



## Changes to NATO Spellings of Place Names in Egypt

Standard NATO spellings for place names in Egypt have recently changed.<sup>1</sup> The new NATO spellings, as specified in STANAG 3619, use the Arabic transliteration system of the United States Board on Geographic Names (BGN), also accepted by the UK Permanent Committee on Geographic Names (PCGN). The old NATO spellings used a transliteration system for Arabic from the Survey of Egypt (SoE). The major differences that users can expect between 1:100,000-scale Topographic Line Maps (TLMs) of Sinai which employ the BGN/PCGN transliteration system for Arabic, vs. older TLMs of Sinai which used the SoE transliteration system, are listed below

1. For the definite article alef-lam (ﺍﻝ), BGN writes it as 'al', but SoE writes it as 'el'. In BGN-approved names, if the definite article comes before a 'sun letter', the *lam* changes to agree with that following sun letter. In SoE-style names, the *lam* of the definite article does not change.
2. For the Arabic letter *jeem* (ﺝ), BGN writes 'j', but SoE writes 'g'.
3. For the combination *fathah* plus *yah*, BGN uses 'ay', but SoE uses 'ei' or 'ai'.
4. For long vowels, BGN uses a macron over the vowel, but SoE uses a circumflex (e.g. *ā* vs. *â*).

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<sup>1</sup> The issue with place-name spellings in Egypt is that for many years there were two standards. US Govt. standard place-names reflected the BGN/PCGN System of Romanization for Arabic. The BGN's Geographic Names Data Base (GNDB) reflects this BGN policy. NATO (for a number of years), in its STANAG 3169, mandated use of the Survey of Egypt System of Romanization for Arabic in NATO mapping over that country. US & UK military mapping followed the NATO STANAG. However, during the 1990s it became clear that Egyptian authorities were moving away from the SoE System toward the Amended Beirut System, which is equivalent to the BGN/PCGN System with minor stylistic differences. Increasingly, Egyptian-produced biscriptual mapping depicted Roman place-name spellings in the Amended Beirut System. Egyptian intentions were confirmed in discussions with SoE authorities at the UN place-name conference in 1998. In 1997, & formally in 1998, UK PCGN decided to harmonize with BGN policy and recommend use of the BGN/PCGN System for Egyptian place-names. Jointly, BGN & PCGN successfully worked to amend the NATO STANAG to adhere to this policy.

5. For the emphatic sounds (ص, ض, ط, ظ) and the hard h (ح), BGN uses cedillas under the letters, but SoE uses dots under the letters (e.g. § vs.Ş).
6. For the combination *fathah* plus *waw*, BGN uses 'aw', but SoE uses o with circumflex: ô.

Examples of new vs. old spellings are provided in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: New and Old Spellings for Sinai**

<i>New NATO/BGN/PCGN spelling</i>	<i>Old Survey of Egypt spelling</i>
Al ‘Arīsh	El-‘Arīsh
Al Jawwādīyah	El Gauwādīya
‘Izbat al Bi’r	‘Ezbet el Bîr
Jabal Qayf al ‘Ujūl	Gebel Qeif el Igūl
Ḥawshat al ‘Asīrāt	Ḥôshet el ‘Asîrât
Kawm az Zayyāna	Kôm el-Zaiyâna
Sîdî Muḥammad ‘Abd al Bâqî	Sîdî Muhammad ‘Abd el Bâqi

*For more information:*

US-Government Standards for Arabic Place Name Transliteration: [http://earth-info.nga.mil/gns/html/Policies/Arabic\\_translit\\_v2.pdf](http://earth-info.nga.mil/gns/html/Policies/Arabic_translit_v2.pdf).

United Nations Group of Experts on Geographic Names, Arabic Transliteration Page: [http://www.eki.ee/wgrs/rom1\\_ar.pdf](http://www.eki.ee/wgrs/rom1_ar.pdf)