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The Motherland: Reviewing *a Fuss over Nothing...* on the Sovereignty over the Three Iranian Islands by Mohammad-Ali Movahhed

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Abstract

Territorial disputes between States are among the most prevalent in international relations and before international courts and tribunals, including the ICJ and ITLOS. Claims made by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) regarding sovereignty over the three islands—Abu Musa, Greater Tunb, and Lesser Tunb—represent a significant case in this respect. This contribution reviews the book *A Fuss over Nothing: Examining the Evidence Referred to by the Sheikhs on Claiming the Islands of Lesser Tunb, Greater Tunb, and Abu Musa* (hereafter *A Fuss over Nothing*) by Mohammad-Ali Movahhed, which supports Iran's sovereignty over the Three Islands. Originally written in Persian, the book has been translated into French, Turkish, and Arabic as of February 2025. It was written in response to *Dispute between the UAE and Iran over the Islands: Abu Musa, Greater and Lesser Tunbs; British Documents (1764-1971)*, authored by Iraqi writer Walid Hamdi al-Aazami in 1995 (in Arabic). Through nine chapters, including a "Preface" and "Final

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Words," Movahhed debunks the UAE's claims of sovereignty over the three islands, demonstrating that these claims are baseless and weak in view of the documents cited by the Iraqi author. Given the scholarly, precise, and forthright character of its author, *A Fuss over Nothing* is an indispensable source for study and research on the subject of Iran's sovereignty over the three islands.

***Keywords**:* Three Islands, Iran, UAE, A Fuss over Nothing, Mohammad-Ali Movahhed.

Introduction

"*Have a care; do not throw away the shield when attacked by an orator*
Who has nothing except borrowed eloquence to show".

Saadi Shirazi

Territory-related issues are of great importance to States, and it is from this point of departure that one can understand the reason for the seemingly endless conflicts between States around the world over territorial and border disputes. Iran is no exception in this regard, and it has always had territorial disputes with some neighboring States throughout history. This neighborhood is accompanied by its related issues, and among them, the claims made by United Arab Emirates (hereinafter UAE) ...over the sovereignty over the three... islands of Abu Musa, Greater Tunb, and Lesser Tunb, since its inception in the early 1980s, is considered one of the most important ones.

As *Askari* has noted, with the UAE government's repeated claims to have sovereignty over the three islands and the support of States [apparently] aligned with Iran, such as Russia and China, for resolving the issue by resorting to peaceful methods of resolving disputes regarding this claim made by the UAE in 2023[1] and 2024,[2] the

[1] See: https://www.newarab.com/analysis/russias-iran-uae-balancing-act-gulf-islands-dispute (last access on February 24, 2025)

European Union has also joined the group of supporters of the UAE and has raised the issue of Iran's "occupation" of the islands.[3] An action that, according to experts, is considered unprecedented in international relations.[4] Due to the tremendous importance of the islands issue for Iran, and the need for more attention to it in scientific and academic circles, the authors of this piece decided to take a very small step in this regard and briefly introduce one of the authoritative works on Iran's sovereignty over the three islands of the Persian Gulf.

One of those who has written on sovereignty over these islands is Mohammad-Ali Movahhed. The name of Movahhed is tied to Iranian culture, history, literature, philosophy, politics, and law. His book entitled *A Fuss over Nothing: Examining the Documents Referred to by the Sheiks on Claims over the Islands of Lesser Tunb, Greater Tunb, and Abu Musa*, should be read in depth and be a subject of further study and scrutiny for all those concerned about the people and territory of Iran, especially students of international law. It should be noted that the first publication of this book dates back to 1994 by the Office of the Presidential International Legal Services. However, the second edition was published by Karnameh Publishing in 2001, and everything that follows is based on the third edition in 2021 by the same publishing house. Originally in Persian, this book is translated

[2] See: https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2024/06/rare-clash-iran-china-reaffirms-solidarity-uae-over-disputed-islands (last access on February 24, 2025)

[3] Amir-Hossein ASKARI, "EU Support for the UAE Sovereignty over Three Islands: Support or Intervention?" [In Persian] *Blog of the Iranian Association for United Nations Studies*, December 30, 2024. Available at: https://is.gd/xckERd

[4] Sattar AZIZI, "There Necessary Documents for Proving Iran's Ownership are Available", [In Persian] *Ham-Mihan Online*, October 19, 2024. Available at: https://tinyurl.com/269tg3ef

into Arabic, Turkish, and French.[5] Followingly, we briefly go through the main points made by Movahhed in the book.

