

Roth: A ‘rigged’ election?

By [Jim Roth](#), Director and Chair of the Firm’s Clean Energy Practice Group. This column was [originally published in The Journal Record](#) on October 24, 2016.



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I know, I know, we are all growing tired of the 24/7 news around our election for a new U.S. president and in just two weeks it should all be over.

But the headline of this column is not about one candidate’s unprecedented forecast of possible election fraud as a cause of his likely defeat. No, this headline is about the other kind of “rigging” that has more often been a subject of debate in American presidential politics.

For the first time in my life, the presidential election year debate around America’s possible role in the turmoil of the

Middle East has nothing to do with the economic implications to our need for Middle Eastern oil and gas. Instead, because of the success and unprecedented production of America's domestic resources over the past years, Americans are now debating the role of America in Syria, Yemen and Iraq on purely humanitarian and global security grounds.

Gone are the spoken or unspoken rationales for early military intervention in places like Kuwait, where we pushed back the aggression of Saddam Hussein, who had overtaken that country's constitutional monarchy for control of its rich oil fields and its strategic place along the Arabian tip of the Persian Gulf. Gone too is the notion that we should bring democracy to places like Iraq, or topple dictators like Hussein, begun in 2003 under the guise of expanding freedoms and revenging supposed involvement during the 9/11 attacks.

To illustrate how far we've moved as a country, both candidates for president of our two major political parties now disavow their earlier support for the invasion of Iraq just 13 years on. And I'm not trying to conflate the idea of 9/11 revenge or Hussein tyranny as justifications. My point is that for decades America's activism in the Middle East, whether through military intervention, military sales or regime change, has been rooted in what it meant to our country's economic interest. Intervention often helped stabilize global markets and our energy-dependent economy at home.

But thanks to the ingenuity, technological advances and drive of America's oil and gas producers over the past decade, our country now stands on its own production better than ever. Our ability to identify, drill and produce new reserves in massive quantities has allowed America to achieve much-improved national security through the drill bit.

The U.S. shale revolution is the most significant global energy development in a quarter century or more. Our oil and

gas commodity markets and the broader economy are no longer impacted by Middle East unrest half a world away, or even the hurricane seasons in our own hemisphere.

With a horrific humanitarian toll growing as Syria rages, with Saudi Arabia in a military fight in Yemen and with Iraqi forces on the march in Mosul, American Oil remains steady at just above \$50 a barrel for West Texas Intermediate. The global benchmark price is also relatively stable at just above \$51 a barrel for Brent Crude.

The American rig count is at 553 active rigs, up 42 rigs from a month earlier, yet it is down 234 rigs from this time last year. And oil prices are still steady.

American energy security is being met more by Americans than ever before and it's making for a new evolution in American politics. So the new question for the next president, and really all of us American citizens, on the modern challenges of the Middle East is becoming: What's our role in the region now that the growing need is more humanitarian interests than economic?

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