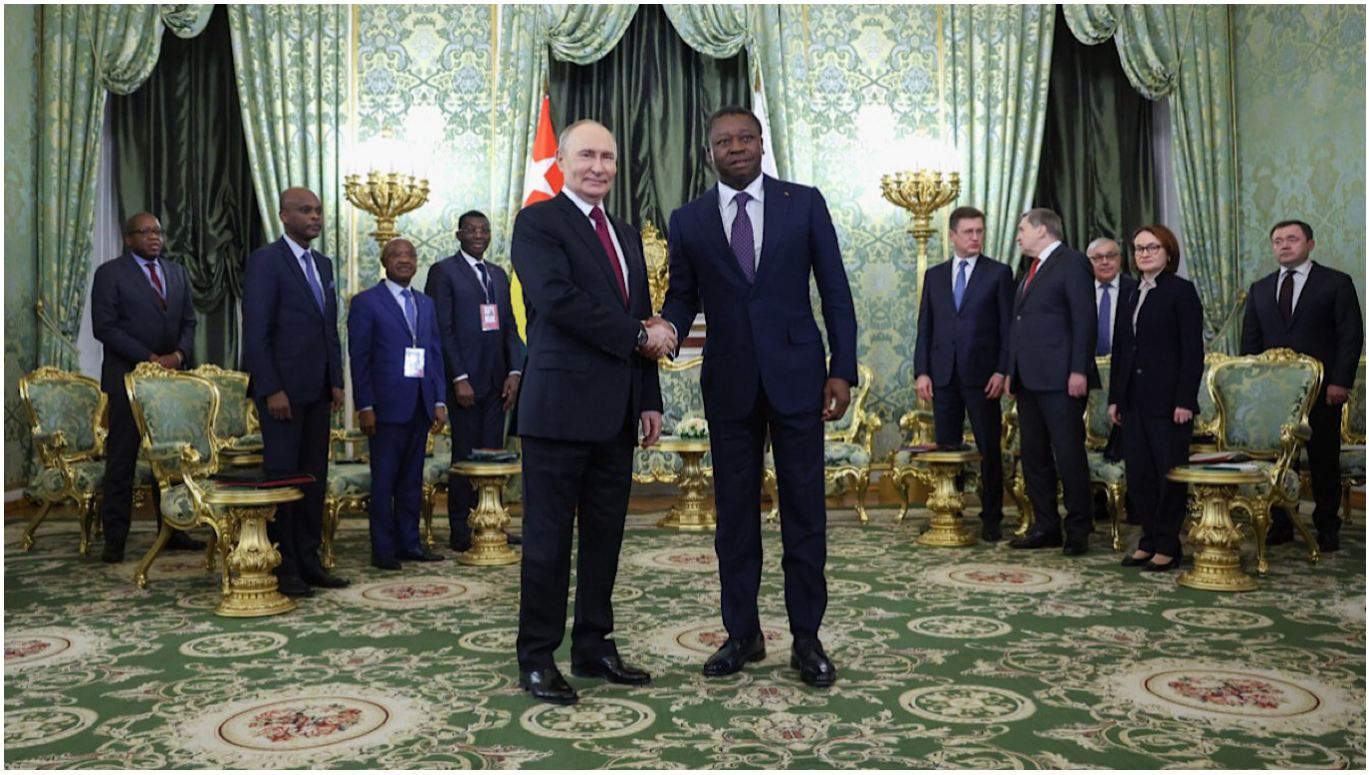
The Moscow Times
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Russia and Togo to Open Embassies as Relations Grow

By AFP

November 20, 2025



Vladimir Putin and Faure Gnassingbé. **Ramil Sitdikov / POOL / AFP**

Russia and Togo will open embassies in each other's capitals next year, the countries' leaders said Wednesday, as Moscow pushes to expand its presence in Africa.

Since launching its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Russia has sought to cultivate political, economic and military partnerships across the African continent, where Western influence has waned in recent years.

Togo has been among the countries moving closer to Moscow, having signed a military cooperation agreement with Russia earlier this year.

"This year, we marked 65 years of diplomatic relations. Strangely enough, during all that time we never opened embassies," President Vladimir Putin told Togo leader Faure Gnassingbé during talks in Moscow. "But we have finally agreed — next year we will open embassies in

both countries."

Gnassingbé thanked Putin for continuing to fund scholarships for Togolese students and said he hoped the new embassies would expand educational ties.

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Togo, a small West African state, has struggled to contain a jihadist insurgency that has spilled over from neighboring Sahel countries, with at least 60 civilians and soldiers killed in attacks this year.

Gnassingbé has also sought to position himself as a regional mediator, including in the conflict between the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda.

Russia, meanwhile, has deepened its security role across the Sahel. In August, it signed a defense memorandum with the military juntas ruling Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, all of which have distanced themselves from France and embraced Moscow, which has sent mercenaries to help them fight jihadist groups.

Russian state TV recently reported that Russian troops are now active in six African countries.

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