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The "Battle of the Corridors": A Postcolonial Analysis of China–United States Competition for Critical Clean-Energy Minerals in Central and Southern Africa

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Abstract

The accelerating global transition toward clean energy has intensified international competition for critical minerals required for renewable energy technologies, electric vehicles, and advanced battery systems. Central and Southern Africa have emerged as strategic regions due to their abundant deposits of cobalt, copper, lithium, graphite, manganese, and rare earth elements, attracting increased geopolitical engagement from China and the United States. This study examines how the contemporary contest for these critical minerals reflects evolving forms of postcolonial power relations, dependency, and African agency. Drawing on postcolonial theory, the paper investigates whether current investment, infrastructure, and supply chain strategies reproduce neo-colonial patterns or create opportunities for greater economic autonomy. The study adopts a qualitative research design based exclusively on secondary data obtained from peer-reviewed literature, policy documents, government reports, and publications by international organisations. Using thematic content analysis, the study finds that although China and the United States pursue competing strategic interests through distinct economic and diplomatic approaches, African states increasingly exercise agency by renegotiating resource governance, promoting local beneficiation, and diversifying international partnerships. The paper contributes to scholarship by integrating postcolonial theory with contemporary geopolitical competition over critical clean-energy minerals, offering insights into resource governance and sustainable development in Africa's emerging green economy.

Keywords: Critical minerals; Postcolonialism; China; United States; Central, East and Southern Africa; Green Transition; Resource Governance.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

The global transition from fossil fuels to cleaner energy systems has significantly increased the strategic importance of critical minerals used in electric vehicles, battery storage technologies, solar panels, wind turbines, and other low-carbon technologies. Minerals such as cobalt, lithium, copper, graphite, manganese, and rare

earth elements have become indispensable for achieving global Decarbonisation targets, prompting major economies to secure reliable supply chains through investment, diplomacy, and strategic partnerships (International Energy Agency [IEA], 2024; International Renewable Energy Agency [IRENA], 2024; Zaman et al.,

2025; Ahmad, 2025).

The growing demand for these minerals has intensified geopolitical competition between China and the United States. China has consolidated a dominant position through extensive investments in mining, mineral processing, and infrastructure across Africa, while the United States has responded by strengthening mineral security partnerships, promoting supply-chain diversification, and supporting infrastructure initiatives such as the Lobito Corridor. These competing strategies reflect broader efforts to secure long-term access to critical mineral resources required for industrial competitiveness and energy security (IEA, 2024; U.S. Department of State, 2024; Vivoda, 2023).

Central and Southern Africa occupy a pivotal position in the global clean-energy economy because they possess some of the world's largest reserves of strategic minerals. The Democratic Republic of Congo accounts for most global cobalt production. Zambia is a major producer of copper. Zimbabwe possesses significant lithium reserves, while Namibia, Angola, and South Africa continue to attract substantial investment in emerging critical mineral industries. These resources position the region as an indispensable supplier within global clean-energy value chains (D'Orazio, 2024; Wu et al., 2012; African Development Bank [AfDB], 2024; Bourne, 2025).

However, the region's resource significance cannot be understood without considering its colonial history. Colonial administrations structured African economies around the extraction and export of raw materials to external markets, creating patterns of dependency that persisted after political independence. Contemporary foreign investment in strategic minerals has renewed debates over whether current resource governance represents a continuation of colonial extraction through new geopolitical actors or provides opportunities for greater African economic transformation (Carmody, 2023). 2016; Nkrumah, 1965/2020; (Arthur, 2025).

Consequently, Central, East and Southern Africa have emerged as major geopolitical hotspots where economic interests, strategic infrastructure, industrial policy, and global power competition converge. Beyond commercial investments, competition over transport corridors, processing facilities, and logistics networks demonstrates that control of mineral supply chains has become central to twenty-first-century geopolitical influence. Understanding these dynamics is therefore essential for evaluating Africa's role within the evolving global green economy (IEA, 2024; UNCTAD, 2023).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite decades of political independence, many African countries remain heavily dependent on exporting unprocessed mineral resources with limited domestic

industrialisation and value addition, leaving economies exposed to commodity price volatility, external market dependence, and unequal participation in global value chains (UNCTAD, 2023). South Sudan exemplifies these dynamics: its economy remains heavily reliant on oil exports, institutional capacity for extractive governance is weak, and conflict-related disruptions have repeatedly undermined efforts to capture greater domestic value from natural resources (World Bank, 2022; PACT & Sudd Institute, 2021).

The accelerating competition between China and the United States for critical clean-energy minerals has introduced new opportunities for investment while simultaneously raising concerns about strategic dependency and external influence. China's infrastructure-for-resources model and the United States' mineral security initiatives represent competing approaches to securing access to Africa's mineral wealth. Although these engagements promise infrastructure financing and capital inflows, they also risk reinforcing asymmetrical power relations that primarily serve external industrial interests and may sideline local development objectives (Carmody, 2023; Ouma, 2012; U.S. Department of State, 2024; Vivoda, 2023). In South Sudan, where governance institutions are still consolidating and regulatory frameworks for mining and oil governance are nascent, such external engagements could exacerbate elite capture, weaken transparency, and limit community benefits unless accompanied by strong oversight and accountable contracting practices (Transparency International, 2021; UNECA, 2022).

Limited domestic processing capacity means that most countries in Central, East, and Southern Africa continue to export raw minerals while importing higher-value manufactured products. This imbalance constrains employment creation, technology transfer, industrial diversification, and long-term economic transformation despite the region's abundant natural resources (AfDB, 2024; UNCTAD, 2023). South Sudan's lack of downstream refining and limited potential for mineral processing beyond crude oil have translated into lost opportunities for job creation, skills development, and fiscal resilience, leaving public revenues vulnerable to price shocks and production interruptions (World Bank, 2022).

Against this background, there is a growing need to examine whether contemporary competition over critical minerals reproduces postcolonial patterns of extraction or creates new opportunities for African governments to exercise greater agency through improved resource governance, strategic bargaining, and regional cooperation. For South Sudan, the question is particularly urgent: can policymakers, civil society, and regional partners leverage rising investor interest to build domestic processing capacity, strengthen legal and institutional frameworks, and design benefit-sharing mechanisms that promote inclusive development rather than deepen

extractive dependencies? Addressing this gap provides the central motivation for the present study.

1.3 Research Objectives

General Objective

To examine how China–United States competition for critical clean-energy minerals reflects contemporary forms of postcolonial power relations in Central and Southern Africa.

