Scholars have used multiple approaches to investigate civil war. Among various civil war studies, those examining civil war onset are important because onset is the first stage of the war. In the early stage of civil war onset studies, scholars focused on the motivation for rebellion. However, these studies overlook the role of state in the onset of civil war. Attempting to remedy this lack, this study aims to investigate the role of the state as a main actor in the process of civil war onset. This study poses two empirical questions: How does state capacity influence civil war onset? What are the factors of state capacity that have an impact on civil war onset? State capacity is considered in order to investigate the role of the state in civil war onset with two state capacity indicators: bureaucratic quality and government stability. This study tests bureaucratic quality and government stability by examining the onset of two scales of civil wars: large and small. Previous civil war onset studies generally focused on either large- or small-scale civil wars, but this study considers both. By considering two scales of civil war onset, this study attempts to provide a comprehensive description of the role of the state. The results confirm that state capacity influences civil war onset. However, the impact of state capacity depends on the scale of civil wars. Findings suggest that state capacity can minimize the possibility of small-scale civil war onset, but it may have little effect in terms of controlling large-scale civil war onset.