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Minerals diplomacy as geoeconomic statecraft

Implications for resource security priorities in a rapidly changing world

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Summary

- Critical raw materials (CRMs) and rare earth elements (REEs) are essential for defence, emerging technologies, and the energy transition. However, supply chains remain highly concentrated, with China dominating much of the refining and processing.

- Asymmetries and choke points highlight the need to control these resources. Minerals diplomacy has become a central tool for geoeconomic actors, including the US and the EU, to secure CRMs and REEs, often through deals with resource-holding third countries. This creates new partnerships while heightening competition to bind third-party countries, which, in turn, seek to assert their agency.

- Minerals diplomacy blends cooperative, coercive, and binding elements, as governments combine bargaining, leverage, and deals to maintain access to critical resources. States are also deploying creative solutions, such as recycling and reusing mining waste, to reduce external dependencies and enable more self-reliant systems, but this requires effective public-private cooperation.

- The intensifying contest for CRMs and REEs exposes governance gaps. Accounting for local perspectives, establishing stronger international oversight and global benchmarks, and ensuring equitable outcomes could ease competition, give third-party countries a greater voice, and serve as a tool of geoeconomic soft power.

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Introduction: Minerals and geoeconomic asymmetries

Mining is costly, complex, and slow. New projects take many years to progress from exploration to production and require enormous upfront capital as well as specialist knowledge. Projects face risks of delay due to regulatory approvals, environmental licensing, and local opposition. These barriers to entry mean that only a handful of countries and companies can effectively scale mineral extraction. This creates asymmetries in the critical minerals materials and rare earths sector.[1]

Meanwhile, the demand for these resources is accelerating rapidly. Electrification, the energy transition, digital transformation, AI, and defence industries all depend on a mix of critical raw materials (CRMS) and rare earth elements (REES). Minerals are not simply another economic input: they are an economic security and foreign policy concern.[2]

In this context, the race for CRMS is a new facet of geoeconomic competition – one in which control of resources or refining capacity can be leveraged for political power. Control of supply chains provides opportunities for coercion, against which others must hedge. Like semiconductors or energy infrastructure, CRMS have become a focus of national security interventions and an avenue for strategic capitalism, in which states intervene to protect sectors that are related to critical economic and security goals.[3]

To secure these resources, many national policies and researchers are turning to what can be described as intensifying minerals diplomacy. This Briefing Paper argues that a multi-track form of minerals diplomacy is emerging – one that includes alliances, cooperation, binding commitments, and coercion. A second argument advanced here is that a splintering effect may be underway, shifting minerals diplomacy between the US and the EU away from cooperation-based approaches towards more competitive or binding strategies.

The result is pressure on all actors. Pressure on countries with resource endowment – where minerals are located – as their governments and local populations must decide which tactics to respond to and which countries to work with. Pressure on countries with processing or technological capacity, as they must decide how to handle their key control over choke points and access. And it includes pressure on countries that are seeking to secure these CRMS, which must decide how best to obtain their minerals. Most actors want to keep their options open, but increasingly, as an economic security mentality takes hold, alliances and collaboration are becoming mutually exclusive, as evidenced by measures to coerce or bind up third-party countries.

Finally, this Briefing Paper argues that mining projects and financing that take a social licence to operate (SLO) into account are introducing a new form of geoeconomic soft power by winning over

1 There is technically a distinction between critical raw materials and critical minerals. The term "critical raw materials" includes critical minerals and rare earth elements, so the term "CRMS" will be used throughout the article; REES will be named separately when necessary. The list of CRMS varies by country, rare earths are a distinct group of 17 metals that are difficult to mine and refine.

2 OECD (2025) "Economic Security in a Changing World, New Approaches to Economic Challenges". OECD Publishing, Paris.

3 Choer Moraes, H. and M. Wigell (2020) "The Emergence of Strategic Capitalism: Geoeconomics, Corporate Statecraft and the Repurposing of the Global Economy". *FIIA Working Paper* 117, September 2020. https://fiia.fi/en/publication/the-emergence-of-strategic-capitalism.

