

# THE BLUE HOMELAND STRATEGY IN THE CONTEXT OF NATIONAL SECURITY \*

## ULUSAL GÜVENLİK BAĞLAMINDA MAVİ VATAN STRATEJİSİ

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### Abstract:

The Blue Homeland has evolved from a symbolic concept representing Türkiye's maritime boundaries into an integral component of its national security strategy, as a result of studies and practices conducted in this field. The Blue Homeland Strategy represents a multi-dimensional maritime strategy that includes the protection of Türkiye's maritime borders, the rise of the Turkish Navy, a presence in international waters, more active use of the seas, the realization of national rights and interests, and most importantly, the realization of all these goals with national means. This strategy represents a comprehensive and long-term strategic orientation that takes into account Türkiye's 21st-century needs in line with geopolitical realities, prioritizes international law, and includes contemporary developments such as advanced technology and artificial intelligence. The aim of this study is to examine the Blue Homeland Strategy and to analyze its constituent elements in light of its fundamental principles. In this context, the study first focused on the concept of the Blue Homeland and then explained the elements that constitute the Blue Homeland Strategy based on its basic principles. This study conceptualizes the Blue Homeland Strategy as a national security matter and distinguishes itself from the existing literature by offering a systematic and comprehensive analysis of its constituent elements.

**Keywords:** Blue Homeland, Blue Homeland Strategy, National Security, Strategy, Türkiye

### Öz:

Mavi vatan, Türkiye'nin denizlerdeki ulusal sınırlarını temsil eden sembolik bir kavram olmanın ötesine geçmiş ilgili alanda gerçekleştirilen çalışmalar ve uygulamalar neticesinde milli güvenlik stratejisinin ayrılmaz bir parçası haline gelmiştir. Mavi vatan stratejisi, Türkiye'nin deniz sınırlarının korumasını, Türk Donanması'ndaki yükselişi, uluslararası sularda var olmayı, denizlerin daha aktif kullanımını, ulusal hak ve menfaatlerin gerçekleştirilmesini ve en önemlisi tüm bu hedefleri milli olanaklarla gerçekleştirmeyi kapsayan çok boyutlu bir deniz stratejisini temsil etmektedir. Bu strateji, Türkiye'nin jeopolitik gerçeklikle uyumlu 21. yüzyıl ihtiyaçlarını dikkate alan, uluslararası hukuku önceleyen, ileri teknoloji ve yapay zekâ gibi çağın gelişmelerini içeren kapsamlı ve uzun vadeli stratejik bir yönelimini temsil etmektedir. Bu çalışmanın amacı mavi vatan stratejisini incelemek ve bu stratejiyi oluşturan unsurları temel ilkeler ekseninde açıklamaktır. Bu kapsamda çalışmada öncelikle mavi vatan kavramı üzerinde durulmuş, daha sonra mavi vatan stratejisini oluşturan unsurlar temel ilkeler ekseninde açıklanmıştır. Bu çalışma, mavi vatan stratejisini milli bir güvenlik meselesi olarak ele almakta ve mavi vatan stratejisini oluşturan unsurları sistematik bir bakış açısıyla sıralaması yönüyle alandaki diğer çalışmalardan ayrılmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Mavi Vatan, Mavi Vatan Stratejisi, Milli Güvenlik, Strateji, Türkiye

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## INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, nations have considered the lands they inhabit as sacred and have defended them against other nations. Borders were drawn on these lands called the homeland, and countless wars were fought to protect these borders. With the emergence of nation-states and the strengthening of central authorities, the importance of national borders has become more critical and protecting the homeland borders has been considered the most fundamental duty of states. Under international law, states have three types of borders: the land they occupy, the surrounding seas, and the airspace above both. The borders drawn in these land, sea and air areas represent areas protected within the scope of national interests and where the absolute sovereignty of states is manifested.

Every political community, group or state exists when it extends its authority over a geographical area and establishes the borders of this area as its own territory in accordance with international rules. With the existence of the state, the principle of sovereignty, which is inherent in the concept of the state, also emerges. According to the principle of sovereignty, states have the right to maintain their existence and independence within their borders, and other states are obliged to respect this right. Along with the principle of sovereignty, one of the fundamental principles of international law is the sovereign equality of states. According to the principle of sovereign equality, states cannot interfere in each other's internal affairs and no state is considered superior to another. The principle of sovereign equality of states has generally been accepted as one of the most fundamental principles in the political order that began with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. In short, in the current political order, states that have declared their existence within the scope of international law have the responsibility not to interfere with each other's internal affairs in accordance with the principle of sovereign equality, in addition to having absolute sovereignty within their geographical borders. Therefore, the land, air and sea borders of states constitute the borders of the homeland and provide states with full authority in these areas within the scope of the principle of sovereignty. The protection of homeland borders is the most fundamental matter of national security.

