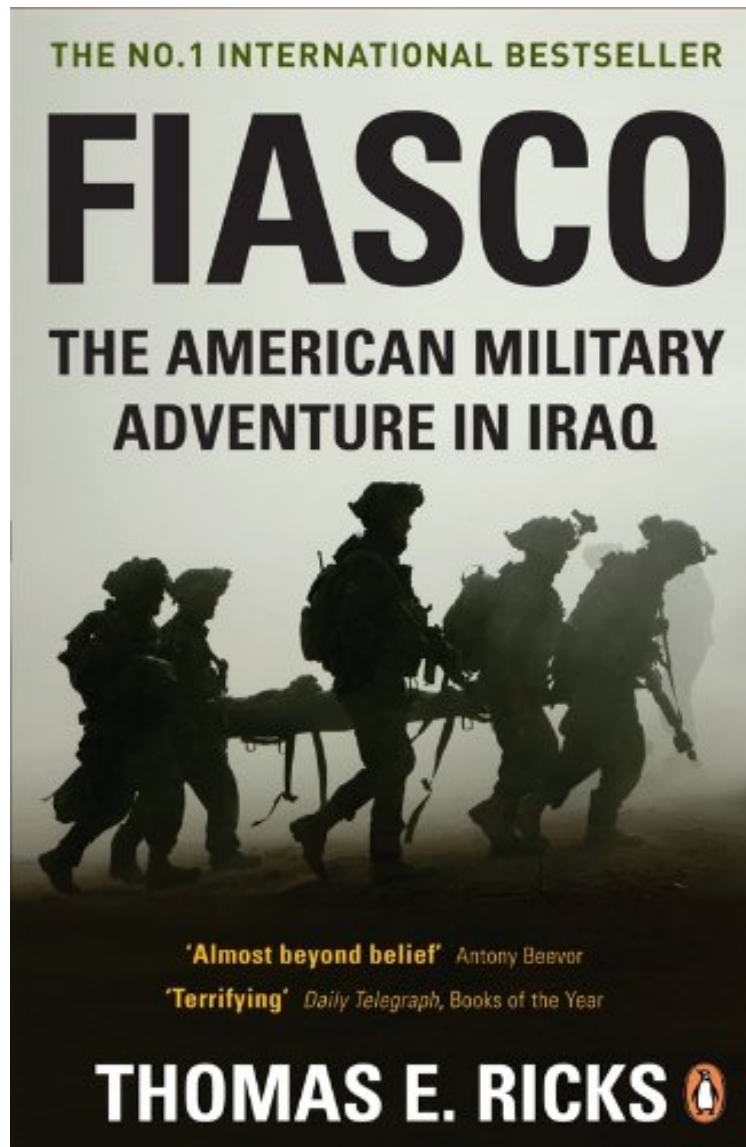


[Mobile ebook] Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq

## Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq

Von Thomas E. Ricks

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**Von Thomas E. Ricks : Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq:

KundenrezensionenHilfreichste Kundenrezensionen6 von 6 Kunden fanden die folgende Rezension hilfreich. Die Inkompetenz der MachtVon Lucullus"Fiasco" ist neben "The Assassins' Gate" von George Packer die bislang umfangreichste Darstellung des Irakkrieges. Anders als Packer, der ein breites Panorama des Geschehens zeichnet, in dem neben der politischen Vorgeschichte des Krieges auch literarisch gestaltete Momentaufnahmen aus dem

