

Kazakhstan

Russian forces arrive in Kazakhstan after president seeks help

Dozens reported killed in clashes between protesters and police while oil markets are unnerved by supply fears



Russian paratroopers bound for Kazakhstan board a military plane at an airfield outside Moscow on Thursday © Russian defence ministry Press Service via AP

Polina Ivanova in Moscow and **David Sheppard** in London 4 HOURS AGO

Russian paratroopers and allied military units started to arrive in Kazakhstan on Thursday after the country's president appealed for help in quelling protests that have led to dozens being killed in clashes with police.

Limited numbers of Russian paratroopers, plus contingents from Armenia, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, were sent as a peacekeeping force at the request of President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev to the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), a Russia-led [military alliance](#).

A video shared by Russia's defence ministry showed soldiers boarding a military plane bound for Kazakhstan. The alliance's troops would focus on "protecting important state and military facilities, and assisting Kazakh law enforcement in stabilising the situation", an alliance statement said.

Key infrastructure includes the Russian space centre in Baikonur and several military sites. Russian units already in the central Asian nation "have begun to carry out their assigned tasks", the alliance added.

Kazakhstan is a significant producer of natural resources including oil and uranium, and markets have also grown unnerved by potential supply disruptions, with oil prices rising to \$82 a barrel, their highest point since late November.

The price of uranium, the metal used in nuclear power stations, jumped 8 per cent to \$45.25 a pound on Wednesday. Kazakhstan, the world's biggest producer, accounts for more than 40 per cent of global primary production.

"To put it in context, Kazakhstan's market dominance in uranium is four times that of Saudi's dominance in oil," said Nick Lawson, chief executive of London-based advisory firm Ocean Wall.

As for oil supplies, Chevron, which has a 50 per cent stake in Kazakhstan's highest-producing field, Tengiz, said it had "adjusted" the field's usual output of between 550,000 and 600,000 barrels a day after "contracted employees . . . gathered at the Tengiz field in support of protests".

Royal Dutch Shell, meanwhile, said production at its Karachaganak and North Caspian fields was ongoing, and the Caspian Pipeline Consortium — the 1,500km-long line that carries two-thirds of

the country's 1.4m b/d of crude oil exports — was functioning normally.

The active joint action by the CSTO, which has a collective security provision, is the first since it was founded two decades ago.

It was unclear how many troops might arrive in total. Armenia is dispatching 70 soldiers, while Tajikistan is sending 200, according to RIA news agency. They may remain in the country for about a month, Interfax reported, quoting the deputy head of the Russian parliament's defence committee.

Tatiana Stanovaya, founder of political consultancy R Politik, said the maximum participation from CSTO allies would reach no more than 3,500 troops. As for Russia, it had “decided to take part symbolically but [its forces] will be there primarily to protect infrastructure”, she added. “Russia does not want to get involved . . . It does not want to do the local government's dirty work.”



Troops at the main square in Almaty on Thursday © Reuters

The protests, which began this week, have taken place mainly in the country's largest city, Almaty. Triggered by fuel price rises, they escalated rapidly into more widespread political protest, with cars and buildings set on fire, including the presidential residence and mayor's office.

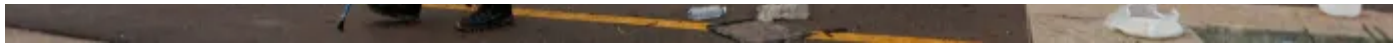
Dozens of people were killed in clashes in Almaty overnight, city police said, and witnesses

reported intense gunfire. The Kazakh health ministry said more than 1,000 people were injured.

After making several concessions on Wednesday — including firing the government and apparently displacing longtime ruler Nursultan Nazarbayev from a key security role — Tokayev announced a tough crackdown and imposed a state of emergency.

Internet access was partially restored on Thursday. But the government ordered banks to remain shut and closed its borders to foreign citizens, RIA reported, quoting embassy officials.





The burnt-out mayor's office building in Almaty © Reuters

It was unclear whether security forces had regained control of Almaty's international airport, and many airlines have cancelled flights to Almaty and Nur-Sultan, the capital.

Some passengers due to depart on Wednesday were evacuated to a nearby village, said Evgeny, who was on holiday from the Russian city of Magadan. He was due to fly out but was unaware of the broader situation because internet access was blocked.

"Suddenly, everyone started to run," he told the Financial Times, describing the situation in the airport. "We didn't know what was going on, but then we were told that attackers had seized the airport." Passengers were initially evacuated to a nearby cargo terminal.

The Kazakh government on Thursday also introduced price controls on petrol, diesel fuel and liquefied petroleum gas for 180 days, the government's press service said, in another attempt to appease protesters.

Russia's foreign ministry said Moscow "will continue to closely consult with Kazakhstan and other CSTO allies in order to analyse and, if necessary, develop further effective steps to assist Kazakhstan's law enforcement agencies in conducting a counter-terrorism operation".

The Kremlin's intervention to help an ally facing upheaval is its second in two years after Russian president Vladimir Putin backed Belarusian leader Alexander Lukashenko in his crackdown on popular protests in 2020.

Josep Borrell, the EU's foreign policy chief, [said](#) the EU had "great concern about developments" in Kazakhstan and that the CSTO's "external military assistance brings back memories of situations to be avoided."

Neighbouring China described the situation as an internal Kazakh matter, while Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan phoned Tokayev, saying Ankara stood in "solidarity" and hoped the

“tension” would end soon.

Additional reporting by Laura Pitel in Ankara

[Copyright](#) The Financial Times Limited 2022. All rights reserved.