One of the most important dynamics of the 21st century is that nation-state borders remain militarily and politically rigid and uncompromising. However, global commercial activities have caused economic borders to become more permeable. Especially in the last decade, hot conflicts in different geographies have undermined the thesis claimed by globalization advocates that nation-state borders will gradually disappear, and nation-state borders have started to become more rigid and protected. Since the early 2000s, rising nationalist movements have pushed concepts such as global society, world citizenship, and borderless states into the background, while international balances have contributed to the increased protection of national borders.

Another of the most striking features of the 21st century in terms of international relations is that states have become more active at sea. With technological developments, the ability of nations to benefit from the seas has increased, increasing the importance of the seas and their borders. Considering that approximately 90% of global trade occurs over the

seas, the shift toward marine natural resources due to dwindling terrestrial resources, the discovery of hydrocarbon resources in the seas, and the historical role of sea power in the rise and fall of states, it is clear that the seas have become one of the most important areas of power and competition in the 21st century. Therefore, issues such as determining maritime borders for states, ensuring absolute sovereignty in these maritime areas and utilizing the seas within the scope of national interests have become prominent topics in international politics. To adapt to these global developments and protect its national interests, Türkiye has focused on increasing its naval power under the “Blue Homeland Strategy” and has chosen to invest in meeting contemporary needs with national resources.

In this study, firstly the concept of Blue Homeland was emphasized, then the elements that constitute the Blue Homeland Strategy<sup>1</sup> were explained and listed on the axis of basic principles. This study addresses the Blue Homeland Strategy as a national security matter and differs from other studies in the field by systematically listing the elements that constitute the Blue Homeland.

## 1. TÜRKİYE’S NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY AT THE SEAS: BLUE HOMELAND

The concept of the “Blue Homeland”, which refers to Türkiye’s national borders at sea, was first used and introduced to national literature at the Black Sea and Maritime Security Symposium organized by the Turkish Naval Forces Command on June 14, 2006. Its frequent use in international literature and its emergence as a common research topic in the discipline of international relations only occurred as a result of the "Blue Homeland-2019 Tactical Exercise" conducted by the Turkish Naval Forces Command in 2019. In his study, Yayıcı (2022: 6) defined the Blue Homeland as all Turkish Maritime Jurisdiction Areas that have been declared or are planned to be declared in line with Türkiye’s rights and interests under international law.

The evolution of the Blue Homeland concept from a symbolic representation of Türkiye’s maritime jurisdiction areas into a doctrine and an integral component of the national security strategy indicates that it has been constructed within a multidimensional and comprehensive framework. Therefore, examining this concept requires a broad perspective and context.

The first Blue Homeland Exercise was conducted by the Turkish Naval Forces in 2019, the second in 2021, and the third in 2022 (Turkish Naval Forces Command, 2024a). These exercises are important in that they are conducted simultaneously in three seas surrounding Türkiye, namely the Black Sea, the Aegean Sea and the Mediterranean, and in that they demonstrate the national capabilities of the force. The Blue Homeland Exercises carried out within this scope have been followed with global interest and the progress made in the Turkish Navy as a result of these practices have had a worldwide impact. Countries concerned by Türkiye’s growing strength at sea, especially Greece, have interpreted this

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<sup>1</sup> Since the Blue Homeland has been taken as a part of the national security strategy in this work, it has been named as “Blue Homeland Strategy” throughout the study.

development as evidence of Türkiye's revisionist policies in maritime affairs (Tsakonas, 2020: 5).

Türkiye's Blue Homeland Strategy, which has found a response in state practices since 2019, marks a shift from the traditional army-based and land-oriented perspective of Turkish political and military decision-makers (Vreÿ & Blaine, 2023: 349). This shift, aligned with the growing importance of the seas in the current century, has led to greater inclusion of maritime issues in Türkiye's political agenda and more active use of sea and naval diplomacy. Especially considering the importance of the seas in sustainable environment, food, energy and economic security, it is clearly impossible for Türkiye to realize its national rights and interests independently of the seas. In this context, Türkiye, surrounded by seas on three sides and located on the intercontinental global trade route, is creating a large-scale strategy over the seas and symbolically describes this comprehensive strategic transformation as the Blue Homeland.

The Blue Homeland is not only a concept expressing the areas of jurisdiction in the seas surrounding Türkiye, but also a multi-dimensional national security strategy that includes the protection of Türkiye's maritime borders, the rise of the Turkish Navy, the presence in international waters, the realization of national interests, adherence to the rules of international law and, most importantly, the realization of all these goals with national means. The inherently multi-dimensional nature of the seas, which are the operational domain of this comprehensive strategy, means that policies based on maritime areas serve multiple purposes and advance significant national interests. Since the naval power of states includes not only the hard power of military capabilities but also the soft power elements of diplomacy, maritime policies emerge as a valuable source of influence with diverse outcomes and broad effects. In this context, the Turkish Naval Forces, while conducting military activities including surface warfare, submarine warfare, anti-submarine warfare, air defence warfare, electronic warfare, strategic attacks on land targets, reconnaissance, surveillance, command-control, communication and intelligence missions, also serves political goals within the scope of soft power through activities such as humanitarian aid, presence, peacekeeping and international exercises (Turkish Naval Forces Command, 2024b). Therefore, Türkiye aims for a more effective and powerful position in the international arena through maritime diplomacy and pursues the Blue Homeland Strategy to resolutely incorporate the privilege of its geographical location into its national power capacity.

