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Research Article

Power, Discourse, and Governance: An Analysis of Türkiye's Long Horizon Integrated Maritime Surveillance System

Güç, Söylem ve Yönetişim: Türkiye'nin Uzun Ufuk Bütünleşik Deniz Gözetleme Sistemi'nin Analizi

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Abstract

This article challenges the paradigmatic exclusivity of analyses of contemporary security technologies within International Relations and Security Studies. It develops and applies an integrated theoretical framework—synthesizing realist, securitization, and critical security studies perspectives—to examine Türkiye's Long Horizon Integrated Maritime Surveillance System (LHIMSS). The study demonstrates that LHIMSS functions simultaneously as a realist instrument for asymmetric balancing, a securitized project legitimized by the Blue Homeland doctrine, and a critical governance vehicle that expands state control through a militarized "White Picture." By revealing the recursive interplay among material capabilities, discursive threat-making, and transformative governance, the integrated approach provides a holistic understanding of how middle powers navigate contested sovereignty and hybrid security. The findings challenge IR scholarship to abandon rigid theoretical compartments and develop multi-causal models that capture the material, discursive, and biopolitical dimensions of 21st-century security.

Keywords: Long Horizon, Maritime Surveillance, Maritime Security, Securitization, Critical Security Studies

Öz

Bu makale, Uluslararası İlişkiler ve Güvenlik Çalışmaları disiplinlerinde çağdaş güvenlik teknolojilerine ilişkin yapılan analizlerdeki paradigmatik tekeli sorgulamaktadır. Makale, realist, güvenlikleştirme ve eleştirel güvenlik çalışmaları perspektiflerini sentezleyen özgün bir bütünleşik teorik çerçeve geliştirmekte ve bunu Türkiye'nin Uzun Ufuk Entegre Deniz Gözetleme Sistemi'ni (Long Horizon Integrated Maritime Surveillance System-LHIMSS) analiz etmek için uygulamaktadır. Çalışma, LHIMSS'nin aynı anda hem asimetrik dengeleme için kullanılan realist bir araç, hem Mavi Vatan doktriniyle meşrulaştırılan güvenlikleştirilmiş bir proje, hem de askerîleştirilmiş bir "Beyaz Resim" aracılığıyla devlet kontrolünü genişleten eleştirel bir yönetişim aracı olarak işlev gördüğünü göstermektedir. Maddi kapasiteler, söylemsel tehdit inşası ve dönüştürücü yönetişim arasındaki döngüsel etkileşimi ortaya koyan bütünleşik yaklaşım, orta ölçekli güçlerin tartışmalı egemenlik ve hibrit güvenlik meselelerini nasıl ele aldığına dair bütüncül bir anlayış sunmaktadır. Bulgular, Uluslararası İlişkiler literatürünü katı teorik ayrımları terk etmeye ve 21. yüzyıl güvenliğinin maddi, söylemsel ve biyopolitik boyutlarını yakalayabilen çok-nedenli modeller geliştirmeye zorlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Uzun Ufuk, Deniz Gözetlemesi, Deniz Güvenliği, Güvenlikleştirme, Eleştirel Güvenlik Çalışmaları

Introduction

The analysis of contemporary security technologies in regions of enduring geopolitical competition presents a persistent challenge to International Relations (IR) and Security Studies scholarship. Dominant paradigms, realism's focus on material power (Mearsheimer, 2001), constructivism's emphasis on discursive threat construction (Buzan et al., 1998), and critical theory's scrutiny of governance and ethics (Booth, 2005), often speak past one another, offering rich yet partial explanations. This article argues that such paradigmatic exclusivity is analytically inadequate for understanding complex socio-technical systems such as advanced maritime surveillance networks. These systems are not merely tools of statecraft; they are pivotal sites where material capabilities, legitimizing discourses, and transformative governance practices converge and co-constitute one another. Focusing on Türkiye's Long Horizon Integrated Maritime Surveillance System (LHIMSS), this study develops and demonstrates a novel integrated theoretical framework as a critical intervention in ongoing debates. It argues that only by synthesizing realist, securitization, and critical security studies can we fully apprehend how such technologies are driven and justified and the profound political consequences they enact, particularly in the strategically vital and contested maritime spaces of the post-Ottoman world (Bueger, 2015; Deibert, 2019).

The LHIMSS, a sprawling network of sensors, data fusion centers, and integrated command systems, represents a cornerstone of Türkiye's 21st century naval strategy (Dz.K.K., 2015; Özel, 2021). The roots of this transformation lie in the 1974 Cyprus operation, which exposed the Turkish Navy's surveillance vulnerabilities in the Aegean and catalyzed a longterm drive for indigenous, bluewater capabilities (Mercan, 2025; Özel, 2021). Its development began with conceptualization in the 1990s and led to the operationalization of a unified "White Picture" surveilling the Black Sea, Aegean, and Eastern Mediterranean. This process cannot be reduced to a simple story of technological modernization. Instead, it captures the multidimensional security dilemmas of a regional power. A purely realist account effectively highlights the material driver. That driver is the imperative to counter Greece's geographic and military advantages, to project power in disputed zones, and to secure energy resources amidst regional anarchy (Mearsheimer, 2001). Yet, it cannot explain how such a costly, long-term project gained and sustained political priority and resource allocation. Conversely, securitization theory illuminates the discursive process, showing how the Blue Homeland (*Mavi Vatan*) doctrine and narratives of historical naval vulnerability successfully framed comprehensive surveillance as an existential imperative, moving it beyond ordinary politics (Buzan et al., 1998; Gürdeniz, 2020). However, this lens often treats the adoption of such discourses as unproblematic, neglecting the institutional politics and material foundations that underpin their credibility. Finally, critical security studies compel us to ask "security for whom and at what cost?" and scrutinize how LHIMSS reconfigures state power, militarizes civilian data, and erodes the boundary between public safety and national security surveillance (Booth, 2005; Foucault, 1977). Yet without such grounding, critical analysis can appear detached from the real security pressures that policymakers face.

