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Geopolitical dimension of Crimea: Analyzing Neo-Eurasianism and regional implications
Kırım'ın jeopolitik boyutu: Yeni-Avrasyacılığın ve bölgesel etkilerinin analizi

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ABSTRACT: This article examines the geopolitical and ideological dynamics underlying the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014. Situated at the crossroads of critical energy routes and military strategy in the Black Sea, Crimea has long been a contested region of strategic importance. The study delves into the theoretical framework of Neo-Eurasianism, which has played a pivotal role in shaping Russia's foreign policy and provided ideological justification for its actions. This article will emphasize the geopolitical importance of Crimea by revealing the basic situation of the region in the context of geography, population, transportation and economy. By exploring the geopolitical dimensions of the annexation, the article highlights the regional and international consequences of Russia's actions, emphasizing their impact on global security and diplomacy. The findings underscore the interplay between historical legacies and contemporary power politics, offering insights into the broader implications of the Crimea issue for the Eurasian region and beyond.
Keywords: Crimea, Neo-Eurasianism, Geopolitics

ÖZ: Bu makale, Rusya'nın 2014 yılında Kırım'ı ilhak etmesinin altında yatan jeopolitik ve ideolojik dinamikleri incelemektedir. Karadeniz'de kritik enerji rotalarının ve askeri stratejinin kavşağında bulunan Kırım, uzun zamandır stratejik öneme sahip tartışmalı bir bölgedir. Çalışma, Rusya'nın dış politikasını şekillendirmede önemli bir rol oynayan ve eylemlerine ideolojik gerekçe sağlayan Yeni-Avrasyacılığın teorik çerçevesine değinecektir. Bu makale, bölgenin coğrafya, nüfus, ulaşım ve ekonomi bağlamındaki temel durumunu ortaya koyarak Kırım'ın jeopolitik önemini vurgulayacaktır. Makale, ilhakın jeopolitik boyutlarını inceleyerek ve Rusya'nın eylemlerinin bölgesel ve uluslararası sonuçlarını vurgulayarak küresel güvenlik ve diplomasi üzerindeki etkilerine dikkat çekmektedir. Bulgular, tarihsel miras ile çağdaş güç politikaları arasındaki etkileşimi öne çıkararak, Kırım sorununun Avrasya bölgesi ve ötesi için daha geniş etkilerine dair içgörüler sunmaktadır.
Anahtar Kelimeler: Kırım, Yeni-Avrasyacılık, Jeopolitik

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GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Literatür taraması

Bu çalışma, Kırım'ın 2014 yılında Rusya tarafından ilhak edilmesinin arkasındaki jeopolitik, tarihsel ve ideolojik dinamikleri çok boyutlu bir perspektiften incelemektedir. Literatürde Kırım, tarih boyunca büyük güçlerin rekabet alanı olmuş ve özellikle Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasının ardından Avrasya coğrafyasındaki en kırılgan ve stratejik bölgelerden biri olarak öne çıkmıştır. Kırım'ın sahip olduğu jeostratejik konum, onu yalnızca bölgesel değil, aynı zamanda küresel güç dengeleri açısından da kritik bir noktaya taşımaktadır.

Bu bağlamda Yeni-Avrasyacılık ideolojisi, Rusya'nın dış politikasını anlamada temel teorik araçlardan biri olarak değerlendirilmektedir. 1990'lı yıllarda Sovyet sonrası kimlik ve yön arayışı içinde şekillenen bu yaklaşım, Rusya'nın Avrasya coğrafyasında doğal bir hegemon güç olduğu tezine dayanmaktadır. Aleksandr Dugin'in öncülüğünde geliştirilen jeopolitik Avrasyacılık, Rusya'nın Batı karşısında alternatif bir medeniyet ve güç merkezi oluşturması gerektiğini savunmaktadır. Buna paralel olarak Aleksandr Panarin'in temsil ettiği kültürel Avrasyacılık ise dini ve kültürel unsurlar üzerinden Avrasya bütünleşmesini öne çıkarmaktadır.

Literatürde ayrıca Kırım'ın yalnızca ideolojik değil, tarihsel olarak da Rus kimliğinin bir parçası olarak inşa edildiği görülmektedir. Bu durum, ilhak sürecinde kullanılan söylemlerin ve meşrulaştırma stratejilerinin anlaşılması açısından önem taşımaktadır. Dolayısıyla çalışma, Kırım meselesini yalnızca bir toprak kazanımı olarak değil, ideolojik, tarihsel ve jeopolitik bir bütünlük içinde ele almaktadır. Bununla birlikte literatürde Kırım meselesi, yalnızca devletler arası güç mücadelesi çerçevesinde değil, aynı zamanda kimlik politikaları, tarihsel hafıza ve söylem inşası bağlamında da ele alınmaktadır. Özellikle Rusya'nın Kırım üzerindeki tarihsel hak iddialarını kültürel ve medeniyet temelli argümanlarla desteklemesi, ilhak sürecinin yalnızca jeopolitik değil, aynı zamanda ideolojik bir yeniden inşa süreci olduğunu göstermektedir. Bu yönüyle Kırım, maddi güç unsurlarının yanı sıra sembolik ve söylemsel güç mücadelelerinin de kesişim noktasında yer almaktadır.

Yöntem

Makale, nitel araştırma yöntemine dayalı olarak hazırlanmış olup doküman incelemesi tekniği kullanılmıştır. Çalışmada akademik literatür, resmi raporlar, uluslararası hukuk belgeleri, istatistiksel veriler ve medya kaynakları sistematik biçimde analiz edilmiştir. Ayrıca tarihsel süreç kronolojik olarak ele alınarak Kırım'ın jeopolitik öneminin nasıl şekillendiği ortaya konmuştur.

Araştırmada disiplinlerarası bir yaklaşım benimsenmiş; coğrafya, uluslararası ilişkiler, güvenlik çalışmaları ve ekonomi alanlarından yararlanılmıştır. Bunun yanında söylem analizi yöntemi ile Rusya'nın ilhak sürecinde kullandığı ideolojik ve politik argümanlar değerlendirilmiştir. Kırım'ın demografik yapısı, enerji kaynakları, askeri kapasitesi ve ulaşım ağları gibi unsurlar detaylandırılarak bölgenin stratejik önemi nesnel verilerle desteklenmiştir. Bu yöntemsel yaklaşım, ilhak sürecinin hem nedenlerini hem de sonuçlarını bütüncül bir şekilde analiz etmeye olanak sağlamıştır. Ayrıca çalışmada elde edilen bulguların geçerliliğini artırmak amacıyla farklı veri kaynakları arasında karşılaştırmalı analiz yapılmış ve çoklu veri doğrulama yaklaşımı benimsenmiştir. Bu sayede hem tarihsel anlatılar hem de güncel gelişmeler arasında tutarlılık sağlanarak analizlerin güvenilirliği güçlendirilmiştir.