In the 19th century, Alfred Thayer Mahan argued that becoming a great power in the global system was only possible by achieving dominance in the seas (Mahan, 1890). He maintained that economic development depended on foreign trade supported by surplus production, that sea routes were crucial for this trade, and that strong navies were necessary to protect these routes. Influenced by this "Naval Dominance Theory" put forward in the 19th century, the United States of America (USA) became the world's most advanced naval power in the 20th century and was recognised as the most effective superpower in the global system. In the 21st century, rapid technological developments, increasing global trade and

decreasing terrestrial resources led to more active use of the world's seas, and states began to develop new strategies for these sea areas. The most important of these strategies is to determine the boundaries of maritime jurisdiction areas and to benefit from these areas at the highest level. Surrounded by seas on three sides, Türkiye is making investments to modernize its naval power and develop its maritime capabilities as a result of both historical experiences and innovations brought by the new age, and in this context, it is adopting the Blue Homeland Strategy. While the views that becoming a great power is achieved through the seas are supported by historical facts, the largest area of power that combines these experiences with the needs of the age appears to be the seas. The Blue Homeland Strategy is only a part of a comprehensive national security strategy that Türkiye has determined by taking these developments into account.

The structure of the naval force, which supports foreign policy with its impressive diplomatic missions as well as compelling military tasks, makes it a smart power tool that encompasses both hard and soft power elements. Türkiye, seeking to increase its smart power capacity, aims to build a large naval force equipped with national elements, capable of utilizing the seas in both war and peacetime, and is developing a strategic perspective aligned with geopolitical realities. When evaluated in terms of overall effectiveness, it is seen that the Blue Homeland Strategy contributes to national power at multiple points. This strategy encompasses military, economic, political, geographical, technological, cultural, and scientific power. The Blue Homeland Strategy involves viewing Turkish maritime jurisdiction areas as part of the homeland, without violating the rights of other coastal states, and aims to achieve the capability to realise high national interests in these areas.

Türkiye describes its maritime jurisdiction areas as a continuation of its territorial integrity and sees these areas as a part of its homeland that must be protected at all costs. In this context, the then Minister of Defence, Hulusi Akar, responded to the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus, which conducted drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean against Türkiye in 2018 by stating: *“Our interlocutors should know that we will never allow our legal and historical rights and interests to be violated in our blue homeland seas, and that no project in the Aegean and the Mediterranean that does not involve Türkiye and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus has a chance of survival.”* (Anadolu Agency, 2018).

The Blue Homeland Strategy not only protects the borders of the seas surrounding Türkiye, but also includes benefiting from the seas in line with national rights and interests. Lawrence Freedman defines the term strategic as “the ability to see the long-term and essential from the short-term and unimportant” (Cheterian, 2023: 1285). The strategic approach that Türkiye advocates at sea is exactly the ability to see the long term and the essential. The sustainable development goals declared by the United Nations in 2015 include sustainably managing marine and coastal ecosystems, protecting them from pollution, and improving the sustainable use of ocean-based resources (United Nations, 2024). Considering the place of the seas in sustainable global welfare and security, it is clear that

the Blue Homeland Strategy pursued by Türkiye is a direction compatible with the requirements of the era, geopolitical realities and future security.

All issues in international relations are fluid and variable. Everything in this area is changeable; the balance of power between states, international law rules, global organizations and global norms are constantly changing. Therefore, it is extremely natural for rising powers like Türkiye to aim to become a great power by developing the elements of national power against the great powers. Factors such as approximately 90% of global trade being carried by sea, the discovery of energy resource reserves in these areas, and technological advances enabling greater benefit from the seas have led states to prioritise maritime issues. In light of these new developments, Türkiye has also developed new strategic approaches focusing on the seas. The most concrete outcome of this situation is the Blue Homeland Strategy.

When examining changes in global security and defence, it is clear that in recent years, hot conflicts have occurred in various regions, new security threats have emerged, and national defence has once again become a priority for states. Türkiye has also closely followed these developments in recent years, prioritized national security issues, and pursued a policy of nationalization in the defence industry by increasing defence investments. It has been announced by the Turkish Presidency of Defence Industries that more than 1000 defence projects have been carried out as of 2024 and that a project volume of approximately 96.3 billion dollars has been reached, including the ongoing projects (Secretariat of Defence Industries, 2024). Within the scope of developing Turkish naval power, projects including advanced warships, unmanned marine vehicles, national submarines, national aircraft carriers and national torpedoes are underway. Finally, the Blue Homeland Strategy also contributes to the country's foreign policy appearing more independent and determined. The resolute defence of maritime jurisdiction areas determined in accordance with international law by the Turkish Navy and the continuation of exploration and drilling activities for the use of marine energy resources with national resources are among the elements that strengthen Turkish foreign policy.