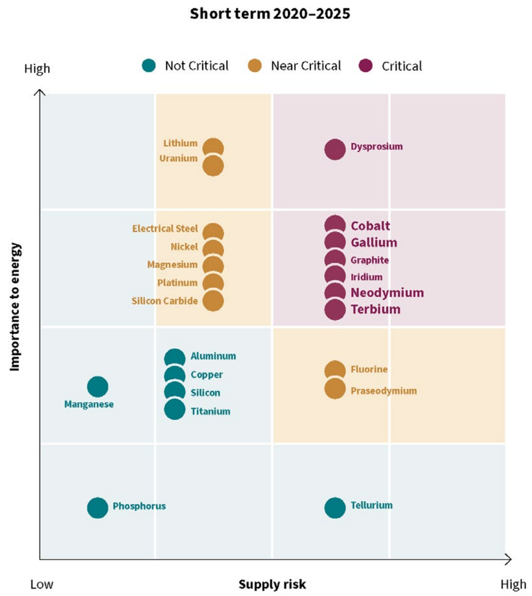

Figure 1. Short-term (2020–2025) criticality matrix for critical raw materials
Source: Critical Materials Assessment, US Department of Energy, July 2023

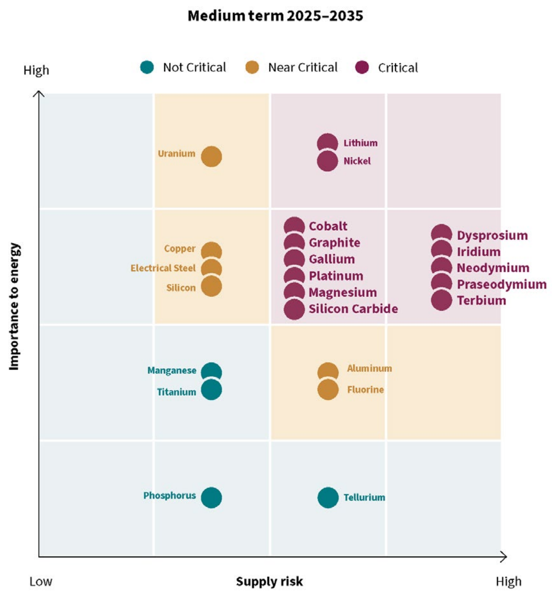

Figure 2. Medium-term (2020–2025) criticality matrix for critical raw materials
Source: Critical Materials Assessment, US Department of Energy, July 2023

local populations to their projects and ways of doing business. On the flip side, the rapid acceleration of mining activity and the possible splintering of minerals diplomacy are creating governance gaps in the sector, particularly regarding transparency and respect for local populations and environments. In these spaces, third-party countries have an opportunity to assert their agency and move from being policy takers to policy makers within broader global CRM custodianship frameworks.

Background: Accelerated demand creates strategic urgency

The competition to find, mine, process and refine CRMs represents a new dimension of geoeconomic rivalry. These resources are more than mere commodities; they are strategic levers of power. This is evident in three ways. First, there is a myopic focus on CRMs themselves, particularly in highly competitive sectors such as defence, energy, and emerging technologies. Second, countries and groups of countries are adopting new policies to give themselves an edge in protecting or securing access. Third, the high stakes of mineral competition are critically shaping relationships, whether forced or forged through pressure or voluntary alliances, against this urgent backdrop.

China has solidified a dominant role in sourcing, processing, and refining between 60–90% of supply chain segments: it is the leading refiner of 19 out of the 20 most important critical minerals, according to the IEA. Much of what other countries are doing – including major actors such as the US and the EU, as well as third-party countries – responds to China's efforts to make itself indispensable to key supply chains for critical minerals. A particularly pervasive narrative is that China's actions in Africa and Latin America are framed as investment-driven support for developing countries, in contrast with the more market-oriented approaches of Western countries. At the same time, there are clear indications that both China and Western countries apply political pressure to local governments and people to coerce or compel them to cooperate through various geoeconomic tools. These can include promises of investment, employment of the workforce, or adherence to sustainability and development goals (SDGs). Such actions highlight the importance that geoeconomic powers

