

Abu Dhabi's claims on three Iranian islands An instrument of Building a UAE Arab Identity

Pirouz Mojtahed-Zadeh* - Associate Professor of Political Geography, Tarbiat Modares University, Tehran, Iran

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Abstract

The United Arab Emirates has been laying claims of sovereignty on three islands of Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb, and Abu Musa, regardless of the fact that these islands formed parts of Iranian dominion in the Persian Gulf undisputedly up until the beginning of ۱۹th century, when British colonial presence began to grow in the southern shores of the Persian Gulf, whereupon the first germs of the creation of the emirates of those shores were sown in what was Iranian dependant tribal entities. Soon these emirates emerge as Arab entities of no Iranian dependency, but as British protectorates and thus British support for their territorial expansion encouraged their territorial claims in a political space that was Iranian to a large extent at the time. There are scores of documents proving that the entire region of the Persian Gulf belonged to Iran since time immemorial. Nevertheless, the British occupied these three islands in ۱۹۰۳ in the name of British protectorate Qawasim tribes of Sharjah.

Before withdrawing its protection of Arab emirates in ۱۹۷۱, the British called for the formation of a federation of its protectorate emirates of the region, namely Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ras al-Khaimah, Ajman, Fujairah and Umm-al-qowin, as well as Bahrain and Qatar, the latter two refusing to join the proposed federation for their own reasons. It was as a result of these said British plans that the United Arab Emirates was formed out of the seven emirates of Musandam Peninsula on December ۲, ۱۹۷۱, and the new entity began to call on behalf of two of its member emirates, Sharjah and Ras-al-Khaimah for the three islands in question to be added to its territories. Since territorial claims against other states is an old, and highly effective tactic for a newly formed state to enhance its particular design of nationhood and to assume a definitive national identity, it seems the UAE has opted for territorial disputes with Iran, the only non-Arab state of the Persian Gulf in the hope of attaining its desired national unity and identity. Territorial claims for nation-building purposes has precedence in the region, as Iran claimed

* E-mail: pirouz_mojtahedzadeh@hotmail.com

Bahrain in ۱۹۳۰s in order to use the old Arab-Iranian conflicts to assist the process of nation-building that Reza Shah had started then. Similarly the Baath regime of Iraq claimed in ۱۹۵۰s and ۱۹۶۰s sovereignty over Khuzestan of Iran, calling it “Arabistan” precisely because it re-awakened historical Arab-Iranian controversy in the hope that it would enhance a pure Arabic identity for Iraq of the semi-Iranian region of Mesopotamia.

Keywords: United Arab Emirates, Iran, Islands, Persian Gulf, Abu Musa, Tunb, Nation-building, National identity, Iraq, Britain.

Introduction

Territorial claims for nation-building exercise

In many of his previous works, the author introduced masses of documents and evidence on Iran’s legal and legitimate ownership of the ۳ islands of Greater

Tunb, Lesser Tunb and Abu Musa, and on their legal return to Iran in ۱۹۷۱. In

this work I would like to examine the ways in which the UAE tries to rewrite history of the region in order to create an academic framework within which they could construct their designs of an Arab identity for the area to the south-east of the Persian Gulf in the hope that a constructive Arab nationality can be formulated for the seven emirates amalgamated by the British in early ۱۹۷۰s in

the form of the United Arab Emirates.

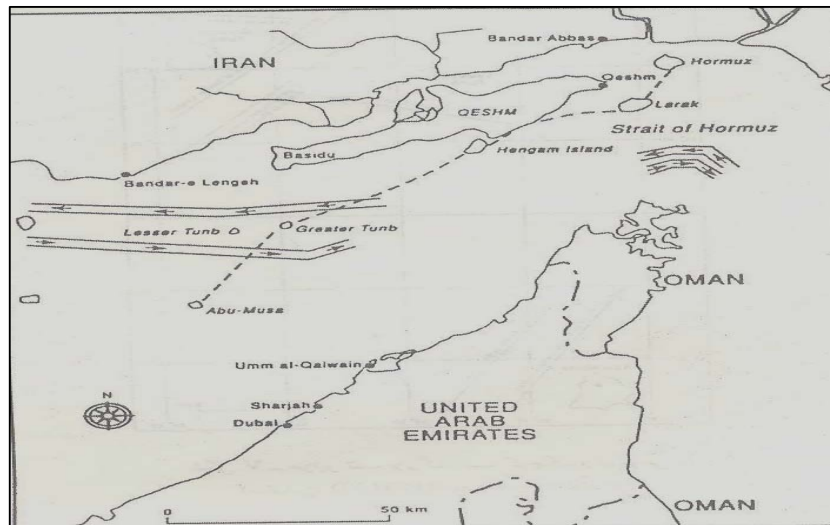


Figure ۱: Location of the three islands relative to the Iranian and UAE Shores; to the main shipping lanes; as well as other Iranian Islands of the Strait of Hormuz

