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**Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) Minerals
Conundrum and March 23 (M23) Rebellion: An
Exposition**

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Abstract

This paper examines the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) minerals conundrum from its independence from Belgium in 1960, under Patrice Lumumba, who was murdered by the Belgians and succeeded by Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu wa za Banga to the present day. The paper's overall objective is to reveal that all wars and conflicts in the DRC were necessitated by mineral resources, found mainly in the Eastern Provinces of North and South Kivu. The rare minerals include cobalt, copper, gold, diamonds, tantalum, coltan and zirconium among other mineral resources. The paper contends that Western countries including Belgium, France and the United States of America (US) among others countries have fiercely contested for mining rights in the DRC since colonialism to this day. Similarly, some African countries have been used by some Western governments as conduits for exploiting DRC's mineral resources. The Chinese are also involved in mining in the DRC. This paper adopts the qualitative secondary research approach as its adopted methodology and deploys the resource curse theory as its theoretical undergirding. Several scholars have researched the DRC's perennial conflicts since colonialism to the present day. However, none of the scholars have focussed on the involvement

of many global powers and some African countries in the destabilisation of the Kivus for mineral resources. This current study zeros its focus on that area. Findings emerging from this paper expose several Western countries, namely the US and Belgium among others, conniving with some African countries in perpetually and persistently disrupting the peace of the DRC to exploit its natural resources. The paper recommends that all foreign governments involved in the Kivus should immediately withdraw all their troops from the DRC.

Keywords: *Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Mineral Resources, Conundrum, March 23 (M23), Rebellion, Exposition.*

Introduction

The Guardian (2025) observes that DRC President Tshisekedi is courting US President Donald Trump, offering rare natural minerals in exchange for security in the Kivus. The proposed deal is informed by the invasion of the mineral-rich Kivus by the allegedly Rwandan-backed March 23 (M23) rebels who seized the mineral-rich province from the DRC government and its forces earlier in 2025. Should the proposed rare minerals deal succeed, it would repeat the same scenario where the US was granted mining rights by the former president of the then Zaire (now DRC) Mobutu Sese Seko until his government fell in 1997. For more than three decades, various US administrations backed Mobutu Sese Seko, who was their Cold War ally to plunder and pillage the Congo's mineral resources in exchange for protection. The Trump administration is seriously considering this deal due to its access to rare minerals like cobalt and copper, which are needed for missiles and microchips. Similarly, the deal gives them access to all the other much coveted natural resources of the DRC thereby countering China, which has access to most of Africa's strategic minerals.

Kopp (2025) submits that the then Congo conflict, fought between 1996 and 1997 involved Uganda and Rwanda, supported by Burundi and Eritrea. The war began when the Rwanda Defence Forces (RDF) together with the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (AFDL) rebels invaded the Kivus, purportedly fighting various rebel outfits that were domiciled there. This invasion later grew in size and strength as other African nations joined to topple the then-Mobutu-led Zairean administration. Former President Joe Biden envisaged partnering with the current DRC administration in clean energy deals. However, the arrival of President Donald Trump seems to

be informed by the expropriation of cobalt and copper that the US needs for its manufacturing of arms of war and microchips for computers and cell phones. This assertion by Ebsco concurs with the submissions of the Guardian elsewhere in this paper. Additionally, since 1996, the DRC's wars have involved many invading forces and surrogates from Europe, Africa, America and the Far East among other countries, all of them informed by the lure of rare natural resources (Kopp, 2025).

