Geographic Names Standardization Policy for Iran

United States Board on Geographic Names – Foreign Names Committee

December 2012

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1. Introduction

This geographic names standardization policy has been prepared as an aid to those geographic names experts who are the working staff for the United States Board on Geographic Names (BGN) in the standardization of the geographic names of Iran for United States Government use. The BGN and its staff work to effect consistent treatment of geographic name spellings in U.S. Government databases, publications, maps, and charts, and are intended to satisfy the statutory requirements levied upon the BGN in Public Law USC 80-242 to develop principles, policies and procedures for geographic names standardization, and to promulgate decisions with respect to the principles of geographic nomenclature and orthography.

2. Languages and Language Policy

a.   Demographics

The July 2012 estimated population of Iran is 78.8 million. The population is 61% Persian, 16% Azeri, 10% Kurd, 6% Lur, 2% Baluch, 2% Arab, 2% Turkmen and Turkic tribes, and 1% other. Islam is the official religion with 89% Shia and 9% Sunni. Other religious groups include Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian, and Baha'i comprising 2% of the population.[1]

b.   Languages

The most common first language in Iran is Persian (also known as Farsi, Western Farsi, or Western Persian). The ISO 639-3 name for this language is Persian, and the ISO 639-3 code is FAS.[2] Persian is spoken by fifty-three percent of the population of Iran, and is the only language used in official Iranian government documents. Other languages spoken in Iran are Azeri, Kurdish, Gilaki, Mazandarani, Luri, Baluchi, and Arabic. Within the Indo-Iranian branch of the Indo-European languages, Persian is a member of the West Iranian group. It is genetically related to Dari, Luri, Baluchi, and Kurdish. It is not genetically related to Arabic (a member of the Semitic language family), but has borrowed many Arabic words and expressions. Collectively, Persian and other Indo-Iranian languages are spoken as first languages by approximately seventy percent of Iranians.

There is a wide variation in dialectal forms of Persian. However, official Iranian mapping privileges the Tehran dialect of Persian. The national language of Iran is Persian, as specified in Article 15 of the Iranian Constitution (source: Flanz (ed.) 1998, volume IX; see also http://www.oefre.unibe.ch/law/icl/ir00000_.html):

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[1] Iran. CIA World Factbook Online. < https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html>. 27 Feb 2012.

[2] This language is considered a macrolanguage for Farsi, Eastern [prs] (Afghanistan) and Farsi Western [pes] (Iran) under ISO 639-3. < http://www.ethnologue.com/ show_language.asp?code=fas>. 27 Feb 2012.

"Article 15: The Official Language and script of Iran, the lingua franca of its people, is Persian. Official documents, correspondence, and texts, as well as text-books, must be in this language and script. However, the use of regional and tribal languages in the press and mass media, as well as for teaching of their literature in schools, is allowed in addition to Persian."

The only other language specifically mentioned in the Iranian constitution is Arabic. Arabic is not an official language in Iran, though its teaching is mandated by Article 16 of the Constitution at post-elementary levels:

"Article 16: Since the language of the Qur'ān and Islamic texts and teachings are in Arabic, and since Persian literature is thoroughly permeated by this language, it must be taught after elementary level, in all classes of secondary school and in all areas of study." (Glanz, op. cit)

c. *Geographic Names Standardization*

Iran has officially participated in the United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names since 1967 and different institutions such as Geographical Organization, Armed Forces, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Geography Institute of Tehran University and Surveying Organization have participated in these sessions as representatives of Iran and have presented the national report, containing internal activities in naming and standardization of geographical names.

The national names authority of Iran is the Iranian Committee for Standardization of Geographical Names (ICSGN) (کمیته تخصصی نام نگاری و یکسان سازی نامهای جغرافیایی ایران), associated with the National Geographic Organization (NGO) (سازمان جغرافیایی نیروهای مسلح) and the National Cartography Center (سازمان نقشه برداری کشور) (NCC). The mailing address for this organization is:

P.O. Box 13185-1684, Azadi Square
Tehran, Iran
Tel: +98(21) 6000031/37.
Fax: +98(21) 6001972.