irakischen Alltag ihren Platz haben, und Gespräche mit einer Vielzahl von Irakern aus den unterschiedlichsten Gesellschaftsbereichen sowie amerikanischen Soldaten und Diplomaten die verwirrende Komplexität der Auseinandersetzung einfangen sollen, konzentriert sich Thomas Ricks überwiegend auf die militärischen Vorgänge, die er durchgehend aus amerikanischer Perspektive präsentiert. Dabei erweist sich der Autor als ein intimer Kenner der Materie, dem es gelingt, seine Vertrautheit mit den Strukturen der amerikanischen Armee und der Mentalität ihrer Angehörigen eindrucksvoll spürbar werden zu lassen. Die ersten hundert Seiten der Arbeit sind den amerikanischen Kriegsvorbereitungen gewidmet. Der Hauptteil von etwa 300 Seiten gilt einer eingehenden Analyse der Anfangsphase der Besetzung zwischen März 2003 und November 2004, während der verbleibende Zeitraum bis zum Sommer 2006 sehr knapp abgehandelt wird. Das Buch schließt mit einem Ausblick auf die künftige Entwicklung des Irak, für die der Autor vier verschiedene Szenarien entwirft. Die Darstellung der Vorkriegsphase ist keinen Zweifel daran, daß die am Anfang der Besetzung begangenen Fehler vermeidbar waren. Lange vor Beginn der Kampfhandlungen hatten Experten darauf hingewiesen, daß die Invasionstruppen zwar ausreichten, um die irakische Armee zu zerschlagen, aber nicht, um im Anschluß daran die öffentliche Sicherheit im Lande zu gewährleisten. Einige Institutionen hatten sogar Listen mit den Gebäuden aufgestellt, für die Plünderungsgefahr bestand - und die fast alle später geplündert wurden! Außerdem hatten die Fachleute empfohlen, die Entbürokratisierung der Verwaltung zu unterlassen und mehrstufige Milliardenbeträge für den Wiederaufbau des Landes bereitzustellen. Die Bush-Regierung wußte es besser. Sie ging fest davon aus, daß die meisten amerikanischen Soldaten schon nach wenigen Monaten den Irak wieder verlassen würden (im September 2003 sollten nur noch 30.000 im Lande sein!), sofort eine funktionierende Demokratie entstünde und die Aufbaukosten mit den Exporten des Landes gedeckt werden könnten. Außerdem war sie überzeugt, das irakische Beispiel werde die Demokratisierung und Befriedung der gesamten Region einleiten. So fanden die Verantwortlichen nichts dabei, jeden einzelnen Ratschlag der Experten zu mißachten und auf Vorbereitungen für die Besetzung des Landes weitgehend zu verzichten. Die Fehler dieser Einschätzung entsprangen, wie Ricks betont, nicht einem Mangel an Sachverstand, sondern selbstverschuldeter Verblendung. Im Geiste ihrer neokonservativen Weltanschauung war die Bush-Mannschaft davon überzeugt, den Irak besser beurteilen zu können als alle Experten. So kam es zu einer Politik, die beispiellos ehrgeizige Ziele mit außerordentlich begrenzten Mitteln verwirklichen wollte. Zugleich waren die Verantwortlichen unfähig, aus ihren Fehlern zu lernen. Weil nicht eingeräumt werden durfte, daß die ursprüngliche Strategie gescheitert war, konnte keine neue entworfen werden, so daß die Administration schon bald nach Beginn der Besetzung dazu berging, sich in tagtäglicher Improvisation nur noch von Krise zu Krise zu manövrieren, immer in der Hoffnung, die grundlegenden Probleme Iraks (der drohende Bürgerkrieg, die Ineffizienz der Verwaltung, der wirtschaftliche Niedergang) würden sich von selbst lösen. Wo die Regierung sich dennoch den Tatsachen stellte, begann sie das Gegenteil dessen zu tun, was sie nach außen hin verkündete. Ein Präsident, der es vor seiner Wahl abgelehnt hatte, die amerikanische Armee zur Nationsbildung einzusetzen, befahl ihr nun, sich auf Jahre hinaus nur damit zu beschäftigen. Ein Präsident, der versichert hatte, er werde sich nicht in taktische Entscheidungen einmischen, verschob die Rückeroberung Falludschas, um seine Wiederwahl nicht zu gefährden. Ein Präsident, der einen starken irakischen Staat gefordert hatte, unternahm nie ernsthafte Schritte zur Auflösung der Milizen. Unterdessen waren die Streitkräfte gezwungen, sich aus eigenem Antrieb an die Verhältnisse des Landes anzupassen. Mörderisch und verlustreich muten sie die Lektionen des Vietnamkrieges, die sie inzwischen völlig verdrängt hatten, ein zweites Mal lernen. Es dürfte kaum ein eindrucksvolleres Beispiel für die Wendung geben, daß derjenige, der seine Geschichte nicht kennt, dazu verurteilt ist, sie zu wiederholen. Wie die Armee sich dieser Herausforderung stellte, wie ihre Soldaten die Gedankenlosigkeit der Führung mit ihrem Leben und ihren Gliedmaßen bezahlten, wie einige Offiziere sich durch Lernfähigkeit und Flexibilität auszeichneten (Die Generalmajore Petraeus und Mattis, Oberst McMaster), während andere auf rohe Gewalt setzten (Generalmajor Odierno), wie gerade die Hauptverantwortlichen (die Generale Franks und Sanchez) ein besonderes Maß an Unfähigkeit an den Tag legten und dennoch ausgezeichnet wurden, wie die Streitkräfte in einem dreijährigen Anpassungsprozeß dahin gelangten, den Erfordernissen der Guerillakriegführung zumindest einigermaßen Rechnung zu tragen, - all dies wird in dem Buch ebenso anschaulich wie packend erzählt. Trotz des relativen Lerneffektes bleibt Ricks skeptisch. Es müsse damit gerechnet werden, so befürchtet er, daß die unternommenen Anstrengungen einfach zu gering waren und zu spät erfolgten. Ergänzt man diese düstere Perspektive noch um die ethnische Zersplitterung des Irak, den beginnenden Bürgerkrieg sowie die Ineffizienz und Korruption der Regierung, wird eine amerikanische Niederlage fast zur Gewißheit. Wenn das Buch am Ende viele Themen (vor allem die irakische Sicht des Krieges) unbehandelt und viele Fragen (vor allem die, ob eine Demokratisierung des Landes und die Beibehaltung seiner staatlichen Einheit überhaupt möglich waren) unbeantwortet läßt, hat dies mehr mit der zeitlichen Nähe der Ereignisse und der Begrenztheit des verfügbaren Materials zu tun als einem Versumnis des Autors. Für die militärischen Aspekte des Irakkrieges dürfte es trotz dieser Lücken in nächster Zeit keine bessere Informationsquelle geben.