This study moves beyond presenting these theories as a sequential toolkit. It proposes and operationalizes a dynamic, recursive model where these perspectives are analytically necessary and mutually informative. Realism provides the structural context of regional rivalry; securitization explains the discursive mobilization of resources within that context; and critical theory reveals the ensuing transformations in state governance and their normative implications. These layers interact continuously: new governance capacities enable fresh securitizing moves, which justify further development of capabilities. To trace this interplay

methodologically, the analysis employs a structured qualitative case study approach, utilizing process-tracing across key phases of LHIMSS's development. It draws on defense white papers, technical reports, policy statements, and procurement records and applies discourse analysis to identify securitizing speech acts and institutional analysis to map shifts in civil-military data governance. This transparent methodology ensures the integrated framework is rigorously applied to empirical evidence, directly addressing concerns about theoretical and methodological coherence.

This study argues that the LHIMSS program is a typical example of how security technologies in contested regions such as the East Mediterranean and the Aegean Sea must be understood as hybrid entities. They are simultaneously realist instruments of power projection, securitized symbols of national resolve, and critical infrastructures of extended state control. Through this lens, the article examines how the system fuels a Greco-Turkish security dilemma, facilitates non-kinetic coercion, and, most consequentially, materializes a "securitized panopticon" through the integration of civilian agencies into its architecture (Bueger, 2020; Özel, 2021). In doing so, the study makes two key contributions. First, it advances theoretical innovation in IR and Security Studies by offering a replicable and synthetic model that bridges paradigmatic divides to better explain 21st-century security governance. Second, it provides a significant empirical contribution to East Mediterranean and Aegean Sea Studies, offering the first comprehensive, critically engaged analysis of a pivotal Turkish capability that is reshaping regional security dynamics, alliance politics, and the very nature of state sovereignty in the digital age.

1. Theoretical Framework: An Integrated Approach to Analyzing Security Technologies

Analyzing complex security technologies, such as Türkiye's Long Horizon Integrated Maritime Surveillance System (LHIMSS), requires a theoretical approach that transcends the limitations of single paradigms. This study advances an integrated theoretical framework that synthesizes realist, securitization, and critical security studies perspectives into a coherent, multi-level analytical model. This framework is not an eclectic compilation of theories but a deliberate theoretical intervention that addresses a central gap in the literature: the inability of any single paradigm to fully account for the material, discursive, and governance dimensions of contemporary security technologies (Bueger, 2015; Deibert, 2019). By demonstrating their complementary utility, this framework challenges paradigmatic exclusivity and provides a more holistic explanatory tool for understanding how states, particularly in contested regions such as the East Mediterranean and the Aegean Sea, develop and deploy advanced security architectures.

Realist theory provides the foundational structural context for understanding the drive behind systems like LHIMSS. Rooted in the assumption of international anarchy—the absence of a supreme global authority—realism posits that states are rational actors primarily concerned with survival, which they pursue through the accumulation of power and security (Mearsheimer, 2001; Waltz, 1979). In this view, military capabilities are the ultimate currency of statecraft. Applied to LHIMSS, realism explains the material and strategic impetus for its development: the imperative to achieve technological parity or superiority vis-à-vis regional rivals, particularly Greece. The system is analyzed as a tool for internal balancing, designed to overcome Türkiye's geographic disadvantages in the Aegean Sea, where Greece's island territories pose a persistent surveillance and anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) challenge (Döğüt, 2020).

A realist lens illuminates how LHIMSS functions as a force multiplier, extending the effective range of naval weaponry and enhancing deterrence by denying an adversary operational surprise (Erkaya, 2000). It frames the system's evolution as a direct response to shifts in the regional balance of power and the proliferation of precision-strike technologies (Black, 2017). However, a purely realist account remains incomplete. Realism treats the state as a unitary rational actor, often concealing the bureaucratic politics, discursive struggles, and societal mobilization that determine which security threats are deemed existential and which capabilities are subsequently built (Bilgin, 2011). While adept at explaining the "why" of power accumulation, it struggles to account for the domestic processes through which costly, long-term technological projects are prioritized, funded, and sustained. Securitization theory, emerging from the Copenhagen School, addresses this gap by providing a constructivist tool to analyze the discursive process of threat legitimation (Buzan et al., 1998). It posits that security is not an objective condition but a socially constructed status achieved through "securitizing moves"—speech acts by authoritative actors that frame an issue as an existential threat to a designated referent object (e.g., the nation, sovereignty, or the economy). Successful securitization moves an issue out of the realm of ordinary politics, legitimizing the adoption of extraordinary measures and the allocation of exceptional resources.

This study applies securitization theory to analyze how the development of LHIMSS was rendered politically urgent and socially acceptable. The Blue Homeland (*Mavi Vatan*) doctrine is examined not merely as a strategic concept but as a potent securitizing discourse that frames control over maritime spaces as an existential imperative for Türkiye's survival, identity, and economic future (Gürdeniz, 2020). Furthermore, specific historical events—most notably the 1974 sinking of the *TCG Kocatepe*, attributed to friendly fire amidst surveillance failures—are analyzed as anchoring events in a narrative of historical vulnerability (Baytok & Erkaya, 2001). This narrative is discursively linked to contemporary Greek militarization, creating a continuum of threat that justifies continuous investment in surveillance as a non-negotiable requirement for national existence. Securitization theory thus explains the "how" of political mobilization, revealing the discursive strategies that transform a technical procurement program into a national security crusade.

However, securitization theory has its blind spots. It can become overly focused on elite speech acts, underplaying the material capabilities that lend credibility to discursive claims and the institutional structures that implement securitizing decisions. It may also neglect the question of who benefits from a given securitization and what broader societal or political costs it incurs—questions central to a critical perspective (Vuori, 2008).