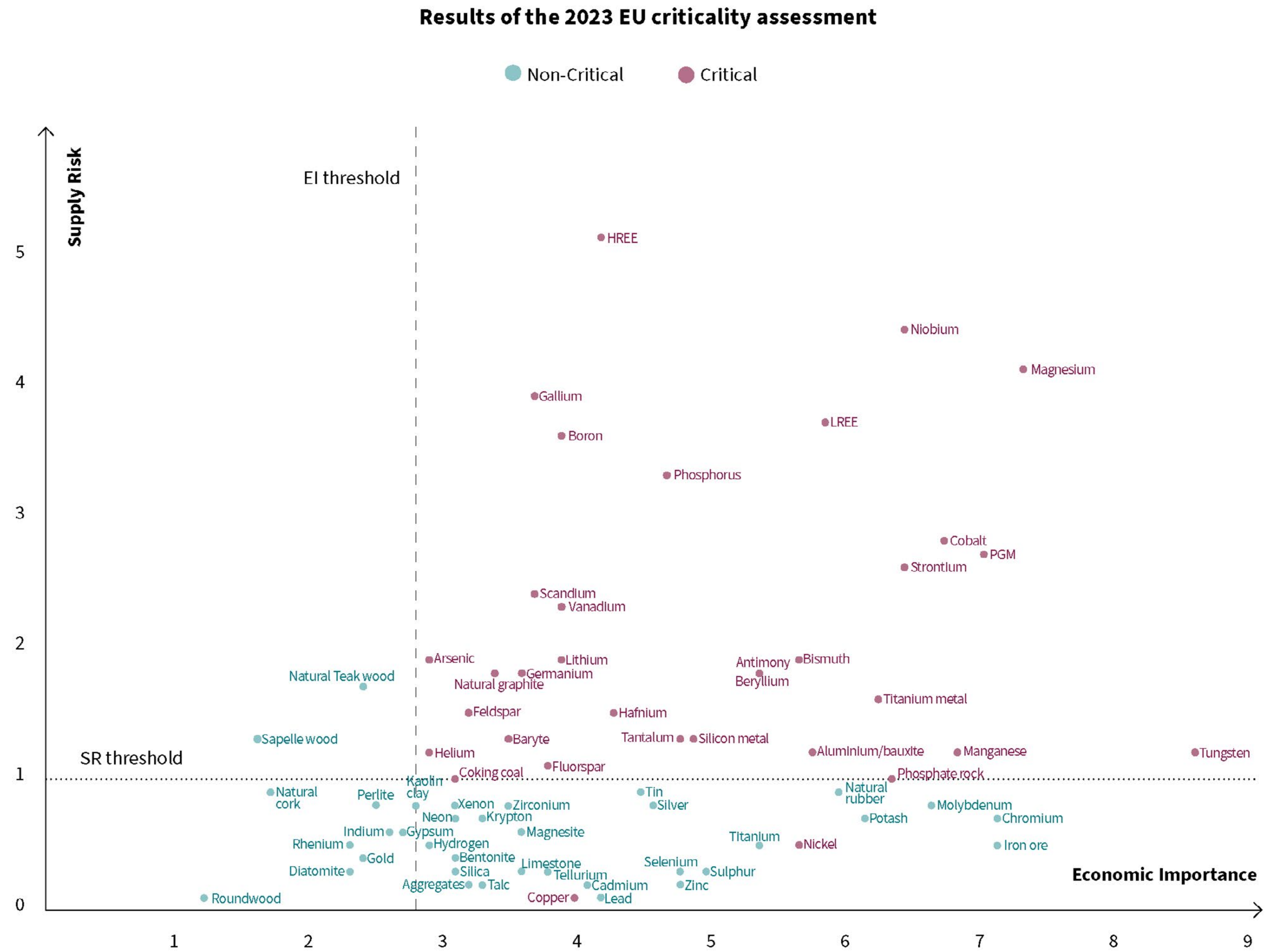

Figure 3. Results of the 2023 EU criticality assessment for critical raw materials
Source: Study on the Critical Raw Materials for the EU 2023

place on gaining the approval of local governments and communities for mining projects in order to advance their own strategic interests.

Many of the same critical materials are needed across multiple sectors; for example, batteries, semiconductors, wind turbines, and missile guidance systems all use copper. This means that control over, shortages of, or choke points in the supply of these minerals can impact several key sectors simultaneously. Indeed, certain minerals such as lithium can become choke points in defence production, which reinforces the zero-sum security dilemma – both in access to the mineral itself and in the ability to build up defences and act within the more traditional hard-power security dimension. For example, lithium shortages would constrain the production of both electric vehicles and defence systems.

