

## **Iran and Obscurities of the Demographic Distribution in Ahwaz**

This article has been written by Mohammad Nawaseri in February 2007. Considering the importance of what this article contains it is translated from Arabic to English as another step to revealing the facts about Iranian policy regarding Al-Ahwaz.

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Of the most important achievements of mankind in the twentieth century, the period of modernism and postmodernism, is the irreversible demise of the great empires which were formed after the Renaissance in Europe and Asia on the ruins of the colonized nations.

Those empires colonized the lands and enslaved the people in the ugliest forms of exploitation and slavery. However, by the end of the age of invading artillery, the method which the newly established systems who inherited the remains of those empires applied in dealing with the indigenous people of the colonized lands was the systematic nationalist policies from ethnocide to cultural dispossession, mass displacement, and ethnic cleansing against these people.

The prime motive of those empires was the economic interest justified by political and religious ideologies sometimes or by human rights and ethical issues at other times as were the Napoleon Bonaparte's occupation of Egypt and/or Russian and British occupations.

The Soviet Union which collapsed in the early nineties is another example of those empires. It was called the prison of peoples, and its essence was exactly that of previous empires. However, people were finally liberated from this great empire which was built on fire, blood, international conspiracies, and rampant lawlessness.

Yet another example of those bloody historical empires is the Iranian Persian Empire which, since its very first inception, has been founded on colonial expansion and economic exploitation of the neighboring nations. Of the devastating consequences of those ambitions it was Arabs who suffered mainly; and it was due to the geographical proximity, and the Persian heritage that carries a deep historical hatred against the Arab nation. However, the ideological basics of this empire, which is of the remnants of the colonial past, have changed a lot through

the different stages of history. In a time of some previous Persian monarchies Persian race was the main ideological motive. For the Islamic Republic, however, the Safawi sectarianism and the Persian ethnic are the main motives. It should be reminded, of course, that the contemporary Persian Empire emerged as a result of the colonial complicity in the twenties of the last century and the geostrategic repercussions of the Bolshevik revolution in Czarist Russia then.

The first victim of the newly emerged Persian empire and its chauvinist attitude against the geographical proximity in general and the Arab neighbors in particular is the Arabian state, Arabistan (Al-Ahwaz), which was occupied on the 20<sup>th</sup> of April of 1925. Arab rule was abolished in this historically Arab region due to its geographical nature; as Al-Ahwaz is considered the Eastern Gateway of the Arabian lands.

The forces that helped caesarean of the Iranian empire - modern Persian- are the same forces that played a key role in undermining Arab rule in Ahwaz. One of them was the British Empire which had colonial ambitions in the Arab countries in that dark era of history. Of other influential parties was the sectarian Safawi establishment men of which, such as Mirza Naeeni and Aboulhassan Isfahani, are famous for their contributing *fatwas* (religious opinions and rules). They played a key role in the preface to the occupation of Ahwaz. There were also politicians, intellectuals and the Zoroastrians of Iran and India who were working in the government of East India Company. People such as Ardeshir Chi and Arbab Keikhosrow as well as racist thinkers like Mahmud Afshar and Kazem Zadeh Iranshahr.

It is not a coincidence that these same parties played a key role in the occupation of Iraq in 2003, where the sectarian Safawi establishment is represented by men like Sistani and Hakim and other men of religion in Iran, and as before, Britain and her confederate, America, who is the most prominent heir to the British colonial past.

One of the most important historical factors that have led to the cooperation between Persian Empire and the Western colonial powers in the past and present, in spite of the ideological differences between them, is the historical hatred of both against Arab nation. Though enjoying strong military forces and a great civilization, Persian Empire was not lucky in her wars against the Arabs for the winner was always the Arabs. Arabs triumphed over the Persians in 310 AD and killed their king, Hormuz II. Moreover, they were victorious in their battle of Dhi Qar in the early seventh century AD, when several Arab tribes (from Iraq and Ahwaz), who were led by Bani Sheiban, allied against the Persians.

This battle was so important that the prophet Mohammad commented about it “Today Arabs won their rights from Persians and evened.”

In the battle of Qadisiya in 635 AD Arabs, led by Sa’ad bin Abi Waqqas, won again. They wiped out the Persian armies led by Rustam, while Na’man bin Moqren was their leader. And eventually, after winning the Nahawand battle, led by Hudhayfah ibn Alyaman in 642 AD, Arabs conquered Persia, and banned Zoroastrian religion there, and Persians admitted Islam as their religion eventually. Arabs were victorious in their several battles against Persians in the era of Moshashaeen, Arabian government of Ahwaz in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. Another victory for Arabs happened in the era of Bani Ka’b in Ahwaz with the leadership of Sheikh Salman Al-Kaabi in the eighteenth century.

