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THE RESOURCE WAR

"He who runs alone will win the race" is reputed to have been said by Benjamin Franklin. Whether he said it or not, this truism is certainly applicable to the race that the Soviet Union is running to win the contest for strategic materials.

Russia has all but ceased mineral exports and has begun to import such important minerals as cobalt, platinum, chromium, and manganese. Control of strategic raw material sources appears to be the objective of current Soviet activities.

Although a land-locked nation, Russia has built the greatest blue-water navy in the world and a state-owned merchant fleet which is the third largest in the world. Many experts believe that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was motivated by a desire to exploit that country's fuel and nonfuel mineral resources.

Like every other aspect of the Soviet economy, the resource war is the result of a political plan laid down by the top bosses. In 1973, Leonid Brezhnev told a meeting of Warsaw Pact leaders in Prague: "Our aim is to gain control of the two great treasure houses on which the West depends: the energy treasure house of the Persian Gulf and the mineral treasure house of central and southern Africa."

The implementation of that national plan is the most logical explanation for the Soviet presence and influence in southern Africa, which is the source of much of the Free World's strategic minerals. Soviet Major General A. N. Lagovskiy was correct when he called America's dependency on foreign countries for certain essential minerals the "weak link" in American military capability.

The nonfuel minerals which our country imports from Africa and other faraway points are just as essential to our modern industrialized economy and to our military defense as our petroleum imports. General Alton D. Slay, Commander of the Air Force Systems Command, told the House Armed Services Committee last November 13: "With growing Soviet strength, we see ourselves in a position of heavy dependence on foreign sources for defense materials, little capability to increase defense production quickly, an alarming

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slow-down in national productivity growth rate, and a questionable record in the quality of what we do produce."

General Slay bluntly called the United States a "have not" nation in essential nonfuel minerals. He added, "It is a gross contradiction to think that we can maintain our position as a first-rate military power with a second-rate industrial base. It has never been done in the history of the modern world."

Dr. William H. Dresher, Dean of the College of Mines at the University of Arizona and one of the country's leading authorities in this field, is concerned not only about U.S. dependence on faraway sources subject to the whim of unstable regimes, but even more about our lack of response to this problem that affects our economic lifeblood. In criticizing the "no growth society" induced by the environmentalists, he says that "the federal and state laws and regulations which have been promulgated in response to this wolf-in-sheep's clothing movement have had a devastating effect on our nation's mining and mineral processing industry--the most basic of our raw material industries."

In a recent speech to the United States Industrial Council at Sea Island, Georgia, Dr. Dresher showed the folly of our government's having declared one fourth of our country's entire land area off-base for mineral exploration, development, or production. Much of this withdrawn land is in prime target areas for new discovery of the mineral wealth on which this nation depends.

The mining industry is hardly a threat to our country's scenic wilderness. Only a fraction of one percent of American land surface has ever been touched by mining, and much of that has been restored.

Unfortunately, unlocking our locked-up lands is not something that can be done overnight. It's not like turning on a water tap. Exploration in the rugged terrain of wilderness areas can take years and require the most sophisticated mining technology.

Dr. Dresher pointed out that the environmentalist lobby treats our public lands "like the sacred cows of India -- not to be touched nor molested, regardless of our need." It's just as foolish to let our economy starve for essential minerals while the sacred lands remain untouched as it is for India to let its people starve while the sacred cows die of old age.

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