Specific Objectives

1. Examine China's mineral diplomacy in Central, East and Southern Africa.
2. Assess the strategic responses of the United States to China's growing mineral influence.
3. Analyse the bargaining strategies and agency of African governments in managing critical mineral resources.
4. Evaluate whether contemporary mineral competition represents a form of neo-colonial resource governance.
5. Discuss the implications of this competition for sustainable development in Central and Southern Africa.

1.4 Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How has China expanded its influence over critical clean-energy minerals in Central, East and Southern Africa?
2. How is the United States responding to China's growing mineral presence in the region?
3. To what extent do African governments exercise agency in negotiating critical mineral investments?
4. Does current competition over critical minerals reinforce postcolonial dependency?
5. What are the implications of this competition for sustainable regional development?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the growing literature on critical minerals, international political economy, and postcolonial resource governance by providing a theoretical and empirical assessment of the China–United States competition in Central and Southern Africa. The findings will assist African policymakers in designing strategies that maximise national benefits from critical mineral resources while strengthening local industrialisation and resource governance.

The study also contributes to scholarship on resource governance by integrating postcolonial theory with contemporary geopolitical competition surrounding the

global energy transition. It provides insights for researchers, development practitioners, and environmental governance experts seeking to understand how strategic mineral competition influences economic transformation, regional integration, and sustainable development in Africa.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Conceptual Review

Critical Clean-Energy Minerals

Critical clean-energy minerals are mineral resources that are indispensable for low-carbon technologies while being vulnerable to supply disruptions. These include cobalt, lithium, graphite, copper, manganese, nickel, and rare earth elements, which are essential for batteries, wind turbines, electric vehicles, solar technologies, and electricity transmission infrastructure. The International Energy Agency (IEA, 2024) projects continued growth in demand for these minerals under all major energy-transition scenarios, making secure and diversified supply chains a strategic priority.

Central and Southern Africa occupy a strategic position in these supply chains because of their substantial mineral endowments. The Democratic Republic of Congo dominates global cobalt production, and Zambia remains a leading copper producer, while Zimbabwe and Namibia have attracted increasing investment in lithium and other battery minerals. Although the region is rich in mineral resources, processing and refining remain concentrated outside Africa, limiting domestic value creation (UNCTAD, 2023; IEA, 2024).

Global Competition for Critical Mineral Supply Chains

The clean-energy transition has transformed critical minerals from commercial commodities into strategic geopolitical assets. Major economies increasingly seek secure access to mining, refining, and transport infrastructure to reduce supply-chain vulnerabilities. China has strengthened its position through long-term mining investments and processing capacity, while the United States and its allies have promoted supply-chain diversification through strategic partnerships and infrastructure investments. This competition extends beyond mineral extraction to include transport corridors, logistics, and downstream industrial capacity (IEA, 2024).

Resource Governance and African Agency

'Resource governance' refers to the institutions,

policies, and legal frameworks through which governments regulate the extraction and utilisation of natural resources. Contemporary debates increasingly emphasise that mineral-rich African countries should move beyond exporting raw materials toward local beneficiation, industrialisation, and participation in global value chains. UNCTAD (2025) argues that industrial policies supporting domestic processing and manufacturing are essential if developing countries are to capture greater economic value from the energy transition.

2.2 Empirical Literature

Recent studies demonstrate that China's engagement with Africa has evolved from infrastructure financing to a broader strategy centred on securing strategic minerals required for industrial and technological development. Chinese state-owned enterprises maintain significant investments in mining operations, mineral processing, and transport infrastructure, particularly in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zambia. Although Chinese lending has moderated in recent years, commercial investment in strategic sectors remains substantial (Carmody, 2016; Ouma, 2012). In South Sudan, China's engagement to date has been concentrated mainly in the oil sector rather than large-scale strategic-minerals projects; nonetheless, Chinese firms' experience in oil infrastructure, exploration services, and construction illustrates the commercial and technical channels through which China could expand into mining if significant deposits are identified and security conditions permit (World Bank, 2022; PACT & Sudd Institute, 2021).

The United States has responded by strengthening critical mineral diplomacy through partnerships aimed at diversifying supply chains and reducing dependence on dominant suppliers. Rather than replicating China's investment model, US initiatives increasingly emphasise infrastructure development, private-sector participation, and resilient mineral supply chains. These policies reflect broader geopolitical concerns regarding energy security and strategic competition in the global green economy (IEA, 2024). For South Sudan, US engagement has historically prioritised governance support, stabilisation, and humanitarian assistance rather than direct mineral diplomacy; however, shifting US priorities on critical minerals could open avenues for technical assistance on regulatory reform, environmental safeguards, and capacity building for nascent mining oversight (U.S. Department of State, 2024; Transparency International, 2021).

Empirical evidence further suggests that the energy transition presents both opportunities and risks for African economies. Rising demand for critical minerals could stimulate industrial development, employment, and export earnings. However, continued dependence on exporting unprocessed minerals may reinforce

commodity dependence and unequal participation in global value chains. UNCTAD (2024) therefore emphasises that mineral-producing countries should prioritise value addition, technological upgrading, and industrial diversification to maximise developmental benefits. In South Sudan's context—where the economy remains heavily oil-dependent and downstream refining and mineral-processing capacity is minimal—these recommendations underscore the need to proactively map mineral potential, invest in vocational and technical training, and design policies that encourage local content and value addition should critical-mineral extraction commence (UNCTAD, 2023; World Bank, 2022).

Emerging scholarship also questions whether contemporary competition represents a "new scramble" for African resources. While external powers increasingly compete for strategic minerals, African governments have demonstrated greater bargaining capacity through contract renegotiations, local content policies, and regional cooperation. These developments suggest that African states are not merely passive recipients of foreign investment but increasingly shape the governance of strategic mineral resources (Carmody, 2023; Ouma, 2012). South Sudan's ability to exercise similar agency is currently constrained by institutional weakness, insecurity, and limited technical expertise; nevertheless, growing domestic advocacy for extractive transparency and recent policy dialogues signal potential for improved bargaining, particularly if regional partners and donors support capacity-building and legal reform (PACT & Sudd Institute, 2021; Transparency International, 2021).

Literature Gap

Existing empirical studies have largely examined critical minerals from economic, environmental, or geopolitical perspectives. Similarly, research on China–Africa and United States–Africa relations frequently emphasises investment patterns, infrastructure development, or supply-chain security. Comparatively little scholarship explicitly applies postcolonial theory to explain how contemporary competition over critical clean-energy minerals reproduces—or challenges—historical structures of dependency while accounting for the growing agency of African states. This study addresses that gap by integrating postcolonial analysis with recent debates on critical mineral governance and strategic competition.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in **postcolonial** theory, which examines how colonial structures of power continue to shape political, economic, and cultural relations after formal independence. Rather than viewing colonialism as

a historical event alone, postcolonial scholars argue that contemporary international relations often reproduce unequal systems of control through economic dependence, knowledge production, and institutional influence (Said, 1978; Kalaycı & Kuşçi, 2021).

