

Another Order of Things: Military imaginaries and the Middle East
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The term 'Middle East' has its origins in European and eventually American discourses of diplomacy, geopolitics and security, and in a more diffuse cultural register as imaginative geographies of a largely Arab 'Orient'. The two cross-cut in complex ways. Their modern genealogy can be traced back to Napoleon's brief but extraordinarily consequential occupation of Egypt at the end of the eighteenth century and Britain's concern to protect the approaches to its Indian empire in the nineteenth century. But here I focus on the construction of a military dispositif and its performative consequences in the course of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. I pay particular attention to three diagnostic moments: British intelligence practices and doctrines of air control in the early twentieth century; the cultural and political formations of Britain's Middle East Command during the Second World War; and the geographical knowledges produced, performed and circulated by the Pentagon and US Central Command during the invasion and occupation of Iraq from 2003. Taken together, these reveal the co-fabrication of 'knowledge' and 'space' in registers not considered by Foucault in his otherwise illuminating discussions of archaeologies and genealogies, and shed new light on the intimacy of the relations between military power, geographical knowledge and the production of space.