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Exchange

LIBERALISM VERSUS STATE-BUILDING

Francis Fukuyama

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I am broadly sympathetic to the arguments made by Thomas Carothers in “The Sequencing Fallacy,” including his skepticism about the wisdom of efforts by the United States and other Western governments to support liberal autocrats. The latter approach to development is nothing new: The idea that governments seek order first, then economic development, and only later democracy was first laid out systematically by Samuel P. Huntington in his 1968 work *Political Order in Changing Societies*. Fareed Zakaria’s *The Future of Freedom* and more recent “realist” calls in the wake of Iraq for sequencing transitions to democracy in the Middle East are simply variants of this basic argument.

There is nothing wrong in principle with sequencing reforms, if the constraints and capacities of the society in question make it a workable strategy. The problem, as Carothers points out, is that the number of cases where one can find genuine development-minded autocrats is extremely small. Carothers is also right that outside powers greatly overestimate their influence if they think that *they* can somehow determine the sequencing of reforms.

I would simply add that virtually all the real cases of this kind of sequencing have occurred in East Asia, where Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand (at least until the September 2006 military coup in Bangkok) have made democratic transitions, and where authoritarian governments in China and Singapore have built impressive economic-growth records. It is no accident that these cases are grouped in East Asia. Many countries in that region had long traditions of strong states with merit-based bureaucracies well before they began modernizing. Confucianism is in part a doctrine about the state, and it prescribes clear rules for bureaucratic authority and recruitment that have provided a cultural foundation for the region’s so-called developmental states. Simi-

lar traditions of deference to well-trained technocrats simply do not exist in Latin America, Africa, or the Middle East, so it is not surprising that one finds relatively few Lee Kwan Yews or South Korean planning ministries among the authoritarian regimes in other parts of the world.

The one part of Carothers's argument that I would modify concerns the potential contradiction between state-building and not just democracy, but liberalism as well. Carothers grants that in postconflict situations it might be necessary to delay democratic elections and run countries under a temporary authoritarian mandate, but holds that state-building is not otherwise incompatible with either liberal rule of law or democracy. I believe that state-building is in many cases at cross-purposes with both, and that stable states often must be constructed through violent means.

State-building in a strict sense is about creating the Weberian monopoly of legitimate violence over a defined territory, and therefore has at its core the concentration of the means of coercion—in practical terms, armies and police—under the control of a central political authority. This then necessitates the development of other state institutions, beginning with taxing authority (which must always be at least partially coercive), but also including agencies providing various sorts of public goods. Both the liberal rule of law and democracy, by contrast, involve *limiting* the central state's authority to coerce, the first by putting it under a set of transparent and universal rules, the second by ensuring that the exercise of power reflects the popular will.

The legitimacy of the state's monopoly of violence can, of course, be built on the legitimation of the state's authority through a democratic vote. Democratic theory, however, does not tell us where to draw a state's boundaries with regard to the social groups that compose it. Who belongs within the boundaries of a nation in the first place? The long-term viability of the state-building process depends heavily on getting this issue right, either through incorporating or divesting territory, or else through changing the character of the populations that live in a given territory. For better or worse, legitimate monopolies of violence (including those legitimated democratically) have been much easier to establish in societies whose underlying ethnic, racial, religious, or other structural characteristics make sense in terms of the society's territorial boundaries.

Societies with significant ethnic, religious, or sectarian cleavages or minorities have always been more difficult to consolidate as states. Sometimes, as in the case of Belgium, Switzerland, or India, institutions can be adapted to accommodate these cleavages. But it has been much more common to modify the state's boundaries to include or exclude various groups, or forcibly to exchange and thereby homogenize populations through a process now known as ethnic cleansing. Needless to say, these changes to borders or exchanges of populations have often required violence to achieve, and have seldom been constrained by liberal rules and democratic consensus.

