crush the resistance strongholds. (27)

In May 1854, General Randon launched a massive offensive against the Kabylie region, supported by forces arriving from Constantine under the command of MacMahon and from Algiers under Cavaignac. The plan called for these armies to rendezvous at Tizi Ouzou following the complete subjugation of the region. (28)

The first Kabyle areas brought under colonial control were Dellys and Béjaïa on the coast, followed by Beni Mansour and Draâ El Mizan, and subsequently Sour El-Ghozlane. Consequently, the Kabylie region became encircled on all sides—east, west, south, and north—by French military concentrations. However, the courage of the local population and the rugged terrain exacted a heavy price from Bugeaud; Marshal Randon acknowledged this, stating: "We have done much to confront the resistance of the natives, yet we remain far from fully subduing them." (29)

Upon his appointment as Governor-General of Algeria on December 11, 1851, General Randon resolved to launch a military campaign against the Djurdjura Mountains, believing that the subjugation of Algeria could not be complete without controlling the Kabylie region and the Sahara. He adopted the motto "occupation at any cost," drawing inspiration from his predecessor Bugeaud's approach—which relied on a scorched-earth policy, internment camps, and exile. As the violence of French forces escalated, popular resistance intensified—compounded by the fact that a portion of the French army was occupied fighting alongside the Turks in the Crimean War—prompting Randon to insist on the definitive elimination of resistance pockets in Djurdjura and the total pacification of the region.(30)

Randon finally succeeded in persuading Napoleon III to mobilize a major campaign to open the key passes leading to the peaks of the Djurdjura range—via Tirourda to Aïn Sebtî, and thence to Arbaâ Nath Irathen towards the Sebaou Valley. (31) While Sergeant Wolff was engaged in battles against the Ath Ghobri, Randon was preparing his forces for a confrontation in the Djurdjura; throughout May, French troops poured into Tizi Ouzou in preparation for occupying the Upper Kabylie region, with specific missions assigned to the units on May 31. (32) The French military force comprised approximately forty thousand combatants drawn from the provinces of Algiers, Oran, and Constantine. In a letter dated May 26, 1854, Randon clearly outlined the campaign's objectives: first, to pursue and punish the Beni Djennad tribe—which had supported Cherif Boubaghla—"as an example to others"; and second, to exert pressure on the tribes situated on the right bank of the Sebaou River, stretching from Idjeur to Zerkhfaoua on the coast. He noted the mobilization of eight regiments from the Algiers province, which were to assemble at Mekla, and another seven regiments from Constantine, which would enter via Ksar Bekkouche. It was evident that the campaign's overarching goal was the subjugation and pacification of the Kabylie region—and the Beni Djennad tribe in particular; consequently, forces were bolstered by the deployment of additional units from Oran and Algiers under the command of General Camus, while reinforcements from Constantine arrived under the command of General MacMahon. (33)

A series of military campaigns against parts of the Kabylie region—situated between Dellys and Béjaïa—began in June 1854; Souk El Sebt was secured on June 16 with the support of divisions from Algiers and Constantine. Despite the rugged terrain of the Ath Bouchaib and Ath Yahia areas, they held immense strategic importance; controlling them allowed for the monitoring of all routes and served as a decisive launching point for the complete occupation of the Djurdjura mountain range. (34) However, 1855 and 1856 saw renewed unrest, as the Beni Arraten, Beni Aknoun, and El Kachtouna tribes led sporadic rebellions that went unpunished due to a lack of available troops. (35)

In March 1856, Governor-General Jacques Louis César Alexandre de Randon ordered General de Trouville to proceed to Tizi Ouzou with instructions for General Deligny. In these directives, Randon clarified that the primary objective of the military maneuvers was to occupy the entire Kabylie region and bring it under French authority. As part of this framework, he decided to relocate the district headquarters from Tizi Ouzou to Dellys and designate the Amraoua area as the new Tizi Ouzou district—a move reflecting his intent to reorganize the colonial administration in a manner that served the French expansionist agenda in the region. (36)

At the beginning of 1857, Marshal Randon decided to launch a major campaign to definitively crush the resistance. He mobilized 35,000 regular troops alongside Arab auxiliaries and tribal allies. His meticulously crafted plan involved three main divisions tasked with entering the Greater Kabylia region from the north via the Sebaou Valley near Tizi Ouzou, supported by three observation columns stationed at Draâ El Mizan, Beni Mansour, and Tazmalt. A fourth division, comprising 5,000 soldiers, was deployed at the Chellata Pass, alongside pro-French Kabyle battalions that fought using their own distinctive tactics. (37)

4. Randon's Campaign in the Kabylia Region

Marshal Randon commanded a substantial, well-trained force and believed the time was ripe to definitively conquer the Greater Kabylia region (the Djurdjura Mountains). He presented his plan to the Emperor, proposing a major campaign aimed at the region's total subjugation.

