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The 2017 incidents in the Aegean and Turkish foreign policy: using Q-methodology to examine Greek viewpoints

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ABSTRACT

In January 2017, relations between Greece and Turkey were under severe strain when warships from both sides engaged in a brief standoff near a pair of uninhabited Greek ‘islets’ in the Aegean, whose sovereignty is disputed by Turkey. Theoretically informed by the literature of foreign policy analysis, we examine how the Greek diplomats, military officers and political analysts interpreted Turkey’s behaviour at that particular time. The article considers the following research question: which factors, from a Greek point of view, explain Turkey’s foreign policy in the Aegean in January 2017? Our theoretical expectation is that, in the aftermath of the coup attempt in Turkey, Greek diplomats, military officers and political analysts would ascribe domestic calculations into Turkey’s activities. We employed Q- methodology to uncover socially shared perspectives on this topic. Based on our findings, we uncovered two viewpoints: (1) Turkey’s diachronic strategy in the Aegean and (2) the strongman style. According to the former and most widely shared viewpoint, a consistent ‘rationalist’ strategy to change the status quo in the Aegean explains Turkey’s behaviour. According to the second one, the belief system of Turkey’s leadership legitimises the use of force in the conduct of foreign policy.

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Introduction

In January 2017, Greek and Turkish warships engaged in a brief standoff near a pair of uninhabited Greek ‘islets’ in the Aegean, whose sovereignty is contested by Turkey. The warships seemed to indicate an impending broader clash between the two sides’ armed forces. Relations between Greece and Turkey were already under severe strain. A row over the sovereignty of these islets (Imia in Greek; Kardak in Turkish) had flared up previously in January 1996, when the two countries had dispatched troops there in what appeared to be an imminent military confrontation, which was avoided after an American-led mediation.

Adding to the continuous dogfights and small-scale incidents across the area for more than two decades, verbal tensions over the legal status quo in the Aegean exacerbated the situation in the autumn of 2016. Two months after the failed coup

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attempt in July 2016, the President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, while addressing regional officials in Ankara, sharply criticized the Lausanne Treaty, which legally demarcates the modern Greco-Turkish borders: 'We gave away islands to Greece that we could reach with a shout. Is this victory? Some tried to trick us into believing that Lausanne was a victory. Those who sat at that table did not do right by that treaty. Now, we suffer its setbacks' (Anadolu Agency 2016).¹

A visit by Turkey's Chief of the General Staff, Hulusi Akar, to the disputed islets in January 2017, 'accompanied by the commanders of Turkey's land, naval and air forces, along with two assault boats', reignited the memories of the January 1996 incidents (Hurriyet Daily News 2017b). This visit triggered the Greek reaction: Greek coastguard vessels and a navy gunboat shadowed the Turkish group, asking them to evacuate the area. In turn, Turkish coastguard vessels intervened, forcing the Greek vessels to leave (ibid.). Greece's Defence Minister responded by dropping a wreath into nearby waters from a helicopter, commemorating the loss of three Greek officers in a skirmish in the same area two decades earlier (Hurriyet Daily News 2017c). According to military sources in Turkey, the military brass had planned the visit in 2015 in retaliation for a similar gesture by the Greek Defence Minister over the islets (Firat 2017). However, these plans were allegedly postponed due to the 15 July 2016 coup attempt and the launch of the Euphrates Shield Operation in northern Syria on 24 August 2016 (ibid.).

Opinion articles from Greek newspapers in January 2017 displayed different perspectives on Turkey's course of action. Some of them directly linked it with the decision of the Greek Supreme Court to turn down Turkey's request that Greece extradite eight military officers who had fled Turkey after the July 2016 coup attempt and were accused of being actively involved in staging the coup (Nedos 2017; Ta Nea 2017). The military authorities understood this coup attempt – allegedly conducted by the Fethullahist Terror Organization (FETÖ) – as an attempt to destroy the Turkish Armed Forces (Hurriyet Daily News 2017a). Therefore, the need to put these officers on trial was so imperative that the Turkish government, through these incursions, was presumably manifesting its discontent with the Greek court's decision to reject their extradition.

Other analysts foresaw pre-electoral expediencies behind the incidents in the Aegean (To Vima 2017). In April 2017, tensions in Turkey were running high in anticipation of the upcoming constitutional referendum. The overhaul proposed by the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) would replace Turkey's parliamentary model of government with a presidential system, granting greatly enhanced executive powers to President Erdoğan. To achieve this objective, the AKP joined forces with the ultra-nationalist MHP.² Some Greek analysts thought that by following a hard-line approach against Greece and making nationalistic gestures, President Erdoğan could score extra points among nationalistic-minded voters.

Other Greek analysts and journalists, however, downplayed these interpretations and adopted a more 'rationalist' approach in deciphering Turkey's incursions (Athanasopoulos 2017). They embedded the staging of these incidents into Turkey's conjectured consistent and diachronic strategy to alter the status quo in the Aegean by creating *faits accomplis*. Turkish officials appeared to have designed these 'incidents' to pursue the wider strategic goal of changing the political landscape in the Aegean.

Considering all these different explanatory accounts, we put forward the following research question: which factors, from a Greek point of view, explain Turkey's foreign policy in the Aegean in January 2017? To address this question, we first explain the historical background of the conflict in the Aegean, touching upon the particular characteristics that have soured bilateral relations for more than four decades.

Second, we review the literature on the strategic interaction between Greece and Turkey during the 1996 crisis. A significant number of scholars (Altman 2018; Athanassopoulou 1997; Bayar and Kotelis 2014; Dimitrakis 2008; Guner 2004; Suzuki and Loizides 2011) have enriched our understanding of Turkey's motives behind the 1996 incidents. However, at the time of writing, no academic article has been published to elucidate the undercurrents of the 2017 crisis. In the context of our research, we have sought to fill this void.

Along the lines of the literature we reviewed, we expect that Athens would attribute Ankara's incursions to the domestic developments unfolding in the country. First of all, such moves can be logically framed by Greece as Turkey's 'retaliation' against the decision of the Greek Supreme Court not to extradite the Turkish military officers. Such assertive policies in the Aegean presumably signal Erdoğan's determination to address Turkish grievances from the day of the coup attempt and score points among his electorate. A second development, closely related to the first one, deals with the mobilization of his electorate on the eve of the upcoming referendum. President Erdoğan expected to become the absolute dominant player of the political game in Turkey following the April (2017) referendum. Tension with Greece could, from Greece's perspective, rally Turkey's constituents around Erdoğan and enable him to mobilize and even partner with nationalist elements, which would approve of such tensions. Such an 'aggressive' move could amplify Erdoğan's attempts to keep the country in a nationwide state of emergency, which he had imposed after the failed coup attempt.