People in the West conveniently forget how violent their own processes of state-formation were. Europe went from being made up of more than three-hundred sovereign entities at the end of the Middle Ages to containing fewer than thirty sovereign nation-states on the eve of the First World War. This involved several centuries of virtually continuous violence. In Charles Tilly's famous formulation, "War made the state, and the state made war." The process of redrawing borders and exchanging populations continued well into the twentieth century, with Greeks, Turks, Jews, Ukrainians, Poles, Germans, Lithuanians, and Russians being forcibly moved from one jurisdiction to another. The stability of the current state system in Europe came about only as a result of these violent changes. This pattern has prevailed up through the 1990s: The Bosnian civil war ultimately could not be ended based on the multiethnic Vance-Owens Plan; the Dayton Accords were built on further ethnic cleansing that separated populations into more homogeneous cantons within Bosnia.

Americans are not exempt from these harsh realities. Liberal-democratic constitutionalism was not adequate as a framework for settling the dispute between North and South over slavery. This issue—as well as the country's ultimate territorial boundaries—was decided only as a result of a civil war that claimed more than 600,000 lives out of a total U.S. population of only about 30 million. Moreover, while the Civil War settled the question of whether there would be one or two countries between Mexico and Canada, the inclusion of California, Texas, and the Southwest into the United States had also been settled violently through the earlier Mexican-American War.

If one defines state-building narrowly to mean the development of certain governmental capacities to provide public goods, and assumes that the territorial question is settled, then Carothers is right that state-building may be compatible with either liberalism or democracy. Indeed, democracy may help to establish the legitimate monopoly of power on which the state is based. But the longer-term stability and coherence of states often depends on adjustments to borders or populations that in practice only enter the realm of possibility because of violence. Sometimes this involves the use of force to disarm militias and establish the state's authority in a particular region (as in the case of Colombia trying to extend the writ of the state into regions controlled by various guerrilla or paramilitary groups). In other cases, it involves states being willing to let go of rebellious provinces or regions for the sake of long-term peace, driven in almost all cases by a violent rebellion that the center cannot suppress.

To the extent that the international community insists that state-building be accomplished under liberal and democratic rules, rather than permitting the sequencing of state-building prior to the promotion of rule of law and democracy, it may simply be freezing conflicts that will eventually reemerge, thereby threatening whatever democracy and

rule of law has been achieved in the meantime. I have already mentioned the case of Bosnia, where the stability afforded by the Dayton Accords could come about only after ethnic cleansing had effected transfers of populations into more homogeneous zones.

Sudan is another case where insistence on peaceful, democratic conflict resolution will only prolong instability. Sudan is a colonial creation whose current boundaries make no sense; it is built around an Arab core, with substantial black African minorities in the south and west that have much more in common with neighboring countries than with the population around Khartoum. Khartoum's efforts to maintain its sovereignty over these areas has led to a prolonged and bloody thirty-year civil war in the south and to the current genocide in the region of western Sudan known as Darfur. The international community, however, has seen these conflicts not as preludes to long-term state-building based on territorial change, but as humanitarian crises that have to be managed within the framework of existing Sudanese sovereignty. As long as it does so, and seeks to freeze the current status quo, it will only put off and not solve the underlying political conflict.

In Europe, the processes of state-building, construction of a liberal rule of law, and democratization occurred in three distinct phases, often separated by decades if not centuries. The vast bulk of the violence that has occurred in Europe over the past five-hundred years has been related not to the spread of democracy, as Jack Snyder has argued, but to state-building. Americans should consider how their own history would have been different had there been a powerful international community in 1863 that insisted that North and South negotiate a ceasefire after the Battle of Gettysburg. International help in providing humanitarian assistance for internally displaced persons and the demobilization of blue and gray militias would have left in place the institution of slavery that was the cause of the war. The North-South conflict might have broken out at a later point, and even if it had not, Europe would have had no savior in the twentieth century.

It is perfectly reasonable, in light of the West's violent history, that today's international community should try to establish a norm prohibiting violent changes to borders or populations. Indeed, there are all too many historical cases where such violence has been a disaster for everyone involved, leading not to long-term stability or strong states but the contrary. Yet the *universal and unbending* application of this norm is tantamount to insistence by the international community that there be no sequencing between state-building and either rule of law or democracy. Today's international community is effectively locked into a no-sequencing norm with regard to state-building. On the whole, this is not a bad default position, but as the example of the U.S. Civil War indicates, it may not always yield the best results. So perhaps there should be room for a bit of flexibility on this question after all.