

FEBRUARY 2022

THE GROWING TIES BETWEEN TURKEY AND TURKIC NATIONS



Research and Consulting



OpSour Turkish Studies Series
No.2

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ABSTRACT

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The Organization of Turkic States (OTS) was established with a significant decision taken at the meeting of Turkish-speaking states in Istanbul on 12 November. President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan, President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, President of Kazakhstan Kasım Cömert Tokayev, President of Kyrgyzstan Sadir Japarov, President of Uzbekistan Shevket Mirziyoyev, President of Turkmenistan Gurbangulu Berdimuhamedov, Prime Minister of Hungary Viktor Orban attended the summit in Istanbul. Nursultan Nazarbayev, Honorary President of the Organization of the Turkic States and First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, addressed the meeting with a video message. This was one of the most important events of recent times. The decision points to an extremely important development not only for the history of the Turkish communities spread over vast geography but also for the entire geopolitical history of the world. The Organization of the Turkic States, which has the capacity to create a new balance of power in Eurasia, will have significant consequences.

This analysis discusses Turkey's political and economic relations with the Turkic Republics. In the analysis, the basic lines of increasing cooperation and rapprochement in recent years have been examined, regional and global factors have been touched upon

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The Growing Ties Between Turkey And Turkic Nations

Central Asia is a region with quite different definitions, geographically and politically. In the narrowest sense, the description made by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) states that the elements that make up Central Asia administratively are Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. After the collapse of the USSR, Kazakhstan was included in the definition of Central Asia. In a broad sense, the north of Afghanistan and Pakistan, East Turkestan, southeast of Russia, and northeast of Mongolia and Iran are also included in this geographical term used to describe the interior parts of Asia away from the oceans. Historically, the region, which is the cradle of Turkish civilization, has been called "Turkistan" for centuries.

With the disintegration of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, "Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan" in Central Asia and "Azerbaijan" in the Caucasus declared their independence, and five independent Turkish Republics with ethnic and religious ties with Turkey were born. Turkey was the first country to recognize these countries and open an embassy. This development was greeted with enthusiasm by the Turkish nation. The Turkish elite and politicians interpreted this period as the "Turkish Century", and there was a hope that Turkish unity would be formed in a wide area bordering the "Adriatic to the Great Wall of China".

This analysis discusses Turkey's political and economic relations with the Turkic Republics. In the analysis, in which the basic lines of increasing cooperation and rapprochement in recent years have been examined, regional and global factors have been touched upon.

TURKEY – AZERBAIJAN RELATIONS

Turkey-Azerbaijan relations have a multidimensional character. One of the important aspects of this multidimensionality is bilateral and multiple economic ties. Although the mutual investments and bilateral trade volume in bilateral economic relations are not at the desired level, it is remarkable that there has been a serious increase compared to the first years of independence and the level of institutionalization has increased in recent years. Azerbaijan, which forms a strategic corridor in the context of connecting with Central Asia, is a source of morale due to its historical and cultural partnerships and will make it a key country in the east-west energy corridor, continues to be indispensable for Turkey.

Azerbaijan and Turkey maintain a special relationship defined by a long history of events and cultural and ethnic connections.¹ Turkey-Azerbaijan relations are progressing at an extremely excellent level. There are several reasons for the good level and continuous development of Turkey-Azerbaijan political relations in the last 30 years.

