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The Format of Middle Eastern Names in Official Documents

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Abstract

This report discusses the ways in which Arabic, Afghan, and Iranian names are written in official documents. All the examples in this report were collected from open source data such as images of ID cards and passports found on the web. The names discussed therefore refer to real living or deceased people.

This document is intended to be an addendum to the following MITRE Reports by the author:

- The structure of Persian names (MP080034)
- The structure of Arabic names
- The structure of Afghan names (MP090315)

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1 Arabic Names

In Arab countries, the ***Ism al-Roba'i*** which could be translated as the "four-fold name" is generally used in official documents. This name format consists of the first name, the father's first name, the paternal grandfather's first name, and a last name. The last name is typically the *Nisba*, which refers to the tribal or geographic origin or an ancestor's name.

Thus, the name *Ali Muhammad Alyan Abuzur* (Iraq) indicates that the person's name is Ali, his father's name is Muhammad, the grandfather's name is Alyan, and the family name is Abuzur. Similarly, the name *Fahad Abdurahman Ahmad Yousef* (Qatar) indicates that the person's name is Fahad, father's name is Abdurahman[1], the grandfather's name is Ahmad, and Yousef in this case could either be the great-grandfather's name (because Yousef is a male person's first name) or it could refer to the family name. Whether Yousef is the family name or the great-grandfather's depends on the format used in the country.

It should be noted that in forms in Syria, for example, the *Nisba* is used to refer to the last name but certain forms as those from Iraq use *Laqab* (epithet) to refer to the last name.

When asked to provide only a first and a last name (e.g., in Western forms), the person would generally skip the father and grandfather's names and write down the first name and the *Nisba* only. In some cases, they may include the father and grandfather's names as initials so they may look like middle names in a Western format. The following are two such examples:

Full Arabic Name	**Name in English as written in document**	**Country**
Bander Mohammad Abdulaziz Al-Dhafiri	Bander M. A. Aldhafiri	Saudi Arabia
Marwan Yousef Mohamad Rashid Lekrab	Marwan Yousef Mohamed R. Lekrab	UAE

Table 1 – *Ism Robai* conversions into Western format

In the first example in Table 1, the father and grandfather's names are transcribed as initials (also see Figure 1). In the second case, the great-grandfather's name is included in the Arabic version but transcribed as an initial in the English version.

[1] Note that Abdurrahman is itself technically a Laqab (epithet) meaning "slave of the generous (God)", but is being used as a first name.