Literature Review

Mwasa (2025) states that the DRC is endowed with the most coveted natural resources include cobalt, copper, uranium, diamonds and gold among a superabundance of other mineral resources. These rare minerals have fueled Western growth for over a century, while Congolese wallow in abject poverty. Western mining conglomerates in the DRC include Union Miniere du Haut Katanga (UMHK), Societe Generale de Belgique succeeded by Groupe Bruxelles Lambert (GBL) and Suez from Belgium. Glencore and a plethora of other Western companies extract copper and cobalt to replenish European industries thereby generating huge profits for Europeans. Paradoxically, the Congolese nation and its inhabitants hardly see hardly any benefits, only a vicious rotation of fleecing evocative of the colonial era. Similarly, Belgium, including several other European countries has no known mines, their industrialisation is powered by the rare minerals of the DRC (Mwasa, 2025).

CBS News (2025) reports that the DRC and Rwanda signed a peace deal on 27 June, 2025 in Washington, US, mediated by President Donald Trump. The US administration hopes that the mediated peace deal would signal the end of a three-decade deadly war between the DRC and Rwanda over rare mineral resources. The negotiated peace deal by the Trump administration speaks to efforts to bring to an end a bloody war in the Kivus, where a rebel outfit, the M23, allegedly supported by Rwanda, controls almost all the mineral-rich eastern provinces of the DRC. Rwanda vehemently denies directly supporting the M23 terrorists who overran the DRC forces earlier in 2025 and threatened to topple the Kinshasa government. President Donald Trump was quoted by CBS News (2025) saying:

Today we are gathered to celebrate a great victory, a commitment that peace shall now prevail in the DR Congo. Everyone has waited for a very long time for this day, and it is finally here. The cessation of all

hostilities between the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Republic of Rwanda. The war between these two neighbouring countries has gone on for a long, long time, no one could stop it, they say it has raged for over thirty years, that is a long time.

BBC News (2025) suggests that the whole of eastern DRC has been volatile for over three decades due to the M23 rebellion and the war resulted in the deaths of thousands of people in recent months. Moreover, an estimated six million people had perished in that conflict according to the Council of Foreign Relations (CFR, 2025). President Trump promised to exert much pressure on both the DRC and Rwanda to ensure that the peace deal holds. He went further to state that there would be heavy penalties on the two parties should they breach the peace deal. The signed peace deal gives the Trump administration free access to the DRC's rare earth minerals such as lithium, cobalt, copper, diamonds, gold and uranium among other minerals. In return, the US would guarantee the security of the Kivus in exchange for the mining concessions granted to them by the Tshisekedi government. Former President Mobutu signed similar security deals for the eastern DRC with the US until his removal from power in 1997.

Tossou (2025) posits that after attaining independence in 1960, fierce fighting broke out between the Patrice Lumumba government and Katanga secessionist leader Moise Tshombe, who was supported by European governments led by Belgium. The fallout between Lumumba and Tshombe was over mineral resources, with the latter pledging to work with Europeans to perpetuate their pillaging of the Congo's minerals for personal gain. The rare minerals in Katanga made it a much-coveted place by the Europeans, including Belgium such that UMHK's role in sponsoring the Tshombe rebellion was of staggering proportions. Belgium fully supported the Katanga secessionists by sending 10000 soldiers under the pretext of safeguarding and protecting Europeans in the area while protecting its mining investments in the conglomerate UMHK. The deployed soldiers offered training and arming the secessionist rebels thereby invigorating their resolve to resist the Lumumba-led administration. This is a stark example of how Belgium, like other European governments such as France, arm-twisted newly formed African governments so that they would perpetuate the pillaging and expropriation of natural resources.

SABC News (2025) suggests that Rwanda is immensely gaining from the M23 plunder of rare mineral resources from the DRC. To support

their argument, the European Union (EU) imposed sanctions on several Rwandan officials including senior army commanders of the Rwanda Defence Force (RDF), leader of M23, Bertrand Bsimwa, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Rwanda's Ministry of Mines, Petroleum and Gas Board, the Gold Refinery in Gasabo, Kigali among others. The sanctions took effect on 17 March 2025. The individuals and entities hit with the punitive measures were accused of being directly involved in the clandestine exploitation and expropriation of natural resources from eastern DRC. The DRC government and several analysts assert that almost all the minerals supplied and traded by Rwanda are looted from the DRC where it is fighting alongside the M23 rebels. The Vice President of the EU, Kaja Kallas, echoed the submissions of SABC News (2025) by saying:

The passage of gold through Kigali's sole gold purifier, Gasabo Gold Refinery, promotes the illegal siphoning of mineral resources from the DRC by Rwanda and it must be stopped forthwith. Rwanda has utilised war, fragility and the vulnerability of the Congo to illicitly expropriate its natural resources for over three decades. Senior Rwandan officials like Francis Kamanzi, leading Rwanda's mining controller, took advantage of the M23 rebellion in the eastern DRC to illegally trade in rare mineral resources.

The United Nations (UN, 2025) contends that the EU is hitting Rwanda's sole gold purifier and its high-ranking executives with punitive measures for trading in illicit mineral resources looted from the DRC. This proves how the *extraction* business has involved itself in one of the most destructive conflicts on the African continent. The EU is punishing the Kigali government's Gasabo Gold Purifier for clandestinely dealing in mineral resources, including gold, illegally obtained from the Rwanda-supported M23 rebels operating in the Kivus. Rwanda is alleged to have sent thousands of its soldiers to back the M23 rebels. The EU slapped 9 people with punitive measures, of which 8 are M23 and RDF commanders. The war in the Kivus has claimed the lives of thousands of civilians including women and children, similarly, millions of others have fled their homes to seek refuge from the marauding M23 rebels. The eastern DRC conflict stems from a combination of factors but it has become rooted in the trade of rare mineral resources, with the M23 rebels capturing vast mining areas and expanding piracy passages throughout the region. DRC mineral resources are carried illegally to

Rwanda where they are purportedly exported to other countries. The UN (2025) asserts that Rwanda exercises command and control over M23 rebels.

The African Union (AU,2025) alludes that the DRC is endowed with a plethora of rare mineral resources, including cobalt, diamonds, copper, lithium, uranium and coltan among others. However, its army is plagued by corruption and very meagre salaries prompting them to shun fighting in the Kivus. This emboldens rebels such as the M23 to stamp their authority in the eastern DRC. This scenario has prompted the Kinshasa government of Tshisekedi to appeal to the US for security guarantees while offering them concessions in mining the coveted mineral resources. President Trump has warmed up to the invitation to provide security to the Kivus while bringing in US investors to exploit the DRC's critical mineral resources thereby competing with China which has a firm foot in the area. The US special representative, Ronny Jackson, met Tshisekedi to discuss mining concessions in the country. Jackson stressed the need to restore peace in the Kivus before US companies could operationalise their mining investments. The DRC Senator Pierre Kanda Kalambayi and Aaron Poynton of the Africa and USA Business Council contacted Secretary Rubio in May 2025 proposing an agreement granting US businesses full access to rare earth mineral, which includes extraction and exports privileges in reciprocate to equipping and training of DRC soldiers so that they would be ready to safeguard the country's' mineral resources. There are allegations that Rwanda assisted the M23 rebels in capturing Goma and Bukavu in early 2025, thereby giving the latter total control over trafficking minerals routes, rare earth mineral areas and crossings of borders in the region (AU, 2025).

Human Rights Watch (2025) states that trade data it gleaned reveal that there were coltan dealers connected to Traxys, a global commodities dealer based in Europe, that bought rare minerals in Rwanda connected to the war in the eastern DRC. One of the rare earth minerals much sought after is tantalum, which is purified from coltan and is widely used to manufacture electronics, among them cell phones, laptops, motor vehicle parts and electric cars that are essential for a carbon-free energy transition. It is estimated that a cell phone contains about 40 milligrammes of tantalum per unit. The M23 rebels are largely financed through the syphoning of the rare mineral coltan in the Rubaya zone of eastern DRC. However, Traxys vehemently denied that the coltan it buys from Rwanda is mined in Rubaya near Goma, the capital of North Kivu province in eastern DRC. Be that as it may, Traxys was the sole importer