- Feeding of both countries from a common political-intellectual culture
- The attitude of the public opinion of the two countries
- Relationships between leaders
- Common interests, culture and history

The basis of the political and intellectual culture prevailing in Turkey and Azerbaijan today is the political-intellectual understanding formed by the modernization intellectuals in the Ottoman and Azerbaijani 100 years ago. When the Republic of

¹ Guivami Rahimli, Azerbaijan-Turkey: Commitment To "One Nation, Two States" Doctrine, New Times, 13.07.2019, <http://newtimes.az/en/organisations/6143/>

Turkey was founded in 1923, it was established as the carrier of that ideology. Although it was a part of the Soviet Union, that idea was also preserved in Azerbaijan. When Azerbaijan regained its independence, it declared itself the heir of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, established in 1918 and the Ottoman ally in the region. This was not just a constitutional heir but also an intellectual heir. For this reason, Azerbaijan's issues are accepted as a national issue in Turkey. The governments that serve the development of Azerbaijan-Turkey relations are accepted as the national power, and the opposite policies are criticized. The rulers of both countries know that close relations will be supported by their people. This common point of view has also affected the marriages and travels between the two countries. As a result of the social convergence of the two countries, the visas were abolished, and the parties started to travel with their identity cards.²

One of the most critical factors that positively affect the two countries' political relations is the relations between the leaders. In particular, the personal relations between the General Leader of Azerbaijan Heydar Aliyev and the President of the Republic of Turkey Süleyman Demirel have formed a tradition for developing relations between the two countries still continue to be influential. The relations between the leaders of these two countries brought the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan, Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum energy lines to the relations between the two countries, created the Azerbaijan-Turkey-Georgia trilateral relations and helped to put the military ties between Azerbaijan and Turkey on solid foundations. The basis of coordination in foreign policy between the two countries was laid at that time.

The independent foreign policy pursued by both countries in recent years is one of the reasons for the rapprochement in the two countries political relations. Developing energy and transportation lines between the East and West, establishing a "Middle Corridor" in this direction, increasing the effectiveness of the Organization of Turkic States, strengthening the sovereignty and independence of Georgia, and establishing good relations with regional states such as Russia and Iran are actually due to the overlap of interests originates.

According to the Azerbaijan Customs Presidency figures, the foreign trade volume between Azerbaijan and Turkey was 4 billion 181 million dollars in the first 11 months of 2021. Turkey ranks second after Italy in Azerbaijan's foreign trade with these figures. Italy is in the first place because oil, which is the leading foreign trade product of Azerbaijan, is sold through Italy. With these figures, the Turkey-Azerbaijan trade volume is two times the Russia-Azerbaijan trade volume and four times the China-Azerbaijan trade volume. Turkey is also in second place in Azerbaijan's imports and exports.

Table 1: TURKEY –AZERBAIJAN TRADE RELATIONSHIP

YEARS	TURKEY'S EXPORT TO AZERBAIJAN (Billion dollars)	TURKEY'S IMPORT FROM AZERBAIJAN (Billion dollars)
2016	1.18	1.18
2017	1.27	2.27
2018	1.57	1.82
2019	1.64	2.86
2020	1.56	2.59

Source: Republic of Turkey Ministry of Trade

Turkey's investments in the non-oil sectors in Azerbaijan and Azerbaijan's

² Check more info: Merve Aydogan, "Turkey, Azerbaijan ink passport-free travel regime", Anadolu Agency "<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/turkey-azerbaijan-ink-passport-free-travel-regime/2073643>

investments in the energy sector in Turkey are emphasized by the officials and experts of the two countries. With the strategic partnership and mutual aid agreement signed between the two countries, bilateral relations have moved to a different dimension in the economic field as well as in all other areas. One of the most striking issues in terms of bilateral relations is the increase in cooperation in the field of defence industry technologies. Turkey and Azerbaijan also enhanced their cooperation in the military area in 2020. Bayraktar TB2s, the apple of the eye of Turkey, were exported to brotherly Azerbaijan. Bayraktar drew attention with his success in the Karabakh operation. In 2020, there were many high-level visits from Turkey to Azerbaijan. In February, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was in Baku for the Turkey-Azerbaijan Strategic Cooperation Council Meeting. Erdogan became the first leader to visit the country after the Karabakh Victory. 2020 has been a historic year for Turkey-Azerbaijan relations. With the exemplary solidarity and cooperation of the two countries, Azerbaijan regained its lands after 30 years.