Theoretical background

The recent history of the region testifies that the United Arab Emirates has been experiencing difficulties in creating a real and true national cohesion in that federation of the seven political entities of Arab tribal identity. Lack of any real challenge of political geography nature to attain the desired identity seems to have deprived their notion of nation-building process of the necessary stimulant (۱) that would bear the fruit of national cohesion. Abu Dhabi's vociferous claims on the Islands of Greater and Lesser Tunbs and Abu Musa, seems to have worked inadvertently to strengthen the Iranian national unity instead of its intended results for the UAE. This was to act as a hot subject of the UAE's territorial dispute with the only non-Arab state (Iran) of the region, but it seems to have failed to play the magical role of a cause célèbre at the Middle Eastern regional level as a symbol of Arab nationalist resistance to the spread of Iranian influence in the Persian Gulf(۲). Domestically, it was expected to become the symbol of a foreign

territorial challenge that would stimulate growth of the sense a 'nationhood' that would be particular to the UAE.

Historical Background

Failing to achieve any real results from the above strategy seems to have lead Abu Dhabi to adopt a more fundamental undertaking of a massive cultural project aimed at creating a new history-o-geographic identity for the region by trying to re-write regional history. The ultimate aim in this cultural venture seems to be complete denial of all aspects of the history of the region that would one way or another relate to Iran and her traditional sovereignty of the southern coasts of the Persian Gulf. Supported by more radical nationalists (pan-Arabist) quarters in places like Qatar, Kuwait, and to some extent Saudi Arabia, Abu Dhabi has benefited from many obliging regional and British academics. In addition to declaring in the title of his book (٣) the three islands of Tunbs and Abu Musa in the Persian Gulf as being owned by the United Arab Emirates, Thomas R. Mattair, for instance has argued that these islands belonged to the emirates of Sharjah and Ras-al-Khaimah for many centuries, without being able to address the fundamental issue of these emirates' existence prior to the ٢٠th century as independent territorial states with spatial dimension that could enable them to claim any territory as representing their legal dominion. In fact when the idea of determining territorial dimension for the tribal entities of Eastern Arabia and defining boundary lines among them was expressed by the authorities of Indo-European telegraph line in ١٨٦٤, British Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, Colonel Lewis Pelly, opposed it on the basis that implementation of these European concepts in Eastern Arabia was 'inexpedient' at the time (٤).

The concept of territorial sovereignty in the Western sense did not exist in Eastern Arabia, A ruler exercised jurisdiction over a territory by virtue of his jurisdiction over the tribes inhabiting it. They in turn, owed loyalty to him... (٥).

These words were echoes of what many Western scholars and diplomats like Professor John Wilkinson of Oxford University and Sir Rupert Hay, a former British Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, had stated earlier. John

Wilkinson described the British attempts of ١٩٦٠s for introducing the concept of territoriality to the local tribes and boundary making amongst them in Eastern Arabia as:

This ludicrous partitioning of territory is of recent origin and stems in large measure from the imposing of European notion of territorialism on a society to which they were foreign Britain sought to develop an exclusive influence in the Gulf and, later still, to favour the claims of particular companies to act as concessionaries for oil exploration, she was forced first into defending the protégé coastal rulers from attack from the hinterland and then of proclaiming their authority over the population and resources of greater Oman.... (٦).

Sir Rupert Hay states:

Before the advent of oil the desert was in many ways similar to the high seas. Nomads and their camels roamed across it at will... (٧).

In its endeavor to establish a new historical identity for the UAE in addition to their pan-Arab tendencies, the UAE Government seems to have opted for the adoption of the same strategy of political ideology devised in ١٩٥٠s and ١٩٦٠s, and implemented by the former Baath Party of Iraq in ١٩٧٠s to ١٩٩٠s.

A background to territorial claims for nation-building

It was in ١٩٣٠s when in the wake of Constitutional Revolution Reza Shah Pahlavi began to form a Persian national identity for Iran in his nation-building endeavor, claimed sovereignty over Bahrain. Though these claims never met the face realization, it worked very well as it invoked traditional Arab-Iranian controversies which in turn, enhanced a strong sense of national identity amongst varying Iranian ethnicities.