6 von 7 Kunden fanden die folgende Rezension hilfreich. A Surprising Misadventure Threatens to Ignite the World's Oil Fields for Decades Von Donald Mitchell Surely, you remember all of those Weapons of Mass Destruction that President Bush, Vice President Cheney, Secretary Powell, Secretary Rumsfeld, and The New York Times assured us were being hidden in Iraq. If you have a short memory about what we were told, Fiasco will remind you what came out of those horses' mouths in 2002 and 2003. If you think back even further, you may also recall an attack on the United States in New York and Washington

D.C. that led to about 3,000 deaths caused by an outfit called al-Qaeda headed by a fellow named Osama bin Laden. We haven't found that fellow yet, and we've invaded at least two countries to locate him. He doesn't seem to be in Iraq, either. Fiasco points out that there never was an Iraqi connection to that group of terrorists, but in the aftermath of our invasion Iraq has become the headquarters and training ground for the most active and effective terrorists in the world. Maybe we'll eventually lure bin Laden there. So why read this book? Well, Mr. Ricks does a superb job of tracking down all of the planning, training and preparation for the post-invasion period that did not occur. As a result, it seems like the United States made virtually every major mistake possible in turning a liberation into a heavy-handed, insensitive occupation that turned the majority of the Iraqi people into opponents of the United States from being favorably disposed. As early as five months after Saddam Hussein was captured, 55% of Iraqis felt that it was more dangerous having American troops in Iraq than to have them all leave immediately. If you are like me, you'll be disgusted, appalled and ashamed at the travesty of how the United States mismanaged the reconstruction of Iraq. Who is at fault? Well, it's hard to find people who aren't at fault. Feel free to list the usual Republican and Pentagon leaders, but add those in Congress who backed off from providing civilian oversight. Can you imagine that serious counter-insurgency planning only began in August 2004? And we lost ground in 2005 on that front. So where are we now? Apparently, we're worse off than if we had stayed home in 2003. The book ends with several scenarios of what might happen next, all of which are even more unpleasant than the reality we have today. Tens of thousands more will die, including thousands of Americans. Power will shift into less friendly hands. More terrorists will be trained. Our supply of oil will be less secure. Gasoline will hit \$9.00 a gallon in one scenario. The book also upholds the honor of the ordinary soldiers and Marines who have done tough duty, far beyond what could have been expected of them . . . without the proper training, support, leadership resources. My sense from this book is that a sequel will be written ten years from now called Quagmire. Why did I grade the book down? Despite doing a fine job of tracking down the untold parts of the story, I found that Mr. Ricks loves to editorialize a little too much before he proves his point. Here's an example in the first sentence of the book: "President George W. Bush's decision to invade Iraq in 2003 ultimately may come to be seen as one of the most profligate actions in the history of American foreign policy." So what are the lessons for us as U.S. citizens? It looks like we should be sure that no one (of either political party) ever gets enough power to head off on such ego trips again. Gridlock looks pretty good as our primary option for getting the government back under control.

