

US Strategy of “A Free and Open Indo-Pacific”: A Perspective of Taiwan

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Abstract

The strategic construct of the Indo-Pacific region has drawn attention from both scholars and practitioners since President Trump’s administration presented the concept of Indo-Pacific strategy in October 2017 and Trump popularized it during his first Asia trip in November 2017. The Asia-Pacific region is becoming the center of gravity of economic development, and this has been driven profoundly by the assurance of security on the global commons. The US has played a significant role in the provision of this security, with Japan and Australia emerging as vital regional partners in this effort. While the US presence in the region was motivated primarily by its Cold War aim of containing communism, the post-Cold War period has demanded a fresh approach to security in a “Broader Asia.” Transforming geopolitical and strategic considerations, however, has raised questions on the continued efficacy of the traditional approach. With the rise of China and its growing influence in the region, the US and allies Japan, Australia, India, and Taiwan, under US support, are attempting to develop a regional security architecture that will continue to bring prosperity and peace under the layout of an Indo-Pacific strategy. Thus, the United States

may promote the security cooperation agenda and cooperation with Japan, India, and Australia further to construct a new “Indo-Pacific Strategy” via the “Quad Dialogue,” which may include Taiwan in the near future. Therefore, Taiwan should make itself ready for this new regional security structure.

Keywords: China Rise, Indo-Pacific Strategy, Asia-Pacific Security, US-Taiwan-China Relations, Taiwan’s Role in Indo-Pacific Region.

I. The Advent of “Indo-Pacific” Era

In recent years, China’s rise has caused structural change in Asia-Pacific regional security because China’s growing power has brought some degree of challenge and threat to its neighboring countries, thereby changing the Asia-Pacific region’s traditional balance of power. The response to the regional security threat by the United States and Japan to China’s rise is most obvious. Therefore, the United States and Japan have begun to think about expanding the concept of Asia-Pacific regional security as a strategic concept of the Indo-Pacific region. In August 2016, Prime Minister of Japan Shinzo Abe unveiled his regional vision in his trip to Africa, called the “free and open Indo-Pacific strategy.”¹ On 10 November 2017, US President Donald Trump made his keynote speech at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit held in Vietnam and echoed the concept of an Indo-Pacific strategy. Trump revitalized the term “Indo-Pacific” to refer to Asia in contrast to the traditional “Asia-Pacific.” Therefore, using the term “Indo-Pacific” not only stresses that the future of Asia-Pacific security will have deeper links

1. 黃惠華, 〈台灣在「印度—太平洋」大戰略的角色〉, 《自由時報》, December 28, 2017, <<http://talk.ltn.com.tw/article/breakingnews/2296421>>.

with India but also means that the United States and its allies in Asia have made structural adjustments to the traditional Asia-Pacific security strategy.²

In addition, that broad strategic framework also was previewed by former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson in a speech at Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) on 18 October 2017, arguing that the Trump Administration seeks a “free and open Indo-Pacific” with clear emphasis on Japan, Australia, and India and open skepticism about China’s trustworthiness.³

II. The Origin of “Indo-Pacific”

The term of “Indo-Pacific” is not new; in fact, the United States Pacific Command developed the concept of “Indo-Pacific” during the Cold War. After the United Kingdom withdrew its military from east of the Suez at the end of the 1960s, the Soviet Union expanded its military presence in the Indian Ocean region. In order to balance the Soviet military forces in the Indian Ocean, the US Pacific Command began regarding the Pacific Ocean and Indian Ocean as one holistic security region in 1972 and perceived the two great oceans as one unified strategic theater by stressing the concept of “Indo-Pacific strategy.”⁴

2. Dindo Manhit, “Commentary: Applying Abe’s Democratic Security Diamond in the Philippines,” *Philstar*, December 15, 2017, <<http://www.philstar.com/news-feature/2017/12/16/1768660/commentary-applying-abes-democratic-security-diamond-philippines>>.

3. Rex W. Tillerson, “Remarks on ‘Defining Our Relationship with India for the Next Century,’” October 18, 2017, *U.S. Department of State*, <<https://www.state.gov/secretary/20172018tillerson/remarks/2017/10/274913.htm>>.