The security conditions and political history of the Arab nation in general and southern Iraq in particular, are the same circumstances which Ahwaz went through before the occupation in the twenties of the last century.

Blatant interference of the Iranian occupation which is represented by the Iranian security agencies<sup>1</sup> and the sectarian Safawi policies in various aspects of daily and/or political life is a preparation for uprooting this important and vital part of the body of the Arab nation and its natural extending with the ambition to attach it to the Iranian body. It was the same policy that paved the way for the occupation of Ahwaz, as this Arabian country was a rebel against the British and Persian and Osmani (Ottoman) empires up to the forties of the nineteenth century. After the Osmani’s broad attack in alliance with the Al-Montafaj Sheikhdome which led to the destruction of Muhammara, the capital of Ahwaz, Sheikh Jabir, sheikh of Ahwaz in that time, was forced eventually to request for help from the Qajarite government. The result was the second Ground Rum Treaty in 1847, which classified Ahwaz under the influence of the Iranian empire, compared with a waiver claim on Iran's claimed influence on some other areas such as the banner of Sinjar and Sulaymaniya. The religion factor played the main role in that treaty, which culminated in the colonial military occupation of Ahwaz in April 1925. Drawing her lessons from history, Iran exercises the same policy in order to single out Iraq and pounce upon it to exploit and plunder its wealth after that she lived and still lives for eight decades of occupation on the wealth of Ahwaz while denying Ahwaz’s citizens the most basic necessities of a free honorable life.

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<sup>1</sup> Iranian Intelligence, Sepah e Pasdaran (Ghods Army), and Iraqi security agencies which were formed in Iran, as Bader Forces. (translator’s note)

## **Systematic policy against Ahwazians**

The policy of the Iranian regime towards different nations in Iran in general and Arab people of Ahwaz in particular -after the direct military occupation-, was and still is systematic at various levels. These racist inhumane policies aimed at the political, cultural, social and economic structures of this nation. Their objective is melting this people in the Persian crucible through obliterating their Arab identity, which is represented in the language and national culture, and eventually uprooting them of their Arabian roots and of the land they lived and took root in for thousands of years. Such policy was always systematized and applied by the political authority in Tehran.

This policy began with the occupation of Ahwaz, and Reza Shah Pahlavi put the first building blocks of it by granting the Arab's lands to the military men of Persia, and the men of politics, administration and security. Moreover, he withdrew the ownership of the remaining lands from the Arab farmers and gave them to Natural Springs Foundation in order to facilitate the confiscation of those lands in the studied future steps. He also displaced hundreds of thousands of the farmers and citizens to the central parts of Iran, Iraq and the Gulf states.

This policy was continued by Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the son, and it became even more brutal because of the Persian racial orientation and its hatred against Arabs. Through the land reform policy in the sixties of last century, specifically in 1963, and under the title of *agrarian reform* and *white revolution*, hundreds of thousands of agricultural lands were confiscated and then entitled to the Persian settlers. The first of these was *the project of sugar canes*, which inaugurated in that period on the ruins of dozens of Arab villages in Ahwaz.

Those criminal policies culminated after the arrival of the clergy to the power, specifically after the end of the Iran-Iraq war. The nature of the ideological composition of this government had the prominent role in the development of the vicious circle of this policy which comprises the terms of sectarian extremism, historical hatred, and the Persian racism and hostility against all that is Arabic.

The strategy of this policy was codified under the rubric of *the demographic distribution* under the circular issued by the Supreme National Security Council headed by Hashemi Rafsanjani, under the number 971 \ 2 b -3416 and the date 14. 04. 1371 Hijri- that is 1992.07.05- and also the circular issued by the Office of Mohammad Khatami as the General

Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, number 27686 \ 12 and the date 01.05.1377 - that is 1998.07.23.

