



# GEOINTELLIGENCE

FOR INNOVATION, RESILIENCE, AND COMPETITIVENESS

## China's Strategic Signals from 2021 to 2025

Date/Period	Signal/Event	Details & Context	Significance/Implication
Jan 2021	Xi Jinping's Rare Earths Tour	Chinese President Xi visited a major rare earth magnet factory, hinting that China might leverage its rare earth dominance amid the U.S.-China trade war. State media warned, " <i>Don't say we didn't warn you</i> " – a phrase signaling serious action.	Strong <i>signal of intent</i> . China telegraphed rare earths as a potential retaliation tool, aiming to deter harsher U.S. sanctions without yet implementing a ban.
Dec 2020	China's Export Control Law takes effect	A new law established a legal framework for China to restrict exports of sensitive items for national security. Rare earths were not explicitly named but fall under its scope.	<i>Strategic groundwork</i> . Gave Beijing a formal mechanism to impose mineral export controls (like those used in 2023), indicating preparation to use economic coercion tools in a calibrated way.
Jan 2022	China Rare Earth Group formed	Merger of key state-owned rare earth firms into one conglomerate controlling 60–70% of China's REE output. New environmental rules for miners have also been introduced.	China is consolidating <b>supply-side control</b> . Eases coordination of output, pricing, and export decisions. Signals that Beijing can more swiftly cut or increase supply as needed, with a tighter grip on producers.
Mar 2023	US & EU accelerate critical mineral plans	The EU proposed its <b>Critical Raw Materials Act</b> (setting targets to mine 10% and process 40% of its own needs by 2030), and the US led a Minerals Security Partnership of allied countries. Defense Dept funding helped Lynas (Australia) and MP Materials (US) expand operations.	<i>Defensive signal from West</i> . Recognizing China's leverage, Western nations moved to dilute it. China likely reads these moves as confirmation that its patience is paying off – rivals are spending billions to catch up, validating the strength of China's position.
July 2023	Targeted Export Curbs (Ga & Ge)	China's Ministry of Commerce announced export licenses required for <b>gallium and germanium</b> products. Justified on national security grounds, it followed fresh U.S. chip export bans.	<i>Tactical countermove</i> . Although not rare earths, this was a <i>signal shot</i> : China is willing to restrict critical materials. It tested the waters of global reaction while reserving rare earths for a potentially larger impact later.
Oct 2023	Expansion to Graphite Controls	Beijing added natural graphite (key for EV battery anodes) to its export control list, requiring permits from December 2023. This came shortly after the US tightened EV-related trade rules.	China is <b>broadening its strategic minerals arsenal</b> . By hitting battery materials, China signals that many high-tech supply chains – not just rare earths – could be disrupted if geopolitical tensions worsen. A form of escalation, yet still below the threshold of rare earths.
2023–2024 (ongoing)	No Rare Earth Ban (Strategic Delay)	Despite tensions (Taiwan Strait issues, tech sanctions), China did <i>not</i> impose a new rare earth export ban up to 2024. It continued issuing semi-annual rare earth export quotas/licenses relatively normally and even modestly increased mining quotas to meet demand.	<i>Strategic patience</i> . China appears to be holding back its most extreme option. This restraint is a signal in itself, implying that Beijing values the long-term strategic and economic benefits of keeping markets guessing over the short-term shock of an embargo.