



NATIONAL GEOSPATIAL-INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Know the Earth... Show the Way... Understand the World

U.S. Board on Geographic Names Foreign Geographic Names Standardization Program

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ILR Plenary
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Outline

- Foreign Language at NGA
- U.S. Board on Geographic Names (BGN)
- NGA Support of the BGN Mission
- Geographic Names Database
- GEOnet Names Server

*Reminder: Keep in mind **the human skills and technology** required to accomplish the BGN mission at NGA*



National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA)

- Mission: NGA provides timely, relevant, and accurate **geospatial intelligence** in support of national security.
- Created in 1996 (NIMA)
- NGA - 2003

Geospatial
Revolution



Foreign Language at NGA

- Hires language-skilled analysts to work in the geographic names standardization program
- 2007: Foreign Language and Culture Program established; FLIP pay began
- 2008: on-site DLPT testing
- Recent rise in interest in hiring language skilled employees (human geography, open source research, etc.)



U.S. Board on Geographic Names (BGN)

- US BGN first established in 1890 by Executive Order
- Re-established in present form in 1947 by Public Law 242, 80th Congress
- BGN (with the Secretary of the Interior), responsible for all aspects of geographic names standardization within the Federal government
- **Purpose:** avoid duplication of effort among Federal Departments and Agencies by establishing a single authority for resolution of geographic name issues
- **Scope:** domestic and foreign geographic names, to include undersea features and features in Antarctica



BGN Membership

- Foreign Names:
CIA, Commerce (Census), Defense (DIA, [NGA](#), NSA, US ACE),
Library of Congress. and State Department
- Domestic Names:
Agriculture (Forest Service), Commerce (Census, NOAA),
Defense (US ACE), GPO; Homeland Security (USCG,
FEMA), Interior (BIA, BLM, BOEM, NPS, [USGS](#)), Library of
Congress, and Postal Service



BGN Mission

“the spelling of foreign geographic names presents several problems which are only vaguely understood by the general public.”

First Report on Foreign Geographic Names (1932)



BGN Geographic Names Data

- The 'product' of the BGN was Decision Lists
- World War II brought about more focus on BGN
 - February 1943: staff of linguists and geographers assembled to systematize analysis, collection, and dissemination of standard geographic names
 - Alphabetical master file of place-name cards established
 - Forerunner of the BGN/DoD *Foreign Place Names File* (FPNF)



Al 'Abbāsiyah 408.04

3. ppl (3) Native Generic

or Area Lebanon Subdiv. Al Janūb

33° 18' N Long. 35° 17' E (3)

Review
Rough AUG 17 77
date AG 77

NAMES ON SOURCES	NO.	DATE	SOURCES
Abbāssiye	(1)	1945	Ser. Geog. F.F.L. 1:50 NI-36-XVII
Aabbāssiye. عَبَّاسِيَّة	(2)	1945	Liban, Gaz. 1:50, Page 19
الْعَبَّاسِيَّة	(3)	1948	Highway Map, 1:200 Nat'l Geog. Office
← الْعَبَّاسِيَّة	(4)	1969	Arabic reconstructed by the Linguistics Section
'Abbāsiyah			

000897

Over ☐



Foreign Place Names File

- Continuously maintained through gazetteer production projects until 1993
- Generally was not used to support cartographic production
- Defined the content specification of the subsequent GNDB



Geographic Names Database

- Formally established in 1993-94 with the introduction of the Geographic Names Processing System
- Initialized through loading of “Names Information Tapes”
- Foreign Place Name File retained on microfilm, with card file bequeathed to the National Archives

NIT Tapes

Nine-track magnetic tapes created to support gazetteer publication. Contained the seven basic data fields appearing in BGN gazetteers.



Is the BGN relevant today?

Eyjafjallajokull

<http://www.jongustafsson.com/eyjafjallajokull-volcanic-eruption-photographs/>



Iran sues Google



Is the BGN relevant today?

" Over the past decade, Google Earth and Google Maps have become the online cartographic resources of reference. But popularity does not bestow authority. The lines that Google draws on maps have no government's imprimatur. Yet by virtue of its ubiquity, Google is often the arbiter of first recourse for borders and **toponyms** [5]. So where Google's maps show borders or place names that deviate from official usage or stray into international disputes, they may cause confusion, offense or worse."

