BRINGING THE STATE BACK: STRONG VERSUS WEAK STATES

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the problem of defining a weak state and the indicators for assessment of a state’s strength. The author argues that there is no clear conception because so many different phenomena are attributed to state weakness. State weakness is observed in very different contexts – from geopolitical, to societal, to administrational efficiency. The indicators proposed are not precise even within each of three separate clusters of framing state weakness detected here. Related scholarship is so diversified that term ‘weak state’ suffers from considerable conceptual vagueness. All-inclusiveness of the concept might provide for various levels of intrusiveness, and hence bears long-term policy implications and practical consequences, for proclaiming of a state weak offer a basis for various forms of foreign interventions.

In contrast with the tremendous attention paid to globalisation, “retreat”, “decline” and “eclipse” of the state in the 1980s and early 1990s, we have witnessed renewed interest in the issues of state strength in last several years. The weak state issue is now quoted as “the single most important problem after the Cold War” and learning to improve state – building as

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central to the future of world order.\textsuperscript{2} All concrete threats to international security, including terrorism, nuclear proliferation, mass violations of human rights, poverty, armed conflict, and refugees, are viewed as the responsibility of states and the consequence of state weakness.\textsuperscript{3}

Alongside the basic term – weak state – there is a plethora of terms used either concurrently, or for a particular dimension or level of weakness: failing and failed state, collapsed state, fragile state, state in risk, quasi-state, predatory state, captured state, incapacitated state, fractured state, dysfunctional state. Still, “in most of the cases they are used as metaphors and less often as analytical terms.”\textsuperscript{4} What actually is a weak state? Is there a theory on weak state, and if so, what does “weak state” mean? This article explores the theoretical problem of defining a weak state, and the issue of the indicators for state’s strength assessment.

Analytical clarification of a “weak state” is not relevant only from the theoretical aspect. New concepts to assess state weakness, including attempts to establish comparative indicators of governance, criteria for states’ ranking, and thresholds are being proposed by policy-oriented scholars and key international actors. “State-building”, “good governance” and “capacity building” are new mantras within the international organizations and donors’ circles. Defining weak (as well as failing and collapsed) states and the establishment of a new set of rules related to state strength therefore have concrete consequences for broad array of countries concerned, ranging from the influence on everyday donors’ decision-making, up to launching “preventive” or “humanitarian” interventions, and the establishment of protectorates.

The author argues that there is no clear conception of state weakness, because of so many different theoretical and policy frameworks in approaching the issue, and different features stressed. Furthermore, the


indicators proposed for assessing state’s strength are not precise. Versatile approaches leads to all-inclusiveness of the term. It might have long-term policy consequences providing for various levels of intrusiveness in external actors’ interventions.

The structure will be as follows: after a brief introduction to recent discussions about the state’s role, scope, and state weakness as a security threat, different approaches toward the issue will be grouped in three clusters. The first is the international relations power politic concept that equates the weakness of the state with its small size and power in traditional sense. The second cluster focus on relations between state and society, i.e. citizens’ and groups’ norms and perceptions related to their state: fragmented distribution of social control, political and social cohesion, the idea of state legitimacy. The third deals with the institutional dimension of the state and governance, or “good governance”, stressing rule of law, problems of corruption and organized crime. The indicators for assessment are discussed for each group, and the problems of different concepts highlighted. Whenever possible, the examples related to the Western Balkans will be offered. In the conclusion, the main features of weak and failed states will be summed up.

RETREAT OR RETURN?

The “state” is among the most contested terms in the social sciences, the very essence of politics and both principal and actor in international relations. After the Second World War there have been many different approaches related to state’s strength, scope and relevance. In the bipolarised Cold War era world the focus was on possible inter-state war, i.e. system level, balance of power and deterrence. The myth of a strong, omnipresent socialistic state was promoted on both sides of Iron Curtain. In the era of decolonisation, international recognition was granted with no attention to the viability of former colonial entities and their internal system of organization through the concept of sovereignty and sacrosanct borders envisaged by the United Nations.5

In the last quarter of the century, theories of interdependence and globalisation have started to question the centrality of the state, stressing challenges both from below and from above such as civil society’s role, the global market, trans-nationalism, international regimes and international

institutions. Since the mid-1980s, a return to the state has been suggested by neo-statists, who stress the autonomy of the state, which derives from state’s capacity.\(^6\) They renewed the critique of the liberal economists model, whose basic idea was simply that the “market would ensure equilibrium and increase the wealth of societies.”\(^7\)

Shortly after the end of Cold War it has become apparent that the truncating of the state’s scope, introducing market, economic and political liberalization, and support for (“good”) civil society does not automatically bring the Western-type of state and society, economic growth, and extended “democratic peace”.\(^8\)

Alongside the security environment, the normative context is also very important in igniting numerous violent intra-state conflicts. “The predominant norm of statehood today is self rule… government by ‘‘one’s own’’.\(^9\) The post Cold War era has brought an explosion of politicisation of different kinds of communities (ethnic, religious), followed by formation of new “in” and “out” groups and securitisation of social and political life. The idea that each (ethnic or religious) community should make decision about all aspects of life and make its symbols visible “has become a fundamental norm of the contemporary international system because it is no longer characterized simply as a political preference, but as a right”.\(^10\) It leads to situations where almost “all contemporary armed conflicts are essentially over the nature of statehood. It is both a contributor to the phenomenon of weak and failing statehood and a product of it.”\(^11\)

More concrete, on policy level after September 11, the United States National Security Strategy issued by George W. Bush in 2002 clearly

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10 Ibid., p. 52.
defined failed states as a threat to U.S. security. Nevertheless, the Bush administration has so far failed to define a coherent strategy to fight that threat. Imposing order on failed or weak states is expensive, difficult and potentially dangerous, and it is not yet clear to what extent the U.S. will pursue it beyond the urgent need to stabilize Afghanistan and Iraq after respective military interventions in 2001 and 2003.