There are further complications in the supply chain process. Although Australia is the world's largest lithium producer, China is significantly ahead in global lithium processing: it accounts for around 60–70% of processing. Meanwhile, the US and Canada are working to develop their own processing capabilities. The relationships among actors create opportunities for leverage in the pursuit of CRMs. Control over these minerals has implications for global development, competitiveness, and international order, and geoeconomic power is influenced by the question of mineral control, which states are approaching with different strategies.

Geoeconomic manoeuvres in minerals diplomacy: From normative goals and collaboration to coercion and binding

The United States and the European Union have elevated critical raw minerals, materials, and rare earth elements to a strategic priority, advancing their acquisition through minerals diplomacy. Critical minerals are listed based on supply risk and their importance to energy.[4] Other factors include geographic location and concentration, substitution ability, the cost of extraction, transportation, and processing, and environmental effects. REEs, in particular, are often found within other minerals and create a large environmental footprint when extracted. As the demand for CRMs and REEs accelerates, geoeconomic actors like the US and the EU are seeking to influence and extract better outcomes for themselves.

"Minerals diplomacy has been a consistent US foreign policy priority from the Biden administration to the second Trump presidency."

On the last day of April 2025, the United States and Ukraine signed the long-anticipated agreement on resource development and established the United States–Ukraine Reconstruction Investment Fund. The deal marked the culmination of a negotiating process that began under the previous Biden administration and gained new momentum under President Trump.

Indeed, minerals diplomacy has been a consistent US foreign policy priority from the Biden administration to the second Trump presidency. The US Department of Energy has established four pillars that it sees as the foundation of its approach to critical minerals: diversifying supply, developing alternatives, improving materials and manufacturing efficiency, and investing in circular-economy approaches. During the Biden administration, minerals outreach focused on responding to China's actions by emphasizing a cooperation framework. The Biden administration signed one executive order in February 2021 focused on supply chains; oversaw the establishment of the Minerals Security Partnership (MSP) Forum with the EU; included incentives for "friendshoring" in the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA); and undertook bilateral deals with Canada, Australia, and Chile.

During his second term, Trump has continued efforts to secure critical minerals, although tactics have shifted. He has signed multiple executive orders to make acquisition of CRMs as a national security priority, including pivotal orders in March and April 2025. As part of this, Trump designated the National Energy Dominance Council as the lead agency, established key posts, and accelerated timelines.[5] In August 2025, the US and the Cook Islands completed an agreement to pursue seabed mining. Trump has also put pressure on China, through tariffs, to facilitate rare earths exports. This is in addition to the deal with Ukraine.

An emerging shift is evident on the domestic and international fronts. Instead of accelerating the energy transition, the focus is now on building data centres to excel in the AI race and onshoring industrial production. During the first months of his term, Trump signalled a rollback and restructuring of the IRA and exerted political pressure to pass a budget that removed electric vehicle subsidies, most notably with his rhetoric on the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, which led to his very public break with Elon Musk. Yet importantly, US minerals policy under Trump is increasingly a tool of competitive industrial policy or private-sector winner-takes-all strategies, rather than alliance-building or a focus on shared normative goals with like-minded allies facing similar dependency issues. Trump has utilized other geoeconomic tools, such as tariffs, to extract concessions – as with China and rare earths in June 2025. This has signalled a new way of doing business.

This strategy was exemplified in the way the US exerted pressure during negotiations with Ukraine over its minerals sector, including through

4 US Department of Energy (2023) "2023 DOE Critical Materials List". Department of Energy (DOE) Critical Minerals and Materials (CMM). https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/08/04/2023-16611/notice-of-final-determination-on-2023-doe-critical-materials-list; European Commission (2024) Regulation (EU) 2024/1252 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 April 2024 establishing a framework for ensuring a secure and sustainable supply of critical raw materials and amending Regulations (EU) No 168/2013, (EU) 2018/858, (EU) 2018/1724 and (EU) 2019/1020.