Official information on these organizations can be accessed at the following URL: http://www.geonames.ncc.ir. Within the ICSGN, transliteration issues are handled by the Transcription Working Group (Islamic Republic of Iran, 2004). Since 2000, the ICSGN is headed by the NCC.

Within the ICSGN, there are working groups for: (a) geographical names website and database; (b) terminology; (c) Romanization; (d) undersea features (new in 2004); (e) exonyms; (f) historical names.

3. Toponymic Policies

a.   Native Script

Official sources in Iran are produced only in Persian, occasionally supplemented with English-language maps. No official geographic sources are published in any other minority language of Iran. Approved Persian-script toponyms for Iran are written in a modified version of the Arabic script, hereafter referred to as the Perso-Arabic script, it is written from right to left. It has no case distinction between capital and lower-case letters. Each letter appears in up to four forms: initial, medial, final, and isolated. Some letters join either on the right or left side with adjoining characters.

The Persian alphabet consists of thirty-two letters, shown in Table 1 below. Numerals are written left-to-right, even though otherwise Persian is written right-to-left, Table 2.

Table 1: Dictionary Order of Persian Alphabet

Letter		Unicode	Letter		Unicode	Letter		Unicode
آ	Alef maddeh	0622	ذ	Zāl	0630	غ	Ghayn	063A
ا	Alef	0627	ر	Re	0631	ف	Fe	0641
ب	Be	0628	ز	Ze	0632	ق	Qāf	0642
پ	Pe	067E	ژ	Zhe	0698	ک	Kāf	06A9
ت	Te	062A	س	Sīn	0633	گ	Gāf	06AF
ث	Se	062B	ش	Shīn	0634	ل	Lām	0644
ج	Jīm	062C	ص	Ṣād	0635	م	Mīm	0645
چ	Che	0686	ض	Ẕād	0636	ن	Nūn	0646
ح	Ḥe	062D	ط	Ṭā	0637	و	Vāv	0648
خ	Khe	062E	ظ	Ẕā	0638	ه	He	0647
د	Dāl	062F	ع	‘ayn	0639	ى	Ye	0649

Table 2: Persian Numerals

0 : ٠	1 : ١	2 : ٢	3 : ٣	4 : ٤, ۴	5 : ٥,۵	6 : ٦,۶	7 : ٧	8 : ٨	9 : ٩

b.   Romanization

Persian geographic names are to be transliterated using the 1958 BGN/PCGN Romanization System for Persian. The system can be found in the publication *Romanization Systems and Roman Script Spelling Conventions* (September 2008, 6th Edition), published by the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency. For convenience, the transliteration system is included as Appendix B of this document.

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The NCC promulgated a new transliteration system for 'broad transcription of geographic names,' which has been adopted in Iran and by the United Nations for the romanization of geographic names, although its use has not yet become widespread in Iran.[3] The NCC transliteration system, developed in partnership with linguists from Tehran University, was approved for use by the NCC in 2003, 'as the system and procedure for preparing broad transcriptions of toponymic items be (sic) NCC. For a comparison between the BGN and other transliteration systems for Persian, see Appendix C.

c.   *Diacritics in Romanization*

The following diacritic marks are permitted in romanized standardized name forms in Iran, as shown in Table 3:

Table 3: BGN Approved Diacritic Marks for Iran Toponyms

Character Name	*Character*	*Unicode*	*Character Name*	*Character*	*Unicode*
Uppercase a with acute accent	Á	00C1	Lowercase a with acute accent	á	00E1
Uppercase a with macron	Ā	0100	Lowercase a with macron	ā	0101
Uppercase h with cedilla	Ḩ	1E28	Lowercase h with cedilla	ḩ	1E29
Uppercase i with macron	Ī	012A	Lowercase i with macron	ī	012B
Uppercase s with macron	S̄	0053+ 0304	Lowercase s with macron	s̄	0073+ 0304
Uppercase s with cedilla	Ş	015E	Lowercase s with cedilla	ş	015F
Uppercase t with cedilla	Ţ	0162	Lowercase t with cedilla	ţ	0163
Uppercase u with macron	Ū	016A	Lowercase u with macron	ū	016B
Uppercase z with macron	Z̄	005A+ 0304	Lowercase z with macron	z̄	007A+ 0304
Uppercase z with sub-macron	Ẕ	1E94	Lowercase z with sub-macron	ẕ	1E95
Uppercase z	Z̧	005A+	Lowercase z	z̧	007A+