Within the European Union Security Strategy adopted in 2003, among the strategic objectives is “to put failed states back on their feet.” Substantial interest in the weak state issue exists with the EU as a donor, a key actor in various post-conflict reconstruction missions, and also as a target for terrorists. The EU works on its security and defence capabilities meant for quick deployment outside its borders, and is focused on immigration/human trafficking and organized crime problems perceived as the security threats imported to within its borders from outside world.

After NATO military intervention over Kosovo, visible endeavours are under way to establish a new international normative framework that would overcome “narrow interpretations of state sovereignty” while avoiding arbitrary and harmful interventions. At the UN General Assembly in September 2000 the International Commission on the Intervention and State Sovereignty was announced, which proposed “Responsibility to Protect”, a concept that means not just “responsibility to react”, but the “responsibility to prevent” and “responsibility to rebuild”, providing conceptual, normative and operational linkages between assistance, intervention and reconstruction. The approach has been followed-up with the High-Level Panel appointment by the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan in November 2003, Secretary General’s Report for the 2005 World Summit, and the Summit Declaration.

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13 The attempts that have been made via development of the Office of the Co-ordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization within the State Department, the formulation of Millennium Challenge Account for new type of channelling official developmental aid, and with emphasise on democracy promotion in the President Bush’s second term.
as Responsibility to protect population from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.\textsuperscript{16}

Simultaneously, the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and similar international institutions have been faced with protracted problems in implementing development strategies within states in different parts of the world and are searching for new models of capacity building within recipient states.\textsuperscript{17} Where the goal for the international financial institutions and major donors for more than 20 years was a liberal-market model of a minimal state and maximum room for the market, private entrepreneurship, and personal liberty, the object has become a responsible state – one that is effective, legitimate, and democratic, one capable of reducing poverty, protecting human rights, and promoting peace.\textsuperscript{18}

All above mentioned illustrates how state weakness, intertwined with state failure and related issues of sovereignty and intervention, currently presents a major policy problem for the main actors in the world politics.

\textbf{POWER AND STRENGTH}

It is not to say that the weak state is a new issue. To elucidate the concept of weak state one might go as far back as Thucydides and the notorious Melian Dialogue stressing that the “strong do what they have power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept”.\textsuperscript{19} A concept equalizing a state’s power with its strength is the leitmotif through the long life of realism in international relations theory or the “power-politics” school of thought. Its focus is on the (nation-) state as the principal actor in international relations, and since the purpose of statecraft is survival in an anarchic (hostile) environment, the main goal is the acquisition of power. Security is perceived as national security and war with another state as the

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{16}] 2005 World Summit Outcome, 60th UN General Assembly, 20 September 2005, A/60/L.1*, para 138 -140.
\item[\textsuperscript{19}] Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, Book V, Ch. 7.
\end{itemize}
main threat. The position and relative security of any weak state is gauged in
term of the specific international system in which it is operating. The weak
state is discussed within a comparative system: great powers, middle powers,
weak states, mini states. The main characteristic of weak states is their lack
of power or strength. Strength is a relative, not absolute phenomenon. The
main criteria for distinction between small (i.e. weak) and strong states are
military power and geographical position as internal sources of weakness,
and formal alliances and weak state-great power relations as external sources
of weakness. Also, weak states frequently produce only a limited number
of products. There are various possibilities for great powers to exploit the
position of weak states, which have fewer choices in decision-making.

The problem with this approach is that it is impossible to have a
“concise, precise and elegant statement”, that is, a definition. “A very large
set of criteria must be used. Some are easily quantified, while others are
highly intuitive and qualitative.” The weak states form the largest class of
states and have the most diverse membership – a fact which makes it still
more difficult to assign them any common denominator other then overall
relative weakness.

The total power of a state is its internal and external power combined.
Military power is measured through “‘effective population’, that is, the part
of the population which can be armed and educated to operate modern
sophisticated weapons”, possession of nuclear weapons, economic, industrial
and social capacity. The indicators used to determine this are population,
Gross National Product, GNP per capita, military expenditure and quantity
of armed forces, energy reserves, production and consumption. In terms of
geographical position, location and nature of terrain are important, but also
“border pressure” – the number of neighbouring countries with which a

20 This part draws from: Michael I. Handel, Weak States in the International System,
London 1990, 2nd edition. Handel’s definition of weak state as a small state is quoted
by scholars dealing with the Balkans, for example in: Filip Tunjic, “Weak States of
Southeastern Europein Between the Great Powers”, in: Building Stability in Weak
217-256.
22 Ibid., p. 48.
23 Ibid., p. 30.
24 Ibid., p. 13 -14.
common border is shared, their relative population ratios, their military strength, and their political intentions.

This approach does not provide clear guidance for comparison of similar-size states. Strength is here discussed only in terms of possible external threats, military and economic, from the system and region level. Although it was mentioned that the strength is not static, many elements of strength are relatively fixed: population, geographic position, terrain and so on. The ratio between multiple criteria is not clarified, except that “on the whole, weak states score relatively low on most criteria”.