Studying the recent crisis is not the only reason explaining the academic contribution of our study to the rich literature of Greek-Turkish relations. Our research offers an operational definition of Turkey's mode of behaviour by placing the subjective understandings of Greek diplomats and military officers about that particular issue at the forefront of our analysis. We let these people articulate their individual perceptions of the motives behind Turkey's foreign policy without a priori imposing on them our own interpretations or theoretical models.

This contribution is manifested through the explanation of the third step, the application of Q-methodology. This methodology offers a conceptual framework and a systematic procedure not only for incorporating the respondents' perspectives, but for projecting them at the centre of our analysis as well (Durning and Brown 2006). Although recent scholarship (Uluğ and Cohrs 2016; 2017) has embraced this methodology for deciphering the perceptual quality of other conflicts, such as the Kurdish-Turkish one, Q-methodology has not been used, so far, in examining Greek-Turkish tensions. This methodological approach differentiates our study from the previous ones on Greek-Turkish relations. Q-methodology provides a unique opportunity to empirically examine phenomena, such as these crises, from a socially shared perspective. Its advantage lies in the researchers not interfering with the revealed preferences of the recruited participants. According to the Q-methodological design, we (a) start with the

collection and sampling of statements regarding this topic, (b) continue with the selection of participants (in our case, diplomats, military officers and political analysts) and the sorting procedure of these statements and (c) conclude with factor analysis.

Historical background of the Aegean dispute

The Imia/Kardak crisis: a paradigm of the dispute in the Aegean

It was not the first time that these two small and uninhabited islets in the Aegean, situated between the Greek island chain of the Dodecanese and the southwestern mainland coast of Turkey, had stirred up a crisis between Greece and Turkey. On 26 December 1995, a Turkish cargo ship, *Figan Akat*, ran aground on one of them (Ioannou 1997). When the Greek authorities offered their assistance, the captain refused, arguing that he was located in Turkish territorial waters and should receive help only from Turkish authorities. Ultimately, he accepted being towed to Turkey by a Greek tugboat (ibid.). On the same day, the Mayor of Kalymnos – an island lying 5.5 nautical miles from these islets – visited the area and raised the Greek flag. On 27 December 1995, some journalists from the Turkish daily newspaper *Hurriyet* lowered the Greek flag and raised the Turkish one. On 28 December 1995, the Greek Navy lowered the Turkish flag and raised the Greek one. Turkish warships then approached the area under the observation of Greek ships, which notified the Turkish vessels of a violation of Greece's territorial waters (Hellenic Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2017).

The situation quickly escalated and reached a point of high tension. After a couple of days, both sides landed troops on each of the islets. A Greek helicopter, which took off from the Greek frigate *Navarino* for a reconnaissance flight over the islets, crashed during its mission, with rumours attributing the crash to Turkish firepower (Ioannou 1997). After the US intervention, the forces of both sides withdrew and the tensions were eventually defused.

Official positions in the dispute

To understand the undercurrents of these incidents, we review the disputants' official positions vis-à-vis the status quo in the Aegean. According to the Greek official stance, except for the delimitation of the continental shelf, there is no pending issue dividing the two sides. From Turkey's standpoint, the dispute in the Aegean is more complex and should be treated as a set of four separate but interrelated issues: (1) the delimitation of the maritime boundaries and continental shelf, including claims over the sovereignty of small islets and rocks; (2) the breadth of territorial waters; (3) control of the airspace beyond the territorial waters and (4) Greece's militarization of its Eastern Aegean islands (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2017).

From the Turkish perspective, international treaties such as the Lausanne Treaty in 1923 and the 1947 Paris Peace Treaty have not determined the legal status of these islets. As per the Turkish arguments, the islets' geological features 'cannot sustain human habitation' or economic life on their own (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2017). Turkey accused Greece of attempting to change their status by

opening some of those geographical features to artificial settlement by enacting laws and regulations in contravention of international law (ibid.). Turkey has interpreted the alleged policy as Greece's strategy to establish *faits accomplis*, which would 'close-off the Aegean Sea as a Greek lake' (ibid.).

Turkish officials have furthermore accused Greece of recruiting potential settlers to some of these small islets and rocks, a move 'in total disregard of the environmental concerns and the fragility of the ecosystems of the small islands and rocks in the Aegean' (ibid.). In the eyes of Turkish officials, this proves 'Greece's thirst for territorial expansion beyond areas ceded to her by the Lausanne Peace Treaty of 1923 and the Paris Peace Treaty of 1947' (ibid.).

The Greek side underlines that the existing international legal framework (the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne and the 1947 Paris Peace Treaty), which settled the issues of sovereignty in the region after the world wars, is 'conclusive and crystal clear' (Hellenic Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2017). It also underscores that, according to Article 15, Turkey renounced in favour of Italy all rights and titles over a number of islands occupied by Italy³ and the islets dependent thereon. According to Article 14 of the Paris Peace Treaty, Italy ceded to Greece in 'full sovereignty the Dodecanese islands indicated hereafter along with the adjacent islets' (ibid.). Greek officials recall Article 12 of the Lausanne Treaty confirming Greece's sovereignty over the islands in the Eastern Mediterranean⁴: 'except where a provision to the contrary is contained in the present Treaty, the islands situated at less than three miles from the Asiatic coast remain under Turkey's sovereignty' (ibid.). Greeks maintain that since these uninhabited islets or rocks lie 3.8 miles off the Turkish coast, they unquestionably come under Greek sovereignty (ibid.).

According to the Turkish line of argument, Article 14 of the Paris Peace Treaty does not include the Kardak islets (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2017) because of their geological features: 'The Kardak formations are not "islets" but two rocks', an element that, in Turkey's interpretation, does not comply with the definition of 'adjacent islets' as stipulated by Article 14 of the treaty (ibid.). The Greek counter-position is that Greece's traditional legal arguments are supported in practice by 'uninterrupted and peaceful Greek sovereignty over the Imia from 1947 and were never contested by Turkey' during the long period since then (Hellenic Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2017).

In the Greek view, Ankara does not ground its claims in legal arguments. Greek officials claim that since the 1970s, Turkey has embarked upon a 'systematic policy of contentions and claims against the sovereignty, the sovereign rights and jurisdictions of Greece' (Hellenic Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2017). The objective of this policy 'has been the changing of the territorial status quo provided for in international treaties' (ibid.). Furthermore, the Greek side posits that since the early 1990s, Turkish officials have started disseminating the novel theory of 'grey zones', reinterpreting international agreements in order to challenge Greek sovereignty over a number of islands, islets and rocks in the Aegean.

The Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs associates Turkey's claims with the Cyprus question as well. Greek officials assert that Turkey systematically opens up new fronts in order to put Greek diplomacy under multiple pressures:

[T]he advent of this new (assertive) Turkish policy coincided with the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in July 1974 and the subsequent Turkish occupation of the northern portion of Cyprus, which continues to this day, decisively impacting relations between the two countries and increasing tensions (*ibid.*).