Similarly since its emergence in late ١٩٥٠s and late ١٩٦٥s the Baath regimes in Iraq launched a massive anti-Iranian propaganda campaign, which became the central theme of its promotion of a purely Arab identity for the newly emerged state of Iraq in the semi-Iranian region of Mesopotamia. This was an expected geopolitical strategy contrasting the demographical features of Iraq. Almost ٨٠% of the population of what has

become the state of Iraq in early ۲۰th century is made up of peoples of Kurdish and Shiite origin with strong cultural and ethnic ties with Iran. Moreover, like the emirates of southern shores of the Persian Gulf, Mesopotamia was part of what was the Iranian federative system (Persian Empire) for the greater part of the past three thousand years. These historical and geographical factors did not offer a comfortable prospect to the former Baath ideologues to work out a completely Arabic identity for Iraq that would enable it to play the role of a leading Pan-Arab power in the region. Hence, the Baath Party had to shed all layers of Iraq's cultural image that in any way represented Iran or its Persian civilization. A massive anti-Iranian campaign that had begun by the first Baath party of Iraq in ۱۹۵۹ was boosted by the re-emergence of that party in ۱۹۶۸.

A major feature of this endeavor was attempts to change the name of the Persian Gulf to Arabian Gulf, changing the ancient name of Iran's Khuzestan province into "Arabistan" and trying to sever that province from Iran by creating a terrorist group of a few elements related to the Iranian Arab tribes living in Khuzestan who occupied Iranian Embassy in London in ۱۹۸۰ in a terrorist action and even now is heavily involved in terrorist activities in Khuzestan and Tehran (۸). Other features of this anti-Iranian racially inclined ideology include changing the name of the islands of Kish and Lavan off the Iranian coasts near the straits of Hormuz, hundreds of miles away from any where near Iraq.

The Baath party and its political philosophy, which symbolized their peculiar way of shaping a national identity, had aimed at proving the argument that not only is Iraq an Arab state, but a leading one. But this whole argument was to materialize on the strength of the geographical fact that Baath party and Iraq's ruling class were from the Sunni Arab population of that country which has always been in minority there, and it was because of this weak geographical foundation of the argument that drove the Baath regime to dictatorship of most severe kind vis-à-vis the people of Iraq and a belligerent approach in their relations with Iran.

The Baath policy of nation-Building was not to follow the path of a normal process of settling the crisis of identity. All philosophers and thinkers of political, geographical and social sciences, including famous

Arab thinker Edward Said, in his famous book *Orientalism* (٩) concede that one normally constructs one's identity by comparing the notion of 'us' with the notion of 'them'. But in the case of the Baath party of Iraq, this mechanism worked differently. In their theory Baath party was to construct an extreme form of Pan-Arab identity for Iraq by destroying the identity of 'them', which in this case was represented by Persia (Iran). This was because what constitutes Iraq now had been a part of the Iranian federal system known in the West as Persian Empire for centuries both before and after Islam. To the Baath party thinkers, Cyrus the Great's conquer of Babylonia in the mid six century BC was not to be forgiven because, no matter how emphatically the holy books in Islam, Christianity and Judaism condemned Babylonian tyranny and its inhumanity, to them Babylonia was an Arab state that represented Iraq's glorious past upon which Iraq's new Pan-Arab identity had to be constructed.

It was on the basis of this peculiar way of reading history that a mind-boggling anti-Iranian (anti-Persian) campaign began which lasted for ٣٥ years, causing the eight-year war of attrition with more than one million people dead, and hundreds of billions of dollars worth of destruction to both countries.

The cultural aspects of this incessant campaign involved a furiously anti-Iranian propaganda throughout the Arab world. Even in their school books Persia (Iran) was presented as a pure evil. In a research work entitled *Sourat al-Iranian fi al-kotob al-madresiyat al-Arabiyyat* (the image of Iranians in Arab school books), Talal Adrisi, an Arab scholar points out that the image of Iran (al-Faresi – the Persians) presented in the Iraqi school books is quite clear. He then quotes an Iraqi history book of the time of the former regime as saying (١٠):

Verily the Iranians are always the same low-down racist Persians who have, since the time of Rashedin Caliphate until the glorious Qadesiyah (the last of the wars of Islamic Caliphate against Iran) of noble Saddam Hussein been against the Arab nation and its unity, against its Arabic-Islamic civilization and against its language.... All problems of the Arabs and the Muslims, and all conflicts and agitations, and ethnic wars, and all efforts for the destruction of its (Arab's) civilization are the result of Persian conspiracies.

Re-writing history for building an Arab national identity

After the fall of Iraq's Baathist regime in ۲۰۰۳, there are many indications that its brand of ideology for nation-building by re-writing the history and revising the geography of the region is being questioned in the Arab world. Yet, this process appears to have started in a reverse direction in some Arab parts of the lower Persian Gulf. In addition to rejecting many calls by Arab scholars and Arab newspapers asking Arabs to abandon the campaign of changing the name of the Persian Gulf (۱۱) for instance, the UAE Government has increased its anti-Iranian campaign. They have started to return sea-going vessels from their shores if happened to produce their cargo-bill bearing the name 'Persian Gulf'; they hugely increased financial support for any journalist, academic, or politician in the West that would adopt the term Arabian Gulf instead of the historical name of the Persian Gulf, the ۲۰۰۵ case of geographical controversy by National Geographic was an example; they began to support any activity that aimed at hurting Iran, the case of financial support for the creation of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and its anti-Iranian activities in late ۱۹۹۰s and early years of the ۲۰۰۰s is one example and its critical stance, encouraged by US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, against Iran's nuclear energy program and attempts to formulate a pan-Arab opposition to it on the argument that close proximity of Iran's nuclear sites would pose a danger to the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf in the events of accidents, is another example. The UAE in putting forward this argument ignores the fact that they have never criticized Israel's nuclear arms program and the danger of Israeli nuclear sites proximity to the "brother" Arab nations of Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, and Egypt.

