

# From "Weak State" to "Strong State"——An Analysis of Fukuyama's State-building Theory

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**Abstract:** *The existence of a large number of "weak states" is the main cause of all kinds of chaos in the world today. "The black hole of public administration" is the main reason for the formation of "weak states". The only way to rebuild the world order is to devote ourselves to the construction of the public administration system, to improve the governance capacity of "weak states", and to build a "strong state" paradigm based on a competent nation with a strong ruling system of law and a responsible government.*

**Keywords:** *weak state; state capacity; public administration; rule of law; state construction; world order*

## 1. Introduction

Fukuyama's latest exposition on national governance is mainly embodied in the book "*State building: governance and world order in the 21st century*". But strictly speaking, this is not an academic book devoted to political theory, but a research report of American foreign policy, especially foreign aid policy. Fukuyama, who always advocates "strong states", sticks to his view in this book, pointing out that "weak states" are the main sources of all kinds of chaos in the world today. The world order can only be rebuilt if we work to improve the governance capacity of the "weak states". Moreover, the developed countries in Europe and America represented by the United States also need to strengthen the construction of the state. Only in this way can they play the role of a "strong nation" in the reconstruction of the world order and effectively promote the improvement of the governance capacity of "weak states".

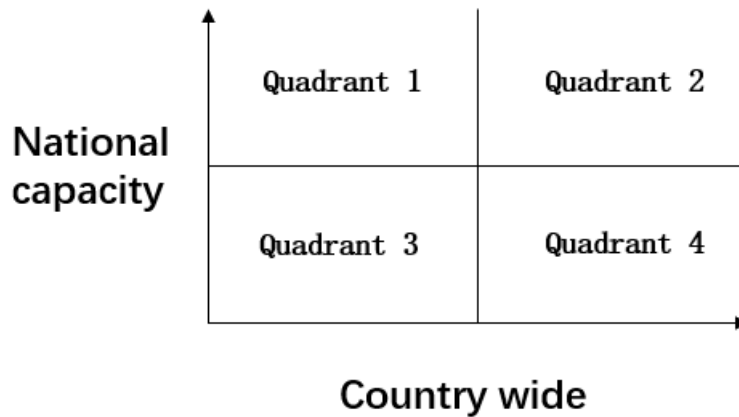
## 2. The formation of "weak states"

In his book "*State building: governance and world order in the twenty-first century*", Fukuyama points out that there are many serious problems in today's world to be solved, all of which are closely related to weak or failed states. Weak or failed states are numerous because of the "absence of the state", that is, the state function is missing. In most developing countries, the capacity of government is not too strong, but too weak.

Since the rise of modern capitalist nations, "small government" and "big society" have been the mainstream of state construction. Whether in the ideological and theoretical circles or in the actual political operation, people are on high alert to "big government", strictly limit the state's functions at the legislative level, and guard against the "offside" of the state's role. In Fukuyama's view, the operation of modern politics, which is guided by the restriction of state power, has led to the long-term existence of a political tendency, that is, the reduction of state functions. With the continuous reduction of state functions, it also has led to the overall decline of state capacity. In this process, the role of the state deviates, the function of the government is largely absent, which leads to the functional obstacles in the economic and social development. In fact, in most cases, even in European and American areas, the state is only acts as a "referee" and is in a relatively weak position in the operation of society. If the state is measured in terms of its function, capacity and legitimacy, "State-building is at least as important as state reduction, but it has not received the same attention. As a result economic liberalization reforms have failed to deliver on their promises."<sup>[1]</sup>

How to judge the strength of state capacity (the capacity of the government) . Or how to determine whether the state is missing? Fukuyama has adopted two concepts that are both differentiated and interrelated – national scope and national capacity. National scope means the scope of activities of a

country, which refers to a number of different functions set up by a country based on a certain objective and activity areas affected by the implementation of these functions. State capacity is the political power of a state, which refers to the clarity of a country's plans and the implementation of policies and laws, and is usually understood as the capacity of the state or system. Combining the two dimensions of national scope and national capacity, and using the coordinate system to express them, a very clear four quadrants are formed:



*Figure 1: National scope and national capacity*

In theory, "quadrant 2" is the best area with the strong national capacity and the large national scope. But in fact, it is difficult for any country to be in quadrant 2 for three reasons. First, the continuous expansion of national scope requires the continuous enhancement of national capacity, which in itself does not conform to the principle of efficiency. Second, when the national scope expands to a certain extent, the state capacity is often difficult to support. Third, the state capacity is too strong, it will infringe on social power, resulting in a serious reduction of social power and sacrificing of social justice.