Bulgular ve tartışma

Araştırma bulguları, Kırım'ın yalnızca coğrafi konumu nedeniyle değil, aynı zamanda enerji yolları, askeri üsleri, limanları ve etnik yapısıyla da son derece kritik bir stratejik değere sahip olduğunu göstermektedir. Karadeniz'e hâkim konumu ve özellikle Sivastopol Limanı, Rusya açısından hayati öneme sahiptir. Bu liman, Rusya'nın sıcak denizlere açılan en önemli kapılarından biri olup askeri ve ticari açıdan vazgeçilmezdir.

Kırım'ın enerji boyutu da dikkat çekicidir. Bölge hem hidrokarbon kaynakları hem de enerji nakil hatları açısından önemli bir merkez konumundadır. Avrupa'nın enerji güvenliği ile doğrudan ilişkili olan bu

durum, Kırım'ı küresel enerji politikalarının da merkezine yerleştirmektedir. Rusya'nın enerji kaynaklarını dış politika aracı olarak kullanması, Kırım'ın önemini daha da artırmaktadır.

Bulgular ayrıca Yeni-Avrasyacılığın öngördüğü jeopolitik vizyon ile Kırım'ın stratejik konumu arasında güçlü bir uyum olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Bu ideolojiye göre Ukrayna ve Kırım, Rusya'nın Avrasya'daki hâkimiyeti için kilit bölgelerdir. Bu çerçevede Kırım'ın ilhakı, yalnızca bir güvenlik hamlesi değil, aynı zamanda ideolojik bir hedefin gerçekleştirilmesi olarak değerlendirilebilir.

Kırım'daki etnik yapı da ilhak sürecinde önemli bir rol oynamıştır. Bölgede yaşayan Rus nüfus hem siyasi süreçlerde hem de referandum sürecinde meşrulaştırıcı bir unsur olarak kullanılmıştır. Ancak gerçekleştirilen referandumun uluslararası hukuk açısından tartışmalı olduğu ve demokratik standartları karşılamadığı bulgular arasında yer almaktadır.

Ayrıca çalışma, ilhak sürecinde kullanılan hibrit savaş yöntemlerine de dikkat çekmektedir. Askeri güç, siber operasyonlar, propaganda ve yerel aktörlerin mobilizasyonu birlikte kullanılarak klasik savaşın ötesinde çok katmanlı bir müdahale gerçekleştirilmiştir. Bu durum, modern çatışmaların doğasının değiştiğini ve savaş ile barış arasındaki sınırların bulanıklaştığını göstermektedir.

NATO'nun Karadeniz'de artan varlığı ve Ukrayna'nın Batı'ya yakınlaşması, Rusya'nın güvenlik algısını doğrudan etkilemiş ve ilhak sürecinin temel itici güçlerinden biri olmuştur. Bu bağlamda Kırım krizi, yalnızca bölgesel bir sorun olmaktan çıkarak küresel güç rekabetinin bir parçası haline gelmiştir. Bunun yanı sıra Kırım'ın ilhakı, Karadeniz'deki askeri dengeleri köklü biçimde değiştirmiş ve bölgenin hızla militarize olmasına yol açmıştır. Rusya'nın yarımadada askeri kapasitesini artırması, hava savunma sistemleri ve donanma unsurlarını güçlendirmesi, Karadeniz'i stratejik bir rekabet alanına dönüştürmüştür. Bu durum, bölge ülkelerinin güvenlik politikalarını yeniden şekillendirmesine neden olmuş ve Karadeniz'in uluslararası güvenlik gündemindeki önemini daha da artırmıştır.

Sonuç ve öneriler

Sonuç olarak, Kırım'ın ilhakı Rusya'nın Yeni-Avrasyacı stratejisinin somut bir yansımasıdır. Bu süreç, uluslararası sistemde jeopolitik çıkarların çoğu zaman hukuki normların önüne geçtiğini açıkça göstermektedir. Kırım, Rusya için yalnızca bir toprak parçası değil, aynı zamanda stratejik, ideolojik ve sembolik bir değere sahiptir.

İlhakın ardından ortaya çıkan gelişmeler, uluslararası hukuk sisteminin etkinliğinin sorgulanmasına neden olmuş ve büyük güçlerin tek taraflı müdahalelerinin önünü açabilecek bir emsal oluşturmuştur. Bu durum, küresel güvenlik mimarisinde önemli kırılmalara yol açmıştır.

Çalışma, gelecekte benzer krizlerin önlenebilmesi için uluslararası toplumun daha etkin mekanizmalar geliştirmesi gerektiğini vurgulamaktadır. Özellikle yaptırımların caydırıcılığının artırılması, uluslararası hukukun güçlendirilmesi ve çok taraflı diplomatik girişimlerin desteklenmesi önem arz etmektedir. Ayrıca Kırım meselesinin çözümünde yalnızca güvenlik odaklı yaklaşımlar değil, aynı zamanda bölgenin tarihsel, kültürel ve demografik yapısını dikkate alan kapsayıcı politikalar geliştirilmelidir. Uzun vadeli istikrarın sağlanabilmesi için diyalog ve diplomasi temelinde çok taraflı bir çözüm süreci oluşturulması gerekmektedir.

Sonuç olarak Kırım, günümüz uluslararası ilişkilerinde jeopolitik rekabetin, ideolojik yönelimlerin ve modern savaş tekniklerinin kesişim noktasını temsil etmektedir. Bu yönüyle yalnızca geçmişin değil, geleceğin de önemli bir çatışma alanı olma potansiyelini taşımaktadır. Bu bağlamda Kırım örneği, uluslararası sistemde güç, meşruiyet ve egemenlik kavramlarının yeniden tartışılmasına neden olmakta; klasik uluslararası ilişkiler teorilerinin günümüz gerçekliklerini açıklamada yetersiz kalabildiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Dolayısıyla Kırım meselesi, sadece bölgesel bir kriz olarak değil, aynı zamanda uluslararası düzenin dönüşümünü anlamak açısından da önemli bir vaka olarak değerlendirilmektedir.