Edward Said's concept of power and representation demonstrates how dominant actors construct narratives that justify intervention and control over less powerful societies. In resource governance, these narratives frequently portray resource-rich states primarily as suppliers of raw materials rather than as industrial economies capable of moving up global value chains (Said, 1978; Kalaycı & Kuşçi, 2021).

Howell (1996) extends postcolonial analysis by emphasising hybridity and negotiation, arguing that formerly colonised societies possess the capacity to reshape relationships with external powers rather than simply submit to them. This perspective is particularly relevant to African governments that increasingly renegotiate mining agreements, promote local beneficiation, and diversify international partnerships. The theory provides an appropriate analytical lens for this study because the contemporary competition between China and the United States extends beyond access to minerals; it reflects broader struggles over economic influence, infrastructure development, technological leadership, and global governance. At the same time, postcolonial theory enables the study to examine African states as active participants whose policy choices influence the outcomes of geopolitical competition rather than treating them solely as objects of external rivalry.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design to examine the geopolitical competition between China and the United States over critical clean-energy minerals in Central, Eastern and Southern Africa through the lens of postcolonial theory. A qualitative approach is appropriate because it facilitates an in-depth interpretation of policy documents, scholarly literature, and institutional reports concerning resource governance, strategic mineral diplomacy, and geopolitical relations. Unlike quantitative methods that emphasise numerical measurement, qualitative research enables the exploration of meanings, power relations, and institutional dynamics embedded within documentary evidence (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3.2 Research Approach

The study employs a documentary research approach based entirely on secondary data. Documentary research is particularly suitable for studies

involving international political economy because it enables the systematic examination of existing evidence from multiple authoritative sources. This approach also allows the researcher to compare policy positions, institutional reports, and scholarly arguments regarding critical minerals, resource governance, and geopolitical competition without collecting primary data from respondents (Bowen, 2009).

3.3 Sources of Data

The study relies exclusively on secondary data obtained from credible academic and institutional sources. These include:

- Peer-reviewed journal articles on critical minerals, postcolonialism, resource governance, and international political economy.
 - i. World Bank publications.
 - ii. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reports.
 - iii. African Union policy documents
 - iv. UNECA
 - v. Official publications from the United States Department of State relating to critical mineral partnerships.
 - vi. Official policy papers and white papers issued by the government of China.
 - vii. Government documents from selected Central and Southern African countries, particularly the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Namibia, and Angola.

The selection of these sources was informed by their credibility, relevance to the study objectives, and authority in reporting developments relating to critical mineral governance.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected through a systematic desk review of published documents. Relevant materials were identified using academic databases including Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Wiley Online Library, Taylor & Francis Online, and official institutional repositories. Search terms included *critical minerals*, *China–Africa relations*, *United States–Africa relations*, *critical mineral supply chains*, *energy transition*, *resource governance*, *postcolonial theory*, *neo-colonialism*, *Central Africa*, and *Southern Africa*.

To ensure relevance and currency, greater emphasis was placed on literature published between **2021 and 2025**, while foundational theoretical works on postcolonialism were included because of their enduring relevance to the analytical framework.

3.5 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The study included documents that met the following criteria:

- i. Published in peer-reviewed journals or by reputable international organisations.
- ii. Focused on critical minerals, energy transition, resource governance, China–Africa relations, United States–Africa relations, or postcolonial political economy.
- iii. Published primarily between 2021 and 2025, except for classical theoretical literature.
- iv. Written in English.
- v. Directly relevant to Central, Eastern and Southern Africa.

Documents lacking academic credibility, unpublished opinion pieces, blogs, magazine articles, and sources without identifiable authorship or institutional authority were excluded from the analysis.

3.6 Method of Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed using thematic content analysis. This analytical technique involves identifying recurring patterns, concepts, and themes across documentary sources before interpreting their implications within the study's theoretical framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The analysis was organised around the following themes:

- Global demand for critical clean-energy minerals.
- China's mineral diplomacy in Africa.
- United States strategic responses.
- Resource governance and African agency.
- Neo-colonialism and dependency.
- Local beneficiation and industrialisation.
- Sustainable development and regional cooperation.

These themes correspond directly with the study's research objectives and provide a coherent framework for interpreting the empirical evidence.

3.7 Trustworthiness of the Study

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, the study employed source triangulation by comparing information from multiple peer-reviewed publications and official institutional reports. Cross-referencing diverse sources reduced the likelihood of relying on a single perspective and strengthened the credibility of the interpretations. In addition, preference was given to publications from internationally recognised organisations and reputable academic publishers.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Since the study relied exclusively on publicly available secondary data, no human participants were involved, and ethical approval for primary data collection was not required. Nevertheless, the research adhered to established principles of academic integrity through accurate citation of all sources, objective interpretation of evidence, and faithful representation of authors' original arguments. All references are presented in accordance with the American Psychological Association (APA 7th edition) guidelines.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 China's Mineral Diplomacy in Central, Eastern and Southern Africa

China's Mineral Diplomacy in Central, Eastern and Southern Africa. The analysis of secondary data indicates that China has emerged as the dominant external actor in the critical mineral sector of Central and Southern Africa through a long-term strategy that integrates mining investment, infrastructure development, mineral processing, industrial cooperation, and diplomatic engagement. Unlike traditional foreign investment models that focused primarily on mineral extraction, China's approach encompasses the entire mineral value chain, from exploration and extraction to refining, transportation, and manufacturing. This integrated strategy has strengthened China's position within global supply chains for minerals required for electric vehicles, renewable energy technologies, and advanced battery production (Carmody, 2016; Ouma, 2012). In South Sudan, however, China's engagement has been shaped more by oil, roads, and hydropower than by major critical-minerals extraction projects (AidData, 2025; Reuters, 2012).

A defining feature of China's engagement is its substantial investment in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), which possesses the world's largest cobalt reserves and remains the leading producer of cobalt globally. Chinese enterprises have acquired significant interests in major cobalt and copper mining operations through mergers, acquisitions, and joint ventures established over the past two decades. These investments have enabled China to secure a stable supply of cobalt while simultaneously expanding its refining capacity, thereby positioning itself as the world's leading processor of battery minerals. From a postcolonial perspective, this strategy reflects an evolution from direct territorial control to economic influence exercised through investment, finance, technology, and industrial integration (Carmody, 2016; Vivoda, 2023). In South Sudan, this influence is visible in commodity-linked financing and

strategic infrastructure projects that support broader resource access and political influence (AidData, 2025; Reuters, 2012).

