

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR: Kurds have convincing grounds for choosing English as their second primary language [Print](#)

By Brendan O'Leary and Khaled Salih  
Published: Nov 19, 2004

*From Prof Brendan O'Leary and Mr Khaled Salih.*

Sir, Damjan De Krenjevic-Miskovic and Nikolas Gvosdev of the Nixon Center have taken it upon themselves to instruct Kurds in Iraq that Arabic rather than English should be their second language ("Kurds should not let language deepen divisions", November 16). Their arguments are specious, especially the suggestion that for Kurds not to learn Arabic is "to embrace their resentments".

That many Kurds have chosen English (or "American") as their primary second language is evidence of Kurdistan's progress, and should be welcomed. English is the lingua franca of advanced scientific and medical journals, and of international governmental and business organisations; and it is the emergent public language of the European Union that Kurdistan's neighbour, Turkey, may soon join.

It is equally in the interests of Arab Iraq to have English as its second language, not least to bridge the three deficits in the Arab-speaking world identified by the Arab Human Development Report of 2002; namely, the democracy deficit, the female equality deficit and the knowledge deficit. Kurdistan's comparative success in these three domains owes much to the prevalence of European second languages among its diaspora and residents. English, as a post-colonial and a world language, is the appropriate impartial link medium for a pluri-national, federal and democratic Iraq in which both Arabic and Kurdish will be official languages.

The Nixon Center's writers risibly suggest that imposing Serb on Kosovar Albanians or Greek on Turkish Cypriots would have delivered peace in these polities. They exemplify the tyrannous majoritarian mentality that causes unnecessary linguistic conflict in many parts of the world. Brendan O'Leary, Lauder Professor of Political Science, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA 191042, US Khaled Salih, Senior Lecturer in History, University of Southern Denmark, DK-5230 Odense, Denmark Constitutional Advisers to the Kurdistan National Assembly

[Copyright](#) The Financial Times Limited 2007