

# The Way Out: Arabistan

by [Dovid Primack](#) (August 2020)



*Al Fiddaiyoun (Freedom Fighters)*, Naim Ismail, 1969

**Setting aside as moot the** issue of global warming and the alleged role, if any, that fossil fuels play in it, it is urgent for the peace of the world that a viable alternative fuel be found or developed. From the jungles of Indonesia to Darfur in the Sudan, when oil is discovered on tribal lands, the indigenous tribesmen are always the losers. Even in the United States, the Osage tribe was wiped out by enterprising assassins when oil flowing underneath their reservation lands in Oklahoma unexpectedly made them rich. Sitting at home in their respective mansions, amid their pseudo-Victorian bric a brac, between 1921 and 1926, they were systematically blown to

smithereens.

In 1908, Khaz'al ibn Haji Jabir Khan, Sheikh of the Kasebite klan of the Banu Ka'b tribe of Arabs, became a wealthy man. His tribe had lived for centuries in Arabistan Province under the nominal rule of the Shah of Iran, happy to enjoy virtual autonomy instead of the heavy hand of the Ottomans or the Mamluks before them. Then in 1908, oil was discovered in Khuzestan province. Khaz'al was highly respected and admired by Muslims and Christians, on friendly terms with the Persian Empire's Qajar dynasty, the British, and neighboring Arab sheikdoms and monarchies. In addition, he was the founder and head of a Masonic lodge, and the protector of persecuted Eastern Christian refugees. He had a Friend of the Empire medal from the British Colonial Office, and a medal from the Pope for his kindness. He concluded a lucrative contract between British Petroleum Ltd., the British Empire, and the Shah, Mohammad Ali Qajar, and also bought up shares in the company. Consequently, he was well set for life, and Arabistan province was by all accounts in fat city. If the Iranian Empire collapsed, the British agreed to recognize Arabistan's independence. He was a religiously moderate, openhandedly generous patron of the arts and literature, a rarity in the Middle East even in the best of times.

Alas, there arose a new dynasty in Iran, whose founder, Reza Shah Pahlavi, knew not Khaz'al. He was bent on modernization, and Khaz'al regarded him as a usurper and a fool. He was very much the former, a regent who took over while his young protege, Ahmed Shah Khajar, was out of the country. But he was not in the least bit the latter, so when poor Khaz'al threatened military action, the British interceded and negotiated peace between the belligerent parties, which modernizing, usurping Reza accepted and then promptly broke. He kidnapped Khaz'al and confiscated his shares in BP, transferring the oil lease to himself. The British did nothing to prevent this abuse of their friend and

ally, and warned his kinsman, King Faisal I of Iraq, not to rescue him from his imprisonment in Tehran, Ambassador Henry Dobbs calling it "playing with fire," and warning him that the British empire would take a strong stand against him. In May of 1936, Khaz'al was murdered by one of the guards, as ordered by the Shah, and his sheikdom officially dissolved. Since Reza Shah was no friend of theirs, Britania's inaction is inexplicable. Perhaps the Colonial Office's archives have some dusty, worm-eaten folder that can shed some light on it. It's safe to assume there was treachery involved. BP kept drilling, now filling Reza's pockets, and life went on.

The last Pahlavi dynasty was run out of town in 1978 by Ayatollah Khomeini, and the Islamic Republic took possession of the oil fields of Khuzestan, still cutting the indigenous Arabs out of any share in the profits, but letting them live among the pollution and debris.

So much for the historical background. How to describe the present? A nightmare. The Kasebite/K'aba Arabs still receive none of the income from these oil wells, but must eke out a sparse living from their polluted ancestral land. They have been re-named Ahwazis, after their largest city, and public speaking, broadcasting and publishing in Arabic is forbidden. Even cultural events such as poetry readings, which are highly valued by Arabs, are forbidden. Even giving their children Arab names is forbidden, unless it is also the name of an Iranian historical figure. Arabistan is now called Khuzestan. Iran is deleting all Arabian links to the region, and colonizing it with Persians as they drive the Arabs out.

The majority of Ahwazis are Shiite Muslims. But living in deep poverty with their culture suppressed and their mineral wealth confiscated, many have secretly converted to Sunni Islam as an expression of extreme alienation. And those that have done so have been frequently [arrested](#) and charged with trumped up crimes. It is impossible to say how many, but much more than a few have been executed, sometimes after

secret trials, using confessions coerced under torture, and professional informers' testimony, and sometimes with no trial at all. A new, sadistic form of execution has been devised just for uppity Ahwazis, slow strangulation.[\[1\]](#)



Understandably, this is another bone of contention between Iran and the Sunni Arab world. There is a sizable Ahwaz community on the other side of the Shat El Arab waterway, in Kuwait, along with strong tribal ties between Ahwazi and Kuwaiti Arabs. The Iran-Iraq war was in fact ignited by Iraqi efforts to annex Khuzestan, one of the first stops in his invasion of Iran. Saddam called it "liberating" the Ahwazi, although, being in the middle of a war zone (Abadan is a major city in Khuzestan), a great many of them were killed in the eight-year war of attrition, sometimes by Iraqis, sometimes by Iranians.