TURKEY – KAZAKHSTAN RELATIONS

Declaring its independence on December 16, 1991, Kazakhstan was recognized by Turkey on the same day. The common historical, cultural, and spiritual ties between Turkey and Kazakhstan have enabled the rapid development of relations. The two countries signed more than 100 agreements on economic and commercial relations in a short time. Starting in 1993, Turkey provided millions of dollars worth of loans to Kazakhstan through Turk Eximbank. In addition, important developments were experienced in export, investment, and contracting projects.

During the official visit of then-President Abdullah Gul to Kazakhstan in December 2007, the issue of transporting Kazakh oil to Turkey and the West via the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline came to the fore. Turkey also supports the construction of ports for oil transportation on the coasts connecting Kazakhstan to the Caspian Sea. The Strategic Partnership Agreement signed during Nazarbayev's visit to Turkey in October 2009 carried the relations to a different dimension. Because, with the resolution of the problems in domestic politics to a certain extent, a more independent and dynamic process in foreign policy has been initiated in Kazakhstan. Since this date, the number of mutual visits has increased every year and the High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council (YDSK) mechanism has been established, which puts the relations between the two countries in an institutional framework.

Table 2: TURKEY – KAZAKHSTAN TRADE RELATIONSHIP

YEARS	TURKEY'S EXPORT TO KAZAKHSTAN (Million dollars)	TURKEY'S IMPORT FROM KAZAKHSTAN (Billion dollars)
2016	625	1.334
2017	747	1.463
2018	695	1.470
2019	900	3.004
2020	985.68	1.180

Source: Republic of Turkey Ministry of Trade

Turkey and Kazakhstan are the two Turkic wings of Eurasia and, if Kazakhstan is the window of the Turkic world to the east, Turkey is to the west, and close cooperation between the two Turkic-speaking countries is inevitable.³ While the

³ Library of Elbassy "Kazakhstan Way: Foreign Policy", "Symbol of brotherhood and friendship: the Republic of Turkey and the Republic of Kazakhstan".

bilateral trade volume between Turkey and Kazakhstan is approaching 2 billion dollars, the common target has been determined as 10 billion dollars. Turkish entrepreneurs stand out in Kazakhstan, especially in the food sector, pharmaceutical-chemical industry, construction, hotel management and manufacturing. In addition, the total value of the projects undertaken by Turkish contracting companies in Kazakhstan has exceeded 21 billion dollars. Although Turkey is the 17th largest investor in Kazakhstan in terms of capital amount, it ranks 4th in terms of investors in non-energy sectors.

Today between Kazakhstan and Turkey do not have any problems in bilateral relations.⁴ Regional and international cooperation between Turkey and Kazakhstan is also developing rapidly. The "Turkic Speaking Countries Summit" was institutionalized under the leadership of two countries; In this context, Kazakhstan, together with Turkey, played an important role in the establishment of the Turkic Council and TÜRKPA (Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic Speaking Countries). In addition, Kazakhstan also hosts the International Turkic Academy, which was established within the Turkic Council.

The ongoing cooperation in the field of education and culture has carried the relations between the two countries to another dimension. In particular, Hoca Ahmet Yesevi International Turkish-Kazakh University, whose center is located in the province of Turkestan (South Kazakhstan), makes a great contribution to bilateral relations with its important studies. The university, where more than 12.000 students are educated in 10 faculties and a college, also has structures such as the Eurasia Research Institute that have signed serious studies in the field of social sciences.

TURKEY – UZBEKISTAN RELATIONS

Turkey was the first country to recognize the independence of Uzbekistan in 1991; Diplomatic relations of the two countries started in 1992. Islam Kerimov, who visited Turkey during this period, expressed his loyalty to Atatürk's principles, stated that he wanted Turkish unity in the economic field, and said that he regarded Turkey as a "big brother". This visit was welcomed with great pleasure from Turkey's perspective. In 1992, then Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel and after a while President Turgut Özal visited Uzbekistan and while diplomatic relations between the countries developed rapidly, more than 90 protocols and bilateral agreements were signed between the two states.