of coltan, marketed by Rwanda minerals dealer African Panther Resources Limited. This is according to data accessed by Human Rights Watch (2025). African Panther's coltan sales abroad in 2024 exceeded previous years, coinciding with the escalating war in the Kivus and increased coltan looting from the Rubaya zone, further revealing their 2024 sales as evidence of smuggling from war areas in the Kivus. The UN (2025) concurs with these submissions when it stated that by the end of 2023, bloody coltan from Masisi was often syphoned to Rwanda before it was disbursed into the global markets.

York (2025) posits that a number of Western states, including the US, Canada, and Australia, among other European countries were involved in the DRC's rare earth extraction industry. The Trump administration, with their allies in the EU, are looking at diversifying supply chains for minerals such as lithium, cobalt, copper and uranium, among others, for their energy businesses and electric cars to curb the dominance of China in the global world. Hence their desire to increase their involvement in the DRC's rare mineral resources. The US, supported by their allies in the EU and the G7 countries is heavily investing in infrastructure, for example, the Lobito Corridor that is in Angola, stretching to the DRC and Zambia. This railway is calculated to ferry the DRC's rare earth minerals to the Atlantic Ocean to reduce reliance on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of China, viewed as a fierce competitor on the global front. The mining industry of the DRC is threatened by the M23-induced conflict, and therefore the Kinshasa administration needs the US for security guarantees. The M23 is among the more than one hundred rebel groups fighting the DRC army in the mineral-rich Kivus and has an estimated fighter count of about 8000 soldiers, according to the UN (2025). The M23 claims that at the heart of its grievances is the motivation to protect the interests of the DRC Tutsi and other minority ethnic groups. Additionally, it seeks to protect the Tutsi from Hutu rebels who fled to DRC after participating in the 1994 genocide in Rwanda (York, 2025). The DRC, US and other countries accuse Rwanda of sponsoring and supporting the M23. Rwanda denies the allegation. The UN (2025) says Rwanda is in total control of the M23 rebels and that in mid-2024 Rwanda had an estimated 4000 troops fighting alongside the M23 rebels in the Kivus.

Mureithi and Egbejule (2025) state that as of 2024, there were about 11000 peacekeeping soldiers in the DRC. These comprised the United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the Southern African Development

Community Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (SAMIDRC). The leaders of African countries and previous US administrations have tried to negotiate an end to the war in the Kivus, but they were all unsuccessful in their quest for peace. In January 2025, 14 soldiers from the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) fell while battling the M23 rebels in North Kivu Province. The killed servicemen were part of the SAMIDRC force deployed to the DRC to stem the M23 rebellion alongside MONUSCO in December 2023 (www.defenceweb.co.za, 2025). The Kivus have an estimated 4.6 million people that were internally displaced in early 2025. Additionally, there were cases of systemic executions and rape of women and children, among other atrocious things, due to the conflict in eastern DRC (The Guardian, 2025).

NBC News (2025) observes that the war in the Kivus reached its peak in January and February 2025, when the M23 rebels supported by thousands of RDF members took control of both Bukavu and Goma, capitals of the Kivus. The corrupt and ill-equipped DRC army was overrun and forced to flee the battlefield. The impact of the deadly attack was catastrophic on the civilian population; thousands were reported dead while others were maimed and injured. Parts of the battlefield were littered with decomposing corpses; it was a horrible massacre. Hundreds of thousands fled their homes to seek refuge elsewhere across the region. The Rwandan head of state denied any involvement in the raging war despite numerous accusations from the UN and some Western administrations. He had this to say:

We do not know why Rwanda is accused of supporting the M23 rebels, we are not involved in the war. Those people exist due to them being deprived of their rights as citizens of the DRC. No one in their right senses should embrace the injustices perpetrated against this community. That is their ancestral land, they belong there, they are defending their rights.

