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New Report Highlights US National Security Challenges Given US Dependence on Rare Earth Metals in China

WASHINGTON D.C., 1 February 2011 – Today the American Security Project released a new report titled “[Rare Earth Metals and U.S. National Security](#),” which outlines the national security risks of US reliance on China as the sole supplier of rare earth metals—metals essential to the United States’ military and economic needs.

Emily Coppel, author of the report and Research Assistant at the American Security Project, said: “*Rare earth metals present a weak link in our defense supply chain. These metals are critical for national security, as they are essential for our most powerful weapons. The US was once the world’s top producer and supplier of these metals, but now China controls over 90% of the rare earths market. This means the US is now completely reliant on China for the production of our most powerful weapons. While the US has taken some steps to reduce this reliance on China, we have not done enough.*”

Ms. Coppel added: “*The first country that can develop an effective and reliable substitute for rare earth metals or that is able to develop new and more efficient technologies will gain a competitive advantage over its peers. With the most robust defense industry in the world, the US has a significant advantage over other countries. We need to capitalize on this advantage and regain our position as a producer and supplier of rare earths.*”

Rare earth metals are not rare at all, contrary to their name; in fact, they are as common in the earth as silver. They are used widely in products such as hybrid car motors, computer hard drives, cell phones, wind turbines and military equipment which are further highlighted in [the report](#). The US has the world’s second-biggest deposit of rare earths, with “approximately 13 million metric tons of rare earth elements,” mainly located in western states such as California, Alaska, and Wyoming ([U.S. Geological Survey, 2010](#)). Until the 1980s, the US was the chief supplier of rare earths to the rest of the world, when production and mining facilities began to move to China. Today, the US no longer produces any rare earth metals, having sold its last domestic producer of rare earth magnets (used in smart bombs) in 2003. The last US rare earth mine, located at Mountain Pass, California, closed in 2002; however, before it closed, Mountain Pass was one of the world’s largest rare earth mines.

Dr. Jim Ludes, Executive Director of the American Security Project (ASP), said: “*The reality is the US has not done enough to secure the supply chain from an inevitable shortage of rare earths expected to come in the next two to three years. Nonetheless, with a coherent, long-term strategy, we can reduce our foreign dependence on these metals. Our policy makers should take careful note of the recommendations outlined in this report, which offer strategic insight on how we should address this critical challenge.*”

Download the full report: <http://americansecurityproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/Rare-Earth-Metals-and-US-Security-FINAL.pdf>

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About the American Security Project: The American Security Project is a non-profit, bipartisan public policy and research organization dedicated to fostering knowledge and understanding of a range of national security issues, promoting debate about the appropriate use of American power, and cultivating strategic responses to 21st century challenges. For more information, visit www.americansecurityproject.org.