

# Chapter 11

## The Montreux Convention (1936) as a Geopolitical Lens Since the Russia–Ukraine Conflict 2022–

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter examines the geopolitics of the Regime of the Straits, (the Montreux Convention 1936), governing the Turkish Straits connecting the Black Sea to the Mediterranean Sea. It is on the agenda following the military attack launched by Russia on Ukraine on 24 February 2022. Russia initiated a naval blockade of Ukrainian ports. The Convention prevents countries outside the Black Sea area from sending ships to break the blockade. In July 2022, an agreement brokered by the United Nations and Turkey was reached for limited exports of some products as many countries worldwide rely on Ukrainian grain, and without it, there would be hundreds of millions of starving people. However, the same agreement also prevents any ships entering the Black Sea to import goods to Ukraine as Russia is concerned that foreign weapons could be shipped there. The Agreement must be renewed every 120 days and so remains at the fore of international attention and may well put to the test other similar international conventions.*

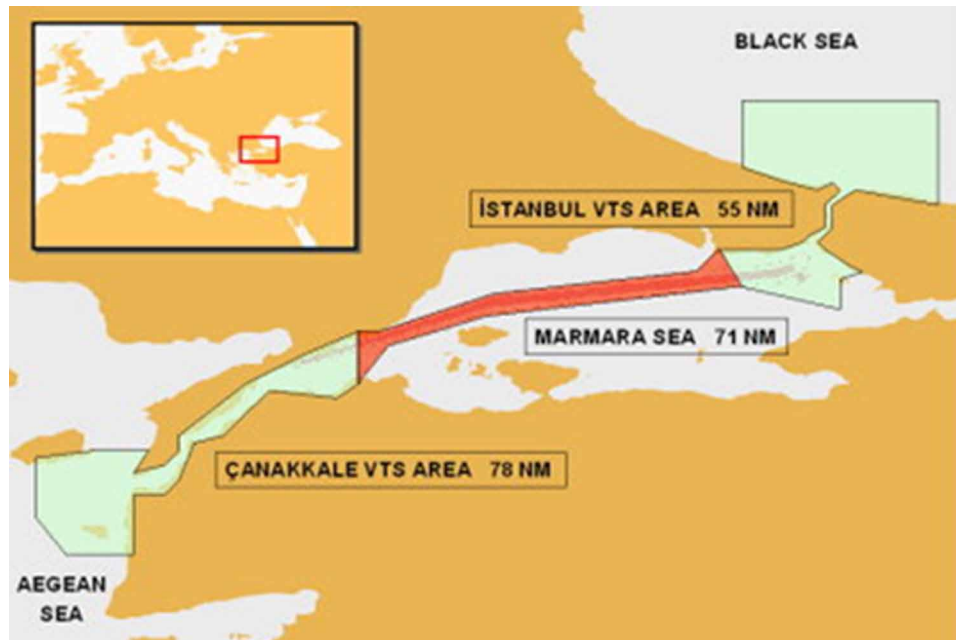
### INTRODUCTION

Geopolitics is politics, especially international relations, as influenced by geographical factors. This chapter takes the geographical factors of sea routes and so maritime trade with the international relations of the Russia Ukraine conflict since 2022 to revisit the Regime of the Straits, often known simply as the Montreux Convention (1936).

The Russia Ukraine war that erupted when Russia invaded Ukraine on 24 February 2022 is a manifestation of renewed geopolitical rivalry between major world powers. Ukraine was a cornerstone of

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Figure 1. The Black Sea corridor/straits/maritime choke point as provided by The Turkish Straits Vessel Traffic Service (TSVTS)



the Soviet Union, the archrival of the United States during the Cold War. Behind only Russia, it was the second-most-populous and -powerful of the fifteen Soviet republics, home to much of the union's agricultural production, defense industries, and military, including the Black Sea Fleet and some of the nuclear arsenal. Ukraine was so vital to the union that its decision to sever ties in 1991 proved to be a *coup de grâce* for the ailing superpower.

In its three decades of independence since then, Ukraine has sought to forge its own path as a sovereign state while looking to align more closely with Western institutions, including the European Union (EU) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Ukraine became a battleground in 2014 when Russia annexed Crimea and began arming and abetting separatists in the Donbas region in the country's southeast. Russia's seizure of Crimea was the first time since World War II that a European state annexed the territory of another.

The potential for the current Russia-Ukraine conflict to impact global geopolitics results from the disruption to maritime trade. The seas, and especially narrow sea passages, are critical to ensuring maritime transport and preventing possible threats. One such significant maritime passage is the Turkish Straits, formed by the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits. The Turkish Straits constitute the sole connection from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean Sea, and so to the rest of the world. The significance is that whoever controls that maritime choke point controls the passage of all ships between the two seas. In this case, control has been granted to Turkey by international agreement

This control was granted by the Regime of the Straits, often known simply as the Montreux Convention (1936), and whose full original text can be read on the Web of the United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (1936). It is an international agreement—signed by Australia, Bulgaria, France, Greece, Japan, Romania, Yugoslavia, the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, and

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