

# Critical Minerals Report (09.26.2025): The Pentagon Doubles Down on Antimony as Neo's Magnet Plant Opens in Europe

written by Tracy Hughes | September 26, 2025

From Washington to Beijing and Brussels, critical minerals drove a whirlwind of policy moves and corporate maneuvers this week. Governments are tightening control over supply chains for strategic materials, while companies and investors are rushing to fill gaps and capitalize on high demand. The past few days saw Western allies plotting rare earths defenses, U.S. officials directly brokering industry deals, and resource-rich nations leveraging their mineral dominance – all against a backdrop of surging market interest in the building blocks of the energy transition and defense sector. The result is a rapidly evolving global scramble for critical minerals that is reshaping industrial plans and geopolitical alliances.

**Antimony & U.S. Defense:** In the United States, securing *antimony* – a mineral used in ammunition and semiconductors – became a clear priority. **Perpetua Resources Corp (NASDAQ: PPTA)** [announced](#) talks with trading giants including **Glencore PLC (LSE: GLEN)** and **Trafigura** to build a U.S. antimony refining partnership. This comes after China blocked exports of antimony, spurring Western efforts to develop domestic supply. Perpetua just won U.S. approval to construct a major antimony-gold mine in Idaho, poised to become the country's largest source of the metal. Meanwhile, **United States Antimony Corporation (NYSE: UAMY)**

scored a \$245 million Pentagon [contract](#) to supply antimony ingots for the strategic stockpile – a sole-source, five-year award that sent its shares jumping nearly 18% on the news. The contract underscores the Trump administration’s push to rebuild U.S. stockpiles of critical minerals amid rising geopolitical tensions. UAMY operates the only U.S. smelters for antimony, and its first deliveries for the Defense Logistics Agency are expected within days.

**Lithium & Government Stakes:** In a striking example of state intervention, the Trump administration is [renegotiating](#) a federal loan for the giant *Thacker Pass* lithium project and seeking up to a 10% equity stake in its developer, **Lithium Americas Corp. (TSX: LAC | NYSE: LAC)**. Thacker Pass in Nevada is slated to become the Western Hemisphere’s largest lithium source when it opens in 2028, crucial for U.S. electric-vehicle battery supply. **General Motors Co. (NYSE: GM)** has already invested \$625 million for a 38% stake in the project, securing rights to its first phase output. Now the White House wants taxpayers to share in the upside, insisting “there’s no such thing as free money” even as it supports the mine. This unusual loan-for-equity gambit – part of a broader strategy in which Trump officials have taken stakes in companies like **Intel Corporation (NASDAQ: INTC)** and **MP Materials Corp. (NYSE: MP)** to bolster strategic industries – galvanized investors. Lithium Americas’ stock surged roughly 80%, from about \$3 to \$5.54, after word of the potential government stake broke. The renegotiation was triggered by low lithium prices (a result of Chinese overproduction) raising concerns about the company’s repayment ability. Both Republicans and Democrats have touted Thacker Pass as a linchpin to cut U.S. reliance on China, which currently processes over 75% of the world’s lithium. Washington’s deeper involvement signals how far it is willing to go – including taking equity – to ensure critical battery materials are

developed on home turf.

**Rare Earths – Western Allies vs. China:** The *rare earth element* supply battle escalated on multiple fronts. In Brussels, G7 nations and the EU [discussed](#) imposing price floors for rare earths and even tariffs or carbon-based taxes on Chinese exports. Technical teams from the Group of Seven met in Chicago to weigh coordinated steps to counter China's dominance in rare earth mining and magnet production, which has left other countries "heavily or exclusively reliant" on Chinese supply. China's surprise export controls on rare earth metals and magnets in April – retaliation for U.S. tech tariffs – jolted industries in the West, causing parts shortages that forced European auto plants toward shutdowns. Although Beijing fast-tracked some export licenses after European outcry, Western officials remain wary of "price dumping" and supply squeezes. U.S. officials confirmed this week that the rare earth issue is still far from resolved in bilateral talks. Representative Adam Smith, leading the first House delegation to China since 2019, emerged from meetings in Beijing to [report](#) that "we didn't resolve the rare earth question" – a key irritant in U.S.-China relations. China still controls about 70% of global rare earth output and an even greater share of processing, leverage it has used as a "strategic lever" during trade disputes. With that backdrop, Western allies are moving from talk to action: exploring everything from strategic stockpiles and investment screening to a floor price supported by subsidies to encourage new non-Chinese production.

