

The Gamble - General Petraeus and the untold story of the American Surge in Iraq,
2006-2008 by Thomas E. Ricks.
Allen Lane 2009.

This is the sequel to Thomas Ricks' brilliant *Fiasco*, in which he demolished the Bush Administration for its calamitously ill-thought through and disastrously mismanaged invasion of Iraq in 2003. Readers of *Fiasco* were left with a sense of disbelief at the incompetence and stupidity at the very top of the power structure in Washington, the malevolence of leading members of the government and the utter incompetence and moronic short-sightedness of the Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld.

The Gamble, written similarly with Ricks' forensic eye and inside knowledge, covers some of the same ground, though set in the context of the major policy and military shift, master-minded by some of the brightest Colonels in the US Army and led by General David Petraeus (made Chief of US Central Command by President Obama), that became known as 'The Surge'.

Ricks' stature as a military correspondent meant that he was accorded unprecedented access to Petraeus and other senior officers and in the areas of internal debate, decision making and action on the ground the reader feels at the heart of things.

The Gamble is divided into three main sections: *The Old War Ends*, *A New War Begins*, and *War Without End* and contains invaluable and fascinating appendices in the form of the actual texts of the discussion and assessment papers that were key to the policy and strategy changes.

One concludes *The Gamble* with a recurring sense of disbelief at and distaste for the idiocy of Rumsfeld, Cheney and their associates, a huge respect for the brilliance and bravery - both political and military - of a swathe of US military personnel, and a strong feeling that Iraq, and Afghanistan, are going to be the major preoccupation of the Obama administration, and possibly whoever follows the ending of his second term.

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