4. Tetsuo Kotani, “Can the ‘Indo-Pacific’ compete with China?” *Japan Times*, January 10, 2018, <<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2018/01/10/commentary/japan-commentary/can-indo-pacific-compete-china/#.W4J1yyQzaUI>>.

Nevertheless, the revisit of the term of “Indo-Pacific” was triggered by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. During his first speech in India as Prime Minister of Japan in 2007, Abe raised a bold vision, stressing that the Indian Ocean should be framed in a “broader Asia” with the United States, Australia, Japan, India, and other Pacific countries. Furthermore, if the great energies of these free democracies could be pooled, they could be developed into a vast network of freely flowing people, goods, capital, and knowledge. This network would build an “arc of freedom and prosperity” along the outer rim of the Eurasian continent.⁵

Here, we can see clearly that Abe strongly suggested that the United States, Japan, Australia and India, the four most powerful democracies, should strengthen their security cooperation and alliances further in order to counter China’s rise and its threat to the India and Pacific Oceans. This assertion would evolve into the “Quadrilateral Security Dialogue” and the “Indo-Pacific Strategy” aim to contain China.⁶

Although some people in the US government still accept the current engagement policy with China, the “Indo-Pacific Strategy” implies a different value. The “Indo-Pacific Strategy” is a reflection on the US policy of engagement or the so-called “congagement” since the Clinton administration. Today, the Trump administration no longer believes that continued engagement with China will lead

5. Rohan Mukherjee, “Commentary: The Indo Pacific, a security diamond, a 10-year Quad?” *Channel NewsAsia*, November 10, 2017, <<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/commentary/commentary-the-indo-pacific-a-security-diamond-a-10-year-quad-9391268>>.

6. Rohan Mukherjee, “Commentary: The Indo Pacific, a security diamond, a 10-year Quad?”

to China’s peaceful evolution; rather, it will keep taking advantage of the United States, thus weakening US security and economic power, thereby eventually crippling American hegemony. Thus, for the foreseeable future, the “Indo-Pacific Strategy” will take on more competitive strategies and even tougher or more hostile stands to curb China’s expansion.⁷

III. Is “Indo-Pacific” Nominal or Substantive?

During his first presidential trip to Asia in November 2017, President Trump made headlines with his use of the phrase “a free and open Indo-Pacific.” This came several weeks after China enshrined “Xi Jinping Thought” in the national constitution and the “Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI) was confirmed at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China on 24 October 2017. This turn of phrase was in part a response to Beijing’s attempts to capitalize on its growing economic dominance in Asia and beyond, and it offers something of a counterpoint to Xi’s strategic ambition in Xi’s Belt and Road Initiative.⁸ Thus, what is in the name “Indo-Pacific?” In Chinese eyes, no less than a strategy for balancing Chinese power in the region.⁹

China’s regional ambition and influence are far greater now than they were a decade ago. Not only has China become more assertive regarding its core interests in the region, it also has developed its

7. Felix K. Chang, “What’s in a Name?: Strategy Behind the ‘Indo-Pacific,’” December 11, 2017, *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, <<https://www.fpri.org/2017/12/whats-name-strategy-behind-indo-pacific/>>.

8. Michael J. Green, “Donald Trump’s message for Asia,” October 31, 2017, *Lowy Institute*, <<https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/donald-trump-s-message-asia>>.

9. Felix K. Chang, “What’s in a Name?: Strategy Behind the ‘Indo-Pacific.’”

economic and military capabilities at a rapid clip during this period. The Belt and Road Initiative signals China's desire and ability to establish a commercial empire of sorts stretching across the region.¹⁰ Over the past three decades, China has accumulated enormous economic power by being the world factory, and they successfully have used these economic engines to develop technology and military capability. Furthermore, China has designed "one Belt one Road" to enhance its economic and foreign relations with neighboring countries. These measures, in turn, may allow China to project its power up to the "Second Island Chain." None of these developments, however, in the eyes of the US and Japan, are acceptable.¹¹

