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Tamara Cofman Wittes is a senior fellow and the director of the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at Brookings. Tamara served as deputy assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs from November of 2009 to January 2012, coordinating U.S. policy on democracy and human rights in the Middle East for the State Department and was central to organizing the U.S. government's response to the Arab awakening.

Her expertise in this area is well established and Ms. Wittes was one of the first recipients of the Rabin-Peres Peace Award, established by President Bill Clinton in 1997.

Subject Area/Topic: ARAB-ISRAELI RELATIONS

Highlights: She said that the President is committed to three high-stakes endeavors:

- 1) Extricating the US from Afghanistan,
- 2) A nuclear agreement with Iran that will ensure against Iranian nuclear weapons, and
- 3) An Israeli/Palestinian agreement that will ensure the security of Israel and the establishment of a viable Palestinian state.

Among the changing conditions that will influence the possibility of successfully achieving our Middle East objectives are:

- the US has achieved energy independence as a result of increased production of oil and natural gas. This changes our priorities with regard to Saudi Arabia and other oil-producing countries;
- international sanctions have made Iran more receptive to a resolution of the nuclear standoff;
- the positions of both the Palestinians and the Israelis have been weakened because of internal dissent. The Netanyahu government is threatened from the right and might have to form a coalition with less conservative parties. If that happened, the possibility of compromises with the Palestinians would increase.

Wittes has been focused on the dilemma of the Middle East's well-educated youth with no place to go since before her 1998 book, *Freedom's Unsteady March*. She noted that India and Indonesia, which recently were in similar circumstances, have surged ahead economically while the Middle East has not. The result is a great mass of frustrated and dissatisfied young people who have been at the heart of political disturbances throughout the Middle East.