**Building New Supply Chains – Americas:** Even as governments craft policies, companies are investing heavily to create alternative supply chains for rare earth magnets – critical for EV motors, wind turbines and weapons. Toronto-listed **Aclara Resources Inc. (TSX: ARA)** unveiled a \$1.3 billion plan to [develop](#) rare earth mines in *South America* and processing in the U.S., aiming to

feed Western manufacturers with non-Chinese magnet materials. The company's strategy earmarks roughly \$150–170 million for a clay rare earth mine in Chile and \$600 million for a larger deposit in Brazil, alongside \$300–400 million to build a state-of-the-art separation plant and \$400 million for a downstream magnet metals plant, likely in North America. Aclara's EVP José Palma said feasibility studies in Chile and Brazil are due by mid-2026, construction could start later that year, and both mines and processing facilities aim to be operational before 2028. Notably, the U.S. International Development Finance Corp. has already committed \$5 million to help fund Aclara's Brazil feasibility study – a sign of U.S. support for diversifying supply. South American governments are also moving: in Brazil, the mining powerhouse state of Minas Gerais outlined a new [strategy](#) this week to consolidate itself as a rare earths hub. State officials detailed initiatives to attract investment in refining capacity and promote R&D, building on projects like a new rare earth refining and recycling center under construction in Minas Gerais' Poços de Caldas region. Backed by a Brazilian-Australian joint venture (Viridis Mining and Ionic Rare Earths), that facility – slated to open in 2026 – will be Latin America's first to produce separated rare earth oxides and recycle end-of-life magnets. At Brazil's Critical Minerals Summit in Belo Horizonte, industry leaders stressed that developing non-Chinese rare earth supply chains is now as much about "energy security" as it is about the energy transition. As one Brazilian executive put it, there is "geopolitical tension that drives us to seek partnerships to reduce dependence on China".

**Europe's First Magnet Plant:** Europe, too, reached a milestone in reducing its reliance on Chinese rare earth magnets. [Neo Performance Materials Inc.](#) (TSX: NEO | OTCQX: NOPMF) this week opened a new €70 million (\$75 million) [permanent magnet factory](#) in Narva, Estonia – the first mass-production rare earth magnet

plant on European soil. Completed in just 500 days, the state-of-the-art facility is already turning out sample Neodymium-Iron-Boron magnets and is targeting an initial output of 2,000 tonnes per year. That volume – about 15% of the EU’s current magnet demand – could equip over 1 million electric cars annually or more than 1,000 wind turbines. The Narva magnet plant sits adjacent to Neo’s existing rare earth separation facility, creating an integrated supply chain within Europe’s borders.

I sat down with Neo’s CEO Rahim Suleman for an exclusive InvestorNews interview, which we anticipate publishing next week. In addition, the Co-Chair of the [Critical Minerals Institute](#) (CMI), Jack Lifton, attended the grand opening. He was so impressed that we anticipate a forthcoming column from him that will offer deeper insight into the plant and its strategic significance.

Suleman noted that Europe still depends on China for 98% of its magnet supply – a situation he called “untenable” with demand set to nearly triple in the next decade. Neo plans to scale the Estonian plant to 5,000 tonnes/year over time. The project aligns closely with the EU’s Critical Raw Materials Act goal: to domestically process at least 40% of its critical minerals consumption by 2030. In fact, Brussels supported Neo’s project with an €18.7 million grant. At the inauguration, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen hailed the magnets produced there as “indispensable to growth and innovation” in Europe.

