

**Arab-Iranian Relations:  
A Geopolitical Perspective**

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Arab-Iranian relations in their immediate region have never been devoid of controversy in the modern era. Historically these controversies emanated mostly from ideological differences (sectarian controversies within varying Islamic schools of thoughts). With the advent of Karbala calamity the foundation was laid for a millennial Shiite ascendancy which in turn introduced new dimensions to the politics of the statehood of Sunnite Caliphate.

With the rise in colonial geopolitics of the Great Games of the nineteenth and early twenties centuries, spread of British colonial rule in the geographical span of what can be described as contiguous Arab-Iranian region in West Asia caused some forms of political affinities between the two as co-sufferers from colonial rule, which in turn gave way to development of relations between Iran and its Arab neighbours more on the basis of natural regional interests. But withdrawal of the colonial rule from the region in early 1970s left new legacies of friction and conflicts resulting from territorial and border differences which in turn have been exploited by the new geopolitical players to drive apart the two sides.<sup>(1)</sup>

**Keywords:** Iran, Arabs, Middle East, Relations, Islam, Persian Gulf, Shiite.

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## **ARAB-IRANIAN RELATIONS: A GEOPOLITICAL PERSPECTIVE\***

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### **HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

Perhaps it would be of interest to this international gathering if started by reminding fellow academics here that it is 42 years that I have been studying the region of the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf. My very first book was entitled *شیخ نشینهای خلیج فارس* = Emirates of the Persian Gulf<sup>(2)</sup> and of 35 titles of my publications so far, no less than 20 titles in Persian, English and Arabic are about this region and of hundreds of my research papers and articles in various languages a large number is about the issues of the Gulf region. This large volume of research and academic works cannot but represent a deep Iranian

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interest in studying our shared region with its huge impact on our shared political, economic and security lives. In comparison, it is indeed a matter of regret that we see most comments about Iran from our brother Arabs of this side of the Gulf are mostly based on perceptions mostly affected by Western propaganda.

When examining the nature of discord in Arab- Iranian relations however, one cannot overlook the fact that the first and foremost issue of conflict between the two sides that has since the advent of Islam caused divisions between Iranians and Arabs has been of the nature of sectarianism in Islam. With the calamity of Karbala in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AH started a movement, mostly underground, that provided the followers of the Shiite doctrine with an instrument of protestation against the rule of Sunnite Caliphate of Baghdad, and later on against that of the Ottoman Empire. With rise into power of the Safavid Empire in 1501 the Shiite version of Islam was declared as the official religion of the state in Iran which at the time included territories much vaster than Iran of today. It included all areas of Greater Khorasan, Greater Baluchistan, Mesopotamia, parts of the Levant and Greater Bahrain, incorporated at the time the Bahrain archipelago, Qatar Peninsula and the entire eastern Arabia<sup>(3)</sup>. This development laid the foundation for the emergence of the independent state of Iran equipped by a renewed and newly reinforced Persian Identity.

Iran's conversion into Shiite version of Islam proved to be the start of major challenges in her overall relations with the Arab World, a phenomenon that soon expanded to cause other political and geopolitical controversies between the two. These new challenges in turn, manifested themselves mainly in four major categories in our modern era with substantial geopolitical consequences for both in their relations in the twentieth and early twenty first centuries<sup>(4)</sup>. These are: religious controversies; sectarian geopolitics, territorial contentions; and controversy over the naming of the Persian Gulf.

## 1. RELIGIOUS CONTROVERSIES

Shiite-Sunni conflicts continued deteriorating relations between Iran and its Arab neighbours for centuries until in mid-1960s when these controversies subsided as a result of endeavours emanating from the Qom seminaries of Late Ayatollah Brujerdi, the then spiritual leader of the world of Shiism, supported by the Iranian political leadership of the time on the one hand, and the Al-Azhar University of Cairo acting as the leading seminary of Sunni Islamic studies resulted in the development of mutual understanding and the Fatwa of Sheikh Shaltut in 1959 accepting Shiite as one of the five main sects of Islam<sup>(5)</sup>. Hence, open conflicts were replaced by cooperation at the service of the idea of unity among Moslems.