0 von 0 Kunden fanden die folgende Rezension hilfreich. A Surprising Misadventure Threatens to Ignite the Middle East's Oil Fields for Decades Von Donald Mitchell Surely, you remember all of those Weapons of Mass Destruction that President Bush, Vice President Cheney, Secretary Powell, Secretary Rumsfeld, and The New York Times assured us were being hidden in Iraq. If you have a short memory about what we were told, Fiasco will remind you what came out of those horses' mouths in 2002 and 2003. If you think back even further, you may also recall an attack on the United States in New York and Washington D.C. that led to about 3,000 deaths caused by an outfit called al-Qaeda headed by a fellow named Osama bin Laden. We haven't found that fellow yet, and we've invaded at least two countries to locate him. He doesn't seem to be in Iraq, either. Fiasco points out that there never was an Iraqi connection to that group of terrorists, but in the aftermath of our invasion Iraq has become the headquarters and training ground for the most active and effective terrorists in the world. Maybe we'll eventually lure bin Laden there. So why read this book? Well, Mr. Ricks does a superb job of tracking down all of the planning, training and preparation for the post-invasion period that did not occur. As a result, it seems like the United States made virtually every major mistake possible in turning a liberation into a heavy-handed, insensitive occupation that turned the majority of the Iraqi people into opponents of the United States from being favorably disposed. As early as five months after Saddam Hussein was captured, 55% of Iraqis felt that it was more dangerous having American troops in Iraq than to have them all leave immediately. If you are like me, you'll be disgusted, appalled and ashamed at the travesty of how the United States mismanaged the reconstruction of Iraq. Who is at fault? Well, it's hard to find people who aren't at fault. Feel free to list the usual Republican and Pentagon leaders, but add those in Congress who backed off from providing civilian oversight. Can you imagine that serious counter-insurgency planning only began in August 2004? And we lost ground in 2005 on that front. So where are we now? Apparently, we're worse off than if we had stayed home in 2003. The book ends with several scenarios of what might happen next, all of which are even more unpleasant than the reality we have today. Tens of thousands more will die, including thousands of Americans. Power will shift into less friendly hands. More terrorists will be trained. Our supply of oil will be less secure. Gasoline will hit \$9.00 a gallon in one scenario. The book also upholds the honor of the ordinary soldiers and Marines who have done tough duty, far beyond what could have been expected of them . . . without the proper training, support, leadership and resources. My sense from this book is that a sequel will be written ten years from now called Quagmire. Why did I grade the book down? Despite doing a fine job of tracking down the untold parts of the story, I found that Mr. Ricks loves to editorialize a little too much before he proves his point. Here's an example in the first sentence of the book: "President George W. Bush's decision to invade Iraq in 2003 ultimately may come to be seen as one of the most profligate actions in the history of American foreign policy." So what are the lessons for us as citizens? It looks like we should be sure that no one (of either political party) ever gets enough power to head off on such ego

trips again. Gridlock looks pretty good as our primary option for getting the government back under control.

Kurzbeschreibung Cutting through the headlines and spin, this is the first book to give us a true picture of the reality on the ground, through the words of the people there - from commanders to intelligence officers, army doctors to ordinary soldiers. Providing eye-witness accounts that contradict the official stories and figures, they give a chilling picture of the deceit, stupidity, wishful thinking, lack of forward planning and total intellectual failure of those behind the invasion. The result is an extraordinary new insight into the plight of ordinary soldiers doing nightmarish jobs, and the real nature of the fighting in Iraq.

Fiasco is a more strongly worded title than you might expect a seasoned military reporter such as Thomas E. Ricks to use, accustomed as he is to the even-handed style of daily newspaper journalism. But Ricks, the Pentagon correspondent for the Washington Post and the author of the acclaimed account of Marine Corps boot camp, *Making the Corps*, has written a thorough and devastating history of the war in Iraq from the planning stages through the continued insurgency in early 2006, and he does not shy away from naming those he finds responsible. His tragic story is divided in two. The first part--the runup to the war and the invasion in 2003--is familiar from books like *Cobra II* and *Plan of Attack*, although Ricks uses his many military sources to portray an officer class that was far more skeptical of the war beforehand than generally reported. But the heart of his book is the second half, beginning in August 2003, when, as he writes, the war really began, with the bombing of the Jordanian embassy and the emergence of the insurgency. His strongest critique is that the U.S. military failed to anticipate--and then failed to recognize--the insurgency, and tried to fight it with conventional methods that only fanned its flames. What makes his portrait particularly damning are the dozens of military sources--most of them on record--who join in his critique, and the thousands of pages of internal documents he uses to make his case for a war poorly planned and bravely but blindly fought.

