

Statecraft 2.0: A Conversation on American Leadership in a Multipolar World

by [Dennis Ross \(/experts/dennis-ross\)](#), [Thomas Donilon \(/experts/thomas-donilon\)](#), [Susan Glasser \(/experts/susan-glasser\)](#)

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Dennis Ross, a former special assistant to President Barack Obama, is the counselor and William Davidson Distinguished Fellow at The Washington Institute.



[Thomas Donilon \(/experts/thomas-donilon\)](#)

Thomas Donilon served in the first Obama administration as assistant to the president for national security affairs. He is currently chairman of the BlackRock Investment Institute.



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Susan Glasser writes the online column "Letters from Trump's Washington" in the New Yorker, where she is a staff writer.



Brief Analysis

Watch an expert webcast marking the publication of Institute scholar Dennis Ross's updated book on American grand strategy in today's multipolar world.

On March 6, The Washington Institute held a virtual Policy Forum with Dennis Ross and Thomas Donilon, moderated by New Yorker staff writer Susan Glasser. Author of the new book [Statecraft 2.0: What America Needs to Lead in a Multipolar World](#) (<https://global.oup.com/academic/product/statecraft-20-9780197698914>) (Oxford University Press), Ambassador Ross is the Institute's William

Davidson Distinguished Fellow and a former Middle East envoy with service in four administrations. Donilon is chairman of the BlackRock Investment Institute and former assistant for national security affairs to President Obama. The following is a rapporteur's summary of their remarks.

[Watch a video brief of Ross's insights from writing the book. \(https://youtu.be/OLMbpyqrcjw\)](https://youtu.be/OLMbpyqrcjw)

Dennis Ross

In 2007, I wrote a book about statecraft. When I took a step back a few years ago, I realized just how much the world had changed since then and decided to write *Statecraft 2.0* to account for the new dynamics and challenges facing the United States internationally and domestically.

To produce outcomes that are truly sustainable and aligned with U.S. interests, policymakers need fact-based assessments, an effective marriage of well-considered objectives and feasible means, and fidelity to America's identity and ethos. The post-Cold War era of American unipolarity is over—with the rise of revisionist great powers and transnational threats that require concerted multilateral efforts to effectively combat, good statecraft is more important than ever. U.S. policymakers no longer have the luxury of practicing it poorly.

Although President Trump wants America to win and appreciates the power of applying U.S. leverage, he fundamentally undervalues—even disdains—the norms that the United States worked for decades to strengthen, especially after the Cold War. Ultimately, forsaking critical statecraft tools like alliances and soft power will make Washington less likely to achieve its objectives.

Thomas Donilon

Statecraft 2.0 is chock-full of valuable insights for foreign policy practitioners, including a profound appreciation for the history and context that have led us to the current moment. Dennis emphasizes the importance of process, so the book is above all practical. His persistence in working on some of the world's most intractable issues for decades has produced a book that accounts for the broadest, most strategic considerations of statecraft—and the very human factors that influence outcomes.

Thus far, the actions President Trump has taken during his second term mark a fundamental reckoning in America's relationship with the world. The administration's foreign policy is quite personal, transactional, and focused on emphasizing dominance. As Dennis notes in his book, however, fact-based assessments are absolutely fundamental to effective statecraft. This element is particularly dependent on making sure that officials in key positions have sound judgment and are willing to speak the blunt truth to their leader. Precise objectives are similarly crucial to ensuring a sound process and favorable outcomes. The administration is still in its early days, so only time will tell to what degree it observes these fundamentals of statecraft.

This summary was prepared by Cleary Waldo. The Policy Forum series is made possible through the generosity of the Florence and Robert Kaufman Family. ❖

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