5 White House (2025) "Immediate Measures to Increase American Mineral Production". Executive Order, 20 March 2025; "Unleashing America's Offshore Critical Minerals and Resources". Executive Order, 24 April 2025.

investment conditionalities and the use of strategic leverage to bring Ukraine to the negotiating table. The agreement resulted in a binding, jointly governed framework for long-term cooperation on natural resource development, covering minerals, oil and gas, and critical infrastructure such as LNG terminals and ports. The US will contribute $1 billion in seed funding, while Ukraine will allocate 50% of new resource development revenues to the Fund. Governance will be shared through a joint board with equal voting rights, supplemented by an independent advisory panel that includes technical experts from the EU and Canada.

Viewed in a broader context, the Reconstruction Investment Fund follows a pattern seen in other resource-linked arrangements. The Fund is a two-country sovereign wealth fund, and there are precedents for similar arrangements: the Gulf Investment Corporation and the European Investment Fund are both examples of multilateral initiatives. Historically, the US exercised significant control over Saudi Arabia's oil resources through Aramco, which gave the US decision-making power over oil production, investment, and pricing until the Saudis nationalized the company in the 1970s. Similarly, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has established bilateral structures that grant China significant control over resources in exchange for investment. In a possible bait-and-switch, the lure of investment in high-risk areas creates asymmetries of dependence that favour the benefactor.

The risk remains that the Fund could become dysfunctional, either politically gridlocked or administratively inert. Ukraine could end up obligated to contribute without seeing timely or effective investment returns. Conversely, if governance functions and project pipelines are credible, the Fund could emulate high-standard investment platforms such as Norway's sovereign wealth fund, enforcing high governance standards and transparency during Ukraine's reconstruction. In a wider context, the deal could serve as a blueprint for how actors seek to execute new agreements and secure access to critical raw materials and rare earth elements.

The US was not the only country courting Ukraine for its resources. The European Union, driven by its own strategic need to source CRMs and REEs, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Ukraine in 2021 to establish a strategic partnership. The following year, Ukraine's parliament passed mining reform legislation to attract investment in its extraction sector and to align more closely with European partners.

The European Union's approach to CRMs is framed by the four pillars of its Critical Raw Materials Act (CRMA). Similar to US strategic priorities, these pillars focus on strengthening the value chain, diversifying imports, improving monitoring of CRM supply risk, and ensuring free movement and environmental protection.[6] The CRMA set out a to-do list to diversify sources and improve recycling, while keeping the energy transition front of mind. Finally, the CRMA provided a framework for the EU to develop strategic partnerships abroad, including contributions to capacity-building for mining projects.[7]

The MSP Forum was developed in part from the EU's raw materials initiative. It was built on the originally envisioned CRM Club and founded with an explicit focus on the role of CRMs in the digital transition and build-up of hydrocarbon alternatives. The Forum has two main strands of work: one focused on facilitating projects and the other on identifying policies to increase production, facilitate regulatory measures to ensure fairness, transparency, and predictability, and promote high ESG standards regarding CRM supply chains. Discussions within the MSP Forum have centred on opportunities and challenges across the mineral sourcing value chain, which includes mining, processing, and recycling. The Forum has also incorporated other countries, including mining economies such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Serbia, and Uzbekistan.[8]

The EU has sought to portray itself as a normative actor, especially in comparison with China,

6 Sinkkonen, E. and M. Siddi (2024) "Foreign investments, de-risking and the EU's green transition: Mining critical minerals in Finland". *FIIA Briefing Paper* 384, February 2024.

7 GTK (2025) "Geological Survey of Finland Selected to Coordinate EU's Geological Partnership With Tanzania and Zambia". 29 January 2025. https://www.gtk.fi/en/current/geological-survey-of-finland-selected-to-coordinate-eus-geological-partnership-with-tanzania-and-zambia/; European Commission (2024) "EU and international partners agree to expand cooperation on critical raw materials". 5 April 2024. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_24_1807.

8 European Commission (2024) EU and US welcome new members to Minerals Security Partnership. Directorate-General for Trade and Economic Security. 27 September 2024. https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-and-us-welcome-new-members-minerals-security-partnership-2024-09-27_en.

and has placed a premium on standards-setting in minerals diplomacy. Its outreach emphasizes sustainability, ecological protection, a social licence to operate, and labour standards. This is evidenced in its approach to international partnerships, which are framed as sustainable alternatives to China in resource-rich countries in Africa, Central Asia, and Latin America. Among member states, national strategies and bilateral agreements exist between key partners, such as France and Kazakhstan, and Germany and Namibia. The EU is also using its regulatory power to impact the market, for example by placing tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles, and applying policies such as the Foreign Subsidies Regulation to control which foreign companies can operate and compete in the EU's single market. Nevertheless, these approaches have their limitations.