Beyond the DRC, China has significantly expanded its presence in Zambia's copper sector. Copper remains indispensable for electricity transmission, renewable energy infrastructure, and electric vehicle manufacturing due to its high electrical conductivity. Chinese firms have invested in mine rehabilitation, processing facilities, and transport infrastructure designed to improve mineral exports. Although these investments have revitalised several mining operations and contributed to employment generation, concerns persist regarding local value addition, environmental sustainability, labour practices, and the extent of technology transfer to host countries (AfDB, 2024; UNCTAD, 2023). Consequently, while Chinese investment has enhanced production capacity, debates continue regarding whether these benefits sufficiently support long-term structural transformation within African economies.

Zimbabwe has similarly become a strategic destination for Chinese investment because of its rapidly expanding lithium industry. As global demand for lithium-ion batteries continues to increase, Chinese companies have acquired interests in several lithium projects while investing in processing facilities intended to strengthen downstream production. Zimbabwe's recent policies encouraging domestic beneficiation rather than the unrestricted export of raw lithium demonstrate growing efforts by African governments to negotiate more favourable investment arrangements. These developments suggest that African states are increasingly seeking to convert mineral wealth into industrial development rather than remaining suppliers of raw materials. South Sudan has not yet become a major lithium destination, but its policymakers could learn from such beneficiation strategies as they consider future mineral governance and diversification (UNCTAD, 2023; World Bank, 2022).

China's mineral diplomacy extends beyond mining investment to include infrastructure financing under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Railways, highways, ports, power projects, and logistics corridors facilitate mineral transportation from inland mining regions to international markets. Such infrastructure improves regional connectivity and reduces transport costs while simultaneously strengthening China's commercial relationships with resource-rich countries. From a postcolonial perspective, infrastructure investment functions not merely as economic cooperation but also as an instrument through which long-term strategic influence is established. Infrastructure therefore becomes both a development asset and a geopolitical instrument within contemporary international relations (Carmody, 2023; Ouma, 2012). In South Sudan, Chinese-backed infrastructure and energy projects have played a similar

dual role, supporting reconstruction while also deepening long-term economic ties (AidData, 2025; Reuters, 2012). Another important finding concerns China's dominance in mineral processing. Although many African countries possess abundant mineral reserves, a substantial proportion of processing and refining continues to occur outside the continent, particularly within China. Consequently, African economies frequently export relatively low-value raw materials while importing higher-value manufactured products derived from those same minerals. This pattern resembles historical colonial trade structures in which colonies supplied raw materials for industrial production elsewhere. Nevertheless, unlike classical colonialism, current arrangements are negotiated through bilateral agreements between sovereign states, creating opportunities for African governments to renegotiate investment conditions and pursue greater domestic industrialisation (UNCTAD, 2023; AfDB, 2024). For South Sudan, the absence of local refining and mineral-processing capacity means that even future discoveries could repeat this pattern unless deliberate value-addition policies are adopted early (World Bank, 2022).

Despite criticisms concerning dependency and unequal economic relationships, evidence from the reviewed literature also demonstrates that Chinese engagement has expanded infrastructure, increased mining output, generated employment opportunities, and attracted capital to sectors that previously experienced limited international investment. Therefore, China's mineral diplomacy should not be interpreted solely as a continuation of colonial extraction but rather as a complex relationship characterised by both opportunities for development and risks of renewed dependency (Carmody, 2023; Vivoda, 2023). The developmental outcomes ultimately depend on the institutional capacity of African governments to negotiate contracts, enforce regulations, promote transparency, and implement effective industrial policies. In South Sudan, these outcomes will depend especially on strengthening institutions, improving transparency in extractive governance, and ensuring that resource deals support national development priorities (AidData, 2025; Transparency International, 2021).

Overall, the findings indicate that China's influence has expanded through an integrated strategy combining mineral acquisition, infrastructure development, processing capacity, diplomatic engagement, and long-term commercial partnerships. This multidimensional approach has positioned China as the leading external actor in Africa's critical mineral economy while simultaneously reshaping global supply chains for clean-energy technologies. South Sudan remains a smaller and more fragile case within this broader pattern, but its resource governance choices will determine whether external engagement produces development gains or

renewed dependency (AidData, 2025; World Bank, 2022).

Discussion in Relation to Research Question One

The findings answer the first research question by demonstrating that China has expanded its influence over Africa's critical minerals through coordinated investment across the entire mineral value chain rather than through extraction alone. Its strategy combines mining ownership, infrastructure financing, downstream processing, industrial cooperation, and diplomatic partnerships that collectively strengthen long-term access to strategic minerals. While this approach has contributed to economic development in several African countries, it also raises concerns regarding dependency, unequal value distribution, and continued external control over mineral supply chains. Consequently, China's mineral diplomacy reflects both developmental cooperation and strategic geopolitical competition within the global energy transition.

4.2 United States Strategic Responses to China's Growing Mineral Influence

The analysis further reveals that the United States has substantially intensified its engagement with Africa's critical mineral sector in response to China's expanding influence. Unlike China's investment model, which emphasises direct participation in mining operations and mineral processing, the United States has adopted a strategy centred on supply-chain resilience, strategic partnerships, infrastructure development, private-sector investment, and multilateral cooperation (U.S. Department of State, 2026; Reuters, 2024). In South Sudan and parts of East Africa, this approach is visible in exploratory mineral partnerships, diplomatic outreach, and efforts to link future mining activity to governance reform and investment transparency (Xinhua, 2019; U.S. Department of State, 2022). This approach reflects broader concerns regarding economic security, technological competitiveness, and the diversification of global supply chains essential for the clean-energy transition.

One of the most significant initiatives has been support for the development of the Lobito Corridor connecting the mineral-rich regions of the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zambia to the Port of Lobito in Angola. The corridor is expected to improve transportation efficiency, reduce export costs, and diversify international access to African minerals. Beyond its economic significance, the project illustrates the strategic importance attached to transport infrastructure within contemporary geopolitical competition (U.S. Department of State, 2026; Reuters, 2026). For East African and South Sudanese policymakers, the Lobito

model highlights how infrastructure can be used not only for export logistics but also for regional integration, corridor-based industrial planning, and future cross-border value chains (Brookings, 2025; Reuters, 2024). Efficient transport networks reduce dependence on existing export routes while strengthening Africa's integration into global markets.

