
Book Review

Telling Part of the Story of Cheney's Iraq Mis-Adventure

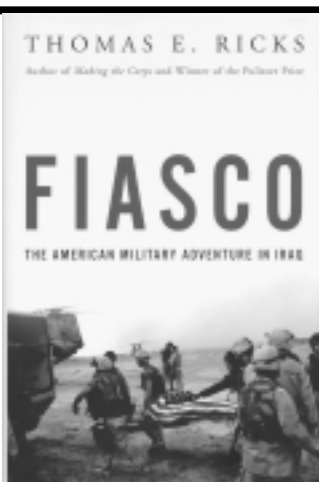
by Carl Osgood

Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq

by Thomas E. Ricks

New York: Penguin Press, 2006

416 pages, hardcover, \$27.95



When Penguin Press released *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq*, by *Washington Post* senior military correspondent Thomas E. Ricks, it immediately shot to the top of Amazon.com's best-seller list. It's not just a book, however. It is also a field of battle in a revolt of the military institution against the Bush-Cheney perpetual war policy. That revolt emerged last Spring, when six retired generals went public with their demands that Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld resign. For the traditionalists in the U.S. military, who refuse to buckle under to Rumsfeld's incompetent and arrogant leadership, this is a life-or-death issue for the military. Ricks finished writing his book six months ago, however, and if Iraq was a "fiasco" then, it has only become much worse since then, as evidenced by the rising death toll among both Iraqis and American troops in the first week of October.

That sense of worsening fiasco has intensified the institutional revolt, as demonstrated by two events during the last week of September, just before Congress adjourned for the November election. On Sept. 25, the Senate Democratic Policy Committee held its 11th hearing on the Iraq war. But

it was the first hearing in which retired officers who had served in Iraq testified on the conduct of the war. One of those retired officers, Maj. Gen. John Batiste, who commanded the 1st Infantry Division in Iraq in 2003 and 2004 (and who makes an appearance in Ricks's book), told the committee that Rumsfeld's "dismal strategic decisions resulted in unnecessary deaths of American servicemen and women, our allies, and the good people of Iraq." Rumsfeld, he said, "violated fundamental principles of war, dismissed deliberate military planning, ignored the hard work to build the peace after the fall of Saddam Hussein, set the conditions for Abu Ghraib and other atrocities that further ignited the insurgency, disbanded Iraqi security force institutions when we needed them most, constrained our commanders with an overly restrictive de-Ba'athification policy, and failed to seriously resource the training and equipping of the Iraqi security forces as our main effort."

Another element of the institutional revolt is that 51 military veterans are running for Congress this year, as Democrats. Two days after the Senate Democrats' hearing, 10 of those veterans, accompanied by Rep. John Murtha (D-Pa.), held a press conference in Washington. Murtha highlighted the damage that the Iraq war is inflicting on the military and praised the candidate veterans for "fighting to take back the honor and patriotism that they deserve."

So, Ricks is giving voice to those who are worried about the damage that the Cheney-Bush war policy and the misleadership of Rumsfeld are inflicting on the integrity of the institution of the military. Ricks, however, is himself part of an institution, the news media, which played a less than honest role in the buildup to war in 2002 and early 2003; therefore, his book tells only part of the story.

The Murawiec Affair

On July 10, 2002, a man described as a "senior analyst" of the RAND Corporation delivered a diatribe to the Defense Policy Board, in the form of a power point presentation of 24 slides, describing Saudi Arabia as an enemy of the United

States. The Board was then chaired by neo-con Richard Perle. The briefer recommended that the U.S. government give the Saudis an ultimatum to stop backing terrorism or face seizure of its oil fields and its financial assets invested in the United States. "The Saudis are active at every level of the terror chain, from planners to financiers, from cadre to foot soldier, from ideologist to cheerleader," the briefer stated.

The briefer further declared that "Saudi Arabia supports our enemies and attacks our allies," and he described that country as "the kernel of evil, the prime mover, the most dangerous opponent" in the Middle East. The briefer further argued that "removing [Saddam] Hussein would spur change in Saudi Arabia" which, he maintained, "is the larger problem because of its role in financing and supporting radical Islamic movements."