I. Background and Purpose of the Book

In the "Preface" of the book, which is the first section of the book and is related to its background and purpose, Movahhed states that this work was written in a way as a critique of and reaction to the publication of a book by Dr. Walid Hamdi Azami entitled *Dispute between the UAE and Iran over the Islands: Abu Musa, Greater and Lesser Tunbs; British Documents (1764-1971)* in 1993 by Dar al-Hikmah Publishing House in London (p. 15). The book, which was intended to be no longer than an average article in terms of length and introducing and reviewing Hamdi Azami's book, has been published in the form of a book in order to do justice to the content. He says that his acquaintance with the subject of the Iraqi author's book dates back to more than thirty years before the publication of this work, when the issue of using oil resources in the Persian Gulf had just been raised, and oil companies were expressing their desire to operate in these areas. For this, the boundaries of Iran's coastal waters and continental shelf had to be defined and delimited. This delimitation was legally associated with determining the most advanced points of the border lines on the country's main coast, as well as identifying and specifying the islands that belonged to Iran beyond the said border line (p. 15). The author then, with a very brief reference to the natural location of the islands, points out that at that time there was no state called the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and it was Britain that, on behalf of the sheikhs of Ras al-Khaimah and Sharjah, occupied Tunbs and Abu

[5] For more information see: https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/463093/Three-translations-of-book-challenging-dubious-claims-on-Persian (last access on February 24, 2025)

Musa, and Iran was forced to negotiate with the British government in London (p. 16).

Professor Movahed, who was the legal advisor to the National Iranian Oil Company at that time, participated in these negotiations and witnessed the failure of checks and balances with the British. "The negotiating party was an occupying party that was stubborn under the pretext of protecting the rights of the people under its protection and, relying on *status que*, wanted to continue its occupation and demanded proof and documents from the other party to say why and for what reason it considered these islands to be its own, but it did not see itself as needing to provide proof and documents. Those islands had been out of Iran's actual possession for almost a hundred years and every time Iran had tried to approach them, it had encountered resistance and threatening reactions from Britain" (pp. 16-17). The author follows that, "but now it is not the case that they only ask Iran for documents and evidence", and therefore, the sheikhs have no choice but to "spend money and employ researchers, writers, historians, and lawyers to sort out this affair and create a polished appearance for a claim that, in Saadi's words, is nothing more than a 'borrowed eloquence'[6]" (p. 17). This statement, of course, reveals our lack of attention to this issue at various levels, especially the lack of conducting accurate and scientific research and publishing it in international languages around the world.

Movahhed then provides a brief introduction to Walid Hamdi's book in less than two pages (pp. 17-19), and points out as follows: "Unfortunately, Mr. Walid Hamdi is not a person of accuracy, reflection, and scientific criticism, and his work does not go beyond

[6] Sheikh Mosleh al-Din Saadi SHIRAZI, *The Golestan of Saadi*, Translated by Richard Francis Burton, p. 172; available at: https://www.iranchamber.com/literature/saadi/books/golestan_saadi.pdf

the scope of simple translation and citation of the contents of the files at most" (p. 18). He notes that in the introduction to his book, the Iraqi writer repeats media claims against Iran, including the conclusion and signing of the "1971 Sharjah Agreement" under pressure and threats from Iran, and as a result, its nullity, citing Article 52 of the 1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties. He also mentions Iraq's objection to it and the severance of political relations with Iran and England, the objection of the UAE government to the deployment of Iranian forces in Abu Musa, and the complaint of Algeria, Iraq, and South Yemen to the Security Council on December 3, 1971 (pp. 18-19).

II. Qawasim of Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah

The second section of the book entitled "The Qawasim of Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah", responds to Dr. Hamdi's claim on page 13 of his book, where he writes: "Nineteenth-century documents relating to the Arabian Gulf coast, which are available in the archives of the Government of India in London dating back to 1871, conclusively prove that these islands have been in the possession of the Qasimi Sheikhs of Ras al-Khaimah and Sharjah since 1750, when they ruled from Bandar Lengeh off the coast of Iran". In addition to mentioning who the Qawasim or Al-Qasimi were and how they governed Bandar Lengeh, Movahhed refers to Hamdi's book itself which, based on documents from the Indian Government archives published in 1928, states that the sheikhs of Ras al-Khaimah invaded the coast of Iran for the first time in 1727 (during the reign of Nader Shah Afshar) and the second time in 1747 (during the reign of Karim Khan Zand), and were expelled from there in 1737 and 1767, respectively. After the death of Karim Khan Zand in 1779, the Qawasim returned to Bandar Lengeh for the third time, and this time they came to terms with the Iranian

government and accepted the citizenship of this country. Until 1887, the decree of the Bandar Lengeh government was issued in the name of the Qasimi sheikhs, and they also paid the prescribed taxes to the Iranian government. The islands of Tunb, Abu Musa, and Sirri were also under their jurisdiction (pp. 21-22).