The United States has also strengthened international cooperation through strategic mineral partnerships involving allied governments, development finance institutions, and private investors. Rather than relying primarily on state-owned enterprises, the U.S. approach encourages private-sector participation supported by public financing mechanisms and development institutions. South Sudan's 2019 agreement with U.S.-based REE-Magnesium Inc. and Canada's CVMR Inc. demonstrates that U.S.-linked private sector engagement in East Africa has extended beyond downstream trade arrangements to include early-stage geological mapping, satellite-based mineral resource assessment, and technical cooperation aimed at supporting the development of the country's mining sector (Xinhua, 2019). This model seeks to promote responsible investment, transparent governance, and environmental standards while expanding access to critical mineral resources necessary for domestic manufacturing and technological innovation.

An important feature of recent U.S. engagement is its emphasis on responsible mining practices, environmental sustainability, labour protection, and good governance. Official policy statements increasingly highlight transparency, local economic development, and community participation as essential components of mineral investment. Although implementation varies across countries, these priorities distinguish the American approach from strategies that focus primarily on securing long-term resource access. Nevertheless, critics argue that strategic competition remains the primary motivation underpinning many of these initiatives, with governance objectives often aligned with broader geopolitical interests.

The analysis further indicates that U.S. policy increasingly recognises the importance of supporting mineral processing and value addition within Africa. Rather than concentrating exclusively on raw material extraction, recent initiatives encourage investment in processing facilities capable of generating employment, technological learning, and industrial development (Brookings, 2025; USIP, 2024). Such policies acknowledge that sustainable mineral partnerships require greater participation of African economies in higher-value segments of global supply chains. For South Sudan, this matters because the country's emerging mining sector will need geological data, skills transfer, and downstream planning if it is to avoid repeating the export-only pattern seen in older extractive economies (Xinhua, 2019; World Bank, 2022). Such policies acknowledge that

sustainable mineral partnerships require greater participation of African economies in higher-value segments of global supply chains.

From the perspective of postcolonial theory, the renewed American engagement illustrates how contemporary geopolitical competition increasingly revolves around economic influence rather than direct political domination. Strategic infrastructure, development finance, technology partnerships, and diplomatic cooperation have become instruments through which major powers pursue influence within resource-rich regions. Consequently, competition between China and the United States extends beyond mineral extraction to encompass competing models of development, governance, and international cooperation.

However, unlike previous historical periods characterised by unilateral external control, African governments now possess greater opportunities to negotiate between competing partners. The existence of multiple investors enables governments to seek improved financing conditions, local content requirements, technology transfer, and infrastructure commitments. This emerging multipolar environment potentially strengthens African bargaining capacity, provided that domestic institutions remain sufficiently effective to negotiate and implement favourable agreements. In South Sudan and neighbouring East African states, this bargaining space is still constrained by weak institutions and insecurity, but it also creates an opening for governments to insist on transparency, corridor access, and national capacity-building in future mineral deals (U.S. Department of State, 2022; World Bank, 2022).

Discussion in Relation to Research Question Two

The findings answer the second research question by showing that the United States has responded to China's growing mineral influence through strategic partnerships, infrastructure investment, supply-chain diversification, and governance-focused mineral diplomacy. Rather than replicating China's state-led investment model, the United States emphasises resilient supply chains, multilateral cooperation, private-sector investment, and sustainable resource governance. Although these initiatives seek to reduce dependence on Chinese-controlled mineral supply chains, they also demonstrate that Africa has become a central arena in broader geopolitical competition associated with the global clean-energy transition.

4.3 African Agency and Bargaining Strategies

The analysis demonstrates that the contemporary competition between China and the United States has not rendered African states passive

recipients of external interests. Rather, governments in Central and Southern Africa have increasingly exercised agency by renegotiating mining agreements, strengthening regulatory frameworks, promoting local beneficiation, and diversifying international partnerships, and South Sudan has begun to show similar bargaining potential through its mining law reforms, critical-minerals promotion, and efforts to attract investors while retaining greater national control over resource development (Republic of South Sudan Ministry of Mining, 2026; South Sudan Minister to Showcase Mining Projects to Global Investors at Critical Minerals Africa, 2024). These developments indicate a gradual shift from traditional resource dependency towards more strategic engagement with foreign investors. Although institutional capacity differs across countries, there is growing recognition that critical minerals should contribute to industrialisation, employment creation, and economic diversification rather than merely generating export revenues.

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) provides one of the clearest examples of increasing African agency. As the world's leading producer of cobalt and a major producer of copper, the DRC occupies a central position in global battery mineral supply chains. Successive governments have sought to improve national benefits through revisions of mining legislation, stronger fiscal provisions, and periodic reviews of mining contracts involving foreign companies. These reforms seek to increase public revenue, strengthen environmental oversight, and encourage greater domestic participation in the mining sector. While implementation challenges remain, the reforms illustrate that the DRC is actively attempting to shape the terms under which its strategic resources are exploited rather than accepting externally determined arrangements.

Zambia has similarly adopted reforms aimed at revitalising its copper industry while enhancing domestic economic participation. Government initiatives have focused on attracting responsible investment, improving regulatory certainty, expanding exploration activities, and increasing mineral production to support national development objectives. At the same time, policymakers have emphasised the importance of processing minerals domestically and strengthening linkages between mining and manufacturing. These initiatives reflect an understanding that long-term development depends not only on increased production but also on greater participation in higher-value segments of mineral supply chains.

Zimbabwe has emerged as an important case in Africa's growing lithium economy. Recognising the increasing global demand for battery minerals, the government has introduced measures intended to encourage domestic processing before export. Restrictions on the export of certain forms of unprocessed lithium demonstrate an effort to retain greater value within

the national economy by promoting beneficiation and investment in processing facilities. Although these policies present implementation challenges, they represent a significant departure from historical patterns of exporting raw minerals with limited domestic value addition.

Namibia has likewise pursued policies encouraging local processing and greater domestic participation in critical mineral industries. The country's policy discussions increasingly emphasise industrial development, skills transfer, and downstream investment as essential components of mineral governance. Rather than relying exclusively on mineral exports, Namibia seeks to position itself as an active participant within regional and global clean-energy value chains.

Angola presents another dimension of African agency through its strategic location within emerging transport infrastructure. The development of the Lobito Corridor enhances Angola's importance as a regional logistics hub connecting inland mineral-producing countries with international markets. By leveraging its geographical position, Angola has the opportunity to expand its role beyond that of a resource exporter to become an important facilitator of regional trade and economic integration.