Neo also revealed it has already signed supply [agreements](#) with major German auto parts makers Bosch and Schaeffler, effectively locking in a significant portion of the plant’s future output. The Prime Minister of Estonia christened the factory as “the most cost-efficient magnet factory ever built in the Western

world". After years of anxiety over having zero EU-based magnet production, Europe now has a toehold in this critical link of the supply chain – one backed by both industry and government support.

**Recycling & Circular Supply:** Another pillar of shoring up strategic metals is recycling, and this week saw a major European player boost U.S. capacity. **Aurubis AG (FRA: NDA)**, Europe's largest copper producer, [announced](#) it has started production at its new metals recycling plant in Richmond County, Georgia. The \$800 million facility – the first of its kind in the U.S. – will process up to 180,000 tons per year of electronic and industrial scrap, including circuit boards, cables, and other metal-bearing waste. From that, Aurubis Richmond will output around 70,000 tons of high-purity blister copper (98–99% Cu) annually, plus significant volumes of nickel, tin, and precious metal by-products. The aim is to bolster domestic supply of these vital materials and reduce America's reliance on imports. The U.S. consumes about *1.8 million* tons of copper annually but currently imports roughly half. Aurubis says its Georgia plant will "quickly" cut the need for imports by supplying copper to U.S. manufacturers directly. "We intend to sell the copper primarily to U.S. customers," an Aurubis spokesperson noted, pointing to surging demand for strategic metals like copper in electronics and renewable energy infrastructure. The blister copper produced in Georgia can also be sent to Aurubis' European smelters for further refining if needed. By mid-2026 the plant should reach full capacity. Aurubis's CEO hinted that given *"the high availability of recycling material and good local conditions,"* the firm is considering additional U.S. projects down the line. The investment reflects a broader trend of transatlantic cooperation on critical minerals: a European company leveraging American scrap supply to mutual benefit, strengthening U.S. supply chains

while expanding its own global footprint.

**Cobalt Quotas in Congo:** On the supply side, the world's top cobalt producer, the Democratic Republic of Congo, made waves by overhauling its export policy to prop up prices and encourage local processing. DRC officials confirmed they will lift a ban on cobalt exports (imposed in February when cobalt prices hit a nine-year low) and replace it with a strict [quota system](#) from October 16. Under the new rules, miners in Congo can ship at most 18,125 tonnes of cobalt for the remainder of 2025, with annual export caps of 96,600 tonnes in 2026 and 2027. That equates to roughly the country's output in recent years – Congo produced about 70% of global cobalt supply (~130,000 tonnes) last year. The quota plan is explicitly designed to reduce a supply glut and lift cobalt's depressed price: it's *“aimed to reduce inventories and support prices,”* according to Congo's strategic minerals regulator. The move is not without controversy among industry players. Mining giant Glencore, a major Congo operator, backs the quotas as a way to stabilize the market, but China's CMOC Group (owner of the huge Tenke Fungurume mine) opposes them – not least because the total quota is below CMOC's full production capacity. (CMOC had declared force majeure on some sales after the earlier export ban, as did Glencore.) Kinshasa insists the policy will remain in place for the foreseeable future. “A country that supplies 70% of the world's cobalt has to have a say about price,” [asserted](#) Congolese mining minister Louis Watum, adding *“we will not be controlled by the Chinese or by anyone, but ourselves.”* The government signaled it may tweak quotas only in the long term, and even then likely in exchange for miners investing in local refining. In fact, 10% of allowed export volume will be reserved for companies that commit to domestic processing projects. The backdrop to these moves is not only economic but security-related: Congo's statement pointed to *“escalating conflict in*



*eastern Congo*” where it says illicit mining of minerals (including cobalt) is funding rebel violence. By exerting tighter control over cobalt flows, DRC’s government seeks to both capture more value and cut off a source of conflict financing. For electric vehicle and battery makers worldwide, Congo’s new quotas add a layer of supply uncertainty in the short term, but could ultimately mean a firmer floor under cobalt prices going forward.