When implemented in five states in Western Balkans, this approach is not particularly revealing. Albania, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, and Serbia and Montenegro all are small states in terms of territory – less than 150,000 square kilometres, and in population – below 30 million. All five states have long borders, no nuclear weapons, low military expenditure, and no versatile production and export. In terms of external indicators, none of them is in NATO, that is in a formal alliance. There are some differences: Croatia has bigger GDP, Serbia and Montenegro the

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25 Ibid., p. 31.
26 Handel himself used some examples from the Balkans in historical context. Albania was an example where a great power – the Soviet Union – accepted its revisionism, and a case of a weak state spending more than 10% of its GDP on military expenses. Serbia was an illustration of a weak state’s attempts to cultivate public opinion in the countries whose support it wanted to secure, in this case regarding pan-Slavism in Russia, of a small state’s potential impact on world events as at the beginning of the First World War, the weak state’s determination to fight back in 1914, the application of economic pressure against economically weak states – the so called ‘Pigs’ war’ between Serbia and Austria-Hungary 1906, and so on. The Balkan Wars were an example of wars between weak states.

27 Handel used such classifications, but noted that size of population cannot serve as a satisfactory criterion - it is necessary to use multiple criteria (p. 31), but he does not provide a mechanism to rank those criteria. A small number of inhabitants is a characteristic of so called quasi-states, according to: Barry Buzan, People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era, Hemel Hempstead 1991 (second edition), p. 66. On quasi-states see: Robert H. Jackson, Quasi-states: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World, Cambridge University Press, 1990, and: Kalevi J. Holsti, Taming the Sovereigns – Institutional Change in International Politics, op. cit.

28 Relations between each of five states and the USA, EU, NATO are beyond the scope of this paper. See: Zlatko Isakovic, “NATO and Southeastern Europe: The Powerlessness of the Powerful and the Power of the Weak in Ethnic Conflict”, in: Predrag Simic (ed), EU, NATO and Southeastern Europe, Belgrade, 2002. On
biggest territory and population, Albania the best terrain for defence, but there is no explanation as to which element has more weight. This concept includes many indicators without assigning value to them; hence it is too vague for finer comparison. Furthermore, there is no explanation as to how such permanent weakness becomes an acute security issue, except that it depends on great power politics.29

STATE AND SOCIETY

The assessments of a state’s strength based on the relations between state and society form the second cluster of approaches toward state weakness. Scholars have different starting points and focus on different aspects, such as the state’s role in development, group identities, or security threats and vulnerabilities.

Joel S. Migdal’s key point is that strong societies results in weak states – he excludes the option of both a strong society and a strong state.30 He argues that one of the necessary conditions for the emergence of strong


29 Recent researches related to a country’s size, economic success and political implications find that being large helps when much has to be spent on defence, and in a world of trade barriers, when the size of a country determines the size of the market. However, “as the world economy becomes more integrated, the trade-off between heterogeneity of preferences and economy of scale ‘tilts’ in favour of small size, as in a world of free trade even small countries can prosper. Thus, as trade becomes more liberalized, small regions are able to seek independence at lower cost. A consequence is that the phenomenon of economic integration is intricately connected with political separatism.” (Alberto Alesina and Enrico Spolaore, The Size of Nations, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA - London, UK, 2003, pp. 218-219). On the current policy level, the needs of small states are recognized in various international documents, including “vulnerabilities of small island developing states” at recent World Summit Declaration. The vulnerability as the central reality of the smallest countries has been discussed at the Small States Forum within the World Bank/International Monetary Fund annual meetings, but small size is not equalized with weak state. See also: 2005 World Summit Outcome, 60th UN General Assembly, September 20, 2005, A/60/L.1*, para 66. It is interesting that “representatives however highlighted their strengths and potential, which range from governance to education.” In: Commonwealth/World Bank Joint Task Force Report on Small States, 2000. Internet: http://web.worldbank.org/WEBSITE/EXTERNAL/NEWS/0,,contentMDK:20677030-pagePK:34370-piPK:34424-theSitePK:4607,00.html 28/10/2005.

30 Joel S. Migdal, Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World, Princeton 1988; and: Joel S. Migdal, State in Society:
states is a “massive societal dislocation, which severely weakens social control”. Migdal emphasizes “the distribution of social control among the many organizations in society that vie to make the rules about how people should behave,” meaning families, clans, tribes, political parties, patron-client dyads, multinational corporations, and domestic businesses. Strong state is defined as one with high capabilities to achieve its goals, including “the capacities to penetrate society, regulate social relationship, extract resources, and appropriate or use resources in determined ways.” Migdal’s focus is on the local providers of the alternatives for survival, centrifugal forces, which prevent establishment of strong state. “Rules of behaviour have been dictated by critically placed strongmen – landlords, caciques, bosses, moneylenders, and others. Their ability to pose themselves between segments of the population and critical resources such as land, credit, and jobs, has enabled them to devise viable strategies of survival for their clients.” Once established, a fragmented distribution of social control is difficult to transform, and its legacy is a conflicting set of rules in society.

The point that social identities may very well be strengthened in ways that go against rather that support the state is emphasised by several other scholars. Bill McSweeney stresses that a “strong sense of societal identity could very likely, and not just pathologically, coincide with resistance to the state.”

32 Ibid., p. xx
33 Ibid., p. 264
37 Bill McSweeney, “Identity and Security: Buzan and the Copenhagen School”, op. cit., p. 93. Migdal was sharply criticised by Robert Putnam: “civic associations are powerfully associated with effective public institutions… strong society, strong state”. The differences result from their different starting points: the Third World developing
The problem of strength of “good” (horizontal civic associations) and “bad” (vertical primordial loyalties) society in the context of state strength might be avoided by the term fragmented society which implies negative connotation and is the core of Migdal’s centrifugal forces; or its opposite, social cohesion, which has been explained in the weak state context by Barry Buzan: “weak or strong states will refer to the degree of socio-political cohesion.” For Buzan, principal distinguishing feature of weak states is “their high level of concern with domestically generated threats to the security of the government; in other words, weak states either do not have, or have failed to create, a domestic political and societal consensus.”

