

Geopolitics of international rivalry in the black sea

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Abstract:

The geography of the black sea affects the strategic importance of the region, because it is a commercial and energy transit area, and a vital zone where great powers like Russia and USA compete; with European and Asian regional powers engaging, in its influence interactions. This research work aims at answering the problematic, of the ability of the geography of the Black Sea to contribute to the redistributing of the global power, in the light of the international rivalry, after the Ukrainian crisis 2022.

Keywords: geopolitics; international rivalry ;the black sea ; geography ;power; Interests

المخلص: إن جغرافية البحر الأسود تؤثر على الأهمية الاستراتيجية للمنطقة ، كونها ممر عبور تجاري وطاقوي، و هي منطقة حيوية تتنافس فيها القوى الكبرى كروسيا والولايات المتحدة الأمريكية مع تداخل القوى الأخرى الأروبية والآسيوية كذلك في ظل تفاعل مستمر وتأثير متبادل . وعلى هذا الأساس تسعى هذه الورقة البحثية للتركيز على مشكلة البحث المتعلقة بقدرة جغرافية البحر الأسود للمساهمة أو التأثير على توزيع القوة العالمية في ظل التنافس الدولي ، خاصة بعد أزمة اوكرانيا 2022 .

الكلمات المفتاحية : جيوبوليتيك ، التنافس الدولي ، البحر الأسود ، الجغرافيا ، القوة ، المصالح .

Introduction :

The black sea region is one of the most important regions that influence global power arrangements , due to its geographical appearance , which lies in the middle of Eurasia ,this provides geopolitical ambitions for other countries such as European one's , RUSSIA ,USA, CHINA ... etc , the importance of this region has increased with the shift of international rivalry from the middle east to the east especially after russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 , and its military intervention in Ukraine 2022 , so this ensures that the great powers turned the focus on the sea power due to the commercial , political , social , and geopolitical interests , in the light of the [conflict between land and sea civilization] .

The international changes that had occurred recently confirm that countries are seeking to maintain their survival in light of realistic thought , which means that they should avoid the international potential crisis that threaten national security such as the food and energy crisis , especially since the black sea is an energy and commercial transit area .

We aim to explain the geographical importance of this region [black sea] in making new roles for new countries in light of the power shifts in the international system and how does it affect on the distributions of power , **so to what extent does the geography of the black sea influence international geopolitical interactions , and the distribution of regional and international power?**

The hypothesis :

We propose the following hypothesis : the more international rivalry in the black sea increases , the more the powers will attempt to reposition in the power hierarchy , ensuring that they share interests in the region .

1-The black sea between geography and geopolitics :

The Black Sea lies in the middle of the continents of Asia and Europe, and is considered a semi-enclosed sea. It is connected to the Sea of Azov via the Kerch Strait, and to the Mediterranean Sea via the Bosphorus Strait, passing through the Seas of ¹Marmara and Ege. It is overlooked by six countries: Ukraine, Russia, Georgia, Turkey, Bulgaria, and Romania..

The area of the water body is 461,000 One thousand square kilometers, including the Sea of Azov . The length of its coast from east to west is 1,175 km. Several rivers flow into the Black sea, the most important of which is the Danube River, which is the second most important river in Europe after the Volga. The river flows on the borders of several countries in the Black Sea: Moldova, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria and Ukraine.

The Black Sea region derives its importance from being a maritime energy corridor from the Mediterranean and the Middle East towards the Caspian Sea and Central Asia, which are rich in energy resources in addition to minerals and natural resources.² It also includes Russia and Turkey as two

member states in the G20 economic group, which makes the region important in the global economy.

The waters of the Black Sea contain oil, especially in the Sakarya field, which can add about 10 million cubic meters of gas to Turkey per day, while the most important Russian oil stations are located on the coast of this sea, which makes it important in the production and transportation of global oil. The Crimean Peninsula provides a very important sea view for ³Russia. Because of its proximity to the Kerch Strait, it is the only outlet to warm waters.

