

Deploying Canada's Critical Minerals for Strategic Leverage and National Security

Issue:

Critical minerals are now at the center of global strategic competition. Recent Chinese moves to restrict US access, combined with President Trump's January 2025 Executive Order on a US 'critical minerals emergency,' have fundamentally altered the landscape. Canada must treat these assets not as mere commodities but as instruments of national strategy, sovereignty, and economic power.

Analysis:

Critical minerals underpin defense systems, clean technology, and advanced manufacturing. US sectors rely heavily on secure access—now threatened by global instability.

Canada's proximity and untapped resources like Ontario's Ring of Fire make it uniquely positioned. However, raw extraction alone is insufficient: full-spectrum industrial policy emphasizing domestic refining and strategic trade leverage is essential.

This requires federal leadership, deep provincial partnerships, Indigenous consultation, and swift mobilization of public-private investment. Indigenous partnership will be essential for legitimacy and success. Delay risks losing strategic advantage to foreign actors. Swift leadership can turn Canada's mineral wealth into a cornerstone of sovereignty, security, and prosperity.

Considerations:

Option A: Maintain Open Export Access

- Pros: Maintains immediate revenues.
- Cons: Surrenders leverage; prolongs raw material dependency.

Option B: Conditioned Strategic Access (Recommended)

- Pros: Embeds Canadian interests into supply chains; strengthens economic sovereignty; supports NATO defense objectives.
- Cons: Requires complex coordination and rapid execution.

Recommendation:

Pass a 'Canadian Critical Minerals Sovereignty and Security Act' to:

- Condition exports on reciprocal respect for Canadian security interests.
- Fast-track Ring of Fire development with Indigenous partnership and benefit-sharing.
- Invest in domestic refining and processing infrastructure.
- Classify critical minerals as strategic defense assets counting toward NATO targets.
- Strengthen investment screening to protect strategic mineral industries.

Background:

China's weaponization of mineral exports and Trump's emergency declaration highlight the urgency. Australia's rare earth success shows a model for Canada. Delay risks surrendering strategic resources to adversaries.

The Ring of Fire offers a generational opportunity to secure economic leadership, technological sovereignty, and defense resilience. The Natural Resources Canada Critical Minerals Strategy emphasizes the strategic importance of the Ring of Fire for North American mineral independence, focusing on domestic refining, job creation, and national security. See Natural Resources Canada, 'Critical Minerals Strategy,' Government of Canada (2025)

The Arctic and Northern Policy Framework, released by the Government of Canada in 2019, provides a comprehensive blueprint for strengthening Canadian presence in the North, focusing on sustainable development, Indigenous co-governance, and enhanced sovereignty through critical infrastructure investment. 'Arctic and Northern Policy Framework' (2019), Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada. <https://www.rcaanccirnac.gc.ca/eng/1560523306861/1560523330587>.

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