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[3] See UNCSGN 10th Conference, E/CONF.101/INF/6 (July 2012).

with cedilla		0327	with cedilla		0327

The apostrophe (') and inverted apostrophe (') are special symbols, and are permitted in the romanized forms of geographic names. The single high reversed-9 quote (ʼ) is not permitted in romanized official names for Iran. Uppercase letters in standardized name forms retain diacritics. Diacritic marks other than the ones listed in Table 3 above are not permitted in official names for Iran.

d.   Generic Terms

Appendix D contains a glossary of generic terminology for Iranian geographical names.

4. Political Geography Policy

a.   Country Name and Capital

Country Name:

Conventional Short Form	Iran
Conventional Long Form	Islamic Republic of Iran
Native Short Form – Romanized	Īrān
Native Long Form – Romanized	Jomhūrī-ye Eslāmī-ye Īrān
Native Short Form – Native Script	ایران
Native Long Form – Native Script	جمهوری اسلامی ایران

Capital:

Romanized Approved	Tehrān
Native Script	تهران

a.   First-Order Administrative Divisions

The BGN recognizes the following structure of administrative divisions in Iran: it recognizes استان - ostān as the first-order administrative division (ADM1); it recognizes شهرستان – shahrestān as the second-order administrative division (ADM2); بخش - bakhsh as the third-order administrative division (ADM3); and دهستان - dehestān as the fourth-order administrative division (ADM4).

	First-Order Administrative Division	*Seat*	*FIPS 10-4*	*ISO 3166-2*
1.	Āžarbāyjān-e Gharbī	Orūmīyeh	IR01	IR-02
	آذربایجان غربی	ارومیّه		
2.	Chahār Maḩāl va Bakhtīārī	Shahr-e Kord	IR03	IR-08

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#	Province		Capital			
	چهار محال و بختیاری		شهر کرد			
3.	Sīstān va Balūchestān	سیستان و بلوچستان	Zāhedān	زاهدان	IR04	IR-13
4.	Kohgīlūyeh va Bowyer Aḩmad	کهگیلویه و بویر احمد	Yāsūj	یاسوج	IR05	IR-18
5.	Fārs	فارس	Shīrāz	شیراز	IR07	IR-14
6.	Gīlān	گیلان	Rasht	رشت	IR08	IR-19
7.	Hamadān	همدان	Hamadān	همدان	IR09	IR-24
8.	Īlām	ایلام	Īlām	ایلام	IR10	IR-05
9.	Hormozgān	هرمزگان	Bandar ʻAbbās	بندر عباس	IR11	IR-23
10.	Kermānshāh	کرمانشاه	Kermānshāh	کرمانشاه	IR13	IR-17
11.	Khūzestān	خوزستان	Ahvāz	اهواز	IR15	IR-10
12.	Kordestān	کردستان	Sanandaj	سنندج	IR16	IR-16
13.	Būshehr	بوشهر	Bandar-e Būshehr	بندر بوشهر	IR22	IR-06
14.	Lorestān	لرستان	Khorramābād	خرّم آباد	IR23	IR-20
15.	Semnān	سمنان	Semnān	سمنان	IR25	IR-12
16.	Tehrān	تهران	Tehrān	تهران	IR26	IR-07
17.	Eşfahān	اصفهان	Eşfahān	اصفهان	IR28	IR-04
18.	Kermān	کرمان	Kermān	کرمان	IR29	IR-15
19.	Ardabīl	اردبیل	Ardabīl	اردبیل	IR32	IR-03
20.	Āžarbāyjān-e Sharqī	آذربایجان شرقی	Tabrīz	تبریز	IR33	IR-01
21.	Markazī	مرکزی	Arāk	اراك	IR34	IR-22
22.	Māzandarān		Sārī		IR35	IR-21