The important point to which Movahhed refers is that "a correct understanding of the claims made by the UAE on sovereignty over the three islands is not possible except in the broader context of examining British policy in the Persian Gulf and the history of British relations with Iran from the first days they entered the Indian Ocean, and this history dates back to 1622 when British warships came to the aid of Imam Qoli Khan, the commander of Shah Abbas, the Safavid king, in retaking the islands of Hormuz and Qeshm from the Portuguese" (pp. 22-23). He also explains that in return for this assistance, the British demanded the surrender of the Fortress of Hormuz and later the seizure of the port of Bushehr and the islands of Khark, Hengam and Qeshm, and sometimes the lease of Qeshm (p. 23), which is clear that this was to strengthen their foothold in the Persian Gulf. The author states that Ras al-Khaimah and Sharjah, which are important in the discussion of the three islands, were the sphere of influence of the Qasimi or Qawasim or Jawasim. A tribe whose origins go back to Iraq and who were mostly involved in piracy and plundering merchant ships, and it was for this reason that the southern coast of the Persian Gulf was called the Pirate Coast by the Europeans (p. 24). The main root of piracy in the Persian Gulf has been traced back to the Qawasim, and especially the Qawasim of Ras al-Khaimah.

The British, who saw their commercial interests in the Persian Gulf as threatened by the Qawasim's piracy, clashed with them in several stages and finally forced them to sign so-called Letters of Promise. In

1820, after the Qawasim had completely lost their strength, an agreement was signed in Ras al-Khaimah between the rulers and sheikhs of the Arabs and representatives of the British government, according to which the sheikhs of the Arab tribes pledged to stop piracy on land and sea, not to fight each other, and not to disturb ships. From then on, the name of the Pirate Coast was changed into the Trucial Coast (Sahel al-Hudnah in Arabic). On the same date as the signing of this collective agreement, separate letters of commitment were also taken from each of the sheikhs, and the British government became their guardian and owner of authority. (pp. 25-27). Movahhed also mentions the occasional incursions of British forces into the coasts of Iran and the destruction of ships belonging to Arab citizens of this State in the Bandar Lengeh under the pretext of pursuing and fighting pirates and the displeasure and anger of Fath-Ali Shah Qajar (pp. 27-29). In fact, in this section and the next one, he seeks to clarify the historical roots of the formation of the claims of the UAE over the three islands.

III. Connections between the Persian Gulf, Afghanistan, and India

In the third and fourth sections of the book, Movahhed talks more about the importance of the Persian Gulf for Britain. Under section 3 entitled "The Connections between the Issues of the Persian Gulf and Afghanistan with the Situation in India," he makes some points in this regard. According to Movahhed, Afghanistan and the Persian Gulf are intertwined in one issue, which is the protection of British interests in India. Britain considered these two regions as bulwarks to protect India, and the Persian Gulf by sea and Afghanistan by land were supposed to block the way for invaders like Napoleon of France and the Tsar of Russia, who had their eyes set on India as the magic jewel

of British operations. Later, other considerations such as access to oil reserves, etc., would arise for the Persian Gulf, but Afghanistan was only India's savior. As long as the Indian rajas encouraged the rulers of Afghanistan to attack British-controlled India, the job of Britain and its agents was to incite Iran to attack Afghanistan. But as soon as Britain was relieved of the danger of local resistance in India and, of course, Napoleon fell, any movement by Iran against Afghanistan, which was now considered a buffer to protect India, was severely suppressed. A prominent example of this change in approach was the occupation of Khark Island in 1836, contrary to its commitments in the instruments concluded with Iran in 1809, 1812, and 1814, when Mohammad Shah Qajar marched on Herat, and with the act conducted by Britain, Iran abandoned its siege of Herat in 1838, on the eve of the fall of Herat. As we know, Iran was forced to abandon its claims to Herat and Afghanistan during the 1867 Treaty of Paris.[7] This section even mentions the possibility of Iran becoming a colony, since Britain knocked down India by establishing small bases on its coasts (pp. 31-41). Therefore, the Persian Gulf is important to Britain in various ways, and the subsequent actions of the British government in this strategic area are in line with achieving the goals and objectives inherent in its presence in this water area.