The legal framework :

The Montreux Convention of 1936 came to govern the global straits system, giving Turkey the right to control the Bosphorus Strait, which gave it the right to monitor ships entering and leaving the Black Sea.

An institutional framework for this region did not emerge until June 22, 1992, when the leaders of 10 countries (Armenia, Albania, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine, Greece, Moldova, Bulgaria, Russia, Turkey) met at the Bosphorus Summit. With this definition, it appeared that the region does not only include the countries bordering the sea, but also takes into account geographical proximity, which made Armenia, Albania, Azerbaijan, Greece and Moldova participate in the decision⁴s related to the management of the region.

The BSEC Economic Cooperation Organization was established in 1999 AD, emerging from this The meeting made the Black Sea region defined in international law, consisting of 12 countries, including 10 meeting at the summit of the Bosphorus Strait, in addition to Romania and Serbia⁵.

The region remained an area of competition between Russia and NATO, which constantly conducts joint military exercises in the Black Sea. However, this competition remained unclear, until after the Georgia crisis and then the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014, which was a turning point in the Russian strategy towards the region. The importance of the Black Sea as a vital space for Russia, thanks to its warm waters. But the Russian military intervention in Ukraine in February 2022 upset the geostrategic balances, and pushed regional countries to try to arrange their positions, benefit from international division, and play new roles using geographical gain⁶.

2-The geopolitical importance of the black sea region :

- The importance of the black sea in geopolitical theories :

Through Halford Mackinder's theory of the heart Land in 1904, he asserted that whoever controls the heart land controls the island, and whoever controls the island controls the world, and therefore the Black Sea region was not included in his theory. This theory was modified in 1919 to include the Black Sea region and the Baltic region, after they became important after World War ⁷I and the attempt of the major powers to expand their influence towards them.

In view of Friedrich Ratzel's contributions to the "living space", the Black Sea region appears as an important vital space for Russia, and therefore it must ensure its hegemony and influence, by expanding in this field. In this context also, the theory of the Rimland "Earth Frame" by Nicholas Spykman was considered, The marginal seas that separate the terrestrial sphere from the great oceans are more important than the heart land region . This ⁸framework can include the Black Sea region, given that it is an area in which land powers (Russia) compete with Western sea powers that are trying to expand their influence in the seas.

'''Alfred Mahan''' set out through the theory of sea power to explain the American geopolitical movement in the seas, as there was competition in the seas between France and England and competition for influence in the sea lanes, as the importance of the Black Sea increased after trade ⁹openness with globalization, and with the increasing importance of the seas, competition over them increased with it.

In Russian geopolitical thought, "Alexander Dugin" limits the competition between land powers and sea powers, and in this Ukraine

and the Black Sea play a buffer zone between the two civilizations. Ukraine (with sovereignty) is considered an obstacle to building the Eurasian empire, and therefore the Black Sea region becomes a region of conflicts and disputes that threaten Russian national security.¹⁰

- The importance of the black sea in international geostrategic interactions :

The Black Sea is an important region for the major powers. It is also an energy transit zone from Asia to Europe, where gas transport pipelines are distributed in the region, including the Blue Stream pipeline within the southern stream that passes through the Black Sea towards Turkey, Bulgaria, then Greece and Italy. Ukraine represents the most important transit points for energy supplies. From Russia to the European union On the other hand, the region provides space for the transit of commercial ships, goods. International trade lines from Asia towards Europe include a large network of railways in Central Asia and the Caspian Sea, then commercial ports spread across the coasts of the Black Sea. Russia and Ukraine are the most important exporters of wheat in the world, accounting for a quarter of the world's share. The southern ports of Ukraine, such as Odessa and Pevdenny, export large shipments across the Black Sea towards Europe and Africa. The Ukraine crisis posed a major threat to food security in the world,¹¹ as the war led to the bombing of facilities in the ports of export in Odessa, Kherson and Mariupol. This has made many countries fear a major global food crisis , Following this, a tripartite agreement was reached in Istanbul on July 22, 2022, between Turkey, Ukraine, and Russia, to return shipments through the Black Sea, and not to be attacked by Russia, on the condition that ships in Turkey be inspected for fear of transferring weapons to Ukraine.