Tensions are emerging between the EU's attempts at a values-based approach and the bloc's industrial urgency. Projects such as the Jadar Valley Mine in Serbia highlight the limits of the EU's normative goals when elements critical for Europe's own competitiveness are in play: the lithium and boron from the mine could support the European Green Deal and battery production in the EU, but the project has faced fierce local opposition and protests.[9] Such tensions are further exacerbated by the fractures in the transatlantic relationship, and the Trump administration's preference for bilateral deals, rather than reliance on pre-existing multilateral approaches. Previously, initiatives like the MSP Forum offered a joint framework to counter China while incorporating normative development goals, but that vision is now splintering. If the MSP Forum is an example of multilateral minerals cooperation among governments, the US-Ukraine minerals deal is emblematic of bilateral, binding minerals diplomacy.

The EU is doing critical work to reduce reliance on newly mined resources and to ensure security of supply. This includes prioritizing policies and practices to recycle critical raw materials and rare earth elements from end-of-life devices. Researchers in countries such as Finland are developing technologies to capture and reuse minerals found in mining side streams and are also pioneers in recycling practices and MinTech.[10] The US, too, is considering ways to innovate away from dependencies on China, including next-generation batteries designed to function without cobalt. Despite the possible challenges from splintering in transatlantic minerals policy and government outreach, the private sector shows promising signs: in August 2025, the US company Lyten acquired the assets of the bankrupt Northvolt in Sweden and Germany. Still, many in Europe are holding their breath for what comes next from the US on CRM policy.

Policy dilemmas and governance gaps – places for cooperation or a competitive edge

The development of mineral resources has reignited longstanding concerns about exploitative extraction. All too often, the wealth of resource-rich states has been stripped away, providing little benefit to local communities and leaving behind environmental damage and governance strain. Mining projects create opportunities for corruption and exploitation that can erode state governance or, at minimum, divert rewards from those who suffer through the mine's effects. In a very physical sense, mines can cause health problems and massive environmental upheaval, affecting air, water, and noise quality, as well as ecological problems by threatening different species and terrains.[11] Yet the reality on the ground is usually more complex: project developers, local communities, and central governments often have diverging interests, and power asymmetries among

9 Dzihic, V. (2024) "Mining Lithium, Undermining a Democratic Future: EU Deal Takes Serbia Further from Europe". Heinrich Bool Stiftung, 30 September 2024. https://www.boell.de/en/2024/09/30/mining-lithium-undermining-democratic-future-eu-deal-takes-serbia-further-europe.

10 Research Council of Finland (2022) "Critical Materials in Circular Economy of Cities (Romulus) 2022–2025)". https://www.aka.fi/en/research-funding/programmes-and-other-funding-schemes/academy-programmes/critical-materials-in-circular-economy-of-cities/; University of Helsinki (2018) "Rare-earth elements in mining industry's waste piles". https://www.helsinki.fi/en/news/mathematics-and-science/rare-earth-elements-mining-industrys-waste-piles.

11 See Bradsher, K. (2025) "China Has Paid a High Price for Its Dominance in Rare Earths". New York Times, 5 July 2025. https://www.nytimes.com/2025/07/05/business/china-rare-earth-environment.html; and Beech, H. (2025) "The Wartime Mining Boom Exporting Rare Earths, and Toxins". *New York Times*, 11 July 2025. https://www.nytimes.com/2025/07/11/world/asia/myanmar-mining-thailand-china.html.

them shape outcomes. In some cases, central authorities strike deals with foreign investors that bypass local consent, sowing resentment and undermining legitimacy. Governments thus face an economic security dilemma, caught between development opportunities and dependency on great-power patrons.

"This creates a vicious cycle: the faster projects are pushed forward, the greater the risk of social and ecological backlash, which in turn fuels delays and instability."