Figure 1 – Saudi passport

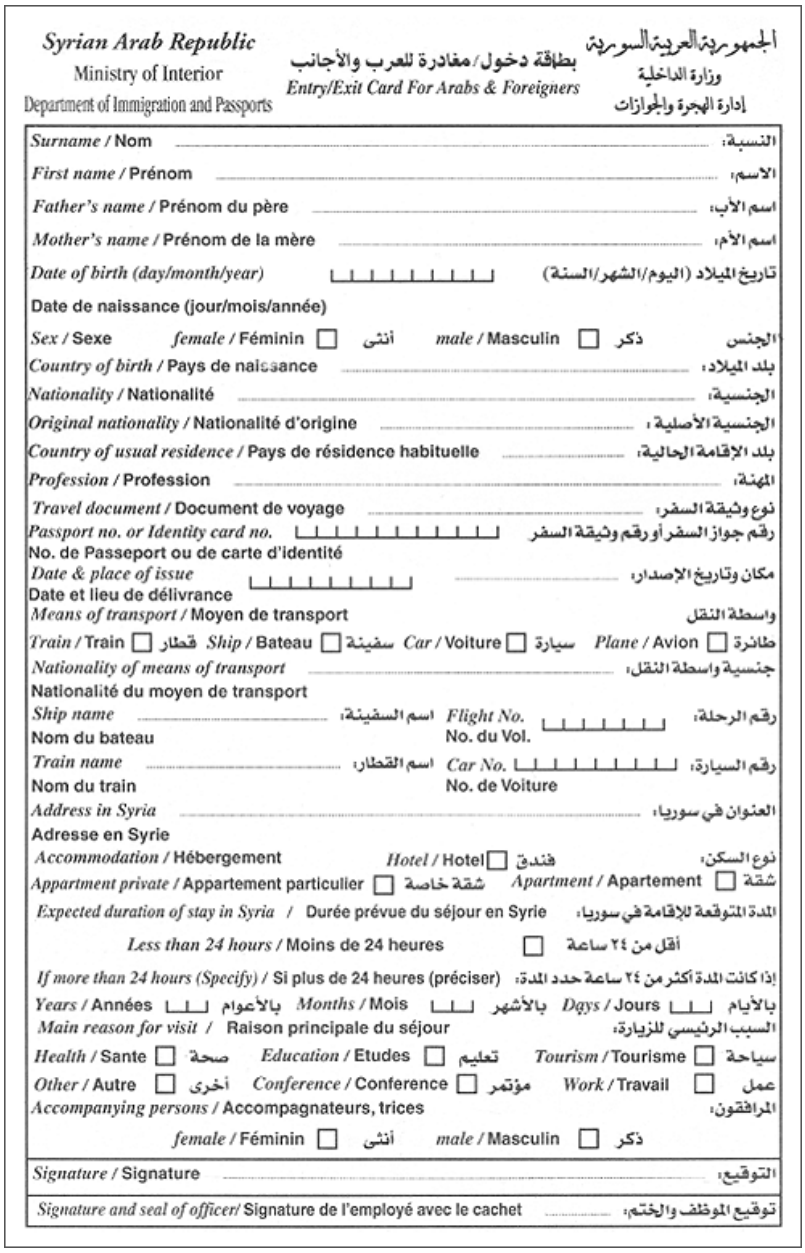
In some cases, such as student, national or military identity cards, the form only asks for *Ism* (Name) in which case people would tend to still write their four-fold name. However, shorter versions may also appear. Table 2 represents a few examples where only three components are included and the third name is either the grandfather's name or the family name (*Nisba*).

Name	**Country**	**Description**
Ahmad Muhammad Ben Asher[2]	UAE	Ahmad son of Muhammad of the Ben Asher family
Faisal Younis Omar	Iraq	Faisal son of Younis son of Omar
Hasan Abdullah Hasan	Iraq	Hassan son of Abdullah son of Hassan
Ahmad Abdullah Al-Omari	Saudi Arabia	Ahmad son of Abdullah of the Al-Omari family
Aso Muhammad Hassan	Iraqi Kurd	Aso son of Muhammad son of Hassan

Table 2 – Arabic names with three components

[2] Although *Ben* or *Ibn* means "son of", it may have crystallized within the last name to refer to the ancestral family root. In this example *Ben Asher* does not literally mean "son of Asher" but refers to the Ben Asher family line. This is also the case for Osama Bin Laden, whose father's name was Mohammad. In this case, Bin Laden refers to the family ancestry.

Certain forms may ask for the father's and mother's names separately. Figure 2 represents a Syrian form of arrival into the country. This form asks for the *Nisba* or last name (surname), the *Ism* or first name, the father's name, and the mother's name.



Syrian Arab Republic
Ministry of Interior
Department of Immigration and Passports

بطاقة دخول/مغادرة للعرب والأجانب
Entry/Exit Card For Arabs & Foreigners

الجمهورية العربية السورية
وزارة الداخلية
إدارة الهجرة والجوازات

Surname / Nom ..... النسبة:

First name / Prénom ..... الاسم:

Father's name / Prénom du père ..... اسم الأب:

Mother's name / Prénom de la mère ..... اسم الأم:

Date of birth (day/month/year) |_|_|_|_|_|_|_|_| تاريخ الميلاد (اليوم/الشهر/السنة)
Date de naissance (jour/mois/année)

Sex / Sexe *female* / Féminin ☐ أنثى *male* / Masculin ☐ ذكر الجنس

Country of birth / Pays de naissance ..... بلد الميلاد:

Nationality / Nationalité ..... الجنسية:

Original nationality / Nationalité d'origine ..... الجنسية الأصلية:

Country of usual residence / Pays de résidence habituelle ..... بلد الإقامة الحالية:

Profession / Profession ..... المهنة:

Travel document / Document de voyage ..... نوع وثيقة السفر:

Passport no. or Identity card no. |_|_|_|_|_|_|_|_|_| رقم جواز السفر أو رقم وثيقة السفر
No. de Passeport ou de carte d'identité

Date & place of issue |_|_|_|_|_|_|_|_| ..... مكان وتاريخ الإصدار:
Date et lieu de délivrance

Means of transport / Moyen de transport واسطة النقل

Train / Train ☐ قطار *Ship* / Bateau ☐ سفينة *Car* / Voiture ☐ سيارة *Plane* / Avion ☐ طائرة

Nationality of means of transport ..... جنسية واسطة النقل:
Nationalité du moyen de transport

Ship name ..... اسم السفينة: *Flight No.* |_|_|_|_|_| رقم الرحلة:
Nom du bateau No. du Vol.

Train name ..... اسم القطار: *Car No.* |_|_|_|_|_|_|_| رقم السيارة:
Nom du train No. de Voiture

Address in Syria ..... العنوان في سوريا:
Adresse en Syrie

Accommodation / Hébergement *Hotel* / Hotel ☐ فندق نوع السكن:
Appartment private / Appartement particulier ☐ شقة خاصة *Apartment* / Apartement ☐ شقة

Expected duration of stay in Syria / Durée prévue du séjour en Syrie المدة المتوقعة للإقامة في سوريا:

Less than 24 hours / Moins de 24 heures ☐ أقل من ٢٤ ساعة

If more than 24 hours (Specify) / Si plus de 24 heures (préciser) إذا كانت المدة أكثر من ٢٤ ساعة حدد المدة:

Years / Années |_|_| بالأعوام *Months* / Mois |_|_| بالأشهر *Days* / Jours |_|_| بالأيام

Main reason for visit / Raison principale du séjour السبب الرئيسي للزيارة:

Health / Sante ☐ صحة *Education* / Etudes ☐ تعليم *Tourism* / Tourisme ☐ سياحة

Other / Autre ☐ أخرى *Conference* / Conference ☐ مؤتمر *Work* / Travail ☐ عمل

Accompanying persons / Accompagnateurs, trices المرافقون:

female / Féminin ☐ أنثى *male* / Masculin ☐ ذكر

Signature / Signature ..... التوقيع:

Signature and seal of officer/ Signature de l'employé avec le cachet ..... توقيع الموظف والختم:

Figure 2 – Syrian entry/exit card

A Syrian ID card is shown below requesting each name part separately. In this case the *Ism* or first name is Qassan, the *Nisba* or last name is Mahmoud, the father's name is Ibrahim, and the mother's last name is Fadawi[3].

Figure 3 – Syrian ID card

The following three documents represent information about Abeer Qassim Hamza al-Janabi's family from Iraq. The forms ask for "Name" (*Ism*), "Father and Ancestor's names", "Last name" (*Laqab*) and "Mother and Ancestor's names".

Figure 4 – The Al-Janabi family IDs

[3] The form here asks for both first and last name of the mother but only a last name seems to be provided.

The translations are provided below:

Person in Document	First name	Father's name and ancestor	Last name	Mother's name and ancestor
Daughter	Abeer	Qassim Hamza	Al-Janabi	Fakhriya Taha
Father	Qassim	Hamza Rasheed	Al-Janabi	Ajmiya Ayd
Mother	Fakhriya	Taha Muheisin	Janabi	Manfiya Alawan

Table 3 – Al-Janabi family information

Based on these documents, one can conclude that the girl Abeer had the following genealogy:

Father's name is Qassim, paternal grandfather's name is Hamza, and paternal great-grandfather's name is Rasheed. The family name is Al-Janabi (or Janabi). The mother's name is Fakhriya, the maternal grandfather is named Taha, and the maternal great-grandfather is Muheisin. The paternal grandmother is Ajmiya whose father's name was Ayd. The maternal grandmother is Manfiya whose father's name was Alawan.