	مازندران	ساری		
23.	Zanjān	Zanjān	IR36	IR-11
	زنجان	زنجان		
24.	Golestān	Gorgān	IR37	IR-27
	گلستان	گرگان		
25.	Qazvīn	Qazvīn	IR38	IR-28
	قزوین	قزوین		
26.	Qom	Qom	IR39	IR-26
	قم	قم		
27.	Yazd	Yazd	IR40	IR-25
	یزد	یزد		
28.	Khorāsān-e Jonūbī	Bīrjand	IR41	IR-29
	خراسان جنوبی	بیرجند		
29.	Khorāsān-e Raẕavī	Mashhad	IR42	IR-30
	خراسان رضوی	مشهد		
30.	Khorāsān-e Shomālī	Bojnūrd	IR43	IR-31
	خراسان شمالی	بجنورد		
31.	Alborz	Karaj	IR44	IR-32
	البرز	کرج		

b.   *Unique Geopolitical Situations*

Note: For the latest country specific boundary dispute information, visit the U.S. Department of State's Boundaries and Sovereignty Encyclopedia, or B.A.S.E., at http://base.us-state.osis.gov/.

1. Disputed Names

Iran and the countries of the Arabian Peninsula use different names for the body of water between them. Iran uses *Khalīj-e Fārs* (Persian Gulf). The Arabian countries use the name *Al Khalīj al 'Arabī* (Arabian Gulf). The BGN-approved conventional name for that feature is 'Persian Gulf.'

2. Disputed Territories

Iran occupies two islands in the Persian Gulf that are claimed by the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and administers jointly with the UAE a third island in the Persian Gulf claimed by UAE. The three disputed islands are, using their Persian forms, Jazīreh-ye Abū Mūsá, Jazīreh-ye Tonb-e Bozorg, and Jazīreh-ye Tonb-e Kūchak. The BGN recognizes two approved names for each feature within these islands, one in the Persian language, determined by the Iranian names authority, and the other in the Arabic language, determined by the UAE names authority. The BGN-approved conventional names for these islands are Abu Musa, Greater Tunb and Lesser Tunb.

3. Non-defined Boundaries

The border between Iran and Turkmenistan has a section which is undefined, due to the construction of a new dam which submerged the border. However, no names policy issues have emerged as a result of the undefined border.

4. Riverine Boundaries

Iran and Iraq dispute certain aspects of their riverine boundary along the Shatt al Arab. Iran names the mouth of the river *Arvand Rūd*, but no names policy issues arise as a result of this dispute.

5. Other Unusual Boundary Issues

For its maritime boundaries, Iran maintains an excessive straight baseline claim; the extension of the Shatt al Arab riverine boundary out to the territorial sea limit is undefined. As yet no names policy issues have arisen out of this situation.

Iran also disputes the extent of its territorial waters in the Caspian Sea with the four other littoral states. Again, no known names-related issues have arisen out of this dispute.

5. Source Material

a.   Map Series containing Standardized Names

NCC and NGO maps are preferred civilian and military authorities, respectively, for topographic map sources.

Iran National Geographic Organization, Various Map Series
No specific statements of historical sources for names and imagery for these maps are given; thus, their reliability is open to question. Names are given in native script, with guidance for hypsographic, hydrographic and spot features are also given. Topographic relief is shown. The post-revolution maps yield some new names and features to be added to the GNDB. Some names changes of certain features are also suggested, pre-supposing approximate feature location congruence with the earlier maps.

Defense Mapping Agency:
   1:50,000 Series: K743, K753
   1:100,000 Series: K653

Iran Joint Operations Graphics: 1:250,000 Scale

b.   Map Series Containing Unofficial Names

Working closely with the National Geographic Organization, three commercial firms function as quasi-official names authorities. These are: Gītāshenāsī, Saḥāb, and Ershād. All three have such

close associations with the NGO, that from an evidentiary standpoint, their products are treated as more authoritative than other Iranian commercial sources. However, in the event that a source published by one of these firms differs from an NGO source, the name from the commercial source is treated as a variant spelling. If a feature appears on a commercial source from one of these three firms, but on no NGO sources, it is treated as an unverified name.

1:300,000 and 1:600,000-scale province maps, Gītāshenāsī, 1982-1995.

1:1,000,000-scale province maps, Gītāshenāsī, 1982-1985 (four sheets).