## 2. ELEMENTS THAT FORM THE BLUE HOMELAND STRATEGY

The scope of grand strategies is long-term, related to the highest priorities of the state and refers to a purpose that deals with all areas of state administration (Siove, 2017: 27). In general, grand strategies refer to the sum of plans and policies that include deliberate efforts to bring together military, political, diplomatic and economic tools to achieve the national interests of states (Peter, 2009). While the Blue Homeland Strategy overlaps with these definitions, it includes multi-dimensional and comprehensive goals to realize Türkiye's long-term national interests, especially with its importance in sustainable development and priority in national security. The unique characteristics of maritime areas mean that policies and strategies in this domain involve multiple elements of national power. Successful maritime strategies enable states to influence global politics in more locations, more decisively, and at greater distances from the homeland.

When the studies on the Blue Homeland are examined, it is seen that these studies are generally aimed at explaining and justifying the concept. Starting from the widespread use of the concept of the Blue Homeland over time, its doctrinalization and, as a result, its becoming a part of the national security strategy, this study examines the elements that constitute this strategic approach. The Blue Homeland strategy emerged from the convergence of closely interconnected elements, all intended to increase national power through the seas. In addition to traditional security threats such as interstate disputes, hot conflicts and terrorist activities, the emergence of new security threats such as climate change, global warming, resource scarcity, increased illegal immigration and smuggling, and cyber threats have brought the sustainable provision of national security to a critical dimension. As a result of all these developments, national security matters have become the priority agenda of states, while advanced technology and artificial intelligence studies are also changing the methods of combating national and international security threats. The Blue Homeland Strategy represents a comprehensive maritime approach based on developing national capabilities to protect national rights and interests at sea, as well as to counter new threats emerging in the 21st century. When the relevant literature is examined, it has been determined that there are five basic elements that constitute the Blue Homeland Strategy, and these elements also form a part of Türkiye's 21st century maritime strategy. These elements, which can also be described as the basic principles of the Blue Homeland Strategy, are listed below;

- Principle of Respect for International Law: Determination of maritime borders within the framework of international law rules
- Sovereignty Principle: Protection of maritime borders and ensuring absolute sovereignty within these borders
- Nationalization Principle: Strengthening the Turkish naval power and the Turkish Navy with national resources
- High Seas Principle: Improving mobility on the high seas and establishing a presence at overseas bases
- Sustainability Principle: Sustainable realization and protection of national rights and interests at sea.

The elements listed above come together to form the Blue Homeland Strategy, and a stronger Türkiye at sea is targeted on the basis of these basic principles. However, this strategy does not only include gaining power at sea, but also increasing national power as a whole. Among the ultimate goals are to be more effective in the global system by developing national power and to be in a position of influencing rather than being affected by international developments. It should be remembered that achieving these goals requires targeted investments and practices over long-term processes. In the following sections of the study, the elements constituting the Blue Homeland Strategy are briefly explained. It is aimed to develop a systematic perspective by considering each element within the framework of a principle.

## 2.1. Principle of Respect for International Law: Determination of Maritime Boundaries Within the Framework of International Law Rules

International law emerges when sovereign states voluntarily come together to establish rules on specific topics through cooperation, agreements, documents, and institutions, and their intention to abide by these rules. The reason for this is that in the global system, states are considered sovereign and equal and there is no authority above states. States, which are the most fundamental subjects of international law, emerge from the coming together of certain elements. Although a state has three basic founding elements, the absence of these elements eliminates the qualification of being a state. These elements are nation, country and sovereignty (Özkaya, 2020: 327). A state can be defined as a political organisation established within a specific geographical boundary, internally sovereign and externally independent, by a settled community of people united by a common purpose. These borders of states established within a certain geographical border include not only the land but also the seas and the air borders on these two. Due to the subject of this study, only maritime borders are emphasized here.

A country consisting of land, sea and airspace is one of the three elements that make a state a state. Therefore, protecting the borders of this country is a requirement of being a state. It is legitimate and normal within the framework of international law for states, which are the most fundamental actors of international law, to preserve their founding elements. Internal waters, territorial waters, continental shelf, exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and straits also constitute part of the state's national borders on the seas. The recent prominence of the seas in natural resource, logistics and defence activities has brought the maritime borders of states back to the agenda and the disputes on this issue have intensified.