Therefore, the best area is actually "quadrant 1". The state has a strong institutional capacity, but the activity area is determined in a limited scope, in line with the principle of economic efficiency, and is a powerful model of the state.

If a country is in the state of "quadrant 3", although the scope of the country is not large, the government is simply unable to perform the minimum functions because the national capacity is too weak. The economy will stop growing and the society will stop developing.

But "quadrant 3" is not the worst case. Countries in "quadrant 4" are typically "weak states". The ambitious and impractical plans laid down by the state have led to an unlimited expansion of the scope of state activities. It looks ambitious, but in fact the state's capacity is very weak and its strength cannot keep up with its ambitions. The "absence of a state" is obvious. This is how weak or failed states emerge. In today's world, a large number of developing countries are in the "quadrant 4" state.

### **3. The Root of the Formation of "Weak State"**

Fukuyama believes that the existence of a large number of "weak states" is rooted in a "black hole of public administration". Although a large number of economists, political theorists and social activists have been calling on countries to establish public administration systems as soon as possible, however, most countries are still unable to establish an effective public administration system under the guidance of Science of Public Administration. As a result, the "black hole of public administration" is getting deeper and deeper, and the improvement of national capacity is therefore subject to unprecedented restrictions.

The "black hole of public administration" of "weak states" has at least three manifestations.

One is the fuzziness of national goals. The goals set by the state are unclear, or too ambitious to give the impression that they are unintelligible, or so contradictory that people do not know what to do, or so vague that they do not know how to implement them. Government organizations form functional conflicts due to the fuzziness of goals, which leads to dysfunction and failure to achieve goals.

Second, the defects in the design of supervision system. The state exercises public power and therefore supervision is indispensable. However, the supervision system of "weak states" generally has design defects, so there are two serious consequences in implementing supervision. One consequence is that the supervised public administration activities are difficult to quantify, and the supervision activities are mere formality and cannot be carried out substantively. Another consequence is the high cost of monitoring and accountability, which seriously impedes the exercise of public power.

Third, the authorization scale of discretion. Public Administration requires a certain authorization, and all authorization involves a balance between efficiency and risk. If the scale of authorization is too large, the efficiency will be improved but the risk will also increase. If the scale of authorization is too small, the risk will be avoided but the efficiency will be affected. Moreover, the states have different internal and external conditions in different periods, and the granting of discretion must change according to the changes of internal and external conditions. Many countries cannot avoid the formation of "black hole of public administration" because they cannot grasp the appropriate degree of discretion, neither can they improve national efficiency, nor can they effectively control risks.

Many countries ignore the "black hole of public administration", instead pursuing "the optimal formal institutional norm" and "the optimal organizational form". In fact, "the best organizations" do not exist. In development policy, do not make light mentioning of some widely applicable rules and lessons."<sup>[2]</sup> The importance of normative norms and "optimal forms of organization" in the governance of a nation is self-evident, but they are too deeply influenced by a nation's social structure, history and culture. And there are other variables that often play a role in it, so in many cases it is difficult to control. This is why a legal system that works well in one country is poorly enforced when transplanted into another. On the contrary, it is relatively simple to transplant the public administration system, "Parachuting ten smart technocrats to a developing country can bring huge changes to public policies in these areas."<sup>[3]</sup> Fukuyama concludes that although the "black hole of public administration" of "weak states" exists in large numbers, it can be changed through technological means, which is also the most convenient path for state construction and world order reconstruction.

#### **4. The Path of Change for " Weak States"**

Fukuyama has demonstrated by ample evidence that since the end of the Cold War, weak or failed states have indisputably become the most important issues in the international order, because their existence has led to instability and extreme disorder in the world order. "From poverty to AIDS, from drugs to terrorism, and so on"<sup>[4]</sup>. These "weak states" erode the principle of sovereignty in the international system, which is manifested in wanton violations of human rights in domestic governance, deliberate international provocations and unbridled attacks on neighbouring countries resulting in frequent humanitarian disasters and large-scale refugee flows. These "weak states" also disregard international morality and openly shelter international terrorists, causing the spread of terrorist activities and posing a great threat to the lives and property of the people of all countries. This has been particularly prominent since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. During this period, developed world struggled to deal with almost all international crises originated in the "weak states".