Beyond individual country initiatives, African governments have increasingly recognised the value of regional cooperation. Continental frameworks such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the African Union's Agenda 2063 provide opportunities for harmonising mineral policies, promoting regional value chains, and strengthening Africa's collective bargaining position. Regional cooperation also offers prospects for coordinated infrastructure development, cross-border industrialisation, and shared technological advancement.

Nevertheless, African agency remains constrained by several structural challenges. Limited financial resources, inadequate processing capacity, governance weaknesses, technological dependence, and infrastructure deficits continue to restrict the ability of many countries to capture greater value from their mineral resources. Competition among African states for foreign investment may also reduce bargaining power where governments offer extensive incentives to attract investors. Consequently, while evidence demonstrates increasing policy autonomy, significant institutional and economic constraints remain.

From the perspective of postcolonial theory, these developments challenge deterministic interpretations that portray African states solely as victims of external domination. Instead, they illustrate that postcolonial societies possess varying degrees of negotiating capacity and strategic choice. Although unequal global power relations continue to influence outcomes, African governments increasingly exercise agency through policy reform, institutional development, and strategic engagement with competing international partners.

Discussion in Relation to Research Question Three

The findings demonstrate that African governments exercise agency through legislative reforms, contract renegotiations, local beneficiation policies, regional cooperation, and diversification of international partnerships. While structural inequalities continue to shape negotiations with major powers, African states are increasingly influencing the governance of their critical mineral resources rather than simply accommodating external interests. Their ability to maximise developmental outcomes, however, depends largely on institutional effectiveness, policy consistency, and regional collaboration.

4.4 Contemporary Mineral Competition as Neo-Colonial Resource Governance

The central objective of this study is to determine whether the current competition between China and the United States represents a contemporary form of neo-colonial resource governance. Analysis of the available evidence suggests that the answer is neither entirely affirmative nor entirely negative. Instead, the competition reflects a complex interaction between enduring structures of dependency and emerging forms of African agency that distinguish the current era from classical colonialism.

Postcolonial theory argues that political independence does not necessarily eliminate unequal economic relationships. Rather, external influence may continue through investment, trade, finance, technology, and international institutions. Within the context of critical minerals, both China and the United States seek long-term access to resources that are indispensable for their industrial competitiveness, technological innovation, and energy security. Consequently, Africa has become an important arena within broader geopolitical competition associated with the global energy transition.

One characteristic associated with neo-colonial governance is the continued export of raw materials with limited domestic value addition. Despite possessing abundant deposits of cobalt, lithium, copper, graphite, and manganese, most countries in Central and Southern Africa continue to participate primarily at the extraction stage of global supply chains. Processing, refining, battery manufacturing, and advanced technological production remain concentrated in more industrialised economies. This distribution of economic activities resembles historical colonial trade patterns in which African economies supplied raw materials while manufacturing occurred elsewhere.

A second characteristic concerns asymmetrical bargaining power. Large multinational corporations and foreign governments often possess superior financial resources, technological capabilities, and negotiating

experience compared with many resource-rich African countries. These asymmetries may influence contract negotiations, investment conditions, and access to advanced technologies. Although governments increasingly seek more favourable agreements, unequal capacities continue to shape the distribution of economic benefits.

Infrastructure has also become an important instrument of geopolitical influence. Chinese investment under the Belt and Road Initiative and Western support for transport initiatives such as the Lobito Corridor illustrate that infrastructure development is closely connected with strategic mineral access. Railways, ports, power systems, and transport corridors facilitate economic development but simultaneously strengthen the long-term commercial presence of external actors. From a postcolonial perspective, infrastructure therefore functions as both a development resource and a mechanism through which influence is consolidated.

However, important differences distinguish contemporary competition from classical colonialism. First, African countries are internationally recognised sovereign states with authority to negotiate investment agreements, revise legislation, and determine national development priorities. Unlike the colonial period, governments possess legal authority to regulate mining activities, impose taxation, introduce beneficiation requirements, and terminate agreements where national interests require such action.

Second, competition between multiple external partners creates opportunities for strategic bargaining. Rather than depending exclusively on a single foreign power, African governments increasingly engage simultaneously with China, the United States, the European Union, Gulf countries, India, Japan, and other investors. This diversification expands policy options and may strengthen negotiating capacity where governments effectively coordinate investment strategies.

Third, growing international attention to environmental sustainability, responsible mining, and community participation has introduced new governance expectations within the mineral sector. Although implementation remains uneven, environmental and social considerations now occupy a more prominent position in mining governance than during previous periods of resource extraction.

The findings therefore suggest that contemporary mineral competition should not be interpreted simply as a repetition of colonial exploitation. Instead, it represents a hybrid system characterised by both continuity and change. Elements of dependency remain evident through unequal technological capabilities, limited domestic processing, and external control over significant segments of mineral value chains. At the same time, increasing African policy autonomy, stronger regulatory frameworks, and expanding regional cooperation demonstrate that resource-rich countries possess greater

capacity to influence development outcomes than in earlier historical periods.

Postcolonial theory provides an effective framework for understanding this complexity because it recognises that historical structures of inequality persist while also acknowledging the capacity of formerly colonised societies to negotiate, resist, and reshape external relationships. The theory therefore avoids simplistic interpretations that portray Africa exclusively as either a victim of exploitation or a beneficiary of foreign investment.

Discussion in Relation to Research Question Four

The findings indicate that current competition over critical clean-energy minerals exhibits several characteristics associated with neo-colonial resource governance, including unequal value distribution, external influence over strategic resources, and continued dependence on foreign processing and technology. However, unlike classical colonialism, African governments increasingly exercise policy autonomy through contract renegotiation, beneficiation policies, regulatory reforms, and diversified international partnerships. Contemporary mineral governance should therefore be understood as an evolving postcolonial system in which dependency and agency coexist.

4.5 Implications for Sustainable Development

The competition between China and the United States over critical clean-energy minerals presents significant opportunities for sustainable development in Central and Southern Africa. The increasing global demand for cobalt, copper, lithium, graphite, manganese, and rare earth elements has the potential to generate substantial government revenue, expand foreign direct investment, improve infrastructure, and stimulate industrial development. If effectively managed, these resources can support economic diversification, employment creation, technological advancement, and regional integration. However, achieving these outcomes depends largely on the quality of governance and the policy choices adopted by mineral-producing countries.

One of the most important implications concerns industrialisation and value addition. Historically, many African economies have exported unprocessed minerals while importing finished industrial products, thereby limiting domestic economic benefits. The growing importance of critical minerals provides an opportunity for governments to promote local beneficiation through investments in mineral processing, refining, battery-component manufacturing, and related industries. Expanding domestic participation across the mineral value chain would increase employment, encourage

technology transfer, strengthen small and medium-sized enterprises, and reduce dependence on commodity exports.