Introduction

Crimea has historically been a region that has attracted the attention of great powers due to its strategic importance, geographical location and valuable resources. Located in the north of the Black Sea, this peninsula is particularly notable for its strategic ports such as Sevastopol and its military infrastructure. The geopolitical value of the region has led to it playing a central role in the conflicts of interest of global and regional powers. Its annexation by Russia in 2014 can be considered a current reflection of this historical process. However, this change in Crimea's status, which has been the subject of discussions in the international arena, has been influenced not only by geopolitical elements but also by Russia's foreign policy and ideological approaches. Russia's foreign policy has been shaped within the framework of the Neo-Eurasianism theory, especially in recent years. This theory expresses a strategic approach that sees the Eurasian geography as Russia's natural sphere of influence and aims to create a balance against the West in this context. Neo-Eurasianism not only provided an ideological basis for the annexation of Crimea, but also paved the way for Russia's efforts to legitimize this move. However, it is not enough to explain the annexation of Crimea only from the perspective of Neo-Eurasianism. The geopolitical dynamics of the region necessitate a multi-layered approach to this process.

The geopolitical importance of Crimea is a critical element not only for Russia but also for other actors in the Black Sea and its surroundings. The region is located at a key point in terms of energy transportation, military strategy and trade routes. This has led to Crimea being an area of instability and competition throughout history.

In this study, the place of Crimea in Russia's foreign policy and the theoretical background of the annexation process will be discussed in the context of its geopolitical importance. First, an analysis of Russia's Crimea policy will be made within the framework of Neo-Eurasianism and geopolitics. Then, the basic geopolitical data of Crimea will be evaluated and the geopolitical importance of the region will be detailed. Finally, the regional and international consequences of the annexation of Crimea will be examined and the effects of this process on global security and diplomacy will be discussed. In this context, the study aims to present a comprehensive assessment by bringing together the historical dynamics and current strategic position of Crimea.

Literature review

Neo-Eurasianism

In the 1990s, an atmosphere of chaos prevailed in Russia from politics to economy, from government to ideology. Neo-Eurasianism, which emerged with the revival of the Eurasianist ideology during this period, is important both for explaining the collapse of the USSR and for resolving the chaos that Russia is in. Geopolitics is at the forefront in the Neo-Eurasianist approach (Sönmez, 2010: 84). After the collapse of the USSR, the Russian Federation began to seek a different foreign policy in the new international system that emerged (Laruelle, 2008: 1). Neo-Eurasianism, on the other hand, is important not only for filling the gaps in ideological but also in economic, cultural and political areas, especially in foreign policy.

The two important trends of the Neo-Eurasianist ideology can be classified as the cultural trend pioneered by Aleksandr Panarin and the geopolitical trend pioneered by Aleksandr Dugin. One branch of the Neo-Eurasianist approach is the Cultural Trend, which examines the cultural dimension. The main representative of the movement is Aleksandr Panarin. Panarin sees Eurasianism as a solution for post-Soviet Russia. According to Panarin, only cultural and religious values determine the fate of the people. Panarin argues that Russia can achieve this by closing itself off to the West. In addition, he continues to believe that Russia is a Slavic-Turkish synthesis. According to Panarin, Russian Orthodoxy and Islam are the elements that will unite Eurasia (Laruelle, 2008: 123-124). All these historical, geographical, religious and cultural identities constitute the civilization specific to Eurasia (Imanov, 2008: 217-218). Based on this idea, Panarin argues that Pan-Turkism is also a threat and that the way for the Turkic world to gain universal value is through unification with the Russian world (Laruelle, 2008: 124).

The geopolitical perspective of the Neo-Eurasianist approach was addressed by Aleksandr Dugin, one of the most important representatives of Neo-Eurasianist thought and the Chairman of the Eurasian

Movement headquartered in Moscow. Dugin addressed Neo-Eurasianism with its geopolitical dimension and presented his approach in his books.

Background of Russian expansionism

After the collapse of the Soviets, the ideology of Eurasianism, Neo-Eurasianism, came to the fore again not only as an ideological phenomenon but also as a political and foreign policy perspective. Stankevich, Foreign Policy Advisor to the President of the Russian Federation Boris Yeltsin, brought the concept of Eurasianism back to the agenda in Russia in 1992 (Yılmaz, 2015: 113). Neo-Eurasianism, which, like classical Eurasianism, takes Russia as its center, has placed it in Russian foreign policy and international relations system as a phenomenon and theoretical structure.

Neo-Eurasianists argue that the West is trying to fill the geopolitical vacuum in the international system created by the collapse of the Soviets. It has been demonstrated that this situation can only be eliminated by implementing Eurasianist thought, and that if this is not possible, it poses a great threat to the Eurasian geography. Neo-Eurasianism, which continues the spiritual side of classical Eurasianist thought, has set aside the left-right distinction and adopted a common third way.

In the post-Soviet period, Neo-Eurasianists were disturbed by the current economic situation in the international system. The perspective of Neo-Eurasianism in the field of economy is just like its perspective in the cultural field. It sees the solution of moving away from the West. In this process, with the economic development of Asia, Russia aims to open up to the world market through this region. The movement, which first manifested itself in the field of economy, emerged as an economic model that adopted neither liberal nor Marxist economy. In this economic model, the economy will be based on spiritual values, a customs union will be established in Eurasia, and the economic system will be shaped by organically combining the market structure with social, national and cultural traditions. This economic model put forward by the Eurasianist approach emphasizes the existence of the state for society and its social structure.

Neo-Eurasianists propose the establishment of a Eurasian Union not only in economic terms but also to create a supranational political area. It is claimed that everyone can freely practice their religious beliefs and culture in a political structure consisting of Slavic, Turkish and Finnish ethnic roots and representing a larger Russia. It is said that the Eurasian Federation, with Russia as the leading country, will be founded on spiritual values and that these spiritual values will rise on the basis of a common geography and political culture as well as the dialogue between Orthodox Christianity and Islam.

Neo-Eurasianists, like Classical Eurasianists, emphasize that they do not have the same social and political past as the West and propose an integration around the Eurasian identity. This integration idea starts from the common characteristics among the Eurasian peoples, taking into account the unique conditions of Eurasia, and aims to create a Eurasian nation with a sense of us.

The geopolitical nature of Russian civilization is Eurasianism (Dugin, 2003: 15). Based on this idea, the conceptual framework is formed by Eurasianism and the geopolitical thought underlying it. In the Geopolitics section, which is based on the dualism of land and sea, theories of sovereignty are included and the importance of Eurasia is explained. It is emphasized that one of Russia's geopolitical goals is the recovery of the empire, with the idea that Russia will either become a great Eurasian continental empire or it will never exist (Dugin, 2003: 15). In this context, Russia must first establish control over Eurasia, the geographical axis of history. In order to ensure geopolitical and strategic superiority, priority is given to regaining the immediate environment. While the land dominance dimension of the neo-Eurasianist thought is shaped by the immediate environment; the maritime dominance dimension should be completed by access to the cold seas of the north and east and by any means to the warm seas of the south and west. It was shaped with the idea that only in this case can Russia be geopolitically competent (Dugin, 2003: 13). According to Neo-Eurasianism, there should be a geographical and strategic unity in Eurasia and Russia and the Russian people should be at the center of this unity. Because the Russians' civilization mission, universal ideals, and historical nation and statehood are compatible with this

mission (Dugin, 2003: 54). In line with this goal, Ukraine, Russia's gateway to the West, and Crimea, its gateway to the Black Sea, are of critical importance.

