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Weaponized Interdependence in Global Semiconductor Governance:

A constructivist study on the governance architectures of
China, the European Union and the United States

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Abstract:

This thesis explores the global politics of semiconductor supply chains, focusing on how states weaponize interdependence through legislative means. Central to this study is the analysis of how states use economic ties as tools of power. Existing research on economic statecraft, geoeconomics, and complex interdependence provides the background, with particular attention to the US-China trade war, the role of the European Union and the strategic role of Taiwan.

The significance of this research lies in its constructivist perspective on global interdependencies, especially in the context of the semiconductor industry. By applying a constructivist approach, this study redefines weaponized interdependence as an insecurity-producing practice that drives normative change. My research utilizes document analysis of legislative texts to understand the regulatory environment within global semiconductor governance.

My findings indicate a shift from liberal-economic norms to national security norms in semiconductor governance. The study reveals differing approaches to weaponized interdependence by China, the United States, and the European Union, influenced by their structural positions within the international system. These findings highlight a changing normative environment where economic means are increasingly used for exercising state power, offering insights into the changing nature of Global Politics.

Keywords: Weaponized Interdependence; Semiconductor governance; Regulatory Security State; economic statecraft; US-China trade war

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Introduction:

Revisiting the article "Chips with everything" published in Le Monde Diplomatique in 2021 shows parallels to the current situation of semiconductor technology. Global supply chains became under scrutiny because of CoVid-19 lockdowns, the lack of vaccines in crucial countries for semiconductor production like Taiwan led to a "famine" of microchips. This time it is technological progress and political will that put semiconductor technology into the spotlight once again. Therefore, the lead of the article remains as relevant as ever:

"Our lives run on semiconductors, the dizzyingly powerful and sophisticated chips found in every device we use. This century, dominating chip design, manufacture and supply will be at least as significant geopolitically as oil was in the 20th" (Le Monde Diplomatique 2021)

In 2024 advances in Artificial Intelligence and other applications led to soaring demands of microchips and elevated global semiconductor supply chains into a prominent spot within the political realm. Returning to the oil metaphor, if oil was the basic resource of the 20th century, microchips are the basic resource of Artificial Intelligence and various other civilian and military applications - and dominating this resource could be a decisive power-factor in the 21st century.

Semiconductor production is a prime example of the globalized nature of capitalist value chains, chips are designed predominantly in the U.S., produced in China and Taiwan using European machinery and ultimately shipped across the globe. This trajectory of globalization seemed unstoppable but crises like the 2008 financial crisis or the CoVid-19 pandemic revealed cracks and vulnerabilities of an ever-increasingly connected globe.

When (former) President Trump assumed office, he criticized a "leadership class that worships globalism over Americanism" (Le Monde 2021). Especially the meteoric rise of China seemed to trouble U.S. politicians and elites. At the time of his election, no one expected that any President could move away too sharply from the post-cold war policies aiming to preserve US hegemony. However it appears that these commentators may have "(...) overestimated the autonomy of capital and its capacity to shape policy and underestimated the political and strategic implications of China's re-emergence" as Philip Golub put it accurately (Le Monde 2019). Today, China is classified as a graver long-term threat than the former Soviet Union and the US efforts to contain Chinas growth are fundamentally changing the fabric of international relations and globalization (Le Monde 2019).

Historically, US-China relations was not always marked by fierce rivalry. Rather, "US political and economic elites saw China as an opportunity rather than a threat" (ibid.). China stimulated the U.S.

economic growth and avoided geopolitical confrontation to avoid derailing its own development. This led western elites to believe they could influence the economic and political trajectories of China. Chinas gains in the global value chain were small and transnational firms profited immensely from the "global workbench" - and China "appeared caught in webs of dependence" (Le Monde 2019).

As it turned out that China was not caught in webs of dependence but rather skillfully utilized these connections for state-led development efforts, technology transfers and joint ventures to steadily climb the global value chain. This led to the Trump administration trying to slow China's rise by "getting rid of the rules" (ibid.) the US set up in the first place. In this "trade war" between the United States and China, the United States are actively "seeking to break apart the global and regional production and value chains that have been a core feature of globalization" (Le Monde 2019). This would entail bringing parts of the manufacturing chains back "home" into the United States weakening Chinese influence on global value chains, but also reduce profit margins of US corporations. For the study of Global Politics these developments open manifold possibilities for theoretical debate. As Golub pointed out with great analytical precision:

“The current situation challenges the liberal hypothesis that the density of interdependence in the late 20th century caused an irreversible change in world social relations. It also undermines neo-Marxist perspectives that envisioned a ‘transnational ruling class’, transcending politics and the state” (Le Monde 2019).

The European Union remained rather reserved in the trade conflict between the United States and China, trying to reinforce its role as a mediator and balancer in global conflicts. However, the EU prepared for the repercussions of the US-China trade war by passing legislative acts like the EU chips act, which is subject of this study. Furthermore, the European Union and corporations within its jurisdictions are a crucial part of the global semiconductor value chain, as I will show with the following example, that will give some practical insight into the geopolitical dynamics of the semiconductor sector.

Illustrating the Global Politics of Semiconductor supply chain – the case of dutch corporation ASML:

In an article in Firstpost (2023) tellingly called “The semiconductor monopoly: How one Dutch corporation has a stranglehold over the global chip industry” ASML is described as a Dutch multinational corporation, that specializes in fundamental machinery of chip production. Simply put, ASML developed the technology “Extreme Ultraviolet Lithography” which is the base of producing the most advanced microchips. In regular Ultraviolet Lithography ASML commands 62 % of the market share. This means that without the machines provided by ASML, chip *manufacturers* like TSMC, would not be able to produce high-end microchips (Firstpost 2023). The dispute began in 2018 when the Dutch government granted ASML a license to export lithography machinery. In 2020 the Trump

administration pressed the Dutch government to revoke this export license. After a visit of US Deputy National Security Advisor Charles, where he supposedly gave the Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte an intelligence report about possible repercussions of China acquiring ASML technology, the Dutch government decided not to renew the export license. The Trump administration had no means to block the sale directly, but pressed the Dutch to consider security issues, based on the "dual-use"-nature of semiconductors (Reuters 2020). In 2024 ASML's license to export less sophisticated machinery, which was revoked after a request from the Biden administration (Forbes 2024). China reacted by calling the export restrictions "hegemonic", "bullying" and "undermin(ing) the global semiconductor landscape". China urged the Netherlands to ensure "a non-discriminatory business environment" (CNN 2024). Furthermore, Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin asked the Dutch government "(...) to be impartial, respect market principles and the law, take practical actions to protect the common interests of both countries and their companies and maintain the stability of international supply chains" (Reuters 2024a). In April 2024 another "front" was established in the "US-China" chip war (Reuters 2024b), this time the U.S. government urged ASML to stop maintaining computer chip manufacturing equipment already sold to China. Generally, advanced semiconductor machinery is hard to maintain without direct maintenance by its manufacturer. This example illustrates the geopolitical relevance of the semiconductor area, which I will discuss now more in depth.

Relevance for Global Politics & Research Gap:

This study aims to contribute to the study of Global Politics as it examines a governance area at the intersection of state action and private corporations, which are the main agents of semiconductor production. Current technological developments in artificial intelligence and its military and civilian applications make semiconductors a crucial resource for states in the 21st century, as I will discuss throughout this study. Political science and International Relations studies on governance of semiconductors are still rare, with a growing number of scientific publications currently being released – which further underlines the growing scientific and political interest in the field.

A substantial body of literature exists regarding global interdependences, drawing from perspectives offered by both liberal and realist scholars. I will start my discussion by contrasting two-ideal types, liberal accounts of complex interdependence theory (Keohane & Nye 2000) to the realist notion of geo-economics as outlined by Luttwak (1990). Digital technologies and its underlying hardware were considered a prime example of a globalized world but are increasingly coming under scrutiny (Mügge 2023). I locate this development in a shifting normative, global environment. I will explain this normative shift by using constructivist theory and the concepts of “weaponized interdependence” and the “regulatory security state”. The constructivist approach (Wendt 1992) will guide my analytical approach and ontological assumptions, whereas the concepts of “weaponized interdependence” and the “regulatory security state” will be utilized as interpretative tools to understand state-action and identity-

formation. Hereby, I will contribute to constructivist understanding of normative shifts in Global Politics, as Deitelhoff et. al. (2019) have argued that norm shifts command research attention.

Multiple cases of weaponized interdependence have been studied, including the fields of energy and natural gas governance, weapons trade and 5G telecommunications (see in: Drezner, Farrell & Newman 2021). However, there is a lack of studies concerned with interdependences in the semiconductor industry. The concept of the “regulatory security state” has its origins in policy studies on the European Union (see in: Kruck & Weiss 2023), the application of the concept onto the United States and China will help identify global shifts in (semiconductor) governance. Lastly, the legislative texts I am using as data have been studied from various angles, as I will discuss below. Here, my contribution lies in applying the constructivist and conceptual framework to gain detailed insights into semiconductor governance. Furthermore, there appears to be a lack of studies on Chinese policy documents, which poses another research gap this study is trying to contribute to by examining China’s 5-year plan and their Cybersecurity Review framework and others.

Research Questions:

Based on my constructivist approach I will structure my analysis on three different levels of abstraction. First, I will assess the semiconductor governance architecture of each researched state. Then, I will examine governance practices through the lens of Weaponized Interdependence. I argue that these practice leads to a specific state-identity formation, the regulator security state, which is marked by the adoption of security logic in different governance fields. These practices and identity formation lead to norm contestation and changes in the normative structure of the International System. Lastly, these norm changes may lead to change in the global social structure as outlined by Wendt (1992).

My research will be guided by the following research questions:

Which governance architectures do the EU, US, and China employ to manage national security concerns and govern interdependence in the semiconductor sector?

How is the practice of Weaponized Interdependence contributing to the contestation and change of liberal-economic norms towards national security-oriented norms?

What are the implications of the regulatory security state for the international system and Global Politics?

Here, I not only aim to examine processes and shifts as I will outline later, but also provide reasoning and causes behind those developments.

Literature review:

In this chapter, I will review the existing literature relevant for governance studies in the field of semiconductors and previous scholarly work on the legislative texts used as a source of data. I will begin by examining key theoretical frameworks and concepts that provide the basis for understanding the dynamics within global semiconductor governance. Through this comprehensive review, I aim to identify gaps, contradictions, and trends in the literature that will guide my research objectives and contribute to the advancement of knowledge in the field of Global Politics.

