

## US Critical Minerals Policy Amid US-China Rivalry

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Mainland China is a primary source of critical minerals for the United States. Since the onset of the US-China trade war, China has repeatedly used restrictions on mineral and technology exports as retaliatory measures. Recently, it has extended its strategy to third-country supply chains, aiming not only to strain US alliances but also to potentially entice supply chain companies to reinvest in China.

To prevail in the supply chain battle, President Trump has implemented multiple policies in less than half a year since returning to the White House in 2025. They include promoting domestic critical mineral production, conducting national security investigations into processed critical minerals and their derivatives, expanding control over foreign mineral resources, developing deep-sea mining, and providing financing for foreign partners supporting US critical minerals policy. These actions reflect a strong determination to decouple from China.

Among these policies, the Trump administration's top priority for the next 4 years is promoting domestic critical mineral production. Current progress shows significant advancements in expediting domestic mining project approvals, with permit timelines warranting close attention moving forward.

In the long term, boosting domestic critical mineral production can create jobs, drive economic prosperity, strengthen US supply chain security, and reduce reliance on foreign sources. However, developing mines and building processing facilities takes time in the short term. To address this, the US Department of Defense plans to fund the purchase, subsidization, and production facilities for critical minerals. Additionally, the US Export-Import Bank will provide financing for foreign partners supporting the US critical minerals policy to bolster the US industry and enhance export competitiveness.

The US Department of Commerce is also conducting national security investigations into supply chain goods from upstream to downstream to prevent excessive reliance on foreign-processed critical minerals and their derivatives, which

could jeopardize US defense capabilities, infrastructure development, and technological innovation.

Looking ahead, the next battleground in US-China rivalry is expected to involve expanding control over foreign mineral resources and developing deep-sea mining. *The US-Ukraine Mineral Resources Agreement* strongly signals that the Trump administration is integrating mineral resources into its foreign policy. It is likely to next target resource-rich regions such as the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda. However, mineral resources are tied to territorial sovereignty, and outcomes may not always align with expectations. Russia has not committed to a ceasefire, leaving Ukraine's future uncertain. Meanwhile, Trump's aggressive rhetoric toward Greenland and Canada has already backfired.

Consequently, deep-sea mining is expected to be the next ambitious challenge for the Trump administration. Taking advantage of international legislative gaps and the US's non-ratification of the *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea*, the US has expanded its deep-sea mining rights to high seas beyond its exclusive economic zone and successfully attracted mining companies to apply for permits. This poses an urgent threat to the international community. Mainland China currently supports the *International Seabed Authority*. How the United Nations addresses the issue of unilateral actions caused by delayed international regulations will depend on the *International Seabed Authority's* capacity to swiftly establish a future international legal order.

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