Although General Vaillant—the Minister of War at the time—did not oppose Randon's project, he expressed certain reservations. He warned that the operation would be long and arduous—far more difficult than even those familiar with the Djurdjura Mountains and the fierce Kabyle resistance there anticipated. In his letter, he stated, "Conquering Kabylia is akin to a siege that must be conducted step by step; every position captured must be held by the army, with no possibility of retreat." (38)

Randon shared this view; he rejected any notion of retreat and insisted on an immediate offensive, confident in the high caliber of his troops. To secure the Emperor's approval, he traveled personally to Paris and succeeded in his mission; he returned to Algeria bearing authorization for the military campaign, alongside the decree of April 8, 1857, which mandated the construction of railway lines in Algeria. Randon received an enthusiastic welcome following this dual success.

At the time, the conquest of the Greater Kabylia region (Djurdjura) was considered a strategic project of paramount importance to the colonial authorities. (39)

Marshal Randon faced two primary challenges in his plan to conquer Greater Kabylia (the mountainous Djurdjura region):

First, the region's harsh geography; it was rugged and mountainous, making traversal difficult and forcing the French army to carve roads through steep slopes in order to advance.

Second, the martial nature of the local population—the Amazigh tribes—who possessed significant firepower estimated at around 30,000 rifles distributed among various tribes, as follows:

- * Beni Feraoussen, Beni Krelil, Beni Zellal, and Beni Bouchaib: approximately 2,600 rifles.
- * Beni Thouragh, Ilitene, and Illoula Oumalou: approximately 4,000 rifles.
- * Beni Bouyoucef, Beni Yahia, and Beni Menguellet: approximately 3,600 rifles.
- * Beni Attaf and Al-Aqbil: approximately 1,500 rifles.
- * Beni Raten: 4,300 rifles.
- * Beni Ouacif, Beni Bouakkache, Beni Yenni, and Beni Boudrar: approximately 4,600 rifles.
- * Al-Wadir, Bani Ahmad, Ait Shabla, Ait Irqan, and Bani Bushnasha: 5,100 rifles.
- * Al-Qashtula: 3,400 rifles.

This brings the total to approximately 29,100 rifles, according to the memoirs of Marshal Randon himself—memoirs which also indicate that neighboring tribes were prepared to provide support and assistance, contributing an additional 5,000 to 6,000 rifles.

In other words, the tribes' defensive force amounted to approximately 35,000 armed fighters, determined to resist the French occupation to the very end and taking advantage of their "rugged and difficult" mountainous terrain. (40)

In early May 1857, Governor-General Randon organized a new invasion force in Tizi Ouzou with the aim of occupying the Djurdjura Kabylie region; he dispatched three corps led by MacMahon, Renault, and Yusuf (41). Amidst growing conviction within French circles regarding the necessity of the complete and explicit annexation of the Kabylie region, a total French force of 35,000 soldiers arrived in Tizi Ouzou on May 17, 1857 (42),

accompanied by several thousand local auxiliaries to wage this decisive campaign (Carrey, 1994, p. 9) (43).

Randon issued orders to advance toward the Djurdjura highlands, paving the way for establishing final control over the region (Carrey, 1887, p. 200) (44).

These forces positioned themselves at the confluence of the Oued Aïssi and Oued Sebaou rivers, awaiting the signal to launch the attack on the Aït Iraten territory. Randon personally took command of the operation and designated May 24—coinciding with Eid al-Fitr—as the date for the assault; on that day, the Aït Iraten stronghold fell (45). The Aït Iraten tribe attempted, albeit in vain, to halt the French advance. Fierce battles ensued, resulting in the loss of approximately sixty French soldiers, while tribal fatalities were estimated at around 400 fighters. Ultimately, the Aït Iraten tribe sought to surrender; the Governor-General accepted this on specific terms, including recognition of French authority, payment of a war levy, and the handing over of hostages. The submission of the Aït Iraten led to the surrender of the tribes allied with their confederation—namely the Beni Feraoussen, Beni Khalil, and Beni Bouchaïb. ...Beni Dawla and Beni Mahmoud. (46)

Upon learning of this heroic resistance, General Lallemand sent a letter to Colonel Marshal on May 25th, stating:

"I congratulate you on the success of the night of the 21st, and please convey my congratulations to your brave little garrison. You have undoubtedly understood the objective I have pursued since leaving Algiers: I saved the Mitidja, which was under serious threat; then I lifted the siege of Tizi Ouzou and subdued the right bank of the Sebaou Valley, while awaiting the reinforcements necessary to wage the major battle to break the siege surrounding you. These reinforcements and the large supply convoy will arrive soon. I ask you to hold out for another eight days until I secure the lines of communication by subduing the Maatqa and Beni Aïssa. I will commence operations as quickly as possible. Stand firm as you have done so far; you are writing a new, glorious page in the history of the war in Africa." (47)