Global Governance and Policy:

Previous research on Global Governance has either focused on theoretical accounts or has explored distinct institutions to solve governance challenges. Focusing on global climate governance Biermann et al. (2009: 14 – 40) have coined the term “governance architecture” to explore norms, principles, and regimes within an issue area. The authors argue that the notion of global governance architectures allows for an analysis of policy domains that are not regulated by a single international regime. These “regime complexes” (Gehring & Faude 2013: 119 – 130) refer to networks of interactions between states and other actors, addressing a certain policy area. Resultingly, actors will tend to shape their preferences and base their decision-making based on the other institutions that form the complex (ibid.: 122). This study regards global semiconductor governance as a regime-complex including a variety of different states, institutions and corporations.

According to Hoppe & Colebatch (2016: 121) the concept of policy "refers to the (sustained, structured) activities of a collective actor. In conventional state theory, the main sovereign authority of decision-making is the state, so "policy" become what the government chooses to do or not to do (Dye 1985: 1; cit. in Hoppe & Colebatch 2016: 122). The growth of economic interdependences led to increasing quantities of policy transfers due to global economic pressures (Dolowitz & Marsh 2000: 6). According to Parsons (1996: 234; cit in. Ibid) the world economy was transformed by new forms of production and trade, wherein transnational corporations gained power. This means that public policy took part on a world and national level simultaneously. Policy transfers do not only entail the direct transmission of policies but also ideas (ibid.: 7). Furthermore, Dolowitz and Marsh' observe that policy goals, content, and instruments as well as whole ideologies can be transferred (Dolowitz & Marsh 2000: 12). Lastly, when studying policy transfer and norm diffusion it cannot be assumed that actors consistently act perfectly rational. Rather, the authors argue that actors are confined within "bounded rationality" (Dolowitz & Marsh 2000: 14). This bounded rationality includes practices like economic statecraft which I will explore in the next section.

Global Supply Chains and Economic Statecraft:

Michael Mastanduno defines economic statecraft as the use of economic measures to achieve foreign policy goals (Mastanduno 2021: 67), wherein "weaponized interdependence is a specific form of economic statecraft. Both economic statecraft in general and weaponized interdependence involve state actors' intervention "in private markets to achieve public policy objectives" (ibid.). The critical distinction between the two concepts is, that weaponized interdependence "exploits regional or global network power" (ibid.), whereas tactics of economic influence typically emphasize the target's reliance on the sender's domestic market or supply sources rather than networks. As already established only the most powerful states the US, the EU and are able weaponize interdependence, as relatively few states have effective control over critical economic networks that are utilized by both state and private actors. Mastanduno points out the unique position of the United States within this network as it gained "first-mover advantages" (ibid.: 68) by establishing the liberal economical world order. These structural advantages have deepened as globalization has increased in the last few decades. This means that: "(f)or the United States, the foreign policy benefits of exploiting structural economic power are potentially massive" (Mastanduno 2021: 68). Consequently, this network power gives the U.S. government capabilities of shaping the behavior of allies, weakening adversaries and force them to policy changes. Yet, weaponizing these interdependences also comes with potential costs to the United States. Firstly, ideological costs because the liberal economic order serves Americas strategic, economic, and ideological interest. Secondly, it harms the profits of U.S.-based firms and banks that are reliant on global supply chains and financial networks.

In "Wars without Gun Smoke" (Chen & Evers 2023: 164 – 204) argue that "(t)oday, great powers fight their battles through supply chains". The authors argue that this is the case when there is a dominant state (in this case USA) and a rising competitor (China). To contain economic growth of the latter, the dominant state seeks to cut off the adversary from global supply chains. This is carried out through policies that align business agency with the geopolitical goals of a given state, another means of economic statecraft (ibid.: 165).

Studies on Semiconductor Governance:

Political science studies on the topic of Semiconductor Governance are still rare, which underlines the research gap this study is trying to fill. Donnelly (Donnelly 2023: 129 – 139) locates the geopolitical relevance within a possible Chinese attack on Taiwan and the role semiconductors could play in future conflicts. Donnelly, focusing on the EU and US, sheds light how the EU and US officials translate "geopolitical concerns into concrete action" (ibid.: 129). The author locates specific responses on a realism-liberalism spectrum on the theoretical level to categorize behaviour of US and EU Institutions, as well as Germany and France. Furthermore, he argues that the liberal end of the spectrum was reflected by the dominant attitude of European and American governments prior to the Trump administration.

These strategies of economic interdependence and friendly political relations “shifted production abroad, concentrated it in Taiwan and Korea, and incorporated China into the assembly process” (ibid.: 130). On the other hand, the realist spectrum stresses self-sufficiency in critical resources technologies and infrastructure. Building on realist scholar Walt, the author argues that focus on security policy and independence declines during times of reduced security concerns but resurfaces when states perceive threats. This produces concerns about their standing in the international system and their capacity to withstand pressure from other states. As I will argue later with Wendt (1992), this depicts precisely one of the weaknesses of realist theory, rather than focusing on the material grounds of realist thought, realists are adding constructed elements like fear and concerns to their analysis, further highlighting the need for a constructivist perspective.

The American context:

According to Donnelly the American approach to semiconductors prior to the Trump administration “(...) was one of liberal interdependence and global supply chains” (ibid.: 131), resulting in manufacturing transfers from the US to East Asia from during 1990s until early 21st century. Under the Biden administration China was identified as a “national security threat” and semiconductors were defined as a “key strategic asset” (ibid.). The focus on national security in American chip policy heightened in October 2022 amidst concerns that China could exploit the Ukraine conflict by staging an invasion of Taiwan which raised fears of chip supply disruptions. In the context of the US the author concludes that these developments towards pursuing technological leadership in response to threats demonstrates a “realist turn” of the United States in semiconductor governance (ibid.: 132).

The European Context:

The European Union began its “realist turn” (Donnelly 2023: 132) in 2019, much later than the United States and China. First geopolitical concerns rose in the EU in 2018 as a response to “a trade war with the US” (ibid.) and growing concerns of the Chinese inward turn, which hurt European semiconductor companies as Chinese investments in European corporations were high. In 2019 the approach shifted from a “liberal stance” to emphasizing security concerns, allocating resources to military chip research and development, arguing that these could boost civilian technology as well. However, the European commission did not share American concerns as China being the main threat to Western security. What worried the European Commission though, was passages in the US Chips and Science Act that the US would “pursue domestic chip manufacturing and re-industrialisation at the expense of the EU” (ibid. 133) and rising concerns about similar initiatives from China, Japan, Taiwan, and Korea. This led the EU to pass the EU Chips Act as an answer to the US Chips and Science Act of 2022.

Geoeconomics and the US-China rivalry:

Malkin & He's (2024: 674 - 699) study on the geoeconomics of global semiconductor value chains and the US-China technology rivalry shows the growing American aggressiveness in global technology competition. The authors claim that this is based on the United States structural power and extraterritoriality which is "(...) exercised through various geoeconomic tools, including export restrictions, formal diplomacy within the US-based network of alliances, and indirectly through US centrality in semiconductor GVCs" (Malkin & He 2024: 693). The study finds that these geoeconomics practices are an integral, structural part of global semiconductor value chains. VerWey (2019: 19) found that Chinese efforts to establish a profitable domestic semiconductor industry have been met with "mixed success" (ibid.). As of 2019, China still heavily relied on semiconductor imports due to growing domestic consumption and the general centrality of semiconductors in global value chains.

The US-China rivalry and the rise of new geopolitical fears:

Mastanduno (2021: 70) locates the preconditions of weaponizing interdependences in conditions of fear. The author argues that whether the international security environment is perceived threatening or non-threatening by an actor, in this case the United States, correlates to the degree the liberal political and economic order is being sustained. Intrinsicly, this is determined by the role that fear and hegemony plays in policy considerations. Hegemony, in that case refers to "foreign policy strategy available to dominant states" (ibid.: 70). Furthermore, U.S. hegemony is based on "(p)romoting economic interdependence within the rules and norms of a liberal world order", as Mastanduno argues (ibid. 71). According to Nye, Chinese policymakers take interdependences into account in their strategic decision making. He further emphasizes that for the US strategy on China to succeed, the US should neither under- nor overestimate Chinese power, as overestimation creates fear - and fear leads to strategic miscalculations as history has shown time and again. Nye concludes that decoupling is bound to increase especially in areas like technology transfer via trade, investment, and scientific exchanges (Nye 2020: 12 - 18).

Conditions of fear, encourage state leaders to weaponize interdependences to address pressing national security concerns. Followingly, the author argues, when hegemonic commitment is high and there are perceived threats, there is "(...) a willingness to weaponize interdependence to meet security threats, coupled with efforts to minimize the damage to allied relationships" (Mastanduno 2021: 72).

Historically, there have been examples of different utilizations of economic statecraft and weaponized interdependence. For example, the 9/11 attacks led to securitization efforts of the global financial system SWIFT. However, during these times US commitment to global hegemony remained strong.

Semiconductors as dual-use items:

Crucial to understanding the Global Politics of Semiconductor supply chains is the dual-use nature of semiconductors. As mentioned in the introduction, semiconductor technology is not only a product of

modern capitalism itself but is increasingly becoming a "resource" of civilian production, military and AI applications (Bode & Huelss 2022; 2023). According to the US National Research Council dual-use (...) refers to technologies intended for civilian application that can also be used for military purposes” (2004: 18; cit. in Forge 2010: 112). In the case of semiconductors this does not only entail the finished product, but can be extended onto dual-use knowledge, as knowledge on producing sophisticated chips for military and AI applications, can be used for purpose-built weapons (Forge 2010: 115). This means regulation and control must consider the multiple dimensions of dual-use artifacts, knowledge, technology and finished products (ibid.). Both the U.S. Department of State and the European Union consider finished semiconductors, the machinery and knowledge needed to produce them as dual-use items (U.S. Department of State 2023; European Commission 2023). According to the U.S. the current semiconductor supply chain, centred in a few countries, is fragile, especially for advanced chips produced by singular companies. The rationale of dual-use, as well as the fragility of the supply chains has led countries to use regulatory measures like export controls on behalf of national and economic security (US Department of State 2023).

