

**Opening Statement of Dr. Tamara Cofman Wittes**  
**Nominee for Assistant Administrator for the Middle East**  
**Senate Committee on Foreign Relations**  
**June 16, 2022**

Chairman Cardin, Ranking Member Young, and distinguished members of the Committee: I am deeply honored to appear before you today as the President's nominee to serve as Assistant Administrator for the Middle East at the U.S. Agency for International Development. I also want to thank Administrator Power for her support, and I can never sufficiently express my gratitude to my husband Ben, and my sons, EJ and Gabe.

I was born at a U.S. Army hospital in Ankara, Turkey, where my father was serving at our embassy with the U.S. Information Agency. I spent my childhood summers in and around the Middle East as he served in Riyadh, Tel Aviv, and several other posts. As a professional, I have spent over twenty years working on Middle East policy and traveled through nearly every country in the region. I was also privileged to serve the American people in the State Department's Near Eastern Affairs Bureau. In that position, I worked with our embassies across the region to support civil society and democratic reforms, and I organized the first wave of U.S. assistance to Tunisia after the 2011 Uprising.

Engagement with the governments and peoples of the Middle East has been part of my entire personal and professional life, which is why I'm so honored to be considered to lead USAID's Middle East Bureau and so grateful for your consideration.

The Middle East today presents tremendous challenges and human suffering, as well as opportunities to build greater human security, stability, and prosperity. Stabilizing the Middle East and strengthening our partnerships there will advance American interests and values while enhancing U.S. national security.

The peoples of the region are overwhelmingly young and seek a better future. Lasting stability demands human security and governments that are transparent, responsive, and accountable to their people. It is essential that America's civilian engagement in this region—our diplomatic and economic engagement, and especially our development assistance—be robust and persistent.

Administrator Power's priorities for the Agency for International Development globally—COVID-19, People's Republic of China (PRC), corruption, democracy, and diversity—frame the work ahead in the Middle East.

Many states in the Middle East, including key American partners, have been hit hard by COVID-19—a health crisis and economic contraction layered atop existing crises in governance and security. Social, political, and economic progress will be absolutely key to regional stability. USAID's development assistance is a central tool in that work.

Administrator Power is also focused on pushing back on the PRC's predatory model of development, combating corruption, and supporting democratic progress—and if I am confirmed, these will be a focus of my work as well.

In addition, Iran's destabilizing influence around the region, bitter conflicts in Syria and Yemen, and a challenging political environment in Libya present major challenges to promoting stability and prosperity in the region. The U.S. government is working with regional and international partners to resolve these conflicts. USAID provides life-saving humanitarian support now and can also play a key role in securing peace for the future.

While the region presents many challenges, the Middle East also presents opportunities for the United States. One that most drives me is the Nita M. Lowey Middle East Partnership for Peace Act. I believe in the power of people-to-people engagement. It can grow the constituency for peace, encourage leaders to take difficult steps towards peace, and rebuild Israelis' and Palestinians' hope in the possibility of coexistence. If I am confirmed, I look forward to working with Congress on this exciting initiative.

There are also opportunities for regional cooperation on shared issues like energy, water security, and health. In marking the anniversary of the Abraham Accords, Secretary Blinken said that "We want to widen the circle of peaceful diplomacy." I am grateful for this Committee's strong bipartisan support for the Abraham Accords and look forward to engaging with each of you on how we can bolster positive engagement across the region.

In closing, I want to emphasize that advancing stability in the Middle East in the face of crisis, conflict, and challenges from malign actors is no simple task. There is no monopoly on wisdom about these issues. My commitment to you is to maintain open and honest engagement, transparency, and dialogue with Congress, with the shared goal of advancing American interests.

I am grateful for your consideration of my nomination and look forward to your questions.

Thank you.