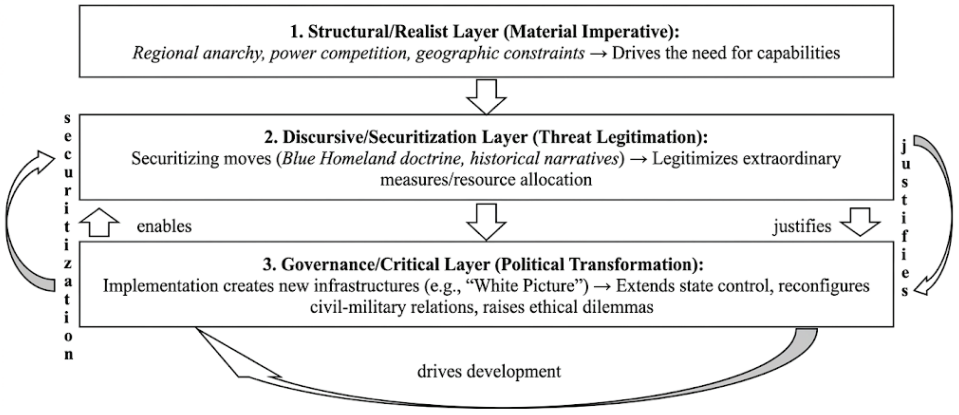
Critical security studies (CSS) provide the necessary lens for interrogating the political effects and normative implications of security practices such as pervasive surveillance (Booth, 2005; Krause & Williams, 1997). Moving beyond the state-centric focus of realism and securitization, CSS asks foundational questions: "Security for whom? From what? And at what cost?" It is particularly attentive to how security measures can extend and deepen state power, reshape social relations, and erode the boundaries between different spheres of life.

In analyzing LHIMSS, CSS highlights the system's role in reconfiguring techno-political governance. The integration of 17 civilian agency data streams into the militarized "White Picture" is not a neutral technical feat; it represents a significant militarization of civilian infrastructure and a blurring of the civil-military divide, expanding the state's surveillance reach deep into societal and economic activities (Özel, 2021; UAB, n.d.).

CSS draws on Foucault's concept of the panopticon to analyze how persistent, wide-area surveillance enables a form of disciplinary power that normalizes observation and potentially chills lawful activity (Foucault, 1977). Furthermore, it raises urgent ethical and democratic questions about algorithmic accountability, the normalization of Artificial Intelligence (AI)-driven targeting, and the lack of civilian oversight over integrated security architectures (Deibert, 2019; **Khlaaf et al., 2024).** This perspective illuminates the "so what" of LHIMSS: the transformation of the Turkish state's relationship with its citizens and the creation of a security dilemma within domestic governance.

The core theoretical contribution of this study is the synthesis of these three perspectives into an integrated and recursive model. This model posits that realism, securitization, and CSS are not competing explanations but analytically distinct layers of a unified political process, each addressing a distinct set of questions essential to a complete understanding (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Integrated Theoretical Model of Security Technology Development



The model operates dynamically. Realist pressures (e.g., Greek capabilities) create a perceived need for a technological response (LHIMSS). Securitizing actors (political leaders and naval commanders) articulate this need as an existential threat, mobilizing political will and resources. The resulting implementation process, analyzed through a critical lens, creates new institutional facts—such as the integrated "White Picture"—that reconfigure state power and societal relations. These new governance realities, in turn, feed back into the system: they provide a material basis for new securitizing claims (e.g., "we must protect our integrated data sovereignty") and reshape future realist calculations about necessary capabilities.

This integrated framework directly addresses calls in the literature for more complex, multi-causal models that can grapple with the intertwined material, discursive, and biopolitical dimensions of 21st-century security (Bueger, 2020). By applying this model to the LHIMSS case, the study demonstrates that only such a synthesis can fully explain why the system was built, how it was politically constructed, and what profound consequences it holds for Turkish statehood and regional security. It is through this theoretically rigorous and methodologically transparent integration that the analysis moves beyond description to

provide a critical, holistic explanation of a pivotal security technology in the context of the East Mediterranean and the Aegean Sea.

In the empirical analysis that follows, each historical phase is examined through a dominant analytical lens, without excluding the others:

- Genesis: Realist security dilemma and material imperatives.
- Legitimation and procurement: Securitization theory – how failures were discursively framed as existential threats.
- Expansion and the "White Picture": Critical security studies – the panoptic governance effects and the militarization of civilian data.

This layered approach prevents theoretical overload while preserving the recursive logic of the integrated framework.

2. Conceptual Foundations of Maritime Surveillance: From Safety to Strategic Imperative

To establish a rigorous foundation for analyzing Türkiye's Long Horizon Integrated Maritime Surveillance System (LHIMSS), this section outlines the conceptual evolution of maritime surveillance. It moves beyond a purely technical description to position surveillance as a socio-technical and political practice whose meaning and purpose have transformed in response to technological change, strategic adaptation, and discursive reframing. Historically rooted in the pragmatic requirements of navigation safety and collision avoidance, maritime surveillance has been progressively securitized and militarized, emerging as a core strategic imperative for state power projection and sovereignty assertion (Bueger, 2015; Bueger & Edmunds, 2019). This conceptual trajectory is analyzed here through the integrated theoretical framework, illustrating how realist security competition, securitizing discourses, and critical governance concerns have collectively reshaped the very logic of observing the seas.

The foundational concept underpinning systems like LHIMSS is Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA). Classically defined as "the effective understanding of anything associated with the maritime domain that could impact the security, safety, economy, or environment" (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2005, p. 2), MDA represents the aspirational goal of total situational awareness across vast ocean spaces. Its evolution mirrors a broader shift from a reactive, safety-oriented paradigm to a proactive, security-dominated one.

Initially, maritime awareness served commercial and safety purposes: ensuring safe passage, managing port traffic, and coordinating search and rescue (İnce et al., 1998). Technologies such as radar, the Automatic Identification System (AIS), and vessel traffic services were developed to mitigate the risks of collisions, groundings, and environmental disasters. However, in the post-Cold War and post-9/11 security environment, this infrastructure was progressively securitized. Discourses linking maritime space to transnational threats—such as terrorism, piracy, smuggling, and illegal migration—justified expanding surveillance from ports and coastlines to the open ocean, reframing MDA as a cornerstone of national and homeland security (Bueger, 2015).

This securitization is operationalized through the creation of a Recognized Maritime Picture (RMP) or the "White Picture" (*Beyaz Resim*). The RMP is not a neutral, objective compilation of data; it is a politically constructed artefact. It involves the detection, classification, identification, and tracking of surface and sub-surface contacts, synthesizing

information from a heterogeneous array of military and civilian sensors (Hicks & Metrick, 2018; NATO, 2013). The pursuit of a comprehensive RMP, as seen in LHIMSS's goals, is a deeply realist enterprise, aimed at reducing operational uncertainty and providing a decisive information advantage in potential conflicts (Erkaya, 2000). Yet, from a critical perspective, the drive for a perfect, all-seeing "picture" represents what Bueger (2020) terms a peril of MDA: the creation of a "totalizing vision" that promises omniscient control while obscuring the technical limitations, algorithmic biases, and political choices embedded within the surveillance architecture itself (p. 238). This pursuit enables a form of data-driven panopticism, in which the state's capacity to monitor maritime activity becomes a tool not just for security but also for the normalization of pervasive observation and the assertion of jurisdictional claims (Foucault, 1977; Özel, 2021). Concretely, a Turkish fishing vessel's Automatic Identification System (AIS) signal—originally intended only for collision avoidance—becomes a track in the military's "White Picture." That same track can be used to enforce a fisheries exclusion zone, to monitor the vessel's movement in a contested maritime area, or even to infer broader economic activity.

