November 10: The Day America Learns Whether It Has Solved Anything

written by Jack Lifton | August 9, 2026

If China extends its temporary suspension of critical minerals export restrictions, the real question will not be what Beijing has decided. The real question will be whether the United States has used the past year to build genuine industrial capability—or merely postponed another reckoning.

November 10 is not a referendum on Xi Jinping. It is a report card on American industrial strategy.

November 10, 2026, is an important date because the one-year suspension of the broader Chinese export-control measures announced after the Busan Trump-Xi agreement is scheduled to expire on that day. Under that agreement, China agreed to suspend implementation of its expanded rare earth and critical minerals export restrictions for one year while issuing broader export licenses, and the United States made reciprocal trade and export-control concessions.

The question is not whether China *can* reinstate the controls. It clearly can. The question is whether doing so advances Chinese strategic interests.

My assessment ("gut feeling") is:

Scenario	Probability	Reasoning
Extension of the current arrangement	**55%**	China is benefiting from maintaining leverage without disrupting its own exporters.
Extension with tighter licensing and more conditions	**30%**	Probably China's preferred negotiating position.
Full reinstatement of October 2025 restrictions	**15%**	Possible if political or military tensions worsen dramatically.

I do **not** think Xi Jinping's objective is to permanently stop exports. I think his objective is much more sophisticated. China has spent forty years creating a global industrial ecosystem, and now everyone else depends upon Chinese processing. Simply demonstrating that dependence may be strategically more valuable than actually interrupting trade.

That lesson has already been learned.

Even if China extends the agreement…

This is the point I think has received almost no attention. If Beijing announces on November 10: "We are extending the suspension," many American commentators will declare victory. I think that would be exactly the wrong conclusion. Instead, the extension would expose several uncomfortable truths.

1. America still has not solved processing. Washington has concentrated heavily on financing mines. China dominates in separation, solvent extraction, metals, alloys, magnet manufacturing, process equipment manufacturing, process chemistry and chemical specialties manufacturing, and operating experience. Building another mine does not replace any of these. This is exactly the distinction I have repeatedly tried to point out between geological resources and industrial capability.

2. Government continues to confuse capacity with capability, announcing: “We have funded ten projects.” is not equivalent to saying: “We can reliably produce qualified commercial product.” The latter requires:

- process stability
- customer qualification
- repeatability
- acceptable scrap rates
- experienced operators
- commercial throughput

Money buys equipment. It does not automatically buy industrial competence.

3. The OEM was largely forgotten

This has always been my strongest criticism. American policy frequently starts with “Let’s build a mine.” Industrial reality starts with “What does Lockheed, GM, Siemens, Toyota or Bosch need next Tuesday?” Supply chains are designed backward from qualified customers—not forwards from ore bodies.

4. America still lacks enough metallurgists. Buildings are easier to finance than people. The United States has only a limited number of experienced solvent extraction specialists, rare earth metallurgists, molten salt electrochemists, alloy specialists, and magnet process engineers. China possesses thousands. That gap cannot be closed by appropriations alone.

5. Industrial time remains badly misunderstood

Politicians continue speaking in election cycles. Industrial capability develops over decades. China’s position is the result of forty years of continuous industrial learning. That cannot be recreated in three or four years regardless of subsidy levels.

6. Success is still measured by announcements

The government frequently measures: dollars awarded, ribbon cuttings, memoranda of understanding, and strategic partnerships. Industry measures: kilograms shipped, rejection rates, yield, production cost, customer acceptance, and profitability. Those are entirely different scorecards.

Ironically, an extension may actually strengthen China’s position. Suppose China extends the moratorium. American firms continue purchasing Chinese material. Some domestic projects proceed. Others are delayed. Capital becomes harder to raise because the immediate crisis appears to have passed. Three years later America may actually be **more** dependent than today. That is a very plausible outcome.

The largest planning error

If I had to identify the single biggest error in American policy, it would be this: Washington appears to have treated the critical minerals issue as primarily a **resource problem**, It is actually an **industrial systems problem**. China’s advantage is not simply that it owns or controls mineral production. Its advantage is that it owns the integrated knowledge connecting: ore → concentrate → separation → purification → metal → alloy → magnet → qualified component → OEM.

Breaking that chain anywhere reduces the value of everything upstream. Opening another mine does not recreate the chain.

My bottom-line expectation

I expect some form of extension or modified extension to the current arrangement, provided the broader U.S.-China relationship does not deteriorate sharply over unrelated strategic issues. That expectation rests on the economic incentives for both governments and on China’s ability to retain leverage through licensing even without reinstating the broadest restrictions.

The real story on November 10 will therefore not be whether exports continue. The real story will be whether the United States has demonstrated that it can become a competitive producer of qualified critical materials **without depending on China’s continued goodwill**.

On that question, the answer remains incomplete today. The United States has made progress in financing projects and expanding planned capacity, but it has not yet, across the full rare earth value chain, as a key example, demonstrated the industrial capability needed to make Chinese export policy largely irrelevant. That, rather than the wording of any extension, is the metric that will ultimately determine whether the past year’s policies have succeeded.