Through this study, we want to examine whether our recruited participants, including Greek diplomats, military officers and political analysts, echo this line, particularly in light of Turkey's 2017 incursions. Do they also believe that Turkey intentionally instigated the recent crisis in order to keep on track with its consistent strategy to alter the status quo in the Aegean? Do they, by contrast, foresee different motives behind Turkey's behaviour in the Aegean? Our expectation, as mentioned in the introduction, is that our participants may invoke domestic calculations behind Turkey's course of action in the Aegean. Before examining their views, we first investigate how the scholarship on Greek-Turkish relations has approached the 1996 crisis.

Literature review

A number of scholars have uncovered potential factors behind the occurrence of the 1996 Greek-Turkish crisis. Relying on official archives and newspaper reports, Athanassopoulou (1997) lays out structural and behavioural accounts pertaining to Turkey's incentives behind the crises. She hypothesizes that in the context of the 1996 crisis, Ankara foresaw a window to fabricate a case to put forward its claims over the 'grey zones' in the Aegean. Based on her findings, she does not rule out that Turkey may have genuinely felt that the very sovereignty of the islets had not been clarified. In their effort to test the limited theoretical power of Democratic Peace Theory concerning the same incident, Bayar and Kotelis (2014) conduct process-tracing to demonstrate how media and opinion makers in both countries contributed in the escalation of the crisis. For the sake of 'operationalization', they resort to Greek and Turkish newspaper archives and the memoirs of the key actors involved in that particular crisis.

Guner (2004) employs evolutionary game analysis to scrutinize modes of stakeholders' behaviour in the Aegean. As he posits, Turkish (as well as Greek) political leaders, while dealing with the crises, embraced behaviours of fixed strategic prescriptions, framed as 'templates'. He envisions an 'incremental model', within which key policymakers build on policies inherited from the past and concentrate on incremental rather than wholesale changes in their strategy vis-à-vis each other in the Aegean. For the sake of 'operationalization', he adopts an analytic narrative approach, which blends analytic tools with the narrative form, paying close attention to accounts and contexts. Through this evolutionary framework, he treats the narrative of the 1996 crisis as an extension of Turkey's strategy in the Aegean instead of an isolated event. To investigate the causation of interstate crisis-escalation among conflictual dyads, such as Greece and Turkey, and India and Pakistan, Suzuki and Loizides (2011) draw from an International Crisis Behavior (ICB) dataset and apply Ragin (2000) qualitative comparative analysis. They conclude that both the security dilemmas and the diversionary theory of war⁵ explain crisis escalation by pinpointing cross-case patterns.

While the approaches above play an instrumental role in delineating the structural and domestic context within which the dispute in the Aegean has unfolded, they do not place the subjective understandings of the disputants on this issue at the forefront. The theoretical and methodological accounts presented above offer a grand strategic outlook for the conflict in the Aegean and the emanating dilemmas; they do not adopt a bottom-up approach that would place the understandings of potential key stakeholders in the crises, such as diplomats and military officers, in the driver's seat. This task is essential if someone wants to capture the 'perceptual' undercurrents that add to the complexity of the conflict in the Aegean. Therefore, through our work, we deviate from an approach that would impose *a priori* theoretical meanings of the conflict and the crisis on our recruited participants, comprising diplomats and military officers, but also political analysts.

Contribution of the present research

There are various ways in which our article contributes to the literature of Greek-Turkish tensions. While the scholarship on deciphering the key actors' motives amid the 1996 crisis is vast, no academic article (at least at the time of writing) has elaborated on the 2017 crisis. Although journalists and researchers have provided diverse explanations about Turkey's 2017 incursions, there is no academic work which conveys the interpretations of these events in a more rigorous fashion. The societal relevance of our work gains currency if we consider that this crisis occurred after Turkey had witnessed the bloodiest coup attempt in its post-WWII political history. This particular timing helps us identify whether our recruited participants – Greek diplomats, military officers and political analysts – perceived any linkages between these two events.

Moreover, our differentiation from previous work does not simply concentrate on the examination of chronically different bilateral crises, but on our methodology around their investigation as well. There is no doubt that the recent 2017 crisis, like the previous ones, is clouded by pervasive uncertainty and conjures up memories from the turbulent past. It is imperative to specify the lessons that diplomats and military officers learn from such events. We do not treat learning as a passive activity, in which military crises automatically produce their own lessons that key stakeholders in the crises absorb (Levy 1994, 283). We rather view it as an analytic construction, in which these people interpret historical experiences through the lenses of their own analytical assumptions and worldviews. Diplomats and military officers have to resort to their own subjective understandings in order to grasp the situation at hand and evaluate Turkey's stakes in that particular context.

To this effect, we adopt a methodology through which we map the interpretations of diplomats, military officers and political analysts of Turkey's stakes in the crisis, with the least possible interference on our part. Aligning with a broader conceptualization of crises as a social construction, we place the human subjectivity of the participants over that particular issue at the heart of our analysis. Our objective is to allow diplomats, military officers and political analysts decide and articulate what is meaningful and significant when it comes to Turkey's incursions in the Aegean.

To achieve this, we make use of Q-methodology, a fully developed paradigm to measure 'human subjectivity'. Multiple scholars (Brown and Good 2010; Dryzek and

Berejikian 1993; Steunenberg et al. 2011; Watts and Stenner 2012) have described this approach as a forum tailor-made to enable the expression of subjective and socially shared viewpoints, unimpaird by the researcher's interference. Having an exploratory heritage, it offers a conceptual framework and systematic procedures for incorporating participants' perspectives and putting them at the heart of analysis. Through it, the selected participants express their viewpoints by sorting statements on the issue at hand. This raises the question as to why we adopt Q-methodology, rather than R-methodology in the form of surveys and questionnaires, in order to decipher the perceptual quality of the Greek constituents vis-à-vis Turkey's incursions in the Aegean. There are multiple reasons for this choice. While R-methodology asks respondents to express views on isolated statements, Q-methodology identifies respondents' views on statements after they have evaluated all the statements presented to them (Dryzek and Berejikian 1993; Silvius et al. 2017). Furthermore, in contrast to R-methodology, Q-methodology traditionally seeks to provide a picture of the pre-existing perspectives among the population (as articulated in opinion articles), rather than investigating the level of support for those perspectives among the population, a logic represented by R-methodology (Silvius et al. 2017). This implies that the procedure for sampling respondents is usually different from that in R-methodology (ibid.). Rather than random sampling and using large sample sizes, as dictated by R-methodology, Q-methodology adopts purposive sampling and smaller sample sizes, involving people who have exhibited adequate knowledge with respect to the topic under investigation.