3-International rivalry in the black sea [redistribution of power]:

- strategic moves in the black sea : Eurasian and Atlantic confrontation :

❖ ANNEXATION OF CRIMEA:

The Georgia crisis came in 2008, and Russia was able to seize a large portion of Georgia's territory, and declare the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as a turning point in the geopolitical scene in the Black Sea, which had been unclear for a long time, as Abkhazia became an independent state overlooking the Black Sea. And it supports Russia against the Atlantic Alliance, in addition to being a new port that facilitates Russia's access to the ¹²Bosphorus Strait.

After the 2014 revolution in Ukraine that overthrew President Yanukovich, Russia was able to re-annex the Crimean Peninsula, which was under Ukrainian control, in a rapid military operation that was followed by a referendum with a percentage of more than 96% in favor of joining Russia, an event that changed the geography of the Black Sea Again.

The Sevastopol base in the Crimean Peninsula is the most important Russian naval base in the Black Sea, where an agreement was signed after the dissolution of the Soviet Union to lease the base that includes the Black Sea Fleet, which is the fleet that Russia inherited from the Soviet Union. The base facilitates the departure of Russian military forces towards the warm seas through the Bosphorus Strait, then the Tartus base in Syria and heading towards the Mediterranean Sea. Therefore, Russia's strategic goals in annexing the Crimean Peninsula were to make Sevastopol a purely Russian region, and to hedge in case Ukraine¹³ joined NATO, which would have constituted a strategic encirclement that threatened Russia's security and sovereignty. Thus, Russia became the dominant power in the Black Sea and its outlets to the Sea of Azov through the Strait. Kerch, and towards the Mediterranean Sea via the Bosphorus Strait.

In addition, military incidents in the Black Sea constituted an important manifestation of the rivalry between Russia and the West, as the British Defender D35 destroyer was intercepted by the Russian Navy in the vicinity of Cape Khersonis, towards the Sea of Azov in December 2020, on the pretext that the destroyer violated United Nations maritime laws.

It appears in This rivalry played the role of geography in giving new roles to countries such as Georgia, Moldova, Romania and Bulgaria to benefit from their important locations in the Black Sea region, on the part of the Western coalition to repel Russia's desire to preserve its vital space.

❖ The strategic of the great powers in the Ukraine war :

the Russian military intervention in Ukraine in February 2020 came as a kind of strategic surprise that re-used hard power in international relations, as Russia rushed militarily, justifying this with the security threat that comes to it from NATO's expansion to the east, and from Ukraine's desire to join the alliance. This region is considered the most important zone of conflict, in which Russia's interests in preserving its national security on the one hand, and ¹⁴the NATO interests of the European Union's desire for expansion and NATO to include more countries in Eastern Europe to strategically encircle Russia on the other hand, collide. These strategic shifts in the Russian-Ukrainian war indicate the motives that drive Russian strategic behavior, which is trying to establish a new international order, in which power is distributed in a pluralistic manner. If Russia is able to resolve the war in its favor, the global balance of power will be affected, so that the United States will appear to be unable to do so. Able to ¹⁵

protect its allies, Europe will enter into an energy crisis, requiring concessions or retreat from the economic sanctions on Russia, which had adverse results and led to a rise in oil prices, especially after the OPEC+ meeting and its decisions to cap production.

In addition to what European countries are suffering from economic and social crises, which led to the need to reduce energy consumption, search for other alternatives, high levels of inflation in the United States of America, and the effects of the Iranian nuclear file on oil markets.

4-rising powers in the black sea region [[rembalancing] :

Rising Forces:

The Black Sea region mediates the continents of Asia and Europe, as it is within the strategies of emerging power China and India D. For China, the region is a new space for strategic competition with the United States.

Where its interest previously stopped at Central Asia, due to the energy resources it needs, but the increase in oil needs and the search for markets for Chinese goods, made Chinese influence extend to the Black Sea and then Eastern Europe.