In certain cases, as in diplomatic documents, the person's honorific title may also be included. For example, in the following diplomatic document from Saudi Arabia, the person's name is written as *Sa'adat-ol-Ustadh Ali bin Hussain al-Musllam* but the English translation is written as "H. E. Ali Bin Hussain Al-Musllam". The first component of the name is a title meaning "His Excellency" (abbreviated in the English version to H.E.) suggesting that the bearer of this diplomatic passport is a member of the royal family.

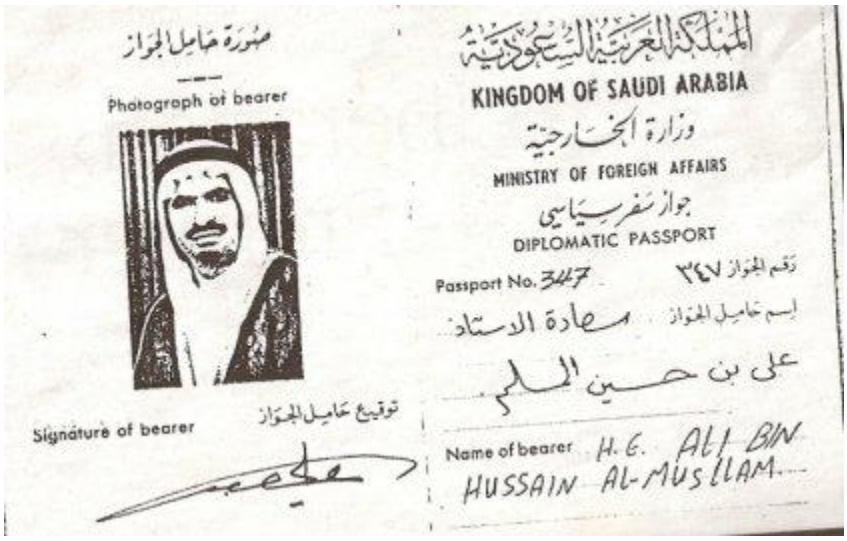


Figure 5 – Diplomatic passport, Saudi Arabia

Similarly, the following identity card from a religious school in Baghdad refers to the name of *Al-Seyyed Farid Mohammad Al-Fadheli*. In this case, Al-Seyyed is a religious title indicating that the

person is a direct descendant of the prophet. The person's name is Farid, his father's name is Mohammad, and his last name is Al-Fadheli.

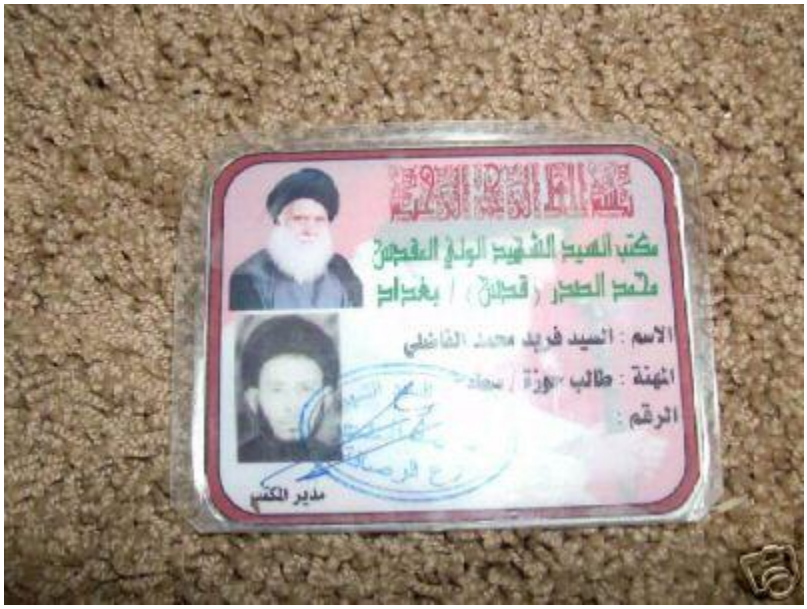


Figure 6 – Student ID card, religious school, Iraq

Lebanese names, especially Christian names, typically consist of a first name and a last name as in the following passport for Nancy Ajram (Lebanese singer). This passport also includes a place to write the father's name and the mother's name.