Crimea has fertile lands, rich natural gas and oil resources, and biological diversity. It also has functional ports, business facilities, and cheap labor to operate all of these (Kelkitli, 2014: 300). When evaluated as a whole, Crimea is of critical importance for both Russia and the West due to its geopolitical location. The Crimean peninsula, which we can describe as Ukraine's gateway to the Black Sea, is also of critical importance for Ukraine. Throughout history, Crimea's location has been privileged compared to other places in the region.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design based on document analysis. It examines primary and secondary sources, including official reports, academic literature, media coverage, demographic data, and geopolitical assessments. A historical-analytical approach is employed to trace the ideological development of Neo-Eurasianism and its influence on Russian foreign policy. The geopolitical significance of Crimea is analyzed through a multidisciplinary lens, incorporating geography, economics, military strategy, and international relations. This method enables a comprehensive understanding of the annexation process and its broader regional implications.

Findings and discussion

Geopolitical importance of Crimea

Crimea, which is part of Ukraine and whose full name is the Autonomous Republic of Crimea (Constitution of Ukraine, 1996), is a peninsula with an area of approximately 26100 km², with an east-west axis of approximately 320 km and a north-south axis of approximately 200 km. According to 2013 data, the population of Crimea is 1.9 million people (Council of Ministers of Crimea, 2013). After the Russian annexation, the population in 2022 published by Russia is 1 million 893 thousand (Federation Council, n.d.).

According to the 2001 Ukrainian census; in Crimea, 58,5% of the population consists of Russians, 24,4% of Ukrainians, and 12,1% of Crimean Tatars (State Statistics Committee of Ukraine, n.d.). According to the data published by the Russian Federation Council, based on the 2014 census conducted after the annexation by Russia, the Russian rate is 65,2%, Ukrainians 15,99%, and Crimean Tatars 12,59% (Crimean Federal District Census, 2014). According to the 2001 census, 10,1% of the Crimean population speaks Ukrainian, 77% Russian, and 11,4% Tatar as their mother tongue (State Statistics Committee of Ukraine, bt.b). The ethnic structure of Crimea has also undergone a transformation throughout history due to various interventions by Russia and forced migrations.

The Crimean peninsula is the key point of Eurasia with its strategic location and favorable climate. Crimea takes its name from the capital of the Crimean province of the Golden Horde State. Located in the south of Ukraine and the southwest of Russia, Crimea is surrounded by the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. It is connected to the Kherson Oblast by the Perekop Isthmus and separated from the Kuban by the Kerch Strait. It has a coastline of approximately 1000 km and an indented structure with gulfs, bays and capes (DİA, 2022: 447). For this reason, it has many ports and piers, and this natural structure gives a strategic meaning to sea transportation (Sarıkaya, 2014: 103).

There are two different climate types on the peninsula. While the northern parts are dominated by a continental climate, the southern parts have a Mediterranean climate. Autumn is rainy and winters are cold. Towards the north, the vegetation is barren steppes with gentle undulations, rising to 1500 meters (DİA, 2022: 447). In the south, it has thorny shrubs and steep slopes on the southern slopes, descending to rocky bays. In terms of climate and vegetation, it is suitable for cattle, sheep and livestock farming. Lands suitable for growing sunflowers, corn and wheat are located in the northern part of Crimea. We can divide the Crimean geography into two as the Eurasian steppes in the north and the mountainous, Mediterranean-like area in the south, which has a richer vegetation. Water is of great importance in Crimea both economically and strategically; The man-made North Crimean Canal carries water from the Dnieper River to the peninsula, and with this water, 50% of agricultural production and 80% of the

water needs of large cities such as Simferopol and Sevastopol are met (Kurt, 2012: 72-73). It also has rich underground resources such as iron and limestone mineral deposits and salt sources (Akman, 2014: 69).

The region, which has many geographical advantages, is also of critical importance in the military and energy fields. The peninsula, which hosted the armed forces during the Soviet period, is in a unique strategic position in terms of both naval and air deployment. Due to its location, Crimea dominates the conflict areas in the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Eastern Mediterranean and is at a point where it can easily reach and control these areas. This situation is a significant advantage for Crimea. Until the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Black Sea Fleet os USSR was stationed in the port of Sevastopol. With Ukraine gaining independence in 1991, Crimea and the Black Sea Fleet remained within the borders of Ukraine. Thus, Russia lost its dominance and reputation in the region. In this context, the navy in Sevastopol is important for Russia not only in terms of military but also in terms of the prestige and symbolism it carries. The problems of the Russian Black Sea Fleet and the status of the Russian base in Sevastopol have become critical issues between the two countries. With the Ukraine-Russia Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership Agreement signed in 1997, it was accepted that Crimea was under Ukrainian sovereignty and it was decided that the Russian fleet would stay in Sevastopol until 2017. Thus, the status maintained its current status until the annexation of Crimea.

In terms of energy, Crimea is of critical importance both because it has significant amounts of oil and natural gas in its territorial waters and because it has important energy corridors. For an energy state like Russia, the capacity of Crimea's reserves and energy corridors are more of interest than their energy resources. Russia, which uses energy as a foreign policy tool with the Putin administration, poses a threat to the EU's energy security. The crisis between Russia and Ukraine in 2006 and Russia's gas cut-off are proof of this. The fact that 30% of the natural gas used by the EU in 2013 was supplied by Gazprom and 50% of this amount was transferred through Ukraine reveals the EU's energy dependence on Russia. In contrast, the South Stream Project, which the EU initiated to ensure its own energy security, will start from the city of Anapa on the Black Sea coast of Russia, pass through Türkiye's exclusive economic zone in the Black Sea, and will provide energy transfer by landing near the city of Varna in Bulgaria (Özmen, 2014: 774). The project was not welcomed warmly due to both its high cost and its potential for environmental danger. While the project would both reduce costs and eliminate environmental risks by passing through Crimea, it became a project that Russia wanted to realize after the annexation of Crimea. In this context, the annexation of Crimea brought positive developments for Russia in terms of energy policies.

The region, which has many geographical advantages, has been the target of empires and great powers throughout history. The geopolitical value of a geography is measured by the suitability of land and sea structures for political, economic and military purposes. From this perspective, the Crimean peninsula is the key point of the Black Sea, which is considered the most important inland sea of Eurasia.