The law of the sea can be defined as a set of decisions concerning the nature and scope of control exercised over the marine environment. International maritime law is a sub-branch of international law that governs the determination of maritime boundaries, the geographical jurisdiction of coastal states, and the rights and responsibilities of states regarding the use and conservation of marine resources (Hoagland et al., 2019). The basis of international maritime law is based on customary rules. By compiling and codifying these customary rules, two significant maritime law conventions were established. The first of the conventions in this scope is the 1958 Geneva Conventions, which include four conventions: the Convention on Territorial Waters and Contiguous Zones, the Convention on the High Seas, the Convention on Fisheries on the High Seas and for the Protection of Living Resources, and the Convention on the Continental Shelf (UN Audiovisual Library of International Law, 2023). However, with advances in technology and changing political and economic conditions, these agreements have become inadequate in resolving international conflicts over access to marine resources (Alexander, 1968). Thereupon, the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the second most important in the field of international maritime law and the most comprehensive maritime law regulation of the 20th century, emerged (Harrison, 2017: 269). UNCLOS, which was opened for signature on 10 December 1982 and entered into force in 1994, consists of 320 articles and nine

annexes and addresses all topics related to the oceans and seas (UN Oceans & Law of the Sea, 1982). It has been ratified by 169 states as of 24 July 2024 (UN Oceans & Law of the Sea, 2024). Although Türkiye is not a party to UNCLOS, it defends the view that the unique characteristics of each geographical region should be taken into account within the framework of customary rules of international maritime law.

Surrounded by the Black Sea to the north, the Mediterranean to the south and the Aegean Sea to the west, Türkiye has determined its maritime borders within the framework of the principles of equity and proportionality and the rules of international law. However, the more active use of the seas by states in the last twenty years has brought maritime border disputes back to the agenda, and especially the energy resource reserves in the seas have increased the interest in these areas. Although Türkiye has actively participated and contributed to international maritime law conferences, it has not become a party to either the 1958 Geneva Conventions or the UNCLOS (Cin, 2006: 23). At these conferences, Türkiye emphasised that geographical features in different regions should be considered, and that the principle of equity should be upheld, while also expressing concerns that articles in the agreements open to interpretation could cause grievances for coastal countries. Türkiye has a geographical wealth that attracts the attention of global powers, from a geo-strategic perspective with its critical maritime areas and straits, from a geo-economic perspective with its location on the global trade route and its potential for energy resources in the seas. Therefore, while Türkiye determines its maritime jurisdiction areas in line with the rules of international law, it also acts to protect and secure its maritime jurisdiction areas.

Since the coastal states can benefit from the seas within the limits of their national borders, the increasing importance of the seas has made it difficult to determine these borders and the number of conflicts in this area has increased. Within the scope of international maritime law, Türkiye has generally defended the need to determine maritime borders within the framework of international customary rules and the principles of equity, non-exclusion and proportionality, taking into account the unique geographical characteristics of each state, and national borders have been drawn in the seas surrounding Türkiye within this framework. In this context, Türkiye applies a territorial water width of 12 miles in the Black Sea and the Mediterranean, and 6 miles in the Aegean. According to UNCLOS, every state has the right to determine the width of its territorial waters, not exceeding 12 nautical miles. Therefore, Türkiye's practice is in line with UNCLOS, which regulates that territorial waters can be a maximum of 12 nautical miles, and is important in terms of distinguishing the special geographical conditions in the Aegean Sea. This issue was also emphasized in the introduction of the agreement signed between Türkiye and Libya, which determined the maritime jurisdiction boundaries, and it was stated that the maritime boundaries were determined by taking into account all geographical conditions (Sağsen and Berkul, 2021: 1158). In addition, in maritime law, maritime boundary agreements should not infringe upon the rights and interests of third parties (Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Communications, 2020: 20). Within the scope of all these principles of equity and fair delimitation, Türkiye has determined the borders of the

Blue Homeland guided by international court precedents, within the framework of customary rules and under the agreements to which it is a party.

## 2.2. Principle of Sovereignty: Protection of Maritime Borders and Ensuring Absolute Sovereignty Rights Within These Borders

While one of the elements of being a state is the country discussed in the previous heading, another is the sovereignty over this country. States that are formed by the combination of nation, country and sovereignty elements have absolute sovereignty rights within the borders of the country. Sovereignty is inalienable, continuous, unrestricted and absolute (Ertuğrul, 2017: 43). Modern nation-states, which emerged with the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, are independent and fully authorized within their national borders, while at the same time having absolute sovereignty over land, sea and the airspace over them. Within the scope of the imperative rules of international law, there is the principle of sovereign equality. According to this principle, all political entities with state power worldwide are considered equal, and no state is superior to another. In this system, states cannot cross national borders or interfere in the internal affairs of other states.

Since the sea borders of the states are also located within the country's borders, they are referred to as maritime jurisdiction areas and grant absolute sovereignty to coastal states. This right, derived from international law, is inalienable, unrestricted, permanent and absolute. Türkiye also exercises a right arising directly from international law in its activities within the borders of the Blue Homeland and expects sovereign equal states to fulfil their obligation not to interfere in its internal affairs. Türkiye exercises its sovereign rights arising from international law within the maritime borders it has determined within the scope of international law rules. Since the borders of the Blue Homeland are the extension of national borders in the seas, the principle of sovereignty constitutes one of the most important and indisputable elements of the Blue Homeland Strategy.

