Belarus Touts U.S. as Possible Alternative to Russian Oil

By [Reuters](#)

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Belarus is looking for alternatives to Russian oil and is in talks with the United States, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates about supplies, President Alexander Lukashenko said on Friday, the Belta news agency reported.

Belarus and Russia failed to agree on an oil supply contract for this year, prompting Russia to halt supplies to refineries in Belarus, though it partially restored them on Jan. 4.

The row has fed into a broader geopolitical dispute between Moscow and Minsk in which Lukashenko has accused the Kremlin of trying to bully Belarus into a union with Russia that he says would spell the end of his political career.

Lukashenko proposed holding a new round of talks with Russia's President Vladimir Putin to resolve a row over oil supplies, the Interfax news agency reported on Friday.

"I don't want to be the last president of Belarus," he said on Friday, adding that he was in talks with the United States the UAE and Saudi Arabia over oil supplies, according to Belta.

"I have wonderful relations with them. They say we will supply whatever you need. Of course, this is the global price. But the oil quality is better there," he said.

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Russia sees Belarus as a buffer zone between it and the West, and it has helped prop up Lukashenko over the past 25 years with loans and energy subsidies. But it started to scale back that help last year.

Russia also sees the United States as one of the key threats to its energy dominance in Europe especially with the recent boom in shale oil and gas production in the U.S.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is due to visit Belarus next week in what will be the highest level visit by a U.S. official in more than two decades.

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