On June 14th, Randon laid the foundation stone for a formidable fort to assert the French presence in the region, naming it **Fort Napoléon** (48). He declared to his troops that this fort would symbolize the conquest of Kabylia, asserting that the 1857 campaign would be regarded as one of the most significant chapters in the history of the French army in Africa. (49)

On June 15th, French forces—led by Generals Lallemand and Randon—continued their advance toward the foothills of the Aït Irathen mountains. Lallemand took up positions facing Taxebt and Souk El-Ahad, while Randon confronted the Sidi Haloui area. Following intense artillery bombardment, Colonel Barachin advanced and stormed the Taxebt position, while the crossfire from Lallemand's and Randon's artillery systematically destroyed Souk El-Ahad. The resistance fighters withdrew after fierce resistance, and the French seized the area.

Two French forces advanced—the first led by Lallemand through the village of Adni, and the second led by Randon toward Iril Djafri—amidst heavy fire from the Kabyle fighters, who defended their positions ferociously. After grueling battles, the villages of Adni, Tala Amara, and Iril Djafri, along with the Toundja hills, fell to the French, enabling them to control all positions overlooking Fort Napoleon.

On the morning of June 16, the French garrison inside the fort launched two simultaneous attacks: the first led by Colonel Marshal toward Imaïnsaren, and the second by Commandant Raviz toward Aghoumoun. After about an hour of fierce fighting, both villages were burned and captured. (50)

However, French forces suffered the loss of thirty-three officers and soldiers who fell while defending the fort. (51)

Another major battle took place at Icheriden on June 24, 1857, where Kabyle battalions—comprising 4,000 to 5,000 men—had dug defensive fortifications in preparation for the confrontation. French forces, led by Generals Bourbaki and MacMahon, attacked their positions, and the village fell that same day. (52)

This battle was considered a pivotal engagement of the campaign. In a dispatch dated June 26, 1857, sent from the Sidi El-Hassan camp in the Beni Djenni region, Randon reported to his command on the

success of French forces—led by Generals Renault and Yusuf—in capturing the villages of Beni Djenni without significant losses. He highlighted the decisive role played by General MacMahon in the occupation of the village of Icheriden, which he described as one of... It was their finest battle in terms of the intensity of the resistance, the size of the enemy force, and the ferocity of the assault. (53) Randon also described it in his memoirs as a decisive battle, characterizing it as "a glorious battle for MacMahon's division, and one of the fiercest battles fought in Africa..." (54)

On June 30, the second line of defense at Agmoun Izem collapsed, and the Ath Irathen tribe surrendered. Unable to halt the French advance, the inhabitants of Ath Yenni, Ath Menguellet, and Ath Boudrar were compelled to surrender their weapons. Sidi Seddik ben Aarab was arrested, while the resistance leaders Sidi Djoudi and Sidi Hadj Amar surrendered on July 8. (55)

In his memoirs, Marshal Randon confirms that the subjugation of the Djurdjura region reached a decisive stage in July 1857, as several tribes—including the Beni Yettouragh, Ilitene, Illoula Oumalou, and Beni Hidjar—declared their submission to French authority and pledged obedience to the French army. He also noted that military operations extended to tribes situated on the southern slopes of the Djurdjura Mountains—such as the Beni Khemis, Chorfa, Beni Ouagour, and Beni Melikeche—which had been among the last to resist French control.

Randon recounts that the French army employed a strategy of encirclement and simultaneous attack; on July 10, he directed forces drawn from the Beni Boudrar tribes to attack the Beni Melikeche from the heights, while tasking columns stationed in the Soummam Valley with attacking from the mountain's base, thereby subjecting them to a pincer movement. Faced with this situation, the Beni Melikeche tribe offered no significant resistance; instead, they hastened to sue for surrender, offering hostages and declaring their advance acceptance of all terms imposed by the French authorities.

Randon concludes that, as of July 12, 1857, there remained no tribe or village in the entire Greater Kabylia region that had not submitted to French authority or felt the weight of its arms, expressing his conviction that this submission would be permanent. He further notes that a number of tribal leaders whose influence threatened regional stability—such as Hadj Omar, Cheikh el-Arab, Si Djoudi, Lalla Fatma, and her brother Si Mohamed Tayeb—were compelled to seek safe conduct and surrender unconditionally, subsequently being removed from the region as threats to the colonial order. (56)

The mistake committed by the tribes may have been waiting for the French in their own positions; it was difficult to imagine the Governor-General reaching the Djurdjura heights and returning without achieving a total victory. Nevertheless, the tribes possessed limited means to confront these invaders. Given the complete annexation of Algerian territory—with the exception of the desert regions—and the disparity in military power between the tribal resistance and French forces, the fate of the tribes was never in doubt; yet, the population remained faithful to their traditions and demonstrated a fierce commitment to their independence using whatever means were available to them.

