

Cuban Officials Divided Over Citizens' Involvement in Ukraine War

September 15, 2023



Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez. **Yamil Lage / AFP**

Cuba's Foreign Minister and Ambassador to Russia have issued conflicting statements about Havana's stance on its citizens taking part in Moscow's war in Ukraine.

The clashing remarks follow Cuba's [arrest](#) last week of 17 people suspected of having links to an illicit Russian trafficking and recruitment network for what the Kremlin calls its "special military operation."

"The unequivocal and unswerving position of the Cuban government, in accordance with its national legislation, is contrary to the participation of Cuban citizens in conflicts of any sort and against mercenarism and trafficking in persons," Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez [said](#) late Thursday.

Hours earlier, Cuba's Ambassador in Moscow Julio Antonio Garmendia Pena [told](#) Russian state media that his government does not oppose Cubans' participation in the conflict as long as it is "legal."

Related article: [Russia-Based Recruiters Lure Cubans to Fight in Ukraine with Promises of Money, Citizenship](#)

He noted that the 17 people arrested last week were Cuban citizens who “sought to make money under the pretext of an important issue like a military operation and relations between our countries.”

“We’re talking about bad people,” the Cuban diplomat told the RIA Novosti news agency.

“We have nothing against Cubans who just want to sign a contract and legally take part with the Russian army in this operation. But we’re against illegality,” he added.

Cuba was among the 32 UN members to [abstain](#) in this year’s General Assembly vote demanding Russia’s withdrawal from Ukraine. The UN resolution was supported by 141 countries and rejected by seven.

Cuba was an important Cold War ally of the Soviet Union after relations with the U.S. soured in the wake of the 1959 Cuban Revolution. The communist Latin American nation came to rely heavily on Soviet aid, and its students flocked to Russian universities.

Moscow has continued to have good diplomatic relations with Havana since the 1991 collapse of the U.S.S.R.

Historical ties and visa-free travel between the countries have made Russia a popular destination for Cuban migrants.

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