Geopolitical importance of Crimea annexation of Crimea and the geopolitical basis of annexation

The starting point of the annexation of Crimea dates back to February 27, 2014, when the actual occupation took place (İmanbeyli, 2014: 4-5). The political crisis in Ukraine spread to Crimea, where pro-Russian Ukrainian demonstrators occupied the Crimean Parliament building and hung Russian flags (Yıldırım, 2020: 404). Putin, who strongly opposed the new presidential elections, sent troops to the Crimean peninsula on the same day. On February 28, Russian soldiers occupied the Crimean Airport, and these troops ensured that a referendum decision was made on May 25 to strengthen the existing autonomy status. This occupation, carried out under the pretext of protecting the rights of Russian ethnicity, escalated the crisis and turned the problems within the country into a global crisis. Following the occupation of Crimea by Russia, a referendum was held in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea on March 16, 2014 regarding its future.

In an effort to legitimize Russia's illegitimate annexation, it was suggested that a referendum would be held in Crimea to preserve its autonomy. However, the subject and questions of the referendum were later changed to "Do you agree to be annexed to Russia?" and "Do you agree to the 1992 Crimean

Constitution being reinstated and Crimea becoming part of Ukraine?", thus bringing the annexation of Crimea to Russia onto the agenda. Following the escalation of events in Crimea, the Crimean Parliament brought the date of the referendum forward to March 16. In the referendum held in Crimea on March 16, there was an 83% turnout, and a 93% vote rate was an indication that Ukraine's rights over Crimea had ended. The day after the referendum, which was concluded against Ukraine, Russia declared Crimea's independence on March 17. On March 18, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed the agreement that would annex Crimea to Russia (Taşdemir & Özer, 2015: 51). Thus, Crimea joined Russia. The Russian Federation announced that Crimea was a part of its country as a result of this referendum. Although the Western bloc considered this situation illegal, the Republic of Crimea and the federal cities of Sevastopol were incorporated into the Russian Federation (Sönmez et al., 2015: 663).

Since the Crimean peninsula has no land connection to Russia and does not have sufficient infrastructure services, electricity, water, natural gas and other infrastructure services were provided via Ukraine. However, in the post-annexation period, it became necessary to establish a land connection with Russia in order to completely take control of Crimea. Construction of the Kerch Bridge, which will provide a land connection with Russia over the Kerch Strait, began in 2015 and the bridge was opened for use in May 2018. The 19-kilometer-long bridge, whose construction purpose is to improve Crimea's infrastructure and make the region more accessible, not only connects Crimea to the Russian mainland, but also strengthens the connection between the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, affecting maritime traffic in the region. While facilitating Russia's control of Crimea, it also increases its geopolitical influence on the Black Sea. In addition, it enables Crimea to become an important military base and the safe transportation of military personnel and materials. Another important point of the bridge is that it has become a symbol that reinforces Russia's presence in the region in an environment where the West does not recognize annexation.

In the West-East competition, Russia's response was to annex Crimea, and in this context, Ukraine had to pay the price of geopolitical competition by compromising its sovereignty. This situation increased Russia's influence over Ukraine and reshaped the geopolitical balances in the region; it also led to a serious crisis in the international community. Although Crimea was an autonomous republic, it remained under Russian influence and faced threats to its independence and security due to its important geopolitical location in the Black Sea. Putin, who effectively used historical and cultural ties, adopted a policy of divide and rule against Ukraine (Demir, 2014: 171-172). In this process, Crimea first became independent from Ukraine and then joined Russia.

Even seven years before the annexation of Crimea, publications on the region spoke of Russian-Ukrainian disputes over Crimea, Sevastopol and the Russian Black Sea Fleet, and of ethnic problems in Crimea between Russians, Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars. Researchers agreed that Crimea was one of the potential conflict zones in the post-Soviet empire geography, comparable to Transnistria, Abkhazia and Chechnya (Sasse, 2007: 32).

Chechen leader Dudayev, who rose to the rank of general in the Soviet Union and had great experience in the functioning of the Russian state, made a prediction much earlier, in 1995, saying that one day Ukraine and Russia would fight and that this conflict would begin over Crimea (Erlanger, 1994). He claimed that this would happen because of "Russian nationalism", which was attacking Chechnya at that time but was clearly insatiable, and that it would use the mask of Pan-Slavism as before (Mepanews, 2022).

When we look at the very beginning of the chain of events that Dudayev successfully predicted nearly 30 years ago and that grew up by first ending with the annexation of Crimea, the close relevance of the subject to this study becomes clear. First of all, the political career of the then Ukrainian leader Yanukovych, who fled to Russia due to the dangerous escalation of the Maidan Protests, began in the Donbas region, where the Russian population is densely populated. Serving as the governor of Donetsk between 1997 and 2002, Yanukovych rose to an important leadership position in the region (Imanbeyli, 2014: 3). As a result of the demonstrations that began against the pro-Russian policies implemented by Yanukovych during his presidency of Ukraine, Russia's intervention in Crimea took place just 2 days

after he fled to Russia on February 22, 2014 (Imanbeyli, 2014: 2). Because Russia, which constantly complains about the West's interventions in regional politics, sees this Revolution of Honor, which is an extension of the colored revolutions that caused great discomfort in Russia about being supported by the West, as the reason for the overthrow of the pro-Russian leader. The first step in the crossroads between Ukraine and Russia, the Crimean military intervention, is also important both because the Russian population is quite dense in the region and because it has a very strategic port opening to the outside world (Sputnik, 2019). The fact that Russian ports can be blocked by Japan in the east, England and Iceland in the west, Denmark in the Baltic Sea and glaciers in the northeast increases the importance of the Crimean Sevastopol port, one of the two strategic ports in Ukraine, for Russia in terms of security (Bingöl, 2014: 23). When we look at the countries bordering the Black Sea; it can be estimated that Türkiye, Bulgaria and Romania are NATO members and that the Black Sea will almost turn into a NATO lake if Ukraine becomes a NATO member, will also make Russia very uncomfortable.

After the intervention, Russian leader Putin expressed his concerns about this issue by saying that if they had not intervened, NATO ships would have anchored in Sevastopol, a sacred port for Russia (BBC, 2014a). The phrase "sacred port" and the language used are important. Because it can be argued that a populist language designed on certain national, cultural and religious symbols was used to consolidate the Russians in Ukraine in this military intervention, which was said to be carried out to "protect the Russian population" in Crimea (Kalabalık, 2014). It has been observed that this language continued to be used after the annexation. In his article evaluating the annexation of Crimea as Russia's reunification with Crimea, Istanbul Deputy Consul General Evdokimov evaluated the annexation as "Crimea's homecoming" (Sputnik, 2014). After the annexation, Putin stated that "Crimea is historically Russian territory" and added the statement that "this highly strategic region can only remain under the sustainable sovereignty of Russia", thus clearly summarizing Russia's realistic geopolitical codes (AA, 2014b). For these reasons, the annexation of Crimea constitutes one of the clearest examples of geopolitical codes and imperial vision.