The advent of Islamic revolution of 1979 in Iran triggered new geopolitical resentments among her extra regional adversaries, which resulted in a series of inevitable changes in the regional geopolitical settings with inescapable impacts on Arab – Iranian relations.

The advent of Islamic revolution in Iran encouraged her regional adversaries like the Baathist Iraq with a long history of geopolitical and strategic rivalries for regional hegemony to try and introduce the revolutionary Iran as being bent to embark upon a new geopolitical ambition for the supremacy of a Shiite power over the rest of the Muslim Middle East largely of Sunni persuasion. It took an eight year war of attrition for the Muslim Middle East to realise that Iraq's Baath party had in reality been hiding its true ambitions of territorial expansionism behind the tactic of scare mongering against revolutionary Iran and her imaginary sectarian geopolitics. The Baath of Baghdad put its true expansionist intentions on display by invading and occupying Kuwait after celebrating its imaginary victory over Iran, but and this magnified the harmful impact of the naive geopolitical ambitions that eventually resulted in the demise of Baath party and its grip on power in the region. Yet, one of the unfortunate

consequences of these naively staged games seems to be its impact on the political psyche of people who give meaning to term “Arab-Iranian relations.

## 2. SHIITE GEOPOLITICS

Slogans in the streets of Tehran such as “export of the revolution” which largely meant for domestic consumption were interpreted by the extra-regional players as new Iranian revolutionary strategy of armed struggle for the eradication of traditional regimes in the Arab World. Lack of an experienced and professional diplomatic service in Islamic Republic of Iran allowed these false but dangerous games of exploitation of domestically oriented propaganda resulted in the tragic imposition of the eight-year war of attrition with consequences that still is affecting geopolitical balances in the region.

The task of deepening ideological friction between Iran and her Arab neighbours on the other hand seemed to have been taken over by Israel in mid-2000<sup>(6)</sup>. Reports in 2004 and 2006 revealed that following meetings between Israeli Premier Ehud Olmert and the Hashemite leaders of Jordan led to the announcement on the discovery of a *Shiite Crescent* in the Middle East that represents a Shiite geopolitics of wanting to establish Iranian hegemony over Sunnite Arab Middle East<sup>(7)</sup>. This propaganda gained momentum by 2006 as Egypt’s Hosni Mubarak jumped on the band wagon, which in turn encouraged a fierce sense of competition among those who insisted on the spread of Wahhabi militancy to counter balance small pockets of Shiite uprising in some parts of the Middle East. Thus, Wahhabi geopolitics had already been encouraged in places as far and wide as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Central Asia and the Caucasus on the eastern and northern flanks of Iran with major setback in the latter two regions. But the situation created in Pakistan and Afghanistan immediately involved the United States and some of its NATO allies with little success and

if spread of its brother movements under the banner of *Salafi* drive in the Arab Middle East, if not checked in time, especially in highly explosive situations like that in Syria, would set Muslims against Muslims to the delight of policies hard at work to drive Arabs and Iranians apart.

There have been references towards the end of this meeting on Arab-Iranian relation (Doha; 1-2 December 2012) to statements by individuals in a recent gathering of academics in Tehran on “Shiite Geopolitics” giving impression that these were to represent official views of the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran. It is of paramount importance that in the assessment of the true nature of Arab-Iranian relations expression of views and ideas by individuals is not perceived as the policies or political ambitions entertained by the governments. Iran is a vast country with a population of about 80 million. Naturally if we were to interpret views expressed by individuals outside the circles of state officials in such a large society as the views of the government itself, we have only misled our own assessment.

Based on his research background on the geopolitics of the Middle East this author has endeavoured to argue from a critical point of view the validity of the claim of emergence of a Shiite Crescent in the geopolitics of the Middle East, and seems to have succeeded in disclosing the falsehood nature of the idea concocted by Ehud Olmert – Prince Hassan Al-Hashemite on geopolitics of Shiite Crescent<sup>(8)</sup>.

### **3. TERRITORIAL CONTENTIONS**

Withdrawal of Pax-Britannica from the region in late 1971 had left behind a legacy of numerous hotspots of territorial disputes. These ranged from maritime boundary differences between Iran and her neighbours to the south, to border disputes between Iran and Iraq, Kuwait and Iraq, Iraq and Saudi Arabia, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait and

Abu Dhabi and Oman, Abu Dhabi and Qatar, as well as Qatar and Saudi Arabia and a host of more limited disputes between the emirates among themselves and with their larger neighbours.