The current scramble for critical minerals amplifies these tensions. Growing pressure to accelerate project timelines is driven by climate, industrial, and defence imperatives. Discussions about the use of Arctic space, or the acquisition of Greenland, for example, have been framed around commercial and governmental expectations for mining projects to commence in the coming years.[12] Countries in Africa and Latin America also face political pressure to commit to one deal or another. Yet speed and pressure often come at the expense of careful environmental safeguards and community engagement. This creates a vicious cycle: the faster projects are pushed forward, the greater the risk of social and ecological backlash, which in turn fuels delays and instability.

This is exacerbated by the concentration of mining in fragile or ecologically sensitive areas, such as the Arctic, and in regions with a history of exploitation and conflict, such as the DRC and Indonesia. To rectify this, extraction-focused countries and companies must consider the interests and well-being of local populations in all mining regions. Ignoring these concerns risks allowing coercion-driven deals to escalate instability in resource-rich countries. This is also geoeconomic soft power at work – by ensuring longer-term community development, great powers can attract cooperation rather than rely on exploitation.

Major powers are aware of these dilemmas of legitimacy and therefore deploy strategies to build social acceptability. China, for example, has sought to leverage its technical expertise across the minerals value chain by encouraging its companies to go beyond mining investment to include refining and other downstream industries. In Kazakhstan, Chinese firms have invested in refining capacity and value-adding industries, creating jobs and infrastructure while deepening economic ties.[13] In Europe, Chinese battery giants such as CATL are establishing gigafactories and recycling plants, marketing themselves as partners – rather than competitors – in "green" industrial growth. In Finland, CATL previously owned 23% of Valmet Automotive, and Beijing Easpring Material Technology owns 70% of a joint project with the Finnish Minerals Group (FMG) in Kotka for a lithium-ion battery cathode plant. This strategy leverages China's technical expertise and value-chain dominance to generate host-country buy-in.

By contrast, Western companies and countries have tended to compete on sustainability and community engagement. Many participate in industry-led standards, such as the Initiative for Responsible Mining Assurance (IRMA), which emphasizes environmental safeguards and local participation. Western firms also promote community development programmes to differentiate themselves from Chinese competitors, who are sometimes criticized for importing labour and providing fewer spillover benefits. Under the Biden administration, the US-led Minerals Security Partnership (MSP) placed sustainability at the centre of its strategy, whereas the Trump administration has shifted the initiative's focus more towards finance and transactional leverage.

Still, the mining sector suffers from a regulatory vacuum at the global level. While frameworks such as the OECD Guidelines, the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), and the International Council on Mining and Metals (ICMM) provide important principles, their practical application and take-up remains fragmented, voluntary, and weakly

12 Hale, T. and S. H Ali (2025) "Mineral diplomacy in Greenland: learning from US-European history of engagement at the Ivittuut cryolite mine". *Frontiers in Political Science*. DOI: 10.3389/fpos.2025.1584988.

13 Eurasianet (2025) "US losing ground to China in competition over Central Asia's critical minerals". 7 August 2025. https://eurasianet.org/us-losing-ground-to-china-in-competition-over-central-asias-critical-minerals.

enforced.[14] Although various authorities, regulatory bodies, and best-practice lists take a serious interest in these issues, their approaches tend to be piecemeal and lack a strong enforcement mechanism. Each major actor approaches these issues in its own way, which is shaping the playing field for geoeconomic tools that states can deploy both to secure minerals and to wield their own influence. A comprehensive global oversight mechanism for critical minerals could set common standards on financing, environmental safeguards, community rights, and end-of-project closure. In its absence, major powers will continue to pursue their own standards through minerals diplomacy, reinforcing the competitive logic of minerals geopolitics rather than mitigating it.

Efforts to develop a universal minerals bank or governance system centred on custodianship could provide third-party countries with a way to assert their agency. By taking part in the building of such structures and frameworks, these countries could move from being policy takers to policy makers, pushing back against some of the actions taken by larger geoeconomic powers. However, major powers such as the US, the EU, or China would likely still play an outsized role by deciding who gets a seat at the table and who gets to set the rules and governance standards. Relatedly, both China and the US seem inclined to skirt around larger governance systems in favour of deals that serve their own national interests.