The state is more an idea held in common by a group of people, than it is a physical organism. Without a widespread and quite deeply rooted idea of the state among the population, the state institutions themselves have difficulty functioning and surviving – the idea of the state provides major bindings holding the territorial-polity-society package together. It might take many forms, but the two main sources for the idea of the state are to be found in the nation and in organizing ideologies. National identity can either powerfully reinforce or deeply undermine the state. Along with nationality,
many varieties of political, economic, religious and social ideology can serve as an idea of the state, and will be closely connected to the state’s institutional structures – Islam, Democracy, Republicanism, Communism and so on. In some cases, an organizing ideology will be so deeply integrated into the state that change would have transformational, or perhaps fatal, implications. Organizing ideologies can be penetrated, distorted, corrupted and eventually undermined by contact with other ideas. Over-insulated political ideas risk a growing divorce from reality, and so invite the insecurity of collapses in legitimacy.42

Within his term “idea of the state”, Buzan assumes the establishment of state legitimacy in the minds of its people. The concept of legitimacy has been further developed by Kalevi Holsti.43 For him “the critical dimension of state strength is legitimacy, which is an idea or feeling. It is a measure of citizens’ attitudes towards the state, whether they withhold or grant the ‘right to rule’ to those who act in the name of the state.”44

Two critical aspects of legitimacy are the principle on which the “right to rule” is based, and the intellectual and emotional bases of political community, that is, the definition of the population over whom rule is exercised.45 Holsti calls these vertical legitimacy – which deals with authority, consent, and loyalty to the idea(s) of the state and its institutions; and horizontal legitimacy – which deals with the definition and political role of community. Where legitimacy claims and popular expectations overlap or coincide, the state gains substantial strength. “Legitimacy is precisely the belief in the rightfulness of the state, in its authority to issue commands, so that those commands are obeyed not simply out of fear of self-interest, but because they are believed in some sense to have moral authority.”46

This definition is similar to Migdal’s. He assesses the state’s strength through the concentration of social control, while the indicators of social control are compliance, participation, and legitimisation. Compliance is connected with the use of the most basic sanctions, force. Participation

42 Ibid., pp. 79-81.
44 Kalevi Holsti, Taming the Sovereigns: Institutional Change in International Politics, op. cit., p. 56.
45 Kalevi J. Holsti, The State, War and the State of War, op. cit., p. 84.
46 Ibid., p. 87.
denotes repeated voluntary use of, and action in, state-run or state-authorized institutions, while *legitimisation* is the most potent factor accounting for the strength of the state.

Whereas compliance and participation may result from calculations by individuals of the array of rewards and sanctions in hand, legitimacy includes the acceptance of the state’s symbolic configuration within which the rewards and sanctions are packaged. It indicates people’s approval of the state’s desired social order through their acceptance of the state’s myths.47

Holsti’s horizontal legitimacy refers to the nature of the community over which formal rule is exercised. These communities have usually been defined in terms of history, religion, citizenship, consanguinity, but may be communities of believers and faith, communities of class, or communities of profession. “Horizontal legitimacy refers to the attitudes and practices of individuals and groups within the state toward each other and ultimately to the state that encompasses them. If the various groups and communities within the polity accept and tolerate each other, horizontal legitimacy is high ...If communities seek to exclude, marginalize, oppress, or exploit others within the same state, then there is low horizontal legitimacy.”48

Hence, very similar processes are sometimes disguised by different terms: fragmented social control versus social cohesion, nationality as an issue in strengthening the idea of the state versus horizontal legitimacy, organizing ideology as an aspect of the idea of the state versus vertical legitimacy and so on.49 Different scholars and policy-makers understand

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48 Kalevi Holsti, *The State, War and the State of War*, op. cit., p. 87-88. “One particularly extreme and odious form of exclusion – the Croatian and Bosnian Serbs’ practice of ‘ethnic cleansing’ - is a basic statement that condemns any notion of community that transcends ethnicity or religion. In terms of state strength, any state/regime, and the community over which rule is exercised, that bases legitimacy on exclusionary categories contains an inherent weakness. ‘Others’ will always constitute an actual or potential threat (as perceived by the rulers) to the integrity of state and/or to the solidarity of its underlying community.” (P. 89).

49 Studies related to the Balkans usually either refer to Buzan and Holsti in general, without detailed elaboration of the indicators (“Lack of legitimacy is the primary source of state weakness in a number of Southeastern Europe states... Albania, Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, even Serbia can be classified as weak states,” Albert Rakipi, ‘Weak States - A View from Within’, in: *Building Stability in Weak States: The Western Balkans*, Vienna 2002, pp. 9-29; ‘many states in South-eastern Europe can be qualified as weak’ Isakovic,
state weakness in some or all of these terms and processes, contributing to the lack of clarity of the concept.