Writing and broadcasting undocumented allegations against Iran as Persian Empire and its founder, Cyrus the Great increased once again both locally and in the West. Appearance of an amazing piece of slur against Iran and its history of civilization, particularly against Iranian federative state (the so-called Persian Empire) of the pre-Islamic era, calling it 'The evil empire' in one of the most unlikely forums, "the Guardian" daily of London perhaps is a good example of the revival of Baath-style campaign of nation-

building in an Arab state through expression of hatred for Iran, which had for over ۳۵ years brought the Arabs and Iranians nothing but wars and devastation.

It might, however, be understandable that these newly formed states would concern themselves with the task of nation-building within the framework of their desired Arab identity, but construction of one's identity cannot always be achieved through destruction of the identity of the others. In their identity seeking efforts when some of these emirates face the reality that the lands on which they are building their new nations formed the southern flanks of the Iranian federative system (the so-called Persian Empire) for thousands of year and, therefore, like the former Baathist regime in Iraq, they too see their options limited to destroying the Persian (Iranian) identity. While, denying in many of their texts in history and geography the existence of such a political entity as Iran or Persia, in many other of their texts they try to reshape the history in a manner that would justify their anti-Iranian arguments. In a friendly correspondence with Dr. John Wilkinson, former professor of Oxford University I invited him to an academic debate who, in reply wrote on Thursday ۵ January ۲۰۰۶ stating; ...my relations and interest are entirely tied up with the Arab side of the Gulf, he then elaborated:

Archaeological evidence (notably by Walid al-Takriti in Buraimi area) is showing that the Dawudi qanat go back well before the Achaemenid period and that on the contrary, there is no firm evidence of an Achaemenid occupation of Oman. Indeed the argument is that Oman was the original site of the qanat development and was taken by the Persians and spread by them..... Some of the major qanat of Oman on the western side of the mountains predate the Achaemenid period (۱۲).

What the real history says

Neither the author of the above nor the source he refers to seem to have paused and asked the question; considering that defining the existence of a real and actual civilization is the pre-requisite condition for any academic claim of the discovery of constructed infrastructure in any given area of the world, how could qanat (underground water channel system) have been constructed in Eastern Arabia and Oman before the Achaemenid period?

They do not seem to be concerned that before making that claim, they have to establish existence of a civilization in that part before the advent of the Achaeminid Iranian civilization. This is an old practice, and attempts to attribute some of better known and well-established features and samples of ancient Iranian civilization to modern countries like Turkey, Iraq and other Arab states of the region, is not new. There are always those in countries of more recent emergence who endeavor to work out an old historical identity for the new nations through re-writing the history. There are claims that qanat was first constructed by ancient Turks who did not even live in southwest Asia before ۱۳th century AD. Some others who are more concerned about purifying their Western identity of any eastern cultural feature, have attributed to Rome almost all of the well known ancient Iranian invention such as the qanat underground water channel system, coinage (gold Daric and silver Ziglus), road system (the Royal Road) etc.

A closer look at the terminologies used in the above quoted letter is more revealing. In another part the author refers to the lack of “firm evidence of an Achaemanid occupation of Oman”. This sentence represent lack of care in the use of the term “occupation” in reference to the presence of Achaeminid Iran in southern coasts of the Persian Gulf and what is now Oman and Emirates. The term occupation is normally used in reference to the legal or illegal act of taking a piece of land from the hands of a previous owner. But in the case of Oman and southern coasts of the Persian Gulf the authors do not bother to identify an owner-occupier of those areas prior to the advent of the Achaeminid state. The existence of the qanat in those areas is the evidence of Achaemanid presence there. On the other hand, they seem to have difficulty in contemplating that no much evidence of the Achaeminid presence are to be found in many areas of the interior of Iran, but that does not suggest that a civilization and a political system (federative state) that had ruled and administered over the largest part of the civilized world of ۶th to ۳rd centuries BC, did not exist in its core areas (lands between and around the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf).

