

White House Escalates Critical Minerals Drive as New Section 232 Investigation Targets National Security and Economic Resilience

written by Tracy Hughes | April 23, 2025

In a series of coordinated announcements aimed at safeguarding America's mineral supply chains, the White House on April 15, 2025, [revealed](#) its most recent steps to secure processed critical minerals and their derivative products. These latest developments follow closely on the heels of measures [announced](#) on March 20, underscoring what the administration deems to be an urgent need to bolster national security and economic resilience through domestic mineral production and trade policies.

April 15, 2025: New Section 232 Actions

On April 15, the White House [published](#) the Presidential Action titled **"Ensuring National Security and Economic Resilience Through Section 232 Actions on Processed Critical Minerals and Derivative Products."** This executive order states:

"A strong national defense depends on a robust economy and price stability, a resilient manufacturing and defense industrial base, and secure domestic supply chains. Critical minerals, including rare earth elements, in the form of processed minerals are essential raw materials and critical production inputs required for economic and national security."

The order instructs the Secretary of Commerce to launch an investigation, under Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962, to determine “*whether imports of processed critical minerals and their derivative products threaten to impair national security.*” It specifically cites America’s heavy reliance on foreign suppliers, particularly those that have “*engaged in widespread price manipulation, overcapacity, arbitrary export restrictions, and the exploitation of their supply chain dominance*” to gain leverage over the United States.

Key provisions within this April 15 directive include:

- A detailed examination of import reliance on processed critical minerals, including an assessment of country-by-country risk;
- An exploration of whether new tariffs or other trade remedies could be warranted;
- Consideration of “*policies to incentivize domestic production, processing, and recycling*” in order to reduce vulnerabilities; and
- A final report to the President with any resulting recommendations, due within 180 days of the investigation’s start.

In a [Fact Sheet](#) released the same day—“**President Donald J. Trump Ensures National Security and Economic Resilience Through Section 232 Actions on Processed Critical Minerals and Derivative Products**”—the White House reiterated the significance of processed critical minerals for both “*national security and economic resilience,*” given their usage in everything from jet engines and missile guidance systems to electric vehicles and smartphones. According to that Fact Sheet:

“*Foreign producers have engaged in price manipulation,*

overcapacity, and arbitrary export restrictions, using their supply chain dominance as a tool for geopolitical and economic leverage over the United States.”

March 20, 2025: Laying the Groundwork

The administration’s most recent actions build on the March 20, 2025 announcement which took a broad-brush approach to rejuvenating the country’s domestic mining and processing capabilities. On that date, an [executive order](#), “**Immediate Measures to Increase American Mineral Production**,” directed multiple agencies to expedite permits for new and pending mineral production projects. It also eased regulatory hurdles, opened certain federal lands for rapid development, and authorized wide-ranging use of the Defense Production Act (DPA) for mineral-related investments. The March 20 order stated:

“It is imperative for our national security that the United States take immediate action to facilitate domestic mineral production to the maximum possible extent.”

A companion [Fact Sheet](#) emphasized the administration’s plan to help finance new extraction and processing ventures through initiatives at the Department of Defense and the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation, as well as to streamline environmental reviews for high-priority projects.

Why Section 232, and Why Now?

Section 232 investigations allow the President to impose tariffs or other trade actions if certain imports are found to threaten national security. This particular investigation zeroes in on what the White House calls “*significant global supply chain*

vulnerabilities” stemming from America’s heavy reliance on a handful of foreign suppliers, some of which, the administration claims, have used their position to exert pressure on the United States and its allies.

The administration’s April 15 announcements also highlight recent events—namely, restrictions by foreign governments on exports of essential high-tech minerals—as evidence of the potential volatility in overseas supply. According to the Fact Sheet:

“A few months ago, China banned exports to the United States of gallium, germanium, antimony, and other key high-tech materials ... Just this week, China suspended exports of six heavy rare earth metals, as well as rare earth magnets.”

These moves, officials say, underscore the need for both short-term and long-term strategies to ensure a stable domestic supply of processed critical minerals crucial to infrastructure, advanced manufacturing, and defense.

Looking Ahead

While the administration’s latest steps have been framed strictly in the context of national security and economic resilience, investors and industries reliant on critical minerals and derivative products are likely to watch the outcome of this Section 232 investigation carefully. The Secretary of Commerce’s final report—due within 180 days—will recommend whether tariffs, incentives for domestic mining, or additional trade tools might be necessary to alleviate U.S. dependence on imports for these essential resources.

Beyond its immediate impact on trade flows, the newly announced investigation could further spur domestic development projects

that have been championed since the March 20 orders. Industry stakeholders may see accelerated permitting and increased federal support in the months ahead.

For now, both the White House executive order of April 15—**“Ensuring National Security and Economic Resilience Through Section 232 Actions on Processed Critical Minerals and Derivative Products”**—and its accompanying Fact Sheet offer a clear message: **the administration aims to streamline, reinforce, and protect America’s supply of critical minerals, viewing it as a cornerstone of U.S. economic security and defense readiness.** Any additional policy steps—especially if Section 232 measures are invoked—will be closely monitored by the broader business community as the next chapter of American critical minerals strategy takes shape.