

Major US think tank highlights importance of critical minerals

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2 March 2025

In his pamphlet “Imperialism,” written in 1916 to analyse World War I and to explain why only a socialist revolution could end the descent into capitalist barbarism, Lenin, the leader of the Russian Revolution of October 1917, pointed to the importance of the acquisition of raw materials as one of the forces driving the imperialist “great powers” into war.

“The more capitalism is developed,” he wrote, “the more strongly the shortage of raw materials is felt, the more intense the competition and the hunt for sources of raw materials throughout the world, the more desperate the struggle for the acquisition of colonies.”

In Lenin’s day, this struggle centred on oilfields, iron ore and the like. With the development of computer technology and now AI, raw materials crucial to the making of semiconductors, batteries and communications systems have become the centre of a global struggle for acquisition of these resources. It has become an existential question for the US.

Lenin’s analysis of the objective, material driving forces for war, rooted in the domination of capitalist production by giant monopolies, very often owned by key sections of finance capital, has often been dismissed as too crude, out of date, an example of “vulgar” Marxism, and so on.

But the conflict between the US and the European Union over how the spoils of the Ukraine war should be divided up has revealed once again that imperialist wars are not fought for “democracy” or “self-determination,” “protection” of small nations, “peace,” etc., but for plunder.

The crucial issue of raw materials is the subject of a recent analysis by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a major think tank for US imperialism.

It began by emphasising the importance of minerals.

“Mining is the foundation that allowed the United States to be a military leader, providing the minerals needed to manufacture tanks, missiles, fighter jets, and warships.”

But as with everything else in today’s world, these weapons now require computerised systems and increasingly AI to operate, and this requires access to minerals that were only of limited importance in the past.

The CSIS immediately cut to the chase. “Today the United States is 100 percent import-reliant for 12 of the 50 minerals identified as critical by the US Geological Survey (USGS) and over 50 percent import-reliant for another 29. China is the top producer for 29 of these critical minerals,” it said.

“China,” it continued, “has a stranglehold on minerals processing, refining between 40 and 90 percent of the world’s supply of rare elements, graphite, lithium, cobalt, and copper.”

Like all other so-called mainstream publications, the *New York Times* has worked to cover over the essential driving forces of US wars and has actively joined in covering up the real motivations, such as in the 2003 war on Iraq when it was the chief promoter of the Big Lie that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction.

But even it has been forced to acknowledge the role of mineral resources as a driver of US policy, citing a remark by Trump that “I want security of the rare earth” at the beginning of a recent article referencing the CSIS analysis.

“The president has talked about acquiring minerals in Greenland and Canada,” it continued, and noted that Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau had told a group of business leaders that Trump’s focus on Canada’s minerals meant threats to annex the country were “a real thing.”

The article said that seizing mineral wealth overseas was a core foreign policy goal of Trump and “an impetus for his most imperialistic remarks since taking office. His instincts hark back to the drives of fallen empires, when resource extraction motivated rulers to expand territory.”

The likening of the US to fallen empires of the past is not misplaced. Its rise to dominance of the imperialist-capitalist system was based on its industrial power. Today the US is the centre of unprecedented speculation and has been hit with three financial heart attacks in the past 16 years—the 2008 crisis, the March 2020 crisis at the start of the pandemic, and the failure of three significant American banks in March 2023.

The extent of the problems confronting US imperialism as it seeks domination of the world’s supply of critical minerals and resources is documented throughout the CSIS report.

It noted that semiconductors were foundational for virtually every part of modern life, requiring small but essential components of gallium, germanium, palladium, silicon, arsenic, titanium, as well as other elements.

“The production of these resources is largely concentrated in foreign adversaries, exposing a severe national security risk. USGS has estimated that just a 30 percent supply disruption of gallium could cause a \$602 billion decline in US economic output, amounting to a 2.1 percent loss of gross domestic product.”

The issue confronting the US is not just the location of rare earths, critical minerals and vital metals such as copper. Mining them is only the start of a complex process in which they have to be refined. And here the question is having those industrial processes in place.

As the report noted, crucial US industries are reliant on supply chains that are “heavily concentrated in foreign adversaries.”

“Over the course of decades and with the assistance of state-led industrial policies and billions of dollars in subsidies, China has grown to dominate the manufacturing sector for the cutting-edge technologies that the modern economy relies on. The risk this poses to US national and economic security is untenable.”

Clearly, if it is untenable, then it must be ended and by whatever means US imperialism considers necessary.

It noted that the CHIPS Act of the Biden

administration, which provided major subsidies to firms manufacturing in the US, “did not prioritize access to critical minerals,” and as a result, the Act’s focus on this area was “minor.”

Processing is among the key questions. The report pointed out that while China only produced 10 percent of the world’s lithium, cobalt, nickel, and copper, it imported “sufficient quantities to process 65 to 90 percent of the global supply of these metals.”

It said the US would have to develop a “carrots and sticks” approach to drive “market-based activity aligned with US government interests.”

The world has already witnessed what that involves. In regard to the Ukraine and the demands of the Trump administration it was like, as even the *Times* commented, a “Mafia don’s extortion scheme.”

But Mafia-like “offers” are only the beginning. The ultimate “stick” to be used in forcing alignment with the US is military force, which will come increasingly to the fore.



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