All local historical evidence, all Arab texts of history like Tabari, Masudi, Yaqubi, Maqdasi, Ibn Huqal etc. confirm what Sir Arnold T. Wilson has asserted in his highly acclaimed publication in ۱۹۲۸ on the Persian Gulf that:

There are myths dating the origin of the people of the Persian Gulf to the meeting of three branches of mankind on the shores of the Gulf in about ۱۰,۰۰۰ BC: the Dravidian of the Makran coasts (Iran) absorbed by their Baluchi conquerors (Iran); the Semites of the Arabian highlands who displaced or absorbed the original Hamitic Euro-African aborigines; and the proto-Elamites of southwestern Iran (۱۳).

The political geography of Eastern Arabia (southern coasts of the Persian Gulf) followed the same pattern of political development in that entire region since the dawn of history. This region first experienced the existence of 'state' in the modern sense of the word, in the mid-sixth century BC when the Achaeminid (۵۵۹ to ۳۳۰ BC) consolidated their federative system, which included most of the civilized world of the time. Iranian settlement and political domination of these areas were consolidated under the Sassanids (۲۲۴-۶۵۱ AD) (۱۴). All Arab and Islamic sources of history of human movements in that Part of the lower Persian Gulf indicate that the first of any migratory movements of Arab tribes to those parts began in a few decades before the advent of Islam according to the all Arab sources of ancient history and to firm local evidence used by Dr. John Wilkinson of Oxford University who discloses that:

The main Shanu'a groupings of Arab immigrants from the interior of Arabia were established in the mountain of Musandam and Oman proper in the early sixth century AD, when the Kawadh (Qobads) ruled the region. It was probably in association with this migration into Oman that elements of the Kinda also came to settle in the mountain areas of jabal Kinda near Buraimi Oasis. Other Arab migration who settled in the desert and border areas of Oman formed the Azd Federation. Faced with this massive new tribal union of migrant Arabs, the Iranian rulers of the region had no alternative but to accord the newcomers a degree of autonomy under their own tribal leadership (۱۵).

In addition to the necessity of being familiar with the evolution of legally inclined concept of territoriality and territorial ownership in South East Arabia and southern shores of the Persian Gulf, and before speaking of "centuries of Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah's history of ownership of territories in and around the Persian Gulf, Thomas R. Mattair of our time

ought to establish first; what is the history of statehood in that part of the world; second, how long these emirates have been in existence as political entities of legal and territorial dimension, and third; what was the role of the British in ۱۹th and ۲۰th century in allocating lands to various emirates at will. In this context, in order to avoid repetition of issues and instances of historical and legal arguments, I would refer these authors to carefully study chapters XVII, XVIII, XIX and XX in this book for matters related to history of statehood in The Persian Gulf, history of the existence of the Arab Emirates of the Persian Gulf, and the role the British played in allocating territories to various state or tribal entities at will in ۱۹th and ۲۰th century. The agents of British colonial rule in the region in ۱۹th and early ۲۰th century, who were the instruments of colonial interference in the political geography of the Persian Gulf and allocated various territories to different entities in the region, conveniently denied all aspects of Iran's traditional dominion and her sovereignty connections with the southern coasts of the Persian Gulf, but several British scholars and academics like Sir Arnold T. Wilson, Dr. John C. Wilkinson, Sir Rupert hay, Donald Hawley, J. B. Kelly etc have made reasonable references to these traditional realities of the region in their scholarly works.

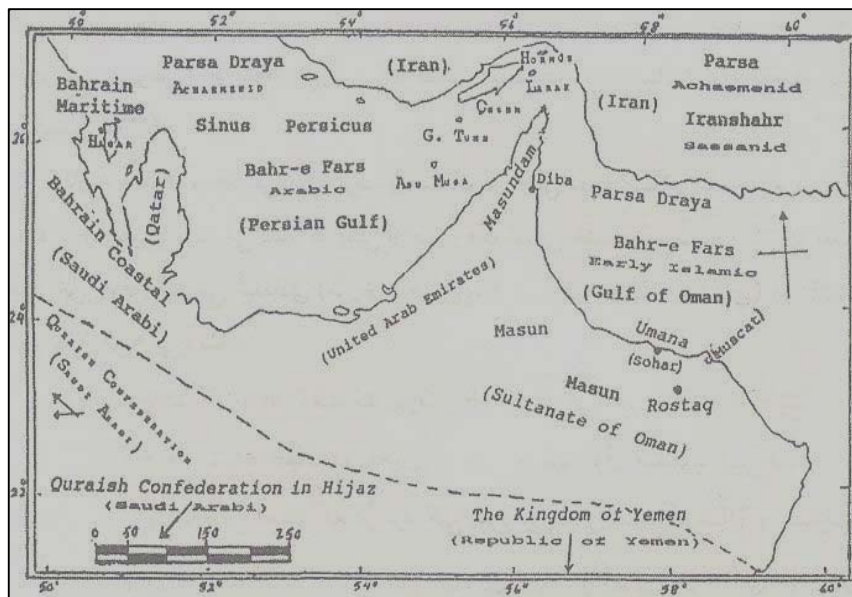


Figure ۲: limits of Iranian dominions on the southern side of the Persian Gulf in both pre and post-Islamic centuries. Iran's post-Islamic sovereignty exercise there became vague.