--Tom Nissley *Making a Fiasco* Thomas Ricks spent five tours in Iraq during the war, reporting for the Washington Post and researching and writing *Fiasco*. Like many of the officers he most admires, when he wanted to understand what was happening as American troops encountered stronger and longer-lived resistance to the occupation than expected, he turned to recent and classic accounts of insurgencies and counterinsurgencies, from the U.S. occupation of the Philippines through the lessons of Vietnam, and he reports on his favorites for us in his list of the 10 books for understanding Iraq that aren't about Iraq. You can also get a glimpse into his writing process with a much different list he has prepared for us: the music he listened to while writing and researching the book, from Stevie Wonder and Joni Mitchell to Ryan Adams and Josh Ritter. And he took the time to answer a few questions about *Fiasco*.

.com: As military correspondent for the Post, you have made five trips to Iraq over the last four years. How has it changed over that time? Thomas E. Ricks: It has been markedly worse each time, in terms of security. On my first trip, in April-May 2003, we would walk out on the streets of Baghdad at night, albeit with caution. Even on my second trip, in the summer of 2003, I would feel comfortable hopping in a car and driving 100 miles north from Baghdad to Tikrit. To do either of those things now would be suicidal. In January and February of this year, Baghdad felt worse to me Mogadishu did when I was there in 1993 or Sarajevo did when I was there a few years later. It appeared to me that there was no security, except what you provided for yourself with armed men and careful planning. One Army major described the city to me as being in "the pure Hobbesian state" in which everybody is fighting everybody. By the way, contrary to what I see asserted occasionally, most reporters don't live in the Green Zone, the walled-off area in central Baghdad that is the headquarters of the American effort in Iraq. Reporters live out in the city, and I think generally have a better feel for what is going on than do people living in the Zone or on big American military bases. In the area of Baghdad I stayed in, I constantly heard gunfire and explosions. Yet an American colonel told me that my neighborhood was deemed "secure." I think that really meant that U.S. troops could drive through it while heavily armed--say, with a .50 caliber machine gun atop a Humvee--and usually not be attacked. I worry that what the Americans measure are threats to U.S. troops and the killings of Iraqis. That neglects a huge spectrum of other significant activities--rapes, robberies, kidnappings, acts of extortion, and, most importantly, acts of violent intimidation.

.com: You cite many strategic errors in the planning and execution of the war, but perhaps the central one is that the U.S. military leadership failed to recognize that they were fighting an insurgency, and their methods of fighting in fact helped to create that insurgency. Can you explain those methods, and their effects? Ricks: The U.S. military that went into Iraq in 2003 was the best military in the world for fighting another military. But it was woefully unprepared for the task at hand. For example, U.S. military culture believes in bringing overwhelming force to bear. Yet classic counterinsurgency doctrine calls for using only the minimal amount of force necessary to get the job done. U.S. soldiers and their commanders, untrained and unschooled in the difficult art of counterinsurgency, tended to improvise. So in the summer of 2003, some soldiers in Baghdad decided that the best way to deter looters was to make them cry--and they sometimes did this by threatening to shoot the children of looters, and even conducting mock executions. More broadly, the Army in the fall of 2003 fell back on what it knew how to do, which was conduct large-scale "cordon-and-sweep" operations. These missions scarfed up thousands of Iraqis, most of them fence-sitting neutrals, and detained them. U.S. military intelligence officials later concluded that 85% of those detained were of no

