



By: *Tomorrow's Affairs Staff*

Is the honeymoon between Russia and Africa coming to an end?



Kenya recently urged Russia to stop recruiting its citizens for the war in Ukraine.

Kenya's Foreign Minister, **Musalia Mudavadi**, stated after discussions with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in Moscow, "They will no longer be eligible to be enlisted."

Data from **Kenyan intelligence agencies** reveal that over a thousand of its citizens have been recruited for the war in Ukraine.

This appears to represent a significant proportion of the total number of Africans fighting for Russia in Ukraine, which **Kyiv estimates at 1,700 fighters**.

Since, according to Kyiv's assessment, fighters for Russian units are being recruited in more than 30 African countries, this African contingent on the Russian side could be much larger.

This is supported by increasingly frequent **testimonies from African men**, who describe in detail how they arrived at the Ukrainian front, only to realise they had been deceived.

A common theme in their accounts points to a fraudulent system organised by Russia, in which Africans are offered well-paid jobs in Russia, which soon turn into military service and deployment to the Ukrainian front.

Stopping the recruitment of fighters

This is why some African countries are attempting to halt the recruitment channels for fighters, which Russia relies on to compensate for the declining number of domestic soldiers sent to the Ukrainian front.

According to its minister, Kenya has already repatriated 27 of its citizens who fought in Russian units and has closed as many as 600 agencies at home that were involved in recruiting soldiers for Moscow.

South Africa managed to repatriate 11 of its

citizens in February, and at the end of February, Ghana requested that Kyiv release from prison two of its citizens who were captured as members of the Russian army.

Zimbabwe is seeking to repatriate 66 of its citizens from the war zone, while confirming that **15 of its citizens have already died** fighting on Russia's side.

It appears that the Russia-Africa relationship is changing direction, and the trend of stopping the recruitment of foreign fighters and returning them to their home countries is becoming more pronounced.

Any abandonment of the front and closure of recruitment sources is a cause for concern for Moscow

For Russian war planners, this "loss" of one source of fighters may not be particularly concerning, given estimates that Africans constitute only about 10% of all foreign fighters on the Russian side, of whom there are about 20,000.

However, as recruitment for the war in Ukraine weakens and losses continue to rise, any abandonment of the front and closure of recruitment sources is a cause for concern for Moscow.

In 2025, 6% fewer soldiers were **conscripted in Russia** than the previous year, and the ongoing intensity of battles on the front increases the number of casualties on the Russian side daily, which, since the start of the aggression in 2022, has exceeded 1.2 million.

Reducing the military presence in Africa

The weakening of channels for bringing in fighters is only one, albeit acute, aspect of the overall decline in the Russian presence in Africa, which until recently was rapidly expanding.

Russia is experiencing a decline in its position in several countries, including those where it previously played a decisive role in overthrowing governments and taking control of natural resources.

The withdrawal of the Russian paramilitary group **Wagner from Mali** in mid-2025 was a clear sign of the changing nature of Russia's presence in the previously friendly environment of Central Africa and the Sahel.

Although in many parts of the region Wagner has been replaced by forces under the direct control of the Russian Ministry of Defence (Africa Corps), Russia's partners in Africa have perceived this as a weaker presence.

As a result, the authorities of the **Central African Republic** last year asked Moscow not to withdraw Wagner, considering it more militarily effective.

Moscow is increasingly forced to redirect its resources towards its invasion forces in Ukraine and the defence of critical facilities in Russia, given frequent Ukrainian attacks

Furthermore, the government of one of Russia's staunchest allies on the continent was dissatisfied with the new conditions under which Africa Corps would be deployed in the CAR at the expense of the local government.

At the same time, Moscow is increasingly forced to redirect its resources towards its invasion forces in Ukraine and the defence of critical facilities in Russia, given frequent Ukrainian attacks.

The duration and intensity of the war in Ukraine simply do not allow for the simultaneous pursuit of the strategy of expanding influence in Africa, which Moscow has been developing for years.

Previously, Moscow encouraged and directly supported a series of **military coups in the Sahel**, but its security support for the new

rulers has not proved particularly effective.

Poor economic record

Moscow's security withdrawal has coincided with a similarly poor record of providing economic support to its African allies.

Across Africa, there have been numerous recent cases where Russian investment plans have either remained unfulfilled or ended in failure, such as the **collapse of VTB Bank in Angola**.



A Russian military presence on the continent is no longer possible on the scale seen five years ago

There are also unrealised plans for the construction of nuclear power plants in South Africa, platinum mining in Zimbabwe (USD 3.3 billion), and **steel plant in Nigeria**.

Russia's imperial overstretch is now most evident in Africa, where pre-war Moscow sought to fill the security and economic vacuum left by the gradual withdrawal of European (notably French) and American interests.

A Russian **military presence** on the continent is no longer possible on the scale seen five years ago, for example, when Wagner troops arrived in Mali.

The lack of resources for waging war in Ukraine, including soldiers, is forcing Moscow to abandon its recent ambitions for global influence and retreat to its own borders, where it is fighting an existential war.

Meanwhile, after four years, the war-oriented economy cannot support the previous plans for expansion in Africa, largely due to sanctions, the intensity of which is not decreasing.

Russia's honeymoon in Africa appears to be ending, and its complete withdrawal is increasingly likely. Its partnership **brings no benefits to its African allies**, either in security or economic terms, prompting them to seek new partners such as China, Turkey, and Arab countries.