

Arabist Snobs

Is knowledge of Arabic necessary to write about Arabs or make policy toward them? Yes, sniff some of those who have learned the language, known as Arabists.

Antony T. Sullivan, for example, pulls rank in the journal *Historically Speaking*. Critiquing an article, “The Military Roots of Islam,” by two non-Arabists, George Nafziger and Mark Walton, he writes: “As one who believes that foreign language competence and accurate rendition of foreign words and concepts into English are important,” – note Sullivan’s puffed-up sense of self – “I must confess to considerable disappointment in the article.” And what devastating mistake did those authors make to undermine their thesis? Did they misunderstand jihad (Islamic holy war)? No, something much worse:

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