

Russian-Led Forces Begin Kazakhstan Pullout

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Russian peacekeepers guard the Almatinskaya TETs-3 power plant near Almaty. **Valery Sharifulin / TASS**

Russian-led forces have begun their gradual withdrawal from Kazakhstan after it was gripped by anti-government rallies that spilled into deadly violence this month, the Russian military [announced](#) Thursday.

Kazakhstan's President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev said the pullout of around 2,000 Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) troops would take no more than 10 days to complete.

Russia's Defense Ministry said the CSTO's "peacekeeping forces" from ex-Soviet nations have begun transferring key state facilities under its protection to the Kazakh law enforcement agencies.

The troops "have completed their tasks" in the energy-rich Central Asian republic and are preparing to start loading equipment onto the Russian Aerospace Forces' transport planes.

“The return of CSTO peacekeepers to their countries will be organized in cooperation with the Kazakh side,” the Defense Ministry said in a short statement.

Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu told President Vladimir Putin that the pullout would be completed by Wednesday next week, days ahead of the alliance's Jan. 22 deadline to complete the withdrawal.

"We must come home. We've completed our mission," Putin told Shoigu during their meeting.

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The CSTO mission was deployed at the peak of the crisis last week, after armed clashes between government opponents and security forces.

Western officials questioned Tokayev's decision to call for Russian military assistance in quelling the violent unrest sparked by New Year's Day fuel price hikes in western Kazakhstan.

Authorities have detained more than 10,000 people in the wake of the violence and looting, while various conflicting accounts place the death toll between dozens and 146.

On Wednesday, Tokayev praised the CSTO for its “psychological” role in “repelling the aggression of terrorists and bandits.” The Kazakh president has framed the unrest — which laid bare infighting within the country's leadership — as a coup attempt aided by foreign terrorists.

“The mission can be considered very successful,” Tokayev said.

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