Research design: the application of Q-methodology

The application of this method unfolds in three distinct stages: formulating the (1) statements under inspection or concourse in the language of Q-methodology (2) the participants (our P-Set) and sorting procedure (Q-sort technique) and (3) the factor analysis.

Formulating the statements under inspection: our theoretical criteria

Concourse represents the 'universe of verbalizations' about a particular topic, which in our case is the Greek view on foreign policy. We detected this 'universe' in opinion articles from the Greek press during the period between January and February 2017; we investigated the ones published in the most popular Greek newspapers⁶ at that time: *To Vima*, *Kathimerini*, *I Eleftherotypia* and *Ta Nea*. The aim at this stage is to identify and extract statements which develop a cause-effect relationship for Turkey's recent incursions.

According to which criteria should we extract the statements composing our concourse and eventually our Q-sample? Taking stock of the literature of *Foreign Policy Analysis*, we uncover structural and behavioural accounts of foreign policymaking. Their theoretical premises navigate us throughout the collection and selection of particular statements in the Greek press. In this respect, we dig into three conceptual models of foreign policy which have captured a dominant portion in the literature: the Rational Actor Model (RAM), the role of belief-system in foreign policy and the entanglement between domestic and international politics. After shedding some light

on each perspective, we explain how the deriving concepts from each model can operate as our guiding ‘microscopes’ in the collection and selection of statements.

The rational actor model (RAM)

RAM is the conceptual model most frequently used by diplomatic historians to explain foreign policy decisions. The endeavour to expound on international events and developments by recounting the aims and calculations of nations or governments constitutes its trademark (Allison 1971; Allison and Zelikow 1999). The proponents of this model treat states as ‘unitary actors, monolithic, speaking with one voice, and with no divisions or differences of opinions within the government or the larger society’ (Kaarbo and Ray 2011, 140).

This assumption blends with the most dominant theoretical perspectives on international politics, especially (neo)realism. The theory of realism envisions states as sovereign entities exerting sufficient control over their constituents and being able to quell any potential divisions unfolding within them (ibid.). Trapped within the predicament of an internationally anarchic environment, their primary question is to safeguard their security. To this end, rational decision-makers, representing the states’ interests, put all internal, personal and bureaucratic machinations aside; they act with one voice for the sake of national security (Allison 1971). Therefore, RAM pictures a group of decision-makers as ‘unimpaired by domestic developments, unencumbered by public and political pressures and free to follow their own risk-propensity when making momentous decisions’ (Trenta 2016, 37).

Another buzzword animating RAM is the concept of rationality. Allison (1971, 30) defines it as a ‘consistent, value-maximizing choice within specified constraints’. In this respect, decision-makers reach a decision via a clearly defined intellectual process: they first define, rank values and weigh all alternative courses of action (policies); they estimate the likely consequences (costs/benefits) of each and choose the optimal course of action in the view of the ends they pursue (Ferguson and Mansbach 2003, 122).

The value of RAM rests in its capacity to provide a rational discipline behind the Turkish incursions during the period of study. It consolidates a remarkable continuity in Turkey’s foreign policy vis-à-vis Greece and makes its decisions in the Aegean appear as an intelligible, rational continuum, irrespective of the different motives, contrasting domestic preferences or the ‘intellectual and moral qualities of successive’ decision-makers (Morgenthau 1970, 6). To this effect, we look for statements, according to which Turkey’s recent incursions are instrumental in its perceived diachronic attempts to alter the status quo in the Aegean. From this angle, the Greek side may interpret the recent course of action as nothing more than part of a strategic behaviour, which the Turkish elites have embarked upon since the 1970s.

Belief systems and foreign policy

Despite its excessive theoretical appeal in mapping foreign policy decisions, the oversimplification of RAM’s philosophy has been severely criticized. When it comes to rationality, there is a school of thought claiming that the human mind is beset with limitations, especially when challenged to analyse and understand complex and volatile situations (Boin et al. 2017, 203–205; Jervis 1976). The high cost of information gathering, risk uncertainty, time pressure and misperceptions are only a few of the

mental shortcuts indicative of the mind's inability to carry out the complicated calculus dictated by the RAM (Jervis 1976). Decision-makers, therefore, remain 'rational' but have to cope with 'bounded rationality' (Simon 1955).

These points have contributed to the rise of a different trend in foreign policy analysis; the behavioural approach, which constitutes the second criterion of our statements' collection. This school examines the nature of the filtering device of leaders' beliefs about empirical and normative issues (Smith 1988, 11). It scrutinizes the extent to which preconceived views of the actors lead them to exclude information contrary to their preconceived views. The research exemplar in this school is the concept of 'operational codes', whose critical development occurred in 1969 through the work of Alexander George. He defined 'operational code' as a 'particularly significant portion of the actor's entire set of beliefs' about the nature of the political universe and the means for dealing with others in politics (George 1969, 197).

Along the lines of this approach, we investigate statements pointing to the reasoning that Turkish policymakers adopted on the eve of these incidents. What kind of criteria did the Turkish policymakers employ in order to select their goals or objectives for a specific course of action? What is the perceived control that Turkey's incumbent president can exert on historical developments? What are his views vis-à-vis the EU and other political leaders, such as presidents Trump and Putin, and how do these views influence his decision-making in the Aegean?

The role of domestic politics in the making of foreign policy

The third criterion according to which we scrutinize the opinion articles is the role of domestic politics in the making of foreign policy. As mentioned in the introduction and the literature review, our theoretical expectation is that domestic calculations are factored into Turkey's course of action in the Aegean. A handful of scholars trod new paths of inquiry by opening the 'black box' of domestic politics in an effort to comprehend actors' choices in global politics. For instance, in his attempt to explain American policy in the Cuban Missile Crisis, Allison (1971) put forward another model, governmental politics. By contrast with the RAM, this model does not treat the key political actors as monolithic and unitary entities sitting atop of the state. It rather describes leaders' decisions as the product of politicking and the decentralized coordination of the various pressures emanating from public opinion and representatives of interest groups (military officers, intelligence services, lobby groups) inside and outside the government. Decisions here spring from bargaining games played by top policymakers based on their unequal positions of power within governmental circles. These assumptions gained empirical ground in the insightful analysis of Snyder and Diesing (1977), who studied how states and decision-makers act in international crises. Their conclusion was that in fully half of the international crises they studied, top decision-makers were not unified.

The most authoritative account of the interplay between domestic and external constraints in foreign policy is offered by Robert Putnam (1988) and his model, known as the 'two-level game'. According to this model, every national political leader appears at two game boards: the national and the international level. At the national level, domestic groups pursue their interests by exerting pressure on the government to employ favourable policies, while politicians seek power through the construction of

coalitions with them (Putnam 1988, 434). At the international level, national governments seek to maximize their own ability to satisfy domestic pressures, while minimizing the adverse consequences of foreign developments (ibid.).