intelligence value. The detention experience frequently was humiliating for Iraqis, a violation of another key counterinsurgency principle: Treat your prisoners well. (Your readers who want to know more about this should read a terrific little book by David Galula titled *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*.) Not every unit was ineffective or counterproductive. I was struck at how successful the 101st Airborne was in Mosul in 2003-04. And some units showed remarkable improvement--the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment had a mediocre first tour of duty in Iraq, but when it went back in 2005 for a second tour, it did extremely well. Col. H.R. McMaster, the regimental commander (and author of a very good book about the Vietnam War, *Dereliction of Duty*) told his troops that, "Every time you disrespect an Iraqi, you are working for the enemy." I was especially struck by how his regiment handled its prisoners--it even had a program called "Ask the Customer" that quizzed detainees when they were released about whether they felt treated well. This recognized the lesson of past wars that the best way to end an insurgency is to get its leaders to put down their guns and enter the political system, and to get the rank-and-file to desert or switch sides. But it will be harder to discuss the sewage system with the new mayor next year if your troops beat him in his cell when he was your prisoner last year. .com: But today's military leadership was formed in Vietnam, when all of those lessons of counterinsurgency were supposedly learned before. Why didn't that experience translate into a preparation for the current conflict? Ricks: Military experts, such as Andrew Krepinevich (*The Army and Vietnam*) and Lt. Col. John Nagl (*Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*) say that after that war ended, the Army washed its hands of the entire experience and essentially concluded that it was never going to do anything like that again. It was almost as if the very word "counterinsurgency" was banned from official Army discourse. In Iraq, there was a tiny minority of American soldiers early on who understood how to win the occupation. These generally were civil affairs officers and other Special Forces types. But their wisdom often was disregarded. "What you are seeing here is an unconventional war being fought conventionally," one Special Forces lieutenant colonel glumly commented one day in Baghdad. .com: You've been writing about the military for the Post and the Wall Street Journal for years now, and *Fiasco* is built from the testimony of a remarkable array of sources up and down the chain of command, some off the record but many more on the record. Can you talk about your sources? Is this level of public criticism of a war from within the military unprecedented?? Ricks: Yeah, reporting the book was a pretty emotional experience. Even having covered this war as it unfolded, I was taken aback by the rage that some officers felt toward the Bush Administration, and especially toward Defense Secretary Rumsfeld. And also toward Paul Wolfowitz, who was then the no. 2 guy at the Pentagon. I think the rage is probably like what the military felt about Robert McNamara during the Vietnam War. What is unprecedented, I think, is that many officers had doubts about the wisdom of invading Iraq, especially in the way we did it. The emotions also hit me pretty hard at times, especially when I was writing my chapter 13, about how widespread abuse was by American soldiers in 2003-04, often because they hadn't been trained for the mission they faced. I have spent more than 15 years covering the military. I tend to like and admire these people. So when I learned about a 4th Infantry Division soldier shooting an unarmed, handcuffed Iraqi detainee in the stomach, and the investigating MPs saying the soldier should be charged with homicide, and instead the commander simply discharged the soldier from the Army--well, that bothered me. Another thing that struck me with sources was the mountain of information that was available. I read over 30,000 pages of documents for this book. At the end of one interview a guy gave me a CD-ROM with every e-mail he had sent to Ambassador Bremer, who ran the civilian end of the first year of the occupation. Other people showed me diaries, unit logs, official briefings, and such. Also the ACLU did a great job of obtaining and releasing piles of official U.S. military documents related to abuse--so I could see the time stamp on an e-mail in which an intelligence officer stated that "the gloves are coming off" in interrogations, and one soldier recommended blows to the chest while another wrote back recommending low-level electrocution. Unfortunately the Army wouldn't release the details of citations for valorous acts by soldiers, which means that the Pentagon made it easier for me to learn about the sins of soldiers than about their acts of bravery. The Marine Corps did give me those "narratives" that support the bestowing of medals, which I really appreciated. Those documents really brought home to me the fierceness of the two Battles of Fallujah, in April and November 2004--probably the toughest fighting American troops have seen since Hue and Khe Sanh in the Vietnam War. .com: In the last section of the book, you project a variety of possible scenarios for the next 10 years in the Middle East, mostly grim ones, and just in the past two weeks the sudden violence between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon is leading to talk of a wider regional conflict. Where do you think those events are leading us? Ricks: We are really in unexplored territory. We are carrying out the first-ever U.S. occupation of an Arab nation. This is also almost the first time we have engaged in sustained combat ground war with an all-volunteer force. (I think the suppression of the Philippines insurrection might count as a small precedent.) Even more significantly, I think the Bush Administration doesn't really like "stability" in the Middle East. In its view, "stability" has been the goal of previous administrations, but pursuing it led to 9/11. It is not the goal, it is the target. So they are for rolling the dice, both in Iraq and in Lebanon. I think the big worry is those wars spilling over borders. Fasten your seat belts. .com *Fiasco* is a more strongly worded title than you might expect a seasoned military reporter such as Thomas E. Ricks to use, accustomed as he is to the even-handed style of daily newspaper journalism. But Ricks, the Pentagon correspondent for the Washington Post and the author of the acclaimed account of Marine Corps boot camp, *Making the Corps* (released in a 10th anniversary edition to accompany the paperback release of *Fiasco*),

