

On Thursday May 25, 2023 Rwanda and Ukraine signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on political consultation.

The MoU was signed by Vincent Biruta, Rwanda's Foreign Affairs Minister and his Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba, after the two had held a bilateral meeting.

Kuleba on his one-day visit during his second Africa tour which he started with visiting Morocco on Monday said that President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has set a clear task for Ukrainian diplomacy: to expand its presence in Africa.

Kuleba noted that after careful analysis, Ukraine is planning to open new embassies in African Countries, one of which will open in Rwanda.

"The Rwandan side has already provided official consent to the creation of a Ukrainian diplomatic mission in Kigali" Kuleba said.

Kuleba's visit to Kigali marks the first state visit by a Ukrainian foreign minister since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries 31 years ago.

Amid the ongoing war, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is trying to launch a major diplomatic offensive. His target is the global South.

Ukraine is planning to send Ambassadors to more than two dozen countries in the middle of the war including Africa, Latin America, and Asia. The idea is to build up a global coalition against Russia.

As part of this plan, Foreign Minister Kuleba made his first trip to Africa in October when he visited Senegal, Ivory Coast, Ghana and Kenya.

However, the trip was cut short after Russia launched strikes against Ukrainian infrastructure.

His Russian counterpart, Sergey Lavrov, was active in shoring up ties with African countries.

Since the Ukraine war broke out, Lavrov has been touring the continent once in 2022 and making at least two visits so far this year.

In Ukraine, Zelenskyy wants to tackle Russia's main narrative, by urging African

countries to abandon their stances of neutrality towards his country's war with Russia.

Against any wish, many African countries have refused to take sides in the European conflict, with several abstaining from votes at the United Nations General Assembly condemning Russia's invasion. Ethiopia is one of them.

Speaking in Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian capital on Wednesday, Kuleba said Ukraine was "very upset that some African countries chose to abstain" and called them to lend Ukraine diplomatic support "in the face of Russian aggression."

In contrast, Russia says that Ukraine's campaign to build up a global coalition is limited. Moscow affirms that beyond NATO, nobody is bothered about Ukraine.

Well, Kiyvu has not sat back; it is trying to make changes however that is proving to be a tough task though.

Pragmatically, Zelenskyy's biggest problem is that he can't do anything on his own.

His tactics, his decisions, his future, and everything is dictated by the West. Why that, it is because Ukraine does not have support beyond them.

For starters, Russia is an established African Partner. It sells wheat, weapons and machineries. Russia's courtship of African nations since the Cold War era has paid off, experts say.

Russia has been the biggest arms seller in the region for more than a decade, propping up regimes on Nato's southern flank, analysts say.

On the diplomatic front, Moscow has also launched its offensives.

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has visited 14 countries in Africa and Latin America in just the month of May.

Russia's Wagner Group private military contractor has worked in countries like Sudan to expand gold mining, among other activities.

Despite heavy casualties, neither side is visibly falling apart or appears ready to back down.

While the West has consistently sent weapons to Ukraine, Zelenskyy's partnership challenges with the Africa still hang on.

Questions remain, can last minute diplomacy, or passionate applications replace decades of partnerships. Can new embassies substitute years of neglect?

To be more precise, no Ukraine Foreign Minister has visited the African continent until 2022.

As many are well away, Africa is 54 countries, not a single visit was made by any Ukrainian foreign minister in 31 years.

Experts say that diplomacy is very important, and good relationships are forged over years not through new Embassies or Ambassadors.