When domestic pressures raise questions over the leader's power legitimacy, the latter may resort to various tactics, such as rally-around-the-flag ones (Mueller 1989). In this vein, leaders seeking to increase their popularity during a period of domestic pressure (produced by economic or political crises endangering their authority) may resort to the use of force while dealing with a foreign policy issue (Kaarbo and Ray 2011, 147). Instrumental in this logic is diversionary theory. It posits that leaders may enact an adventurous foreign policy in order to divert attention from potential domestic unrest to the international arena (Smith 1996, 134). Even if the 'artificial' crisis does not manage to fully deflect the public's attention, governments may still undertake risky foreign policies. If leaders extract concessions from their external opponent, then they may retain power because success constitutes a signal of competence in the eyes of their constituents. Thus, international crises are not the product of well-designed rational calculations; they are rather modeled as a 'political war of attrition', where 'leaders choose at each moment whether to attack, back down, or escalate' (Fearon 1994, 577).

The rally-around-the-flag effect and diversionary theory also motivate our research through the Greek viewpoints on Turkey's actions at that time. In this manuscript, we examine statements framing Turkey's recent incursions as a response to Greece's decision to block the extradition of eight Turkish military officers accused of participating in the failed attempt to oust the Turkish government. Extraditing these eight officials would satisfy Turkey's public opinion demands for immediate justice after the coup attempt in July 2016. Moreover, Turkey was greatly divided on the eve of a highly charged referendum that would amend its constitution. The overhaul proposed by the AKP greatly increased the president's executive powers. While many political parties had opposed this perspective, the AKP joined forces with the nationalist MHP to form a winning coalition supporting the constitution's amendment. Bearing the role of political expediencies in mind, we look for statements forging linkages between Turkey's domestic developments and the 2017 tensions. In any case, all the concepts above set forth the guiding principles that navigate our collection and selection of statements from the opinion articles. Along these theoretical lines, the sampled statements, 24 in total, address the quintessentially political aspects of the viewpoints on Turkey's foreign policy and build up the Q-sample of our research, as shown in [Table 1](#).

Participants and sorting procedure

For the implementation of the second stage of our Q-design, the sorting procedure or Q-sort (in the language of Q-methodology) and the recruitment of our participants (or P-Set in the language of Q-methodology), we took three distinct steps. First, we assigned each of the 24 statements to a distinct printed card. The number of statements are limited compared to the number used in an average Q-study (between 40 and 80). Our effort to capture the very momentum of the crisis, as framed by the Greek newspapers in the period between January and February 2017, explains to a great extent this limitation. Second, we formulated a seven point distribution template from 'most disagree' to 'most agree', where the participants were called to match the 24 statements

Table 1. The Q-sample and Z-score of the statements for each viewpoint.

The Q-Sample (statements translated from Greek)		Z-score for Viewpoint 1	Z-score for Viewpoint 2
Items	Content		
1	After Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu threatened to annul the Greco-Turkish agreement on the refugee question, Turkish Naval Forces muscled their way in Imia. This constitutes part of Ankara's nervy response to the recent decision of Supreme Court for the Greek government to not extradite the eight Turkish Military Officers.	0.61	0.75
2	Turkey has disproportionately heavy losses in its endeavour to control al-Bab and banish ISIS from that city. An analysis of the events in the Aegean should not rule out a potential Turkish initiative to divert attention from the military-laden hindrances that Turkey has come across in Northern Syria.	-0.31	-1.51
3	The recent incident is directly tied up with Turkey's general position about the lack of delimitation agreements in the territorial waters in Aegean and about its 'grey zone' theory.	1.20	1.07
4	After the defeat of the coup instigators, nationalistic features from different sides re-surface. However, whatever becomes an object of struggle in the domestic arena gains an external dimension and incorporates itself into a <i>sui generis</i> revisionism of Turkey's political scene.	0.81	0.31
5	Russians may feel displeased by the Turkish incursions in the Aegean; nevertheless, they prioritize their very good cooperation with Ankara in Syria.	-0.52	-1.51
6	NATO's presence in the Northern Aegean is disturbing Turkey because 'it does not want the presence of an international observer supervising its plans in the region'.	0.45	0.00
7	The US is 'neither in a position nor in the mood' to interfere, as it did in the '90s. This may explain Turkey's rally in the Aegean.	-0.81	-0.31
8	President Erdoğan has a bargaining chip vis-à-vis the EU that had not existed earlier: the refugees. By opening the doors in the Aegean, he knows that he can strike a politically mortal blow to the EU leaders.	0.71	-0.13
9	Erdoğan is not Çiller, not even Özal. He feels, even temporarily, omnipotent and deeply pressured. Between himself and his inner circle, as well as the fleet commander, there is no one else involved. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and military officers have been set aside.	0.53	0.44
10	Turkey never relinquished its aspirations in the Aegean.	1.91	0.62
11	The international instability and the introversion of the crucial actors of the international system have enabled Ankara's breaking loose from all restraints.	-0.74	-0.31
12	In Europe, the electoral cycle that was opening up at that time along with the derailment of Turkey's EU admission perspective left a narrow margin for the EU to intervene and exert its influence.	0.25	0.58
13	Putin's policies in reinstating spheres of influence and favouring violence or the threat of use of violence while implementing foreign policy provided a convenient environment for the Turkish behaviour.	-1.62	1.95
14	The domestic instability in Turkey fuels the tensions in Greco-Turkish relations. In April's (2017) referendum Erdoğan sought to become the absolute dominant player of the political game. A tension with Greece rallies society around his figure and allows him to go into partnership with extremist elements.	-0.35	-0.89
15	Through a staged crisis in the Aegean, Erdoğan was offering the Turkish armed forces an opportunity to restore their image shaken after successive purges and the ineffective combat against two fronts: the PKK and ISIS in Syria.	-0.42	-1.07
16	The hard line stance taken by Turkey is also an attempt at bullying in the Cyprus reunification talks. It is further a warning and preparing of the public opinion's climate about what will follow after the failure of the negotiations.	0.69	-0.75
17	The arms race is undoubtedly one of the reasons for Greece's economic downturn.	-1.65	0.00
18	I do not believe that the recent tension is linked to the case of the '8 .	0.44	0.04

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued).