**INDICATORS FOR SOCIO-POLITICAL STRENGTH**

The implementation of these concepts is further hampered by lack of focus on ways to assess state weakness. Holsti gives a list of indicators of vertical and horizontal legitimacy, “not placed in any necessary order or ranking”:

- Implicit social contract,
- Consensus on political “rules of the game”,
- Equal access to decision and allocations,
- Clear distinction between private gain and public service,
- Effective sovereignty,
- Ideological consensus/pragmatic politics,
- Civilian control of the military,
- International consensus on territorial limits and state legitimacy.50

However, he relativizes his own indicators or “fundamental prerequisites” acknowledging that “some polities are reasonable strong in the absence of many of these characteristics”; “there is the possibility that the analysis derives too extensively from a single political tradition”; “the criteria are dimensions rather than absolute”, and so on.51

Buzan also provides a list, which outlines “the kinds of conditions one would expect to find in weak states”:

- High levels of political violence,
- A conspicuous role for political police in everyday lives of citizens,
- Major political conflict over what ideology will be used to organize the state,
- Lack of a coherent national identity, or the presence of contending national identities within the state,

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51 Ibid., p. 96.
- Lack of clear and observed hierarchy of political authority,
- A high degree of state control over the media.\(^{52}\)

He notes problems of the lack of a quantifiable measure, which restricts the usefulness of the concept, but believes it does not prevent it from being valuable for analysis. Buzan offers no convincing explanation for the selection of the six indicators listed above, and relies on the application of common sense, admitting that this is not reliable when it comes to finer ranking.

### STATE INSTITUTIONS AND PUBLIC GOODS

The common features within the third cluster of approaches toward state weakness are the state institutions’ efficiency or “good governance”. It entails the discussions about the distinction between state’s scope and strength, and the state’s role in development, which are still hotly debated. The institutions of the state are understood to “comprise the entire machinery of government, including its executive, legislative, administrative and judicial bodies, and the laws, procedures and norms by which they operate.”\(^{53}\)

The institutional dimension of the state is, as emphasised by Buzan and Holsti, intertwined with “the idea of the state”. However, the lack of social consensus with regard to the state idea was frequently compensated for by strengthening of the institutional element – that is why socialist states were considered to be strong.\(^{54}\) Strengthening only the institutions that exercise repressive functions “weakens rather than strengthens the state.”\(^{55}\) Reduction of state scope must not be performed so to undermine state’s strength.\(^{56}\)

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52 Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear*, op. cit., p. 100. Several indicators are related to the institutional dimension of state weakness, which is also discussed in Buzan’s work. Grouping in this paper is systematized according to the explanation in the introduction for analytical purpose.

53 Ibid., pp. 82-83.


56 ‘Antistatist political culture’ in the United States and liberal assumptions about market and ballot box as the panacea, together with myths about strong communist states, informed a push toward the ‘minimal state’ in the first years of the post-Cold War era. But, for many transitional and emerging-market countries ‘in the process of reducing state scope they either decreased state strength or generated demands for new types of state capabilities that were either weak or nonexistent.’ Abolition of state-owned enterprises in post communist countries, while appropriate cuts in state scope, has
Third World specialists analysing the slim prospects for development in these countries have given warnings about the dangers of liberalization in the absence of proper institutions for some time. “There could be no assurance that the transferred resources would be put to use efficiently and properly because it is not yet within the capacity of such governments to do this.”

In current policy discourse the focus is on the lack of effective and accountable state institutions, which are usually seen as the most fundamental obstacle to the advance of democracy and security in developing, post-conflict and/or post-communist states. For example, with regard to the Balkans, the European Commission is explicit that the “lack of effective and accountable state institutions hampers the ability of each country to co-operate with its neighbours and to move towards the goal of closer integration with the EU.”

Ivan Krastev considers state weakness as a major security challenge in the Balkans and defines weak state as “a state that fails to protect the rights of citizens and property rights. The failure in providing for the rule of law is the basic characteristic of a weak state,” while state weakness can be overcome mainly through “bureaucracy-building” and “constituency-building.”

There are claims that a new consensus is emerging among both regional and international actors that the most fundamental obstacle to the advance of democracy and security in South Eastern Europe is the lack of

been carried out without the institutional capacity to implement it properly, contributing to the delegitimisation of the state, notes Fukuyama in: Francis Fukuyama, *State-building: Governance and World Order in the 21st Century*, op. cit., pp. 6-15. The East Asian experience questions whether democracy is a necessary precondition for a developmental state – effective economic governance is also a source of legitimacy, and raises doubts whether the International Monetary Fund’s strategy of minimizing state influence through privatization and expenditure cuts is always good. See: Anne Mette Kjaer, *Governance*, op. cit.


effective and accountable state institutions. Hence, the “good governance” discourse is becoming the most common approach to state weakness in the region, focusing on corruption and organized crime. “It is the weak state that generates insecurity of property, life, dignity and incomes of the population. It is the weak state that allows the wide propagation of corruption, organized crime, and state capture by vested interests. It is again the weak state that is not able to provide basic services such as justice, equal rights, decent education, health care services, electricity, water supply, etc.”

The strengthening of state institutions is understood as the issue of state capabilities in the provision of other goods, along with national and societal security, which will thus enhance its legitimacy both internally and externally.

For Fukuyama the strength of institutional capabilities includes “the ability to formulate and carry out policies and enacts laws, to administrate efficiently and with a minimum of bureaucracy, to control graft, corruption and bribery; to maintain a high level of transparency and accountability in government institutions; and, most important, to enforce laws.”

The World Bank identified poor governance as the cause of the prolonged economic crisis in developing countries. “Poorly functioning public sector institutions and weak governance are major constraints to growth and equitable development in many developing countries”. The World Bank underlines “the institutional capability of public organizations to provide the public and other goods demanded by the country’s citizens or their representatives in an effective, impartial, transparent and accountable manner, subject to resource constraints.”

However, there is no agreed list of state functions and public goods hierarchy. Robert I. Rotberg distinguished stronger states from weaker according to the effectiveness of their delivery: how many of how few political

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64 Anne Mette Kjaer, Governance, op. cit., p. 173.
goods a nation-state provides for its inhabitants.\(^{65}\) His hierarchy of political goods is: security, rule of law, political rights, health care, education, communication infrastructure, money and banking system, civil society, and environment; with security, rule of law, and macroeconomic stability and growth outweighing the provision of other political goods.\(^{66}\) Rotberg does not provide explanations for this hierarchy or ratio of importance.