As a national policy report of the United States, Fukuyama cannot avoid the obsession of "weak states" to the United States in this book. Faced with the destruction of the international order by these "weak states", as "a world leader", the United States has two choices in its foreign policy. First, it undertakes the so-called "great power responsibility" in the name of foreign aid, fighting terrorism or other activities to help these "weak states" build their nations and promote their national governance. The other is to disregard the reputation of "world leaders", give up "great power responsibilities" and leave the series of disasters caused by "weak states" to the international community. For the United States, choosing either of these two foreign policies would be an embarrassment. Choosing the former is accused of practicing hegemonism in the name of international assistance, which is suspected of creating a "new empire". While choosing the latter is accused of abdicating international responsibility, damaging the image of a great power, and leading to disputes between the United States and other developed countries in Europe. What is worse, being forced to choose the latter after failing to choose the former, it will inevitably lead to double accusations against the United States by the international community. In this respect, Fukuyama's vision is exemplified by the recent American withdrawal from Afghanistan. After "9/11 incident", the United States entered Afghanistan. Twenty years later, the United States' efforts in Afghanistan failed to achieve the expected goals. Under pressure from various sources, decided to withdraw its forces and allow the Taliban to return. The ensuing humanitarian disaster shocked the international community, and accusations against the United States poured in.

Based on the above analysis, Fukuyama points out that the change of "weak states" has become a top priority to stabilize the world order. State-building is the core issue of contemporary international politics, which is to help "weak states" establish self-sustaining systems and promote the improvement of "weak states" governance capacity.

The change of the "weak states" can be divided into three different paths or stages in time dimension. First, post-conflict reconstruction. After the chaos caused by the violent conflicts or other reasons, the government organization of "weak states" has nearly collapsed, the function of the government has been lost, the authority of the state no longer exists. Therefore, it is necessary to start from scratch and completely rebuild. Second, state building. On the basis of the first phase, state construction is initiated and a complete system of public administration is established to enable them to function well after the withdrawal of the international community. This is the most important stage of state building. In the past almost all the efforts of the international community aimed at changing the "weak states" suffered "Waterloo" at this stage, so the task is more arduous than the first stage. Third, "strong states" construction. On the basis of the achievements made in the change of "weak states", we should promote the construction of "strong states" in these countries, that is, to promote these "weak states" to become strong. After the initial state-building, many "weak states" appear to be basically stable, but still unable to perform some of the necessary functions. Once the international community withdraws from the country, it will soon revert to its former condition<sup>[5]</sup>. Therefore, it is necessary to make "weak states" strong and to construct "strong states". Of course, the task is more onerous and complex.

## 5. The Construction of "Strong State"

Since nation-building has become an urgent task to maintain the current international political order, "as important as the deployment of traditional military forces to maintain world order<sup>[6]</sup>", "then, how to build a "strong state"? Fukuyama's so-called state-building, in fact, refers to the establishment of a new system of government and strengthen the existing government. Contrary to the traditional state theory, Fukuyama's "strong states" theory strongly advocates the establishment of a powerful government, that is, the establishment of a complete and powerful state system.

The basic framework of state-building includes three aspects. First, "Competent Nation". The power is relatively concentrated in the state, with the military, police and other violent institutions as the guarantee of power. Under the power structure, government organizations have a relatively clear hierarchy and clear functional objectives. Mainstream society and religious beliefs perform their respective duties and social functions are well positioned. Second, "Strong Rule of Law". According to the general consensus of society, historical traditions and standards prevailing in the international community, a set of legal system are formulate, in which the state operates within the framework of the legal system and the law is binding on everyone, including the most powerful political participants. Third, "Responsible Government". The government is fully functional and governs the country in accordance with legal procedures. What the government cares about is not only the national interests, but also the interests of society as a whole and, especially of all its citizens. The government must maintain a high-efficiency operation, timely response and properly address the various demands of the people<sup>[7]</sup>.