Conclusions: Minerals as a facet of geoeconomic power politics in the future

To confront the challenges of resource security, geoeconomic actors need a creative and modular policy toolbox. Efforts are underway to embed best practices into the entire value chain, particularly by encouraging the private sector to adopt public-sector guidance. In 2019, the London Metal Exchange (LME), a centre for metal trading, adopted the OECD's responsible sourcing recommendations and the EITI's reporting standards, which emphasize transparency and clarity in sourcing.[15] This allowed the exchange to require that metal brands and companies comply with these standards in order to be listed (and therefore sold/traded). More recently, a group of scholars and practitioners published a paper in Science advocating the creation of a Global Minerals Trust to address resource management challenges and shift the sector away from competition towards a cooperative model of custodianship.[16]

Much of the effort to secure natural resources has alternated between resource extraction, charm offensives, and attempts to win the support of local governments and populations. The EU and the US in particular have sought to frame their focus on sustainability, transparency, and ESG standards, in stark contrast to its claims of China's exploitation, land misuse, and harm to local populations.[17] Discussions of financing and local community engagement are often intertwined. The recent deal between the United States and Ukraine is – depending on one's perspective – either a blueprint for what cooperation could look like in the future, or a warning to resource-rich countries unwilling to cede their sovereignty.

The OECD estimates that the mineral supply will need to quadruple by 2040 to meet the low-carbon energy goals of the Paris Agreement. Going forward, critical minerals will remain a part of great-power rivalry, bridging industrial development, ecological and environmental goals, and security issues. Minerals diplomacy is here to stay in one form or another. It can take different forms – partnerships among like-minded countries; competition for

14 OECD (2025) "Making critical minerals work for sustainable growth and development". Policy Issue. https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/policy-issues/sustainable-mining-for-development.html.

15 LME (2019) LME Responsible Sourcing: Setting the Global Standard. October 2019.

16 The Executive Director of the International Energy Agency (IEA) also advocated for national cooperation, drawing comparisons to the 1970s oil crisis: Birol, Fatih (2025) "Nations rallied to stop the 1970s oil crisis. It's time to do the same for critical minerals". *Time*. 10 September 2025. https://time.com/7315610/critical-mineral-energy-crisis-fatih-birol/; Ali, Saleem H., Daniel M. Franks, Jose A. Puppim de Oliveira, Kaveh Madani, Owen Gaffney, Eva Anggraini, Leonard Wantchekon, Xianlai Zeng (2025) "A global minerals trust could prevent inefficient and inequitable protectionist policies". *Science*, Vol. 288, 1028–1030.

17 Transparency International (2024) "Digging Deeper: Understanding the Global Chinese Mining Sector". Accountable Mining Programme. https://transparency.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Digging-Deeper_Global-Chinese-Mining-Sector_2024.pdf. (Note that this is funded by Anglo American.); Cerimagic, Kenan (2025) "Fertile Land and Clean Air at Risk: Chinese Mining Alarms Villagers in Serbia and Tajikistan". RFE/RL. 8 June 2025. https://www.rferl.org/a/enviroment-pollution-zijin-serbia-tajikistan-china/33432904.html.

resources; cooperation between the source of the project and the final recipient; or an asymmetrical relationship. Yet, led by the US and China, a blend of selective cooperation and coercion will be deployed for maximum benefit. The EU is positioned to push a standards-based path, but it would face difficulties in pursuing this alone, and there is a risk that this approach will be overshadowed by the harder-edged strategies of the US and China. This is emphasized by the tactics of the Trump administration, which is keen to push its advantage, and could adopt a go-it-alone strategy, treating the EU as a competitor rather than a collaborator.

The demand for minerals is not going away, but there are opportunities for actors to shape the next steps. There is an ongoing push and pull between more multilateral, collaborative approaches and coercive, binding practices. The former can be supported by international organizations and pacts around standards, while the latter is more of an extension of one country's strategic competitive practices. Early-stage projects have room to manoeuvre and make improvements, for example, by securing local community buy-in, environmental and ecological protections, and planning for end-of-project life cycles. International organizations such as the UN and the OECD could better inform all actors, including governments, local populations, investors, companies, and product end-users about the way projects and supply chains work. Innovation is another variable that could shape the future of geoeconomic minerals leverage by creating options that cut China out of the value chain altogether. The race for minerals continues to shape a new order of global cooperation and coercion, with consequences far beyond resource markets alone.

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