### **Results of some of those racist policies**

- Confiscation of more than 70 thousand hectares of agricultural lands in areas such as Al-Shuaibia, Al-Minaw, Susa and northern parts of Ahwaz to the advantage of companies the most important of which are Iran Cultivation and Manufacture Company – Iran and America Cultivation and Manufacture Company - California Company, DezKar Company, Shell Company, Klassno Company and other American and Israeli companies during the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah.
- After the success of the Iranian revolution, more than 135 thousand hectares of lands belonging to Ahwazi farmers in southern part of Ahwaz city and northern part of cities of Muhammara and Abbadan and on both sides of Karoun river have been confiscated. These lands are of the most fertile agricultural lands in Ahwaz, and they all were confiscated with the pretext of setting up the *Sugar Canes Project*, while the companies instituted on this project belong to the men of the Iranian government and the ruling denominational Safawi institution in Iran.
- Confiscation of 47 thousand hectares of Ahwazi Arabs' lands for the purpose of setting up the project of *the disabled of Iraq-Iran war* in Jufair near to the Iraqi-Iranian borders.
- Confiscation of more than 25 thousand hectares of Arabs' lands for the purpose of setting up the project of fish farms in south of the Ahwaz city. These lands were granted to the Persian settlers who were of the newcomers to the territory.
- Confiscation of more than 100 thousand hectares of lands in the east of the Huwaiza town extending to the north of Al-Muhammara city under the pretext of military maneuvers of the *92 Army*, and very obviously the whole of that area is an agricultural land. Several Arab villages there were inhabited by thousands of Arabs who were finally displaced from their lands by force.
- Confiscations of thousands of hectares of agricultural land in cities of Al-Khafajiya, Al-Huwaiza and Al-Besitin under the pretext of developing the Azadegan oilfields which extend to the Majnoun oilfields in southern Iraq; Japanese companies oversee this project.

- Confiscation of more than 6 thousand hectares of agricultural land in the city of Susa, and granting them to the military men of the Revolutionary Guard and Ghods Forces. This project is called the settlement of the clergy in the north and northern-east of Ahwaz province. The confidential document of this project eventually leaked out. The document is called the *Sardar Rasheed* document; and Sardar Rasheed Is one of the senior commanders of the Revolutionary Guard and Ghods Forces.
- In addition, there is the entire demolition of Arabian areas and displacing thousands of Ahwazis under the systematic policy with the purpose of turning the demographic distribution in Ahwaz, such as the demolition of Sepidar neighborhood in the city of Ahwaz in 1998 and displacing the people of this district who are mostly of the lower economic class.<sup>2</sup>
- Beside the policy of land confiscation, a parallel policy against Ahwazis is being practiced by Iranian government which is not less vicious and racist than the former, and that is perverting the main river courses in Ahwaz such as Karoon, Al-Karkha, Al-Jarrahi and other rivers, and stealing the water and pumping it into central Persian areas such as Isfahan, Yazd, and Kerman for the purpose of irrigation. This happens while they deprive the Arab farmers of these waters and make their fight for living more difficult and more frustrating. Moreover, periodically they fabricate floods through the dams that have been constructed for this purpose, in order to demolish the infrastructure of Ahwazi villages, and consequently facilitate the displacement of Arab people and confiscation of their agricultural lands and demolition of Arabian villages and countryside of Ahwaz.

The purpose of all this is the displacement of the farmers from their villages and systematic destruction of their economy and their enrolment in suburban marginalized areas, that are called "the Arab belt of poverty"; and then besiege of the Arab towns with Persian settlements and towns that have been established for this purpose and there are dozens of them, such as "Shirin Shahr" Settlement in the south of Ahwaz city, in the midst of the villages that have been destroyed for *The Sugar Cane Project* and fish farms. This settlement is designed for more than ninety thousand people as a first step to be widening. There is also the giant

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<sup>2</sup> Also, 25 houses in the Arab area of Hasir Abad in Ahwaz were destroyed in May of 2008.(translator's note)

“Ramin” settlement in the north of Ahwaz city, which is built for more than one million settlers from the Persian newcomers to the Territory.

Marginalization of “the Arab belt of poverty” is a deliberate and planned process, where poverty, addiction, crime, and all kinds of structural imbalances at the level of cultural, social, and economic structures spread widely. Living on the margins of the society is a normal secretion of these inhuman policies.

Of the most important implications of this policy are the environmental disasters, water pollution, increasing salinity in the land, environmental pollution and spread of infectious diseases, and all these complications are mentioned in the report submitted by “Milan Kothari”, United Nations’ envoy to the province, less than three years ago. In this report he describes these policies as catastrophic for the indigenous Arab people of Ahwaz.

### **Escalating policy of confiscation and settlement**

These criminal policies are escalating and being accelerated during the past fifteen years, and they were highly applied especially during the presidency of Hashemi Rafsanjani and Mohammad Khatami after that the crew of technocrats (the group of Kargozaran-e-Sazandegi) -with Persian tendencies and orientations- became the authority of development projects in Iran. During this period tens of thousands of hectares of fertile agricultural land in various towns of Ahwaz were confiscated, under the political plan known as “settlement demographic distribution”.

After coming of Ahmadinejad and his “Hojjati” crew to the rule, these policies peaked. This was especially after the outbreak of Intifada in 15th of April 2005 and it was a collective punishment of Ahwazis for their steering disobedience against the Iranian military occupation. The evidence of this is the starting of the confiscation of 30 thousand hectares of agricultural land in the cities of Ahwaz, Al-Khafajiya, and Al-Hindian (Al-Tamimia). This plan is mentioned in the assessment report issued by the Department of Fisheries in the territory.