The World Bank published a list of “minimal” (defence, law and order, property rights, macroeconomic management, public health and protecting the poor), “intermediate” (education, environment, regulation of monopolies, insurance, financial regulation, consumer protection and social insurance); and “activist” functions of the state (industrial policy and wealth redistribution).\(^{67}\) Institution development cuts across all sectors, and capacity building refers to the building of effective and accountable institutions to address development issues and reduce poverty in borrowing countries.\(^{68}\)

The “good governance” concept introduced by the World Bank tends to provide the same blueprints for all states and introduces huge expectations from governments, which are supposed to deliver a long list of demands. Fukuyama pays attention to the limits in providing a theory of optimal institutional design and organization, stressing the importance of different cultural and structural contexts in different states, which strongly influence the development of formal institutions. Hence, according to him, it is a hard task to direct their development, and on long term, incremental changes as the only way successfully to strengthen state institutions.

**MEASURING A STATE’S INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY**

There are a great variety of methods for the assessment of a state’s institutional strength, ranging from several indicators applicable only in analytical case studies, to combinations of dozens, even hundreds of numerical data sets to create universal indicators, which allow for cross-country comparison. A number of templates currently exist to assess different state

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functions, with many attempts to provide an “early warning system”\(^6^9\). Yet there is no agreement as to which data are relevant for assessing institutional capabilities and how to construct comprehensive indicators.

Barry Buzan did not provide detailed explanations about institutional weakness, but mentioned indicators such as the lack of a clear and observed hierarchy of political authority (using the former Yugoslavia as an example), a high level of political violence, a conspicuous role of political police in the everyday lives of citizens, and a high degree of state control over the media.\(^7^0\)

The World Bank’s experts have constructed new aggregate governance indicators based on several hundred individual variables measuring perceptions of governance, drawn from 37 separate data sources constructed by 31 different organizations. They have produced estimates of six dimensions of governance: rule of law, control of corruption, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, political stability, and voice and accountability, and have a wealth of perceptions-based data on many dimensions of governance, from cross-country surveys of firms and individuals, from think-thanks and commercial risk-rating agencies, covering 209 countries and territories for years 1996-2004.\(^7^1\) This aggregation method provides “with not only estimates of governance for each country, but also with measures of precision or reliability of these estimates, for every country, indicator and year.”\(^7^2\) While acknowledging that the sources are “imperfect”, the authors claim that they “use methodology which optimally weights each individual source according to its precision or reliability, and thus results in substantial reductions in overall margins of error”.\(^7^3\) According to them, “objective measures” of governance also have measurement error – for

\(^6^9\) Alongside many specialized UN agencies (such as UNDP Human Development Index), prominent are the Polity IV Project, Internet: http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/iscr/polity/, Country Indicators for Foreign Policy http://www.carleton.ca.cifp (06/09/2004)

\(^7^0\) Barry Buzan, People, State and Fear, op. cit., p. 100.


\(^7^2\) Daniel Kaufmann and Arst Kraay, Governance Matters III: New Indicators for 1996-2002 and Addressing Methodological Challenges, Washington, July 1st 2003, 06/09/2004. According to this indicators, Croatia is not a weak state, while the four others in the Western Balkans are.

\(^7^3\) Daniel Kaufmann and Arst Kraay, Governance Matters III, p. 2.
example, an attempt to use the share of trade tax revenue in total revenues to capture overall government effectiveness is a "noisy" indicator, because the tax revenue itself may contain a variety of errors.74

However, there are many problems, the most obvious being that the data are subjective, hence capturing only perceptions instead of facts. It is not possible to measure the activities with illegal and clandestine natures by objective indicators. An additional problem is the possibility that results reflect the ideological bias of the agencies and think-thanks involved in data gathering. The authors are explicitly against use of the indicators in and "in or out" manner, stressing risk of misclassifying countries given the substantial margins of errors, and that "this type of data cannot substitute for in-depth country specific governance diagnostics as a basis for policy advice to improve governance in a particular country."75

Such pitfalls do not discourage other attempts to construct an instrument to measure the quality of governance. Robert Rotberg believes "an array of indicators, if cleverly chosen by a consensus of knowledgeable experts, is capable of providing an effective proxy for governmental performance according to each critical category" and hence for ranking states according to their governance capabilities.76 According to him, the "proxy indicators approach" permits objectivity, and thus quantification, since there is no better or more direct supply of information. For example, the extent to which an economic environment is conducive to entrepreneurial initiative and the pursuit of prosperity is reflected by GDP growth rates, inflation levels, and gini coefficient spreads.77 Rotberg’s students experimented with various methods of developing proxy indicators and sub-indicators to measure delivery of security, law, freedom, prosperity, schooling and medical attention. Separate groups were focused on particular regions, and constructed different sub-indicators. They faced a lack of data for some countries, poor statistical offices, lack of census material, the fact

74 Ibid., p. 3.
75 Ibid., p. 5. It is important to note that the main idea of the US Millennium Challenge Account is that low income countries need to be in the top half on the World Bank Control of Corruption indicator to be eligible for aid, i.e. that aid should be provided only for states which have capacities to use it efficiently.
that Interpol crime statistics should not be compared across countries because there are different legal definitions of punishable acts and so on.