Since maritime disputes seriously affect the economic development of coastal states, regional stability and peace, and the interests of the international community, it is important to reach a consensus in these areas and implement international law. The absolute sovereignty of states within their homeland borders is also a requirement of international law. National borders are sacred and inviolable (Dien et al., 2024: 20). Since the Blue Homeland borders represent Türkiye's national borders at sea, they are likewise sacred and inviolable. Furthermore, maintaining a stable and peaceful environment is critically important for the country's independence, sovereignty, and national prosperity. In summary, the right to absolute sovereignty within the borders of the Blue Homeland is among the uncompromising national values for Türkiye.

## 2.3. The Principle of Nationalization: Strengthening the Turkish Naval Forces and the Turkish Navy with National Resources

In general, it is seen that countries with large navies establish more diplomatic relations by controlling military expenditures and tend to project power further away from the homeland (Gartzke & Lindsay, 2020: 603). In this context, while large navies make positive

contributions to the diplomatic relations, foreign policy practices and security policies of states, the development of a country's navy also contains important clues in the context of that country's economy, industry and strategy. Investments made by countries with weak economies in maritime and naval forces, the budgets allocated, and the number of projects undertaken will also be limited. In addition, while only industrially developed countries can manufacture, maintain and repair ships, it is very difficult for weak states to acquire large naval power in terms of strategic planning.

While the first condition for having large and powerful navies from past to present was the number of ships, today strong navies stand out with their advanced technological features rather than the number of ships. The largest navy of all time was the U.S. Navy, which consisted of 6,768 ships during World War II (World Population Review, 2024). However, since that date, no navy in the world, including the US, has had such a number of ships. With technological advances, the presence of marine vehicles equipped with advanced technology and artificial intelligence has become increasingly important in naval forces. Therefore, especially in the 21st century, not only the number of ships but also the presence of technologically advanced marine vehicles with wide mobility in the seas has become an important indicator in measuring naval power.

For Türkiye, the seas are of vital importance for sustainable national security and prosperity. In this context, considering the changing global conditions, keeping pace with technological advances and strengthening the Turkish Navy with national resources are key elements of the Blue Homeland Strategy. Türkiye represents one of the most important points in the world in terms of geo-economic, geopolitical, geostrategic and geo-cultural equations due to its geography (Öcal, 2010: 285). For a country like Türkiye, surrounded by seas on three sides and located in such an important geographical position, ensuring economic, military and political security in this region depends directly on the seas. The Blue Homeland Strategy includes the development of the national defence industry, the nationalization of the naval force, and the ability to operate at sea with national means. In this regard, a wide range of projects—both completed and ongoing—are being carried out under the Presidency of Defence Industries, encompassing the national frigate program, national fast attack craft, the procurement of next-generation submarines, multi-purpose amphibious assault ships, and unmanned naval vehicles. (Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, Secretariat of Defence Industries, 2026a). Within the scope of modernization projects in naval power, which have gained momentum since the early 2000s, production, supply and renewal activities continue with national resources. Thus, while the Turkish Navy is being developed with national technologies in terms of power, capacity and capability, it is aimed to reduce and ultimately eliminate external dependency in the country's security.

Having a deterrent and advanced domestic navy is a critical strategic orientation that strengthens Türkiye's hand both militarily and in terms of foreign policy. The nationalization and modernisation initiatives launched in the Turkish naval force, carried out with advanced technologies, contribute to the development of the country's defence

industry. Artificial intelligence and advanced technology, especially used in unmanned marine vehicles, are important evidence that the naval power has been modernized in line with 21st century developments. In this regard, Türkiye has placed increasing emphasis on investments in its national defence industry, especially over the past two decades. As indicated in the 2026 Turkish Defence Industry Product Catalogue, the total project portfolio managed under the coordination of the Presidency of Defence Industries has surpassed 100 billion USD. Moreover, over 1,400 projects are currently underway in the defence sector, while exports have exceeded 10 billion USD and R&D expenditures have risen above 3.4 billion USD (Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, Secretariat of Defence Industries, 2026b). In this context, advanced warships, unmanned marine vehicles, national submarines, national aircraft carriers and national torpedoes are also being developed in order to equip the naval force with national capabilities.

The “nationalization principle”, one of the elements of the Blue Homeland Strategy, aims to modernize the Turkish Navy with national systems and platforms, and includes the Turkish defence industry's taking an active role in the modernization of other countries' naval systems and realizing exports (Anadolu Agency, 2023). In this context, the Turkish defence industry improves its shipbuilding infrastructure and experience in this field day by day, while making the necessary investments for new technologies on a public and industry basis. One of the most significant projects in this context is Türkiye's national warship program. Through the National Ship (MİLGEM) Project, which maximizes the use of domestic capabilities, a complex, high-standard surface combatant—fully compatible with contemporary technological requirements—has, for the first time in Türkiye, been designed and integrated through national means with the support of the domestic defence industry (TSKGV, 2025).

The defense industry has become the leading sector in Türkiye's domestic and national technology production (Ministry of Industry and Technology, 2025: 36). Türkiye pursues multi-dimensional strategies under the nationalisation principle, undertakes multilateral activities in the maritime field through bilateral cooperation and international organizations, and invests in its domestic defence industry. The strategic initiative, known with the slogan “National Technology Move” and aiming for national independence in advanced technology, was announced by the Ministry of Industry and Technology with the “2023 Industry and Technology Strategy” document declared in 2019 (Ministry of Industry and Technology, 2019). In this document, it is stated that the digital transformation and technological advancement experienced worldwide is the beginning of a new era, and that Türkiye is included in this transformation with its national technology move.

