

Technology Metals Report (03.28.2025): Geopolitical Turbulence Shakes Critical Minerals Sector as Trump, the DRC, and Trade Policies Reshape Supply Chains

written by Tracy Hughes | March 28, 2025

Over the past week, the critical minerals sector has experienced significant geopolitical turbulence, particularly in Asia and Africa. In Myanmar, the Kachin Independence Army's seizure of a vital rare-earth mining region has led to an 89% [drop](#) in Chinese imports, underscoring the fragility of global heavy rare-earth supplies vital to wind turbines and electric vehicle production. Meanwhile, tensions continued to flare in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where officials hinted at a possible [extension](#) of a cobalt export ban that has already boosted prices by over 50%. Separately, the DRC's proposal of a minerals-for-security deal with the U.S. could open the door for American companies to access some of the world's richest mineral reserves—but also [risks](#) pulling the U.S. deeper into a complex regional conflict.

In Europe, energy security and raw materials sourcing took center stage. Germany's nuclear association, Kerntechnik Deutschland e.V., advocated [reviving](#) closed nuclear power plants to speed up the country's coal phase-out and stabilize the grid, even as nuclear remains controversial. The European Commission [announced](#) 47 Strategic Projects to secure critical raw materials, including lithium, cobalt, and graphite, aligned with

a goal to bolster domestic production and recycling by 2030. At the same time, high-level EU officials warned that Europe cannot allow Chinese lithium to become “the new Russian gas,” reiterating the urgent push for raw material self-sufficiency.

In the United States, President Donald Trump enacted several measures aimed at reshaping domestic and international trade dynamics for critical minerals and the broader economy. Most notably, a 25% [tariff](#) on imported automobiles and foreign-made auto parts rattled global markets, with many forecasting higher prices and possible trade retaliations. Copper, a cornerstone metal in electronics and infrastructure, shot to [record highs](#) amid this uncertain trade environment. Additionally, Trump’s executive order to expedite critical mineral production highlighted copper’s challenges, despite it not being officially listed as “critical.” Elsewhere, potash was newly [classified](#) as a U.S. critical mineral, potentially reshaping agricultural inputs and supply chains.

Finally, technological innovation continued apace in the sector. Argonne National Laboratory [introduced](#) a promising rotating packed bed system that could revolutionize how used nuclear fuel and rare earth materials are recycled. By enabling processing at or near a reactor site—and offering smaller, more cost-effective equipment—this approach might reduce transportation risks and waste. These developments, taken together, underscore an industry at the nexus of policy, technology, and shifting geopolitical alliances.

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Myanmar rebels disrupt China rare earth trade, sparking regional scramble (March 26, 2025, [Source](#)) – In October, armed rebels from the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) seized northern Myanmar's rare-earth mining region, which produces about half the world's heavy rare earths, disrupting crucial supplies for wind turbines and electric vehicles. The KIA imposed a hefty tax, effectively halting operations, and Chinese imports plummeted 89% in February. This move aims to pressure Beijing, which backs Myanmar's military junta and has significant investments in Kachin. Observers say the rebels want leverage to force recognition of their control and to challenge Chinese support for the junta.

German nuclear association calls for restart of reactors (March 27, 2025, [Source](#)) – Kerntechnik Deutschland e.V. (KernD) advocates restarting Germany's closed nuclear power plants as a safe, climate-friendly, and cost-effective measure. According to the association, up to six reactors could potentially be recommissioned within a few years, enabling a faster coal phase-out without harming power supply security. The group points to slow renewable expansion, reliance on fossil fuels and imports, and high electricity prices as key issues. KernD argues that nuclear power can complement renewables by stabilizing output, cutting CO2 emissions, and improving competitiveness. Member companies, including Framatome and Westinghouse, support the call, citing existing infrastructure and expertise.