Despite all these developments in bilateral relations, the anti-religious The Kerimov administration, which carried out a policy, thought that some religious groups were supported by Turkish-origin sects, and this caused the Uzbek authorities to look at Turkey with suspicion. In addition, Turkey's granting of asylum to Muhammed Salih and some Uzbek dissidents, who were rivals to Kerimov in the presidential elections, caused a violent reaction from the Uzbek administration. For this reason, the Uzbek administration recalled its ambassador in 1994 and the Uzbek students studying in Turkey in February 1999. Turkey also criticized the Uzbek government for suppressing the opposition and warned of democracy. The crisis in political relations also affected the trade between the two countries and Turkey-Uzbekistan economic relations could

<https://elbasylibrary.gov.kz/en/news/kazakhstan-turkey-symbol-brotherhood-and-friendship>

⁴ Sholpan Ormanova, RESTORATION OF RELATIONS BETWEEN KAZAKHSTAN AND TURKEY:

INTERNATIONAL AND LEGAL BASIS, II. Türk Hukuku Tarihi Kongresi Bildirileri,

https://cdn.istanbul.edu.tr/FileHandler2.ashx?f=restoration-of-relations-between-kazakhstan-and-turkey-international-and-legal-basis_sholpan-ormanova.pdf

not reach their potential level. Although there has been a certain movement in commercial relations since 2003, the desired level has not been achieved.

In 2003, then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan visited Uzbekistan to restore relations, but the presence of opposition leader Mohammed Saleh in Turkey and Turkey's criticizing attitude towards the Karimov administration in the Andijan events in 2005 prevented the relations from improving. The Turkish and Uzbek foreign ministers, who did not come together for a long time, came together at the EU and Central Asia Forum in France in 2008 and held bilateral meetings. In a process where Turkey followed a multi-dimensional foreign policy, diplomatic initiatives gained momentum again in 2012 in order to bring the bilateral relations back to the desired level. In September, then Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan within the framework of his UN contacts in New York. In this meeting, it was agreed to prepare a cooperation plan to cover the years 2013-2015. Thus, the interrupted relations were restarted.

In particular, the meeting of Erdoğan and Kerimov in Sochi in February 2014 was considered an important step. As a matter of fact, after this meeting, Turkey reappointed an ambassador to Tashkent. The strategic relations that Turkey wanted to develop with Uzbekistan showed a more concrete progress after Şevket Mirziyoyev came to power. Turkey was also included in the wind of change that started in Uzbekistan with Mirziyoyev. Even in November 2016, when Mirziyoyev was acting president, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan made a historical visit to Uzbekistan with a large delegation. This move to deepen bilateral relations yielded results in a short time.

Turkey and Uzbekistan are countries with common cultural, linguistic and historical ties. Being the first country to recognize the independence of Uzbekistan, Turkey attaches great importance to the development of bilateral relations. With its rich culture, natural resources and economic infrastructure, Uzbekistan is one of Turkey's strategic partners in Central Asia. However, relations have not been at the desired level in the past decades. After Mirziyoyev's election as president in 2016, a rapprochement occurred between the two countries. As a result of this convergence, foreign trade volume expanded and investments increased. Between 2016 and 2019, foreign trade more than doubled and reached 2.2 billion dollars. While Turkey has an investment of over 1 billion dollars in Uzbekistan, more than 1,300 Turkish companies operate in the country.