"Britain in the Persian Gulf" is the title of the fourth section of *A Fuss over Nothing,* in which the author addresses issues that are directly related to the Persian Gulf and the three islands. At the beginning of this section, he cites articles from two treaties of 1809 and 1812 between Britain and Iran. Among them, Article 5 of the 1809 treaty stated: "Whenever, with the permission of the Shah of

[7] See: Gholamreza ALI-BABAIE, History of Iranian Foreign Policy, [In Persian] 1st published (Tehran: Liusa Publication, 1997), pp. 223-224.

Iran, several British troops enter the Persian Gulf and land on the island of Khark or other ports, they will of course have no right to occupy or possess these islands or ports, and from the date of the conclusion of this preliminary or general treaty, this army will be under the command and instructions of the King of Iran, and the number of this army will be determined in the detailed treaty". Article 9 of the detailed treaty of 1812 also stated that if Iran needed help in the Persian Gulf, Britain would provide warships and troops to the country and receive the costs of the operation from Iran. But the British government was not satisfied with this and wanted a base in the Persian Gulf for itself, including taking possession of an island in this water area. Britain's threatening proposal to establish a permanent base for its forces in Kish in exchange for huge financial benefits and recognition of Iranian sovereignty over Bahrain was strongly rejected by the Iranian authorities and the Shah. It was almost from this point that the question of Iran's rights and ownership of all the islands of the Persian Gulf was raised and cast into doubt as a result of the rejection of the insidious British proposal (pp. 43-47). This date coincides with the days when Iran's heavy wars with Russia left no trace for the country, and ultimately ended with the conclusion of the 1813 Treaty of Golestan and its grave consequences.[8]

While rejecting the establishment of a permanent base on the island of Kish by England, Iran also asked this government to withdraw its forces from Qeshm. However, the British argued that Qeshm was not a province of Bandar Abbas, which the Imam of Muscat had ceded to Iran after its capture, and that he, as an agent of the Iranian government, had a lease on Bandar Abbas. In other words, England

[8] Houshang TALE', *History of the Partition of Iran (Vol. 4: Partition of the Caucasus)*, [In Persian], 2nd ed. (Langroud: Samarghand Publication, 2011), pp. 189-202.

considered Qeshm to be outside the sovereignty of the Iranian government in this way. However, citing the 1855 manuscript of Tahmasb Mirza Moayed al-Dawlah in the name of the Imam of Muscat, Movahhed reveals the inclusion of the "two islands of Hormuz and Qeshm" in the manuscript as the counties of Bandar Abbas province (pp. 47-48). This section also refers to an agreement between Captain Bruce, the British Resident Representative in Bushehr, and Mirza Zaki Khan Nouri, the Minister of the Persian Province, in 1822, which, among other things, recognized Iran's sovereignty over Bahrain in Article 2. The Indian government rejected this treaty, and Tehran did not follow through (pp. 48-49). It also mentions the mischief and provocations of Britain, including in Bandar Lengeh and the arrest of the Sheikh of Bahrain and the replacement of its ruler without the will and permission of the Iranian government (pp. 50-53). The result of those mischiefs and provocations in connection with the Three Islands was that in 1863, Nasser al-Din Shah ordered the removal of Qawasim from the government of Lengeh and handed it over to a deserving and competent person, even if it was a non-Arab. It should be noted that the official and public action of the Iranian government to replace the government of Lengeh was delayed until 1887. In this year, Haji Mohammad Mahdi Malek al-Tojar Bushehri was appointed to the government of Lengeh and the Qasimi Sheikh was sent to Tehran. The last Qasimi Sheikh from the Qawasim of Bandar Lengeh died in exile in Tehran in 1896 (pp. 53-54). In fact, by raising such discussions, Movahhed is trying to shed more light on the background of the claims and issues surrounding the three islands.