According to the Kennedy School of Governance indicators, Gabon, a tightly-run autocracy for decades, was judged to be the best governed country in Middle Africa, Singapore in Asia. Nevertheless, Rotberg believes that “the mix of objective – and subjectively derived data” used to elaborate proxy indicators “is plausible, and capable of leading to reasonable and defensible results”, “the results comprise overall national governance scores which by and large seem reasonable” and “most of the individual indicator rankings also appear to accord with common sense”. Rotberg calls for the creation of a new non-partisan, non-profit organization to prepare a full-fledged governance ranking system and to work in the field.

However, there is a global database that builds on new data gathered entirely for the purpose of measuring governance – the World Governance Survey (WGS) based at the UN University. Six sub-components simplified as civil society, political society, government, bureaucracy, economic society and conflict resolution, are measured by five questions each, and range of answers goes form “very low” to “very high”. The questionnaire is answered by 35 well-informed persons, who are asked to evaluate their country’s performance both five years ago and at the present time, so that an index can be constructed and used to compare countries. Still, using subjective indicators makes each evaluation specific to that country, raising concerns about cross-comparability of country results.

The concept of good governance presented in this chapter tends to provide universal templates that are hardly transferable in different contexts, as was shown by Fukuyama. It is difficult to construct quantifiable indicators, even when the attempt is made through dozens of aggregated data, as is the case with the World Bank experts’ toolkit. The

78 The Balkan states were not discussed in Rotberg’s volume on state failure, with only Moldova being marked as a weak state. Kosovo was mentioned to illustrate that ‘effective nation building is possible if there is sufficient political will, targeted and well-funded external aid’ in the introductory chapter Rotberg, “The Failure and Collapse of Nation-States: Breakdown, Prevention and Repair”, in: Robert Rotberg (ed) When States Fail: Causes and Consequences, Princeton University Press, Princeton-Oxford, 2004, pp. 1-45.
80 Pilot Phase; Internet: http://wwwunu.edu/p&g/wgs (06. 09. 2004)
task is particularly demanding when attempting to introduce a hierarchy of goods and worldwide universal criteria, as was demonstrated in Kennedy School of Governance pilot research chaired by Rotberg. It has been shown that the attempts to measure the institutional capacity face numerous problems, including the subjectivity of polls and lack of data for objective assessment. The “hierarchy” of goods that state institutions are supposed to deliver, and selection of indicators, particularly numerical, differs, implying policy preferences. Ambitious proposals for a universal worldwide blueprint ignore the importance of states’ different starting positions and local context.

...AND STATE FAILURE

The “weak state” concept is further blurred with additional, equally vague defined terms. Most recently the new type of state gradation is increasingly formulated along a continuum of weak, failed and collapsed states, although the terms are still also used simultaneously.82 There is a growing literature related to such categorization, particularly concerned with failed states as a key threats defined in the security strategies, and with options for more effective military and institutional interventions.83

Generally, failure and collapse count for very few countries sliding into complete anarchy and with massive violence; which is not a characteristic of weak states. In the most drastic cases of overwhelming weakness, “the basic functions of the state are no longer performed” and the state collapses.84 The failed state is described as “utterly incapable of

sustaining itself as a member of the international community.” According to Susan Woodward, “state failure is an inability to make collective decisions and to enforce them, if necessary.” As the clearest signs of impending failure she lists: credible challenge to monopoly over the legitimate use of force or its outright loss of that monopoly; state’s inability (or unwillingness) to use force when it is necessary; and, third, the premature resort to force because the state lacks other instruments (financial, economic, social, cultural, political, legal, moral in the sense of legitimacy) of enforcement that in functioning states normally preclude the resort to force and naked power.

Jean-Germain Gros created an interesting taxonomy of failed states consisting of “anarchic”, “phantom”, “anaemic”, “captured” and “aborted” states. Anarchic states have no central government. In phantom states an authority exists, but it has very limited control over its territory. Anemic states have little power to govern due to counter-insurgency groups or out-moded state structures. Controlling elites dominate captured states. Finally, aborted states are states that have never actually realized independent statehood.

The most ambitious endeavour to assess state failure has been undertaken by the Fund for Peace, whose indictors are: Mounting Demographic Pressures, Massive Movement of Refugees and IDPs, Legacy of Vengeance – Seeking Group Grievance, Chronic and Sustained Human Flight, Uneven Economic Development along Group Lines, Sharp and/or Severe Economic Decline, Criminalization or Delegitimization of the State, Progressive Deterioration of Public Services, Widespread Violation of Human Rights, Security Apparatus as “State within a State”, Rise of Factionalised Elites, Intervention of Other States or External Actors.

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88 The Failed States Index, The Fund for Peace and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005; also: Internet: http://www.fundforpeace.org/programs/fsi/fsindex.php. It is interesting that in the first phase, covering 76 states in 2004., Serbia and Montenegro’s rank is 66; Bosnia and Herzegovina 22, with the first three being: Cote D’Ivorie, Congo and Sudan.
CONCLUSION

This paper has explored the theoretical problem of defining a weak state and the indicators for assessment of a state’s strength. The term “weak state”, often used with regard to the Balkans, is relevant both in theoretical and policy context. However, it was documented that there is no clear conception of state weakness, because of so many different frameworks of approaching the issue. Scholars and policy-makers observe state weakness in very different contexts – from geopolitical via societal security to administrational efficiency. Various levels of weakness have been proposed: weak/failing/collapsed state, as well as numerous indicators for the strength assessment and ranking. In general, academic papers tend to isolate and focus on one particular issue, with secondary references to other state weakness problems.