The British left the region in 1971 and the Americans entered the region in 1981. The interim period was the period of Iranian domination of affairs in the region and it was during this period that territorial dispute began to be solved peacefully.

Yet, immediately after the British withdrew forces from the Persian Gulf by the end of 1971, Iran began the initiative of settling territorial differences among the littoral state. Negotiations for the delimitation of maritime boundaries in the Persian Gulf which started in 1968 with Saudi Arabia continued with each and every Arab Emirates and Countries of the region and by 1975 all maritime boundaries of Iran with her Arab neighbours were settled. In 1957 the age-old Iran-Iraq territorial and boundary disputes were settled in Shatt al Arab, almost all of these territorial and boundary disputes were settled and in the same year Iran's initiative of settling territorial disputes went beyond the region of the Persian Gulf and the Shah intervened among Egypt and Israel to settle their differences over the Sinai Peninsula. Yet, the Shah has always been blamed by the Arab scholars for recognising Israel and for supplying Israel with the Iranian oil. They seldom scrutinised the issue to find out that even in that context Iran used the opportunity to serve Egypt, the Arab nation, in its hour of need. Israeli author, Samuel Segev admits in his 1981 publications on Israeli secret relations in the Middle East that "The Shah was the originator of the idea to mediate between Anwar Sadat and Golda Meir". In this regard one has to be attentive of the fact that Iran did not fully recognise Israel at that time or at any other time. Iran under the Shah had extended a de facto recognition to Israel and tried to use it to facilitate establishment of peace among Israel and Arabs.

Iran had already started supply of oil to Israel and after the 1973

Arab-Israeli war when Egypt lost control of Sinai Peninsula to Israel, Iran began mediating between the belligerents to save the situation in favour of Egypt. This is confirmed by the sources from both sides and this is the reason that Sadat remained a faithful friend of the Shah until the very end of his life and risked his own career and life in the pursuit of that faithful friendship.

In 1975 Iran sought to use her oil supplies to Israel as leverage in an attempt to induce Israel to relinquish her control over the Egyptian oilfields in the occupied Sinai Peninsula and return Sinai to Egypt in return for Egypt's official recognition of Israel as well as the Shah pledging to provide Israel with the amount of oil Israel needed after relinquishing Sinai Peninsula to Egypt<sup>(9)</sup>.

Another instance of Iranian endeavour to safeguard Arab territorial integrity was Iran's undertaking in eradicating threats to Oman's territorial integrity in early 1970s. Within three years Iranian soldiers defended with their lives Oman's territorial integrity in Dhufar Province in the face of a fierce communist separatist movement that British forces could not eradicate in twelve years.

### **THE CASE OF THE THREE ISLANDS**

Settling territorial dispute with Britain in 1971 proved to be more difficult in the case of the three islands at the mouth of the entrance of the Gulf than settling the issue of Bahrain a year earlier when Iran accepted that a plebiscite by the United Nations would suffice to determine the fate of the Archipelago.

The Iran- Sharjah controversy over the Island of Abu Musa was settled as a result of negotiations between Iran and Britain towards the end of 1971 when the latter was still in charge of foreign relations and territorial defence of the British protectorate emirates. In the same negotiation it was agreed that the two Tunb islands should also be returned to Iran without signing a separate legal instrument which Iran

though it would jeopardise her undisputed sovereignty over those islands<sup>(10)</sup>. Iraq, Libya, Algeria and South Yemen complained to the UN Security Council over this settlement which was rejected by the UNSC in the Security Council's meeting of 9 December 1971 and thus the agreement was ratified by the UN and registered there.

A misunderstanding triggered by the Iranian officers at the island of Abu Musa in 1992 resulted in the outbreak of fierce UAE territorial claims on this island. Abu Dhabi's disproportionate and highly vociferous propaganda campaign to politicize and internationalise the issue of their claims caused new conflicts with Iran which elevated Arab-Iranian misunderstandings substantially<sup>(11)</sup>.

