

The United States is in early discussions with the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) about a possible deal that would give American companies access to Congo's valuable minerals in exchange for military support, according to the Financial Times.

The idea came up two weeks ago, after DRC President Félix Tshisekedi told The New York Times that the Trump administration had shown interest in the country's mineral resources.

Congo is one of the richest countries in Africa in terms of natural resources. It produces over 70% of the world's cobalt, a key mineral used in electric car batteries, and also has large reserves of gold, copper, lithium, tin, and tantalum.

However, many of these minerals are in eastern DRC, a region controlled by the M23 rebel group. According to the United Nations.

While talks are still in the early stages, any agreement could see the US help train and equip the Congolese military to fight back against rebel groups.

Congolese Senator Pierre Kandi Kalambayi has written to US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, suggesting that US companies be granted mining rights in return for military assistance.

Government spokesperson Patrick Muyaya said last week that Congo wants to "diversify its partners" and that there are "daily exchanges" with the US.

The US also sees this as a chance to reduce China's dominance in the Congolese mining sector. A US State Department spokesperson told the Financial Times that the DRC holds many of the world's most important minerals for new technologies, and the US is open to partnerships that support its "America First" agenda.