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MINERALS, MARKETS, AND MILITARIES: AFRICA'S CRITICAL RAW MATERIALS AND INDIA'S SECURITY CALCULUS

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This guest lecture explored the rising strategic importance of Africa's essential raw materials, as well as the ramifications for global markets, military security, and India's diplomatic and economic policies. Africa has some of the world's largest deposits of vital minerals used in electric cars, renewable energy systems, aerospace, electronics, and advanced defence technology. Cobalt from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, lithium from Zimbabwe and Mali, rare earth elements from South Africa and Malawi, and graphite and nickel from Morocco, Madagascar, and South Africa are all valuable resources. Despite this richness, Africa's contribution has generally been restricted to extraction because of financial constraints, poor infrastructure, inadequate technical competence, energy difficulties, and insufficient regional collaboration.

Africa's mineral richness provides significant development potential, such as economic growth, infrastructural expansion, job creation, and technical innovation. There is substantial potential for value addition through local refining and downstream processing, which would boost profits and link African economies into higher-value global supply networks. However, these prospects are limited by governance and transparency issues, environmental and social hazards, and infrastructure gaps in transportation, electricity, and logistics.

Beyond resources, Africa is a rapidly increasing market, with a population of over 1.4 billion and the world's youngest median age. Rapid urbanisation and a burgeoning middle class are fuelling demand for consumer goods, digital services, healthcare, and education. The African Continental Free Trade Area (ACFTA) has the potential to considerably strengthen intra-African commerce and regional value chains. Meanwhile, fragmented rules, non-tariff obstacles, inequality, and infrastructural deficiencies continue to impede market integration and purchasing power.

Minerals are becoming more linked to security and military dynamics. Uranium, cobalt, lithium, gold, and rare earths are critical minerals for weaponry and military sectors. Control of mineral-rich areas entails both local and foreign military participation. State troops frequently safeguard mining districts and transportation routes, but in areas with weak government, armed groups dominate artisanal mining and smuggling networks, utilising mineral income to fuel fighting. External countries routinely link military cooperation, training missions, and base access to resource and supply chain interests, resulting in militarised extraction and less civilian supervision.

The lecture compared India's and China's engagement with Africa. China maintains persistent, high-level diplomatic attention, as seen by its foreign ministry's yearly Africa

visits and comprehensive China-Africa cooperation framework. China's approach combines crucial mineral supply chains, security agreements, political links, and soft-power measures, including cultural exchanges, health programs, education projects, and internet connectivity. Its five-point program focuses on resource security, political alignment, and military modernisation alliances.

In comparison, India is characterised as "there but not there". Although India has established initiatives such as the India-Africa Forum Summit, extended lines of credit through Exim Bank, expanded UN peacekeeping and security training cooperation, and increased commerce to around \$100 billion, it has not completely capitalised on its comparative advantages. India's 2018 ten-point Africa agenda and support for African Union membership in the G20 and BRICS demonstrate commitment, however, implementation issues persist.

The lecture concludes that India needs a more comprehensive, whole-of-government Africa policy based on both norms and pragmatic interests. Supporting Africa's progress along the vital mineral values chain, coordinating institutions, and forming issue-based relationships with like-minded nations will boost India's strategic position while also promoting Africa's long-term development.