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FROM TOI PRINT EDITION

# A Bastille day of mourning: Why France is reeling under horrific attacks by Islamist extremists

July 17, 2016, 7:06 PM IST / Sreeram Sundar Chaulia in TOI Edit Page, Edit Page, World, TOI

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**Sreeram Sundar Chaulia**

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The devastating terrorist attack on holiday revellers in the capital of the picturesque French Riviera, Nice, is a fresh onslaught in a relentless war by Islamist extremists on their favoured foe. That France is reeling from another horrific blow by jihadists after the Charlie Hebdo massacre and the Paris attacks of last year is a commentary on how strongly it is

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being targeted and how vulnerable it remains by not learning from past mistakes.

There are both external and domestic factors for France to suffer as the number one choice for repetitive terrorist acts. The aggressive use of the military in overseas combat operations by the French socialist regime in the name of rolling back jihadist threats in Mali, Central African Republic, Syria and Iraq sets this country apart as a *bête noire* for the Islamic State and its kindred. IS's official spokesman Abu Muhammad al-Adnani has proclaimed it a holy duty to kill Westerners "in any manner or way, especially the spiteful and filthy French".

The sense of an unforgotten imperial mission that France harbours in its foreign policy and the prominent leadership that it holds within core western military formations like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, make it a hateful nation for radical Islamists.

The driver of the lorry who rammed into unsuspecting tourists and locals in Nice picked an occasion like no other, Bastille Day, which symbolises all that stands for French pride and grandeur. It was a macabre poetic justice from the viewpoint of jihadists who want to turn around the wars started or supported by France's military on their turfs into



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revenge taken at the heart of civilian France.

Locking in on France, a country with staunch Republican and secularist values, is also becoming a habit for extremists because of the culture wars and domestic disarray plaguing the country. The apartheid-like conditions which have alienated young French Muslims and the incompatibility of authoritative French civic customs with the radicalised, ghettoised and exclusivist mentality among minorities of Arab origin, generate a fundamental crisis of identity and citizenship. Out of this crucible of rejection and segregation comes explosive terrorist violence.

A second internal defect that is denting France's ability to prevent attack after attack is its weak government that is prone to political infighting, lacklustre economic performance, and utter unpopularity with the people. The disastrous run that President François Hollande has had since assuming office in 2012 in almost all departments of governance has ushered in a systemic funk where nothing seems to be workable or fixable.

Saddled with a vast public sector bureaucracy that wants to keep its vested privileges at the cost of the general welfare, France is woefully unprepared to



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defend its national security against agile, daring and inventive terrorists. The very idea of a large lorry in itself becoming a weapon of mass destruction to mow down over 80 people is somewhat novel, although IS and other Islamist hardliners around the world had been advocating deployment of motor vehicles to inflict damage on their enemies.

Unlike mass terrorist incidents before, where trucks have been used as carriers of bombs for causing massive damage, the simple modus operandi of the lorry-driving terrorist clearly caught the French intelligence and security apparatus napping. In a system where heads rarely roll for accountability and where all branches of the public sector have militant trade unions to hold managers to ransom, there is a severe dearth of competence and flexibility.

France is today a dinosaur with antiquated laws and regulations that inhibit reforms and present a sorry face of a 'Republic of paralysis' for terrorists to make hay. Irrespective of whether terrorists wreaking havoc are merely inspired by IS or actually trained agents of IS's external operations branch, France has a big problem.

Terrorists always carry the political goal of forcing a reversal in policies of the targeted country. In the French character,



it would be cowardly and out of the question to withdraw from the war on IS or abandon the secular ethos in response to outrages like the Nice attack. But systemic reform and rejuvenation are necessary if France hopes to avoid more mayhem on its streets.

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## TOP COMMENT



ajitvadakayil Vadakayil  
2222 days ago

the ncw must have 50% representation for men . . .  
women alone cannot do justice as most of them are hormone driven and have ego issues . .  
indian women now descend almost da ...

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