Previous studies on the US CHIPS act of 2022 and the EU Chips act:

Previous business studies on the United States CHIPS and Science act (Luo & Van Assche 2023) have termed the act a "techno-nationalist policy that feeds techno-geopolitical uncertainty" (ibid.: 1425). The legislation allocates \$280 billion to boost American competitiveness, with \$52 billion designated for various incentives aimed at stimulating semiconductor manufacturing within the US. It also prohibits American citizens and permanent residents from supporting advanced chip development and production within Chinese firms. Various countries, including China, the European Union, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan, have heavily invested in funding strategic sectors to re-shore key technologies. Furthermore, the authors found that the expressed geopolitical purpose of the act, aimed at weakening China, Russia and Iran is a novelty (ibid.: 1426). From a business studies perspective the authors critique that the act may only boost competitiveness of the US semiconductor manufacturing segment short-term but might weaken both the US and the global economy long-term. Furthermore, they argue that self-sufficiency is unachievable in the semiconductor sector and the act might force China to act techno-nationalist as well, which could put the liberal international order at risk (Luo & Van Assche 2023: 1427).

Previous literature on the EU Chips act (Poli 2023) indicates that Europe is trying to achieve technological sovereignty by ensuring technological leadership, particularly in the semiconductor sector. This should reduce global dependencies and enhance European security. The paper also contextualizes the EU Chips act within broader global measures such as the US Chips act and China's technological strategy. The protection of technological assets via export controls and trade measures and the emphasis on technological leadership are clear indications of technological nationalism (ibid.: 431 - 438).

Theory – a constructivist approach:

In this chapter, I will present the constructivist framework that underpins my study of global semiconductor governance. Drawing upon established theories and conceptual models in Global Politics, Political science, and International Relations, I develop a framework that explains the mechanisms, relationships, and dynamics at play within the field of global semiconductor governance. I begin by discussing foundational theories such as complex interdependence theory and realism as overarching ideal types of the International System. I will define states as the primary actors within the system and the field of semiconductor governance. Subsequently, I will explore normative shifts through a constructivist lens on a liberalism-realism spectrum, which poses the main theoretical foundation. Additionally, I will utilize the concepts of weaponized interdependence and the regulatory security state to gain an in-depth understanding of state-action and identity formation as outlined in the legislative documents of my data-sample.

Theoretical ideal types – complex interdependence theory and the concept of geoeconomics:

State cooperation and interdependences have largely been explained through the paradigms of neoliberal institutionalism and structural realism and the logic of absolute gains within the former and the logic of relative gains within the latter. On the one hand Powell (1991: 1303 – 1320) showed that states are concerned about relative gains when the possible use of force is at stake. On the other hand, if use of force is out of question, states don't assume that their relative loss will be turned against them, which thus makes liberal accounts of cooperation possible.

I will use the neoliberal conception of international system as my analytical starting point. This conception is not an empirical description of the world, but rather “an ideal concept abstracting from reality” (Keohane & Nye 2000: 117). The concept moves beyond the realist paradigm of defining global politics as interstate relations focusing on force and security and considers networks of interdependences. In their essay on globalization, Keohane and Nye introduce the term “globalism”, where they define “global” phenomena as networks of interdependence at multicontinental distances. In their definition of “complex interdependence” as an ideal type, levels of economic, environmental, and social globalism are high, and levels of military globalism low (ibid.: 115).

Liberal accounts of global interdependence:

According to J.S. Nye (2020: 7 - 21) the coercive power of interdependences is based on asymmetrical vulnerabilities. Contrarily, symmetrical dependencies between states do not influence power relations. One of the major cornerstones of complex interdependence theory is the assumption that direct military attacks also impose significant costs on the attacker.

However, the shifting trade policy environment, particularly in the United States has implications for globalization. The tariff war between China and the US marks the US departure from being the

hegemonic state of trade liberalization and multilateralism. Additionally, export restrictions in the semiconductor industry based on national security considerations signal a new era in US trade policy. Goldberg and Reed (2023) argue that the US' inward turn and weaponizing interdependences as a policy tool could significantly impact the future of trajectory of globalization (Goldberg & Reed 2023: 8 - 10). Ultimately, a shift of the hegemonic ideology of the United States towards protectionism and economic nationalism could challenge the normative order of liberal trade and multilateralism and could lead to a primacy of national interest over global cooperation. This could potentially reshape global power dynamics and could alter the geopolitical and normative fabric of Global Politics.

Realist scholar Edward Luttwak also perceived a “waning importance of military power” (1990: 17) but argues against the overtaking logic of commerce in International Relations. Rather, he argues that states as territorially defined entities cannot follow a commercial logic as this would undermine the cornerstones of their existence. The author locates economic regulation in the same realm of statecraft as military defenses and hence argues that the logic of state action necessarily entails the logic of conflict. He argues against the ideas of liberalism as “World Politics is still not about to give way to World Business” (ibid.: 19). Coining the term “geoeconomics” he argues that this entails “the logic of war in the grammar of commerce” (ibid.: 19). Furthermore, the author argues that states tend to act geoeconomically, because the very reason of their existence is to provide inner- and outer security. However, Luttwak agrees with liberal scholars, that the advent of complex interdependences and the reality of nuclear weapons have made war an increasingly costly and risky tool of statecraft, which leads to the “causes [and] instruments of conflict” becoming economic in nature (ibid.: 21).

In this study my hypothetical starting point will be the empirical shifts from the ideal type of complex interdependence towards the realist concept of geoeconomics. In 2024 levels of economic globalism remain high, whereas national security considerations also seem to be increasing. This has led some scholars to move away from the liberal assumption of complex interdependence theory, that interdependence leads to peace, and focus on the possible conflictual consequences of global interdependence. I argue, only a constructivist approach can explain how and why these shifts come into being. I will do this by outlining the paradigm-shift away from a global social structure of economic globalization and liberal norms to global securitization and realist norms. I argue that these dynamics are not endogenous to the International System, but rather precisely show the social construction of Global Politics. Using the concept of Weaponized Interdependence and guided by the spectrum of liberal-realist theory debates, I will highlight the peacebuilding and conflictual aspects of material interdependences in the semiconductor area.

Interdependence is what states make of it - a constructivist approach:

My theoretical framework and key epistemological assumptions are based on Wendt's argument (1992: 395) that the anarchical state system and the resulting self-help practices are based on processes within the International System, rather than being structurally given. Wendt further argues, that "self-interested conceptions of security are not a constitutive property of anarchy" (Wendt 1992: 396), but rather a processual result of the logic of anarchy. Within the International System, actors acquire relatively stable identities, role-specific understandings, and expectations about self by participating in collective meaning making. As a result "institutions" defined as relatively stable structures of identities and interests arise, which lead to the establishment of rules and norms. However, the structural power of these norms relies on the socialized beliefs of actors and their participation in what Wendt calls, "collective knowledge" (1992: 399). I agree with Wendt's statement that "(...) far from being exogenously given, the intersubjective knowledge that constitutes competitive identities and interests is constructed every day by processes of 'social will formation'" (ibid.: 410).

Here, the anarchical state system becomes a competitive and conflict-driven environment created by the actions of states themselves. (Wendt 1992: 412) This means the security dilemma of anarchy only comes into being by the collective, insecurity-producing practices of states. These socially produced systems can become relatively stable and produce specific logics, as it is rewarding competition, and punishing altruism in the self-help systems. Additionally, states, as socialized actors, may maintain relatively stable role identities to minimize uncertainty and confirm existing beliefs about the social world (ibid.: 411). In an ideal-type Hobbesian state of nature, there would be no safety guarantee for states other than raw power – a state's life would be solitary, brutish, nasty, and short and cooperation would be virtually impossible (ibid.: 415). From a constructivist perspective, cooperation is safeguarded by intersubjective understandings or norms, like the norm of sovereignty. As Wendt (1992: 412) phrases it, "the principle of sovereignty transforms this situation by providing a social basis for the individuality and security of states".

Cooperation, Interdependence and Power in Constructivism:

Sovereignty leads to a paradigm shift from a competitive framework to a Lockean one, emphasizing egoistic notions of security rather than competitive ones. Crucially, Wendt notes that growing interactions do not ensure joint gains of states, "(...) interdependence also entails vulnerability and the risk of being 'the sucker' which, if exploited, will become a source of conflict rather than cooperation" (Wendt 1992: 416). The internal transformation of actors' identities and interests towards social norms makes cooperation possible. However, this "evolution of cooperation" (Wendt 1992: 418) faces two important constraints. First, structural changes are slow and cooperation and the risks that come with it require actors to identify positively with each other. Moreover, actors primarily focus on their own

gains, arising antipathy and distrust can lead to shifts in the security environment towards egoistic practices (ibid.: 418).

Wendt further developed the constructivist approach in his essay “Constructing International Politics” (1995: 71 – 81), where he subdivides the “social structure” into three elements: shared knowledge, material resources, and practices. Shared knowledge describes a conflictual or cooperative relationship between actors. In the context of this study, relations between the U.S. and China are characterized by mutual distrust and a tendency to assume the worst about each other's intentions, posing a “security dilemma”. On the other hand, relations between U.S. and Europe are composed of trustful shared knowledge, representing a security community. These social structures are “(...) not acts of god: they are effects of practice” (ibid.: 77) Additionally, “(...) social structures include material resources, like gold and tanks” (Wendt 1995: 73). In this case the material resources are the global semiconductor value chains. Following Wendt, these resources only attain meaning for human agency through the structures of shared knowledge in which they are embedded.

Constructivism & Security:

The traditional focus on power and politics in security studies has successfully been challenged by constructivist scholars as Farrell (2002: 49 – 72) has outlined. Here, norms of international security define the agency of actors, “states do what they think most appropriate” in each situation as the author puts it (ibid. 52). Additionally, he states that realism demonstrates how states can “estimate the power of opponents” but lacks an explanatory component about threatening and associative behaviour. According to Farrell constructivism is the most suitable theoretical approach for explaining how threats are formed and alliances forged (ibid.: 65). It is here, where we can establish a link between cooperation, interdependence and possible weaponization within global semiconductor supply chains. As I will discuss in detail later, interdependences have security consequences because they decrease agency of previously relatively autonomous states, which might lead to a shifting normative environment (Farrell & Newman 2019).

Conceptualizing state-practices and identity formation in semiconductor governance:

As I will discuss now, the basis of the global social structure and the normative order is based on practices and identities. In this segment I will define Weaponized Interdependence as insecurity-producing practice and the Regulatory security state as a specific form of state-identity-formation in a constructivist sense.