Figure 7 – Lebanese passport

As already indicated, when converting to the Western format, the person would probably select his or her first name and last name (*Nisba*), but there may also be some variations. The following are some examples of university professors in Saudi Arabia who chose to write their names differently in the Arabic and in the English versions on their websites:

Four-fold Arabic Name (if provided on website)	**Arabic Name**	**Name in English as written on website**
زهير عبدالمجيد محمد زميرلي Zouhir Abdolmajid Muhammad Zemirli	زهير عبدالمجيد زميرلي Zouhir Abdolmajid Zemirli	Zouhir Zemirli
N/A	حبيب الله محمد فله Habeebullah Muhammad Vulla	Habeeb Vulla
N/A	د. محمد العربى بودهير D. Mohamed Elarabi Boudihir	Dr. Mohamed Elarbi-Boudihir
N/A	د. يحيى محمد الحاج D. Yahya Mohammad El-Hadj	Dr. Yahya Elhadj

Table 4 – Arabic names and corresponding English variants

2 Afghan Names

The format of Afghan names in official documents is similar to the format in Western forms.

Afghan documents typically ask for a name (full name) and a father's name. Some documents, such as the passport application shown in Figure 8, request the following information:

- Title (laqab)
- Family name: generally a name that refers to the clan, tribe, or geographic root of the family.
- Given name: note that most Afghan names, especially for men, consist of two parts.
- Father's name
- Paternal grandfather's name

Figure 9 is an Afghan identity card for Enayatullah Qasimi where Enayatullah is the first name and Qasimi is the last name.

Figure 10 is a Pashto form requesting a first name (Ashar Hasan), a father's name (Sher Hasan), and a grandfather's name (Mir Hasan). There is no place for a last name but the place of birth is indicated.

سفارت کبرای جمهوری اسلامی افغانستان
استانه

دافغانستان د اسلامی دولت لوی سفارت
استانه

Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan-Astana
قونسلی هانگه
Consulate Section Almaty
فورم تقاضای پاسپورت /دپاسپورت غوسنلیک

محل نصب	لقب و اسم خانوادگی		لقب	اسم خانوادگی
	نوم/نام به انگلیسی و فارسی		نام	Mr. /Mess .
فوتو جدید	دپلار نوم/نام پدر به انگلسی و فارسی			
	دنیکه نوم/ نام پدر کلان			
۴/۳	تاریخ تولد به هجری و عیسوی		تاریخ هجری / / ۱۳ وتاریخ عیسوی / / ۱۹	
	شماره تذکره،صفحه، جلد، شماره ثبت		شماره( ) صفحه ( ) جلد ( ) شماره ثبت ( )	
	شماره- نوع- اعتبار- محل -تاریخ پاسپورت قبلی		شماره( )محل( ) تاریخ / / ۱۳ اعتبار( ) سال	
	نام اطفال که شامل پاسپورت گردد		۱ :	۲ :
دزیږیدنی خای/ محل تولد	کشور		آدرس فعلی اوسنی پته	کشور
	ولایت	ولایت( )		ولایت
	ولسوالی			ولسوالی
	قریه			قریه
وظیفه فعلی اوسنی وظیفی	وزارت ( ) ریاست( )			تلفون مبایل ( ) و خانه
تابعیت کشور های دیگر / دنورو کشورنو تابعیت				
سابقه جرمی				
علایم فارقه– رنگ – چشم- موی و غیره				
حالت مدنی / دمدنی حالت-			نامزد - متهل- زن مرده - بیوه- طلاق شده	
وظیفه قبلی / مخکنی وظیفی	وزارت( ) ریاست ( ) مدیریت ( ) مسولیت			
هدف از اخذ پاسپورت و سفر	تجارت- تحصیل- کار- دیدار اقوام و دوستان – اخذ اقامه در کشور ( )			