Their enmity with the Iranian government has also drawn Ahwazis towards the fighting in Syria, where they had hoped to topple Assad and thereby deal a critical blow to the Iranian

regime as well. There have also been bombing incidents and sabotage of the oil fields, either in sympathy for Ahwazis, or by the Ahwazis themselves.

In nearby Kuwait, there is a large foreign community, in fact comprising 70% of the total Kuwaiti population. Of these, as of 2006, approximately 50 to 60 thousand are Iranian expatriates, and of those, between 30 and 40 thousand were Ahwazi Arabs. Even on good days nomadic, semi-nomadic and formerly nomadic peoples can give any demographer, professional or amateur, a headache. Registering their comings and goings with a government that enjoys little if any confidence does not sit well. So, all the data we have is questionable. But we at least have that ballpark figure from the CIA as of 2006 (whose credibility is beyond reproach, of course). In 2019, the overall population of Khuzestan was approximately 4,900,000. As of 2013, Khuzestan itself was 50 percent Arab, the other half comprised of the largely nomadic Bakhtiari Lors. This, however, discounts the ongoing aggressive colonization of Khuzestan with Persians, as the Iranian federal government continues a policy of driving the indigenous inhabitants out and erasing the Arabian identity of the region, formerly known as Arabistan. Iran itself has been undergoing a decline in population growth, which may or may not have affected the Ahwazi and Lors living in Khuzestan, much less those living in nearby Kuwait. So all that can be said is that approximately 2,500,000 Ahwazi Arabs live in Khuzestan, and that anywhere from 50,000 to 100,000 live as expatriates, in Kuwait or elsewhere.

Those who remain in Khuzestan suffer from the ongoing persecution. It is far from easing up, and in fact is becoming more irrational. Amnesty International reports that in April of 2019, 24 social media users residing in Khuzestan were arrested for reporting to the outside world news of the floods, which the prosecutor general had forbidden, claiming that it is the Farsi equivalent of "fake news". [Unrepresented](#)

[Nations and Peoples Organization: UNPO](#) reprints an article from the Ahwazi Human Rights Organization stating that in December 2019, 1,000 Ahwazi *children* were arrested! As far as I've been able to ascertain, they are still incarcerated for being present at protests against the government, and are being held in a state of neglect and abuse. But this is all news that never happens on TV, so the western world remains ignorant.

But this is Iran. The government persecutes everybody, and especially those who they not only dislike, but also have a vested interest in driving out; i.e., the Ahwazi. And especially when Iran's stock is falling all over the world, in Syria for helping to bolster the Assad regime, in Lebanon for supporting Hizbollah, whose forces have been depleted fighting to bolster Assad, and needless to say throughout the rest of the Middle East for its incessant meddling and threats. And its leadership is on the ropes, first because of the Corona Virus, which has killed more than a few of the Ayatollahs, who are supposed to be favored with divine guidance and infallibility. And second, because the economy is in the tank due to US-imposed sanctions.

Understandably, there are several Ahwazi resistance groups. On August 27, 2006, an activist with knowledge of these groups met with CIA Agent Poloff to brief him on the most prominent organizations, and ask him for American aid in their struggle. Agent Poloff explained that while the US has a democracy program for Iran, it would not provide funds to any group that advocates the use of violence or the division of Iran into separate states. This would exclude most of the Ahwazi groups, but not all.[\[2\]](#) And this was the policy of the Bush Administration, not binding on the Trump Administration, which can and should take a fresh look.

Iran is a country rich in resources. Khuzestan is the source of about 80% of its vast oil wealth. But its land is fertile, its people well-educated and industrious, and heirs

to an ancient and sophisticated culture. How they have been reduced to watching public executions in soccer stadiums is a tragedy, but hardly an unique tragedy. France did little better after 1789, and the New World has had its dark moments, not least of which was the murder of the oil-rich Osage Tribe in the 1920s, right around the time that Reza Khan, the first Pahlavi Shah, kidnapped Khaz'al Khan off his yacht and imprisoned him, seizing his holdings with BP, and later murdering him.

This is why I pray for an end to the use of fossil fuels. It enriches the technologically and culturally advanced West. But all too often it plunges the indigenous tribes from whose land the oil is extracted into poverty, oppression, and in the case of the Osage, genocide. The past is past. The Osage will not get a casino or tax-free cigarette stand. They won't sell jewelry or blankets to tourists. But the future is ours to shape in the present. Ultimately, Nikola Tesla (the one man Albert Einstein considered smarter than himself) might save us all, once his theories can be put to the test in outer space, and unfiltered solar radiation is converted to inexhaustible electricity and transmitted wirelessly and safely to appliances and vehicles on the earth's surface.



