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**HEADLINE: The Quartet's Road Map: Yassir Arafat Is More And More Alone**

**By Rino Labate**

**Interview of Kenneth W. Stein**

If the conflict in Iraq goes according to the hopes of the United States, Great Britain, and Spain and their allies, the Middle East will have a new layout. Is this new order compatible with the current situation in Palestine? With Kamikazes operating in Israel and Sharon's tanks in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip?

Since Sharon's visit to the Mosque esplanade 3,000 casualties from both sides have occurred. Many people maintain that so much blood, hatred, and violence cannot be abolished by decree, but need to be defused.

This is why a few days ago President Bush, following the appointment of the new Palestinian Prime Minister, Abu Mazen, announced that the plan (*Road Map*) (translator's note: in English in the text) for the creation of a Palestinian state drafted by the Quartet (U.S., Russia, EU, U.N.) will be handled to the two parties "as soon as the new prime minister achieves a position of true authority." Today, the Palestinian Parliament granted full powers to Abu Mazen.

A few days ago we spoke about all this, about the future of Palestine, about the new order in the Middle East after the war on Iraq, with Prof. Kenneth Stein, a major expert in the historical and diplomatic aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and a professor at Emory University in Atlanta.

**Q: After Saddam Hussein leaves the stage, will it be "bad" Arafat's turn?**

A: Yes. Arafat made a first big mistake in 1978 when he did not accept Camp David's accords. He was not ideologically and intellectually equipped for peace. If he had accepted them, today we would have a West Bank and Gaza State. In 1987 he started the first Intifada because he was afraid he would loose control of the liberation movement. Let's not forget that in '91 he sided with Saddam, and afterwards he did not stop violent struggle. Like Saddam, he has piled up huge wealth at the

expense of his people.

**Q: Is Abu Mazen going to face a hard task?**

A: Yes, it's always difficult to replace a symbol. And, once Arafat is gone, the different ethnic groups will clash with one another.

**Q: While in Washington Powell describes Abu Mazen as a "gentleman," terrible signs come from Gaza. Popular resistance committees and sheikh Yassin label Abu Mazen as "meaningless" and promise (to give him) a "very special" welcoming.**

A: Progress can also be achieved without a final agreement... Beyond appearance, Palestinians strongly want peace. During the 1996 elections, I was part of the monitoring committees, and often heard Palestinians say proudly: "We don't want Arafat to replace Israel." We need to isolate and fight against extremism and terrorism.

**Q: Many believe that the Quartet's "road map," containing a series of steps toward the creation of a Palestinian state in 2004-2005, may no longer work. After the disagreement with the USA over the war on Iraq, France is said to have a peace plan of her own.**

A: I rule it out. I don't think Mr. Chirac is going to take that responsibility. We need to carry on, having the political courage of carrying on. No, I don't think France will act alone. And then, in such a case, why the other Quartet members should stop their attempts at creating a credible Palestinian state that gives up the use of violence?

**Q: Throughout the world there are protests against the war on Iraq. Don't you think the Bush Administration should have tried other approaches?**

A: No, we waited for 12 years. Saddam deceived everyone and, despite his promises, has kept making fun of the U.N.