

# **From the Deep Sea to D.C.—How China Fears Have Put Ocean-Floor Mining on Washington's Radar**

**The possibility of harvesting the seabed is growing in popularity among lawmakers amid a push to extract rare minerals for defense applications**



A deep-sea mining collector vehicle operated by The Metals Company in the Clarion-Clipperton Zone in the Pacific Ocean. THE METALS COMPANY

By [Yusuf Khan](#)

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Mining the ocean floor for minerals often seemed like a fantasy, but U.S. national security concerns could be bringing it closer to reality.

Thousands of feet down at the bottom of the ocean, small rocks holding vast quantities of nickel, manganese and cobalt—the perfect combination of minerals to



make an electric-vehicle battery—sit untouched, as high costs to reach them, a lack of research and public opposition have kept deep-sea mining a pipe dream.

Lobbying efforts seeking governmental approval to mine the seabed for [EV battery metals](#) often fell on deaf ears, but backers have found a way to appeal to lawmakers—as a source of cobalt for U.S. weapons makers that avoids Chinese suppliers, building on efforts to decouple from the Asian superpower.

“Without question the narrative around deep-sea mining has gone through an inflection point in that it has clearly found a home in the context of national security,” said Samir Kapadia, a Vogel Group lobbyist backed by The Metals Company, one of the [few companies working in the field](#). Kapadia said that lawmakers in past years saw deep-sea mining as a “pie in the sky” idea, unlikely to come to fruition and even laughed at in some quarters.

Switching the messaging to defense has spurred interest in the field.



Nodules on the ocean floor contain minerals that can be used in EV battery and weapons production. PHOTO: SMARTEX

On Tuesday, Reps. Carol Miller (R., W.Va.) and John Joyce (R., Pa.) [introduced a bill](#) to Congress pushing for the development and financing of deep-sea mining in the country. The bill in particular put forward the idea of creating a processing industry inside the U.S. as well as for deep-sea mining’s legalization and formalization in international waters.

The boost in urgency has come amid China's increasing domination of many critical mineral supply chains and its growing influence over deep-sea mining. The country holds five contracts to explore the seabed for minerals in international waters, more than anyone else. The next highest is Russia. China has also been sending ships out for research into the Pacific Ocean—alarming lawmakers in the U.S.

More than 30 Republican members of Congress wrote a letter to U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin in December pushing the case for deep-sea mining and for processing minerals within the U.S. and warning against China's control of the critical minerals sector.

"We cannot afford to allow China to capture and exploit seabed resources, which the CCP has characterized as 'a new frontier for international competition.' We must explore every avenue to strengthen our rare earth and critical minerals supply chains," said a letter signed by the likes of Reps. Robert Wittman (R., Va.) and Elise Stefanik (R., N.Y.).

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