In the interim, waiting along with us all for salvation from the stars, the Ahwazi remain alive, if not well, in Khuzestan, watching their oil stolen from underneath their feet as they eke out a living subsistence farming their polluted homeland, and getting what jobs they can despite poor education and discrimination. The oil is used to finance Iran's war machine, which features terror and death all over the world.

Love Donald Trump or hate him. But since he is the President of the United States, he must be used however he can be, and he can be used for good. He has repeatedly declared his opposition to further "endless, pointless wars" in the Middle East, and on several occasions has shied away from war with Iran despite provocation. But as Iran continues to stick its hand into areas of great concern to the US and the International Community, he will find it increasingly difficult to avoid open conflict, which Iran would dearly love, not because they can win, but because it would re-consolidate their fading power over their subjects, as the



1991 Gulf War did for Saddam Hussein, even though he lost.

But here we have it: The Ahwazi people are yearning for freedom and independence, and have been unjustly robbed and oppressed. And their oppressor, Iran, uses the oil wealth that it's been stealing for almost a hundred years, to commit murder and mayhem all over the world. If we help the Ahwazi people to obtain their freedom and independence, Iran loses its power to wage war, and the United States has an alternative to further embroilment in the muddled, bloody Middle East. Yes, many hate Trump, but many of those who claim to hate wars and to love oppressed indigenous peoples. So here we have a win/win/win situation. No war with Iran. Freedom and independence for the Ahwazi people. The weakening of an oppressive murderous regime in Iran. Therefore, the best result would be for Trump to officially recognize the Independent State of Arabistan (f/k/a Khuzestan), and provide them as a sovereign nation with the hardware and training necessary to defend their own sovereignty.

This venture could end badly. But I am thoroughly convinced that if things continue on the present course, another pointless, endless war is inevitable.

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[\[1\]](#) 19/12/2006 three arrested: Malek Banatumim, Abdullah Solaimani, and Ali Motorizadeh.

1. 24/1/2007 four put to death, Mohamad Chanbpour, Abdolamani Farjolah Chaab, Abdolamir Farjolah Chaab, Alireza Askareh, and Khalef Khanaferah.
2. 14/2/2007 Ghasem Salami, age 41, father of six, and Majad Albughbish, age 30, both publicly hung.
3. 15/2/2007 Risan Sawari (possibly related to Hamza Sawari

listed in No. 6 below), 32 year old teacher, killed under torture at Karoon Prison.

4. 10/9/2007 according to activist Peter Tatchell, three unnamed Ahwazi political prisoners were executed, apparently as a childish act of spite, right after UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour visited and expressed UN concern regarding Ahwazi Arabs.
5. 6/10/2007, according to Amnesty International human rights and democracy activists, the following individuals were to be executed at Karoon Prison in Ahwaz City, with Musa Pirbani, Prosecutor: Rasoul Ali Mazrea, age 65, refugee; Ahmad Marmazi, age 65, Ma'shur resident, father of two children; Hamza Sawari, age 20(possibly related to Risan Sawari mentioned in No. 4 above); Zamel Bawi, son of Haj Salem Bawi, an Ahwaz tribal leader; Abdulemam Zaeri; Nazem Borghi. I was unable to discover the final disposition of their cases.
6. All in all at least 13 Ahwazis were killed in the nine months preceding the 26 October 2007 article by Peter Tatchell from which these names were taken.
7. Activist Emadeddin Bayhi wrote a letter to the prosecutor in their defense, and was arrested for "revealing state secrets" and sentenced to Summary Indefinite Detention.
8. 2/2014 20 arrested at Quran and Arabic study meeting in Koye Alawi neighborhood of Ahwaz City.
9. 7/2014 10 arrested; three for preaching Sunni beliefs, seven for holding communal Sunni Tawheed prayer during Ramadan.
10. 11/2014 16 Ahwazi converts from Shia to Sunni Islam arrested in Ahwaz City during a Quran class.
11. 12/2014 Two converts preaching Sunni beliefs were arrested and charged with "causing corruption on earth," a capital crime: Hossein Saboori and Sami Zehady Alboghobesh. Both also accused of burning down a Husseiniya (Shia Mosque), which both deny having done.
12. All in all 150 Sunnis were detained in 2014 from all

ethnic groups in Iran.

13. On September 22, 2018, there was an armed attack on a military parade through Ahwaz City killed 22 civilians, and injured 57 more. The four gunmen were apprehended and killed. During the investigation, at least 55 were arrested by local intelligence, but the actual number is rumored to be as high as 300. HRNA definitively identified 55 detainees, and it's believed that those arrests carried out through September and October are all part of the same sweep, "investigating" the attack.
14. To spare avid readers of footnotes further agony, the link is <https://www.en-hrana.org/>