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Weaponized Interdependence and Collective Resilience [1]

The global economy is so tightly interconnected that states can exploit mutual dependencies as leverage against one another—a dynamic known as weaponized interdependence. According to Farrell and Newman, this is the capacity for a state to be "so central to an embedded network of interdependence that it can impose its will on others." In other words: control of the nodes that facilitate the global economy, money or supply chains creates states of power. Through a surveillance system (known as the 'panopticon effect') and the ability to deny resources ('chokepoint effect'), such states can get their partners to do anything including unintended adjustments to policy.

Where economic and technological ties are used as coercive tools, scholar Victor D. Cha advocates for "collective resilience" a public diplomacy strategy in which allies treat economic coercion against one as an attack on all. This shared stance deters aggressors by threatening multilateral retaliation and reinforces diplomatic solidarity through coordinated responses such as supply chain adjustments and alternative financial systems. As public diplomacy adapts, it must shift from promoting free markets alone to emphasizing resilience, strategic alignment, and cooperative deterrence in the face of coercive global interconnectivity.

Weaponized interdependence features two central effects of coercion. The first is the chokepoint effect. When a nation acts as a critical node for a supply chain necessary to a nation, it can deny other nations access and create tremendous costs. The second is the panopticon effect. When a nation has access to a network, it can see what everyone else is doing and exploit it. Farrell and Newman suggest that the financial and informational networks are incredibly asymmetric. Nodes exist in which certain nations are points of service for the bulk of the world's transportation. To control the payment system or the essential supply chain node acts as a weapon.

Consider, for example, the SWIFT financial messaging network. SWIFT links over 11,000 banks globally. With a Brussels base, it's the only international system in this field, it's the perfect chokepoint. Thus, since 9/11, the United States has seen SWIFT as useful for sanctions and surveillance. When one cuts a nation off SWIFT, one literally chokes access to international financial transactions. According to the HIKMA Summit, after the United States and EU invaded Ukraine, they kicked Russian banks off SWIFT. They wanted to make it complicated for Moscow to control this interbank transaction network. They did, successfully. Russia had difficulty paying bills, was forced into currency volatility, and lost capital inflows. While this action did nothing to deter Russia's aggression, it proved two points: how much power resides in a centralized tool; and, as long as SWIFT remains in the United States' or its allies' hands, it remains so for international inter-banking messaging.

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coercive global interconnectivity."

An extreme example involves critical materials, specifically rare-earth minerals. Until recently, China processed an estimated 99% of the world's heavy rare earths, which are frequently used for high-tech industries. In April 2025, China submitted new export licensing applications for seven different rare-earth elements. Seven rare-earth elements are critical for military and energy work, found in everything from smartphones to F-35 fighter jets. Thus, China's monopoly was a way to choke supply relevant to Western nations, an obvious weaponized interdependence move. Denying accessibility suggests a decreased ability to operate in Western technological spheres or military efficiency. China has already done this in the past. In 2010, China ceased exporting rare earths to Japan due to diplomatic strife. Japan experienced a spike in global prices. China's recent application gives the same impression, unless consumer countries can find other means of supply and stockpile in excess, they could be subject to the strategic blackmail of a single-supplier monopoly.

Finally, consider weaponized interdependence with regard to semiconductors. The U.S. designs chips but needs Chinese raw materials and assembly. At the same time, China needs Western technologies for the best chips. As Hamdani and Belfencha explain it, it's a prisoner's dilemma of co-dependency as elaborated in the United States-China Semiconductor Standoff. Yet the cards are stronger for China now. Its progress includes strides toward a domestic 7-nanometer chip, and China has even threatened to limit exports of gallium and germanium material prerequisites for semiconductor production. The United States, for its part, has denied China access to certain advanced chipmaking tools. Yet all of these moves expose the fragile fist; access chokepoints (advanced equipment) and vulnerabilities (critical materials supply) are now weapons of a larger technological fight.

But with international vulnerabilities, nations are attempting to learn how to fight back. Cha proposes one solution as collective resilience: allies considering an attack on one economy an attack on any economy. Such a standard allows nations to agree to retaliatory actions against economic coercion instead of just the economically coerced nation suffering the penalty, aggressor nations realize quickly that their larger interests in trade will suffer as allies intervene and inflict costs against them. Collective resilience can include supply chain diversions, stockpiling of critical materials, alternative payment systems and communication systems, and contracts that protect against unreasonable costs. The logic of resilience is simple if the key access points are not under the dominance of any particular nation, then there is no ability to weaponize them. Cha calls this a response to coercive weaponized interdependence that exploits power asymmetries.

Yet weaponized interdependence reveals the negative side of globalization; what connects can just as easily coerce. Whether through SWIFT, rare earth minerals, or semiconductor production, globalization creates a standard that strong global connectedness can harm as much as failings can harm. The United States and China have learned that being connected is as much a blessing as it is a warzone. Moving forward, states must consider resilience, alignment, diversified interdependence, and possibly deterrent strategies. International order does not hinge on free markets; it hinges on how nations react to weaponized interdependence.