5. The Campaign's Impact on the Region

Following the conclusion of this campaign, which lasted more than two months, the forces returned on July 26. According to statistics provided by Robin, the campaign inflicted heavy losses on the French ranks, amounting to 286 dead and 1,032 wounded, while the number of sick personnel sent to the hospital in the capital reached 2,458(57). With this operation, the entire Djurdjura region was brought under French authority. Notably, after establishing Fort Napoléon, Randon appointed Major Bicho as its commander; the fort subsequently became the headquarters of a new district, replacing the area's previous administrative affiliation with the Tizi Ouzou district. This new district comprised the following tribes: Beni Yrathen, Beni Menguellet, Beni Yahia, Beni Bou Youcef, Beni Yettouragh, and Beni Yelliten. Meanwhile, the tribes of Illoula Oumalou, Beni Zikki, Beni Yadjare, and Oued El Hammam were transferred from the Tizi Ouzou district to the Béjaïa district, while the tribes of Beni

Melikeche, Bahlil, and Beni Hamdoun were attached to the Bordj Bou Arreridj district. Under a decree issued on March 29, 1861, the tribes of Akbil, Beni Yenni, Beni Attaf, Beni Boudrar, Beni Ouacif, and Beni Bouakkache were transferred from Draâ El Mizan to the Fort Napoléon district. Furthermore, a decree dated May 12, 1862, attached the tribes of Beni Yadjare, Beni Zikki, and Illoula Oumalou—previously under the Béjaïa district—to Fort Napoléon (58).

The success of Marshal Randon's campaign is attributed to a series of well-planned measures, such as the strength of the French army, the abundance of diverse supplies, and the exploitation of internal tribal divisions. Military arrangements also played a crucial role, including the deployment of troops in a circular formation, the execution of simultaneous attacks, the avoidance of retreat under fire from resisting tribes, and the construction of roads to secure supply lines for the French army. (59)

French forces viewed the Djurdjura Mountains and the Kabylie region as symbols of staunch resistance and the final bastions of opposition to French colonialism. The colonial command considered subduing this region a prerequisite for achieving security and stability in Algeria, fearing that any external support or religious incitement could ignite a widespread uprising against the French presence. (60)

Following the establishment of military control, the colonial administration began imposing a new taxation system in Kabylie, replacing traditional **Zakat** and tithes with the **Lazma** (a per-capita tax) in an effort to integrate the region into the French financial system. French authorities struggled to subjugate the tribes of Jijel and Collo—which had never previously submitted to any authority, including that of the Regency of Algiers—due to their rugged mountainous terrain and remoteness from centers of power; historically, tax collection in these areas had relied on force or subterfuge, as noted by an Ottoman official. (61)

Nevertheless, following the 1857 campaign, the French administration decided to extend the **Lazma** system to the entirety of Kabylie, adopting the tent or the **douar** (hamlet) as the unit for tax assessment based on each tribe's proximity to administrative centers. This measure marked a pivotal step in integrating Kabylie into the French fiscal framework, transforming the relationship between the local population and the authorities from one of tribal allegiance to one of direct administrative and economic subjugation to colonial rule. (62)

Conclusion

A study of General Randon's 1857 campaign in the Kabylie region reveals that it was far more than a mere ad hoc military operation; it marked a decisive phase in the French penetration of one of the areas most resistant to occupation. By examining Randon's background and career, alongside the situation of the Kabyle tribes prior to the campaign, it becomes evident that the French military project was the culmination of a long series of failed attempts to breach the mountainous terrain and dismantle the cohesion of the tribal confederations. Furthermore, a review of the meticulous preparations preceding the operation highlights the importance the colonial administration attached to subjugating this region, which served as the final bastion of organized resistance.

The 1857 campaign enabled the French army to shift the balance of power within Kabylie by seizing strategic locations, dismantling traditional structures, and establishing a new administrative system—thereby paving the way for a deeper phase of economic and social domination. Although resistance did not cease entirely, the campaign represented a pivotal turning point that fractured the political and social fabric of the Kabyle tribes and laid the foundations for colonial control in the years that followed. Thus, it is clear that Randon's campaign was not merely a military move to eliminate a "pocket of resistance," but rather part of a comprehensive colonial project aimed at reshaping the region through the logic of force and hegemony. This makes the study of the campaign essential for understanding the transformations experienced by the Kabyle tribes during the nineteenth century.

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