The GCC and the League of Arab Nations were provoked to issue numerous but meaningless one sided statement that could only deepen misunderstanding. In one occasion the Arab League's Council of Foreign Ministers lodged on 17 March 2008 a complaint with the UN Security Council (UN- S/2008/179), requesting UNSC intervention on their behalf to give the said islands back to Abu Dhabi. That official complaint rendered ineffective as a result of this author's letter of rebuttal of 30<sup>th</sup> March 2008 to UN Secretary General whereby a detailed counter argument with legal, historical and geographical assessment of the situation was put to the UN<sup>(12)</sup> with the unmistakable result that the Arab League's complaint was deleted from all UN and Security Council's sites<sup>(13)</sup>.

US president George W. Bush and British Premier Tony Blair personally travelled to the countries in Iran's neighbourhood in an unmistakable attempt to exploit the issue in favour of causing further division among the Muslim nations of the Persian Gulf. They openly encouraged Arab countries of the region to pick up arms against the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Use of harsh language of disrespect against national identity of Iran by some UAE officials agitated at least this one Iranian expert on

territorial issues and differences between Iran and her Arab neighbours in this region to adopt a strong legal and geopolitical language to offer rebuttals on so many occasions with unmistakable results, but all these could have been prevented if we the Arabs and the Iranians of this region were to avoid confrontation by avoiding politicising and internationalising genuine territorial differences if any, and decide to solve mutual differences amicably among ourselves.

#### **4. CONTROVERSY OVER THE NAMING OF THE PERSIAN GULF.**

It was in mid-1930s that Sir Charles Belgrave, British Political Resident in the Persian Gulf opened a file on changing the name of the this sea into an Arabic form. His suggestion was ignored by the British Government, then in charge of foreign relations and territorial defence of its protectorate emirates ten of them at the time, including Kuwait. He later acted as a confidant and adviser to the Emir of Bahrain and encouraged that emirate to use Belgrave's newly fashioned name for the region but to no avail.

With the rise into power of Saddam Hussein in the second Baath regime (1968 – 2003) a long-lasting anti-Iranian propaganda campaign was launched which was to become the central theme of promotion of Baath philosophy. This was an expected geopolitical strategy contrasting the demographical features of Iraq. Similarly, it is noteworthy that like the emirates of southern shores of the Persian Gulf, Mesopotamia had formed parts of what was the Iranian federative system (Persian Empire) for the greater part of the previous three thousand years. These historical and geographical factors did not offer a comfortable prospect to the former Baath ideologues to work out a complete 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 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 1980 in a terrorist action and even now is heavily involved in terrorist activities in Khuzestan and Tehran. 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 near Iraqi.

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*<sup>(14)</sup> 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 federative 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 of the *sematic* religions (Islam, Christianity and Judaism) condemned Babylonian tyranny and its inhumanity, to the Baath of Baghdad Babylonia was an Arab state that represented Iraq's glorious past upon which Iraq's new Baathist 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 35 years, causing the eight-year war of attrition with more than one million people dead, and hundreds the idea of changing historical name of the Persian Gulf become a major point of conflict with Iran.

There are many indications that Iraqi Baath's brand of ideology for nation-building by re-writing the history and revising the geography of the region that has devastated Arab-Iranian relations 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<sup>(15)</sup> for instance, the UAE Government has increased its ant-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 2005 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 1990s and early years of the 2000s 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. Moreover, scholars from UAE express misgivings over Iran's persistence on enriching uranium up to 20% of purity, hinting that it is for strategic use of her nuclear program. Often the fact is ignored that for production of nuclear weapon enriching uranium at 95% of purity is needed. Furthermore, the fact is ignored that under the impact of severe economic sanctions, Iran suffers from shortage of many essential items of consumer's goods, including medicines and for the domestic production of which she needs enrichment of uranium of at least 20%.

And finally, the controversy over the naming of the Gulf separating Iranian Plateau from the Arabian Peninsula, though quite old, caused new frictions among Arabs of Peninsula and the Iranians in the first decade of the 21 century. In addition to rejecting masses of documents from Arab scholars and Arab newspapers listed in many Arab sources as well as my book on the name of the Persian Gulf<sup>(16)</sup>, advising Arab societies against use of *Arabian Gulf* instead of Persian Gulf, the UAE Government, for example, increased its campaign to change the historical name of in this geographical place in recent years.