Employment generation constitutes another important developmental outcome. The expansion of mining activities has already created jobs in exploration, extraction, logistics, engineering, and supporting services. However, the greatest employment opportunities lie beyond extraction in downstream processing, manufacturing, research, and technological innovation. Investments in technical education, vocational training, and engineering skills are therefore essential if African countries are to develop a competitive workforce capable of supporting an emerging green industrial economy.

The analysis also highlights the importance of institutional governance. Transparent licensing procedures, effective contract management, regulatory accountability, and anti-corruption measures are essential for ensuring that mineral revenues contribute to national development. Weak governance institutions may undermine the developmental potential of mineral wealth through revenue leakages, regulatory capture, and inefficient resource management. Consequently, strengthening public institutions remains a prerequisite for translating mineral abundance into sustainable economic transformation.

Environmental sustainability represents another critical consideration. Although critical minerals are indispensable for the global transition to low-carbon energy systems, their extraction can generate environmental degradation if not properly regulated. Mining operations may contribute to land degradation, biodiversity loss, water pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions where environmental safeguards are inadequate. Sustainable mining practices therefore require effective environmental regulation, rehabilitation of mining sites, responsible waste management, and meaningful consultation with affected communities. Integrating environmental, social, and governance (ESG) principles into mineral governance would enhance both environmental protection and long-term investment sustainability.

Regional integration also emerges as a significant implication of the findings. Individual African countries often possess different mineral resources, infrastructure capacities, and industrial capabilities. Regional cooperation through the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) provides opportunities to develop integrated mineral value chains that connect extraction, processing, manufacturing, and export across multiple countries. Such cooperation could improve economies of scale, strengthen Africa's bargaining position in international markets, and encourage cross-border infrastructure development.

The findings further suggest that diversification of international partnerships can strengthen sustainable development outcomes. Rather than depending exclusively on a single external partner, African governments increasingly engage with multiple countries and international institutions. This diversified approach enables governments to negotiate more favourable investment conditions, encourage competition among investors, and reduce the risks associated with excessive dependence on any one geopolitical actor. Strategic diversification therefore enhances both economic resilience and policy autonomy.

Technology transfer remains another important determinant of sustainable development. Foreign investment should extend beyond capital inflows to include technical training, research collaboration, innovation partnerships, and local capacity development. Countries that successfully negotiate technology-sharing arrangements are more likely to develop domestic industrial capabilities capable of supporting long-term participation in global clean-energy supply chains.

Finally, sustainable development requires balancing economic growth with social inclusion. Mining projects should generate tangible benefits for local communities through employment opportunities, community development programmes, infrastructure provision, and equitable revenue distribution. Inclusive governance mechanisms that involve local stakeholders in decision-making processes are likely to reduce conflict while improving the legitimacy and sustainability of mineral development projects.

Overall, the findings indicate that critical minerals can become a catalyst for sustainable development if African governments adopt policies that prioritise industrialisation, institutional strengthening, environmental protection, regional cooperation, and technological upgrading. Conversely, failure to implement these policies risks reinforcing historical patterns of resource dependence despite the unprecedented opportunities presented by the global green transition.

Discussion in Relation to Research Question Five

The findings demonstrate that competition over critical clean-energy minerals has significant implications for regional development. While increased investment can stimulate economic growth, infrastructure development, and employment, sustainable development will depend on strengthening governance institutions, expanding domestic value addition, promoting responsible environmental management, encouraging technology transfer, and enhancing regional cooperation. Therefore, mineral wealth alone is insufficient; its developmental impact depends on effective resource

governance and strategic national policies.

4.6 Synthesis of Findings

This study examined the "Battle of the Corridors" through the analytical lens of postcolonial theory to understand how contemporary competition between China and the United States over critical clean-energy minerals influences resource governance and development in Central and Southern Africa. The findings reveal that geopolitical competition has evolved beyond traditional resource extraction to encompass transport corridors, mineral processing, industrial investment, technological cooperation, and broader strategic influence.

The first objective sought to examine China's mineral diplomacy in Central and Southern Africa. The findings indicate that China has adopted an integrated strategy combining mining investment, infrastructure development, processing capacity, and long-term commercial partnerships. This multidimensional engagement has enabled China to establish a dominant position across several segments of global critical mineral supply chains while strengthening its geopolitical influence within Africa's emerging green economy.

The second objective assessed the strategic responses of the United States. The analysis demonstrates that the United States has pursued a distinct approach centred on supply-chain diversification, strategic infrastructure, responsible investment, and multilateral partnerships. Rather than replicating China's investment model, American policy seeks to strengthen resilient mineral supply chains through cooperation with African governments and international partners while promoting governance and sustainability principles.

The third objective examined African governments' bargaining strategies and agency. The findings challenge perceptions of African states as passive participants within global geopolitics. Instead, governments have increasingly exercised agency through mining policy reforms, contract renegotiations, beneficiation initiatives, regional cooperation, and diversification of external partnerships. Although institutional capacity varies considerably across countries, African governments possess greater opportunities to influence investment outcomes than during previous historical periods.

The fourth objective evaluated whether contemporary mineral competition represents neo-colonial resource governance. The analysis reveals that elements of dependency remain evident through unequal technological capabilities, limited domestic processing, and external dominance over higher-value segments of mineral supply chains. Nevertheless, the findings also demonstrate important departures from classical colonialism because sovereign African governments increasingly negotiate investment conditions, strengthen

regulatory institutions, and pursue industrial development strategies. Consequently, contemporary competition reflects a hybrid postcolonial environment characterised by both structural inequality and expanding African agency.

The fifth objective considered the implications for sustainable development. The findings suggest that critical minerals provide an unprecedented opportunity for industrialisation, employment creation, technological upgrading, and regional integration. However, realising these opportunities requires stronger institutions, transparent governance, environmental sustainability, domestic value addition, human capital development, and effective implementation of regional economic initiatives such as the African Continental Free Trade Area.

Taken together, the findings support the central argument of this study that the contemporary competition between China and the United States should not be understood solely as a struggle for access to strategic minerals. Rather, it represents a broader contest over global economic influence, technological leadership, and the governance of the clean-energy transition. While postcolonial structures of dependency continue to shape international economic relations, African governments increasingly possess opportunities to transform geopolitical competition into a catalyst for sustainable development through strategic governance, institutional reform, and regional cooperation.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study examined the geopolitical competition between China and the United States over critical clean-energy minerals in Central and Southern Africa through the analytical lens of postcolonial theory. Against the backdrop of the global transition towards clean energy, critical minerals such as cobalt, copper, lithium, graphite, manganese, and rare earth elements have become strategic resources that shape international economic and political relations. Consequently, Central and Southern Africa have emerged as important theatres of geopolitical competition because of their abundant mineral endowments and growing significance within global clean-energy supply chains.

