

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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July 15, 2025

The Honorable Pete Hegseth
Secretary
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary Hegseth:

The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform is examining the Department of Defense's (DOD) efforts to counter Chinese Communist Party (CCP) initiatives to mine critical minerals found in deep-sea waters. Deep-sea mining (DSM) has the potential to provide an abundance of critical and rare earth minerals that are vital to everyday life for Americans and America's national security.¹ In April 2025, President Donald Trump issued an executive order demanding that agencies unleash American offshore initiatives to maintain "leadership in deep sea science and technology and seabed mineral resources."² The CCP has designs to extract and commercialize these resources—and otherwise box-out the U.S. and its allies from direct access.³ The Committee seeks a staff-level briefing to understand how DOD is complying with President Trump's executive order.

Technologies developed for deep-sea exploration and mining will greatly impact advancement in both the maritime and defense sectors, making the dual-use nature of these technologies important for both commercial use and U.S. national security.⁴ As DSM is largely unregulated, Chinese companies and the CCP are actively pursuing the extraction and commercialization of deep-sea minerals through DSM, while simultaneously developing and testing new maritime and military capabilities.⁵

Furthermore, China is establishing Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) with small island nations⁶ around the globe, particularly in areas with high concentrations of critical

¹ Andrew Thaler, *Understanding the Executive Order on Deep-sea Mining and Critical Minerals: Part 1, what are we talking about?*, Southern Fried Science (Apr. 25, 2025).

² Presidential Actions, *Unleashing America's Offshore Critical Minerals and Resources*, The White House (Apr. 24, 2025).

³ Lily Kuo, *China is set to dominate the deep sea and its wealth of rare metals*, WASH. POST (Oct. 19, 2024).

⁴ See Darshana M. Baruah, *Uncharted territory: deep-sea mining and the underwater domain*, Int'l Ins. for Strategic Studies (Mar. 25, 2024).

⁵ Kuo, *supra* note 3.

⁶ Baruah, *supra* note 4.

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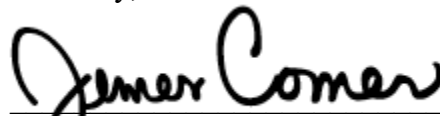
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minerals.⁷ This allows China to form strategic partnerships and access to waters rich in underwater critical minerals.⁸ The CCP is emboldened to encroach upon the sovereign waters of less powerful countries in the Pacific who may not want to partner with the CCP, but do not have the power to protect their waters against China's military and commercial reach.⁹ The long-term repercussions could impact the freedom of navigable waters, commercial enterprise of DSM, and the sovereignty of smaller, less powerful Pacific Island nations.

To assist the Committee's oversight of this matter, we request a staff-level briefing as soon as possible but no later than July 22, 2025, to discuss how DOD is complying with President Trump's executive order and protecting American interests and national security in the DSM sector.

The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform is the principal oversight committee of the U.S. House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate "any matter" at "any time" under House Rule X. To schedule the briefing to ask any related follow-up questions, please contact the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform Majority staff at (202) 225-5074. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Comer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "James" and last name "Comer" clearly distinguishable.

James Comer
Chairman

cc: The Honorable Robert Garcia, Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

⁷ Kuo, *supra* note 3.

⁸ Baruah, *supra* note 4.

⁹ *Id.*; see also Isaac B. Kardon & Sarah Camacho, *Why China, Not the United States, Is Making the Rules for Deep-Sea Mining*, Carnegie Endowment for Int'l Peace (Dec. 19, 2023); see also Charles Edel & Katheryn Paik, *China's Power Play Across the Pacific*, Cent. for Strategic and Int'l Studies (Apr. 8, 2025).