Weaponized Interdependence:

In their ground-breaking work “Weaponized Interdependence: How Global Economic Networks Shape

State Coercion”, Farrell and Newman (2019: 42 – 79) argue that global economic networks can be used to achieve geostrategic aims. The authors claim that “(...) unprecedented levels of interdependence are combined with continued jockeying for power, so that states that are unwilling to engage in direct conflict may still employ all measures short of war” (Wright 2017 in Farrell and Newman 2019: 43). Contrary to the fundamental assumption of complex interdependence theory, Farrell and Newman argue, that these global economic networks have security consequences because they can be used as a coercive tool and thus decrease agency of previously relatively autonomous states. Consequently, the authors diverge from the liberal account of complex interdependence, which focused on bilateral relations and cooperative gains but largely left out (realist) accounts of state power and the structural aspects of interdependence. Furthermore, they argue the study of International Relation scholars have largely neglected networks such as supply chains and the internet and aim for a new understanding of globalization and power (ibid.: 44 – 45).

Applying a constructivist perspective on this theoretical concept, I will discuss weaponized interdependence as an insecurity producing practice as outlined by Wendt. This leads to the creation collective understandings which are based on practices. States perceive these practices through own security interests and interpret the actions of other actors within the system. Followingly, states might depict interdependence as a threat to national security or sovereignty. On the level of material resources, this study is concerned with semiconductors defined as dual-use technology. States will try to utilize material resources to exert influence and control in interdependent relationships and thereby shape the dynamics of power and dependency. This is exercised via strategies and policies that govern interdependences. Here, states use various instruments such as trade policies, regulations, and investment strategies to protect national security and manage potential vulnerabilities.

The theoretical framework of “weaponized interdependence” relies on the assumption that global economic networks are asymmetric because some nodes and hubs are far more connected than others, which allows state jurisdictions that exercise power over these hubs and nodes to influence and coerce other governmental and private actors. Here, the authors argue that there are 2 possible strategies for states to apply: the panopticon and the chokepoint effects. The panopticon effect describes states using their position to extract informational advantages out of global networks, and the chokepoint effect describes states cutting off adversaries from network flows. This study will focus on possible utilization of chokepoint effects in the global semiconductor supply chain. This assumes, that: “(...) only those states that have physical or legal jurisdiction over hub nodes will be able to exploit the benefits of weaponized interdependence” (Farrell & Newman 2019: 56). Consequently, only a few states and “statelike entities” (ibid.), the USA, the EU and China can benefit from weaponized interdependence (ibid.: 57). One key argument of the concept is “(...) that globalization and networks concentrate rather than diffuse national power” (Mastanduno 2021: 69).

State-identity formation – the regulatory security state:

Conceptualizing the state as a "regulatory security state" (RSS) (Kruck & Weiss 2023) will assist in gaining a better understanding of the weaponization of global semiconductor supply chains. The RSS is concerned with domains that rely heavily on cooperation with private actors. Semiconductor production is based on globalized networks of private corporations, connecting it to the concepts of geoeconomics and economic statecraft. The concept of the "regulatory security state" is beneficial to understanding governance processes in fields that previously weren't regarded as security issues. In this case, semiconductor supply chains have primarily been regulated based on economic considerations; however, with the growing securitization of technology governance, as noted by Mügge (2023; also Sivan-Sevilla 2023), semiconductor supply chains are becoming subject to heightened security concerns. This development has led to the adoption of security logics in many different policy fields like health security (Rimkute & Mazepus 2023), artificial intelligence (Mügge 2023; Bode & Huelss 2023) among others. Drawing on previous research on "regulatory governance", Kruck and Weiss (2023: 1211) identify two major policy instruments, governing by *capacity* and governing by *rules*. Governing by capacity within the security state framework means that the state "(...) commands and controls coercive state capacities to produce collective goods directly" (ibid.: 1212). Primary examples are the armed forces, police, and intelligence services (ibid.). More importantly, "(...) governing by rules implies that the security state draws up regulations that incentivize the provision of collective security-relevant goods by other actors" (ibid.). As semiconductors are produced by private actors and thus, outside a capacity-based governance approach, this study tends to utilize the "governing by rules"-approach which will be applied to semiconductor regulation policies. This is reinforced by the authors' claim that if third parties within a state jurisdiction are the relevant technologically innovative actors, states tend to regulate these actors to align them with their security goals (Kruck & Weiss 2023: 1212). In his study about the "securitization of the EU's digital tech regulation", Mügge (2023: 1431 - 1446) found that the RSS impacts (global) governance twofold, first, by showing a power shift away from state actors, as states are increasingly dependent on private actors in security provision. While digital technologies were initially considered exemplars of a globalized world, they are now being re-evaluated in the context of power dynamics and security concerns, reflecting a shifting perception of their role in global politics.

For this study I am defining the RSS as a specific form of state-identity formation, which prioritizes national security norms over norms of economic liberalism. This influences the shared knowledge and may shift global regulatory norms regarding acceptable behaviour in security and economic governance. The growing securitization of economic matters, especially within the semiconductor industry, possibly leads to a contestation of norms of free-trade and economic globalisation as these norms cease to align with security objectives. This shift towards securitization might then be "mirrored"

(Wendt 1992) by other actors within the social structure. This presupposes influence over material resources, in this case some sort of leverage on global semiconductor supply chains as outlined above. According to Mügge (2023: 1433) the European security state is embedded in a geopolitical regulatory context. Traditionally, regulatory politics managing interdependence have been viewed through an "economic lens" (ibid.: 1439), yet Mügge points out that there has been a shift towards viewing regulation "through a security lens" (ibid.). This shift towards regulating global security concerns "(...) can shift international economic cooperation overall into a competitive (...) and realist mode" (ibid.). Ultimately, the RSS intensifies the convergence of security and economic logics in global regulatory governance. Here the EU, as a state-like entity seems to be trailing behind China and the USA, as they have been utilizing the geostrategic dimension of economic regulation for longer.

Norms in Global Politics:

The practice of Weaponized Interdependence might lead to emerging counter-norms to liberal norms of globalization. Finnemore & Sikkink (1998: 887 - 917) argue that ideational and norm shifts are the main agents of system transformation. Norms entail "standards of appropriateness" (ibid.: 895) and emergence in a highly contested normative space where they compete with other norms and ideas. The main motive of norm adoption is "legitimacy" and "reputation" which can be socialized and institutionalized (ibid.: 898). This would underline Finnemore & Sikkinks claim that: "(...) states comply with norms to demonstrate that they have adapted to the social environment (...) that they "belong" (ibid.: 903). Additionally, norms are especially open to contestation in times of crises and change. For example, the periods of globalization lead to opening the arena for expansion of new norms that increased global interdependence. I argue that "weaponized interdependence" could lead to norms of decreasing liberal globalism and the adaption of novel global security norms. This could especially play a role in times when states are increasingly balancing security and trade policies. This balancing act is illustrated by Finnemore & Sikkinks claim that "(a)ctors must choose which rules or norms to follow and which obligations to meet at the expense of others in a given situation, and doing so may involve sophisticated reasoning processes. These processes, however, involve a different kind of reasoning than that of utility maximization" (ibid.: 914).

The contestation of liberal norms:

Norm scholars seem to agree that the international order is widely to be in crisis, and the standard liberal perspective that international interdependence and the web of related norms are steadily growing have come under scrutiny (Deitelhoff et al. 2019: 2 – 7). Constructivist approaches to security studies were applied where realist and liberal approaches fell short of sufficient explanations (see Finnamore 1996). Challenges to the international order and the contestation of norms is not a new phenomenon, yet the "(...) sheer sum of challenges to its major norms and institutions" (Deitelhoff et al. 2019) has led constructivist and liberal scholars to reassess the fate of its central norms (see Acharya 2017; Nye 2017).

Yet, Deitelhoff et al. studying norm contestation and robustness found that norms and institutions related to security are stronger than most observer tended to believe (2019: 13). This is backed by Sandelholz (2019: 146) findings, stating that if states and other actors acknowledge the legitimacy of the existing regimes, norms are unlikely to be displaced. Norms may undergo changes, such as refining or broadening their scope, adjusting interpretations or introducing exceptions while still retaining their foundational role within the established normative order. The author therefore argues that norm replacements are striking and command research attention. This study aims to contribute to that knowledge by examining norm contestation in the socially, economically, and politically highly relevant field of global semiconductor governance.

Norm Relations and Interactions between International Norms:

Fehl & Rosert (2020: 1 – 26) outline a framework for studying norm complexity in International Politics. This framework is built on the concept of “normative complexity” (ibid.: 1) which is used to capture norm relations and interactions. This framework consists of three “analytical building blocks”: norm relations, norm interactions and their effects (ibid.: 2). They define norm relations as: the (objective or socially constructed) positions of norms in relation to each other” (ibid.). This study uses the hierarchical description of norm relations and norm complexes as outlined by the authors. (ibid.).

Following Fehl & Rosert (2020: 5 – 7) a norm contradiction exists between two or more interrelating norms that require action and behavior that cannot be simultaneously fulfilled. This can reflect underlying values, which in this case are economic values versus security values. These norm contradictions can occur vertically on a global level, consequently leading to the establishment of norm hierarchies which may alleviate the tensions between conflicting norms (Nave 2019: 304; cit. in Fehl et al. 2020: 7). The authors argue that studying norm relations requires a “snapshot view” (ibid.: 11) of the evolving normative structure, in this study this “snapshot” will be formed by studying legislative texts. These legislative texts should provide a deep understanding of the underlying normative structure, norm relations and hierarchies within the policy field of semiconductor governance. Regarding specific policy fields, the authors argue to look for change of the normative structure within a given policy field, as I suspect for the field of global semiconductor governance. This will help to examine the “intertwined elements of the global normative order (...) and [help] improve our understanding of its evolution and dynamics” (ibid.: 3).

Research Design:

In this chapter, I will outline the research methodology employed to address the research questions and objectives of my study on global semiconductor governance. I begin by outlining the philosophical assumptions and epistemological stance of interpretivism that inform my approach to knowledge

production. Subsequently, I will provide a detailed description of the research design, including my methodology which draws on the traditions of content, document, and interpretative policy analysis. Furthermore, I will explain my coding scheme and data collection methods and the process of data analysis and interpretation, ensuring transparency in my analytical approach. By articulating the methodological choices and justifying their appropriateness, I aim to enhance the reliability and validity of my research findings.