Jacobs, Frank : "The First Google Maps War," *The New York Times*, February 28, 2012. (<http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/02/28/the-first-google-maps-war/?ref=opinion>)



BGN and NGA

- US BGN Foreign Names staff transferred from Department of Interior to the Department of Defense (1968)
- The majority of the staff were assigned to the Army Map Service
- Principal activity was the production of National Intelligence Survey gazetteers



BGN Foreign Names Staff

- US BGN Foreign Names Secretariat and staff are provided by NGA
- Within NGA, the staff is assigned to the Political Geography Division of the Office of GEOINT Research, Source Operations and Management Directorate
- The Political Geography Division also bears responsibility for political boundary work at NGA



International Collaboration

- United Kingdom's Permanent Committee on Geographical Names (PCGN) <http://www.pcgcn.org.uk>



- United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/ungegn.htm>



United Nations Group of Experts
on Geographical Names

- Toponymic training programs



The Geographic Names Database (GNDB)

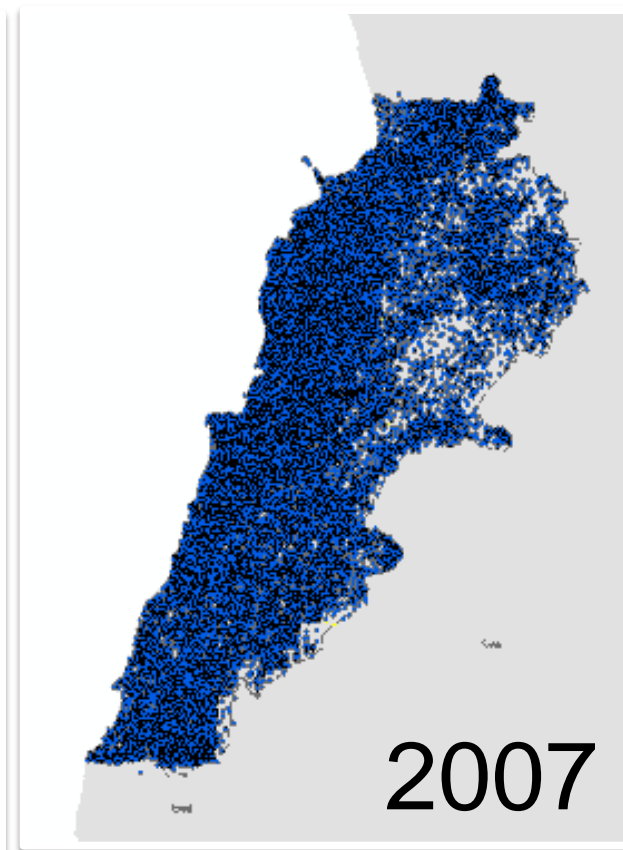
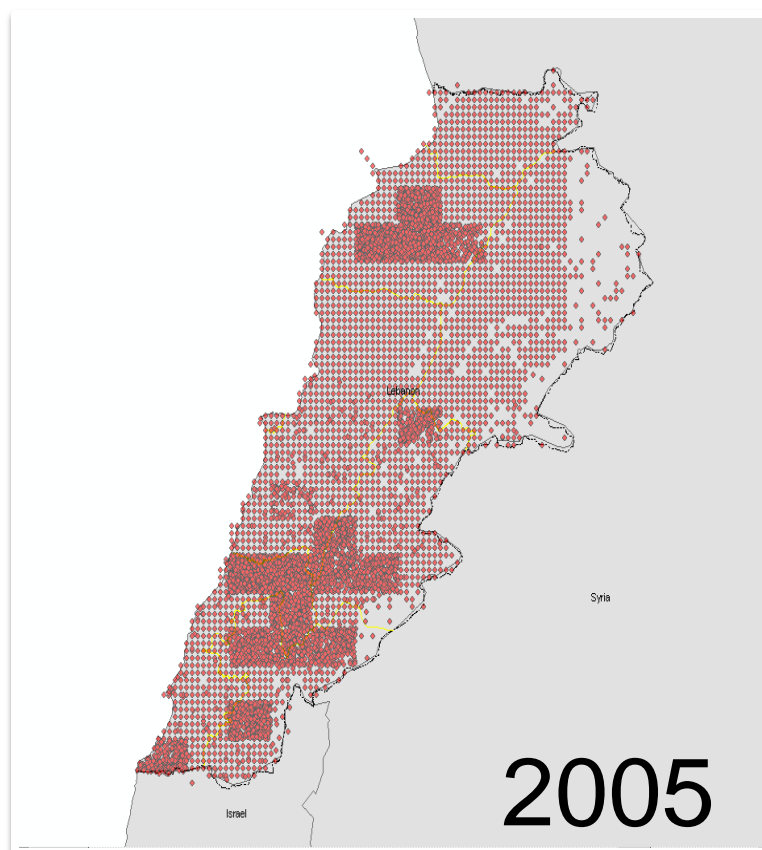
- Over 8 million names for over 5 million features
- Based on 60 years + of analysis and compilation
- Most names based off medium-to-small scaled maps
- Recent updates being done using large-scale sources