Here, it suffice to briefly state that even the name Ras al-Khaimah is reminder of Iran's age old sovereignty presence in southern coasts of the Persian Gulf. Iran's pre-Islamic dominion and sovereignty over these areas were well defined and well documented. The term Ras al-Khaimah is an Arabic construction of two parts: Ras is head (the tip of) in Arabic, and Khaimah means tent in both Arabic and Persian. Ras al-Khaimah therefore, means the 'tip of tents', and that is in reference to the tip of the tented headquarter of Iran's military camp in that vicinity during the time of nadir Shah Afshar (first half of the ۱۸th century). Iran's post-Islamic sovereignty and presence were defined in terms of Islamic territorial description, and continued albeit vaguely until the arrival in the Persian Gulf of British colonialism and start of their interference in the political geography of the region as from ۱۸۲۰ when they signed their first treaty of peace with the tribal entities therein. They continued this task and by ۱۸۹۹ signed many similar treaties that brought all major tribal entities under British protection and sovereignty. The Iranian Government protested against this process of colonization of Iranian dependent entities in the south of the Persian Gulf and Prime Minister in mid-۱۸۴۰s, Haji Mirza Aghasi issued a warning reminding the British that all ports and islands in and around the Persian Gulf belonged to Iran, but they preferred to ignore his warnings (۱۶). Here, it might be worthwhile to bring to the attention of the authors at the service of the UAE government claim to the three islands in question one of many historical documents verifying acknowledgement by rulers of tribal entities of southern coasts of the Persian Gulf of historical tradition of Iranian sovereignty over those areas. The following is the text of articles I, II, and III of a formal letter from Sheikh Sultan Bin Saqar of Ras al-Khaimah to the Iranian authorities most relevant to the status of Ras al-Khaimah as a dependency of Iran like other tribal entities of southern coasts of the Persian Gulf which had enjoyed the same status vaguely throughout the post-Islamic history of the region. In this letter, which is dated ۱۷ of Sha'ban ۱۲۷۲ H.Q.

(۲۳ April ۱۸۶۵), the ruler of Ras al-Khaimah principally requests from the authorities in Tehran to grant him the lease of Bandar Abbas on the northern coasts of the Persian Gulf; for that he argues that as Ras al-Khaimah was an Iranian dominion, its leasing of Bandar Abbas would benefit Iran without even encountering any legal problem:

Articles ۱, ۲ and ۳ of the statement of His Highness the

Sheikh of all Sheikhs, His Excellency Sheikh Sultan Bin Saqar (۱۷)

Article ۱; The first issue is that I am grateful to you, and like my ancestors from the oldest time, we have been your servant, companion, and subject, and today also I am your servant, companion and subject, and I am ready for your command and instructions so that whatever command you might have to be carry out with our lives, by myself, my children, my clan and my tribe, we are all your subjects and citizens and servants and abide by your instructions. And Ras al-Khaimah has been your (territorial) dominion since the oldest time and is now an Iranian territory.

Article ۲; The second issue is that if I were to have a person in Bandar Abbas, I will see to all affairs of Bandar Abbas perfectly and completely as might be asked of me. But if the forced of Sayyed Saeed (Sultan of Oman) come and position themselves before Bandar Abbas, I could not see it and keep silent, it would be inevitable that I challenged him and chase him out of that place. If I were to challenge him at sea the England will be the obstacle, and would say I am the lord of the sea. On whose permission and on whose authority are you quarrelling in the sea? You get a letter from the English or issue an order to the English not to challenge me at all in the sea so that not only I could see to the service of your maritime affairs to the best of my ability, but also I could add all coasts and islands in Oman to your dominion.

Article ۳; the fourth issue is that as I stayed in Bandar Abbas, the province of Ras al-Khaimah is a vast province. Some of the time there are disturbances and your support is essential. As I have become in your charge, your subject, and have accepted citizenship of the Iranian Government and my children, my tribe and clan request to send ۳ divisions of soldiers with a commander and ten canons and a sufficient amount of Qur-Khaneh (a ۱۹th century Persian

word for armory, arsenal, shot guns, or ammunition) and all expenses to Ras al-Khaimah where they could be stationed permanently.... (۱۸).