It is not difficult to see that Fukuyama's "state-building" consists of three systems – the state, the rule of law and responsible government. This is also the foundation of the formation of a good political order in the modern state. Without these three institutional frameworks, the so-called "strong states" would be out of the question. On this issue, there are many positive and negative examples in the political history of human being.

Positive cases include early adopters of modern systems such as the United Kingdom (the UK), the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden. The UK was the first country to combine the three systems into a strong whole. The UK has built a modern national framework of the state, the rule of law, and the responsible government which are interdependent and mutual restrained centuries ago. Within this framework, a strong legal system has been established and the legal property right consciousness of the whole people has been formed early in the world history. On this basis, the British monarchy performed the function of "Responsible Government" better. It is the overall framework formed by the combination of the three systems that makes Britain a powerful country in modern era. After the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden and other countries also established a modern state system similar to the United Kingdom in the 19th century, and thus became one of the "strong states"<sup>[8]</sup>.

The achievements of the countries that pioneered the establishment of modern political systems in terms of democratic legitimacy, economic growth and the promotion of sound governance has fully demonstrated that the framework of "strong states" can serve as a template for nation-building.

Fukuyama argues that while there have been a series of foreign policy missteps since the end of the Cold War, this does not negate the typical significance of the United States in national construction. At the beginning of the founding of the United States, the consensus that "Government is a necessary evil" was formed. Therefore, the system was designed to weaken or restrict the government. The separation of powers was designed to balance and restrict the government. Even so, the nation building of the United States still meets all the requirements of "strong state". At the national level, although the federal system is not designed to centralize state power, it has clear decentralization and state functions. At the level of the rule of law, all issues of national governance are eventually transformed into legal issues, which are handled by law enforcement and judicial institutions throughout the country. At the government level, although its functions are limited, it relies on the scientific operation to implement effective control and management of the whole country, and the government's executive ability and decision-making capacity are relatively strong.

The former Soviet Union is the negative case of state-building. Although the system design ensures the centralization of state power, in the process of operation, the state gradually controls almost all the social resources and the social forces are weak. The relative centralized state power has finally developed to the level of "willfulness", which is manifested in grand goals, expanding scope of national activities and the lagging national capacity-building, which is difficult to match with the ambitious national goals. Due to the lack of institutional design in terms of checks and balance and the high cost of supervision, the government itself eventually evolved into part of the problem, and the phenomenon of power rent-seeking is widespread.... The interaction of many malpractices eventually led to the loss of state authority. When the upper power was destroyed, the state collapsed<sup>[9]</sup>. The former Soviet Union has the appearance of a "strong state", but it is in fact a typical example of the "Quadrant 4" region, which is a negative example of state-building.

## 6. Conclusion

Compared with the previous state theory, the state-building theory proposed by Fukuyama in "*State-building: State Governance and World Order in the 21st Century*" has the following innovations. Firstly, a modern state is a necessary condition for economic development. The negative effects of government collapse, civil war and conflict on economic growth are obvious, and the strong public administration capacity has a positive correlation with economic growth. Secondly, the construction of democratic political system is inseparable from the construction of a state. At any time and in any region, the building of freedom and democracy is of great significance. In the process of human civilization, those hateful slogans and terrorist tactics must be replaced by constructive solutions of openness, cooperation and win-win results. Thirdly, the threat of "weak states" to the world political order can be solved through state-building, but it is still a long-term and arduous task for the international community to establish a self-sustaining modern political system in these "weak states".

Fukuyama's theory of state-building also has obvious deficiencies. First, although to a certain extent, the division of national scope and national capacity and the related discourse have clarified the cause of the formation of "weak state", however, the boundary between state power and state capacity has been blurred. Besides, the differences of the two concepts have not been clearly distinguished in theory and have not penetrated this division through the whole process of national construction theory. Second, the whole theory of state-building lacks the perspective on the relationship between the state and society, only one-sided emphasizes on state construction, excessively pursues of the framework of "strong state". Thus it ignores the erosion of social forces caused by the over-expansion of state power, and take a blind eye on the role of social forces in state construction. Thirdly, although the former Soviet Union is regarded as a negative case of state-building, it only lists a number of disadvantages of the Soviet system, fails to analyze the nature of its state-building system in depth, and does not have a clear understanding of the relationship between state construction and "strong state".

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