Figure 8 – Afghan passport application form

Figure 9 – Afghan ID card

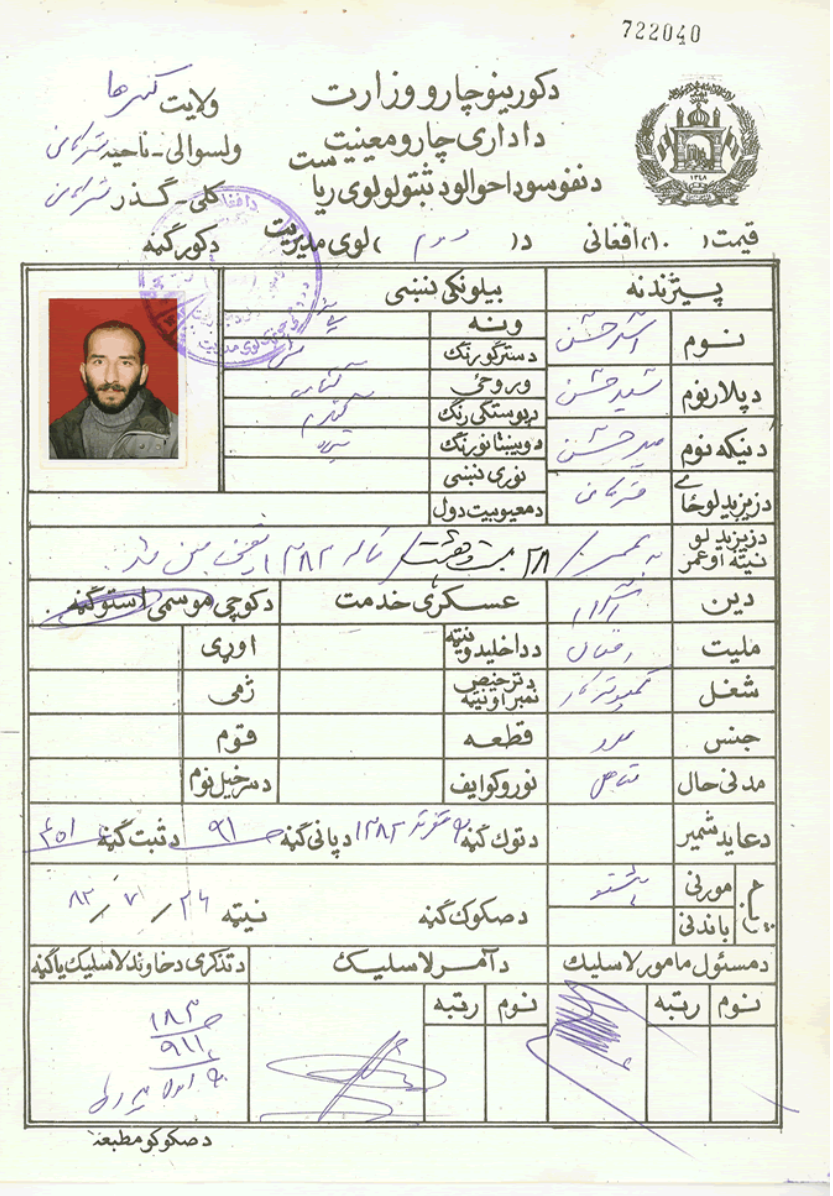


Figure 10 – Afghan form (in Pashto)

3 Iranian Names

Since Iranian names typically consist of a first name and a last name, the conversion into a Western format is quite straightforward. The only remaining issue, of course, is the transcription

into English (as with all non-Latin script languages) – e.g., whether پویا should be written as *Pooya* or *Pouya*, or if محمد should be transcribed as *Mohamad* or *Mohammad*, etc.

The following are some examples of Iranian documents:

The picture below is of the current Iranian President's birth certificate. The first name is Mahmoud and the last name or family name is Ahmadinejad. Official documents typically include a place for the father's name as well.

Figure 11 – Iranian birth certificate

The image below is of a national identity card. The first name of the person is Fereydoon, the last name is Ahmadi and the father's name is Jamshid.

Figure 12 – Iranian national ID card

Figure 13 is an Iranian passport also including the last name, first name, and father's name.