The traditional international relations approach equalizing strength and power is too general and includes too many states within category of “weak state”. It signals permanent weakness and dependence of power politics. This concept includes many indicators without assigning value to them; hence it is too vague for comparison within weak states’ cluster. Within the focus on state-society relations, the main authors (Migdal, Buzan, Holsti and others) have introduced many different terms for very similar processes. Their versatile approaches related to civil society’s role, social cohesion, the ideological and ethnic context within society, and the concept of legitimacy, have been reduced here to key points: social cohesion/fragmentation, and the acceptance of the idea of the state/legitimacy. Even these authors who have substantially elaborated concepts of socio-political sources of weak statehood, did not focus on ways to measure state weakness, so that bold indicators have not been provided.

Most recent approaches are meant to signal the state’s priorities in institution building and the routes toward enhanced governance efficiency. With the focus on “good governance” and threats from state failure, there is a tendency to impose uniform prescriptions, disentangled from the context of a particular state and society. The “hierarchy” of goods that state institutions are supposed to deliver, and selection of indicators, particularly numerical, differs, implying policy preferences. “Good governance” indicators intend to be objective, but are mostly based on perception, with substantial margin of error. The purpose of ranking is perceived as important at international policy level, in context of development of early warning systems, and as a tool for navigation of external (developmental) aid, i.e. external prioritising of national governments reform agendas. Yet there is no agreement as to which
data are relevant for assessing institutional capabilities and how to construct a small number of comprehensive indicators.

Finally, it has been shown that related scholarship is so diversified that the term “weak state” becomes very broad. Assuming that state weakness is analytically obvious contributes toward neither theoretical nor policy clarification. The all-inclusiveness of the term might provide for various levels of intrusiveness of the outside intervention, and hence bears long-term policy implications. In sum, in the absence of theoretically tighter conceptualisation and the instruments for finer ranking, the analytical value of the term “weak state” is reduced.

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Original in English
Povratak državi: jake versus slabe države

REZIME


Uvidom u literaturu koja se bavi slabim (propalim, kriznim, nefunkcionalnim, kvazi, državama u kolapsu), ustanovljeno je da se ovom problemu polazi sa različitih osnova i pod tim podrazumevaju raznovrsni geopolitički, socijalni i institucionalni fenomeni. Oni su u ovom radu sistematizovani u tri grupe.

U okviru realističke teorije međunarodnih odnosa jačina države i moć se izjednačavaju, a male države to automatizmu smatraju slabim. Indikatori za procenu snage države su brojnost stanovništva, veličina teritorije, nacionalni dohodak, vojni potencijali, konfiguracija terena, pripadnost savezima i slično, ali među njima nije uspostavljena jasna vrednosna hijerarhija. Ova škola mišljenja tretira ogroman broj država kao slabe, te je stoga prilično neodređena, bez mogućnosti za finije poređenje i rangiranje.

U okviru sagledavanja slabosti države sa stanovišta unutrašnjih odnosa jačina države i moć se izjednačavaju, a male države to automatizmu smatraju slabim. Indikatori za procenu snage države su brojnost stanovništva, veličina teritorije, nacionalni dohodak, vojni potencijali, konfiguracija terena, pripadnost savezima i slično, ali među njima nije uspostavljena jasna vrednosna hijerarhija. Ova škola mišljenja tretira ogroman broj država kao slabe, te je stoga prilično neodređena, bez mogućnosti za finije poređenje i rangiranje.

U okviru sagledavanja slabosti države sa stanovišta unutrašnjih odnosa između društva i države, brojni autori koriste više različitih termina za vrlo slične procese. Snaga države se tako meri direktno proporcionalno snazi “dobrog” civilnog društva (Putnam) ili obrnuto proporcionalno snazi “lošeg” civilnog društva (Migdal), odnosno kao socijalna fragmentacija (Migdal) ili nedostatak političke i socijalne kohezije (Buzan). Razrađuju se prihvatanje ideje države (Buzan) i horizontalni i vertikalni legitimitet (Holsti), ali ne i jasni indikatori za utvrđivanje snage države u ovom kontekstu.

Snaga države se u poslednje vreme sve više sagledava sa stanovišta institucionalnih kapaciteta, odnosno “dobre uprave”. Efikasnost državne administracije u obezbeđivanju javnih dobara, poput vladavine zakona i transparentnosti, predmet je analiza ne samo u akademskim, već naročito u krugovima donatora. Razvijaju se brojni koncepti merenja kako bi se države rangirale. Autor ovog rada pokazuje da su oni zasnovani na različitim pretpostavkama o funkcijama države, raznovrsnim indikatorima, često konstruisanim na osnovu percepcije i bez dovoljno preciznih podataka, sa velikim statističkim greškama. Pokušaji rangiranja država po ovom osnovu polaze od
jednog modela kao univerzalnog, postavljaju (pre)velike zahteve za zemlje u razvoju, i u krajnjoj liniji vode nametanju prioriteta reformi spolja.

Ovi neusaglašeni pristupi u definisanju pojma slabe države, i divergentni indikatori na osnovu kojih se ta slabost pokušava utvrditi, dokazuju da je zapravo ceo koncept previše širok. Uključivanje raznovrsnih fenomena u pojam slabe države čini ga više metaforom nego jasnom analitičkom kategorijom. Neodređenost poimanja slabe države, zaključuje autor, ima i dalekosežne praktične posledice, jer proglašavanje državom slabom pruža osnov za raznovrsne vidove spoljašnje intervencije – od odlučivanja o donacijama, preko preduzimanja “humanitarnih” i “preventivnih” intervencija, do uspostavljanja protektorata i stvaranja novih država. Stoga je neophodno uspostaviti jasniji teorijski okvir za korišćenje ovog očito nedovoljno određenog pojma.