Tungsten and the New Global Supply Chain War

written by Tracy Hughes | May 7, 2026

For decades, tungsten operated quietly in the background of the global economy – overlooked by policymakers, underappreciated by investors, and overshadowed by higher-profile critical minerals such as copper, uranium, and rare earths. Today, however, tungsten is emerging as one of the most strategically important critical minerals in the world.

That reality will be front and center at the upcoming CMI Summit 5 in Toronto, where the theme – *The New Critical Minerals Economy* – closely reflects the forces now reshaping the tungsten market: geopolitics, defense policy, industrial security, and supply-chain control.

Tungsten is the hardest pure metal known to man and possesses the highest melting point of any pure metal at 3,422°C. It is foundational to precision manufacturing, aerospace systems, semiconductors, mining drill bits, armor-piercing munitions, and high-temperature industrial applications. Cemented tungsten carbide tooling remains central to global manufacturing, metal cutting, mining, and industrial machining. Without tungsten, modern precision manufacturing becomes significantly more difficult and expensive.

The world is now confronting a major supply-chain reality: the industrial economies of North America, Europe, Japan, and South Korea remain heavily dependent on China for tungsten supply and downstream processing.

China currently controls approximately 79–80% of global tungsten mine production and dominates downstream processing capacity in

ammonium paratungstate (APT), powders, and carbides.

China’s dominance over tungsten supply and downstream processing has become a significant strategic concern for Western governments and manufacturers.

Over the past several years, China has steadily tightened export controls, licensing systems, and quota mechanisms around tungsten exports. In February 2025, Beijing implemented additional tungsten export licensing controls in response to escalating U.S. tariffs and broader strategic trade tensions.

According to CriticalMineralsPlatform.com, the Asia-Pacific volume-weighted average price for tungsten 99.9% has increased by approximately 273% year-on-year (April 2025 to April 2026). By April 2026, tungsten 99.9% pricing had reached approximately US$183.32/kg global weighted average FOB. At the same time, Rotterdam APT pricing has strengthened amid tightening supply, strategic stockpiling, defense demand, Chinese export restrictions, and widening ex-China pricing premiums.

The current tungsten market is being driven by tightening supply, export restrictions, defense procurement policies, semiconductor demand growth, and Western efforts to rebuild strategic supply chains outside China.

The United States has already classified tungsten as a critical mineral with high supply disruption risk. Washington has established January 1, 2027, as the deadline to cease procuring tungsten from China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea for defense applications.

In 2024, the European Union formally designated tungsten as both a Strategic Raw Material and a Critical Raw Material under the Critical Raw Materials Act.

South Korea formalized its current critical minerals framework in 2023 through its Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy (MOTIE), identifying tungsten among 33 critical minerals tied to supply-chain security and advanced manufacturing. Japan has also incorporated tungsten into its broader critical minerals and economic security policies in recent years as semiconductor and industrial supply-chain risks have intensified.

These developments are occurring alongside a major increase in global defense and industrial spending.

Global defense spending is forecast to rise toward US$3.5 trillion by 2030, driven by escalating geopolitical instability, NATO spending increases, munitions replenishment programs, and the broader militarization of industrial supply chains.

According to the International Tungsten Industry Association (ITIA), approximately 10% of global tungsten demand is directly tied to defense applications, including kinetic penetrators, aerospace alloys, missile systems, radiation shielding, and advanced military drone technologies.

At the same time, tungsten is becoming increasingly important to semiconductors and AI infrastructure.

Modern semiconductor manufacturing relies heavily on tungsten thin films and interconnects because tungsten can withstand the extreme thermal conditions required by advanced chips.

As a result, tungsten is increasingly being viewed as a strategic industrial material rather than simply a specialty metal.

According to Canaccord Genuity’s April 2026 tungsten industry analysis, global tungsten demand could grow from approximately 143kt in 2025 to 210kt by 2035. Meanwhile, supply growth outside

China remains constrained by a limited development pipeline, aging operations, declining ore grades, and insufficient Western refining capacity.

The result is a market that increasingly appears structurally undersupplied.

What distinguishes tungsten from many other critical minerals is the concentration of the industrial ecosystem surrounding it. According to supply-chain intelligence compiled by CriticalMineralsPlatform.com, operational exposure across the tungsten sector remains heavily concentrated in a small number of jurisdictions. Australia accounts for approximately 23.3% of tracked operational tungsten company presence globally, followed by China at 21.8% and the United States at 12.7%. India and Japan account for 4.4% and 4.2%, respectively.

The broader tungsten supply chain also remains remarkably narrow.