The Belt and Road Initiative includes Romania and Bulgaria, as two countries within the European Union and the Black Sea region, making Chinese influence extend to the Black Sea and then Eastern Europe, and although the opportunities for economic and trade cooperation with China seem important, but the slowdown in completing projects¹⁶

Fear of trade imbalance, and entering a long -term debt crisis with China, makes this initiative

Unable to achieve balanced gains between China and the countries of the Black Sea region.

On the other hand, the European Union cannot bear the costs of any economic crisis on the long term, so the Belt and Road Initiative in the Black Sea remains linked to what China benefits from in terms of commercial transport lines, via railways towards Central and Western Europe, to enhance its commercial and economic activity, in The rest of the Black Sea countries, such as Ukraine and Georgia, continued to seek to s¹⁷trenghen their relations with the European Union, in preparation for joining it.

In addition, the 17+01 initiative was established in 2012, which brings together China with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, including

countries bordering the Black Sea such as Bulgaria and Romania, and its aim was to strengthen Chinese-European economic cooperation, through infrastructure investments and transportation projects. A budget estimated at 10 billion was allocated to it, and an agreement was signed between China and Romania in 2013, to implement three projects in the fields of nuclear energy at the Cernavoda station, and hydrochemical energy at the Lapustesti-Tarnita station. But the projects are currently on hold.

The United States of America considers China a strategic competitor in the Black Sea, so it is trying to obstruct the Belt and Road Initiative, by using the European Union as an institutional framework, which stipulates that the European countries belonging to it must find a unified position on China's influence in the region, in light of the clear division of the European countries regarding The initiative's ability to further activate intra-European relations, and not create economic crises that may spread from one European country to another, as happened in the 2008 Greek crisis.

In terms of security, Georgia is part of the ring of Atlantic expansion, which aims to exclude Russia's role in Asia, which includes Azerbaijan, the countries of Central Asia, and the Caucasus. Georgia still depends on American military aid, after the Rose ¹⁸Revolution in 2003, which made it a security ally. Important in the Black Sea, where the United States provided it with the Javelin anti-aircraft system and security aid worth \$117.3 million in 2014 after Russia's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, which is considered a strategic encirclement of Georgia. On the contrary, Romania sees its relations with China as marginal, and does not seek It has no partnership with it, as it is a strategic ally of NATO and a member of the European Union, as it sees that the LWMA is an ally that guarantees its security against Russian influence in the Black Sea.

As for India, it is seeking to exit Central Asia towards Europe via the Black Sea, by strengthening its relations with the coastal countries in the Black Sea such as Georgia, Bulgaria and Romania, where the Indian Foreign Minister visited Georgia in 2021, and it was agreed to increase investments between the two countries. This movement establishes an Indian vision.

New, making Europe an investment area and a market for production and information technology coming from India. Thus, India has found a position for itself within the Black Sea interactions, based on its strategic vision as a rising country, and it¹⁹ must be present in the seas and oceans as a maritime power.

Conclusion:

The geography of the black sea plays an important role in redistributing regional and international power , where was the Ukraine war 2022 the reason for the great powers to engage in the global interactions , for this research paper we summarize some results :

1. The black sea region is within the heartland that MAKINDER'S referred to in his theory also in the living space[lebensraum] for ²⁰RATZEL'S theory so that makes Russia protect this region from any western threat the geography of the black sea provides important corridors for the transports of oil , commercial goods and grains making it a choke point that effects the global energy and food security .
2. After Russia annexed the crimea , it aimes to maintain its dominance over the black sea which provides it with an outlet towards warm water
3. The war in Ukraine brought together the great powers in the clash zone where the black sea takes an important part there
4. Oil is the most important tool for putting pressure on regional and international powers , as cutting off Russian gas which led to a fear of a crisis in the global economics .
5. Rising powers aim to find an important positions in the black sea region such as China , India

6. The war in Ukraine gave an important role for the regional powers such as turkey for reposition in the strategic balance map
7. The black sea region imposes a form of a multipower distribution this last effects on the global power hierarchy .

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