Epistemology & Ontology:

This study is situated within the paradigm of Interpretivism. This is based on the ontological assumption that the social world fundamentally differs from the natural world (Halperin & Heath 2020). The goal is to gain scientific understanding of the empirical phenomenon of weaponized interdependence of semiconductor supply chains in Global Politics. This is furthermore based on the theoretical argument, that international relations, supply chains and semiconductor governance are elements of the social world and a result of human behavior (Wendt 1992) From an epistemological standpoint, this study supports Wendt's notion of the sovereign state as the main unit of analysis but diverges from a strictly realist interpretation of state utility maximization. As a result, knowledge can be gained by examining content of legislative texts and the norms and values behind it (ibid.: 5).

Therefore, I will employ a hermeneutical approach to analyze legislative documents like the EU Chips Act, the CHIPS for America Act and Chinese policy documents. This aligns with Taylor's requirements for hermeneutics, which specify that the data must be text or "text-analogue" and in some way unclear or contradictory (Taylor 1994: 181, cited in Halperin & Heath 2020: 49). Additionally, this is backed by Yanow (2007: 114) who argues, that in policy analysis a hermeneutic approach focuses on policy-relevant texts, such as legislative records or annual reports. Followingly, the field of global semiconductor governance which is a conflicted area between trade and security policy is a suitable research area. Examining this intersection will provide knowledge about international relations, global trade and modern statehood.

I agree with Yanow, that Interpretive policy analyses are situation-specific rather than entailing general laws or universal principles that are independent from space, time, and context. However, by conducting interpretative policy analysis, researchers can uncover trends and developments in any given moment in time. These trends can become norms, and these norms can significantly change the social and political fabric. This study aims to assess, if there is a shift from liberal norms and ideas of free-trade to norms of economic independence and national security (Yanow 2007: 110). These developments will be uncovered by utilizing the theoretical concepts as outlined above. Here, I examine my dataset through a constructivist lens, and my interpretation will be guided by the concepts of weaponized

interdependence and the regulatory security state to uncover meaning behind state action and unveil the underlying normative structure of this governance field.

The phenomena outlined above will be studied empirically. Halperin & Heath (2020: 4) argue, “(e)mpirical research is always shaped to some extent by normative thinking”. Here, the theoretical starting point is a supposed rise in protectionist policies regarding semiconductors. Thus, if evidence of the weaponization of global supply chains can be found, this will add to the scientific assessment of liberal-realist theory debates.

Methodology:

Overall, the methodological approach will be rather multi-faceted as it draws on various approaches and research traditions. Primarily, I am conducting a qualitative content analysis of policy documents, which is a suitable approach for constructivist research (Finnamore & Sikkink 2001: 395). Daugbjerg et al. define policy documents as “documents that contain strategies and priorities, define goals and objectives, and are issued by a part of the public administration” (Daugbjerg 2009: 806). This allows the implementation of previous methodological considerations of document analysis. According to Bowen (2009: 32) document analysis “combines elements of content analysis and thematic analysis”. Content analysis aims to organize and categorize information in a way relevant to the main research questions, whereas thematic analysis establishes patterns, connections, causal and correlative evidence and is thus the basis of analysis (Bowen 2009: 32). The process involves 3 steps. A first initial skimming, a thorough reading and a stage of interpretation (Bowen 2009: 807). This is common practice in content analysis of various governance fields as previous studies on immigration policy (Ledoux et al. 2018: 3), public health policy (Daugbjerg 2009) and the conceptualization of “citizen science” (Hecker et al. 2009) have shown.

In a first step I was to use the theoretical concepts outlined above to see if the data is suitable for answering my research questions. This was ensured by first skimming through and identifying relevant parts of the report using deductive key words like “trade”, “implications”, “national security”, “dependence”, “interdependence” and “weaponization”. Once the documents had been deemed suitable, an initial reading was performed. As the theoretical framework clearly indicates that relevant information is concerned with economic and/or security policy, I deductively generated 2 overarching categories. The categories I assigned to relevant data was “National Security Policy & State Power” and “Economic Policy”, whereas this category consisted of “Economic Interdependence” and “Economic Nationalism”, which also entails the economic supranationalism of the European Union. These categories were a first step towards operationalizing the concept of “weaponized interdependence”.

Within these classifications, the data was inductively coded based on Saldaña (2015). This coding scheme corresponds well with the primary method as the “cyclical act” (ibid.: 8) of coding entails

multiple readings of the text, revising codes and establishing links within the dataset and codes. Furthermore, the author (Saldaña 2015: 4) states that coding is not a precise science but primarily an interpretative art, which connects to the interpretative paradigm of the study.

Interpretative policy analysis challenges the foundations of public management by questioning the reliance on scientific authority to tackle collective action problems (Hoppe & Colebatch 2016: 125), as seen in scientific approaches to administrative practices (Yanow 2007: 111). This development has also been described as “scientization” (Meyer & Bromley 2013: 370 – 371). The legislative texts examined fall into the practice of scientifically and legally informed text production and try to convey specific meaning(s). The hermeneutical approach in this study will be to uncover “hidden” meanings (ibid.: 116) within the text based on my theoretical concepts and framework. As a result, “interpretation” in this case should not be mistaken as some obscure process of personal meaning-making, but as a process of gaining knowledge through theory-guided examination.

Although the study is situated within the interpretative paradigm, I want to rely on the positivist conceptualization of evidence. This means that the “evidence” as “textual data” should be as unambiguous as possible to ensure scientific reliability and validity. Only if policy tools exhibiting specific norms are backed by textual data and the theoretical framework the data will be utilized (Bowen 2009; Wesley 2014).

Method – document analysis:

Using the document analysis framework as outlined by Bowen (2009), I fully read and coded the EU Chips Act, the United States CHIPS Act of 2022, the Chinese 5-year-plan, as well as the Chinese Cybersecurity review framework and the “Made in China 2025” initiative. Furthermore, I partly read the US Science Act of 2022, which is in the same document as the US Chips Act. The relevant parts were identified using keyword search identifying words & word combinations like “export controls; national security”. The first step was to classify relevant data into “security policy and norms” and “economic policy and norms” as outlined above using descriptive coding (ibid.: 3). These codes generally informed the predefined categories, and subcategories. This follows the inductive approach of inquiry, where coded findings ultimately tie into themes and concepts and thus should further inform the theories used. Furthermore, this coding approach reinforces Bowens dichotomy of content and thematic analysis, as descriptive coding is applied to the specific content of the documents, whereas a “theme is an *outcome* of coding” (Saldaña 2015: 13). Ultimately, coding is a first step of analysis to uncover meaning, linking data, concepts and theory and thus interpreting policy documents in a systematic order (ibid.: 8).

In the following readings, I inductively generated categories and concepts that may be specific to the data sample or have not yet been scientifically defined. So, the logic of reasoning was “retroductive” as Halperin & Heath (2020: 35) call it or, “abductive” as coined by others.

Using the coding software NVivo, I then coded relevant parts of the document using a deductive coding scheme. The top-level of the coding scheme is called “Semiconductor Governance Architecture” and had two subdivisions “(Techno-)globalism” linked to a liberal governance approach vs. “(techno-)nationalism”, which was strongly linked to the regulatory security state, weaponized interdependence, and economic statecraft. In the (techno-)globalist category, coding focused on global cooperation and contained: “global supply chains”; “global risk mitigation”, “global innovation”, “international (strategic) partnership and “open market policies”. The (techno-)nationalism category was based on deductive coding. The first coding subsection was called “Economic statecraft and geopolitical tensions”, which split into “national security” and “economic security”. “National security” contained the codes “critical infrastructure security”, “cybersecurity”, “strategic industries” and “Weaponized Interdependence (WI) (offensive)” and “WI (defensive)”. “Economic security” entailed: “business-state relations”, “national development”, “supply chain security and resilience”, “protectionism” and “trade secrets”. To assign a “Semiconductor Governance Architecture” to each of the actors, I used NVivo’s visualization tools to see the quantity of codes in each “architecture”. Then I revisited the coded data and created themes, extracted specific policy tools and other relevant information. Relating to the interpretivist paradigm of the research, relevant parts were identified and partly quoted in the “Analysis”-section to illustrate key-points of my findings.

Case selection & Data:

Wendt’s framework highlights the nation state as the main unit of analysis (1992: 424), therefore I selected the United States and China and the European Union, defined as a state-like entity, as the main cases of this study. I chose these 3 entities based on the notion of Farrell & Newman (2019: 56), that these 3 entities would have sufficient leverage on global value chains and the weaponization of interdependences. The nation state approach is further backed by Finnamore and Sikkink’s (2001: 397) idea that examining domestic politics at the intersection of international relations and comparative politics can offer valuable insights into understanding global social structures, which this study is aiming to contribute to. The documents selected as seen below, where easy to identify for the United States and the European Union, as they are accessible in terms of language, topic and my previous knowledge on state policy. Data for the United States:

“PUBLIC LAW 117–167—AUG. 9, 2022; CREATING HELPFUL INCENTIVES TO PRODUCE SEMICONDUCTORS (CHIPS) FOR AMERICA FUND” henceforth “US CHIPS Act 2022” (US Chips Act 2022)

Data for the European Union:

“REGULATION (EU) 2023/1781 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 13 September 2023 establishing a framework of measures for strengthening Europe’s semiconductor ecosystem and amending Regulation (EU) 2021/694 (Chips Act)” (European Union 2022) henceforth “EU Chips Act”

For China, I selected multiple different documents as there is no comprehensive legislative act governing semiconductors. To alleviate the language barrier, I chose translations by actors like the Center for Security and Emerging Technology and the DigiChina Project of Stanford University. These translators are reliable and valid sources, as translations always pose the risk of ideological and contextual misinterpretation.