On 18 December 2017, the Trump administration released its National Security Strategy (NSS). Analysis of the document has high-

10. Howard J. Shatz, *U.S. International Economic Strategy in a Turbulent World: Strategic Rethink* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2016), p. 93; Karl Hallding & Sylvia Zhang, "China's economic slowdown: good news for the environment?" October 1, 2015, *Stockholm Environment Institute*, <<https://www.sei.org/mediamanager/documents/Publications/SEI-2015-DiscussionBrief-Hallding-Zhang-ChinaEconomicSlowdown.pdf>>; Christopher K. Johnson, "President Xi Jinping's 'Belt and Road' Initiative," March 2016, *CSIS*, <https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/160328_Johnson_PresidentXiJinping_Web.pdf>; Rohan Mukherjee, "Commentary: The Indo Pacific, a security diamond, a 10-year Quad?"; Jonathan E. Hillman, "China's Belt and Road Initiative: Five Years Later," January 25, 2018, *CSIS*, <<https://www.csis.org/analysis/chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-five-years-later-0>>; Andrew Small, "The Backlash to Belt and Road," *Foreign Affairs*, February 16, 2018, <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2018-02-16/backlash-belt-and-road>>; Talat Shabbir, "Rising China and its South Asian Neighbors: Evolving Dynamics and the Outlook," *Policy Perspectives*, Vol. 14, No. 2, January 2017, p. 137.

11. Ashley J. Tellis, "Protecting American Primacy in the Indo-Pacific," April 25, 2017, *Carnegie*, <<http://carnegieendowment.org/2017/04/25/protecting-american-primacy-in-indo-pacific-pub-68754>>.

lighted the prominence of Russia and China, identified as revisionist powers that “want to shape a world antithetical to U.S. values and interests.” In fact, the NSS characterizes the region as “A geopolitical competition between free and repressive visions of world order.”¹²

Nevertheless, the security cooperation between the United States and the countries in the Indo-Pacific region mainly are bilateral. The United States has strong military ties with Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Singapore, and Australia, but there is still a lack of security regime based on multilateralism in the Indo-Pacific region, which could strengthen and consolidate the security alliances among allies.¹³ In addition, Japan, Australia, and India have tended to adopt alliances with the United States on security issues to contain China, but India, Japan, and Australia still want to maintain some certain cooperative relationship with China, especially in the trade and economic fields, thus giving China some opportunities to weaken the Indo-Pacific strategy. Therefore, how to strengthen and consolidate the four side relations of the Indo-Pacific strategy to curb the expansion of the Belt and Road will be the most substantive challenges to an Indo-Pacific strategy.

IV. Strengthening the “Indo-Pacific” Strategy

Since the Trump administration began unveiling the contours of an “Indo-Pacific” strategy in October 2017 to replace the Obama administration’s “pivot/rebalance,”¹⁴ US former Secretary of State

12. Alyssa Ayres, “More Prominence for India and the Indo-Pacific in the U.S. National Security Strategy,” December 19, 2017, *Council on Foreign Relations*, <<https://www.cfr.org/blog/more-prominence-india-and-indo-pacific-us-national-security-strategy>>.

13. Felix K. Chang, “What’s in a Name?: Strategy Behind the ‘Indo-Pacific.’”

Rex Tillerson followed to deliver remarks on “Defining Our Relationship with India for the Next Century” at the CSIS. He stated:

“The world’s center of gravity is shifting to the heart of the Indo-Pacific. The U.S. and India – with our shared goals of peace, security, freedom of navigation, and a free and open architecture – must serve as the eastern and western beacons of the Indo-Pacific.”¹⁵

The Trump government prefers the term “Indo-Pacific” to “Asia-Pacific” due to India’s strategic geographical position. Besides its vast population and land, along with its potential economic and technological capabilities, India’s competitive or contradictory relations with PRC also have been considered. Trump has been convinced that, if India is to be integrated into the security network of the United States and the Asia-Pacific countries, it will have the strength and determination to restrain China, therefore benefiting the balance of power in the region.¹⁶

Tanvi Madan, Director of the India Project at the Brookings Institute in Washington, said there were elements of continuity between Obama’s Asia pivot and Trump’s strategy, but also key differences, “including the term Indo-Pacific, the explicit concern expressed about

14. Russell Hsiao & David An, “Taiwan Is Ready to Serve as an Indo-Pacific Partner,” *The National Interest*, January 4, 2018, <<http://nationalinterest.org/feature/taiwan-ready-serve-indo-pacific-partner-23936?page=4>>.