The study found that China has established a dominant position in Africa's critical mineral sector through an integrated strategy combining mining investment, infrastructure development, mineral processing, industrial cooperation, and long-term diplomatic engagement. This comprehensive approach has enabled China to secure significant influence across multiple segments of global critical mineral value chains while strengthening its broader economic and geopolitical presence in Africa.

The findings further revealed that the United States has intensified its engagement through strategic partnerships, infrastructure initiatives, supply-chain diversification, and governance-orientated investment frameworks designed to reduce dependence on concentrated mineral supply chains. Although China's and the United States' approaches differ in implementation, both countries view Africa's critical minerals as indispensable to their economic competitiveness, technological innovation, and national security within the emerging green economy.

Importantly, the study demonstrates that African countries should not be viewed merely as passive arenas of great-power competition. Evidence from the analysis indicates that governments in Central, East and Southern Africa are increasingly exercising agency through policy reforms, contract renegotiations, local beneficiation initiatives, and diversification of international partnerships. These developments illustrate that African governments possess greater opportunities than in previous historical periods to influence the terms under which their natural resources are developed.

For example, South Sudan has a real but still underdeveloped opportunity to turn its mineral endowment into a driver of growth, diversification, and regional relevance. Recent policy attention to mining reform, investor outreach, geological mapping, and critical minerals suggests that the country is beginning to position itself within Africa's emerging clean-energy mineral economy, but its gains will depend on stronger institutions, transparency, and deliberate value addition.

From a postcolonial perspective, the study concludes that contemporary competition reflects both continuity and change. Elements of historical dependency remain evident through external dominance over mineral processing, technology, finance, and global value chains. However, unlike the colonial era, African states now possess internationally recognised sovereignty and increasing policy autonomy that enable them to negotiate more favourable development outcomes where institutional capacity is sufficiently strong. The relationship between external powers and African governments is therefore characterised by negotiation, interdependence, and strategic competition rather than direct colonial control.

Ultimately, the study concludes that the developmental impact of critical mineral wealth will depend less on the intensity of geopolitical competition than on the ability of African governments to strengthen governance institutions, promote domestic industrialisation, encourage value addition, protect environmental resources, and pursue regional cooperation. If effectively managed, the global energy transition presents an unprecedented opportunity for Central and Southern Africa to transform mineral wealth into sustainable

economic development rather than reproducing historical patterns of resource dependency.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Promote Domestic Mineral Beneficiation and Value Addition

Governments in Central and Southern Africa should prioritise policies that encourage domestic mineral processing, refining, and manufacturing instead of relying primarily on the export of raw minerals. Expanding downstream industries would create employment opportunities, increase export earnings, and reduce dependence on external processing facilities.

2. Strengthen Resource Governance Institutions

Governments should strengthen mining governance, licensing, and revenue management to improve accountability and investor confidence by improving transparency, accountability, and regulatory oversight within the mining sector through strengthening institutions responsible for licensing, contract negotiation, revenue management, environmental compliance, and anti-corruption measures. Strong institutions are essential for ensuring that mineral wealth contributes to long-term national development.

3. Enhance Regional Cooperation

African governments should utilise regional frameworks such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the African Union's development agenda to establish integrated regional mineral value chains. Deepen cooperation with East African and African regional frameworks to improve bargaining power and support cross-border value chains. Greater cooperation would improve bargaining power, facilitate cross-border industrialisation, and strengthen Africa's position within global supply chains.

4. Diversify International Partnerships

Rather than depending excessively on a single external partner, African countries should maintain diversified economic and diplomatic relationships with multiple international actors. Competitive partnerships create greater opportunities for negotiating favourable investment conditions, technology transfer, infrastructure development, and local economic participation.

5. Prioritise Technology Transfer and Human Capital Development

Future investment agreements should incorporate clear provisions for technology transfer, Accelerate geological surveys, mineral mapping, and data systems to identify commercially viable deposits and reduce uncertainty for investors. There should be technical training, research collaboration, and skills development. Building domestic technological capacity is necessary for enabling African countries to participate in higher-value segments of the global clean-energy economy.

6. Promote Environmentally Sustainable Mining

Governments should strengthen environmental regulations governing mining operations by enforcing responsible extraction practices, land rehabilitation, biodiversity protection, water resource management, and community participation. Sustainable mining practices will ensure that economic development does not occur at the expense of environmental integrity or social well-being. Equally, governments should put environmental safeguards and community benefit-sharing mechanisms at the center of mining policy to reduce conflict and protect livelihoods.

7. Improve Infrastructure that Supports Industrial Development

Use mineral partnerships to support Infrastructure investments in roads, energy, and skills development and extend beyond facilitating mineral exports to include industrial parks, reliable electricity supply, transportation networks, digital infrastructure, and logistics systems that support manufacturing, domestic value addition and contributes to broader economic transformation. Such investments would enhance industrial competitiveness and reduce production costs.

8. Encourage Strategic African Bargaining

Governments should strengthen technical expertise in contract negotiation and mineral policy to improve their ability to negotiate equitable agreements with foreign investors. Negotiate future mineral deals is vital to secure local content, technology transfer, and domestic processing rather than raw export alone. Regional cooperation in negotiating major strategic mineral investments could further enhance Africa's collective bargaining position within the global economy.

5.3 Contribution to Knowledge

This study contributes to the literature by integrating

postcolonial theory with contemporary debates on critical clean-energy minerals and geopolitical competition. Unlike many previous studies that examine China's or the United States' engagement separately, this study provides a comparative analysis of both powers while simultaneously emphasising African agency. The study further demonstrates that current geopolitical competition should not be interpreted solely as a continuation of colonial extraction but as an evolving postcolonial system in which dependency, negotiation, and strategic autonomy coexist.

5.4 Suggestions for Future Research

Future studies may adopt mixed-methods or primary-data approaches involving policymakers, mining companies, local communities, and regional organisations to assess how critical mineral governance influences sustainable development at national and community levels. Comparative studies involving Latin America, Southeast Asia, and other mineral-rich regions could also provide broader insights into the evolving geopolitics of the global energy transition. In addition, future research should examine the long-term effects of emerging industrial policies, mineral beneficiation initiatives, and regional value chains on Africa's economic transformation within the global green economy.

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