CriticalMineralsPlatform.com currently tracks 48 producers with approximately US$148.8 billion in combined revenue exposure across 11 countries, alongside 49 explorers representing another US$169.8 billion in combined revenue exposure. Downstream capacity remains even more concentrated, with only four major refining participants globally representing approximately US$51.3 billion in combined revenue exposure. The platform also identifies just two major logistics participants tied directly to the tungsten market and seven significant investment participants connected to the sector.

These figures reinforce a broader reality increasingly recognized by governments and manufacturers: tungsten is not simply a mining story. It is an increasingly strategic industrial supply-chain issue with limited redundancy outside China.

“Tungsten is no longer just a metal – it is a strategic choke point in the critical minerals supply chains.” – Alister MacDonald, Director, Critical Minerals Institute (CMI)

Forecasts continue to point toward ongoing tungsten market deficits through much of the coming decade.

That matters because tungsten is not easily substituted.

Unlike many industrial metals, tungsten’s combination of hardness, density, tensile strength, and thermal resistance makes substitution extremely limited in high-performance industrial, defense, and semiconductor applications.

This shift is now being reflected in government policy, defense procurement strategies, and capital allocation across the critical minerals sector.

Tungsten remains a relatively small global commodity market by overall size. However, its role in defense systems, semiconductor manufacturing, industrial tooling, aerospace applications, and advanced manufacturing infrastructure is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore.

The strategic issue facing Western economies is no longer whether tungsten is critical.

The issue is whether sufficient non-Chinese supply can be developed quickly enough to reduce long-term dependence on a concentrated and increasingly politicized supply chain.

Tungsten Companies Participating at CMI Summit 5

Several companies directly involved in the emerging non-Chinese tungsten supply chain will be presenting at the upcoming

Critical Minerals Institute Summit 5 – *The New Critical Minerals Economy* – taking place May 13–14, 2026, in Toronto. These companies represent different parts of the evolving tungsten ecosystem, ranging from advanced producers and near-term developers to exploration-stage companies focused on rebuilding Western tungsten capacity.

Allied Critical Metals Inc. (CSE: ACM | OTCQB: ACMIF | FSE: 0VJ0)
Roy Bonnell will present *"Tungsten: The Small Market That Won't Stay Small – Why the next decade will reshape demand, supply, and price"* on Wednesday, May 13, 2026, from 3:10–3:25 PM.

Almonty Industries Inc. (NASDAQ: ALM | TSX: AII | ASX: AII)
Led by Lewis Black, Almonty Industries is advancing the Sangdong Mine in South Korea, widely regarded as one of the most significant non-Chinese tungsten projects globally and a potentially critical future source of tungsten supply outside China.

Lewis Black will present on Thursday, May 14, 2026, from 1:15–1:35 PM and also participate in the closing strategic panel, *"The Endgame – Who Will Control the Critical Minerals Economy?"*

American Tungsten Corp. (CSE: TUNG | OTCQB: TUNGF)
American Tungsten is focused on developing domestic U.S. tungsten supply through advancement of the historic Ima Mine in Idaho.

Ali Haji will present *"American Tungsten: Advancing Early Leadership in Domestic Tungsten Supply"* on Thursday, May 14, 2026, from 9:00–9:20 AM.

Fox Tungsten Ltd. (TSXV: FOXT)
Fox Tungsten recently completed a bought-deal financing of

approximately C$11 million, reflecting increasing investor interest in strategic tungsten development projects.

Stephen Gray will present on Thursday, May 14, 2026, from 2:10–2:25 PM.

Resolution Minerals Ltd. (ASX: RML | OTCQB: RLMLF)
Resolution Minerals is advancing the Horse Heaven antimony-tungsten-gold-silver project in Idaho.

The company's assets include the historical Golden Gate tungsten mine area and the Johnson Creek tungsten-antimony mill and stockpiles, positioning it within broader U.S. critical mineral supply-chain development efforts.

Craig Lindsay will present "*Antimony Ridge & The FAST-41 Process*" on Wednesday, May 13, 2026, from 10:25–10:40 AM.

Spartan Metals Corp. (TSXV: W | OTCQB: SPRMF)
Spartan Metals is building a strategic tungsten-focused portfolio targeting future supply opportunities.

Brett Marsh will present *"Spartan Metals – Building a Strategic Tungsten Portfolio"* on Thursday, May 14, 2026, from 10:30–10:45 AM.

For more information on the CMI Summit 5, go to www.criticalmineralsinstitute.com

For additional tungsten supply-chain intelligence and market data, visit CriticalMineralsPlatform.com