IV. Confidential Documents of the Government of India (The British Raj)

The fifth section of the book is devoted to the "Confidential Documents of the Government of India". It is noteworthy that the Government of India means the *British* Raj, which was the rule of the *British* Crown on the *Indian* subcontinent, lasting from 1858 to 1947. From here on, the issues discussed in *A Fuss over Nothing* gain a more direct connection with the three islands. According to the documents of the Government of India Foreign and Political Department, in response to Iran's secret negotiations with the sheikhs of the Persian Gulf and the attempt to form a regional alliance to reduce Britain's role in the Persian Gulf and increase Iran's political dominance on the coasts and islands surrounding this region, the British government began to obtain an undertaking from the sheikhs of the Persian Gulf that they would not correspond with any foreign government without Britain's consent, would not assume any obligations towards them, and would not allow representatives of any government other than Britain to be stationed on their territory (pp. 55-57). These documents also refer to the last chapter of the Qasimi rule in Lengeh, and among other things, it is stated that after the dismissal of Qasimi shiekh and the appointment of a new ruler in 1887, the ruler of Qeshm was ordered to seize the island of Sirri as a subordinate of the port of Lengeh, and he, along with thirty people, raised the Iranian flag on that island (pp. 57-58).

This event led to the emergence of the first stage of the dispute over the islands, and the British representative, in response to the position of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs claiming the permanent occupation of Siri by the rulers of Lengeh and the collection of taxes from the people there on behalf of Iran, stated: "It is true that the Deputy Governor of Lengeh ruled on Siri island, but he did not have it in his possession as the ruler of Lengeh, but as the sheikh of the Qasimi tribe. The Qasimi sheikhs, apart from being the

rulers of Lengeh and being subjects of the Iranian government, had traditional rights on this island, and their Arab relatives on the Omani coast shared these rights, and the residence of the Lengeh sheikhs in Iran could not result in the loss of the rights of the aforementioned partners". At this time, Sirri Island, like the islands of Tunb and Abu Musa, was considered a vassal of Bandar Lengeh, and that is why Britain's claims regarding the three islands are like its claim regarding Sirri Island and are based on the hereditary and traditional rights of the Qasimi sheikhs (pp. 58-59). Movahhed states that the British talk about Sirri Island was to prevent a repetition of the incident related to it regarding other islands of the Persian Gulf, including the three islands (p. 58).

The second stage of disputes over the islands goes back to the planting of the Sharjah flag on them. In 1903, the Sheikh of Sharjah, on the advice and insistence of the government of British Indian, raised his flag on the islands of Tunb and Abu Musa, which was met with a reaction from Iran. It was in April 1904 that Iranian customs officials, while visiting the islands, lowered the Sheikh's flag from the islands of Abu Musa and Tunb and raised the Iranian flag instead, and assigned of guards to guard both islands. The Deputy Governor of British India suggested in a telegram that Britain should use force and send a warship to the islands with the sheikhs to lower the Iranian flag and raise the flag of Sharjah. However, the then British Minister Plenipotentiary in Iran, Sir Arthur Harding, suggested that they enter into negotiations with Iran before resorting to force. In negotiations between Harding and Joseph Naus, who was the Director General and then Minister General of Customs of Iran, the sovereignty over the three islands was declared a disputed issue, and it was decided that the Iranian flag would be removed and negotiations about them would continue. Thus, the Iranian flag was removed from the islands on June

14, 1904, but contrary to the understanding between the two parties, who were supposed to negotiate the issue, the Sharjah flag was raised there a short time later. Britain's pretext for this was to preserve the status quo, arguing that "the Arabs have raised their flag where it was before the recent events". Britain implicitly threatened that if Iran did any act in this regard, it would once again raise the issue of Sirri Island (pp. 60-64). These points, which are presented in more detail in Movahhed's book, are not mentioned in Hamdi's book.

V. The Inside of the Negotiations According to Documents Contained in Hamdi's Book

In its sixth section, the book deals with the inside of the negotiations based on the documents contained in Hamdi's book. Movahhed states that the sum of the material contained in Hamdi's book, in addition to what was mentioned in the fifth section, shows that the dispute over the islands in question between Iran and Britain began in 1887 with the removal of the Qawasim from the Lengeh government and continued in various forms throughout the Qajar era and thereafter until 1971 (p. 65). Iran's objections to the re-installation of the Sharjah flag on the three islands in 1904 were repeated on various occasions during the years 1905, 1912, and 1913, and each time they were met with British stubbornness and threats. Even in 1923, the issue of raising the dispute between Iran and Britain before the League of Nations was raised. In the heat of British threats to resort to force if necessary, Iran, *inter alia*, in a written note signed by the then Foreign Minister of the Pahlavi Dynasty (Zaka' al-Mulk Foroughi), emphasized and clarified its claims to Abu Musa and Tunbs. In the fall of 1925, the Director General of Persian Customs sent a boat to inspect the status of the red soil mines of Abu Musa, and in response to British objections and threats to send a warship, Iran

declared Abu Musa part of Iranian territory (pp. 66-67). From 1928 on, the dispute became more active and intense, and we witness the reluctance of the sheikhs of Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah to hoist the flag on the islands of Abu Musa and Tunbs, which the British government finally forced them to do so (pp. 67-68). It is worth mentioning that Iran had also raised the issue of Bahrain in the League of Nations in 1927.[9]

