

Turkey's Naval Activism: Maritime Geopolitics and the Blue Homeland Concept

Serhat Süha ÇUBUKÇUOĞLU

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Alisha SHAMAS

Independent Researcher

E-Mail: alishashamasuddin@gmail.com

Orcid: 0009-0005-9913-9743

The Eastern Mediterranean region has entered a geopolitical competition since the discovery of major gas reservoirs in 2009. The discovery of gas reservoirs fueled the ongoing maritime dispute between Turkey, Greece, and Cyprus (Çakmak 2024). The region has drawn the attention of geopolitical analysts as there is growing competition and cooperation between major actors (Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, and Israel). One is Serhat Suha Çubukçuoğlu, a geopolitical strategist and senior researcher at TRENDS Research and Advisory in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

Çubukçuoğlu's book, *Turkey's Naval Activism: Maritime Geopolitics and the Blue Homeland Concept*, comprehensively examines Turkey's evolving maritime strategy and global and regional geopolitical implications. It sheds light on the origins, strategic importance, and development of the Blue Homeland doctrine. It traces this doctrine's trajectory from conceptualization to operationalization. When introduced in 2006, the idea was neglected, but foreign policy makers later adopted it. The author uses the neoclassical realist approach to situate Turkey's naval activism within domestic political factors and systemic pressure. It offers an insight into how Turkey has positioned itself as a prominent maritime actor in a complex geopolitical landscape, where Israel, Greece, and Cyprus formed a trilateral partnership to counter Turkey.

The book is divided into three parts. The first part, "Maritime Geopolitics and Turkey's Interest in Naval Development," discusses global maritime powers as a whole and focuses on Turkey's Blue Homeland concept. While discussing the modern origins of the Blue Homeland concept, the author explains Turkey's maritime crisis and naval development. The second part concerns Turkey's naval activism, energy geopolitics, and axis shift towards securitization. In the third part, the author discusses the realignment of foreign policy and the de-prioritization of Naval activism with the softening Blue Homeland narrative. The author employs neoclassical realism as an analytical lens to bridge systemic

constraints of domestic-level variables that shape State behavior and international politics. The frameworks effectively explain the evolution of the Blue Homeland concept and allow analysis of internal dynamics and external pressure.

Due to its geostrategic location, Turkey is one of the most critical states in the world. Since the Republic of Turkey was established, the country's foreign policy has been dealing with the Turkish straits and Black Sea since the 1930s, since the 1970s, there is the Aegean Sea problem, and since the 2000s, there are issues in the Eastern Mediterranean (Özkan and Kırval 2023). The book charts the development of Turkey's Blue Homeland doctrine since the early 2000s till it became the central pillar of Turkey's foreign policy by the end of 2010. Retired Admiral Cem Gürdeniz first presented the idea of the Blue Homeland Doctrine. He emphasized Turkey's maritime rights and interests in the Black Sea, the Aegean Sea, and the Eastern Mediterranean. The author highlighted the key milestones in the institutionalization of doctrine and the adoption of maritime boundary agreements. The expansion of naval capabilities and integration of doctrine into broader discourse were also discussed in the book. Later in 2016, the author argues that there was a turning point with heightened nationalism and consolidation of the authoritarian governance model under the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP).

The concept of Blue Homeland was developed within the Navy to a broader geopolitical manifesto and reflects Turkey's ambitions to secure energy rights, balance regional adversaries, and assert strategic autonomy. The author identifies the Eastern Mediterranean's energy geopolitics, maritime boundary disputes with Greece, which are unresolved to date, and the Cyprus issue as critical drivers of Turkey's naval strategy at the regional level. The key factors of naval activism include competition among great powers, the rise, and shifting alliances with NATO. The author examines Turkey's balancing acts between NATO, Russia, and China. It underscores efforts to maximize the strategic autonomy of Turkey while navigating its position within the international system.

The book examines how Turkey's domestic politics play a crucial role in Turkey's maritime policy. It highlights the key institutional changes, including the executive presidential system, constitutional amendments, and consolidation of power by AKP. It also explores the role of culture, ideological and historical elements, and the legacy of Ottoman maritime heritage. The tools used to legitimize maritime activism, including public statements, political rhetoric, and symbolic acts, are also analyzed. The author argues that Turkey securitized its maritime domain to address genuine security concerns, to bolster national prestige, and consolidate its political legitimacy. Along with the achievements of Turkey's naval activism, the author also discussed the challenges and limitations. There is a risk of overextension and conflict escalation with Greece and other regional actors. For sustaining naval modernization, there are increasing logistical and economic demands. The book also critiques the absence of a long-term maritime strategy, as the author notes that this doctrine often functions as a symbolic framework rather than a fully operationalized policy.

One of the book's strengths is its comprehensiveness, as it gives a holistic understanding of Turkey's naval activism through integrating domestic, regional, and systemic perspectives.

The book offers a historical analysis based on policy documents and, most importantly, interviews with key stakeholders. The book is a timely contribution to the study of geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean Region, as the region entered geopolitical tensions in 2019 with the development of the Blue Homeland Doctrine.

While discussing Turkey's naval activism and Turkey's perspective, there is limited engagement with alternative perspectives of Greece, Cyprus, and other regional actors. There is an overemphasis on strategic autonomy, which overshadows the rest of the critical factors, including public opinion and economic constraints. The author thinks that Turkey should prioritize a more defensive naval posture instead of the Blue Homeland concept, which leads to building a power projection navy. One aspect of Blue Homeland is to become an energy exporter rather than an energy importer. The book focuses more on Turkey's quest for maritime control.

Turkey's Naval Activism: Maritime Geopolitics and the Blue Homeland Concept significantly contributes to studying Turkey's maritime geopolitics and foreign policy. The analysis and meticulous research of the author provide a comprehensive understanding of the Blue Homeland Concept and its implications for Turkey's global and regional standing. Although the book has some limitations, like limited engagement with alternative perspectives and overemphasis on strategic autonomy, these do not detract the reader from the overall value.

References

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