The Q-Sample (statements translated from Greek)			
Items	Content	Z-score for Viewpoint 1	Z-score for Viewpoint 2
19	It is much easier for Trump to cooperate with Turkey, especially with Erdoğan. He looks on him as a powerful man with similar thoughts, who can abide by agreements and comply with them.	-1.72	-1.38
20	The carrots that the EU offers Turkey, such as visa liberalization and, finally, admission, command convergence policies on behalf of Turkey; however, for Erdoğan, issues such as security and counter-terrorism are off the table.	-1.11	1.20
21	Greece is the weak link for Erdoğan, thus the first target. He throws 'warning' shots on Greece, not ignoring Greece only but also feeling that even the US would not interfere the way it had done in the past.	-0,72	-1.33
22	Groups of Turkish elites attempts to question international law and Greece's rights -deriving from the latter- persists. Their objective is to contest them from the angle of a historically inaccurate revisionism.	1.60	1.20
23	Turkey does not question today whether the Greek islands have territorial zone or continental shelf rights; it constantly challenges the Greek identity of some islets and even inhabited islands.	1.38	0.83
24	The dispute between Kemalists and Erdoğanists over 'Greek occupation of some islands in the Aegean is a squabble over an alien hayloft', without reference to any real facts. What they actually want to do is to raise claims in order to enlarge the package of a future negotiation or justify future activities opposing international law.	0.36	-0.75

against this distribution depending on their degree of agreement or disagreement with each statement.

What kind of participants do we need for the purpose of such a study? Relying on strategic considerations in forming the P-Set, we recruited diplomats, military officers and political analysts, 15 in total. Q-studies, generally, recommend the recruitment of 40 to 60 participants for the P-Set (Shinebourne 2009). However, Q-studies with fewer participants are conducted as well (Uluğ and Cohrs 2017b). Some of them have first-hand experience of such crises while others, examining Turkish foreign policy, offered us important insights into this topic. Could we identify any link between their experiential insights and the viewpoints they express? Did age and profession play any instrumental role in articulating their views? These questions prompted us when recruiting these respondents. Table 2 lists the members of the P-Set, including the Q-sort name assigned to them, their age and their profession.

Lastly, after recruiting these people, we invited them to sort the items into a specific kind of rank order on a card board, ranging from -3 (totally disagree) to +3 (fully agree). It is a forced distribution process because, regardless of the number of statements they agree or disagree with, they are 'compelled' to match their preferences against the number of 24 cells, expressed throughout a specific configuration, as shown in Figure 1; they had to place each statement stipulated on an imprinted card into one of the 24 cells.

Factor analysis

After gathering the (Q-) sorted answers of the P-set, we proceeded with factor analysis through the software provided by the PQMethod. By virtue of demonstrating similar

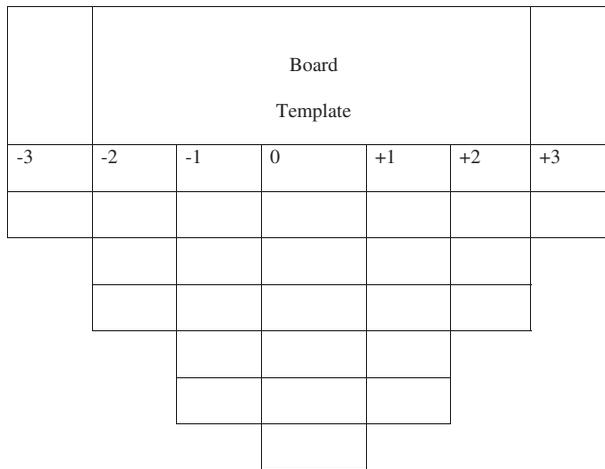


Figure 1. Grid to sort statements.

ranking, we identified the kind of different socially shared perspectives these 15 participants adopted (Table 2). The logic of factor analysis is to pinpoint patterns of similarity in the Q-sort configurations and, hence, in the viewpoints that the participants expressed. Within this process, we provided a measure that notified us of the degree to which each individual Q-sort correlated with a potential factor. This measure is called factor-loading and is generally expressed in the form of a correlation-coefficient which measures the extent to which two observed variables' movements are associated (Brown 1980; Watts and Stenner 2012). Each factor should include at least two factor loadings.

How did we identify these loadings? Through the PQMethod software, we manually flagged the most representative Q-sorts (associated respondents) loading to each factor. Through manual flagging, we highlighted the Q-sorts that we used for subsequent calculations; we measured their idealized score for each statement and for each respective

Table 2. The P-Set and the factor loadings per viewpoint.

No.	Profession	Year of birth	Viewpoint 1	Viewpoint 2
1	Diplomat	1946	0.68X	-0.04
2	Political Analyst	1984	0.57X	-0.39
3	Political Analyst	1988	0.50X	0.23
4	Military Officer	1969	0.42	0.75X
5	Political Analyst	1985	0.47X	0.25
6	Political Analyst	1988	0.51	0.19
7	Political Analyst	1989	0.10	0.27
8	Diplomat	1945	0.03	0.81X
9	Diplomat	1943	0.56X	-0.30
10	Political Analyst	1984	0.65X	-0.04
11	Diplomat	1983	0.78X	-0.05
12	Military Officer	1983	0.50	0.40
13	Political Analyst	1982	0.57X	0.16
14	Diplomat	1950	0.74X	0.24
15	Military Officer	1985	0.80X	0.10
cum% expl.Var. ^a			32	13

^aProportion of the explained variance expressed as a percentage.

factor. The purpose of flagging is to gain as many distinguishable perspectives as possible. We decided on the final factor solution based on a number of criteria. The first criterion was that the loading should be significantly high and much larger than the loadings of the same Q-sort for other factors. The second criterion was that the square loading for a factor would be higher than the sum of the square loadings for all other factors (Zabala and Pascual 2016). Q-sorts with higher factor loadings should theoretically contribute proportionally more to each of the factor-estimates than Q-sorts with relatively lower factor loadings. Through this procedure, we decided to extract two factors.⁷

We then performed a ‘varimax’ rotation of these factors for each side. Through rotation, we switched their positions along with their viewpoints relative to the Q-sorts. During the rotation, we placed the factor loadings under a series of carefully trained microscopes (Watts and Stenner 2012, 129), which re-examined the nature of the correlations among our participants. After the rotation, we identified any Q-sorts which closely approximated the standpoint of each of the three factors. Through the software, we identified two main factors which accounted for the greatest part (45%) of the explained variance expressed in the correlations among all Q-sorts. Table 2 displays the factor loadings that correspond to each of the three factors. These factors represent the viewpoints that we interpreted.

Interpretation of the key viewpoints

In the following section, we analyse each viewpoint by presenting the mostly agreed and mostly disagreed statements in each of them, some elementary features of the respondents loading in each viewpoint and the interpretation they provided for the ranking.