The strategic value of maritime surveillance cannot be understood in isolation from the revolution in naval warfare catalyzed by long-range, precision-guided weaponry. The advent of anti-ship missiles decisively decoupled the sensor from the shooter, extending engagement ranges far beyond the horizon of any single warship (Black, 2017). This transformation rendered organic and platform-centric surveillance obsolete for high-intensity conflict, creating an imperative for networked and off-board sensing systems.

This shift gave rise to the doctrine of network-centric warfare, in which combat power derives from the ability to collect, fuse, and disseminate information across a distributed force (Alberts et al., 1999). In this paradigm, surveillance assets—maritime patrol aircraft, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), satellites, and submarine-detection networks—are no longer merely supportive elements but primary strategic assets. They function as critical force multipliers, enabling a fleet to leverage its missile inventory to maximum effect by providing targeting data, track custody, and battle damage assessment (Erkaya, 2000; Sünnetçi, 2021). From a realist lens, the development of LHIMSS is a direct and rational response to this technological imperative. For Türkiye, facing a rival (Greece) with geographic advantages and advanced missile capabilities, establishing an independent, resilient surveillance network is a non-negotiable requirement for credible deterrence and warfighting efficacy (Dz.K.K., 2015; Döğüt, 2020).

The historical progression of surveillance technology—from visual lookouts and coastal radars to over-the-horizon sensors and space-based systems—demonstrates a continuous action-reaction dynamic driven by realist competition (Lautenschlager, 1984). Each technological leap has aimed to extend detection range, improve accuracy, or counter stealth, which, all in turn, has triggered countermeasures and further innovation. This dynamic is central to the Greco-Turkish security dilemma in the Aegean, where advances in one nation's surveillance or strike capabilities are immediately perceived as threats by the other, fueling a cycle of military modernization in which LHIMSS is a pivotal component.

Applying the integrated framework developed in Section 1 to the maritime domain reveals that surveillance practices are simultaneously material, discursive, and governanceoriented. Rather than repeating that tripartite structure here, the following empirical analysis (Sections 3–4) will demonstrate how each dimension operates in the specific case of LHIMSS.

This tripartite reconceptualization moves the analysis beyond viewing LHIMSS as merely a "system of sensors." Instead, it frames LHIMSS as a materialization of strategy, discourse, and power. Its architecture reflects realist assessments of the operational environment; its political sustainability is secured through securitizing narratives such as the Blue Homeland; and its ultimate societal impact lies in its capacity to reshape the relationship among the Turkish state, its citizens, and the maritime domain. This foundational understanding sets the stage for the following empirical analysis, which will trace how these conceptual dimensions interacted historically to produce the specific technological-political artefact that is the Long Horizon system.

3. The Genesis and Development of LHIMSS: Tracing Theoretical Dynamics

This section applies the integrated theoretical framework to trace the historical development of Türkiye's Long Horizon Integrated Maritime Surveillance System (LHIMSS). Moving beyond a linear chronology, the analysis uses structured process-tracing to show how the dynamic interplay of realist imperatives, securitizing moves, and critical institutional transformations shaped the system's conception, procurement, and evolution. This methodological approach reveals LHIMSS not as an inevitable technological outcome but as a political artefact whose trajectory was contingent on the recursive interaction of material pressures, discursive strategies, and bureaucratic power struggles within specific historical conjunctures.

The development trajectory of LHIMSS, traced here, provides a granular lens into the enduring mechanics of security competition in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean. More than a national procurement story, it reveals the specific regional triggers (shifts in missile technology and hydrocarbon discoveries), domestic mobilization patterns (the political utility of naval memory), and inter-alliance hedging strategies that characterize the ways in which post-Ottoman states convert strategic anxiety into technological capability. This process-tracing, thus, offers a concrete historical sociology of armament in a zone of perennial rivalry. To appreciate this realist foundation, one must recall the transformation of Turkish naval strategy after 1974. The Cyprus operation exposed the vulnerability of a navy constrained by Greece's island chain in the Aegean. In response, Turkish naval planners gradually shifted from a coastdefense mindset toward a more ambitious "sea control" posture in the Aegean and "sea denial" in the Eastern Mediterranean (Özel, 2021; Döğüt, 2020). The LHIMSS was conceived as the enabling infrastructure for this shift.

This geographic imperative was not merely a theoretical construct but a concrete operational problem. Turkish naval planners observed that Greece's integrated radar network, established in the late 1970s, provided real-time targeting data to dispersed missile boats and landbased batteries. This system effectively threatened Turkish naval access to the Aegean (Döğüt, 2020). The Long Horizon project was, therefore, conceived as a direct counter to this operational asymmetry, not as an abstract theoretical exercise.

The materialstrategic context was worsened by the 1974 sinking of the *TCG Kocatepe*—a destroyer lost to friendly fire due to surveillance failures. This incident became an "anchoring event" in Turkish naval memory, discursively framed by Admiral Güven Erkaya as proof that without a comprehensive surveillance network, national sovereignty in the Aegean remained critically exposed (Baytok & Erkaya, 2001). Erkaya's securitizing move transformed a technical procurement into an existential imperative.

The genesis of LHIMSS is rooted in a foundational realist security dilemma shaped by the distinctive geography of the Aegean Sea (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). Following the 1974 Cyprus operation, Turkish naval strategy faced the operational challenge of Greece's control over numerous islands off the Turkish coast. Because of its geography, Greece had a natural advantage in surveillance and the chance to establish an anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) envelope, which could have threatened to bottle up the Turkish fleet (Döğüt, 2020). This geographic asymmetry forced the Turkish Navy to reconsider its traditional seadenial posture and to embrace a seacontrol doctrine that requires persistent, widearea surveillance—a shift that directly motivated the Long Horizon project (Özel, 2021, pp. 7882). The proliferation of long-range anti-ship missiles further worsened this asymmetry, as engagement ranges began to exceed the detection horizon of ship-based sensors, creating an urgent need for networked and over-the-horizon surveillance capabilities (Black, 2017; Erkaya, 2000).

