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**Interview with Kenneth Stein by Carlo Anastasio and Giuseppe Di Fazio**

**HEADLINE: The Dangers of the Post-Saddam [Period]**

**Sub-head: Kenneth Stein, the Middle East expert at Emory University of Atlanta, explains possible developments of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the risks of the war against Iraq. "Removing Baghdad's *Rais* could bring unforeseeable consequences."**

**Boxed quote: "It is easier to remove WMD than changing a country's political culture. Bush's choice is a dream difficult to come true."**

"Why didn't you ask me whether I am against the war?" asks Kenneth Stein after the interview held at our newspaper headquarters. Because it is evident that you are against it, we reply. "You should have asked in the interview, though," he argues. May be. But it may well be counting "yeses" and "noes" to war-- however authoritative and important-- makes little point at this time and probably downplays the issue. It is perhaps more useful to focus comprehensively on Middle East dynamics, with the help of a great expert in the field: just him, Kenneth Stein, a professor at Emory University in Atlanta, GA, and an advisor to former President Jimmy Carter.

**Q: Professor, during the 1991 [Gulf] war, Yassir Arafat was the only Arab leader who supported Saddam Hussein. Now, could the possible fall of Saddam cause Arafat to become politically irrelevant?**

A: I think I remember that also King Hussein initially supported Saddam. It is also true that the Arab countries wanted that Saddam be removed. As to Arafat, changes in the Palestinian community started well before this confrontation with Iraq, and will go on independent from the eventual outcome.

**Q: Therefore these are two separate issues?**

A: Changes in the Palestinian community started before the Palestine turmoil, well before September 2000. The pressures of the internal Palestinian community, in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, against the external leadership-- i.e., Arafat, Abu Mazen, and the others

coming from Tunis-- was already underway. The Palestinian upheaval was not directly only against Israel, but was mainly an internal struggle aimed at determining which direction Palestine should take in the future. And the ability (or inability) of Arafat to be in control of this upheaval clearly showed that the use of violence and the weapons did not result in the creation of a Palestinian state. Changes are already underway, and this is witnessed by the presence of a prime minister net to the president. A prime minister whose powers are destined to increase so much as to become the one who will indicate which direction should take the movement for the creation of a Palestinian state. The real problem is the following: the Al Fatah faction, together with Arafat and Abu Mazen, that is to say the faction that was in Tunis, is now clashing with the faction of the Palestinians from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, to determine who is going to get the decision making power.

**Q: The Palestinian issue seems to have disappeared from the U.S. foreign policy agenda.**

A: Disappeared? On the contrary, it appeared again. In March 1977, President Carter delivered a speech in Massachusetts, and was asked his opinion about the self-determination of the Palestinian people. Carter said it was necessary to give the Palestinians a homeland. This statement caused an uproar among Jewish Americans and among those, not Jewish, who supported the State of Israel. An explosion of protest occurred, and the Israeli prime minister shook his head saying: "How is it possible for an American president to say such things?" 25 years later, in October 2001, at a time when the American appreciation for the Arabs and the Muslims is at its lowest, Mr. Bush clearly said at the United National that it is necessary to create an independent Palestinian state. This time nobody turned a hair, nobody argued: "No, this can't be done." The following month, in November, Secretary of State Colin Powell explained the steps to follow towards the birth of a Palestinian state. That speech became the road map to be used by the four-party initiative (which includes the U.N., the EU, Russia, and the U.S.) to define appropriate steps leading to the creation of the Palestinian state in 2005-2006.

**Q: Mr. Sharon, however, has clearly indicated that he really cares only about the U.S. Where are the Bush Administration's views about the Israeli prime minister's policy?**

A: Let's go back to the "road map." Some steps have already been achieved. For example, there is more transparency regarding funds destined to the Palestinian Authority. On the Israeli side, after the elections there has been no widening of the settlements in occupied territories. Mr. Sharon told President Bush that he was ready to accept a

painful compromise as soon as violence would stop. We have to point out that Sharon, unlike Begin, is no ideologist, and does not harbor any- so to say- philosophical feeling toward the "sacred borders" of Israel. He wants to be in control of certain areas just for security reasons. In addition, he is supported by a very beautiful coalition: no one in his government is really opposed to the creation of a Palestinian state, and even if there were any, Mr. Sharon has the Meretz party and the labor party in the opposition which both favor the creation of a Palestinian state and would therefore support Sharon. Israel's most serious problem is demography. Today there are 3 million Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, and one million of Israeli Arabs in Israel: 4 million in total. The Jewish are 5.2 million. In 25 years there will be more Palestinians than Israelis. Therefore Israel must necessarily decide to separate itself from the Palestinian state to avoid becoming a state that is no longer a truly Israeli state. If I were a Palestinian negotiator, I would say: "Let's do nothing, for in 25 years we'll be anyway the majority." On the contrary, Israel is now in a position to determine its borders and to separate itself from the Palestinians' life. By "separate itself" I mean that Palestinians should no longer even work in Israel, otherwise Israel would always retain power, as it happens now, to "turn off the tap." So completely separate states. There should be a separation, not a division, also for Jerusalem.

**Q: One of the reasons mentioned by the Bush Administration for the war against Saddam is the possibility of bringing democracy to Iraq and the neighbor countries. Do you think Islam and democracy are compatible?**

A: Are you asking me if I agree with Bush?

**Q: Perhaps with Bernard Lewis...**

A: Yes, I would definitely agree more with Lewis. One of his students was a teacher of mine; therefore I feel like one of Lewis' grandchild. As to the Bush Administration, the thing is that it has been announcing a series of objectives regarding Iraq. The first objective was: let's remove all WMD. Then, a second objective was stated: Let's work toward a change in the regime. Then a third one: not just a regime change, but also a change in the political culture. Removing WMD was the simplest task: you need to define them, find them, and remove them. It is a practical matter; it has to do with numbers. With the second objective, we move to something more vague. What do we really mean by removing Saddam: do we want to remove one person? All of his family? All of his Tikrit clan? Do we want to remove 3,000 people who are part of the military apparatus, of the bureaucracy, of the party? And this applies only to the regime. When moving to democracy, things are even more complicated.

What kind of democracy we have in mind: Jeffersonian democracy? Can a democracy such as the American one exist within an Arab culture? A better question would be: What are the changes that can possibly be introduced in the Iraqi political culture? We should remind ourselves that Iraq is an Islamic, Arab, tribal state. It seems almost a dream to apply the ideal of democracy to such a context. A dream: not impossible, but certainly difficult. I am afraid that removing Saddam may cause the explosion of Iraq. However terrible, Saddam is the cement of the Iraqi society. Removing him could bring unforeseeable consequences.