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Russia-Led Peacekeeping Force Completes Pullout From Unrest-Hit Kazakhstan

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Alexander Avilov / Moskva News Agency

A Russian-led regional military bloc has completed its withdrawal from Kazakhstan following violent unrest that rocked the ex-Soviet nation this month, Russia's Defense Ministry announced Wednesday.

The contingent of Russian, Belarusian, Armenian, Tajik and Kyrgyz peacekeepers was deployed to Kazakhstan on Jan. 6 at the request of its president as protests over a New Year energy price hike spiraled into violence that left over 200 dead.

The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)'s deployment to the energy-rich Central Asian republic marked the bloc's first major joint action since its founding in 1999.

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Around 2,000 CSTO troops began returning to their home bases last Thursday ahead of the alliance's Jan. 22 deadline to complete the withdrawal.

"The Russian Defense Ministry's Il-76 and An-124 military transport aircraft carried out more than 100 flights from Kazakhstan," the military said in a statement.

The aircraft returned troops to the Moscow region and the cities of Ivanovo and Ulyanovsk in Russia, as well as the Belarusian capital of Minsk, Armenian capital Yerevan and Tajik capital Dushanbe, it added.

The last peacekeeping units departed Kazakhstan on Wednesday with their command headed by Col. Gen. Andrei Serdyukov, commander of Russia's Airborne Troops.

Footage released by the ministry showed Serdyukov boarding one of four Russian military transport aircraft that took off from airports in Nur-Sultan and Almaty.

Western officials had questioned Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's decision to call for Russian military assistance in quelling the violence.

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