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The end of innocence

By [Natasha Mozgovaya](#)

WASHINGTON - "Innocent Abroad: An Intimate Account of American Peace Diplomacy in the Middle East" is the title of Martin Indyk's book. In the book, Indyk, who served two terms as U.S. ambassador to Israel during the Bill Clinton administration, writes about the failure of the Middle East peace process. Those who interpreted Barack Obama's promises as a return to that type of "innocent" idealism are now discovering they were wrong. The new American administration has made it clear that its foreign policy will be everything but innocent, and it will be based on U.S. interests. The Obama administration's guiding light is pragmatism.

The administration's moves to close the prison in Guantanamo and halt the torture of prisoners raised great hopes among human rights organizations. But the first disappointment was not long in coming. In her recent visit to China, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said human rights must not interfere with more urgent matters. Until then, it seemed as if there was no topic closer to Clinton's heart, but administration officials explained to the shocked reporters that there was no contradiction.

Human rights organizations are complaining that the new administration is still far from being its predecessor's antithesis. President Obama promised to listen and not to dictate, and Clinton promised to talk with the entire world, though the new approach is yet to be felt in Afghanistan and Pakistan, among others. Afghanistan's president, Hamid Karzai, was almost the last person to hear from Obama that he planned to station more troops in his country, while American attacks on the Taliban continue on Pakistani soil, despite Pakistan's wishes.

However, the complainers should remember that Obama never sold himself as a pacifist, just an opponent of "stupid wars." He also never spoke of a new era of conciliation, but of "a new era of responsibility."

The countries whom Obama has offered his "hand of friendship" are still considering how to respond to the new American style, which is influenced more by falling oil prices - and encourages Russia to agree to dialogue, and potentially opens doors for Iran and Venezuela - than by the president's lofty statements.

Israel is also wondering whether the U.S. is signaling it is distancing itself. Israel is hanging on to the "special relationship" between the two countries, but this is still not the same relationship Britain, Canada or Australia enjoy. Underneath the administration's proclamations of friendship is a very realistic examination of Israel, based on the potential trouble Israel might cause. Like the rest of the global land mines, Israel has been handed to a diplomatic subcontractor, endowed with enough caution so as not to jeopardize the president's political credit.

While Clinton is shuttling between the superpowers, explaining, promising, pleading and teasing in her own unique and strident style, a new club of acceptable nations is developing. Its members, including those who are not so punctilious about human rights, are invited to discuss problems of climate, economics and energy. But what will Clinton discuss with Israel in her coming visit? Like the misbehaving pupil, who continues to annoy the teacher the more she preaches to him, Israel is only reinforcing its status as a country that draws its influence from its problematic nature.

In light of the lack of proportion between the size of Israel and the size of its problems, it seems that nevertheless innocence and optimism, as Indyk states, are critical components for American involvement in the Middle East: "Otherwise, why should we bother?"

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