From a critical institutional perspective, this early phase also revealed the constraints within which the securitizing moves operated. Initial attempts to launch an Aegean surveillance project in the 1980s stalled due to fiscal constraints and lack of sustained institutional commitment, highlighting the fact that discursive success alone could not overcome material and bureaucratic hurdles (Örnek, 2016). The eventual approval of the Long Horizon project in 1990, thus, represented a moment where realist imperatives (the Greek threat), securitizing discourse (the *Kocatepe* narrative), and institutional agency (reformist naval leadership) converged to create a policy window.

The "Towards Blue Waters" strategy was not developed in intellectual isolation. Its conceptual foundations were laid by Captain Mert Bayat (19262005), a longtime lecturer at the Naval War College and the author of *Milli Güç ve Devlet* (National Power and State, 1986). Bayat systematically distinguished between "maritime power" (commercial shipping, shipbuilding, and fisheries) and "naval power" (combat force)—a distinction that later became central to official Turkish naval strategy. He also taught generations of officers that a state's status depends on its ability to project power beyond its littorals, directly influencing the officers who drafted the 1997 "Towards Blue Waters" pamphlet and later formulated the "Blue Homeland" doctrine (Özel, 2021, pp. 125-130; Gürdeniz, 2005).

The initial architectural design of LHIMSS, formalized in the mid-1990s, embodied a clear realist logic of internal balancing and alliance hedging. The system was conceived as an integrated network linking maritime patrol aircraft (MPAs), coastal radar stations, and future unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to central and regional fusion centers (Uzun Ufuk Proje Grubu, 1997). Its primary stated objective was realist and operational: to provide real-time targeting data for the Navy's Harpoon missile systems, thereby countering the Greek A2/AD threat and enabling power projection (Dz.K.K., 1997).

A critical design choice reflected a nuanced realist calculation within alliance politics: the insistence on incorporating North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-standard Link-11/16 data links (Örnek, 2016). This served a dual purpose. First, it ensured interoperability with NATO assets, a pragmatic move to leverage alliance resources and maintain Turkey's strategic value within the bloc. Second, and more subtly, it functioned as a hedging strategy, preserving a conduit for Western military technology and cooperation even as the project aimed to foster indigenous capability. Simultaneously, the establishment of the Naval Research and Development Directorate (APGE) and, later, the Research Centre Command (ARMERKOM) signaled a long-term realist commitment to technological autonomy, aiming to reduce dependence and cultivate a domestic defense-industrial base (Kutluhan, 2006). The

Research Centre Command developed the system's software domestically, later evolving into the ADVENT networkenabled combat management system (HAVELSAN, n.d.). ADVENT is now the backbone of the "White Picture," integrating data from surface ships (GENESIS variant), submarines (MÜREN), and air platforms (MARTI). This institutionalization of indigenous C4ISR (Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance) capabilities was a deliberate move to reduce dependency on foreign technology.

Beyond its operational objectives, the Long Horizon project initiated a profound institutional transformation within the Turkish Navy. The establishment of APGE in 1993 and its subsequent reorganization as ARMERKOM in 1998 created a dedicated institutional framework for indigenous software development and systems integration. This institutional capacity enabled the Navy to assume direct performance responsibility for the project's software components, gradually reducing dependency on foreign suppliers. The collaboration with Turkish defense industry partners—particularly in the integration of national data fusion algorithms and the development of the ADVENT combat management system—transformed the Long Horizon project from a procurement program into a catalyst for broader defenseindustrial autonomy. This institutional dimension, often overlooked in purely technical accounts, is essential for understanding how the system achieved its current systemofsystems architecture.

The critical lens illuminates the governance implications embedded in this design. The blueprint for a centralized, network-centric system aimed at creating a "recognized maritime picture" was, in essence, a militarized digital panopticon. It envisioned extending the state's institutional gaze across the entirety of Türkiye's claimed maritime jurisdictions, laying the infrastructural groundwork for the later integration of civilian data streams and the normalization of pervasive surveillance (Foucault, 1977).

The implementation phase exposed significant friction between the realist-securitized vision and the critical realities of bureaucratic politics, industrial capacity, and inter-service rivalry. The MELTEM maritime patrol aircraft program became a case study in this tension. The Navy's preference for modifying cost-effective, turboprop platforms (CN-235, ATR-72) for Aegean and Mediterranean patrols reflected a realist logic of resource-constrained optimization (Sünnetçi, 2021; Özel, 2021). However, this preference conflicted with the global trend toward high-altitude, jet-powered aircraft like the P-8 Poseidon, which offered greater interoperability with NATO and true blue-water power projection capabilities. The compromised and delayed outcome of the MELTEM program revealed how bureaucratic and fiscal constraints could dilute strategic ambitions, creating long-term capability gaps (Ariş, 2003; Alemdar, 2021).

Importantly, these procurement failures were not merely technical delays; they were securitized. Naval commanders framed the diversion of Heron UAVs to the Air Force as a "national vulnerability" and the dependency on foreign patrol aircraft as a "strategic gap." This discourse—linking procurement delays to existential risk—mobilized political support for homegrown alternatives. Consequently, the success of domestically developed drones (Bayraktar TB2, AKSUNGUR) after 2016 was presented not as an industrial achievement but as a security imperative, accelerating the Navy's push for its own UAV fleet and embedding a new logic of strategic autonomy (Tanış, 2024).

Another recursive interplay also occurred between 2010 and 2017. The Navy's inability to access Israeliorigin Heron UAVs (diverted to the Air Force for counterterrorism) created a realist capability gap (Kutluhan, 2012, p. 14). This gap was securitized by naval commanders who framed foreign dependency as an existential vulnerability, accelerating political support for indigenous drones. The resulting governance transformation—the establishment of a national UAV procurement framework and the leasing of domestic Anka systems—then enabled a new securitizing claim: that Türkiye must achieve full "data sovereignty" in maritime surveillance. This claim justified further realist investments in encrypted national data links and the ADVENT combat management system (HAVELSAN, n.d.).

