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U.S. Believes Cuba Helped Russia Recruit Soldiers to Fight in Ukraine – Axios

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Vladimir Putin and Cuba's President Miguel Díaz-Canel. **kremlin.ru**

The U.S. State Department believes the Cuban government has helped Russia recruit its citizens to fight in the war against Ukraine, Axios reported on Tuesday, citing a report to Congress.

The report states that "significant indicators" suggest authorities in Havana "knowingly tolerated, enabled or selectively facilitated the flow" of Cuban nationals to bolster the Russian armed forces.

"Estimates vary, but most open-source information suggests between 1,000 and 5,000 Cuban citizens are fighting in Ukraine at any given time," Axios cited the report as saying.

Reuters cited a similar number in October, when U.S. diplomats were reportedly instructed to inform governments that Cuba was the second-largest contributor of foreign fighters to

Russia after North Korea.

In the Axios report, the State Department also questioned the Cuban government's previous claims that it has worked to dismantle human trafficking rings involved in such recruitment.

"The Cuban regime has failed to protect its citizens from being used as pawns in the Russia-Ukraine war," a State Department spokesperson told the outlet.

The Moscow Times first exposed the enlistment of Cubans into the Russian army in 2023 when it identified social media groups offering lucrative military contracts and a path to Russian citizenship for recruits and their families.

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Russia has increasingly relied on foreign nationals to sustain its war effort since President Vladimir Putin signed a decree in November 2022 allowing non-citizens to join the armed forces.

More recently, the Russian army is believed to have recruited thousands of men from countries across Africa, according to various estimates.

The influx of foreign fighters has in some cases sparked diplomatic friction between Moscow and its allies. Countries including India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Kenya have asked Russia to stop recruiting their citizens, many of whom were reportedly lured by predatory job offers or false promises of non-combat roles.

Although Russia has only officially acknowledged the presence of North Korean troops, journalists and monitoring groups estimate that thousands of foreign recruits, including at least 3,300 from the global south, have been killed in the conflict.

Ukraine also maintains an international legion of foreign soldiers, though its recruitment efforts are generally publicized.

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