Movahhed goes on to point out the efforts of Teymour Tash, Reza Shah's Minister of Justice, to find a political solution to the islands issue and the dangers of military and legal solutions in this regard from the British perspective, and states that it seems that Iran's actions in 1888 and 1928 were taken seriously by Britain, in a way that this government made efforts to collect documents and evidence to prove the ownership and pre-emption of the sheikhs over the islands. Britain's disappointment with Teymour Tash and his strictness in negotiations led to adoption of a more rigid stance against Iran by the British authorities (68-73). Along with the British rigid positions, we witness the increase in naval actions towards the islands by the Iranian government on the one hand and the British attempt to maintain the status quo on the other hand (pp. 73-74). Another noteworthy issue is the order of the ruler of Ras al-Khaimah to remove his flag from Tunb Island at the end of 1934, to which Britain, in response, asked the ruler of Sharjah to plant his flag on this island as well, which occurred in April 1935. It is at this time that the then Iranian Foreign Minister (Baqir Kazemi) raised the failed idea of exchanging Abu Musa with Bahrain during negotiations with the British Minister Plenipotentiary. In addition, mention should be made of Iran's objection to the transfer

[9] See: Fereydoun ZANDFARD, *Iran and the League of Nations*, [In Persian) 1st published (Tehran: Shirazeh Publication, 2021), pp. 159-165.

of the concession of the Abu Musa red soil mines to a British company in March 1935, which continued until the outbreak of World War II and the occupation of Iran by the Allied Powers (pp. 74-76).

The turn comes to the period in which Mohammad Mossadegh became Iran's prime minister. At the time, again, the reluctance of the sheikhs, especially the ruler of Ras al-Khaimah, to raise their flag is repeated. A telegram was sent from the British Foreign Office to the political representative of that government in the Persian Gulf on December 14, 1948, in which, among other things, Britain's weak position vis-à-vis Iran in terms of law in the case of the referral of the three islands issue to the International Court of Justice was cautioned (pp. 76-78). During Mossadegh's office, Iran's actions towards the islands increased again. During a visit by the commander of the British ship named Flamingo to the Island of Abu Musa, he recalled that the phrase "Iranian territory" was written in English on the rocks (p. 79). Even when political relations between the two States were severed due to the nationalization of the oil industry and its stories in the International Court of Justice, and even more so, less than a week before the 1953 coup against Mosaddegh which organized and financed by British and the US governments, Iran's efforts in this regard were evident (78-80). After the coup, the dispute and protests between the two sides of the dispute continued, and the proposal of Anthony Eden, the then British Foreign Secretary, in 1955, to have Iran give up Bahrain and Abu Musa and for Britain to withdraw from Greater and Lesser Tunbs and Sirri also failed. The British proposal to submit the Abu Musa and Tunbs cases to international arbitration also failed because it was made conditional on a comprehensive solution for the Three Islands and Bahrain cases by Iran (pp. 80-83). Movahhed mostly quotes these points from the Iraqi author's book.

VI. Evaluation of Evidence and Documents

The seventh section of the book is "Evaluation of Evidence and Documents," whose importance is evident from the title itself. Through general remarks, Movahhed mentions some matters, the most important of which will be briefly discussed in the following lines. Regarding Abu Musa, he refers to the 1971 Memorandum between Iran and Sharjah, and continues that in Hamdi's book, no document has been presented proving the seizure and ownership of Sharjah by the Sheikh before 1887. Seizures after this date have always been objected to by Iran. In a note dated December 1, 1900, from the British Foreign Office to its political representative in the Persian Gulf, it is explicitly stated that the ownership of the Tunb Islands had always been doubtful (pp. 85-86). After referring to some of the positions of the British government in its official correspondence, the author notes that all is that Britain, by emphasizing the ownership and sovereignty of Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah, aimed to find a pretext to prevent Iranian domination in the Persian Gulf and, as a consequence, weakening of the British forces in this region. In this regard, he cites examples such as the sheikhs' reluctance to hoist their flag on the islands and their related stories (pp. 86-90). The opinion of the British legal advisor in 1932 is also noteworthy, stating that proving the British claim that the governors of Lengeh's Qawasim between 1880 and 1887 were responsible for the administration of these islands on behalf of the Qawasim of Oman and that these islands were not part of their governorship requires evidence and proof which is not available (p. 92).

