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## White House Fantasies on Iraq

**S**omeday, in the months ahead, there may be an Iraq where a smoothly run American occupation authority has dealt devastating setbacks to terrorism, brought security to most of the country, improved infrastructure and basic services, and elicited encouraging signs of democracy, economic renewal and cultural rebirth. Unfortunately, right now that Iraq exists only in the pages of the implausibly upbeat 100-day progress report recently issued by the White House.

In Iraq today, American soldiers die, electricity shortages lead to rioting, and the threat of terrorism against civilians must be taken increasingly seriously. The biggest problems have been airbrushed out of the White House report, making it read more like a Bush campaign flier than a realistic accounting to the American people. There have, of course, been positive accomplishments, but making a success of Iraq will require much time, many billions of dollars and real sacrifices. Pretending otherwise risks future public disillusionment.

In the face of news reports detailing continued insecurity, failing basic services and painstakingly slow political progress, the White House cites significant signs of better security, improved basic services and emerging democracy. Not mentioned in the Panglossian report, covering the 100 days after President Bush declared an end to major combat operations, were the 56 American soldiers killed in attacks during that period.

Days after the report's release, Basra was swept by rioting over electricity and fuel shortages. While the report boasts of broad international support, Washington still scrambles to line up countries willing to contribute peacekeeping troops without expanded United Nations authority.

Many of today's problems in Iraq can be traced to the Bush administration's tendency to credit what it wants to believe rather than more realistic accounts. It exaggerated the evidence on Iraqi unconventional weapons and links with Al Qaeda, underestimated the potential for chaos in a country that had endured years of war, sanctions and dictatorship, and misjudged the patience of the Iraqi people for putting up with postwar disruptions and an occupying army. All those delusions find uncanny echoes in the 100-day report.

In the real world there have recently been some hopeful signs that administration policies are beginning to reflect a more sophisticated understanding of Iraq. Future White House reports should describe that world, not wishful fantasies.