



**With Colonial Complicity**

# The Day Ahvaz Lost its Freedom in (1925)

Loss of Ahvaz is one of the black pages in contemporary Arab history. Persian colonialism agreed with foreign ambitions in the region in (1925) on the fall of Ahvaz by the hands of Iran, as a deal within the framework of redrawing the map of the Arab region in post-World War I world. So, what is the story of Ahvaz?

Ahvaz was one of the Arab emirates independent from the Arabian Gulf. This emirate has always been vulnerable to Iranian ambitions as a result of its strategic location, in addition to its significant agricultural and oil resources. However, Iran did not succeed in seizing that emirate due to the strong position of its Emir, Sheikh Khazal Al-Kaabi.

Britain initially stood by Sheikh Khazal Al-Kaabi and declared its protection thereof against Persian ambitions, given the importance of the oil fields in his emirate to Britain. In this context, Britain established an oil refinery in the port of Abadan in Ahvaz and implemented some investments in this regard.

With the outbreak of World War I in 1914, Britain asked Sheikh Khazal to stand thereby in the war in order to attract the Arabs thereto. He did and pledged to protect the oil installations in the emirate from any Turkish or German attacks. In return, Britain, through the British delegate in the Gulf, issued a letter to Sheikh Khazal, in which it pledged to protect him from Iranian ambitions. This letter stated: "Whatever the change might be in the form of the Iranian government and whether this government is monarchical, tyrannical, or constitutional, Britain is ready to provide you with the necessary assistance to reach a solution that satisfies you and us in case the Persian government infringes your recognized competence and rights or your money in Persia. Also, our government will also do its best to defend you against any aggression or transgression that may occur to you from any European country".

However, matters in Tehran were going in the opposite direction. With the arrival of officer Reza Khan to power and then his accession to the throne thereafter under the name of Reza Shah Pahlavi in the year (1925), the extreme Persianism increased and voices raised demanding the return of ancient Persian glory.

Iranian harassment began with Sheikh Khazal actually began, as a prelude to extending Persian influence over Ahvaz and, eventually, seize it. Tehran started making financial claims it deemed owing by the emirate. Sheikh Khazal refused to submit and responded to Tehran saying that such action is deemed interference in his internal affairs and it contradicts the Shahshahi decree that was granted to his father in the year (1857).

Tehran was not satisfied with that, but rather began a military harassment by sending hundreds of Iranian soldiers to the borders of the emirate under the pretext of maintaining security and order and to confront Bakhtiari Khans who rebelled against Tehran. This matter disturbed Sheikh Khazal and asked for Britain's intervention to counter this in accordance with its previous pledges made in (1914) to protect Ahvaz from any Iranian interference. However, Britain contented itself with reassuring Sheikh Khazal, who received a letter from Basra confirming the same, that: "Days will prove to Sheikh Khazal that Great Britain does not neglect its friends and does not forget their favors".

The matter did not stop at military harassment and sending soldiers to the borders of Ahvaz, as the Persians began to stir up the internal troubles to Sheikh Khazal and tried to turn some of his followers against him. Meanwhile, major changes began to emerge in Britain's policy in the region and began to abandon its traditional allies in favor of Reza Shah Pahlavi and his government in Tehran. Ali Mohafaza explains that political shift and the strong rapprochement between Reza Shah Pahlavi and Britain, saying: "The British admired Reza Khan's hatred for the Soviets and communism, as much as they liked his ability to impose his obedience on his fellow officers, as well as his ambition to develop the Iranian army and his closeness to them."

Britain's statements then changed and was no longer in favor of Sheikh Khazal. The British ambassador in Tehran pressured Sheikh Khazal to settle his differences with the Shah, telling him that it was better for him to "be a friend of our friend", i.e., to Reza Shah Pahlavi.

Thus, Sheikh Khazal realized the extent of Britain's deception to him and its inclination towards the Shah. At that point, he tried to unite the tribes of the south under his loyalty to stand up against the Iranian ambitions. Hence, the formation of the "Al-Saada Alliance" or the union of the southern tribes was announced, in preparation for confronting Tehran's provocations.

Iranian forces moved to invade Ahvaz and the Shah sent a deceptive message to the people of Ahvaz in an attempt to calm them down and separate them from their leader, Sheikh Khazal. The Shah claimed that he came to Ahvaz in order to rid its people of the oppression of Sheikh Khazal and the Iranian forces stormed Ahvaz. Then they resorted to deception and the commander of the Iranian forces claimed to hold a ceremony honoring Sheikh Khazal, yet once the Sheikh arrived, he was arrested and sent to Tehran.

**Jack Beribi: "Sheikh Khazal died in Tehran, surrounded by all trappings of honor, deprived at the same time of all his rights as an independent Emir"**

French writer Jacques Biribi comments on the tragic situation that Sheikh Khazal ended up with, saying: "Sheikh Khazal died in Tehran surrounded by all manifestations of honor, deprived, at the same time, of all his rights as an independent Emir. As for his lands, they were annexed to the Persian Empire and all his fault is that his Emirate It is located in a strategic petroleum place in today's world, the world of oil that does not preserve rights or obligations.



**References:**

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