This plan contains:

Beginning the second phase of the *Ahwaz “Azadegan” project* (NDC) which will eventually end up with the confiscation of 12400 hectares of Arabs’ lands. In the first phase of this project 25 thousand hectares of these lands were confiscated.

Beginning of a project in Al-Khafajiya which will cover ten thousand hectares of lands. Shrimp breeding project that covers 8 thousand hectares in the east and west of the river “Zahra” in the city of al-Hindian (Al-Tamimia).

The establishment of ports in Bahraikan area of Al-Indian and Nahrolghasir River in Abbadan and more other ports in other spots. This has been known that these ports are not subject to the authority and control of the Ports Department; they are rather exploited and utilized by the Revolution Guards (Sepah e Pasdaran) for smuggling and circumventing the international resolutions against Iran in banning the importation of weapons. These ports are important because they are located near Iraq and the Gulf States.

### **The objectives of these policies**

There are economic, historical, political, and security tendencies behind these systematic structural policies against the Arab people of Ahwaz.

With a closer look at the political map of Iran and its Arab neighbors, we notice that the lands that were confiscated in the north-west and west and south of Ahwaz are along the Iraqi and the Gulf States borders. The purpose, however, is to facilitate the process of Iranian intervention in the internal affairs of these countries away from the eyes of Ahwazis and to create a military logistical environment to provide protection and adequate supply for the Iran’s continuing interference in the affairs of these countries.

Moreover, emptying these areas, in which lie the largest fields of oil and gas, from Ahwazis as a first step, and titling them to the Persian settlers and newcomers as a step forward is Iran’s main policy in order to change the population composition of the Territory in favor of the Persians and the central government, as all the successive governments of Iran have maintained this policy since the formation of the Iranian state, or rather the modern Iranian *empire*, at the hands of Reza Khan.

Among these goals is also the dismemberment of the Arab people of Ahwaz and isolating and sieging them in their towns and villages and depriving them of any connection with the Arab world, through Iraq and the Arabian Gulf, which was naturally easy due to the strategic geographical position of Ahwaz.

And this explains the breadth of the policy of land confiscation and mass displacement which was stated in the document that was leaked out from the Office of Khatami. That document, with the accumulation of contradictions and with the overall conditions, caused the Intifada of



the April 15th the result of which was hundreds of martyrs and wounded while thousands of people have been arrested and 12 people so far have been executed, and the list is growing<sup>3</sup>.

This plan also included the areas in the north, the middle, the east and south of the territory. This is the most serious ever, and was disclosed by the document mentioned above, under the title of the industrial and commercial draft of Arvandan in the cities of Muhammara and Abbadan, for which reason hundreds of thousands of Ahwazi Arabs will be displaced from their towns and villages that fall within the scope of this large settlement project and so dozens of Ahwazi villages will be demolished.

In addition, there has been the displacement of more than 300000 Ahwazi citizens from the cities and countryside of Muhammara and Abbadan during the Iran-Iraq war who did not return to their villages which they had abandoned due to the destruction of infrastructure, lack of services, and spread of minefields in those areas and all are the remnants of the war. The Iranian government went to no action for clearing the minefields in order to prevent Arabs from returning to their villages and leaving their exile zones in northern and central Iran. In conclusion, this must be emphasized that all these criminal policies, which are of course applicable to the concepts of mass displacement and ethnic cleansing and major crimes punishable by international law, are implemented before the eyes and ears of the Arab States and the international community who ignore the Ahwaz tragedy claiming that it is an Internal issue and is part of the concept of sovereignty.

Nevertheless, one who follows the events prudently is to note that Ahwaz was not Iranian ever, it is an Arabian land occupied with brutal force since 1925, and the most prominent evidence of this is the successive uprisings of its Arab citizens against the different Iranian governments during the last 83 years. Ahwaz is a region for which its Indigenous Arab people are fighting against the Iranian occupation authority. And this is what all Ahwazi national resistance parties are unanimous in, despite their various beliefs and different ideas.

Accordingly, the need for Arab and international intervention in this regard is clear in order to tame this arrogant Persian monster and save the Arab people of Ahwaz from the policy of ethnic cleansing, and to stop the Iranian interference in the internal affairs of Arab countries under the pretext of sectarian Safawi Purism at one hand, and preserving the Persian vital interests and national security at the other hand. The aim behind this is hegemony, which is an integral part of the mentality of Persians, clericals they are or seculars.

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<sup>3</sup> Many more Ahwazi people have been executed since the time of this article.