Can Trump's critical minerals drive pass the copper test? (March 26, 2025, [Source](#)) – U.S. President Donald Trump's executive order aims to enhance domestic production of critical minerals by simplifying the mine permitting process, which currently takes around 29 years from discovery to production. This initiative, however, faces significant challenges such as environmental concerns and community opposition. Copper, not listed as a critical mineral but highlighted in the order,

exemplifies these hurdles with several major projects like Resolution, Pebble, and Twin Metals stalled due to permitting issues. Despite potential acceleration, these mines will take approximately a decade to produce copper. Additionally, the U.S. lacks adequate processing facilities, further complicating efforts to increase domestic copper production. Meanwhile, increased investment in copper recycling presents a quicker, more environmentally friendly alternative to new mining projects.

Trump to impose 25% tariff on all automobiles and foreign auto parts brought into the U.S. (March 26, 2025, [Source](#)) – President Donald Trump announced a 25% tariff on all imported vehicles and foreign-made auto parts. This decision, which extends to auto parts in domestically assembled vehicles, sparked significant criticism from foreign governments and affected global auto stocks negatively. While USMCA-compliant vehicles and parts will initially be exempt, the broader tariffs have alarmed both domestic and international stakeholders. Industry representatives predict higher manufacturing costs, increased vehicle prices, and potential job losses in the U.S. Foreign leaders have threatened retaliatory measures, and Trump warned of even higher tariffs if economic conflicts escalate. The tariffs are set to start being collected on April 3.

Copper prices surge to record high amid tariff anxiety (March 26, 2025, [Source](#)) – Copper prices soared to a new record as tariff speculation fueled US stockpiling. Copper futures in New York reached \$5.374 per pound Wednesday before settling at \$5.24, up 30% this year, outpacing gold's 16% gain and major US indexes. Although tariffs on copper remain unconfirmed, President Trump's previous investigation has heightened market anxiety. US buyers reportedly shifted major stockpiles, with about 500,000 tons shipped this month compared to the usual 70,000. Global supply may tighten further amid rising demand for

copper in construction, electronics, and energy, potentially leaving other markets with fewer reserves.

Trump Executive Order Elevates Potash to U.S. Critical Minerals List, Boosting Agricultural Security (March 25, 2025, [Source](#)) – President Donald Trump's executive order reclassifies potash as a critical mineral, a move applauded by The Fertilizer Institute for potentially boosting U.S. agricultural security. The U.S. currently produces only a fraction of its potash needs, relying heavily on imports from Canada and elsewhere. Global potash markets have been shaped by geopolitical events, with Canadian production dominating in North America. BHP Group Limited's (NYSE: BHP) massive Jansen project in Saskatchewan aims to meet rising demand, particularly in Brazil. The potash market, valued at around \$66.11 billion, faces increasing sustainability and environmental concerns as it grows.

Argonne innovations squeeze more out of used nuclear fuel and rare earth materials (March 25, 2025, [Source](#)) – Argonne National Laboratory has developed a rotating packed bed (RPB) technology that supports safer, more localized recycling of uranium, transuranic elements, and rare earth materials. This approach may reduce transportation risks by processing used nuclear fuel at or near its original site and lower the cost and size of equipment required. The adaptable and scalable nature of this solution indicates that the U.S. could enhance the extraction of valuable materials from sources typically destined for landfills, including mining waste, coal fly ash, and obsolete electronics. Funded by the DOE's ARPA-E, the research includes partnerships with Case Western Reserve University and focuses on streamlining metals production.

Japan to put 95.2% duty on China graphite electrodes from Saturday (March 25, 2025, [Source](#)) – Japan's cabinet will impose a 95.2% anti-dumping duty on China's graphite electrode exports

for four months, starting March 29. A government probe, initiated by complaints from Japanese graphite makers SEC Carbon, Tokai Carbon, and Nippon Carbon, concluded that Chinese exporters were selling at unfairly low prices. Last month's interim report found these practices harmed Japanese producers. The investigation began in April 2024, and a finance ministry council recently approved the temporary measure, which aligns with World Trade Organization guidelines.

Chinese lithium must not become 'the new Russian gas', says EU industry chief (March 25, 2025, [Source](#)) – The EU is intensifying efforts to secure lithium supplies and cut reliance on external sources, especially China. Vice-president Stéphane Séjourné declared that Beijing's dominance over critical resources must not replicate Russia's historical stranglehold over gas. Highlighting lithium's central role in electric vehicle batteries and Europe's transition away from fossil fuels, he emphasized the urgency of ramping up domestic production and streamlining permits. Séjourné pointed to ongoing geopolitical tensions as drivers of this push for autonomy. He also underlined the need for political support, emphasizing that community acceptance is essential for future projects.