That so-called "analyst" was Laurent Murawiec, a one-time European associate of Lyndon LaRouche who left *EIR*'s Wiesbaden, Germany, office in 1990, having been picked up by the organized crime circles of fugitive Marc Rich, and later brought to the United States by Richard Perle, who sponsored an appearance Murawiec made at the American Enterprise Institute in 1999. A few years before he left *EIR*, Murawiec had objected to the publication of a 1986 special report entitled "Moscow's Secret Weapon: Ariel Sharon and the Israeli Mafia," which highlighted Sharon's U.S.-organized-crime connected backers who ran the Jonathan Pollard Israeli spy ring.

The Murawiec story was broken on Aug. 6, 2002 by none other than Tom Ricks, in a front-page article in the *Washington Post*. However, this particular episode, which caused such a firestorm at the time, doesn't get mentioned in his book. In fact, Ricks plays down the role of the Perle-led Defense Policy Board in the run-up to the war in Iraq, mentioning only one Policy Board meeting in September 2001 addressed by Perle's favorite Iraqi, Ahmad Chalabi, and British Arab Bureau agent Bernard Lewis.

As for Perle himself, Ricks writes that Perle's "influence in the events leading up to the war likely has been overstated." Perle may have had some influence in the office of Vice President Dick Cheney, Ricks says, but the author otherwise limits Perle's role in the war drive as the one who seemed to be "willing to be quoted in the media, saying in public what his more discreet allies in the Bush Administration, such as I. Lewis 'Scooter' Libby, Cheney's chief of staff, would say to reporters only on background."

Murawiec Exposé Meets Angry Response

Although not mentioned in *Fiasco*, the response to Ricks's Aug. 6, 2002 exposé was instantaneous and angry. Ricks reported that on the next day, according to State Department spokesman Philip Reeker, Secretary of State Colin Powell called Prince Saud Faisal, the Saudi Foreign Minister, to reassure him that Murawiec's briefing did not "reflect the

views of the President of the United States or of the U.S. government." Rumsfeld called the story "unfortunate," and complained that leaking of it was "a terribly unprofessional thing to do and clearly harmful." Murawiec's ostensible employer, RAND Corporation, issued a statement disavowing Murawiec's briefing, saying that it "was not a RAND research product."

Sources close to the Bush Administration told *EIR* that the backlash against Perle had "badly damaged the neo-conservative 'mole-hill' inside the Bush Administration, giving ammunition to Powell in his fight against the Cheney cabal over the Iraq war, the Israel-Palestine peace process, and other Middle East policy issues," wrote Jeffrey Steinberg in the Aug. 23, 2002 *EIR*. More important, Steinberg said, the Murawiec rant, and Ricks's exposé of it, demonstrated "for all to see that the Wolfowitz-Perle faction's objectives are the total breakup of American ties to the moderate Arabs, in favor of Anglo-American-Israeli imperial policy."

Before the heat from the Murawiec episode had cooled down, Vice President Cheney told the national convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars in Nashville, Aug. 26: "There is no doubt" that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction. Cheney claimed that in the age of terrorists, and dictators who were willing to share weapons of mass destruction with them, containment, which worked so well during the Cold War, was no longer possible.

"Many of us are convinced that Saddam Hussein will acquire nuclear weapons fairly soon," Cheney said. "Simply stated, there is no doubt that Saddam Hussein now has weapons of mass destruction," and that "there is no doubt that he is amassing them to use against our friends, against our allies, and against us." Even worse, "the risks of inaction are far greater than the risks of action." Ricks describes this speech as "even more stunning than it appeared to be then, because it has become clear with the passage of time that it constructed a case that was largely false."

Not only would Cheney continue this drumbeat, but it would find its way into President Bush's 2003 State of the Union speech, in the form of the infamous "16 words," which claimed that the British had evidence that Saddam was trying to acquire uranium ore from Niger.

Ricks does not mention the Niger claim, the fact that it was based on forged documents, or the fact that it was exposed by Amb. Joseph C. Wilson IV, until page 384, and only then in the context of the story of *New York Times* reporter Judith Miller, who had fabricated a dozen stories backing up Cheney's claims, and then got caught up in U.S. Attorney Patrick Fitzgerald's investigation of the leak of the identity of Wilson's wife, who was a CIA operative working on weapons of mass destruction issues. As in the Murawiec affair, the Niger forged documents affair, and Cheney's vendetta against Wilson for exposing it publicly, Ricks does not get at the issue of the *intent* of the war-mongers in their invasion of Iraq.