Positional Accuracy

Refining coordinates from the nearest minute to the nearest second

Lebanon:
data density
and
distribution -
before and
after shots





Language/Linguistics Knowledge

- Understanding of culture
- Ability to fully exploit sources in native publications and websites
- Development of policy
- Development of transliteration
- Database work

*Reminder: Keep in mind **the human skills and technology** required to accomplish the BGN mission at NGA*



Romanization

- Develop/adopt romanization systems for geographic names
- Work done in conjunction with PCGN (UK)
- Monitor UN systems for romanization
- 2008 publication (31 systems)
- Posted on GEOnet Names Server (now 48 systems)
- NGA staff contributes to work in development of transliteration systems for personal names (IC)



Development of a Transliteration System

Example: Dzongkha (Bhutan)

DAMPHU DZONG
ཐམ་ཕུ་རྫོང་།

SAMCHI DZONG
ཐམ་ཅི་རྫོང་།

Chengmari
ཅེང་མའི་

Dorokha
དོ་རོ་ཁ་

Lamidangra
ལམ་ཇི་དང་ར་

Sarbhang
ས་ར་ཕང་།

1987 map produced for the Planning Commission of the Royal Government of Bhutan by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (The World Bank)

Native Source: Script	Native Source: Transliteration	UNGEGN Applied Transliteration
བུམ་ཐང་	Bumthang	bum-thang → Bumthang
ཅུ་ཁ་	Chhukha	chhu kha → Chhukha
གས་ས་	Gasa	ga-sa → Gasa
པམ་དག་ཅེ་ལ་	Pemagatshel	pema-ga-tshel → Pemagatshel
པུ་ན་ཁ་	Punakha	pu-na-kha → Punakha
བསམ་རྒྱུ་ལྷོ་དང་ས་མཁར་	Samdrup Jongkhar	sam-drup-jong-khar → Samdrupjongkhar



BGN

Information Portals

- US BGN website (<http://geonames.usgs.gov/>)
- GEOnet Names Server (NGA/BGN Foreign Names)
 - www: <http://earth-info.nga.mil/gns/html/index.html>
 - OSIS (SBU): <http://osis.nga.mil/gns/>
 - also on SIPRnet and JWICS
- US BGN Domestic Names (and Antarctica): USGS site listed above
- Web Map Service (WMS)/ Web Feature Service (WFS), Web Feature Service-Gazetteer (WFS-G) web services available



Custom Search Criteria

Name Type Search

Select one or more of the eleven name types

- Conventional
- Approved (BGN Standard)
- Unverified
- Provisional
- Variant
- Anglicized Variant
- Native Script
- Unverified Native Script
- Provisional Native Script
- Variant Native Script

Select Display

- Diacritics
- No Diacritics

Select Sort Order

- Feature
- Name
- Coordinate
- Feature Designation

Custom Search Criteria

Name Type Search:

Approved Names

Uncheck All

Reset

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Conventional | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Approved | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unverified |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Provisional | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Variant | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Anglicized Variant |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Native Script | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unverified Native Script | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Provisional Native Script |
| | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Variant Native Script |

☒ Match Any of the Selected Name Types ☐ Exactly Match the Combination of Selected Name Types

Select Name Display: ☒ Diacritics ☐ No Diacritics

Sort Order: ☒ Feature ☐ Name ☐ Coordinate ☐ Feature Designation

Search Database

Any combination of these may be selected for a query



Tools / Miscellaneous

Download File

- Used with the Output tab

Show Search Criteria

- Lists search parameters selected

Create Generic Term Glossary

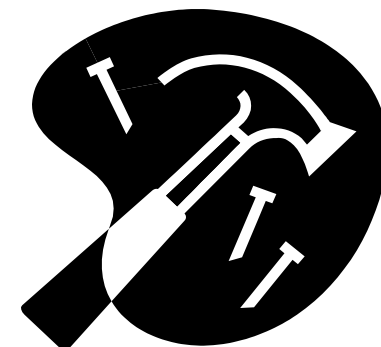
- Creates list of all generics for any given country file

Lookup Tables

- ADM1 Codes
- Country Codes (Former FIPS 10-4 code)
- Designation Codes
- Language Codes

GeoName Downloads

- Country Files in either HTTP or FTP





What is trending?

[Trendsmap](#)



BGN – Foreign Names

Key Points of Current Environment

- Challenged by attempt to balance work to support map production, database maintenance, and sustaining relevant and meaningful support to global BGN mission
- Promote awareness, maintain relevance to, and solicit active participation from US Government community
- WWW presence of data can be a liability

Questions?



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