When evaluated in the context of the elections, it can be seen that the regions in Ukraine where the Russian population is densely populated played a major role in Yanukovych's election as president. Although Yanukovych, who was elected president of Ukraine in 2010, received 49% of the vote in the country, his vote rate exceeded 90% in the Donbas region, where Russians live densely, and was around 80% in Crimea (Reyhan, 2022). It is clear that the demographic power of Russians in Ukraine had an impact on the election of this candidate supported by Russia. These vote rates also reflect the East-West divide that is said to dominate Ukraine politically: the pro-Western nationalist West and the pro-Russian Russian-speaking separatist East (Sarıkaya, 2010: 5). The fact that Russia did not recognize the interim government formed after the overthrow of the pro-Russian leader, but the West supported it, is again a reflection of this political structure in Ukraine on regional and global international politics (Bingöl, 2014: 17). Russia has long tried to manipulate Ukrainian domestic politics, which is shaped on this fault line, and has used the Russian population in election processes. However, it was found unacceptable for Russia to have Crimea and its "holy" ports remain in a Ukraine that had turned its face completely to the West with a revolution led by the West. Thereupon, it mobilized the Russians as a means of direct intervention in this incident.

In the developments leading to the annexation of Crimea, the demonstrations held with Russian flags in Crimea, the counter-demonstrations organized by the Crimean Tatars, the escalation of the events, the news in the Russian media that fascist groups would come to Crimea by train and engage in ethnic cleansing against the Russians, and the subsequent entry of Russian soldiers into Crimea (Kalabalık, 2014) were important events, but the establishment of an armed militia force of 3,500 people by the leader of the Crimean Russian Unity Party, Aksyonov (İmanbeyli, 2014: 5), known for his extreme Russophile views (AA, 2021a) is considered the most important evidence that the Russians here have become a direct means of intervention. One of the cornerstones of the process is the parliament raid by these militias. While supporters of annexation to Russia put pressure on the parliament, on February 25, around four hundred pro-Russian groups stormed the parliament and called for a referendum on independence. When it was rumored that the Crimean Tatar National Assembly would also hold a rally, Aksyonov's militia blockaded the parliament building (AA, 2021a). The armed forces that suddenly

appeared during the process, with no markings on their uniforms, were called “green men” and seized the Crimean Parliament and government buildings. The Crimean Parliament made the referendum decision that resulted in the annexation of Crimea to Russia in this way under the shadow of weapons (AA, 2021a). In the referendum, which also took place under the shadow of weapons, the decision was made to annex Russia with the power of the Russian population in the region. In the referendum held on March 16, 2014 (Gamsız and Gürson, 2022: 83), the decision was approved with an extremely high approval rate of 93%, while the Crimean Tatars boycotted the referendum, while the UN Security Council’s decision to deem the referendum illegitimate was vetoed by Russia (BBC, 2014b). 1 million 200 thousand voters participated in the referendum, which was monitored by 135 observers from 23 countries (AA, 2014c), and the participation rate was 81 percent (CNN Türk, 2014).

The West, especially the European Union, reacted against the annexation; Ukraine, the United Nations and Western countries condemned the situation and described it as contrary to international law (DW, 2015), and Russia faced a series of accusations and sanctions, such as arming rebels in Crimea and eastern Ukraine, organizing an artificial referendum in Crimea, instigating an uprising against the Ukrainian state, and the presence of armed special forces affiliated with Russia on the territory of independent states (İlbasmış, 2018: 92). While the EU imposed various political and economic sanctions, NATO also suspended military cooperation with Russia, but these weak sanctions were not enough for Russia to make any changes in its Crimea policies (Öztopal, 2018: 129).

In the periods when Russia became stronger, it was not the first time that the Western-Russian geopolitical competition turned into a conflict over Crimea. The anti-Russian alliance, which did not want Russia to become too strong in the war it waged against the Ottomans, surrounded Russia from all sides, British ships appeared even in Kamchatka, the British and the French entered the Baltic Sea, and they carried out the main operation over Crimea, which they saw as a highly strategic region. Because the main base of the Russian Black Sea fleet is the Sevastopol port, and the capture of this place is so valuable that it could paralyze Russia militarily (Kurat, 1987: 328-229). This is also the reason behind Russian Federation leader Putin’s attribution of holiness to this place.

Leaving geopolitical concepts aside for a moment and looking at the issue from a pure realpolitik perspective, we can clearly see that the crisis began, escalated and turned into a conflict immediately after Russia’s need for the ports in Crimea, where its Black Sea fleet is hosted, and the lease agreement it had signed with Ukraine based on this was jeopardized. During both the Tsarist and USSR periods, the Russian Black Sea fleet was hosted at the Sevastopol port (Sönmez et al., 2015: 666) and this situation did not change during the Russian Federation period. Although the pro-Western governments that came to power in Ukraine with the Orange Revolution of 2004 wanted to send foreign military assets, namely the Russian navy, to the country in order to get closer to NATO and the fact that the lease agreement with Russia was set to expire in 2017 worried the Russians, Ukrainian President Yanukovych, who came to power in 2010, signed an agreement paving the way for extending the agreement until 2042. The agreement also included incentives such as the Russians providing natural gas to Ukraine at a 30% discount (Berktay, 2010). Yanukovych’s call for asylum in Russia due to the lack of security of life following anti-government demonstrations and incidents in the country was met with a positive response by the Kremlin administration. Immediately afterwards, Russian leader Putin said that he wanted to check the readiness level of the army and first mobilized 150,000 soldiers, 880 tanks, over 120 helicopters, 90 fighter jets and 1200 military vehicles. Although Russian Defense Minister Shoygu claimed that this had no connection with the situation in Ukraine, the Crimea intervention was subsequently carried out (AA, 2014a). The soldiers in Russia’s Sevastopol base also played a role in the successful and bloodless intervention (Koçak, 2015: 15).

There is also a group that thinks that the Crimean intervention occurred as a result of the West not giving sufficient response to Russia’s attempts against the color revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, which were claimed to have been carried out under Western influence. Accordingly, the process was marked by the closure of US bases in Uzbekistan after the suppression of the Andijan incidents in 2005 in Uzbekistan, which was supported by the West, and the lack of a necessary response to Russia’s military intervention in Georgia and its gains (Sönmez et al., 2015: 657) encouraged Russia

to raise its hand and intervene in Crimea (Citak & Harris, 2018). With the Ossetia intervention, the Russians realized that they could now violate international law, occupy other countries and not receive a reaction. The West did not give the necessary reaction to the Crimea intervention, except for some sanctions. The Sudetenland crisis and the international community's failure to react due to appeasement policies (Hobsbawm, 2006: 235) also paved the way for Hitler's Germany to swallow the whole of Czechoslovakia. The most important common point of these two events, which can be compared in many ways, is that both annexations are presented as an effort to provide protection for the compatriots living in the region and the people who speak the same language.