Dataset for China:

“14th Five-Year Plan for National Informatization” by the People’s Republic of China; translated by the Digichina Project of Stanford Cybersecurity Center; henceforth “China’s Five-Year-Plan” (Digichina Project 2022a)

“China’s Cybersecurity review”; translated by the Digichina Project of Stanford Cybersecurity Center (Digichina Project 2022b)

Notice of the State Council on the Publication of "Made in China 2025; translated by the Center of Security and Emerging Technology (CSET 2022)

Limitations:

Here, I am analyzing the observed "states" as a uniform category. This does not consider the inner dynamics of the observed “states”. Naturally, I am aware of the differing state systems: the United States as a federal democracy, China with its autocratic system, and the supranational structure of the European Union. Ensuring relevance for Global Politics, I have chosen a rather broad dataset. This comes with trade-offs regarding analytical depth because of the wide reach of the study. Furthermore, in practice, the concept of “Weaponized Interdependence” in semiconductor supply chains seems to be also relying on diplomatic channels, so analyzing legislative documents might cover the legal grounds of these actions but might not be able to describe every aspect of the process. While my approach allows to describe a rules-based governance approach, the capacity to produce semiconductors is mostly located in the realm of private businesses. Here, this study might underestimate the agency of multinational corporations, treating the state as the main agent in the International System.

Analysis:

In this section I will answer my research questions, by first outlining a descriptive approach of the governance architectures of each state. This will be backed by actual textual data quoted out of the legislative documents. Then I will interpret these findings based on the concept of Weaponized Interdependence and the Regulatory Security State and assess the normative environment. Lastly, I will discuss my findings on a global level, ensuring relevance for Global Politics.

Analysis: United States of America

The semiconductor governance architecture of the United States:

The main strategy of the Chips and Science act of 2022 is to incentivize domestic semiconductor manufacturing within the United States. This is ensured by creating a fund, that encourages the establishment and expansion of semiconductor production facilities in the United States. This is clearly linked to national security and reducing supply chain risks posed by “foreign countries of concern”, especially the People’s Republic of China (US Chips Act 2022: SEC. 10638. DEFINITIONS). The US Chips & Science Act of 2022 is a legislative document that strongly exhibits a techno-nationalist strategy by relying on protectionist policies and tools. Firstly, the act strongly relies on financial initiatives to ensure supply security and resilience by strengthening semiconductor production within the United States. It relies even stronger on regulatory security, strongly intervening into economic relations by government oversight and compliance mechanisms targeting private corporations. These mechanisms include foreign investments screening especially focusing on China. Still, the document acknowledges the global, interdependent nature of semiconductor supply chains. Geopolitically, the act is specifically targeted on China as observers (The Economist 2023) have pointed out. While the United States heavily relies on state coercion, imposing export restrictions, on allied states (see introduction). The Chips & Science Act of 2022 surprisingly mentions “export controls” only twice, and “export control” 6 times, only referencing previously established acts.

Down below you can see goals and tools of the national security driven approach that also regulates the global nature of semiconductor supply chains within the document:

“(…) provide a secure supply of semiconductors necessary for the national security, manufacturing, critical infrastructure, and technology leadership of the United States and other essential elements of the economy of the United States” (US CHIPS Act 2022.: 136 STAT. 1381).

“(…) the Federal Government could take specific actions to address shortages in the semiconductor supply chain, including - demand-side incentives, including incentives related to the information and communications technology supply chain; and “(II) additional incentives, at national and global scales, to accelerate utilization of leading edge semiconductor nodes to address shortages in mature semiconductor nodes; (ibid.: 136 STAT. 1391).

This example shows how the United States government reserves the right to take “specific actions to address shortages in the semiconductor supply chain”. This is relevant, because it could mark a shift away from liberal practices of the state not interfering into private economic markets.

The designation of “foreign countries of concern”, namely the People’s Republic of China, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation, the Islamic Republic of Iran (US Chips Act 2022: SEC. 10638. DEFINITIONS), or any other country determined to be a country of concern by the Secretary of State further underlines the geopolitically targeted nature of the document. The link between semiconductor governance and national security is explicitly established and further undermined by the institutional composition that defines geopolitical adversaries, which include the Secretary of Commerce in consultation with the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of State, and the Director of National Intelligence (US Chips Act 2022: 136 STAT. 1380 [b]).

This is based on the ideas and goals, which are outlined in the “Sense of Congress”-section (ibid.: 136 STAT. 1385 d) of supply security and resilience, national security, and technological leadership, as shown below:

“It is the sense of Congress that, in carrying out subsection (a), the Secretary should allocate funds in a manner that—

“(1) strengthens the security and resilience of the semiconductor supply chain, including by mitigating gaps and vulnerabilities;

“(2) provides a supply of secure semiconductors relevant for national security;

“(3) strengthens the leadership of the United States in semiconductor technology;

“(4) grows the economy of the United States and supports job creation in the United States;

(...)

“(7) improves the resiliency of the semiconductor supply chains of critical manufacturing industries”(US Chips & Science Act 2022: 136 STAT. 1385)

These statutes are stated as a prerequisite for a “covered entity” to receive government funding. Furthermore, the act aims to counteract a “lack of geographic diversification in the covered entities supply chain” (ibid.: 136 STAT. 1381), which I will discuss now focusing on Weaponized Interdependence.

The role Weaponized Interdependence in the United States semiconductor governance architecture:

The American approach to Weaponized Interdependence is by far the most aggressive one, especially towards China, as the US CHIPS Act of 2022 is specifically targeted on China as I have shown above. This aggressive stance of the United States can be explained by the crucial position American

companies have in chip design and the structural power of the US and “first mover advantages” (Mastanduno 2021) within the global economic system (Malkin & He 2024). This crucial position within the *network* of semiconductor supply chains gives the United States the possibility to shape the behavior of allies, such as the European Union. The “lack of geographic diversification” could mean a concentration of production resources within Taiwan, as roughly 60 % of global semiconductor production is located within Taiwanese corporation TSMC alone (The Economist 2023). This means, that the risk mitigation strategy of “geographic diversification” can be seen as an attempt to reduce dependency on Taiwanese semiconductor production, and with the ongoing tensions between China and Taiwan, hence mitigating geopolitical risk towards China. Furthermore, relocating semiconductor production is an approach to contain Chinas economic growth, as well as a strategy to minimize risks of a possible Chinese invasion of Taiwan. Yet, the strategy of exploiting chokepoints in the global semiconductor supply chain, might be a double-edged sword, as it may ultimately provoke China to gain jurisdictional control over the Taiwanese semiconductor production by invading Taiwan.

The Regulatory Security State and Norms in the United States Semiconductor Governance:

The fact that the US is the dominant player in the semiconductor industry leads to the leverage of its technological leadership and economic power as I have shown using the concept of Weaponized Interdependence. This leads to norm contradictions that are visible in the United States national-security driven approach that strives to strengthen economic competitiveness and relative economic gains. The utilization of export controls and bolstering domestic production, contradicts the “classical American” commitment to trade liberalization and open market mechanisms. Still, the US Chips Act of 2022 contains elements that advocate for international cooperation and market-driven innovations, reflecting liberal-economic norms. However, the security norms seem to outweigh economic norms. Here, especially the designation of “countries of concern” and the targeted nature of the act against China, lead to a primacy of security norms over liberal-economic norms in semiconductor governance.

This aligns with the concept of the regulatory security state, as the US governs semiconductor supply chains through a “security lens” rather than a liberal-economic lens (Mügge 2023). Furthermore, the notion of aligning private actors with national security goals through rules-based governance is evident, as the United States relies on private companies in the production of semiconductors.

Analysis: European Union

The semiconductor governance architecture of the European Union:

Overall, the EU Chips act can be interpreted as a legislative document that follows a techno-nationalist governance architecture within Global Semiconductor Governance. With the most prominent overarching themes being supply security and resilience; technological leadership and innovation ecosystems; and European Cooperation. This is formulated in the main objective sections:

The first objective is to ensure the conditions necessary for the competitiveness and innovation capacity of the Union, to ensure the adjustment of the industry to structural changes due to fast innovation cycles and the need for sustainability, and to strengthen the Union-wide semiconductor ecosystem with pooled knowledge, expertise, resources and common strengths (European Union 2023: L 229/2)

The second objective, separate from and complementary to the first, is to improve the functioning of the internal market by laying down a uniform Union legal framework for increasing the Union's long-term resilience and its ability to innovate and provide security of supply in the field of semiconductor technologies with a view to increasing robustness in order to counter disruptions (ibid.).

Yet, there are also themes of techno-globalism and international cooperation. The general approach to “security” tends towards economic security is mostly defined within the theme of supply security and resilience, but also themes of national security are present. Strategic mapping is a regulatory tool for strategically mapping the European Union’s semiconductor sector, with an emphasis on understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the EU within the global supply chain, as well as global dependencies and vulnerabilities. Hence, strategic mapping can be interpreted as a proactive approach of the European Union to ensure security of supply and mitigate potential risks arising from cooperative and competitive global dependencies which are showcased below:

The European Semiconductor Board shall periodically discuss the following, and shall inform the Commission of the outcome of such discussions: (...)

(b) which third countries could be prioritised for enhanced international cooperation related to semiconductors, considering:

- (i) complementarities and interdependencies along the semiconductor supply chain*
- (ii) the effect on semiconductor supply of trade policies, tariffs, export restrictions, trade barriers, as well as the effect of business closures, offshoring or acquisitions of Union key market actors by entities established in third countries on the basis of publicly available information (ibid.: L229/38).*

The current disruptions have exposed long-lasting vulnerabilities in this respect, in particular a strong third-country dependency in manufacturing and design of chips (European Union 2023: L229/1).

As a result, by prioritizing the security and competitiveness of the EU’s semiconductor sector, I argue that this regulation reflects the techno-nationalist paradigm. Nonetheless, by acknowledging dependencies on global supply chains and highlighting aspects of international cooperation, it also

contains elements of techno-globalism. Security considerations especially play a role within the crisis stage framework of the European Union as I will show below.

The "Crisis Stage" in the European Semiconductor Regulatory Framework:

The "Crisis Stage" regulation (European Union 2023: L 229/33) establishes protocols for structurally approaching disruptions in the global semiconductor supply chain. Possible causes for these disruptions are not clearly indicated, but as priorly established these interruptions could be a result of natural catastrophes or political decisions. The regulation aims to mitigate these general risks and can thus also be interpreted as a potential countermeasure to willfully weaponized disruptions of the global supply chain.

Priority rated orders:

The policy instrument of priority rated orders is especially interesting for the study of economic statecraft and even for assessing modern statehood. Priority rated orders empowers the European Union to prioritize orders for crisis-relevant semiconductor products. This means that sector vital for infrastructure – and national security and have priority access to semiconductors, production facilities and open EU foundries. This could mark a substantial shift from the (neo-)liberal paradigm of statehood towards the regulatory security statehood, by aligning different actors, including private actors, to national security and stability interests as outlined in the framework.