This controversy has also been exploited by the extra regional

players in their geopolitics of divide and rule, though indirectly, the undertone of affront to national identity left little room for patience and tolerance with the consequent result that regional experts such as this author used his vast efforts to neutralise most successfully the harmful effect of extra-regional exploitation of this case whereas the Arabs and Iranians have the ability to find out that they can overcome even this sensitive issue if they sincerely wanted to bring harmony to their inter-related regional life.

### CONCLUSION

With the fundamental changes brought about by the more intensified political and strategic activities of some of the regional actors who act as the appendix of the extra-regional powers, and with new threats that it has paradoxically caused in the form of the so-called *Arab Spring* opened up new opportunities for the regional players to broaden the regional prospect of harmony and cooperation. In this new atmosphere Arab-Iranian relations cannot escape the imperatives of greater geopolitical awareness of; firstly, the twenty first century world of geopolitics is changing fast from big power domination of the regions in favour of greater dispersion of power throughout regions; and secondly, finding out what can bring the Arabs and the Iranian closer to each other in greater regional harmony and how could this be made possible in a way that greater cooperation for the harmonious management of the affairs of the region would safeguard natural interests of all concerned. Having studied the affairs of the region in details for the past forty years or so, this author is of opinion that forums made up of regional academic and diplomatic experts can examine possibilities of regional solutions to regional conflicts and working out regional geopolitical possibilities to elevate the standing of the region in the international geopolitical order of the twenty first century.

In this direction it is important to realise that the only solution to religious controversies both in its more traditional aspect and its new geopolitical manifestation is to be found the return to Qom - Al-Azhar seminaries diplomacy of early 1960s. It worked then and it will no doubt work again. On the issue of territorial disputes, this author believes that international rules and regulations, including irreversibility of international treaties and agreements as well as the rulings of the UN Security Council of 9 December 1971 are to be observed at all times while there are still rooms for manoeuvres for both Iran and the UAE to accommodate each other in Abu Musa Islands administration task.

On the issue of variation in naming the Persian Gulf, it is noteworthy for either sides of the spectrum that following any tradition of racially motivated skim in this respect is not helpful to overcome the problem. Both sides are to observe the facts of history as well as UN secretariat directives; No. AD 311/1 Gen, of 5 March 1971; and, No. ST/CS/SER.A/29 of 10 January 1990, and many other UN documents that advise member states not to attempt changing historical names of geographical locations in our region.

Compared with masses of documents from Arab scholars listed in many Arab sources as well as my book on the name of the Persian Gulf<sup>(16)</sup>, advising Arab societies against use of *Arabian Gulf* instead of Persian Gulf, I for one Iranian expert, have done my outmost to discourage similar attempts in Iran in changing the name of Shatt al-Arab to *Arvand-Rud*. Best example of these is my paper to this years' five-yearly national conference on unification of geographical names<sup>(17)</sup> which appeared in *Iran newspaper*<sup>(18)</sup> bringing the importance of not changing historical names of geographical places to the attention of my fellow Iranian. Thus this author is of the opinion that even in the matter of controversy over the name of the Persian Gulf there are the scope for compromise among the Arabs and Iranians of

the region based on the principle of preserving historical names of geographical places, while local sentiments can also be addressed in adoption of localised variations.

In my final summation, while I feel I have to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Ahmari and his group of researchers at Arab and International Relations for having so successfully organised this meeting, I find it necessary to point out that should we decide on improving Arab-Iranian relations which is vital for the peace and prosperity for all in the region, we will have to repeat meetings of academic experts and veteran diplomats in future and hope CAIR will continue helping organization of such meetings in the near future. ❖

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

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11. Ibid.
12. For relevant reports, see: www.ettelaat.com/etbarchive/2008/09/09-11/P8.pdf See also; Author in interview with BBC Persian Television, Thursday 18th January 2011.
13. On the legal aspects of the UAE claims to the islands I reminded the United Nations Secretary General that:  
1) Members of the Arab League, including Iraq, Libya, Algeria, Kuwait, South Yemen, and the United Arab Emirates complained against Iran to the UN Security Council in December 1971 similarly arguing without proof that Iran had occupied the said islands. The Security Council met on December 9, 1971 and after full deliberation decided, without objection, to let the case to rest (UN monthly chronicles, January 1972, Vol. IX, No. 1, Records of the month of December 1971).