The Crimean geography, which was associated with the Crimean Tatars in the past, was gradually cleansed of Tatars through policies of de-Tatarization that included methods such as oppression, forced migration, artificial famines, conflicts, exiles, and executions, while its demographic structure was changed by Russifying it through settlers sent to the region. The masses that constitute the Russian diaspora in the region emerged as a result of these population policies. In other words, Crimea is not a historical Russian homeland as Putin claims, it has been Russified. As Russian politicians sometimes say, it is indispensable for Russia due to its extremely important geopolitical location and the ports it hosts, which open up to the world and hosts the Black Sea Fleet.

Hybrid warfare and the Crimean conflict

The annexation of Crimea in 2014 marked one of the most vivid examples of hybrid warfare in the post-Cold War era. Following the Russian Federation's occupation of the peninsula, analysts began to interpret the event not merely as a geopolitical maneuver but as a complex fusion of conventional, cyber, and informational warfare. The Crimean operation demonstrated Russia's ability to employ a multi-layered strategy combining psychological manipulation, cyber disruption, and military coercion without overtly declaring war (Görgen, 2022: 287). This reflected the evolution of Russian military doctrine, which blurs the lines between peace and conflict by emphasizing non-linear engagements designed to achieve strategic objectives through ambiguity.

The notion of hybrid warfare gained significant traction in security studies after the annexation of Crimea, as the Ukrainian conflict introduced a new dimension of warfare that integrated disinformation campaigns, economic pressure, cyber operations, and the mobilization of unmarked forces, often referred to as "little green men" (Demedziuk, 2017: 94-95). These methods allowed Russia to achieve decisive results with minimal conventional confrontation, demonstrating a strategic innovation that challenged existing NATO and EU deterrence models. Hybrid warfare in this sense enabled Russia to conceal direct aggression under the guise of local insurgency and civilian unrest, exploiting the confusion created by overlapping political, social, and technological domains.

Cyber operations constituted one of the most significant aspects of Russia's hybrid campaign. During the annexation, digital attacks targeted Ukrainian communication systems, disrupted government coordination, and simultaneously promoted pro-Russian narratives across digital media (Willett, 2022: 8). These operations not only destabilized Ukraine's decision-making mechanisms but also eroded public confidence in Western media and institutions. The expansion of conflict into cyberspace redefined the battlefield as a twenty-four-hour information struggle, where control over perception became as vital as control over territory (Willett, 2022: 18).

The Crimean operation also illustrated the synchronization of kinetic and non-kinetic instruments within a unified strategic framework. The conflict revealed how political manipulation, disinformation, and economic coercion could operate alongside limited but precise military interventions to reshape the regional balance of power (Anbarlı Bozatay, 2025: 345-346). Through such methods, Russia was able to project influence while maintaining plausible deniability and avoiding direct confrontation with international law (Anbarlı Bozatay, 2025: 349). The hybrid structure of the Crimean campaign thus became a model for Russia's subsequent operations in Eastern Ukraine and other regions, reflecting a systematic rather than improvisational approach.

Hybrid warfare in Crimea cannot be examined separately from the peninsula's historical and geopolitical context. Russia's hybrid strategy drew upon pre-existing sociocultural networks and divisions within Crimea, exploiting ethnic fault lines and mobilizing local pro-Russian elites to legitimize intervention (Aydın Bezikoğlu, 2022: 214). This combination of social engineering and military precision transformed Crimea into a testing ground for integrating hard and soft power instruments, revealing Moscow's capacity to wage war through social polarization and digital influence as effectively as through traditional military means.

Ultimately, the Crimean crisis illustrates that Russia's hybrid warfare strategy was not an ad hoc reaction to geopolitical pressures but rather a coherent doctrine rooted in its broader Neo-Eurasianist worldview. Hybrid warfare served as the operational expression of Russia's ideological objective to restore influence across its perceived historical sphere. The annexation thus functioned as both a geopolitical act and an ideological Project, one that merged classical expansionism with twenty-first-century cognitive and informational techniques (Görgen, 2022: 295). Understanding Crimea through this hybrid framework enriches the study of modern geopolitics by demonstrating how contemporary conflicts increasingly blur the boundaries between military, political, and technological domains.

Regional and contemporary effects of the Crimean annexation

More than a decade has passed since the annexation of Crimea, yet the impact of the event continues to resonate across regional and international arenas. One of the most immediate regional consequences has been the transformation of trade flows and economic linkages in the Black Sea and Eurasian settings. A recent structural-gravity approach studying agricultural trade shows that following the annexation the trade patterns of both Ukraine and Russia were altered significantly, and sanctions further deepened these changes (Dadakas et al., 2025:1-3). These findings imply that the annexation's effects are far from being a static historical event; they are embedded in ongoing economic shifts that affect export dependencies, value-chain configurations and regional trade resilience.

Beyond economic dimensions, the strategic and geopolitical ripple effects have been profound. The contestation of control over Crimea has reinforced a broader sense of great-power rivalry in Eurasia and revived border revisionist logics that many believed dormant after the Cold War (Marxsen, 2016: 13-15). Moreover, Russia's invocation of identity, security and historical narratives in the annexation process illustrates how the peninsula was used as a strategic lever to redefine the country's role in the region and its relation to the West (Hirano, 2024: 16-20). Together, these shifts demonstrate that annexation is not just an act of territorial change, but a mechanism for recalibrating regional power balances.

In addition, the concept of hybrid warfare remains central when assessing the contemporary ramifications of Crimea's status. Recent scholarship argues that although the character of Russia's conflict operations has evolved, many of the features associated with hybrid strategies, ambiguity, cyber operations, information warfare, continue to inform Moscow's posture toward Ukraine and beyond (Person et al., 2024: 1753-1755). Accordingly, the Crimean event serves as both a precedent and a continuing reference point for how regional actors interpret and respond to Russia's strategic tool-kit, which means the region remains in effect a future-oriented zone of observation and concern.

On the human-security and normative front, the enduring consequences are equally noteworthy. The annexation has triggered persistent challenges for international legal order, human rights practice and the regional security architecture. For instance, the legitimacy of territorial acquisition by force remains contested, and states in the Black Sea region must now factor in the potential of similar dynamics occurring in other disputed zones (Dragiev, 2022: 8-10). At the same time, the Crimean case has led to a deeper entrenchment of defensive doctrines within neighbouring states, which are increasingly oriented toward counter-hybrid and resilience frameworks.