#### 2.4. The High Seas Principle: Improving Mobility on the High Seas

While the Admiral Barbaros Hayrettin Pasha expressed the importance of the seas with the saying, “He who controls the seas, controls the world.” British Sir Walter Raleigh emphasized that states that control the seas will also control trade and ultimately dominate the world, and the famous American naval theorist Alfred Thayer Mahan argued that the

path to becoming a global power passes through the seas. The views defended by these thinkers who lived in different centuries have been confirmed in the context of state victories, collapses, wars and rises throughout history, demonstrating that being strong at sea brings great success. While these experiences and views remain valid in the 21st century, the seas have gained even greater importance in terms of resources, transportation and sustainability today. Existing at sea requires more strength and specific skills than in terrestrial areas. Therefore, maintaining a presence at sea requires a developed naval force supported by economic and technological infrastructure. Coastal states generally follow different defence and security strategies such as coastal defence, near-sea presence and offshore strategy, and determine these strategic preferences in proportion to national power.

Maritime strategies involve the development of a nation's maritime capabilities and abilities within the scope of national power in order to realize its interests and benefits. In this context, Türkiye determines maritime strategies and creates policies to the extent that national power elements allow. However, due to its geopolitical, geo-economic, and geostrategic significance, Türkiye maintains a more delicate balance at sea and considers its prosperity and security closely tied to maritime affairs. The ability to operate on the high seas has diplomatic and political value as well as military value, as it allows states to demonstrate their power in the international arena. This capability enhances global competition and produces political consequences by putting pressure on others. Accordingly, Türkiye, as a peninsula state, continually advances its maritime capabilities because of its seas, coasts, straits, and global position, and pursues a maritime strategy aligned with the dynamics of the 21st century.

Maritime strategies and policies are affected by global developments, and factors such as security risks, economic environment and technological developments that arise worldwide affect the direction of these strategies. The Turkish Naval Forces are an important branch of the armed forces, providing reliable access to the seas for both commercial and military purposes, and are the implementing force of maritime capabilities and strategies. The strategy announced by the Turkish Naval Forces under the title of "Towards the Open Seas" has been in effect since the early 2000s, with its scope expanded and continued in 2015. While the Turkish Naval Forces are involved in multilateral cooperation to realize national rights and interests, they have also turned to the open seas in order to be more active and independent at sea and have focused on developing their offshore capabilities with national elements.

The offshore strategy implemented by the Turkish Naval Forces since the beginning of the 21st century has been greatly influenced by the development of naval capabilities through advanced technology. Because marine vehicles containing advanced technology facilitate the access of navies to the open seas, improve the ability to stay further from the homeland and for longer periods of time, and increase diplomatic influence by displaying the state's magnificence in more distant geographies. The strategy document titled "Towards the Open Seas" states that Türkiye entered the 21st century in a dynamic economic, security, and political environment, that its welfare and security in this new era are directly linked to

the seas surrounding it on three sides, and that the development of Türkiye's naval power is critically important in this context (Turkish Naval Forces, 2000: 4). Similarly, in the strategy document titled "Turkish Naval Forces Strategy" published on 19 May 2015, includes the phrase "To be Safe in the Homeland, To be Strong at Sea; To have a Say in the World, To be Present in All Seas." (Turkish Naval Forces Command, 2015).

Since the beginning of the 21st century, Türkiye has focused its maritime strategy on the high seas and has launched modernization efforts in its naval forces to ensure security in surrounding waters, especially the Black Sea, the Mediterranean, and the Aegean, as well as to establish a presence on the high seas. The high seas, one of the most important competitive areas of our age, are home to global powers and are also the focus of attention of rising powers. Since the active presence of states in the open seas is directly related to their naval capabilities, even the existence of an open sea strategy can provide information about the naval power of that country. The offshore strategy provides states with economic, military, diplomatic and scientific advantages, while enabling national rights and interests to be protected in the high seas in addition to coastal waters. The Turkish Navy represents the most advanced naval force in the region, with the ability to access the high seas and eliminate risks to the homeland in distant geographies.

## 2.5. Sustainability Principle: Sustainable Realization and Protection of National Rights and Interests in the Seas

The seas carry approximately 90% of global trade, host food and energy resources, and are of strategic importance in terms of security. While the economic and military benefits of the seas give coastal states an advantage, it is crucial that these states consider sustainability when using these areas within their national rights and interests. One of the elements of the Blue Homeland Strategy is the sustainable management of economic and military activities within Türkiye's maritime borders. Surrounded by seas on three sides, Türkiye's national rights and interests are closely linked to the seas, and the Blue Homeland waters constitute an important part of the country's prosperity and security.