Movahhed then proceeds to a legal analysis of the positions of the parties. He recalls that from the very beginning of the dispute in 1887, during the replacement of the ruler of Lengeh, it was clear that the

islands had been part of the Lengeh governorate for about a hundred years. Both Iran and Britain accepted this, except that England claimed (and the burden of proof is on the claimant) that the Lengeh governor had administered these islands not as an agent of the Iranian government, but as private property owned by the Qawasim tribe. According to Movahhed, this claim in turn depends on proving that the Qawasim had owned the islands in question before coming to Lengeh and accepting Iranian citizenship, and then it must be determined when and under what circumstances this right was transferred from Qawasim of Oman to Qawasim of Lengeh, and how Qawasim of Lengeh separated the administration of those islands from the administration of the official territory of its governorate. England has not presented any acceptable document to prove its claim (p. 93). Thereafter, he briefly discusses the history of the Qawasim and notes that the leasing of areas in Iran to tribes was prevalent and that the basic condition for such transfers, in addition to paying the lease money, was acceptance of Iranian citizenship. He states that "the sheikhs of Ras al-Khaimah, who have now claimed ownership of Tunbs and Abu Musa under the pretext of kinship with the sheikh of Lengeh, must provide convincing evidence and prove that those islands were in their possession before Qawasim arrived on the coast of Iran and had no connection to the Lengeh government" (pp. 93-97). The UAE claims that the ruler of Lengeh, who was in charge of the Lengeh government by official order of the Iranian government, was also an agent of others and managed properties that others had outside the territory of the Lengeh government. Assuming that the issue is accepted in this way, the UAE must present evidence in at least three stages to prove three claims: 1) The islands in question were not only outside the territory of the Lengeh government, but also outside the territory of the Iranian government; 2) The islands belonged to the

Omani Qawasim before the Iranian Qawasim were appointed to the Lengeh governorship; and 3) The governors of Lengeh were agents of the Omani Qawasim and had placed those islands at the disposal of the Omani Qawasim's agents (p. 97).

The author then discusses the story of a map that was prepared in six sheets at the request of Nasser al-Din Shah by the British War Office Intelligence Department and submitted to the Iranian government in August 1888, just a few days before the negotiations between the parties stopped. In this map, the islands of Siri, Tunb, and Abu Musa were marked in the same color as the main territory of Iran, indicating the belief of the map-makers as official agents of the British government that the islands in question belonged to Iran. This map is mentioned on page 27 of Hamdi's book, but the Iraqi author refrained from explaining it in detail (pp. 98-101). In therest of this section, the discussion of Britain's intention to purchase or lease the islands for 99 years from Iran in consultation with the government of the British India is raised, based on a document dated 1914 (pp. 158-159), which, according to Movahhed, reveals two facts: 1) Britain and the government of the British Indian did not doubt that the islands belonged to Iran; 2) The absence of any reference to the Qasimi sheikhs in this document, which indicates that behind the British support of the Qasimi sheikhs, the main purpose is to secure Britain's undisputed dominance over the Persian Gulf (pp. 101-105). He then refers to the documents presented to prove the sheikhs' claim and states that the documents cited by Hamdi from the British Foreign Office archives include a letter written by the Sheikh of Ras al-Khaimah in 1864 to the British Consul in Bushehr and letters from the rulers of Lengeh to the Sheikh of Ras al-Khaimah. The original versions of none of these letters appear in Hamdi's book, and only copies of them are included in his work. Movahhed reviews the

contents of these letters in the rest of the pages of the seventh section of *A Fuss over Nothing* (pp. 105-111) and evaluates them in the subsequent one section.

VII. Evaluation of The Letters

The eighth section of Movahhed's book is an evaluation of the same letters mentioned in the previous section, which are ten in number. Not all of these letters are worthy of mention, and only three of them are worthy of attention. It was previously said that Britain took a serious legal stance on the statements of Iranian officials twice, one in 1887, when the Qasimi ruler of Lengeh was dismissed, and the other in 1928, when the Iranian navy increased its actions concerning the islands and discussions were held about referring the case to the League of Nations. In the first part, the British political mission in the Persian Gulf had asked its agent in Sharjah in December 1887 to convey the statements of Iranian officials about the islands to the Sheikh of Sharjah (Saqr bin Khalid) and to provide evidence to refute Iran's claim and prove the sheikhs' prior occupation. In this regard, the Sheikh of Sharjah provided the British agent with three letters from the ruler of Bandar Lengeh, along with explanations. After reviewing Sheikh Sharjah's explanations, Movahhed points out that there is no evidence or proof regarding Abu Musa dating back to before 1887, and that only Tunb is mentioned in the three letters attributed to the Sheikhs of Lengeh. Saqr bin Khalid also says about Tunb that “no one lives there, nor are there fishermen who pay taxes. The land is open there, and whenever it rains, grass grows on it, and the friends of the Qasimi Sheikhs on the Oman coast are allowed to take their cattle