The Washington Post/Robert A. Reeder

Then-Secretary of State Colin Powell (left) argues with Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, as National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice looks on. Ricks joins much of the military establishment in blaming Rumsfeld for the failure of the war. But Ricks himself is part of the media apparatus which played a less than honest role in the buildup to war—the story he leaves out.

The Post Admits That It Omits

One possible clue to why Ricks omits the Murawiec caper from his book appeared in the *Washington Post* itself on Aug. 12, 2004. Staff writer Howard Kurtz, in an article entitled “The *Post* on WMDs: An Inside Story,” reported that some critics complained that the *Post* did not give prominent placement to stories questioning the Bush Administration’s claims about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, during the run-up to war in late 2002 and early 2003. “We should have warned readers we had information that the basis for this was shakier” than was widely believed, Bob Woodward told Kurtz in an interview. “Those are exactly the kind of statements that should be published on the front page.”

Ricks was one of the victims of that failure. “The paper was not front paging stuff,” he said. “Administration assertions were on the front page. Things that challenged the ad-

ministration were on A18 on Sunday or A24 on Monday. There was an attitude among editors: Look, we’re going to war. Why do we even worry about all this contrary stuff?” Kurtz recounts that in October of 2002, about three months after he broke the Murawiec story, Ricks turned in an article entitled “Doubts,” in which he reported that senior Pentagon officials were resigned to an invasion but were reluctant and worried that the risks were being underestimated. The article was killed by the *Post*’s then-national security editor, Matthew Vita, who supposedly expressed frustration that Ricks quoted only retired officers by name.

The fact that the *Post* was burying information contrary to the Bush Administration’s drive for war does not get much play in Ricks’s book, except in general terms. He notes that the editorial page was “hawkish,” and he cites one incident in which the *Post* had evidently helped drive the case for war. The deputy chief of the CIA’s Iraq task force had dismissed concerns about sections of the speech that Colin Powell was about to deliver to the United Nations on Feb. 5, 2003, because, he said, he saw war with Iraq as inevitable. When Congressional investigators later asked him why he thought war was inevitable, he said, “My source of information was the *Washington Post*,” an indication, Ricks writes, “of the significant role the media played in paving the road to the Iraq war, and especially influencing the views of intelligence operatives.”

Military Disaster in Iraq

What the reader is presented with, then, is a detailed account of a story that is now becoming more widely known in general terms: the military and strategic failure of the Iraq war. Ricks, like a large segment of the military establishment, lays the blame for the insurgency right at the feet of Donald Rumsfeld, starting with the pre-war planning for the post-Saddam Hussein Iraq, which left too few troops to secure the country, after the fall of Saddam’s government in April of 2003, to the replacement by Amb. Paul Bremer of retired Lt. Gen. Jay Garner, who was initially chosen by Rumsfeld to administer post-invasion Iraq. Bremer’s first three decisions as American pro-consul in Baghdad—de-Ba’athification, disbandment of the Iraqi army, and the closing of state-run factories—laid the groundwork for the insurgency that would emerge that Summer.

Garner had planned to put the Iraqi army back to work. “One of our goals is to take a good portion of the Iraqi regular army” and put them to work in reconstruction, he had told reporters at the Pentagon in early March. “The regular army has skill sets to match the work that needs to be done.” A month earlier, Garner had briefed Condoleezza Rice, Bush’s National Security Advisor, on his plans. “Cannot immediately demobilize . . . 300-400K unemployed,” one of his briefing slides had stated. “Take advantage of ready labor force. . . . Reconstruction is labor intensive.” He

had contracted with MPRI, a military consulting firm, to draw up a plan to put up to 100,000 Iraqis to work on the low-tech end of reconstruction.

Garner told Ricks in an interview that having an operating Iraqi army was a key element of U.S. military planning, and all the top commanders were for it. Lt. Gen. David McKiernan, the overall commander of coalition ground forces, was particularly anxious. Garner said of him, he “beat me up every day, saying ‘When are you going to get the army back?’ ”

By mid-June 2003, Garner, McKiernan, and a host of others working on the stabilization of post-invasion Iraq were gone, replaced by politically hand-picked functionaries in Bremer’s Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), and an inadequately staffed headquarters commanded by the Army’s most junior Lieutenant General, Ricardo Sanchez. Retired Marine General Bernard Trainor, and *New York Times* military correspondent Michael Gordon report in their book, *Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq*, that McKiernan saw the Summer of 2003 as the period of a lost chance to build support and prevent the insurgency from gaining momentum: “With few exceptions, we were not being shot at. I could walk the streets anywhere in Baghdad. Most Iraqis, there, still viewed us as liberators, even if they did not particularly like us culturally,” he said in December 2005.

