

# Molycorp, (The Last) Chapter 11 Exit

There is now a good chance that Molycorp will finally exit  the scene with a last act that was unfortunately very foreseeable. The latest, probably ultimate, chapter of the Molycorp drama has it that the state-owned-enterprise, Chalco, or, as it is sometimes called, Chinalco, China's largest producer of aluminum and one of the six SOEs tasked by the central government to reign in, restructure, and manage a section of the Chinese domestic total rare earth supply chain, is thought to have made a substantial bid, far above the company's self-assessed valuation, to buy ALL of the **non-US** assets of Molycorp. In other words, Chalco is bidding to buy the former Neo Materials and, perhaps, the former Silmet in Estonia.

I am not really surprised by this action as it has been a year now since Chalco's now subsidiary, Shenghe Resources, which operates a total rare earth supply chain in China, bought an off-take and a participation in the Madagascar deposits of Germany's Tantalus, AG. After that I personally knew of Shenghe approaching two North American juniors. I noted at the time of this activity that it had become apparent that Chalco-Shenghe was operating under the new outreach/outsource paradigm for sourcing critical materials put forward as part of the 5-year plan for 2016-20 by China's President Xi. This is at least a partial break with China's past practice, but I do not think that Shenghe (Chalco) has ever been doing more than testing the waters, so to speak, with regard to buying or joint venturing with North American mining ventures. North America is perceived in Chinese business circles to be a hostile environment politically, and this perception is correct at least with regard to natural resources. After all the only reason that the Chinese petroleum industry did not

acquire Molycorp in the first place was the hostility to its offer to buy Unocal in the early 2000s. At that time China was after Unocal's deep sea drilling expertise and technology and Molycorp was just baggage.

I am therefore not surprised that Chalco has specified non-USA assets. It does not want nor does it need any more high cost sources of light rare earths, and the now closed rare earth magnet alloy plant in Tolleson, Arizona has not been profitable since 2012 due to the low cost of Chinese competition. It does however want Neo's expertise in magnets and alloys, and with that acquisition Chalco would be the world leader in bonded rare earth magnets and would acquire the Singapore and, I believe, Thai R&D operations of the former Neo Material. I suspect also that Chinese engineers could improve Silimae's SX operations, and since feed stock, would no longer be a problem it could use it as a base to aggressively enter the European markets. This would not be welcome by Solvay.

As I've said before China may now move to acquire Lynas, if for no other reason, than to cut Japan off from its currently best non-Chinese source of light rare earths. But the growth of Viet Nam and India in the rare earth space may lessen the value of Lynas to China.

In order to succeed in meeting, the targets for the current 5-year plan China will need not only more lithium than it can produce domestically, much more, but also better technology for battery graphite, and foreign (to China) sources of cobalt.

I predict that China will now look even more to Australia, and Africa, and add both South America, and The South Pacific for the additional critical raw materials it needs to achieve its goals in pollution reduction and the replacement of fossil fuels by alternate energy sources.

All I know is what I see and hear myself, and what I read in the (Chinese translated to English) newspapers, journals, and books. I sometimes wonder if US government planners even do that...