Common purchasing:

Common purchasing enables the European Union to act as the central purchasing body on behalf of the participating member states in case of supply chain disruptions. By exclusively linking common purchasing to the crisis stage, this can be seen as evidence of the regulatory security state, as it applies a security logic to economic issues. Combined with the framework of priority rated orders, this is clear evidence of economic statecraft and an exercise of state-power into business-state relations. Furthermore, by safeguarding critical economic and infrastructure sectors this can be interpreted as an attempt to ensure economic and national security. In terms of weaponized interdependences, the policy instrument seems to be defensive in nature, attempting to minimize global vulnerabilities and together with priority orders gain strategic autonomy and agency.

The role of Weaponized Interdependence in the European Union's semiconductor governance architecture:

The European Union's approach to weaponizing interdependence is a balanced one as it has leverage over crucial companies within the global semiconductor value chain like the Dutch corporation ASML but does not have the structural power and first mover-advantages of the United States. The EU Chips act acknowledges dependencies "in the design" (European Union 2023: L229/1) and "manufacturing"

of semiconductors, as previously established this mainly reflects the design capabilities of the United States and the manufacturing capabilities of China and Taiwan. The role of Taiwan is implicitly visible in the following segment of the document:

Recent developments, such as increased outsourcing, longer global value chains, and the increased use of information and communication technology contribute to increasing the risk of those practices (...). To further address key supply-chain risks, Member States may (...) carry out coordinated security risk assessments of critical supply chains, (...) counter critical dependencies, potential single points of failure, threats, vulnerabilities, and other risks associated with the supply chain (ibid.: L 229/10 [43]).

Returning to Donnelly (2023) part of the geopolitical relevance of global semiconductor supply chains is the possibility of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan – here the “potential single point of failure” could be a reference to the concentrated semiconductor production capabilities located on Taiwan. Geopolitically, the EU positions itself, again implicitly, as a strategic partner of the United States and its allies:

*9) In accordance with international obligations and applicable procedural requirements the Union and Member States could engage, including diplomatically, **with international strategic partners that have advantages in the semiconductor industry**, with a view to seeking solutions to strengthen the security of supply and to address future supply-chain disruptions of semiconductors, such as those resulting from third-country export restrictions, and to identify the availability of raw materials and intermediate products (European Union 2023: L229/3; emphasis by author).*

This is remarkable, because the European chips act does not explicitly mention specific countries and the positive or negative relations to it as opposed to the United States CHIPS act. Here, the European Union chooses a diplomatic route, not specifically defining any geopolitical adversaries, but still implicitly mentioning its allies. Furthermore, this risk mitigation strategy also includes an assessment of “bottlenecks”:

*(d) the technological characteristics, the dependencies on third-country technology and providers, and **bottlenecks of the Unions semiconductor sector including access to inputs**; (European Union 2023: L 229/30)*

These “bottlenecks” correspond to the idea of utilizing “chokepoint effects” and politically caused disruptions of the global supply chain of as means of weaponizing interdependences as outlined above. Ultimately, the European Union tries to counteract these risks by relying on its inner market and production capabilities as visible in the policy tools described above.

The Regulatory Security State and Norms in the European Unions Semiconductor Governance:

The European Union and its regulatory measures as described above, exhibit a more balanced approach between security and economic norms. The EU Chips Act strives to strengthen Europe's semiconductor ecosystem and establish technological sovereignty, but also promotes economic collaboration and innovation. Yet the overarching themes established in my empirical research were supply chain resilience and strategic autonomy, which is further underscored by regulatory tools such as "priority-rated orders" which strongly intervene into the private sector and thus break with classical liberal-economic norms. Thus, in the European Union balances security imperatives with economic considerations, with a tendency towards security norms.

Regarding the Regulatory Security State, the baseline of the EU Chips is trying to balance national-security norms with liberal-economic norms. Here, I agree with Mügge (2023), that the European Regulatory Security State represents a convergence of economic and security norms. However, the tools of the crisis stage, strongly intervene into private markets and actors. Especially, the tool of "priority-rated orders" which gives the EU power to define "crisis-relevant semiconductor products" and enforce the allocation of production capabilities of private actors, marks a strong shift away from the neoliberal governance paradigm.

Analysis: People's republic of China:

The semiconductor governance architecture of the People's Republic of China:

The Chinese semiconductor governance documents exhibit stronger Techno-globalist strategies than the US and EU documents. Themes within the techno-globalist paradigm are open-market policies, international cooperation, and innovation. This is especially exhibited in the "go global" initiative:

Deepen industrial international cooperation and accelerate the globalization of enterprises. Strengthen top-level design, formulate an overall strategy for the manufacturing industry to go global, and establish and improve overall planning and coordination mechanisms (CSET 2022: 26).

Yet, Chinas approach to semiconductor governance also relies on national development of the semiconductor sector and relevant base research. This is exercised through financial support and tax cuts and a preferential treatment of Chinese companies. Nevertheless, these tax cuts also exempt key companies from import duties, which naturally rely on a globalized economy, showing the fine line between the two governance strategies. However, these efforts are balanced with regulatory measures to protect national security interests, especially evident through the definition of the semiconductor industry as a "strategic industry":

Aim at strategic priorities such as new generation IT, high-end equipment, new materials, and biotech and pharma, guide the gathering of various resources from society, and promote the rapid development of well-positioned and strategic industries (CSET 2022:19)

This could be a result of the fact that China, while having great capabilities in lower-end manufacturing capabilities does not have the means to weaponize interdependences of high-end chips and manufacturing equipment. Hence, China's focus on building innovation ecosystems is a response to the direct and indirect weaponization attempts of other global actors, mainly the United States. As a result, China is heavily investing in domestic production capabilities and research and hence strives for technological leadership.

National security implications with connections to "supply chain security" is regulated within "China's Cybersecurity review" framework, focusing on "Critical Information infrastructure" and "critical industries":

A: Critical information infrastructure (CII) is of the highest importance for national security, economic security, social stability, and the health and security of the masses. Our country has established a cybersecurity review system, with the objective to discover as quickly as possible and avoid the purchase of products and services bringing risks and harm to the operation of CII through the measure of cybersecurity review, to ensure the security of CII supply chains, and to safeguard national security (Cybersecurity Review 2020).

Furthermore, it is stated that cybersecurity review process addresses national security risks by assessing:

3. The security, openness, transparency, and diversity of sources of products and services; the reliability of supply channels, as well as the risk of supply disruptions due to political, diplomatic, and trade factors; (Cybersecurity Review; Article 9/3).

Yet, China's approach to the regulatory security state attempts to balance economic security through international cooperation and national security through safeguarding critical infrastructure.

The role of Weaponized Interdependence in People's republic of China's semiconductor governance architecture:

As I have described above, China has great capabilities in lower-end manufacturing, but lacks high-end manufacturing capabilities. Hence, the overall approach to semiconductor governance is rather globalist as China is still reliant on semiconductor imports as VerWey (2019) has shown. This means that China is forced into a very defensive stance regarding Weaponized Interdependence as it hardly has the capabilities to actively weaponize interdependencies in the semiconductor sector. Here, China tries to

advance its technological position by heavily investing into domestic research to build their own high-end chip design and manufacturing capabilities.

Furthermore, the United States and the European Union both have leverage on crucial “chokepoints” within the global semiconductor value chain, as I have shown. China is lacking control over a crucial high-end chokepoint in the value chain. From a perspective of weaponizing interdependences and taking the geopolitically crucial position of Taiwan (Donnelly 2023) into account, a Chinese invasion of Taiwan would level the playing field from a Chinese perspective.

The Regulatory Security State and Norms in Chinas Semiconductor Governance:

The Chinese semiconductor strategy is peculiar, as they also strive for technological leadership, critical infrastructure security and technological sovereignty. However, more than the United States’ and the EUs, the Chinese framework emphasized economic norms of global collaboration and market access as a driver of economic growth and innovation. While China seeks to strengthen its semiconductor industry through state-led initiatives and strategic investments, it strongly depends on state-of-the-art United States chip design and European machinery. This leads China into a regulatory dilemma, where to satisfy national security concerns, they rely on economic cooperation and technology transfers from a “snapshot” point of view, China's semiconductor strategy appears balanced, exhibiting a paradoxical observation. It challenges the Western notions of weaponizing interdependencies thus paradoxically advocating for traditional “Western values” such as free trade and transnational economic cooperation. However, as this balancing act is a necessary means to access essential technologies, drive innovation, and subsequently achieve technological sovereignty, I would argue that also the Chinese Strategy tends to focus on security norms. Regarding the concept of the regulatory security state, the distinctive difference of the Chinese state is of course that it is not a liberal-democratic state. Hence, the relationship between private actors and the state has always been marked by strategies of state influence, resembling the Regulatory Security State. Here, the Chinese strategy must be seen in context. China may have more leeway in externally promoting liberal-economic strategies as the close ties between the Chinese state and Chinese corporations leads to higher absolute gains of global cooperation for the Chinese state, compared to the “truly” liberal stance of the United States and the EU, where ties between the state and corporations loosely coupled.

Analysis: The Global Level

The Global Semiconductor Governance Regime Complex:

At the very core of these policies lies the redefinition of interdependence from a liberal-economic understanding of interdependence to a realist-security understanding. In all 3 cases, this is largely based on the idea of technological leadership and, what I call, “technological sovereignty”. This shift is largely governed by a rules-based approach (Kruck & Weiss 2023: 1211) as opposed to a capacity-based approach (ibid.). The semiconductor sector is a prime example of globalized economic structures

largely ruled by private corporations, which is a result of the neoliberal governance paradigm of the last decades. As this sector is increasingly becoming relevant for national security, as I have shown, governments have increasingly lost the ability of capacity-based national security governance. Hence, states are now utilizing a rules-based approach to re-establish technological sovereignty and thus provide national security assurances. To achieve this, states seem to be increasingly willing to intervene in economic relations, using export controls, priority-rated orders, and other policy instruments.

Weaponized Interdependence as a global insecurity-producing practice:

Following constructivist thought my argument is that weaponized interdependences as an insecurity-producing practice (Wendt 1992), which I will discuss in the following section. According to liberal theorists, interdependence should lead to peaceful interactions between states (Kant 2014 [1795]; Owen 1994; Doyle 1996; Russett et al. 1995) and the establishment of *security communities*, which rely on trust. As I have shown, interdependences in the semiconductor industry are increasingly governed through regulatory measures that are based on security considerations. This is a result of the internal framing of interdependencies in the semiconductor supply chain as vulnerabilities, as I have shown through thematic analysis. This leads to a security dilemma, which Wendt (1995: 73) defines as “(...) a social structure composed of intersubjective understandings in which states are so distrustful that they make worst-case assumptions about each other’s intentions”.