Even as late as ۱۹۶۹ Arab scholars verified that the issue of territorial sovereignty in the southern coasts of the Persian Gulf was of an Arab-Iranian mixture. In an interview with the Iranian press, Dr. Sayyed Mohammad Nufel of Egypt, visiting Tehran in his capacity as Deputy Secretary General of the Arab League, stated:

I rededuced the efforts for changing the name of the Persian Gulf and condemn these futile efforts... I have made some studies about the region of the Persian Gulf and published a book in ۱۹۵۲ in which I used the term Persian Gulf, only saying that the Sheikdoms were neither Arab nor Iranian, but a mixture of both.... (۱۹).

Inhabitants of southern shores of the Persian Gulf carried Iranian identity card and border pass up until mid-twentieth century. It was in ۱۹۵۰ that the Iranian Government imposed visa requirement for the inhabitants of the lower Persian Gulf traveling into Iran.

Anglo-Iranian territorial contention

The Anglo-Iranian territorial contention, which began in ۱۸۴۰s with Haji Mirza Agassi's declaration of opposition to the British annexation of ports and islands of lower Persian Gulf, the most prominent of which in the twentieth century were the issues of Iran's claim on Bahrain and Britain's claim on Tunbs and Abu Musa on behalf of its client emirates, continued throughout the ۱۹th and early ۲۰th centuries until in ۱۹۶۵ when negotiations began between the two for a north-south maritime divide in the Persian Gulf. Though these negotiations did not produce conclusive agreements on the subject, it established in ۱۹۶۶ the median line of the sea as a principle upon which the continental shelf between Iran and her Arab neighbours was to be divided. It was on the basis of this principle that the subsequent maritime delimitation agreements were achieved. This was a decision on an ad hoc basis that the median line of the Persian Gulf would become the term of reference on which the maritime areas of the sea would be delimited and delineated between Iran to the north, and Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia to

the south (۲۰). This was a general understanding on the basis of which the Iranians accepted that the southern limits of their sovereignty rights retreated to the median line of the Persian Gulf and therefore, relinquished claims on Bahrain archipelago in ۱۹۷۰. The British also decided, after intensive negotiations throughout the ۱۹۷۰ and ۱۹۷۱ to return the three islands of Tunb and Abu Musa, situated in the northern half of the Persian Gulf and on the median line respectively to Iran.

Gun Battle at Greater Tunb

There are those who describe the process of actual transfer of sovereignty control of the islands of Tunbs and Abu Musa to Iran by means of hoisting Iranian flags on them by an Iranian naval unit in the morning of November ۳۰, ۱۹۷۱, as “Iran’s military occupation” of these islands. What these individuals conveniently ignore is the fact that hoisting the flags of the recipient state over the territory, the sovereignty control of which is being transferred from one state to another, is a normal legal practice. For instance the district of Alaska was ceded to the United States by Russia on March ۳۰, ۱۸۶۷, but it was the US Navy that started governing the territory by hoisting US flag there in ۱۸۷۹.

The Iranian flag was unfurled on the two Tunb islands and Abu Musa Island in the morning of November ۳۰, ۱۹۷۱ in an official arrangement with the British authorities and the authorities of the emirates of Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah. An Iranian Naval unit arrived in Abu Musa Island first and was officially welcomed by H. H. Sheikh Saqar Bin Mohammad al-Qassemi, brother of the ruler of Sharjah.

Unlike the peaceful transfer of sovereignty control of northern half of Abu Musa Island to Iran, an unexpected incident at Greater Tunb disturbed peaceful transition.

On their arrival at Greater Tunb the Iranian naval representative noticed the absence of welcoming party but the small island seemed to them peaceful enough. On the approach to the island Iranian officials on board naval vessel Artmiss heard gun shots from the inside of Ras al-Khaimah’s police station in the island. In an interview with this author on ۲۱ June ۲۰۰۳, Iranian journalist

Mr. Ali-Reza Taheri, who represented the daily Ettelaat of Tehran in the Iranian delegation on board Artmiss to the three islands, stated:

It had been arranged that like in Abu Musa, the Iranian delegation would be welcomed at Greater Tunb ceremonially..... The Iranian delegation would not even contemplate that peaceful process and their security would be threatened by the police force inside the police station (of Ras al-Khaimah at the Greater Tunb). Captain Suzanchi headed four navy personnel who attempted to investigate the source of disturbance, were so sure of their safety that none of them had a naked gun in their hands when they were killed. On his martyrdom Captain Suzanchi's gun was still in its case fastened on his vest. At the heat of the gun shots had only his walky-talky in his hand.

The Iranian delegation had no knowledge of the number of police officers in the station. The two individuals, who had come out of the station initially, had raised their guns over their heads indicating their intention to surrender. Thinking that these two were the only personnel there and that there would not be anyone else in the station Captain Suzanchi and his company approached the individuals surrendering themselves to the Iranian delegation. As soon as they reached the fire range of the station, they were showered with bullets coming from the inside of the station..... Captain Suzanchi and two of his fellow officers were killed on the spot the forth officer was wounded with only one of them survived unscathed.