there for grazing". According to Movahhed, the documents and evidence presented show that the temporary use of Tunb for grazing, contrary to the claims of the Sheikhs of Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah, was not limited to them, but people from Dubai, Ajman, Umm Al Quwain, Qeshm, Lengeh, and even Abu Dhabi also sent their cattle there. The Sheikh of Sharjah has referred to the two Tunbs as "open land," and the Sheikh of Dubai has referred to them as "sea property" (pp. 113-121), which indicates that Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah do not own the two Tunbs as exclusive property.

VIII. Final Words and Appendices

The last section of the book is "Final Words," in which the author reiterates that this work only examines what was raised by the other side in Hamdi's book, and does not consider Iran's arguments and evidence. Movahhed states that, according to Hamdi's claim in his book, the disputed islands have been in the possession of the Qasimi Sheikhs of Ras al-Khaimah and Sharjah since 1750, and that the evidence cited by the Sheikhs has been examined in his book. He adds, but "how can that extravagant claim be proven with these weak and fictitious documents?" (pp. 123-124). The final part of the book is the narrative of Dennis Wright, the British ambassador to Iran from 1963 to 1971, in his book *The British Among the Iranians,* as his memoirs regarding the three islands issue. In his book, wright calls Iran's ownership of the islands undisputed and far from controversy until the dismissal of Qasimi sheikh from the government of Lengeh, and refers to the maps of the British War Office Intelligence Department in which the islands are shown in the main Iranian soil color (pp. 125-126). *A Fuss over Nothing* also has appendices. The first appendix is the names of the sheikhs of Dubai, Sharjah, and Ras al-Khaimah in the years corresponding to the dates of the documents

mentioned in the book (pp. 129). The second appendix is dedicated to documents related to Abu Musa Island (pp. 136-131). The third appendix is a brief introduction of those whose names appear in the book's collection of secret political documents of the government of British India (pp. 137-141). Appendix 4 is devoted to the images of the letters discussed on pages 99-101 of the book on the British War Office's map (pp. 141-156). Appendix 5 is the image of the document regarding the British offer to purchase or lease the islands from Iran for 99 years (pp. 157-159). Finally, Appendix 6 and the final one are the images of the letters discussed in the seventh and eighth sections of the book (pp. 161-176) that were discussed.

Conclusion

Given the scholarly, precise, and non-hypocritical personality of its author, *A Fuss over Nothing* is one of the sources that cannot be avoided in the path of study and research on the subject of Iran's sovereignty over the three islands. In international relations, which is more a battlefield of force and politics than of right and justice, legal legitimacy alone is not sufficient to advance national interests and achieve national goals. What is of significant importance, in addition to legal arguments, is the need to strengthen regional and international diplomacy and increase the level of the country's international relations in order to benefit from its numerous benefits, including preventing actions that threaten our national interests. A wise agent and a benevolent ruler for the country and the nation will use every means to maximize opportunities to secure national interests and security and minimize threats to them, and will avoid any action or movement that is detrimental to the welfare and collective interests of the people and the country. On this basis, Iran's rulers and statesmen, regarding their disputes with their neighbors, including territorial

disputes such as the issue of the three islands, in addition to using international legal instruments to prove the legitimacy of our country, should not neglect the importance and necessity of improving balanced mutual relations and wisely reducing tensions with other countries in the world, especially our neighbors, based on the interests of the people and the ancient land of Iran, and think about Iran, its future, and its people before and above any non-national or banditry issue. The entire territory of Iran, including the three islands of the Persian Gulf, is the motherland, ancestral home, and legacy of all Iranians, which everyone should strive to preserve and promote in every way they can. What is troubling in this regard regarding the Iranian international law community is the severe lack of credible writings in international languages, especially English, in support of Iran's sovereignty over the three islands, in contrast to a plenty of written and published books, articles, and reports aimed at explaining and even imposing the claims of the United Arab Emirates.