15. Rex W. Tillerson, “Remarks on ‘Defining Our Relationship with India for the Next Century.’”

16. Peter Martin, Justin Sink, & Iain Marlow, “Trump Discovers ‘Indo-Pacific’ on Asia Tour in Boost for India,” *Bloomberg*, November 14, 2017, <<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-11-13/trump-discovers-indo-pacific-on-asia-tour-in-boost-for-india>>.

China.....and a greater emphasis on democratic partners, particularly India.”¹⁷

The NSS repeatedly mentions that China and Russia are the biggest threats to US national security over the next 10 years, which comes mainly from China and Russia’s challenge to the United States in terms of military security, technology, economic and trade matters, and even democratic values and institutions, which will either erode or plunder US power. In particular, China has attempted to strengthen the economic and security relationships with countries in Central Asia, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, Africa, and the Pacific in recent years through the “one Belt one Road initiative.” This kind of development may endanger the international value and order that has long been constructed by the Western democratic spirit. Facing this challenge, The United States and traditional allies, including Japan and Australia, try to incorporate India’s democracy as well as geopolitical advantages, to build a military or security alliance of the United States, Japan, Australia, and India to balance China’s influence in the region.¹⁸

“A geopolitical competition between free and repressive visions of world order is taking place in the Indo-Pacific region. The region, which stretches from the west coast of India to the western shores of the United States, represents the most populous and economically dynamic part of the world. The U.S. interest in a free and open Indo-Pacific extends back to the

17. Demetri Sevastopulo, “Trump gives glimpse of ‘Indo-Pacific’ strategy to counter China,” *Financial Times*, November 10, 2017, <<https://www.ft.com/content/e6d17fd6-c623-11e7-a1d2-6786f39ef675>>.

18. Alyssa Ayres, “More Prominence for India and the Indo-Pacific in the U.S. National Security Strategy.”

earliest days of our republic."¹⁹

It also pledges to "expand our defense and security cooperation with India, a major defense partner of the United States, and support India's growing relationships throughout the region."²⁰ Under such geopolitical considerations, the Trump administration then actively counted India into the Indo-Pacific strategy and ranked India as the premier ally to expand and strengthen the US grand strategy. This development in turn boosted India's strategic role in the region to meet the increasingly complex security environment in the region. As the National Defense Strategy of the United States of America (NDS) has stressed:

*"Today, we are emerging from a period of strategic atrophy, aware that our competitive military advantage has been eroding. We are facing increased global disorder, characterized by decline in the long-standing rules-based international order — creating a security environment more complex and volatile than any we have experienced in recent memory. Inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in U.S. national security."*²¹

19. The White House, "National Security Strategy of the United States of America," December 2017, p. 46, *The White House*, <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>>.

20. Alyssa Ayres, "More Prominence for India and the Indo-Pacific in the U.S. National Security Strategy."

21. U.S. Department of Defense, "Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America," January 2018, p. 1, *U.S. Department of Defense*, <<https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>>.

“China is a strategic competitor using predatory economics to intimidate its neighbors while militarizing features in the South China Sea. Russia has violated the borders of nearby nations and pursues veto power over the economic, diplomatic, and security decisions of its neighbors.”²²

If the United States can successfully integrate India, Japan, and Australia into a substantial strategic security alliance, then the overall strength of the Indo-Pacific strategy will make China no match, and effectively restrain China’s expansion through the Belt and Road Initiatives (See Table 1).

Table 1. The Population, Military Strength Ranking, GDP, and Economy of the US, Japan, India, Australia, and China.