Road Atlas of Iran, 1:1,000,000, Gītāshenāsī, 1990.
There is no statement on the three source series from Gītāshenāsī as to the provenance of either names or imagery. Thus, while the names on those sources are presumed to be an accurate reflection of NGO – ICSGN policies, their reliability is uncertain. The names on the maps are mostly for populated places, though a limited amount of information is also contained on them for hydrographic and hypsographic features. Limited spot-feature and elevation information is also given. These maps do not fully cover all names and features of comparable area found in the GNDB, and thus while these maps may be suitable for a civilian market, they are only of limited value for U.S. DoD purposes.

1:300,000 and 1:600,000-scale province maps, Saḥāb, 1982-1995.

Soviet General Staff Map Series, 1:50,000 and 1:200,000 Scales

Turkmenistan Administrative Map (1995), 1:1.5 Million Scale

Survey of Pakistan 1,50,000 Series

Yeni Türk Atlası (New Turkish Atlas)

Iraq Survey Authority, 1:100,000 Series

Safavi, Major General Dr. Sayed Yahya (2001). *An Introduction to Military Geography of Iran, Vols. 1-3.* ISBN 964-6383-49-1.

c.   *Gazetteers Containing Standardized Names*

National Geographic Organization Geographic Dictionaries with accompanying 1:250,000-scale maps, 1975-1995 (136 volumes).
This series was mostly produced during the decade of the 1990s, based primarily on field surveys and census materials. The main entry names in the books are populated places, although other types of features may be coincidentally mentioned in the brief descriptions of their contextual geographic settings. There is generally a presumption of names density at the 1:50k scale, although there are names in the books not found on the accompanying maps, and vice versa. The maps are sanitized of all topographic relief information, and are

sometimes lacking PPL symbols next to the names. In the books, BGN romanization of the names accompanies the Persian-script entries. Coordinates for PPL's are given only in degrees and minutes, not in seconds; thus, while these sources are excellent for names, their usefulness for coordinate information is mediocre.

National Geographic Organization Geographic Dictionary of Mountain Names

A. Ja'farī (1997). Rivers of Iran. Tehran: Gītāshenāsī.
A single-volume distillation of the four-volume NGO gazetteer of Iranian rivers, it uses the new NCC transliteration system, not the BGN/PCGN Persian transliteration system.

A. Ja'farī (2005). Mountains of Iran, Volume 1. Tehran: Gītāshenāsī.
A single-volume distillation of the four-volume NGO gazetteer of Iranian mountains, it uses the new NCC transliteration system, not the BGN/PCGN Persian transliteration system.

Iran National Geographic Organization (2002 - 4). *National Gazetteer of the I.R. of Iran.* Provinces Kerman and Yazd.

BGN Gazetteer of Iran, 2 volumes, 1984.
This publication is a handy reference for names only, albeit of limited value, given up-dating activities since the 1984 publication. Feature coordinates are given only in degrees and minutes, not in seconds. Names are in alphabetical order, and tagged with JOG-reference maps listings. Names are given both in BGN-approved official format and in alternate cross-referent variant forms. These variant forms offer a handy link from other unofficial maps to the correct BGN-approved name. The names are derived from various sources, such as JOG/NGO 1:250K-scale maps, Iran Statistical Center 1:200K maps, and various Iran geographic dictionaries. For names, the sources are excellent; but at this small scale, coordinate accuracy from the JOG/NGO maps is atrocious.

