

Lugar Promotes NATO Gas Independence

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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WASHINGTON — A senior Republican lawmaker is urging the Obama administration to do more to help NATO allies in Europe ease dangerous dependence on Russia's gas monopolies.

Republican Sen. Richard Lugar is advocating legislation that would remove restrictions on U.S. gas exports for all NATO countries. He argues that the possibility of U.S. exports could remove leverage Russia could exert on vulnerable allies by threatening to cut off gas supplies. He says the administration should also focus more on helping the completion of strategically routed pipelines from central Asia to Europe that could diversify gas supplies.

Lugar has been a leading voice on NATO strategic issues for decades and was a mentor to U.S. President Barack Obama when he was a senator. But he was defeated in the Indiana Republican senate primary earlier this year and will leave the Senate early next month.

In a report by his staff released late Tuesday, Lugar argues that a boom in U.S. natural gas

production and progress on pipelines from Central Asia to Europe have created opportunities to dramatically diversify supplies to NATO allies who rely on Russian gas.

New extraction techniques have allowed the U.S. to tap huge deposits that were previously hard to reach. The development has catapulted the U.S. over Russia as the world's largest natural gas producer and eased prices for Europe because U.S. imports have fallen drastically.

Lugar says the U.S. should allow import terminals to be retrofitted to boost export capacity for liquefied natural gas that could be shipped to allies.

The report suggests that the administration is losing focus on the energy vulnerabilities in Europe because of a belief that the boom in gas production in the U.S. and elsewhere will undermine Russia's gas power on its own. But Lugar's staff argues that without U.S. and European efforts, some allies could remain vulnerable because it will be hard to distribute the new sources to their markets.

Lugar wants the administration to rethink its plan to eliminate a diplomatic position dedicated to Central Asian energy questions. U.S. diplomats serving as special envoy for Eurasian energy security have helped negotiate deals involving multiple energy companies and countries to build key parts of the infrastructure to bring gas from Azerbaijan to Turkey.

But it is still not clear what path that gas will take to Europe. There are two proposed routes from Turkey. One called the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline would go through Greece and Albania and under the Adriatic to Italy. Lugar argues that the second choice, called Nabucco West, would better serve U.S. interests.

He urges the administration, which has been reluctant to pick a side, to endorse that route because it would pass through some of the allied countries that are most dependent on Russia for gas. That pipeline would go through Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary on the way to a distribution hub in Austria.

U.S. diplomats should also push Azerbaijan to link up with the huge gas reserves of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to significantly boost possible capacity to Europe.

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