“From the beginning in planning for a post-Saddam Iraq, we failed to seize a window of opportunity to get military, political, economic, and informational effects harmonized to bring order to a chaotic situation,” McKiernan said. “While the Ba’athist hardliners would have opposed the coalition under any circumstances, I believe the insurgency’s mosaic of affiliations was not a pre-ordained event.”

But it wasn’t just the policy decisions emanating out of the White House and the Pentagon that helped bring on the insurgency during the Summer of 2003. Ricks accuses the Army of having completely forgotten the hard-won lessons of the Vietnam War, particularly the lessons of counter-insurgency warfare. Ricks clearly represents a faction of the military establishment, in expressing this view; recent issues of *Military Review*, the professional journal of the Army’s Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, have been replete with articles making almost the identical point.

The French in Algeria from 1954 to 1957, the British in Malaya in the 1950s, and the U.S.-run CORDS/Phoenix program in South Vietnam in the 1960s seem to be the main experiences these writers are reaching back to. Obviously, the French failed in Algeria, but that failure is the subject of a book entitled *Counter-insurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, by David Galula, a retired French army officer, who had fought in World War II, studied Mao Zedong’s insurgency in China, was in Greece during the civil war there, and then fought in Algeria. Galula’s book was almost unknown at the Army Command and General Staff College

as of 2003. It has since become something of a bible there.

No Doctrinal Solution to This Problem

Ricks argues that the failure to apply classical counter-insurgency methods to the early going in Iraq, also helped to intensify the insurgency. He singles out Maj. Gen. Ray Odierno (since promoted), who commanded the 4th Infantry Division in Iraq from May 2003 to May 2004, in particular. Odierno’s huge cordon-and-sweep operations indiscriminately sent tens of thousands of Iraqis to Abu Ghraib prison, thereby not only creating more recruits for the insurgents, but also helping to set the conditions for the torture scandal that emerged in the Spring of 2004.

Getting praise from Ricks are Lt. Gens. David Petraeus, who now commands the Army Combined Armed Center after two tours in Iraq, and James Mattis, who commanded the 1st Marine Division in Iraq in 2004. Mattis and Petraeus jointly oversaw the production of the new Army-Marine Corps counter-insurgency manual, which begins with a quote from Galula. Ricks also praises Col. H.R. McMaster for successfully applying classical counter-insurgency methods in Tal Afar during the Winter of 2005-06. McMaster’s 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment was cited by President Bush in early 2006 as a sign of the “progress” the United States was supposedly making in pacifying Iraq up to that time.

McMaster, who holds a Ph.D. in history from the University of North Carolina, is an interesting figure for another reason, however. He is the author of *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Lies that Led to Vietnam*, in which he documents how Secretary of Defense McNamara and Gen. Maxwell Taylor lied to President Johnson and the American people about Vietnam. More important for the military establishment, McMaster also documents how senior military leaders failed to challenge those lies, even though they knew McNamara’s strategy would lead to disaster. McMaster’s book has often been cited as a factor in the above-cited “generals’ revolt.”

The problem in trying to fight the war in Iraq now, according to competent counter-insurgency strategy, is that it fails to address the political objectives of the Bush Administration in the Middle East. Ricks, himself, provides the answer, early in his book when he recounts why the war party rejected the advice of former National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft. Scowcroft had warned in an Aug. 15, 2002 op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal* about the regional effects of an attack on Iraq. “If we reject a comprehensive perspective . . . we put at risk our campaign against terrorism as well as stability and security in a vital region of the world.” For Dick Cheney and Paul Wolfowitz “ ‘Stability’ wasn’t their goal, it was their target,” Ricks writes (emphasis in the original).

As Lyndon LaRouche keeps warning, that is precisely the point. No amount of competent counter-insurgency doctrine can overcome a war policy meant to produce decades of religious warfare. Again, the issue is one of *intent*.