d. *Gazetteers Containing Unofficial Names*

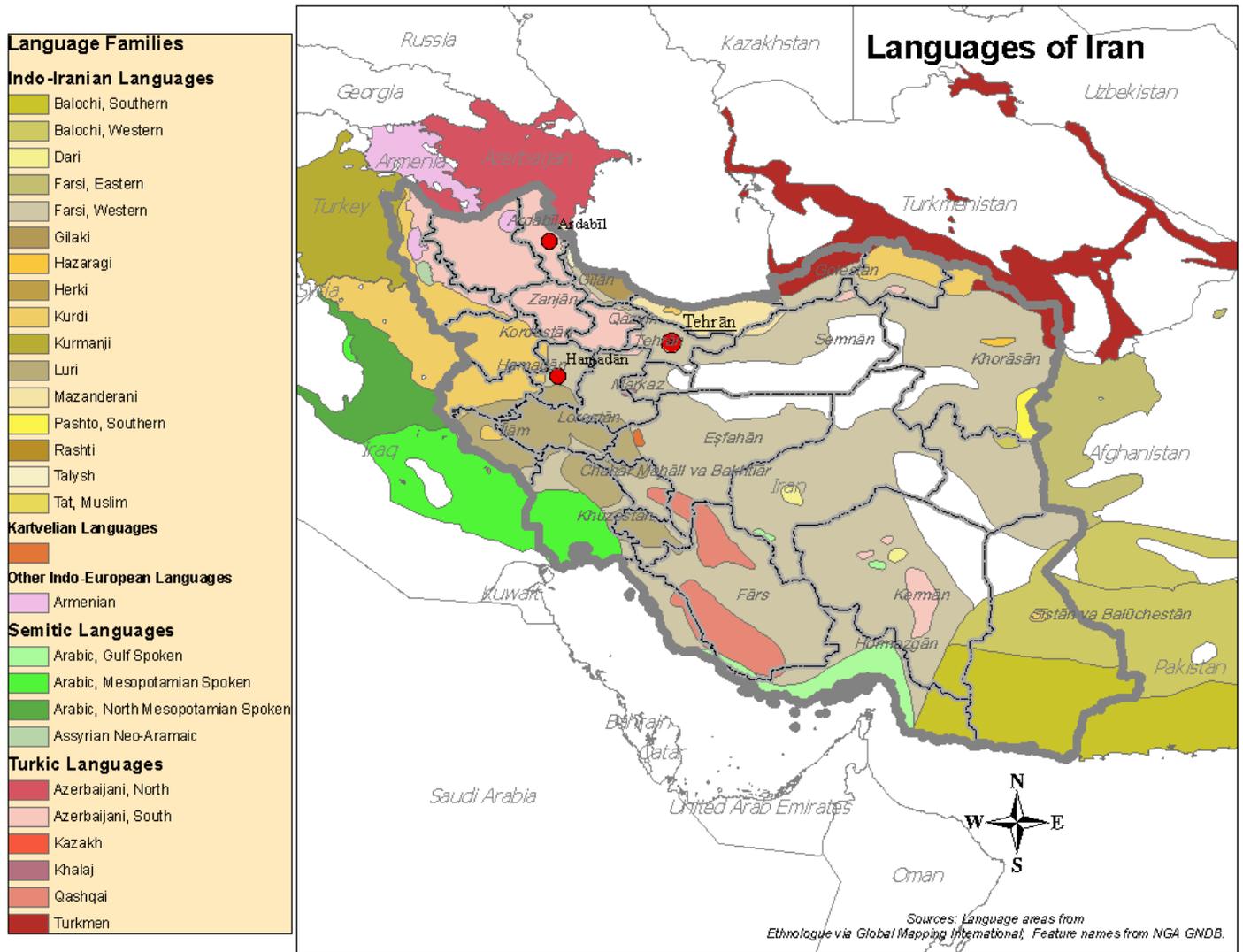Burke, Andrew, Elliott, Mark, & Kamin Mohammadi (2004). *Lonely Planet Iran, 4th Edition*.

Appendix A. Map of Languages Spoken in Iran

Language Families

Indo-Iranian Languages
- Balochi, Southern
- Balochi, Western
- Dari
- Farsi, Eastern
- Farsi, Western
- Gilaki
- Hazaragi
- Herki
- Kurdi
- Kurmanji
- Luri
- Mazanderani
- Pashto, Southern
- Rashti
- Talysh
- Tat, Muslim

Kartvelian Languages

Other Indo-European Languages
- Armenian

Semitic Languages
- Arabic, Gulf Spoken
- Arabic, Mesopotamian Spoken
- Arabic, North Mesopotamian Spoken
- Assyrian Neo-Aramaic

Turkic Languages
- Azerbaijani, North
- Azerbaijani, South
- Kazakh
- Khalaj
- Qashqai
- Turkmen

Languages of Iran

Sources: Language areas from
Ethnologue via Global Mapping International; Feature names from NGA GNDB.

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Appendix B. BGN/PCGN 1958 Transliteration System for Persian

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Appendix C. Broad Transcription for Persian

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Appendix D. Glossary of Generic Terms

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