

The Role and Significance of Signature Attacks in the Iraqi Insurgency

Sep 30, 2010



Articles & Testimony

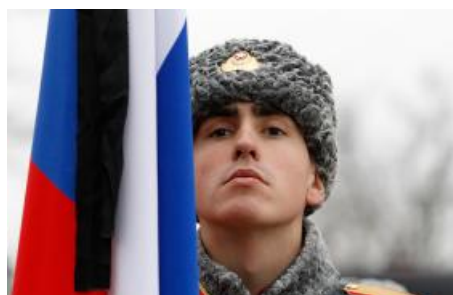
On August 31, 2010, the United States declared an end to combat operations in Iraq. In recent months, however, there has been a stubborn perception that security in Iraq is suffering a downturn. Yet the raw numbers of monthly security incidents reveal a significant decline in year-on-year comparisons. The key reason for the difference between perception and reality is the rising incidents of so-called "signature attacks" that capture the media's attention. These high-profile attacks involve tactics such as suicide vest bombings, suicide car bombings and other attempted mass casualty attacks. In October to December 2009, for example, the average number of attempted or completed signature attacks in Iraq was 15 per month. By the second quarter of 2010 (April-June), the monthly average increased to 23. The month of July 2010 witnessed 34 such attacks and was claimed by the Iraqi government to have been the deadliest month since May 2008.

Typically for Iraq, the rise in signature attacks can be viewed in two ways. To some analysts, the attacks signal a partial recovery of movements such as the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). To others, including Iraqi government spokesmen and U.S. military leaders, the attacks represent increasingly desperate attempts by such groups to demonstrate that they remain active and strategically relevant.

This article will show how the ISI's insurgent campaign was interrupted in March 2010, when the insurgent group lost a key operational leader. As a result, large-scale simultaneous bombings on strategic targets have given way to sporadic and sometimes ineffective attacks on individual targets. It will then disaggregate the different strands of Iraq's interwoven insurgencies to gain a better understanding of the role, significance and future evolution of signature attacks in Iraq. ... ❖

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