**Uranium – A Nuclear Revival:** Signs of a nuclear energy revival continued to emerge, affecting the *uranium* fuel cycle from production to trading. **Centrus Energy Corp. (NYSE American: LEU)**, a supplier of nuclear fuel, revealed plans to invest “billions of dollars” to [expand](#) U.S. uranium enrichment capacity. The company is ramping up its Piketon, Ohio enrichment plant (a former DOE site) and boosting output at a Tennessee facility, with an eye toward supplying the next generation of reactors. This historic [investment](#) – reportedly at least \$1.5 billion for the Ohio site alone – aims to restore an American enrichment capability that atrophied over decades. Currently, the U.S. relies heavily on imported enriched uranium, especially from Russia, for its commercial reactors. Centrus’s expansion would help develop a domestic supply chain for nuclear fuel at a time when Washington has set a 2028 deadline to end purchases of Russian reactor fuel. The exact scope of the plan will hinge on federal support; Centrus indicated the size of the investment depends on funding decisions by the Department of Energy, which is expected to announce ~\$900 million for enrichment projects soon. The project is expected to create hundreds of jobs and position the U.S. to produce *HALEU* (high-assay low-enriched uranium) fuel needed for advanced reactors.

In tandem with these industrial moves, major commodity traders are betting big on uranium itself as prices climb. **Mercuria Energy Group**, a Geneva-based trading house, has quietly [launched](#)



a new physical uranium trading desk, becoming the first leading commodity firm to foray into this niche market. Mercuria began trading uranium oxide ( $U_3O_8$ ) earlier this year and hired a senior ex-Goldman Sachs uranium trader to run the unit. It joins a small club of financial players in uranium: until now, only **Goldman Sachs (NYSE: GS)** and Australia's **Macquarie Group** had a significant presence in a global uranium market valued around \$15 billion annually. Now Mercuria is joined by France's Natixis and **Citigroup's (NYSE: C)** trading arm, which are both moving into uranium trading as well. The motivation is clear – a “*nuclear boom*” is anticipated as many countries extend reactor lifespans or build new ones to meet zero-carbon goals. The World Nuclear Association projects demand for nuclear fuel will more than double by 2040, driven by climate policies and energy needs for emerging technologies like AI. Uranium prices have been on a tear: the spot price of  $U_3O_8$  has more than doubled in the past five years to around \$77 a pound. Although still below the spike of \$106/lb reached briefly in early 2024, prices are at their highest sustained levels since 2007. Analysts at Citibank predict uranium could hit \$100 within 2026 as mine supply struggles to keep pace with demand growth. This price strength and optimistic outlook have “attracted a lot of interest” from both European and U.S. trading firms, noted one uranium trader. It's not a market one enters overnight – building relationships with utilities and mastering opaque logistics can take years. But Mercuria's move signals a broader recognition that uranium – long a sleepy or specialist commodity – is now viewed as a high-growth opportunity in the global clean energy transition.

**Week-in-Review:** Taken together, this week's developments underscore how critical minerals are increasingly treated as strategic assets rather than mere commodities. Western governments are crafting industrial policies – from equity stakes and export quotas to price floors and subsidies – in a

bid to secure reliable supplies of the materials that power the modern economy. Corporations are responding with cross-border investments in mines, processing plants, and recycling facilities. And markets have begun to price in a new reality: that control of “the new oil” – whether lithium, rare earths, cobalt, or uranium – could define economic and national security advantages in the years ahead. The critical minerals race is clearly accelerating on multiple fronts, with last week’s events showing no sign of this momentum abating. The coming months will test how effectively these nascent partnerships and policies can reduce longstanding dependencies – and whether they can do so fast enough to meet the surging demand of the green and digital revolutions.

**Do you enjoy the Critical Minerals Report?**

[Click here](#) to become a **Critical Minerals Institute** member and get each edition delivered straight to your inbox.