Viewpoint 1: Turkey’s diachronic strategy in the Aegean

Viewpoint 1, as shown in Table 2, accounted for the biggest proportion of the explained variance (32%). Respondents loading in this viewpoint varied across the three different professions (i.e. diplomats, military officers and analysts). Furthermore, the fact that their age varied showed that the latter did not represent a crucial criterion in the articulation of the viewpoints expressed. The statements scoring the most positive Q-sort value were ‘Turkey never relinquished its aspirations in the Aegean’ (Statement 10) and ‘Turkey challenges on a constant basis whether some islets and even inhabited islands are actually Greek’ (Statement 23). The statement that the participants disagreed with was: ‘It is much easier for Trump to cooperate with Turkey, especially with Erdoğan. He looks on him as a powerful man with similar thoughts, who can abide by agreements and comply with them’ (Statement 19).

According to this viewpoint, the respondents diagnosed a rational continuum in Turkey’s foreign policy in the Aegean through these incidents. They viewed the latter in light of Turkey’s allegedly ‘consistent strategy’ to alter the power balance in the region to its favour; they did not frame Turkey’s behaviour through the lens of its perceived domestic turbulence at that moment. As the respondents explained, Turkey allegedly staged these incidents, not because it sought to express its discontent with the Greek supreme court’s decision for the eight officers, but in order to create *faits accomplis* in the region for its benefit. The participants downplayed the assumption that Turkey

produced these crises in order to ‘externalize’ the domestic turbulence unfolding at that time within its territories. One of them posited:

Many analysts claim that Turkey’s course of action in the Aegean comes in the wake of its domestic political developments. Things are not like that ... Turks follow a strategy and everything they do is pre-planned.

Another respondent supporting this viewpoint further argued:

If someone reads the Strategic Depth Doctrine of Davutoglu, [s]he realizes that Turkey, since 1973, wants to control the Aegean. Even before the 1974 coup was staged in Cyprus, Greece was in negotiations with Turkey about the delimitation of the continental shelf. Many times, the Aegean has been dogged by multiple similar incidents to serve this purpose.

Viewpoint 2: the strongman style

Viewpoint 2 accounts for 12% of the explained variance, with two participants supporting, one diplomat and one military officer. The most agreed statement among the participants was ‘Putin’s policies in reinstating spheres of influence and favouring violence or the threat of use of violence while implementing foreign policy provided a convenient environment for the Turkish behaviour’ (Statement 13). The same respondents disagreed with Statement 14: ‘The domestic instability in Turkey fuels the tensions in the Greco-Turkish relations. In the April’s (2017) referendum Erdoğan sought to become the absolute dominant player of the political game. A tension with Greece rallies society around his figure and allows him to go into partnership with extremist elements.’

As one of the respondents explained, Turkey’s incursions reflect the rise of strongman politics across the globe, where manifesting an ‘iron hand’ in bilateral relations is considered a ‘legitimate way’ to tackle chronic problems, such as the conflict in the Aegean. In this vein, ‘muscling your military strength in the international arena’ becomes a dominant worldview that somehow legitimizes such incursions. As one of the respondents argued, the practices followed by other ‘macho’ leaders in the international arena, such as President Putin, might have inspired the belief system of the current Turkish leadership on how to conduct its strategy in the Aegean. Allegedly motivated by the way Russia annexed Crimea, Turkey’s incumbent leader embeds ‘gunboat diplomacy’ into legitimate foreign policy practices.

One of the two respondents posited that the precedents in the Balkans and in Crimea might have prompted Turkey’s leadership to employ the use of force in the conduct of Turkey’s relations with Greece. They simply believe that Turkey’s recent incursions are a legitimate way to conduct foreign policy. The respondent underlined:

Crimea, the failed coup attempt in Montenegro, the involvement in the American elections and Brexit are indications of Russia’s pursuit to contest the Western democratic model. It does not aim at the revival of the bipolar system, according to the Cold War standards, but the prevalence of chaos, thanks to which its power will be multiplied. Russia aims at this because any other direct confrontation with the US or the EU today is not in its favour. While Erdoğan detests the way Western policy is generally conducted, he benefits from the new ‘institutionalization’ of power and the use of violence in the conduct of foreign policy.

Conclusions

In this study, we explored how Greek diplomats, military officers and political analysts interpreted Turkey's behaviour during the 2017 incidents. Our initial expectation before starting this research was that our Greek participants would flag domestic calculations as the main motive behind Turkey's activities in the Aegean. In light of the failed coup attempt and in order to restore the constituents' grievances and keep them in check, Erdoğan was expected to stage such incidents. Our logic was that through such assertive policies, he kept Turkey in a near-constant state of war in order to delay potentially future coup attempts. In this way, he was able to diffuse the domestic crises he was called to tackle across the Aegean while keeping his country in a state of emergency. Furthermore, pursuant to the logic of diversionary theory, he was expected to instigate such crises in order to deflect the attention of his constituents from the domestic turmoil unfolding at that moment in the country to an 'external arch enemy', such as Greece. Our expectation was that by pursuing such policies, he additionally scored extra points among the nationalist constituents, which he was politically in need of in order to win the upcoming referendum at that time.

Based on our findings, our expectations proved wrong. Through the application of Q-methodology, we identified and highlighted two shared viewpoints by which our respondents explained Turkey's course of action: 1) Turkey's diachronic strategy in the Aegean and 2) the strongman style.

According to the first viewpoint, it is not domestic politics that motivates Turkey's incursions in the Aegean. These incursions were believed to be embedded in Turkey's alleged longstanding strategy to alter the status quo in the Aegean to its favour. Such logic mirrors a rationalist thinking. In this vein, domestic factors did not reportedly impact Turkey's diachronic rational calculations in the Aegean. The incursions should be comprehended as the implementation of a strategy to increase its dominance in the Aegean. The respondents in Viewpoint 1 framed them as nothing more than Turkey's tactics in the context of a long-term strategy to alter the power configuration in the Aegean for its benefit.

The respondents traced these tactics back to 1970s and associated them with Turkey's strategy in Cyprus as well. They underscored the centrality of geopolitics in Turkey's calculations. They posited that both the Dodecanese islands and Cyprus have been falling within Turkey's vital national and strategic interests due to their geographical proximity to the Anatolian heartland. They recognized the threat of encirclement that Greek sovereignty over the Dodecanese islands and the close cooperation between Greece and Cyprus could pose to Turkey. They stressed Turkey's strategic belief that enhanced cooperation between two 'hostile' countries would restrict its free access to the northern shores in the eastern Mediterranean. In dealing with two 'enemies' in both the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean, Turkey would presumably fear that both Cyprus and Greece would jeopardize its control of its harbours in Iskenderun and Mersin; by questioning its authority there, both countries would allegedly have the ability to strike the nation's Anatolian heartland. Fearing, therefore, that Greece would 'envelope' Turkey with a strategic belt of hostile islands, it militarily intervened in Cyprus in 1974 and has embarked since then upon a continuous 'gunboat diplomacy' in the Aegean.