According to Akinochi (2025), Rwanda's involvement in the DRC is informed by tensions bordering on ethnicity and its resolve to crush the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), an extremist Hutu outfit that fights together with the DRC army. Rwanda also harbours ambitions to control deposits of diamonds, copper, lithium, gold and coltan, among other minerals found in the Kivus. It was also reported that Tshisekedi hired mercenaries from France, Romania,

Poland and Bulgaria, among other EU countries, to help him fend off the M23 advance into the DRC.

Methodology

This paper utilises qualitative secondary research which is also referred to as desk research. Qualtrics (2025) posits that secondary research relies on data that is readily available and was collected by forerunners. This research methodology entails that the researcher would not go into the field to gather data but solely make use of available data sets. These data sets come in the form of government reports, scholarly articles, media houses, census data, the internet, newspapers and textbooks among others. This method of research is known for its cost-effectiveness as compared to other research methods. Here, the researcher analyses the available data in the comfort of their home. Makonye (2022) states that secondary research involves synthesising available data from varied sources, including news outlets, among others. This paper extended Secondary Research to include social media, websites and published journal articles, among other sources.

Theoretical Framework

Auty (1993) is credited with popularising the Resource Curse Theory. Other proponents of the theory include Sachs and Warner (2001). The Resource Curse Theory argues that countries which have natural resources in abundance are less developed than those that do not have the resources. This theory fits well into the issues at hand in this paper. The DRC, as stated elsewhere in this paper, is endowed with rare earth minerals, including cobalt, lithium, gold, copper and diamonds, among other minerals. Paradoxically, the DRC is one of the poorest and most underdeveloped countries in the world. Similarly, countries that exploit and plunder its minerals are developed, for example, Belgium, France, the US and Canada, among others. This speaks to glaring evidence that instead of using the resources to develop and prosper the DRC, it is other countries that are syphoning those rare earth minerals for their own development and prosperity. The resource wealth of the DRC is perpetually and persistently looted by the West, among other countries, for their own aggrandisement. This explains why the DRC is underdeveloped to this present day despite having almost all the precious minerals of the world.

Findings and Discussion

This paper's findings uncover a range of issues regarding DRC rare earth minerals and the M23 rebel movement. These findings are discussed in depth in this section of the paper. The DRC is endowed with rare earth minerals, which include coltan, cobalt, copper, tantalum, uranium, diamonds, crude petroleum and gold, among other minerals. Coltan is important for making laptops, mobile phones, electric vehicles and other consumer electronics. This finding echoes the submission of AU (2025), which states that the DRC is destabilised by the M23 rebels for its rare earth minerals, such as coltan, among other minerals. In support of this finding, York (2025) reveals that the US, Australia and Canada are involved in the DRC mining of rare earth minerals to boost their electric vehicle production and to counter China in the electric automobile industry, where it has total dominance.

Several European conglomerates, such as UMHK of Belgium, have extracted the DRC's rare earth minerals since colonialism and have continued looting those minerals through other subsidiary companies, for example, GBL and Suez. The Belgians executed the former President of Congo, Patrice Lumumba, when he leaned towards socialism and succeeded him with their puppet Mobutu, who allowed them to persistently pillage Congo's mineral resources. Similarly, other companies from Europe, such as Glencore, owned by Switzerland and Britain, are also involved in extracting rare earth minerals in the DRC. This concurs with the observations of Mwasia (2025), who contends that Glencore and other European mining companies are involved in the DRC mining industry, where they reap huge profits by supplying European markets while the local population of the DRC lives in abject poverty.