The weaponization of interdependences and shifting norms on the international level define the agency of state-actors, as state-action is also based on standards of appropriateness (Finnamore & Sikkink 1998; Farrell 2002). As states are socialized actors and global semiconductor value chains are not governed by a single international regime, states base their decision making on other institutions that form that regime complex (Biermann 2009). The growing fear of the United States towards China has led to shifts of the global security environment towards egoistic practices, which is also visible in global semiconductor governance.

The construction of a security dilemma was empirically observable within the documents, as there is a construction of “threats” and “vulnerabilities”. Here, only the United States specifically name, “foreign countries of concern”. The EU and China remain very vague about these “vulnerabilities”. These threats and vulnerabilities partly have material grounds, as the dual-use nature of semiconductors and recent technological developments in AI may have consequences for national security. On the other hand, these threats are inherently based on a perceived security dilemma, which is socially constructed and socialized at the actor level through interactions on the international level (Wendt 1992). Causal to that mechanism might be the US definition of China as a security threat, which led to efforts of containing Chinas growth by cutting it off crucial supply chains. This forced other actors like the EU and China to respond to these practices and resulted in similar practices, which further reinforces the anarchical security dilemma.

The Regulatory Security State in Global Semiconductor Governance:

As I have shown, global semiconductor value chains are globe spanning networks of entailing various interdependences. The link between semiconductor technology and semiconductor supply chains with national security, was consistent throughout all documents and state-actors, as presented in the “governance architecture”-sections. The theoretically implied shift from governing interdependence through a security-lens seems thus be empirically visible in this governance area. Yet, security considerations are still balanced with economic objectives. As Finnamore and Sikkink (1998: 914) have pointed out these balancing processes might involve a different reasonings than utility maximization. On this level, I did not find any meaningful evidence that transcends the rationalist reasoning of utility maximization. The specific reasoning in the documents was predominantly one of maximizing security-and/or economic utility. The overarching theme of “technological leadership” could be interpreted as a more identity-based approach to governance, but this ultimately also comes back their material grounds. This is to be expected as material capabilities are crucial to the social structures (Wendt 1992).

The previous sections illustrated that the United States, the European Union, and China are determined to ensure critical infrastructure security and technological leadership in the semiconductor sector. This is underpinned by the concept of “weaponized interdependence”. The “regulatory security state” emphasizes national security as a governance paradigm. This could be interpreted as the reclaiming of state-agency in national security provision. Mügge (2023) has argued a supposed power shift away from state actors, because states are increasingly relying on private actors in matters of national security. I argue against this notion. The examined states are increasingly controlling and protecting their technological capabilities, challenging norms of economic interdependence and free trade by restricting the global flow of semiconductor technology and knowledge and thus heavily interfering into “private” markets. Hence, the shift from a capacity-based to a rules-based governance approach should not be misinterpreted as a sign of waning state-power, but rather as a transformation of how states exercise power. The practices and identity-formation that entail this transformation are then “mirrored” and socialized (Wendt 1992) on a global level and thus shifts the normative structure of economic cooperation into a competitive and realist mode (Mügge 2023).

Conclusion:

In this study I applied a constructivist framework to global semiconductor governance. Using Wendt (1992) I have shown that the International System is based on collective knowledge and social will formation. This means that the anarchic international system is socially constructed and shaped by practices such as Weaponized Interdependence. Resultingly, I have defined “weaponized interdependence” as an insecurity-producing practice, which shifts the collective knowledge towards the securitization of interdependences in global semiconductor governance. In order to implement this

securitization, states take up the identity of the regulatory security states and align economic policy with national security goals. This alignment was observable across all observed entities, the United States, Europe, and China. I uncovered this alignment using document analysis, reading, and coding the United States Chips Act of 2022, the EU Chips Act, the Chinese 5-year plan on National Informatization and the Chinese Cybersecurity Review framework and the Made in China 2025 plan.

The content of these legislative documents were analyzed using a document analysis framework, drawing on the traditions of content analysis and interpretative policy analysis. I found that there is in fact a shift in global semiconductor governance from a liberal-economic governance structure of global interdependences towards a security driven approach. The application of this security logic is based on a “security dilemma”, where states make worst case assumptions about each other. This security dilemma is not necessarily based on material grounds but rather socially constructed and socialized- This socialization process leads to the adoption of a regulatory security logic as I have shown on the state-level. This is based on the construction of “threats” and “vulnerabilities” in the legislative documents. These threat mitigation strategies arise at the expense of norms of free-trade and economic liberalism. Here, the United States exhibits the strongest hierarchical prioritization of national security norms over norms of economic cooperation, the European Union tries to balance security imperatives with economic considerations, the framework as outlined in the EU Chips Act tends towards a normative focus on security. China depends the most on global technology transfers and supply chains and is thus the strongest advocate for open-market policies in global semiconductor governance. However, this balancing act is necessary for China to achieve technological sovereignty and thus also can be interpreted as ultimately serving security interests.

As demonstrated using the concepts of Weaponized Interdependence and the regulatory security state, there is friction between security and economic norms within global semiconductor governance. Security norms prioritize technological sovereignty, safeguarding critical infrastructure and strategic industries, while liberal-economic norms emphasize free trade, economic globalization and the free flow of goods and information. As I have shown with Fehl et al. (2019: 6) a norm hierarchy exists, when one norm carries more “social weight” than the other. This relative social weight between conflicting norms interacts with policy decisions and regulatory practices. This study adopted an inductive approach, analyzing policy decisions and regulatory practices to explore these Norm Hierarchies. According to my findings, globally there seems to be a shifting normative environment towards prioritizing national security considerations, which relegates economic norms to a subordinate position. The regulatory security state might be emerging as states have outsourced security provisions to private companies. This might undermine the very reason of state existence, the provision of inner- and outer security. Hence, by interfering with global competition, using tools of economic statecraft,

and taking reduced profits for private corporations into account the era of corporate driven neoliberal governance might come to an end.

Returning to liberal accounts of interdependence and the claim that growing interdependences might have forever changed global social relations and interdependence decreases the chance of military conflict (Le Monde 2019; Keohane & Nye 2000). These developments have been linked with rather bold statements by scholars of different theoretical backgrounds. The rise of geoeconomics, “the logic of war in the grammar of commerce” as Luttwak put it, economic statecraft, and the idea that “(t)oday, great powers fight their battles through supply chains” (Chen & Evers 2023).

Luttwak (1990) discussed the diminishing potential of military conflicts as “import-restricted supercomputers cannot be forcibly delivered by airborne assault to banks or universities in need of them” (1990: 20 – 21) Yet, when Luttwak coined the term of geo-economics it might have been too early to fully understand the possibilities of weaponized interdependences. As I have shown, both the U.S. (chip design) and the EU (e.g. ASML) control crucial chokepoints in the semiconductor sector. Only China lacks a sophisticated “high-tech” chokepoint – if it wasn’t for Taiwan, which China considers a breakaway province, and controls over 60 % of the semiconductor production. If the geoeconomics logic of weaponized interdependence continues, China might be forced to either achieve technological sovereignty from within or gain sovereign control over a crucial chokepoint within the semiconductor supply chain – this would most likely be Taiwan-based corporation TSMC.

Here, I will not be as dramatic and claim that what I have been describing and discussing in these pages was a “battle”. Yet, I showed that the global semiconductor supply chains are a field of high-geopolitical relevance and subject to great contestation. What are witnessing, is the unfolding of geoeconomics, economic statecraft and the weaponized interdependences as tools of state power. Liberal interdependence might not have fundamentally changed social relations but altered the logic of conflict from a military to an economic logic. Changes in the normative structure of international cooperation in the field of semiconductor governance, away from an absolute gains logic towards a relative gains logic suggests that the very nature of state power is shifting from a primarily military focus to an economic one. In a recently published commentary on Project Syndicate, German economist and political scientist Daniel Gros (2024) argued that the relative size of the economy is now crucial for geopolitical power. This notion might explain the shifting environment of practices and norms within the Global Politics of semiconductor governance. Semiconductor technology is one of the most crucial economic resources of the 21st century (Le Monde 2019). Dominating this resource will not only give states increased military power as the dual-use nature of microchips implies but might be the decisive factor of relative economic growth. As this relative economic power is increasingly exercised as state power *per sé* as demonstrated, this might be the explanatory variable of *why* battles are now fought through

semiconductor supply chains. Ultimately, these associated practices, ideas and norms recreate the anarchical security dilemma by shifting the normative environment into a competitive mode. While purely “economic battles” might be normatively desirable at least compared to military warfare, it is highly doubtful that these battles remain on the purely economic level forever. Consequently, scholars and politicians should be cautious when advising for shifting the normative environment of Global Politics towards the logic of conflict (Gros 2024). However, it cannot be fully answered if liberal globalization has forever changed the structure of the International System. If war doesn’t make realism true, as Wendt (1992) has argued, periods of peace do not prove liberal theory. Complex interdependences might lead to peace as it gives all actors in the system access to critical material resources, regardless of territoriality, which makes the use of force unreasonable. However, this does not seem to transcend the social relations of domination (Žižek 2023: 166), leading to wars by other means. These previously established interdependences and the purposeful denial of actors’ access to critical resources could ultimately mark the return of military conflict to regain access to crucial nodes within global networks of dependencies.

Future Research:

Future research on Weaponized Interdependence could assess the specific internal mechanisms of state-action to further highlight the state-specific approaches and differences in state systems and ideology. Furthermore, as the main producers of semiconductors, an examination of the agency of businesses and the resulting business-state relations could be fruitful. Furthermore, Weaponized Interdependence could be studied through analysing diplomatic channels to explore the less formal processes of the phenomenon. Here, not only legislative text produced by state-actors but also speech acts of individuals could be explored. This could not only entail the role of politicians, but also high-level executives of multinational corporations and industry associations. In the specific field of semiconductor governance, the role of international institutions could also be explored. Lastly, quantitative studies on Weaponized Interdependence in various fields could clarify the actual political and economic gravity of the phenomenon.

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