In light of these long-standing fears, should readers decipher the recent incursions according to the first viewpoint? The respondents asserted that the decision of Greece's Supreme Court to reject Turkey's request to extradite the eight military officers was just the proxy cause (and not the real cause) that Turkey needed to muscle its military strength. They downplayed the importance of the domestic turbulence unfolding in the country in the aftermath of the coup attempt in July 2016 as well as on the eve of the referendum in April 2017. Geopolitical calculations triumph over domestic configurations.

Finally, in the second viewpoint, the participants underscored the importance of a strongman style behind these incidents. The respondents who shared this perspective scoring in this viewpoint believed that 'macho strong-man politics' is on the ascendant globally, with Putin and Erdoğan being among its main representatives. The neoliberal worldviews which powered the Cold War's winners seem much less appealing than they did a generation ago. In the respondents' view, President Erdoğan admired the paradigm President Putin developed in the aftermath of Crimea's annexation and strived for ways to apply it in the Aegean (and Syria) as well. As the respondents argued, Erdoğan, inspired by Putin, did not foresee any reason to emulate the Western-centred style of negotiations, with all the checks and balances impeding him from tackling chronic challenges, such the Aegean dispute. Without these checks and balances and due to his self-conception as a determined leader, he was able to offer a credible shortcut to greater security and national pride by muscling Turkey's military strength against an arch enemy such as Greece. Therefore, Turkey's recent incursions constitute a clear manifestation of Erdoğan's strongman style in the international arena.

There is no doubt that other perceptual factors might be at play. Regardless of whether these exist, herewith we would like to encourage the application of Q-methodology in deciphering the perceptual quality of such incidents. We wish to invite other scholars to collect similar data from Turkish policy entrepreneurs and see how they envision Greece's activities in the Aegean. Any study comparing the two sides' positions in the Aegean would enable readers to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the stakes underpinning the long-lasting dispute.

Nevertheless, this article has some limitations as well. As regards the methodology, one problem with this paper is related to the statements under inspection. All of the statements were 'extracted' from opinion articles, which sought to deliver a key message. In order to clearly capture this key message, the relevant contextual background information was added to the content of some statements. Therefore, some of them appeared as narratives and not typical Q-statements, which left less room for interpretation on behalf of the respondents. The implication was that some of these statements may have required more than one judgment in their ranking and interpretation. In order to address this limitation, we had to prioritize the respondents' 'qualitative arguments' before ranking these statements.

An additional limitation regarding the proper implementation of Q-methodology in our study relates to journalistic sources, from which we extracted the statements under examination (our Q-sample). We focused on the most popular newspapers and did not investigate articles in different newspapers which may have criticized Greece's position or may have covered alternative perspectives on the recent dispute in the Aegean. Moreover, the number of statements we collected for our Q-sample were more limited than the one employed in an

average Q-study. While the required number of statements vary across different Q-studies, a set of between 40 and 80 statements is considered satisfactory in Q-methodology (Shinebourne 2009). Nevertheless, while focusing on the 2017 particular crisis in the Aegean and observing how the newspapers framed that moment of the crisis, we decided not to wait for more detailed analyses that could have shed more light on these events. Therefore, throughout these 24 statements, we cannot be certain that we achieved theoretical saturation on this topic. Nevertheless, the qualitative arguments provided by our participants and the ranking of these 24 statements introduced a more qualitative depth in our study.

Another limitation is the study of one particular crisis only. An isolated incident cannot inform readers of Turkey's perceived foreign policy strategy in the region, especially after the July 2016 incidents. Due to the crisis period unfolding that time, we focused on one case study event. Future researchers could make use of this methodology to examine similar incidents which occurred in the past (especially in 1996). Furthermore, for the sake of the 'concourse', we should expand the database with the inclusion of statements in historical textbooks, official reports and press releases during those periods. Thus, a more macro-level approach may enlighten us on how Greek bureaucrats comprehend Turkey's foreign policy in the Aegean. Moreover, researchers could explore the theoretical account of other models in the making of foreign policy. For instance, they could treat these incidents as part of standard operating procedures conducted by the military and dive into the *modus operandi* of these particular institutional aspects.

The dispute in the Aegean is so convoluted that multiple factors may not be gaining the publicity they probably merit. Through the presentation of these perspectives via Q-methodology, we laid out which theoretical-perceptual accounts are at play. Despite the various explanations, we cannot discount the fact that the vast majority of our participants framed the 2017 incidents as part of Turkey's consistent strategy to consolidate its dominance in the Aegean. This mirrors a structural approach towards how the Greek side interprets the developments in the region. Reading between the lines of these interpretations, we conclude that future incidents may re-occur regardless of who is in power in Turkey. The dominant figure of Turkey's current leader or the domestic turmoil in the country does not suffice as independent variables to explain Turkey's incursions. From our participants' viewpoints, Turkey's rationalist strategy to alter the status quo in the Aegean holds the greatest explanatory power in comprehending what happens in the region.

These reflections have wider implications. The end of the Cold War made many of us believe that the 'territorial divisions in our world would be surmountable' (Kaplan 2012, 3–4). The increasing economic interdependence of nation-states and the de-territorializing consequences of new information technologies could have driven a stake into the heart of neorealist approaches towards global politics. However, these incidents and their interpretation remind us once again that these theories have never gone away, especially from that particular region. If such visions remain intact, in spite of the augmentative economic interaction between the two countries, the zero-sum views in their bilateral relations will become the dominant paradigm. If that is the case, the arc of history bends towards delusion.

Notes

1. Paradoxically, the official website of the Turkish Foreign Ministry recalls Lausanne's provisions to back the Turkish positions in the Aegean: 'The Lausanne Treaty

established a political balance between Greece and Turkey by harmonizing the vital interests of both countries including those in the Aegean. Turkey fully respects the provisions of Lausanne and in return expects Greece to act in the same manner' (MFA.GOV.TR).

2. MHP is an acronym for Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, a Turkish far-right conservative political party which adheres to a Turkish ultra-nationalistic ideology.
3. Stampalia (Astypalia), Rhodes (Rhodos), Chalki, Karpathos, Kassos, Tilos, Nisyros, Kalymnos, Leros, Patmos, Lipsos, Symi and Kos, which were occupied by Italy at that time before 1947.
4. Other than the islands of Imvros, Tenedos and Rabbit islands; particularly the islands of Limnos, Samothrace, Mytilene, Chios, Samos and Ikaria (*Treaty of Lausanne*).
5. See section 3a.
6. The selection criteria were based on the Press and Book Distribution Agency of Argos (<http://www.argoscom.gr/eng/index.php>), which provides daily Nationwide Bulletin Data. We also checked on some popular Greek news websites, such as protothema.gr, newsit.gr, iefimerida.gr, news247.gr and in.gr., to see how they framed Turkey's behaviour.
7. There were initially three factors produced by the software. Nevertheless, only two of the three included at least two factor loadings. Therefore, we extracted two factors.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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