Commission selects 47 Strategic Projects to secure and diversify access to raw materials in the EU (March 25, 2025, [Source](#)) – The European Commission has adopted a list of 47 Strategic Projects to strengthen Europe's raw materials value chain under the Critical Raw Materials Act. Located in 13 EU Member States, these projects focus on extraction, processing, recycling, or substitution of strategic raw materials, including lithium, cobalt, nickel, manganese, and graphite. They aim to meet the Act's 2030 targets for domestic extraction, processing, and recycling. With a total capital investment of €22.5 billion, these projects will receive coordinated support, including financial access and streamlined permitting, ensuring compliance

with environmental, social, and governance criteria.

Why a US-DRC minerals-for-security deal could backfire (March 24, 2025, [Source](#)) – In March 2025, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) proposed a deal to the Trump administration that would allow American companies access to its vast mineral resources in exchange for U.S. military support. This proposal aims to diversify U.S. critical mineral sources and aid the DRC's economic growth, potentially offsetting local conflicts. However, the deal could entangle the U.S. in the DRC's complex and volatile environment, reminiscent of previous problematic military engagements. Publicly, details are sparse, but the deal involves exclusive mining rights for U.S. firms paired with comprehensive security assistance, potentially leading to direct U.S. military presence in the region.

Congo could extend cobalt export ban, government spokesperson says (March 21, 2025, [Source](#)) – The Democratic Republic of Congo, the world's leading producer of cobalt, may prolong a four-month export ban on the metal initially imposed in February due to a significant price decline, stated government spokesperson Patrick Muyaya. This measure was introduced to address a global surplus and stabilize the market. Since the ban, cobalt prices have surged over 50%. Additionally, Congo is considering implementing export quotas and collaborating with Indonesia to manage cobalt pricing and supply. An evaluation at the end of the ban period will determine if the suspension continues or if new strategies are needed to sustain market stability.

InvestorNews.com Media Highlights

- March 27, 2025 – Trump Executive Order Elevates Potash to U.S. Critical Minerals List, Boosting Agricultural

Security <https://bit.ly/4c8NHLw>

- March 24, 2025 – LSE's Secondary Listing Roadblock: Missing Out on the Mining Boom <https://bit.ly/4hJ89DZ>

InvestorNews.com Video Highlights

- March 26, 2025 – Stanford's Jef Caers Drives AI Innovation at Mineral-X to Accelerate Critical Minerals Discoveries <https://youtu.be/j4-iYw24jTc>
- March 25, 2025 – Western Uranium & Vanadium CEO George Glasier Predicts Uranium Price Surge Amid Global Supply Shortage and Rising U.S. Demand <https://youtu.be/neyr2cN-7T4>
- March 25, 2025 – Meteoric Resources' Stuart Gale Highlights Caldeira Project's Path to Becoming a Leading Global Rare Earths Producer <https://youtu.be/-yyYcp5WDtw>

InvestorNews.com Member News

- March 26, 2025 – Nord Precious Metals Closes First Tranche of Non-Brokered Private Placement and Announces Additional Private Placements <https://bit.ly/3DGgNoU>
- March 25, 2025 – Nano One Reports Q4 2024 Results and Summary of Activities <https://bit.ly/3QMZS6Q>
- March 25, 2025 – Panther Metals PLC Dotted Lake: Drilling Results <https://bit.ly/424UMIw>
- March 25, 2025 – Power Metallic Expands the Lion Zone with Deepest Assayed Intersection to Date and Delivers Initial Ni/Cu Assays from the Tiger Zone <https://bit.ly/4j3e2Nm>

The upcoming **CMI Summit IV**, themed *The War for Critical Minerals and Capital Resources*, is scheduled to take place in Toronto, Ontario, on May 13-14, 2025. This event aims to unite industry leaders to tackle pressing issues in the global critical minerals market. To learn more about the **CMI Summit IV**, [click here](#) – or to secure a **CMI Summit IV** 2-day Delegates Pass, [click here](#)