The final phase of LHIMSS's development saw it expand beyond its original Aegean focus and culminate in the integrated "White Picture" system. New realist calculations related to energy security and regional influence drove this expansion. Operations Black Sea Harmony (2004) and Mediterranean Shield (2009) extended the system's reach into the Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean, respectively. These moves were framed by securitizing discourses that linked maritime surveillance to existential economic threats, such as the security of hydrocarbon resources and pipelines (Özgen, 2013; Dz.K.K., 2004).

Operation Black Sea Harmony (2004) was a direct response to NATO's identified "black hole" of maritime awareness. The Navy modernized coastal radars and integrated Automatic Identification System (AIS) data, sharing the resulting "White Picture" with NATO allies. Similarly, Operation Mediterranean Shield (2009) was triggered by unauthorized hydrocarbon drilling in Southern Cyprus's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The Navy deployed radar stations in Mersin, Adana, and Northern Cyprus and used UAV patrols to monitor the BakuTbilisiCeyhan pipeline corridor (Özgen, 2013). These operations transformed LHIMSS from an Aegeanfocused military tool into a regionwide guardian of energy security—a core tenet of the Blue Homeland doctrine.

The creation of the "White Picture" represents the fullest expression of the integrated theoretical dynamics. From a realist standpoint, integrating data from 17 civilian agencies—including the Coast Guard, port authorities, and the fisheries monitoring system—represents a "whole-of-government" optimization of national power, creating unparalleled situational awareness (UAB, n.d.; TOB, 2016). Securitization theory explains how this vast data grab was legitimized: by subsuming disparate civilian functions under the overarching, existentially charged imperative of "maritime security" and the Blue Homeland doctrine.

It is, however, the critical security studies lens that reveals the profound transformation. The "White Picture" operationalizes a securitized panopticon (Bueger, 2020). It dissolves the boundary between military and civilian surveillance, militarizing civilian infrastructure and data flows. This creates a system of governance where the state's capacity to monitor, analyze, and potentially intervene in maritime activity—from commercial shipping to fishing—becomes totalizing and normalized (Bueger, 2020, p. 238). This architecture raises fundamental questions about democratic oversight, data sovereignty, and algorithmic accountability, particularly as the system evolves toward AI-driven analysis and autonomous response protocols (Khlaaf et al., 2024). Thus, LHIMSS culminates not just as a tool for external balancing but as a critical infrastructure for a new, digitally enabled modality of state power, born from the recursive interplay of threat, discourse, and technological ambition. For example, new surveillance capabilities (realist) enable naval leaders to frame energy security as an existential threat (securitization), which then justifies integrating civilian fisheries data into military command centers (critical governance).

4. Expansion and Integration: The "White Picture" as Securitized Panopticon

Before proceeding to the critical analysis of the "White Picture," it is worth noting that maritime surveillance systems like LHIMSS serve legitimate state functions. According to international law (UNCLOS, Article 94), Türkiye, like all coastal states, has the sovereign right to monitor its maritime approaches, enforce customs and immigration controls, combat smuggling and human trafficking, and coordinate search-and-rescue operations. The following critique does not dispute these legitimate security interests. Rather, it examines how the specific architecture of LHIMSS—particularly its integration of civilian data streams into a militarized command structure—generates governance consequences that extend beyond these legitimate purposes. This distinction between the legitimacy of maritime surveillance and the specific design choices of the Turkish system is essential for a fair assessment.

A concrete illustration of recursive interplay occurred between 2009 and 2013. The Navy's initial realist concern was monitoring unauthorized hydrocarbon drilling in Cyprus's EEZ. That material need was securitized by Admiral Nusret Güner, who publicly framed energy security as existential for Türkiye's economic survival—justifying the expansion of LHIMSS into the Eastern Mediterranean via Operation Mediterranean Shield (Özgen, 2013). The resulting governance transformation integrated civilian AIS and fisheries data into the military "White Picture." That new governance capacity, in turn, enabled a fresh securitizing claim: the need to protect "data sovereignty" against foreign intelligence gathering. This claim then justified further realist investments, such as the domestically developed ADVENT command system and encrypted national data links. The cycle shows how each theoretical layer feeds the next.

The final phase of LHIMSS's evolution transcends its original mandate as a naval force multiplier. This phase is also the most consequential for understanding technopolitical governance.

This section analyzes the system's geographic and functional expansion, culminating in the creation of the integrated "White Picture (*Beyaz Resim*)." Through the integrated theoretical framework, it is demonstrated how this expansion represents not merely a technical scaling-up but the realization of a securitized panopticon—a comprehensive surveillance architecture that simultaneously serves realist power objectives, is legitimized by existential threat discourses, and fundamentally reconfigures the relationship between the state, its citizens, and the maritime domain (Bueger, 2020).

This analysis moves beyond mere descriptive accounts of system integration to critically interrogate how the absorption of civilian data streams and agencies enacts a profound shift in governance and raises urgent normative questions about sovereignty, privacy, and democratic accountability in the digital age (Deibert, 2019).

The post-9/11 security landscape and the intensifying competition over Eastern Mediterranean hydrocarbons provided the context for LHIMSS's expansion beyond the Aegean. This expansion was driven by a recursive interaction of realist calculations and securitizing discourses. Operation Black Sea Harmony (initiated 2004) exemplified a realist alignment with NATO security priorities, modernizing Black Sea coastal radars and integrating Automatic Identification System (AIS) data to monitor commercial traffic (Dz.K.K., 2004). From a realist perspective, this expansion served dual objectives: addressing NATO's identified "black hole" of maritime awareness in the Black Sea and enhancing Türkiye's standing as an indispensable regional security provider, thereby strengthening its geopolitical hand (Özel, 2021).

Concurrently, Operation Mediterranean Shield (initiated in 2006) was a more overt securitizing move that directly linked surveillance to economic survival. Framed as a response to unauthorized hydrocarbon exploration by the Greek Cypriot Administration and Greece, the operation justified the extension of the LHIMSS network to the Eastern Mediterranean. The deployment of radar stations in Mersin, Adana, and Cyprus, coupled with UAV patrols, was discursively constructed as an imperative to protect critical energy corridors, most notably the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline (Özgen, 2013). This narrative successfully securitized energy security, transforming maritime surveillance from a military tool into a guardian of national economic sovereignty, a core tenet of the Blue Homeland doctrine. The geographic expansion of the surveillance network was, thus, materially driven by realist energy politics and discursively legitimized as an existential defense of the national patrimony.