has written a thorough and devastating history of the war in Iraq from the planning stages through the continued insurgency in early 2006, and he does not shy away from naming those he finds responsible. His tragic story is divided in two. The first part--the runup to the war and the invasion in 2003--is familiar from books like *Cobra II* and *Plan of Attack*, although Ricks uses his many military sources to portray an officer class that was far more skeptical of the war beforehand than generally reported. But the heart of his book is the second half, beginning in August 2003, when, as he writes, the war really began, with the bombing of the Jordanian embassy and the emergence of the insurgency. His strongest critique is that the U.S. military failed to anticipate--and then failed to recognize--the insurgency, and tried to fight it with conventional methods that only fanned its flames. What makes his portrait particularly damning are the dozens of military sources--most of them on record--who join in his critique, and the thousands of pages of internal documents he uses to make his case for a war poorly planned and bravely but blindly fought. The paperback edition of *Fiasco* includes a new postscript in which Ricks looks back on the year since the book's release, a year in which the intensity and frequency of attacks on American soldiers only increased and in which Ricks's challenging account became accepted as conventional wisdom, with many of the dissident officers in his story given the reins of leadership, although Ricks still finds the prospects for the conflict grim. --Tom Nissley

*A Fiasco, a Year Later* With the paperback release of Thomas Ricks's *Fiasco*, a year after the book became a #1 New York Times bestseller and an influential force in transforming the public perception (and the perception within the military and the civilian government as well) of the war in Iraq, we asked Ricks in the questions below to look back on the book and the year of conflict that have followed. On our page for the hardcover edition of *Fiasco* you can see our earlier QA with Ricks, and you can also see two lists he prepared for customers: his choices for the 10 books for understanding Iraq that aren't about Iraq, a collection of studies of counterinsurgency warfare that became surprisingly popular last year as soldiers and civilians tried to understand the nature of the new conflict, and, as a glimpse into his writing process, a playlist of the music he listened to while writing and researching the book.

.com: When we spoke with you a year ago, you said that you thought you were done going back to Baghdad. But that dateline is still showing up in your reports. How have things changed in the city over the past year? Thomas E. Ricks: Yes, I had promised my wife that I wouldn't go back. Iraq was taking a toll on both of us--I think my trips of four to six weeks were harder on her than on me. But I found I couldn't stay away. The Iraq war is the most important event of our time, I think, and will remain a major news story for years to come. And I felt like everything I had done for the last 15 years--from deployments I'd covered to books and military manuals I'd read (and written)--had prepared me to cover this event better than most reporters. So I made a deal with my wife that I would go back to Iraq but would no longer do the riskiest things, such as go on combat patrols or on convoys. I used to have a rule that I would only take the risks necessary to "get the story." Now I don't take even those risks if I can see them, even if that means missing part of a story. Also, I try to keep my trips much shorter. How is Baghdad different? It is still a chaotic mess. But it doesn't feel quite as Hobbesian as it did in early 2006. That said, it also feels a bit like a pause--with the so-called "surge," Uncle Sam has put all his chips on the table, and the other players are waiting a bit to see how that plays out.

.com: One of the remarkable things over the past year for a reader of *Fiasco* has been how much of what your book recommends has, apparently, been taken to heart by the military and civilian leadership. As you write in your new postscript to the paperback edition, the war has been "turned over to the dissidents." General David Petraeus, who was one of the first to put classic counterinsurgency tactics to use in Iraq, is now the top American commander there, and he has surrounded himself with others with similar views. What was that transformation like on the inside? Ricks: I was really struck when I was out in Baghdad two months ago at how different the American military felt. I used to hate going into the Green Zone because of all the unreal happy talk I'd hear. It was a relief to leave the place, even if being outside it (and contrary to popular myth, most reporters do live outside it) was more dangerous. There is a new realism in the U.S. military. In May, I was getting a briefing from one official in the Green Zone and I thought, "Wow, not only does this briefing strike me as accurate, it also is better said than I could do." That feeling was a real change from the old days. The other thing that struck me was the number of copies I saw of *Fiasco* as I knocked around Iraq. When I started writing it, the title was controversial. Now generals say things to me like, "Got it, understand it, agree with it." I am told that the Army War College is making the book required reading this fall.

