

The “shale oil era” and President Trump’s “energy dominance” doctrine

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In December 2015 the US decided to repeal a 40-year-old ban on crude oil exports driven by a boom in domestic oil drilling and production. The decision could be considered a win of US oil industry, especially, shale producers.

In fact, it was hardly an outcome of tension-free political arrangement. The Democrats had found themselves in disunity. Some were among the strongest proponents of removing export restrictions, whereas then-President Barack Obama appeared to favor a “transition to a low-carbon economy” through policy moves targeting “wind, solar, energy efficiency, and other clean technologies”(Rowel, 2015). At the same time, the Republicans concurred in the view that the country’s oil and natural gas reserves were abundant enough to both meet its energy needs and reinforce job creation.

New US President Donald Trump seems to have gone even further to call for energy supremacy. In May 2016, before the presidential elections, he said in a speech at a North Dakota oil industry conference: “America's incredible energy potential remains untapped. It's a wound that is totally self-inflicted”(Detrow, 2016). More than a year later, in June 2017, as an elected President, he staked a claim to “American Energy Dominance”(President Speech, 2017). And, in December 2017, he made it clear in his first National Security Strategy document that energy dominance, which was taken to pertain to “America’s central position in the global energy system as a leading producer, consumer, and innovator”, was part and parcel of a broader design to enhance US prosperity; it being a “vital national interest” that his administration set out to safeguard(The White House, 2017, p. 2–3,22).

The impact of the shale revolution on US gas and oil production has been so immense that several analysts claim that it has yielded a new dichotomy point in the US oil history timeline, between the “pre-shale era” (1997-2008) and the “shale era” (2009-present)(Clemente, 2017).

The proposed presentation seeks to explore and map out the course of events towards this development. It tries to bring out, primarily, the dynamics of domestic factors to demonstrate that the energy dominance doctrine is more than a mere public declaration of the commitment of the US to ensure the well-being of its people or the stability and freedom of the global energy market. In the light of innovative advances in shale oil technology, lifting the ban, we argue, was the combined result of power and policy-making rearrangements, alongside changing attitudes and aspirations, in US leadership and industry circles; thereby, in essence, preparing the ground for energy dominance to surface and become an indispensable element of the Trump ‘America First’ agenda.

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