The logical pinnacle of this expansion was the formal integration of disparate data streams into a single, unified "White Picture." This system, operationalized through central and regional fusion centers, amalgamates real-time information from military sensors (naval radars, aircraft, and UAVs) with data from 17 civilian agencies, including the Coast Guard Command, the General Directorate of Coastal Safety, the Port Authorities, and even the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry's Fishery Vessel Monitoring System (*Balıkçı Gemilerini İzleme Sistemi*-BAGİS). BAGİS, originally designed to track fishing vessels for quota enforcement, provides location data that is automatically fused into the military "White Picture." Similarly, the Vessel Traffic Management System (*Gemi Trafik Yönetim Sistemi*-GTYS)—a civilian vessel traffic management system—and the LongRange Identification and Tracking (LRIT) system for Turkishflagged ships are integrated into the same military command network (UAB, n.d.; TOB, 2016). A concrete illustration of this securitized panopticon can be drawn from the fisheries monitoring system. A Turkish fishing vessel operating in the Eastern Mediterranean transmits its location for safety and quota enforcement purposes via the Fisheries Monitoring System. That same data stream is automatically fused into the military "White Picture," where it can be used to track the vessel's movements, to identify patterns of fishing activity that might indicate illegal smuggling or covert surveillance, or even to serve as a lowcost intelligence asset in contested waters. This transformation of a civilian safety tool into a military intelligence feed dissolves the functional boundary between public good and national security surveillance (UAB, n.d.; Deibert, 2019).

The "White Picture" operates simultaneously across the three analytical dimensions of the integrated framework:

Realist Instrument: The integration represents the ultimate "whole-of-government" optimization for maritime domain awareness. By fusing civilian and military data, the state achieves unprecedented operational efficiency in monitoring, tracking, and—if necessary—interdicting vessel traffic across millions of square kilometers. This creates a formidable asymmetric advantage in situational awareness, which is a key component of non-kinetic coercion and deterrence against regional rivals (Döğüt, 2020). Collaborations with NATO's Maritime Command and Control Information System (MCCIS) and other international networks demonstrate a continued realist strategy of leveraging alliance interoperability while fiercely pursuing indigenous command systems, such as ADVENT, for autonomous control. The domestically developed ADVENT combat management system and ARMERKOM are the institutional embodiments of this realist logic (HAVELSAN, n.d.).

Securitized Project: The absorption of civilian infrastructure is not presented as a power grab but is discursively legitimized as a necessary response to transnational, hybrid threats. The integration of AIS and fishing vessel data is framed as essential to combat terrorism, smuggling, human trafficking, and illegal fishing—threats constructed as diffuse, networked, and existential to public order and economic health (Özgen, 2013). This securitizing discourse overrides potential objections based on data privacy or institutional autonomy and moves the issue into the realm of extraordinary security logic, where the imperative of total awareness justifies the erosion of traditional boundaries.

Critical Infrastructure of Governance: It is here that the most transformative implications are revealed. The "White Picture" materializes a securitized panopticon (Foucault, 1977). It embodies the peril that Bueger (2020) identifies in Maritime Domain Awareness: the pursuit of a totalizing, omniscient vision that serves as a "glue" for intensified state control (p. 238). By militarizing civilian data streams—turning a fishing boat's locational broadcast or a container ship's AIS signal into an intelligence feed for a military command center—the system dissolves the functional and legal distinction between civilian oversight and military surveillance. The state's panoptic gaze is rendered persistent, automated, and total and, thereby, normalizes a condition of constant visibility for all maritime actors within its domain.

Distinguishing between documented capabilities and speculative projections is crucial. Turkish authorities publicly document the integration of civilian AIS and fisheries data into the military "White Picture" (UAB, n.d.; TOB, 2016). However, claims regarding AIdriven autonomous targeting or the repurposing of civilian data for covert intelligence operations remain inferences drawn from the system's architecture rather than verifiable facts. The critical analysis offered here is, therefore, confined to the documented governance implications of data integration, while acknowledging that the full extent of the system's AI capabilities and datarepurposing practices is not publicly verifiable.

To be fair, the integration of civilian data streams into the "White Picture" is not solely a militarizing act. From a functional perspective, the same surveillance infrastructure delivers legitimate public goods. The unified maritime picture enhances the search-and-rescue coordination of the Turkish Coast Guard, reduces response times to maritime distress calls, and improves environmental monitoring for oil spills and illegal dumping. The fisheries monitoring system, integrated into the same network, helps combat illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing—a recognized threat to sustainable resource management. Turkish authorities often cite these non-military benefits as justifications for the system's expansion (UAB, n.d.). A complete assessment must acknowledge that the "White Picture" serves dual-use functions: it is simultaneously an instrument of securitized state control and a practical tool for maritime safety and environmental protection. The critical concern, therefore, is not integration *per se*, but the absence of transparent governance mechanisms to ensure that civilian data are not repurposed for military objectives without democratic oversight.

This architecture of integrated control represents a significant evolution in state capacity and sovereign practice across the region. The Turkish "White Picture" model demonstrates how a regional power can leverage digital integration to overcome traditional geographic and bureaucratic limitations. For regional analysts, this move is critical: it signifies a shift from discursively claiming sovereignty (e.g., through doctrine) to operationalizing it through persistent, automated technological surveillance. This has immediate implications

for diplomatic and legal disputes in the region, creating new, data-centric "facts on the (virtual) ground."

The operationalization of the "White Picture" triggers profound critical questions about power, accountability, and the future of conflict. First, it signifies a critical reconfiguration of the Turkish state, centralizing informational power within a military-technocratic framework and extending bureaucratic control deep into the maritime economy. This raises significant concerns about democratic oversight, transparency, and the potential for mission creep, where data collected for safety or security is repurposed for other forms of state monitoring (Deibert, 2019).