The UN (2025) submits that Rwanda is involved in the war in the DRC and that it supports the M23 rebels fighting in the Kivus. The UN further asserts that the RDF was directly involved in the fighting in January and February 2025 when the M23 rebels took control of North and South Kivu Provinces after overrunning the DRC forces. This submission is supported by NBC News (2025), which states that the M23 rebels, together with their RDF backers, attacked Goma and Bukavu, thereby taking control of both capitals in January and February 2025. After these attacks, thousands of people were killed while others fled the Kivus to seek refuge elsewhere. NBC News adds that M23 rebels and their RDF counterparts rampantly raped women and children during their attacks in the eastern DRC. However, Kigali denies these

allegations; it claims that it does not support the M23 rebellion and that its army is not involved in the DRC war. Kigali also states that the M23 rebels are fighting to stop the discrimination of Congolese Tutsi by the Kinshasa administration. Additionally, Kigali states that the M23 rebels are after the FDLR, Hutu extremists, who partook of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda and are now fighting alongside the DRC army (NBC News, 2025).

The Kinshasa administration of President Tshisekedi courted US President Donald Trump to provide him with security to protect the vast minerals of the DRC in exchange for the country's rare earth minerals, such as copper and cobalt. This finding is supported by the Guardian (2025), which states that Tshisekedi has fallen into the same trap as Mobutu who traded the country's natural resources with the previous US governments to protect the country from mineral-sniffing speculators such as the M23 rebels, among other groups fighting in the Kivus. On 27 June 2025, Rwanda and the DRC, represented by their foreign affairs ministers, signed a deal to cease hostilities in the Kivus. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio presided over the signing of the peace deal between the two belligerent neighbouring countries. This was reported by various international media houses, including BBC News (2025), SABC News (2025) and CGTN News (2025), among others.

The EU imposed sanctions on several M23 and RDF members accused of dealing in syphoned DRC natural resources. Some government entities, such as Gasabo Gold Refinery, among others were also added to the sanctions list for trading in bloody minerals looted from the DRC. This confirms the observations of the UN (2025), AU (2025) and Mureithi and Egbejule (2025), who asserted that some senior commanders in the RDF and the M23 leadership were sanctioned for trading in minerals expropriated from the eastern DRC war by the EU in early 2025. In the same vein, some officials, such as Francis Kamanzi, the CEO of Rwanda Minerals Board, were slapped with an asset freeze and travel ban for trading in natural resources exploited from the war in the DRC. Companies that include Traxys and African Panther were also implicated in the trade and exploitation of minerals looted from the DRC, thereby confirming the submissions of the Guardian (2025).

The Kinshasa administration hired mercenaries from European countries, for example, France, Bulgaria and Romania, among others, to help it quell the M23 rebellion in eastern DRC. Also helping the DRC government are troops from MONUSCO and SAMIDRC, with the latter losing about 14 soldiers belonging to SANDF earlier in 2025. This

echoes the submissions of Carter (2025), who asserted that a number of foreign soldiers from Europe, Africa and other countries were directly involved in the war in the Kivus of the DRC.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper looked at the eastern DRC rare earth mineral resources and the rebellion involving the M23 rebels in the area. The paper contended that countries from Europe, America, Africa and the Far East are competing for the DRC's natural resources in the Kivus, among other areas. The M23 rebels, together with other smaller rebel outfits in eastern DRC, are all involved in the trade of illicit minerals exploited from the Kivus. The mineral resources rush has attracted mercenaries from France, Poland, and Bulgaria, among other countries, at the invitation of the Kinshasa administration to help quell the rebellion. Conglomerates from Belgium, Canada, Australia, France, Switzerland, and Britain are involved in mineral extraction businesses in the DRC. Rwanda is accused of supporting the M23 rebels, although it denies the allegations. MONUSCO and SAMIDRC are fighting alongside the DRC army to help defeat the Rwanda-backed M23 rebels. On June 27, 2025, US President Donald Trump brokered a ceasefire deal between Rwanda and the DRC. This paper recommends that all foreign countries with troops in the DRC's Kivus should immediately withdraw them to give the country a chance to manage its rare natural resources.

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