

How dependent on China do we want to be?

It means tolerating child labor, genocide and slavery sponsored by Beijing

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Environmental activists will need to decide very soon whether they are more concerned about the United States becoming dependent for energy on the communist regime in China, noted mostly for its international hooliganism and genocidal tendencies, or are they more worried about the potential risks of climate change.

In recent weeks, environmental activists have started to admit in public what has been known all along: The only way to decarbonize the American economy quickly — or perhaps at all — is to rely almost entirely on China to supply the minerals — cobalt, nickel, copper, rare earths, etc. — necessary for the energy transition they claim they want.



If the Biden administration and environmental activists are truly serious about attaining their goal of net zero by 2050, they will need to start permitting mines here in the United States — an imperfect and lengthy process — or get used to relying on our adversaries in Beijing.

At the moment, China owns, controls or processes more than 70% of the cobalt and rare-earth minerals used in batteries for electric vehicles or utility-scale energy storage. China is also the third-largest producer of lithium and makes about half of all the lithium batteries in the world. South Korea makes most of the rest.

In short, if you own an electric vehicle, the odds are pretty good that your EV started its journey at a mine using child labor in the Democratic Republic of Congo — probably owned or controlled by China — or transited a slave labor camp in China.

This problem is liable to get worse, not better. In May 2021, the International Energy Agency produced a report on mining and the energy transition. It concluded that demand for key minerals such as lithium, graphite, nickel and rare-earth metals would increase dramatically, rising by 4,200%, 2,500%, 1,900% and 700%, respectively, by 2040.

Almost all of that will come from China or the companies under the control of the regime in Beijing.

The International Energy Agency also said that there are no plans to fund and build the necessary mines and refineries elsewhere. The supply of the needed minerals is entirely notional, and increasing production will take time. The agency noted, “It has taken on average over 16 years to move mining projects from discovery to first production.”

That leaves the Biden administration with the following options: Abandon the energy transition to which it claims to be committed, anger their environmentalist donors and activists and permit American mines that will take decades to come to fruition, or continue to rely on the adversarial regime in China.

Most Americans would recoil when confronted with the idea that we should become dependent on our global adversary for the energy essential to our economy, national security and way of life.

Environmentalists don't seem too concerned, though. Jason Bordoff, who led the charge on climate change for former President Barack Obama, argued in a recent article that reliance on China may be a good thing. He wrote: “It is unrealistic for U.S. policymakers to believe they can decarbonize by 2050 if clean energy supply chains rely only on the domestic market and a few friendly countries.” In other words, to get to net zero, we are going to have to tolerate some child labor, genocide and slavery sponsored by our friends in Beijing.

Ceding the high ground of energy independence — and becoming dependent on China, of all countries — seems incredibly unwise.

If the choice really is between dependence on China for our energy needs and not achieving the completely arbitrary goals and timelines created by environmental activists to encourage a sense of unwarranted anxiety about climate change — and it appears that is likely to be the choice — then the clear and obvious answer is that it's time to abandon the expensive and pointless chase of net zero.

Any other answer is too terrible to contemplate. Michael McKenna is a contributing editor at The Washington Times and a co-host of the podcast “The Unregulated.”