Second, the system's evolving integration of artificial intelligence for pattern recognition, anomaly detection, and predictive targeting introduces a security dilemma of automation (Khlaaf et al., 2024). The drive for faster decision cycles and reduced human-in-the-loop oversight, while enhancing real-time operational tempo, simultaneously increases risks of algorithmic error, unintended escalation, and obscured accountability. When a semi-autonomous system designates a contact as a "threat," the chain of responsibility becomes blurred, posing grave ethical and strategic dangers. For example, if the ADVENT system's AIassisted trackfusion algorithm misclassifies a Greek searchandrescue vessel as a hostile fastattack craft due to anomalous AIS behavior, the compressed decision cycle could prompt a warning shot or a maneuver that escalates unintentionally. The absence of a clear "human in the loop" for intermediate threat levels makes accountability difficult to assign (Khlaaf et al., 2024).

It must be noted, however, that Türkiye is not exceptional in this regard. All major NATO naval powers—including the United States, the United Kingdom, and France—are actively integrating AI into their maritime surveillance and targeting pipelines (Khlaaf et al., 2024). The U.S. Navy's Project Overmatch and the Royal Navy's NELSON program pursue similar goals of automated threat detection and decision support. The algorithmic accountability deficit is a global challenge, not a uniquely Turkish pathology. Moreover, proponents of AI integration argue that automation reduces human error, accelerates threat response, and protects personnel by keeping them out of immediate danger. The critical task, therefore, is not to reject AI-enabled surveillance outright but to demand transparent standards for algorithmic auditing, human-in-the-loop requirements for lethal decisions, and international norms governing autonomous systems in maritime domains. These standards remain underdeveloped globally, and Türkiye's LHIMSS should be assessed against this shared international deficit rather than isolated as a singular case of technological overreach.

Finally, the "White Picture" does not operate in isolation. Its very existence, as a symbol of Turkish techno-nationalist prowess, fuels the regional action-reaction cycle analyzed earlier. Greece's development of its own Aegean Surveillance System is a direct response, locking both nations into a competitive dynamic in which advances in one's panoptic capabilities are perceived as existential threats by the other, driving a perpetual escalation of surveillance and counter-surveillance investments (Tsailas, 2023).

Yet from a Greek strategic perspective, this dynamic is asymmetrical. Greek defense analysts argue that the Aegean Surveillance System is fundamentally reactive rather than offensive. They contend that Greece's island geography—hundreds of islands positioned close to the Turkish coastline—creates a natural vulnerability to amphibious assault and covert infiltration. From Athens' perspective, maritime surveillance is not an instrument of power projection but a defensive necessity for monitoring Turkish naval and air activities

that Greek officials and analysts have periodically described as violations of Greek territorial waters and national airspace (Tsailas, 2023). Greece's European Union (EU) membership adds an additional legal and institutional context to its maritime policy, while both Greece and Türkiye remain embedded in NATO structures. However, the extent to which these frameworks constrain national surveillance practices remains an empirical question rather than a settled fact. Acknowledging this asymmetry does not absolve Greece of its own securitizing moves, but it complicates any simple narrative of mutual escalation. Therefore, the security dilemma manifests itself asymmetrically: what Ankara frames as balancing, Athens frames as defense against revisionism.

In conclusion, the "White Picture" is the definitive manifestation of the recursive theoretical dynamics that have shaped LHIMSS. It is the material outcome of realist power calculations, sustained by securitizing discourses of economic and national survival, and it critically functions as an infrastructure that reshapes state sovereignty in the digital era. It represents not the end of a procurement story, but the beginning of a new chapter in the political life of surveillance, where the boundaries between war and peace, military and civilian, and security and liberty are irrevocably blurred. The following conclusion will assess the broader implications of this development for Türkiye's strategic trajectory and for theoretical debates on security and technology.

Conclusion

This article has argued that Türkiye's LHIMSS cannot be understood solely as a technical procurement project or as a conventional naval capability. Rather, it is a hybrid security technology shaped by the interaction of material power competition, securitizing discourse, and changing practices of state governance. By bringing together realist, securitization, and critical security studies perspectives, the article has shown that each theoretical lens explains a different but interconnected dimension of the system: why it emerged, how it was politically justified, and what kinds of political and institutional effects it has produced.

The empirical analysis demonstrated that LHIMSS developed in response to concrete strategic pressures in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean, especially the need to overcome geographical disadvantages, improve maritime domain awareness, and strengthen deterrence. Yet, these material imperatives did not operate on their own. They were activated and sustained through narratives of vulnerability, sovereignty, energy security, and the Blue Homeland doctrine. In this sense, surveillance became more than a military requirement; it became a symbol of national resolve and strategic autonomy.

At the same time, the system's evolution into the integrated "White Picture" reveals consequences that go beyond external balancing. The fusion of military and civilian data streams has expanded the state's capacity to monitor maritime activity and has blurred the boundary between public safety, economic regulation, and national security surveillance. This does not mean that maritime surveillance is illegitimate. Coastal states have valid responsibilities in search and rescue, border control, environmental protection, and the prevention of smuggling or illegal fishing. The critical issue is how such systems are governed, what oversight mechanisms exist, and whether civilian data can be repurposed for security objectives without sufficient transparency or accountability.

The article, therefore, makes two main contributions. Theoretically, it offers an integrated framework for analyzing contemporary security technologies as socio-technical systems in which power, discourse, and governance are mutually reinforcing. Empirically,

it provides a detailed account of a key Turkish maritime capability that has shaped regional security dynamics, defense-industrial autonomy, and the operationalization of the Blue Homeland doctrine. LHIMSS is not peripheral to Türkiye's strategic posture; it is one of the infrastructures through which Türkiye claims, monitors, and enacts its maritime sovereignty.

These findings also point to broader implications. For regional security, LHIMSS may strengthen Türkiye's deterrence and crisis-management capacity, but it can also intensify the Greco-Turkish surveillance competition and contribute to an action-reaction cycle in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean. For governance, the growing role of automation, data fusion, and AI-assisted analysis raises unresolved questions about accountability, escalation risks, and democratic oversight. Future research should therefore compare LHIMSS with similar surveillance architectures in other regional powers and examine more closely the legal, institutional, and political economy dimensions of integrated civil-military surveillance systems.

In sum, the LHIMSS case shows that contemporary security technologies are not neutral instruments. They organize how threats are perceived, how state power is exercised, and how sovereignty is practiced in contested spaces. Understanding them requires moving beyond single-paradigm explanations and examining the interaction between strategic necessity, political legitimation, and the everyday infrastructures of surveillance.

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