While maritime security includes, on the one hand, the protection of the natural integrity of maritime areas, on the other hand, it also covers the protection of ships, states and individuals using maritime borders. Coastal states are responsible for ensuring maritime security in the maritime jurisdiction areas they have, and they have sovereign authority in these areas. The Blue Homeland Strategy contributes to both ensuring maritime security and protecting maritime jurisdiction areas. It also aims for the sustainable use and protection of the seas in line with the sustainable development goals declared by the UN.

While marine areas host many living species, they also produce half of the world's oxygen, regulate the global climate, and balance global life by absorbing one-third of the carbon dioxide produced in the world (Reçber, 2022: 4). Maintaining this balance is among the primary duties of all countries in the world, especially coastal states. In this context, Türkiye conducts scientific research and projects to protect the marine ecosystem and contributes to sustainable development goals. The sustainability principle, which forms an

important part of the Blue Homeland Strategy, includes protecting and utilizing the seas not only from a military perspective but also from an economic, scientific, food and cultural perspective.

The principle of sustainability requires focusing on economic, military, political and environmental security and includes a comprehensive approach that goes beyond the traditional understanding of security. This approach emphasizes protecting the marine environment and preventing its destruction. Türkiye focuses on the realization of its national rights and interests within the borders of the Blue Homeland and on the high seas with this understanding. As technological developments lead to increased use of the seas and greater destruction in these areas, it is essential to use these areas without causing harm. The Blue Homeland Strategy aims to sustainably realize and protect national rights and interests in the seas, starting from the surrounding seas to the high seas.

## CONCLUSION

The nation-state order, which began with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, created sovereign equal states in the global system, and these states were accepted as the main actors of international law. States that are formed by the combination of the elements of nation, country and sovereignty lose their state status in the absence of one of these founding elements. National borders, including land, sea, and air boundaries, are considered inviolable and are evaluated as part of national territory. The Blue Homeland also constitutes Türkiye's national borders at sea, and the protection of the Blue Homeland borders is a requirement of statehood under international law. The concept of the Blue Homeland, which was initially used symbolically to indicate Türkiye's maritime jurisdiction areas in the surrounding seas, was developed over time by experts, soldiers, academics, politicians, researchers and institutions in the relevant field, became a doctrine and eventually became a part of Türkiye's national security strategy.

In this study, since the Blue Homeland is considered as a part of the national security strategy, it is described as the Blue Homeland strategy and in this context, the elements that constitute the Blue Homeland strategy are listed on the axis of basic principles. The Blue Homeland strategy is a multi-dimensional national security strategy that includes the protection of Türkiye's maritime borders, strengthening the Turkish Navy, the presence in international waters, the realization of national interests, adherence to the rules of international law, and most importantly, the realization of all these goals with national means. Within the scope of this strategy, Türkiye, which is surrounded by strategically important seas such as the Black Sea to the North, the Mediterranean to the South, and the Aegean Sea to the West, is aimed to become stronger, more active, more effective, and more independent at sea through the Turkish Navy developed with national resources and the modern Turkish Naval Forces. In this context, the protection of national rights and interests in Turkish maritime jurisdiction areas and on the high seas is among the priority targets.

The Blue Homeland Strategy represents a comprehensive and long-term strategic orientation that takes into account Türkiye's 21st century needs in line with geopolitical

reality and includes contemporary developments such as advanced technology and artificial intelligence. Factors such as 90% of global trade being carried by sea, improved access to marine resources, and the discovery of seabed energy resources have led all world states to focus on the seas, increasing the importance of maritime areas. Türkiye also prioritizes enhancing its national power at sea by integrating these global developments into its national power elements as a key national security issue. In this context, the development of maritime capabilities in order to realize national rights and interests in a wide range from the surrounding seas to the high seas constitutes a part of the Blue Homeland Strategy.

The Blue Homeland Strategy consists of five elements based on basic principles. The first of these is; determining the maritime borders in accordance with the rules of international law within the framework of the principle of respect for international law; the second is; protecting the maritime borders within the framework of the principle of sovereignty and ensuring the absolute right of sovereignty within these borders; the third is; strengthening the Turkish naval power and the Turkish Navy with national means within the framework of the principle of nationalization; the fourth is; developing the operational capability in the open seas and establishing a presence in overseas bases within the framework of the principle of open seas; and finally, the fifth is the sustainable realization and protection of national rights and interests in the seas within the framework of the principle of sustainability. The Blue Homeland Strategy, consisting of these five basic principles, forms part of the strategic orientation that contributes to Türkiye's goal of becoming stronger, more active and more independent at sea.

### ***Statement of Research and Publication Ethics***

The publication process of the article has been conducted in accordance with the principles outlined under the heading “Compliance with Ethical Rules” in the Social Sciences Journal of the Institute of Social Sciences at Karadeniz Technical University. The research section of the study does not contain any issues requiring ethical committee approval.

### ***Author Contributions Statement***

The article, handled as a single-authored work, was entirely produced by the author.

### ***Conflict of Interest Statement***

There are no potential conflicts of interest declared by the author in the article.

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