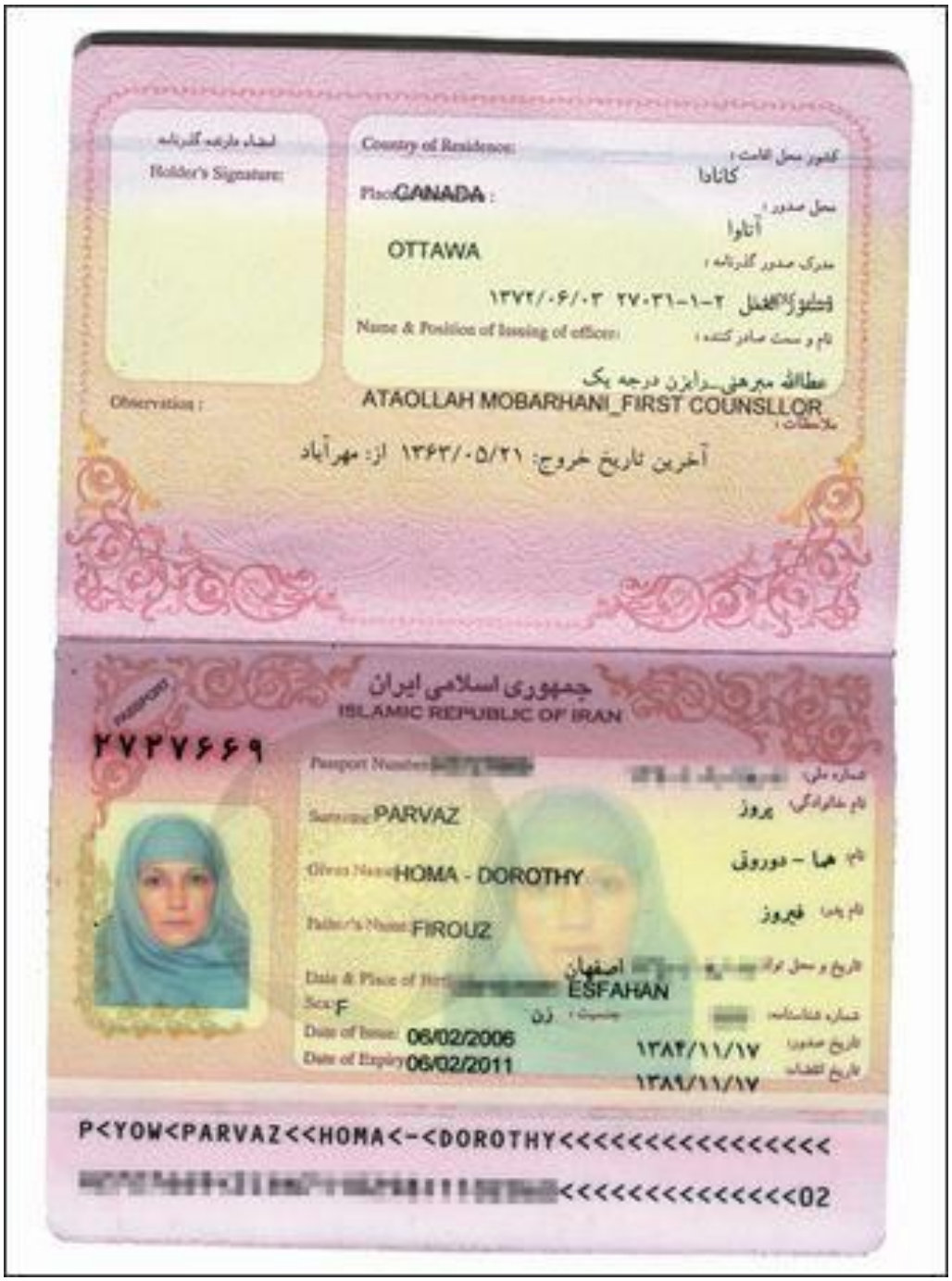


Figure 13 – Iranian passport

In certain cases, as in student cards, the form may simply state Full Name or ask for first and last names in one field as in Figure 14, where the person's name is written as Amir Javadi-Far (where Javadi-Far is the last name).

Figure 14 – Student ID card