



RESOURCE SECURITY WATCH

The American Foreign Policy Council's Review of
Changes to the Global Strategic Environment

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Related Categories: Resource Security; China; Russia; Africa; Ukraine; South Africa

CHINA AND AFRICA'S CRITICAL MINERALS

At the world's biggest mining investment conference in South Africa back in February, China's increasingly pervasive control of the rare earth minerals market was a major point of discussion. Lithium producing countries in Africa have taken particular note of their treatment by the PRC. According to Acorus Capital director Tony Carroll, the Chinese made it a "priority to corner the market for critical minerals about two decades ago and supported that strategy with massive public diplomacy and infrastructure investments into Africa — most of which [came] via long-term debt." Leaders like Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) President Felix Tshisekedi are non-plussed. While China sources the majority of its cobalt from the DRC, Tshisekedi stated that his country hadn't really benefited from a \$6.2 billion minerals-for-infrastructure contract with China signed by his predecessor. Another rare-earths producer, Namibia, is now insisting that all lithium mined within the country needs to be processed within the country, and Zimbabwe has instituted similar policies.

Increasingly, African leaders appear to be considering leaning westward in order to retain the value of their resources. For instance, last year, the DRC attended the Minerals Security Partnership conference organized by the Biden administration. And alongside Zambia, the DRC signed an MOU with the U.S. earlier this year to jointly develop a supply chain for electric vehicle batteries. (Mining.com, February 9, 2023; *Voice of America*, February 10, 2023)

THE ENVIRONMENTAL RISKS OF THE UKRAINE WAR

More than a year into Russia's war in Ukraine, Ukraine's State Environmental Inspectorate estimates that some 1.74 trillion hryvnas (\$47 billion) worth of environmental damage has been caused as a direct result of the fighting. The figure, however, is likely much greater, given that inspectors are limited to regions not currently under occupation by Russia. The Kremlin, for its part, has consistently targeted Ukraine's energy sector, creating a distinct worry regarding the potential environmental implications of blown oil depots. Additionally, in August 2022, Russian shelling caused multiple fires near the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant and forced Ukraine's state energy company, Energoatom, to disconnect the plant's two remaining functional power reactors. In response, International Atomic Energy Agency Director-General Rafael Grossi warned in his January 2023 address to the European Union: "I don't know for how long we are going to be lucky in avoiding a nuclear accident."

Ukraine's position as an agricultural powerhouse has also been greatly diminished as a result of Russian aggression. As of November 2022, experts from the country's Ministry of Agrarian Policy and Food and the Kyiv School of Economics estimated that the war had caused more than \$34 billion in indirect losses to Ukraine's agricultural sector. In a further blow to the agricultural (and public safety) sectors, experts are concerned about the long-term effects of chemicals leeching into the local groundwater as a result of Russian artillery strikes. According to Ukrainian State Environmental Inspectorate Deputy Director Andriy Vahin, melange and decylene were detected in unexploded [Russian] Kh-101 missiles. Ukraine lacks the technology to test for such substances, which have been labeled a "toxic time bomb" that "can pose a grave threat to human life and the environment" by the OSCE. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, March 5, 2023)

A SCRAMBLE FOR THE ARCTIC

After the State Department's announcement, last year, that it would replace the position of "Coordinator for the Arctic Region" with the first-ever Arctic ambassadorship, the Biden administration nominated Mike Sfraga for the position in February 2023. The new Ambassador-At-Large position signals a growing U.S. recognition of the strategic importance of the Arctic region. Nevertheless, many argue, the U.S. is playing catch-up to Russia with regard to Arctic policy, given that Moscow has been ramping up its military presence in the region for years. In a recent interview with NPR, Sherri Goodman, the secretary general of the International Military Council on Climate and Security, noted, "[b]ecause of climate change, we've seen a whole new ocean open in our lifetime. We now have quite a navigable Arctic," with both China and Russia already rolling out plans for a larger regional presence.

"Russia under Putin envisions a toll road for transit across the northern sea route that would transit goods and energy from Asia to ports in Europe," she explained. "And as part of that, he has militarized and nuclearized the Arctic to ensure that ships requiring access would have to rely on Russia's icebreaking escort. And we've seen more aggressive military behavior by Russia."

The Pentagon, meanwhile, is struggling to fill "arms gaps" in the region – and looking to Congress for help. "The fact is the Navy has no vessels that are capable of operating in ice and therefore we cede control of the Arctic to China and Russia, both of whom have extensive icebreaking fleets, including Russia with nuclear powered icebreakers," says Rep. John Garamendi (D-CA-8), the Ranking Member on the House Armed Services Committee Subcommittee on Readiness. "We're way, way behind... We may, much to my disappointment, have to do a long-term lease of icebreakers from other countries and repurpose them for our own Coast Guard and military." (*NPR*, March 23, 2023)