Finally, the need to update and situate the Crimean discussion in current terms becomes clear: the passage of more than ten years since 2014 requires scholarship to integrate not only the original act of annexation but also the long-term trajectories of regional integration, infrastructure development,

security posturing and economic adaptation. For example, ongoing infrastructure projects such as the bridge across the Kerch Strait and sustained Russian subsidies to the peninsula continue to shape Crimea's embeddedness in Russia's economy and its peripheral role in Ukraine's reconstruction planning (Pifer, 2020: 2-4). This long-term perspective helps to align the sections of the study in proportion and depth and ensures that the "regional effects" promised by the title are fully addressed.

Results and recommendations

Crimea's geopolitical and strategic significance cannot be overstated. Throughout history, this peninsula has been a focal point of regional and global power struggles due to its strategic location, natural resources, and military infrastructure. As an essential gateway to the Black Sea, Crimea serves as a critical asset for energy transportation, military operations, and trade routes. Its annexation by Russia in 2014 reflects not only historical continuity in the region's contested status but also the contemporary dynamics of global geopolitics.

The annexation of Crimea represents a manifestation of Russia's Neo-Eurasianist strategy, which views the Eurasian geography as its natural sphere of influence. This ideological framework has provided a basis for Russia to legitimize its actions and assert its dominance in the region. By prioritizing geopolitical unity and strategic control, Neo-Eurasianism has shaped Russia's foreign policy, particularly regarding its near abroad, as exemplified by the events in Crimea.

The annexation has had profound implications for international relations and global security. It has intensified tensions between Russia and Western powers, leading to sanctions, diplomatic rifts, and shifts in military strategies. Furthermore, it has highlighted the vulnerabilities of international law and norms in resolving territorial disputes and managing unilateral actions by major powers. The situation in Crimea underscores the enduring complexity of balancing regional interests with global stability.

In this context, the case of Crimea serves as a pivotal example of how historical legacies, geopolitical ambitions, and ideological frameworks converge to shape international politics. As the region remains a point of contention, the annexation of Crimea continues to influence the trajectory of global diplomacy, regional security, and the balance of power in Eurasia. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for comprehending the broader implications of the Crimea issue and its role in shaping the modern geopolitical landscape.

More than a decade after the annexation, Crimea stands as both a symbol and an instrument of Russia's evolving grand strategy. The event cannot be understood merely as a territorial acquisition, but rather as a crystallization of the Neo-Eurasianist worldview, an ideology that merges geopolitics with civilizational identity. Rooted in the belief that Russia must reclaim its historical sphere of influence and act as a continental counterweight to Western liberalism, Neo-Eurasianism provides the intellectual foundation for Moscow's post-2014 assertiveness. Crimea, within this framework, embodies the geographical heartland that anchors Russia's spiritual and strategic vision. The peninsula's "return" to Russian control thus became not only a geopolitical maneuver but a metaphysical affirmation of Eurasian unity and destiny.

At the same time, the Crimean operation demonstrated how Neo-Eurasianism has adapted to modern instruments of power. Rather than relying solely on classical hard power, Russia integrated the tenets of hybrid warfare into its ideological doctrine. The annexation unfolded through an intricate combination of military precision, informational manipulation, and political symbolism. Unmarked soldiers, digital propaganda, and orchestrated referenda blurred the line between war and peace, sovereignty and subversion. In this sense, hybrid warfare became the operational face of Neo-Eurasianism, a pragmatic method to achieve an ideological goal. The doctrine's emphasis on multipolarity and resistance to Western dominance found tangible expression in the use of non-linear, multidomain strategies that could bypass direct confrontation while reinforcing regional control.

Economically, this ideological-technological synthesis has reshaped Eurasia's balance. Sanctions and realignments since 2014 have accelerated the consolidation of alternative institutions such as the

Eurasian Economic Union and strengthened Russia's pursuit of autarky. Crimea, strategically positioned between Europe and Asia, has been used to project the vision of a self-reliant, sovereign Eurasian bloc capable of resisting Western economic leverage. Through infrastructure integration, symbolic investments, and energy logistics, Moscow has turned the peninsula into a platform for demonstrating Neo-Eurasianist resilience, a tangible geography of ideological resistance.

The hybrid dimension of this process also extends into the informational and cultural realms. Media narratives, education campaigns, and identity politics have reinforced the notion of Crimea as an inseparable part of the Russian "civilizational space." This effort to fuse identity with territory is central to the Neo-Eurasianist project: it transforms geopolitical expansion into a moral restoration and legitimizes power through historical and cultural continuity. By combining ideological conviction with modern instruments of influence, Russia has effectively hybridized its grand strategy, making Crimea both a physical bastion and a discursive weapon in its confrontation with the West.

The consequences of this synthesis are visible in the wider regional and global order. The annexation has inspired defensive recalibrations across Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, while simultaneously deepening Russia's integration with China, Central Asia, and parts of the Global South. The Crimean model, rooted in Neo-Eurasianist thought and executed through hybrid means, has become a template for Moscow's broader approach to power projection. It redefines conflict as an ongoing state of competition, waged through infrastructure, information, and ideology as much as through military force. This reflects a transformation in how Russia conceptualizes sovereignty: not merely as control over territory, but as control over meaning.

From a strategic standpoint, the Crimea question illustrates the merging of two paradigms, ideological geopolitics and technological warfare, into a coherent statecraft model. Neo-Eurasianism provides the narrative, the justification, and the historical mission; hybrid warfare delivers the tools and tactics to implement it in the twenty-first century. The annexation thus symbolizes a convergence of tradition and innovation in Russian foreign policy. It demonstrates how an old geopolitical idea can find new vitality in an age of information and cyber conflict, and how identity itself has become a battlefield.

Looking forward, any resolution of the Crimean issue must take into account both dimensions of this dual strategy. Diplomatic engagement that fails to recognize the ideological depth of Russia's motivations will remain ineffective, just as deterrence that ignores hybrid tactics will remain incomplete. A sustainable framework for stability in the Black Sea and Eurasia requires addressing not only material power but also the narratives that sustain it. The challenge is not solely to reverse the annexation, but to understand and counter the worldview that made it possible. Crimea, therefore, is not merely a past event, it is an evolving paradigm, where Neo-Eurasianism and hybrid warfare intersect to shape the future of regional and global order.

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Ethical approval

This study is among the studies that do not require ethics committee approval as it does not use surveys, interviews, focus group studies, observations, experiments, or interview techniques, does not use humans or animals (including material/data) for experimental or other scientific purposes, and is not within the scope of the personal data protection law.

Conflict of interest

There is no potential conflict of interest in this study.