

# The Fine Art of Statecraft

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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**W**hen one looks at U.S. foreign policy and our standing in the world today, it is hard to escape the conclusion that the Bush administration has not exactly excelled in the exercise of statecraft. Good statecraft matches objectives and means. Poor statecraft does not.

Look at the administration's signature issues -- Iraq and democratic transformation in the Middle East -- and one sees poster children for ambitious objectives married to minimalist means. Part of the problem has been the instinct to try to get by on the cheap. More basically, however, the problem has been the administration's tendency to rely on faith-based, not reality-based, assessments. Too often objectives have been shaped by a world that the administration wants to believe exists or can be easily created.

If the administration had more of a negotiating mind-set, it would have understood the importance of seeing the world as it truly is. That does not require settling for the status quo. Those with a negotiating mind-set believe they can solve problems even if they don't believe every problem can be solved. They realize they have to understand each and every reality, no matter how unacceptable, before they can try to change it.

That is why those with negotiating mind-sets know it is essential to set clear objectives and identify the means to achieve them. They also understand the importance of leverage: One always wants the other side to think it needs a deal more than your side. Had Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice been governed by a negotiating mind-set, would she have issued several public calls for the Iranians to send their foreign minister to the recent Sharm al-Sheikh conference on Iraq? Consider that the Iranians weren't equivocating on attending, just on the level of representation. To Iranian (and other Middle Eastern) ears, Rice seemed to be pleading for the Iranian foreign minister to come -- in effect saying we need you more than you need us.

Statecraft, like negotiations, is about understanding both our leverage and our adversaries' vulnerabilities. Often our allies may have far more leverage, and we have to find ways to shape objectives that they share. We need to frame them publicly in a way that makes it easier for them to embrace, to orchestrate with them how best to exercise pressure as well as inducements, and to recognize that a readiness to engage with adversaries often makes it easier for our allies to take tougher steps that add to our leverage.

Iran is a good case in point. The Iranians have high unemployment, high inflation, and declining oil and natural gas

output, their chief sources of revenue. To preserve social peace, they use the revenues they generate from oil and natural gas exports to subsidize consumer goods in Iran. The Iranian vulnerabilities are very clear, and the Bush administration, to its credit, has focused on generating United Nations Security Council sanctions to persuade the Iranian regime of the high price it is going to pay for continuing with its nuclear program.

Slow motion. That's the good news; now the bad. Iran is not changing its behavior. We have the right objective in trying to stop the Iranian nuclear program. But we have a mismatch between that goal and the means we are using: We are employing slow-motion diplomacy at the Security Council while the Iranians have a fast-paced nuclear development program. It's time to go outside the Security Council and persuade our European allies to move beyond incremental pressures and actually cut their economic lifeline to Iran such as the billions of dollars in credit guarantees to companies doing business with Tehran.

How to convince the European Union? Statecraft. Convey to the Europeans that unless economic pressure is dramatically increased now, the use of force to stop the Iranian nuclear program will become more, not less, likely. To make economic pressure more palatable to the Europeans, let them know that once the new penalties are in place, we will join them in direct negotiations with Iran -- something they believe is the key to overcoming the crisis with Iran.

Ultimately, statecraft is about clarity, communication, intensive engagement, and knowing how to apply leverage. It is time to restore it to U.S. foreign policy.

A former Mideast negotiator, Ambassador Ross is author of [Statecraft and How to Restore America's Standing in the World \(http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC04.php?CID=270\)](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC04.php?CID=270), published this month by Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.

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