.com: And what are its prospects at this late date? Ricks: The question remains, Is it too little too late? It took the U.S. military four years to get the strategy right in Iraq--that is, to understand that their goal should be to protect the people. By that time, the American people and the Iraqi people both had lost a lot of patience. (And by that time, the Iraq war had lasted longer than American participation in World War II.) Also, it isn't clear that we have enough troops to really implement this new strategy of protecting the people. In some parts of Baghdad where U.S. troops now have outposts, the streets are quieter. Yet we're seeing more violence on the outskirts of Baghdad. And the cities of Mosul and Kirkuk make me nervous. I am keeping an eye on them this summer and fall. The thing to watch in Iraq is whether we see more tribes making common cause with the U.S. and the Iraqi government. How long will it last? And what does it mean in the long term for Iraq? Is it the beginning of a major change, or just a prelude to a big civil war? .com: You've been a student of the culture of the military for years. How has the war affected the state of the American military: the redeployments, the state of Guard and Reserves troops and the regular Army and Marines, and the relationship to civilian leadership? Ricks: I think there is general agreement that there is a huge strain

on the military. Essentially, one percent of the nation--soldiers and their families--is carrying the burden. We are now sending soldiers back for their third year-long tours. We've never tried to fight a lengthy ground war overseas with an all-volunteer force. Nor have we ever tried to occupy an Arab country. What the long-term effect is on the military will depend in part on how the war ends for us, and for Iraq. But I think it isn't going to be good. Today I was talking to a retired officer and asked him what he was hearing from his friends in Iraq about troop morale. "It's broken," he said. Meanwhile, he said, soldiers he knows who are back home from Iraq "wonder why they were there." Not everyone is as morose as this officer, but the trend isn't good. .com: You quote Gen. Anthony Zinni in your postscript as saying the U.S. is "drifting toward containment" in Iraq. What does containment of what will likely remain a very hot conflict look like? You've written in your postscript and elsewhere that you think we are only in act III of a Shakespearean tragedy. I wouldn't describe Shakespeare's fifth acts as particularly well contained. Ricks: I agree with you. Containment would mean some sort of stepping back from the war, probably beginning by halving the American military presence. You'd probably still have U.S. troops inside Iraq, but disengaged from daily fighting. Their goals would be negative ones: prevent genocide, prevent al Qaeda from being able to operate in Iraq, and prevent the war from spreading to outside Iraq. (This was laid out well in a recent study by James Miller and Shawn Brimley, readable at <http://www.cnas.org/en/cms/?368>.) Containment probably would be a messy and demoralizing mission. No one signs up in the U.S. military to stand by as innocents are slaughtered in nearby cities. Yet that might be the case if we did indeed move to this stance and a full-blown civil war (or a couple) ensued. And there surely would be refugees from such fighting. Either they would go to neighboring countries, and perhaps destabilize them, or we would set up "refugee catchment" areas, as another study, by the Brookings Institute, proposed. The open-ended task of guarding those new refugee camps likely would fall to U.S. troops. The more you look at Iraq, the more worrisome it gets. As I noted in the new postscript in the paperback edition, many strategic experts I talk to believe that the consequences of the Iraq war are going to be worse for the United States than was the fallout from the Vietnam War. .com: A year and a half is a long time, but let's say that we have a Democratic president in January 2009: President Clinton, or Gore, or Obama. What prospect would a change in administration have for a new strategic opening? Or would the new president likely wind up like Nixon in Vietnam, owning a war he or she didn't begin? Ricks: Not such a long time. President Bush has made his major decisions on Iraq. Troop levels are going to have to come down next year, because we don't have replacements on the shelf. So the three big questions for the U.S. government are going to be: How many troops will be withdrawn, what will be the mission of those who remain, and how long will they stay? Those questions are going to be answered by the next president, not this one. My gut feeling is the latter: I think we are going to have troops in Iraq through 2009, and probably for a few years beyond that. Indeed, I wouldn't be surprised if U.S. troops were there in 15 years. But as I say in Fiasco, that's kind of a best-case scenario.