And while you’re at it, don’t miss the brand-new **CMI Store**—[click here](#)

## **Top Stories Tracked by the CMI Directors of the Week:**

- September 25, 2025 – Perpetua Resources in talks with Glencore, others for US antimony processing ([Source](#))
- September 25, 2025 – Centrus Plans to Invest Billions To Boost Uranium Fuel Supply ([Source](#))
- September 24, 2025 – G7 weighs price floors for rare earths to counter China’s dominance, sources say ([Source](#))
- September 24, 2025 – Miner Aclara Resources plans \$1.3 billion rare earths investment ([Source](#))
- September 24, 2025 – China Rare Earths Issue Remains Unresolved, US Lawmaker Says ([Source](#))

- September 24, 2025 – Minas Gerais outlines strategies to consolidate itself as a rare earths hub in Brazil ([Source](#))
- September 24, 2025 – Aurubis starts production at US copper recycling plant ([Source](#))
- September 23, 2025 – Trump wants piece of company in charge of America's biggest lithium mine ([Source](#))
- September 23, 2025 – US Antimony Corp wins \$245 million Pentagon contract to build defense stockpile ([Source](#))
- September 22, 2025 – Neo Performance Materials Opens State-of-the-Art Permanent Magnet Facility in Europe ([Source](#))
- September 22, 2025 – Congo to replace cobalt export ban with quotas from Oct 16 ([Source](#))
- September 22, 2025 – Commodity trader Mercuria bets on boom with foray into uranium, sources say ([Source](#))

## InvestorNews.com Media Updates:

- September 25, 2025 – From Survival to Strength – How Amanda Lacaze Transformed Lynas Rare Earths <https://bit.ly/3KnC5KI>
- September 24, 2025 – Check Out Our Latest Shorts: Top 5 Wins for Listed Companies <https://bit.ly/3KpSpdX>

## InvestorChannel.com (YouTube) Interview Updates:

- September 26, 2025 – Pat Ryan of Ucore Leads the Rare Earth Refining Race From Canada to Louisiana <https://youtu.be/mzXWn3wtdzw>
- September 22, 2025 – Antimony Resources' Jim Atkinson on

the Critical Metal Nobody Knows and North America's Highest-Grade Deposit <https://youtu.be/hIKR40taQJ4>

## **InvestorNews.com      News      Release Updates:**

- September 25, 2025 – Scandium Canada updates on its proprietary Aluminum-Scandium Alloys <https://bit.ly/4o9uv5h>
- September 25, 2025 – Panther Metals PLC: Half Yearly Financial Report <https://bit.ly/46T0wqu>
- September 24, 2025 – American Tungsten Advances Rehabilitation Efforts at IMA And Enters into LOI for U.S.-based Offtake <https://bit.ly/4mxEq0K>
- September 23, 2025 – Test Mining Completed at the Cowboy State Mine, Comminution Optimization Tests Underway <https://bit.ly/4m0TfPb>
- September 23, 2025 – Appia Announces Non-Brokered Private Placement <https://bit.ly/4pwe5VP>
- September 23, 2025 – Antimony Resources Corp. (ATMY) (K8J0) Reports Commencement of Phase Two Drilling Program at Bald Hill Antimony Project, New Brunswick <https://bit.ly/3V06EeN>
- September 22, 2025 – Quantum Completes Initial Airborne Survey at NMX East Project in Quebec <https://bit.ly/3VuvRv2>
- September 22, 2025 – Antimony Resources Corp. Closes Flow Thru Financing <https://bit.ly/3KjDcuR>
- September 22, 2025 – Power Metallic Reports High Grade Assays and Provides Summer Update <https://bit.ly/4gxRXpX>
- September 22, 2025 – Homerun Resources Inc. Provides Financing Updates <https://bit.ly/3Kf5dDR>

- September 22, 2025 – Neo Performance Materials Opens State-of-the-Art Permanent Magnet Facility in Europe <https://bit.ly/3Ky3Hg9>
- September 22, 2025 – Panther Metals PLC – Winston Tailings Project: Mineral Resource Appointment <https://bit.ly/3KcMhpq>
- September 22, 2025 – Resouro Amends Terms of Private Placement <https://bit.ly/46xMmLK>

The **Critical Minerals Report** (CMR) is the [Critical Minerals Institute](#) Board of Directors' hand-picked digest of the week's most consequential developments. Receive each edition straight to your inbox by becoming a **Critical Minerals Institute** member—[click here](#). And don't miss the new **CMI Store**—[click here](#).

