

Abstract

This dissertation delves into the complex realm of geopolitical flashpoints, offering an in-depth analysis that bridges theoretical constructs with practical application. Through an exploration of the intricate dynamics of geopolitical tensions, this study unveils the underlying mechanisms that transform disputes between states into flashpoints—social phenomena in international relations that have the potential to escalate into kinetic conflicts. By employing a novel approach grounded in the Copenhagen School, particularly its concepts of securitization and Regional Security Complex Theory, the research illuminates how these flashpoints are not only constructed phenomena with traceable causal chains, but also inherently regional issues that necessitate a nuanced understanding of regional versus global dynamics. The dissertation further introduces a typology of flashpoints and a diagnostic to provide a structured framework to examine their formation, durability, and potential pathways towards de-escalation or conflict. Through detailed case studies of the Arctic and the South China Sea, it illustrates the diverse spectrum of flashpoint volatility, highlighting the role of political rhetoric, military posturing, and diplomatic efforts in shaping the discourse and outcomes of these critical geopolitical junctions. The findings not only enhance the academic discourse on international relations and conflict resolution, but also offer strategic insights for policymakers aimed at mitigating tensions and fostering peace. This work underscores the significance of understanding flashpoints in preventing escalations and contributing to a more stable international order.