Country	Population (2017)	Military Strength Ranking (2017)	GDP (2017, in USD)*	Economy/Trade (2016, in USD)
United States	326,625,791	1	19.3 trillion	18 trillion (24.3% of the world economy)
Japan	126,451,398	7	5.4 trillion	4.4 trillion (6% of the world economy)
India	1,281,935,911	4	9.4 trillion	2 trillion (2.83% of the world economy)
Australia	23,232,413	22	1.2 trillion	1.4 trillion (1.81% of the world economy)
China	1,379,302,771	3	23.1 trillion	11 trillion (14.8% of the world economy)

Sources: Central Intelligence Agency of U.S.A., “The World Factbook,” March 14, 2018, Accessed, *CIA*, <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/xx.html>>; World Bank, “World Development Indicators,” March 14, 2018, Accessed, *World Bank*, <<http://databank.worldbank.org/data/reports.aspx?source=world-development-indicators>>; International Monetary Fund, “IMF Data,” March 14, 2018, Accessed, *International Monetary Fund*, <<http://www.imf.org/en/Data>>; Alex Gray, “The world’s 10 biggest economies in 2017,” March 9, 2017, *World Economic Forum*, <<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/03/worlds-biggest-economies-in-2017/>>; “Jane’s Security: Military Capabilities Module,” March 14, 2018, Accessed, *IHS Markit*, <<https://ihsmarkit.com/products/janes-security-military-capabilities.html>>.

Note: *List by Purchasing Power Parity (PPP).

V. Taiwan's Role in the US Indo-Pacific Strategy

Partly because of the importance of Taiwan's geostrategic position in the Indo-Pacific region, the NSS document highlights China's relationship with Taiwan, which scarcely has been mentioned in the past National Security Strategies.

The Indo-Pacific strategy has not included Taiwan formally in the "Quad Dialogue" of the US, Japan, Australia, and India. Nevertheless, from a geostrategic viewpoint, Taiwan's strategic diamond in Indo-Pacific is located in the strategic hub location. Thus, in the foreseeable future, Taiwan will begin to play an increasingly important role in the Indo-Pacific strategy, as Randall Schriver, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asian and Pacific Security Affairs, emphasized that the president's vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific "suggests..... that there should be a key role for Taiwan."²³

From the point of view of the Indo-Pacific strategy, the United States sees China as the biggest challenge to American hegemony, so the Trump administration actively will look for partners who can ally themselves with the United States in the Indo-Pacific. For the United States, Japan is now the most solid ally in the Asia-Pacific region. The Trump administration will be more flexible to use the geopolitical strategy of Taiwan and the sensitivity of the Cross-Strait relations to build a closer tie with Taiwan to strengthen the United States to conduct the Indo-Pacific strategy as NSS pointed out:

22. U.S. Department of Defense, "Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America," p. 1,

23. Russell Hsiao & David An, "Taiwan Is Ready to Serve as an Indo-Pacific Partner."

*“We will maintain our strong ties with Taiwan in accordance with our ‘One China’ policy, including our commitments under the Taiwan Relations Act to provide for Taiwan’s legitimate defense needs and deter coercion.....We will maintain a forward military presence capable of deterring and, if necessary, defeating any adversary. We will strengthen our long-standing military relationships and encourage the development of a strong defense network with our allies and partners.”*²⁴

Support for Taiwan’s security role in the Trump administration’s Indo-Pacific strategy is clear. For example, regarding the “One China” policy written in the “*US-China Three Communiques and Interpretation*” and “*Taiwan Relations Act*,” Trump has used only “Our One China Policy” in the 2017 NSS. Here, the term of “Our One China Policy” may hold a quite different value from China’s version of the “One China Policy.” In fact, the NSS deliberately has emphasized the role of Taiwan independently from Beijing’s assertion that Taiwan is part of China’s territory. Nevertheless, the NSS also has brought some warning to Taiwan, in particular, a serious trade war between the US and China probably would do a meaningful damage, which will test the Taiwan economy and Cross-Strait relations. In this regard, Taiwan’s national security administration first should study new developments of future US-Taiwan relations, along with its derivative opportunities and costs, and the layout of the response measures that should be taken as early as possible.