Facing that unexpected situation which was later blamed on the British officer in command of Ras al-Khaimah's police station in Greater Tunb, the Iranian naval unit reacted in the defense of the lives of the rest of delegation and the safety of the local residents by brought the police station under fire. Three of the rebelled Ras al-Khaimah officers inside the building were killed and the rest were arrested and transferred to Ras al-Khaimah....

This incident, not anticipated and was blamed on the lack of competence on the part of the British and Ras al-Khaimah authorities at Greater Tunb, has apparently provided those opposed to the Anglo-Iranian settlement of the case of these islands to accuse Iran of having occupied the islands in question by force of arm. This accusation has been repeated many times in certain Arab and Western circles without the offer of any evidence or credible explanation to support the allegation and/or being aware of what had exactly happened in Abu Musa and in Greater Tunb on the day these islands were lawfully returned to Iran.

Notes and References

- ١- See Jean Gottmann's theory of iconography in the following document for instance: Gottmann, Jean (١٩٦٤), *Geography and International Relations*, in W.A. Dauglas Jackson (ed.) *Politics and Geographic relationships*, N. J. Englewood, Cliffs, Princeton Hall Inc.
- ٢- Keith McLachlan, *The boundaries of modern Iran*, The SOAS/GRC Geopolitics Series ٢, UCL Press, London ١٩٩٤, p. ٩.
- ٣- Thomas R. Mattair, *The Three Occupied UAE Islands: The Tunbs and Abu Musa*, The Emirates Centre for Strategic Studies and Research, in English and Arabic, Abu Dhabi ٢٠٠٥. This is a UAE Government publication and the UAE Government emblem appears on its cover page.
- ٤- J. G. Larimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Vol. I, India* ١٩٠٨, p. ٦٢٥.
- ٥- J. B. Kelly, *Eastern Arabian Frontiers*, London ١٩٦٤, p. ١٨.
- ٦- John C. Wilkinson, *Water and Tribal Settlement in South-East Arabia*, Oxford research Studies in Geography, Oxford ١٩٧٧, p. ٦.
- ٧- Rupert Hay, *The Persian Gulf States*, Washington ١٩٥٩, pp. ٣-٤.
- ٨- This terrorist group (Al-Ahwaz) has, with the permission of British Government, placed its headquarters in London where they had in ١٩٨٠ carried out their well known attack on the Iranian Embassy and were defeated by the British special anti-terrorist squad.
- ٩- Edward Saeed, *Orientalism*, Vintage Books, New York ١٩٧٩).
- ١٠- Talal Adrisi, *Sourat al-Iranian fi al-kotob al-madresiyat al-Arabiyyat* (the image of Iranians in Arab school books), in Khair Ed-Din Haseeb ed., *Arab-Iranian Relations*, Beirut ١٩٩٦, p. ٣٠٤.
- ١١- See for example the following instances:
Magdi Omar's interview in *Al-Ahram of Egypt* on ٢١/٦/٢٠٠١
Abdul Monim Saeed in *Al-Ahram* of ٢٢ December ٢٠٠٢.
Al-Anba' daily of Kuwait wrote on ٧ October ٢٠٠٢
Mohammad Abu Ali in *Al-Sharq al-Owsat* of London ١٦/١٢/٢٠٠٤
Abd or-Rahman Rashed in *Al-Sharq al-Owsat* on ١/١/٢٠٠٥
Sad Ibn Tafлах former Kuwaiti Minister of Culture and Information in *Sharq al-Owsat* of ١/١/٢٠٠٥ and in ١٥/١/٢٠٠٥
Dr. Hesham Al-Asmar in *Al-Ahram of Egypt* ١٨ January ٢٠٠٥
Dr. Yaseen Suwaid in *An-Nahar* of Lebanon and Morocco on ٧/١/٢٠٠٥
Dr. Foad Haddad in *The Qods al-Arabi* of London on ٢٦/١/٢٠٠٦
Sad Ibn Tafлах former Kuwaiti Minister of Culture and Information in *Sharq al-Awsat* of ٤/٣/٢٠٠٦.
- ١٢- J. Wilkinson@free.fr, ٠٩ January ٢٠٠٦ ٢٠:٠٣:٤٢'+٠١٠٠
- ١٣- Sir Arnold T. Wilson, *The Persian Gulf*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, ٢nd publication, ١٩٥٤, p. ٢٢.
- ١٤- For details of evidence and references on these developments see; Pirouz Mojtahed-Zadeh, *Security and Territoriality in the Persian Gulf*, Curzon/ Routledge, London ١٩٩٩.
- ١٥- John C. Wilkinson, *The Julanda of Oman*, in the *Journal of Oman*, Vol. ١, London ١٩٧٥, p. ٩٨.