2) Whereas the Government of the United Arab Emirates does not have relevant mandate to proceed with a legal complaint in this context at international levels, the question is how the Arab League whose member states are not directly or otherwise connected to a territorial dispute that was settled before the creation of the UAE between Iran and the Emirate of Sharjah could presume such authority?

Considering the above and the fact that the case of these islands was settled between Iran and the Emirate of Sharjah by the British before the creation of the United Arab Emirates, the UAE cannot defy the Iran-Sharjah MoU that had come into being before their existence, unless such agreements had been officially declared null and void by the newly created state at the time of its creation. Not only did not the UAE declare the arrangements arrived at by Iran and Great Britain (acting as the government of the protectorate emirates of the time) as null and void, but also the Supreme Council of the Union decided in its meeting of 12 May 1992 that foreign obligations of emirates prior to the formation of the UAE will be the obligations of the Union itself.

The MoU of November 1971, signed by Iran and Sharjah, is a legal instrument giving no right of interference to any third party according to international law. Also the return of the two Tunb islands to Iran by Great Britain took place on the basis of understanding of the two sides Iran wished no written agreement which would cast doubt on her absolute sovereignty over these islands. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that permanent representative of the United Kingdom (responsible for territorial defense and foreign relations of the emirates) declared in the Security Council meeting of December 9, 1971 that the arrangement on the islands arrived at by his government and that of Iran in November 1971 constituted a model arrangement for settling similar territorial issues elsewhere in the world (UN monthly chronicles, January 1972, Vol. IX, Records of the month of December 1971).

In the meeting of 12 May 1992 of the Supreme Council of the United Arab Emirates, H. H. the Emir of Sharjah who is Iran's partner in the 1971 MoU, refused to entrust his Emirate's authority over the issue of Abu Musa island to the UAE leadership and abandoned that meeting. Hence, UAE President's act of assuming authority for the case of Abu Musa Island in the absence of the ruler of Sharjah and without his consent renders UAE leadership's claim on that island illegal. It is noteworthy that UAE leadership has been usurped by the Al-Nahyan ruling family of Abu Dhabi since its emergence, against the text of UAE constitution which prescribes presidency of the union to rotate among the rulers of the seven member emirates and that the vice-president should succeed in the event of the demise of the president.

The UAE leadership has for years been trying to present the legal return of Abu Musa and Tunb islands to Iran on November 30th 1971 as a military occupation. In its scenario the visit to Abu Musa Island of an Iranian naval vessel that went to hoist the Iranian flag on that island at that date was enough reason to manufacture that accusation, disregarding the fact that Iranian naval representatives were welcomed officially in Abu Musa by the brother of the Emir of Sharjah. Hoisting the flag of the recipient state on the territory changed hand between two states is a legal practice as US navy hoisted that country's flag at Alaska when it was transferred to US sovereignty from Russia.

The United Arab Emirates distributed on October 27, 1992 a position paper among UN members whereby they asked Iran to adhere to the terms of the 1971 Iran-Sharjah MoU, and at the same time claimed sovereignty over all three islands. That act proved that the UAE was not even aware that by so doing they contradicted themselves and thus nullified their own claims according to international law where it says; *allegans contraria non est audendus*, that is; he whose statements contradict each other ought not to be heard (A. D. McNair, *The Law of Treaties*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1961, p.185).

14. Edward Saeed, *Orientalism*, Vintage Books, New York 1979).

15. See for example the following instances:

Magdi Omar's interview in Al-Ahram of Egypt on 21/6/2001

Abdul Monim Saeed in Al-Ahram of 23 December 2002.

Al-Anba' daily of Kuwait wrote on 7 October 2003

Mohammad Abu Ali in Al-Sharq al-Owsat of London 16/12/2004

Abd or-Rahman Rashed in Al-Sharq al-Owsat of 1/1/2005

Sad Ibn Tafflah former Kuwaiti Minister of Culture and Information in Sharq al-Owsat of 1/1/2005 and in 15/1/2005

Dr. Hesham Al-Asmar in Al-Ahram of Egypt 18 January 2005

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