On 9 November 2017, the US Congress coordinated the *2018 Defense Authorization Act*. 1259 of these records stated that, when the two governments of the United States and Taiwan have tried to

²⁴ The White House, “National Security Strategy of the United States of America,” *The White House*, p. 47.

strengthen Taiwan's defensive capabilities, the US policy was to strengthen its commitment under the *Taiwan Relations Act* and to maintain the same agreement with the United States on the Six Assurances.²⁵ This act is expressed in the form of a congressional resolution, so Congress believes the US should strengthen and improve the long-term partnership and cooperation with Taiwan. As such, the US should be in accordance with the *National Defense Authorization Act of 2017*. In addition, "the US-Taiwan military officer and senior official exchange plans to improve the relationship between the two armies should be implemented, the expansion of Taiwanese personnel trained in the US should be supported, and the appropriateness and feasibility of establishing an exchange of visits between US and Taiwanese naval vessels should be considered."²⁶

On 10 January 2018, The US House of Representatives passed the legally binding *Taiwan Travel Act* (HR535), making it clear that the US government should encourage US-Taiwan visits at all levels. The US Senate, on 28 February 2018, passed a bill promoting closer US ties with Taiwan, which China has warned would threaten stability in the Taiwan Strait and must be withdrawn.²⁷

In my opinion, the *Defense Authorization Act* and the *Taiwan*

²⁵ U.S. Congress, "Reaffirming the Taiwan Relations Act and the Six Assurances as cornerstones of United States-Taiwan relations," March 14, 2018, Accessed, *U.S. Congress*, <<https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-concurrent-resolution/88/text>>.

²⁶ "Taiwan in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), 2018," December 12, 2017, *Taiwan Defense & National Security*, <<http://www.ustaiwandefense.com/taiwan-in-the-national-defense-authorization-act-ndaa-2018/>>.

²⁷ "China says U.S. bill on Taiwan ties threatens stability," *Reuters*, February 9, 2018, <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-usa-taiwan/china-says-u-s-bill-on-taiwan-ties-threatens-stability-idUSKBN1FT13G>>.

Travel Act are the legal effect that have the greatest and far-reaching impact on the US-China-Taiwan triangle relationship since the establishment of US-China diplomatic relations in 1979. Trump signed the *Taiwan Travel Act* into law on 16 March 2018. How will it work? If Taiwan is to cooperate actively with the United States to implement these Acts, what are the preventive measures that Taiwan must take first *vis-à-vis* China’s vertical opposition and possible political, economic, or military sanctions against Taiwan? These will impose tremendous impact on the US-China-Taiwan triangular relationship, thereby altering the peace, stability, and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific region.

With the increasing competition and contradiction between the United States and China’s economic, trade, military and technology, both the US and China will attach more importance to the strategic geographic position of Taiwan. While the United States is strengthening its bilateral relationship with Taiwan in security, economic, trade, and technological cooperation, China may impose even greater pressure on Taiwan via its political, economic, and security power. This, in turn, may result in further American support for Taiwan and in China’s more serious punishment of Taiwan. For example, the recent termination of diplomatic ties with Taiwan by the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, and Panama and the subsequent recall of the three country ambassadors of the United States is clear evidence of the sensitive and complex US-Taiwan-China relation.

Taiwan now is facing the biggest window of opportunity and the most serious security challenge from the United States and China since 1979 due to the structural conflict between these two great powers. Given the premise of increasingly fierce competition between US and China, Taiwan will inevitably be seriously affected. Thus, Taiwan’s National Security Council should conduct a new strategy

to manage challenges/opportunities with the thought of “comprehensive security” more systematic and in-depth analysis and concrete implementation of methods and steps of a new strategy, in order to cope with the new era of power transition or hegemonic stability.²⁸

28. Similar viewpoints can be seen in 宋學文,〈台灣應加入日本主導的 CPTPP 以確保經濟與國安〉,《民主視野》, No. 21, Spring 2018, p. 60.

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