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EXCLUSIVE

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Malou Innocent

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Malou Innocent interviewed by Paulo Gorjão (*IPRIS Digest*, Vol. 2, No. 99, April 28, 2009).

“[We] cannot underscore the seriousness of the existential threat posed to the state of Pakistan by the continuing advances now within hours of Islamabad that are being made by a loosely confederated group of terrorists and others who are seeking the overthrow of the Pakistani state,” Hillary Clinton said (UPI, April 22, 2009). Does the AfPak strategy already needs to be reviewed towards a PakAf strategy? Is Hillary Clinton's "mortal threat" assessment correct? Given the challenges plaguing Pakistan -- economic insolvency, political turmoil, social unrest, and a powerful jihadist insurgency -- the Obama administration must recognize Pakistan's problems its own right and not only how it pertains to events in neighboring Afghanistan. If Pakistan's Army is unable -- or unwilling -- to mend the country's lack of internal cohesion it risks pushing the country toward Balkanization. Its Pashtun-dominated regions along the Afghan border stand almost fully Talibanized. The Baloch people, long denied economic and political rights, may continue their separatist insurgency for the foreseeable future. And as we witnessed over thirty years ago with Bengal's separation from West Pakistan, history often has a habit of repeating itself. *During the presidential race Barack Obama said he would be willing to intervene in Pakistan if necessary. Recent*

events in Pakistan could trigger renewed US military operations in Pakistani soil? At present, the United States has an undisclosed number of Special Forces conducting clandestine operations in and around FATA. It is impossible to declare with absolute certainty whether this role will be expanded. The local tribes of this region, particularly the Mehsuds, are rabidly anti-foreign, which undermined efforts by the Punjabi-dominated Pakistan Army in early 2004 to ferret out al-Qaeda operatives from the region. Any US-effort on Pakistani soil must learn this lesson and intensify efforts to enlist tribal elders in the broader fight against extremists. Negotiations with various tribes and an assurance to respect tribal autonomy would be the only way such an approach would succeed. Without significant support among indigenous tribes, the United States could kick over the hornet's nest and inadvertently exacerbate the militancy. *Is Pakistan in danger of becoming a failed state with nuclear weapons? Why?* Pakistan is and is not in danger of becoming a failed state. As my colleagues Christopher Preble and Justin Logan note the diagnosis of state failure lacks methodological uniformity.¹ Will Pakistan see a total collapse of civilian administration? That seems a bit alarmist. Much of the country today is beyond the reach of Islamabad's writ, but it would take more than loose networks of suicide bombers for the world to see a complete implosion of the 6th most populous country in the world. As for the safety of the nuclear arsenal, the central tenet of Pakistan's nuclear strategic doctrine is minimum credible nuclear deterrence against India. Fortunately, due to security measures already in place at the military bases that house its arsenal of nuclear weapons, the danger of militants seizing Pakistan's nuclear weapons--while possible--remains highly unlikely.”

¹ Christopher Preble and Justin Logan, “Fixing Failed States: A Cure Worse than the Disease?” (*Harvard International Review*, Vol. 29, No. 4, Winter 2008 [http://www.cato.org/pubs/articles/logan-preble-hir-fixing_failed_states.pdf]): 62-6.