Table 3 : TURKEY – UZBEKISTAN TRADE RELATIONSHIP

YEARS	TURKEY'S EXPORT TO UZBEKISTAN (Million dollars)	TURKEY'S IMPORT FROM UZBEKISTAN (Million dollars)
2016	533	709
2017	680	823
2018	951	795
2019	1.135 Billion	1.076 Billion
2020	1.15 Billion	969.98

Source: Republic of Turkey Ministry of Trade

As a matter of fact, Erdogan and Mirziyoyev, who came together at the international meetings held in Beijing, Astana and New York after this visit, decided to develop bilateral relations quickly. Targets such as increasing the bilateral trade volume, which is 1.3 billion dollars, to 5 billion dollars in five years and 10 billion dollars in 10 years have been determined. Şevket Mirziyoyev's visit to Turkey in October 2017 went down in history as the first presidential visit from Uzbekistan to Turkey after 20 years. During this visit, 24 agreements were signed in many fields from economy to defence

industry, from health to agriculture, from education to culture. In April 2018, Erdogan visited Uzbekistan once again, and this visit thoroughly demonstrated the importance of bilateral relations. The factors of the historical, linguistic, cultural, and ethnic closeness of the two countries and peoples, as it were, a priori directed the analytical thought towards simple, clear, and even romantic conclusions that Turkey and Uzbekistan are destined for friendly relations and their cooperation will be guaranteed by the fundamental significance of this factor.⁵ All these developments are an important indicator that the relations between Turkey and Uzbekistan will progress further in the upcoming period.

TURKEY – KYRGYZSTAN RELATIONS

Turkey became the first country to recognize the independence of the Kyrgyz Republic on December 16, 1991. Diplomatic relations between the two countries were established on 29 January 1992. In this process, embassies were opened mutually in Bishkek and Ankara. Turkey is one of the key partners for Kyrgyzstan and plays an important role in the country's foreign relations.⁶

Since 1992, more than 30 high-level visits have been made between Kyrgyzstan and Turkey and more than 100 bilateral agreements have been signed. Particularly, with the signing of the 1992 Agreement on Mutual Promotion and Protection of Investments, the Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreement in 1997, the Agreement on the Avoidance of Double Taxation in 1999, the Agreement on Cooperation in the Customs Area of 1997, and the Long-Term Trade and Economic Cooperation Program in 2002 between the two countries. economic relations are placed on a legal basis. With the Eternal Friendship and Cooperation Agreement signed between the two countries in 1997, the foundations of the strategic partnership were laid. The strong partnership, which continued with the declaration "Turkey and Kyrgyzstan: Together into the 21st Century" published in 1999, progressed until the establishment of the High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council (YDSK) signed in 2011.

The historical and cultural ties between Turkey and Kyrgyzstan provide a suitable environment for the development of commercial relations between the two countries. On the other hand, the fact that Turkey is more experienced than Kyrgyzstan in terms of industrialization and technical knowledge is an important factor in increasing the cooperation and foreign trade volume between the two countries. In addition, the diversity of investment opportunities in Kyrgyzstan makes the region attractive in terms of investment and constitutes an important reason for the increase in Turkish investors' investments in the country.

Table 4: TURKEY – KYRGYZSTAN TRADE RELATIONSHIP

YEARS	TURKEY'S EXPORT TO KYRGYZSTAN (Million dollars)	TURKEY'S IMPORT FROM KYRGYZSTAN (Million dollars)
2016	309	101
2017	343	143
2018	377	47
2019	442	77

⁵ Farkhod Tolipov, Uzbekistan-Turkey: Pending the Outcomes of Strategic Relationships, Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting, 22.07.2021, <https://cabar.asia/en/uzbekistan-turkey-pending-the-outcomes-of-strategic-relationships>

⁶ Dinara Murzaeva, Kyrgyzstan-Turkey Relations: Cooperation in Political and Educational Spheres, Review of European Studies; Vol. 6, No. 3; 2014, <file:///Users/my-mac/Downloads/39511-135238-1-SM.pdf>

2020	417.54	91.15
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Source: Republic of Turkey Ministry of Trade

Ethno-cultural closeness with Kyrgyzstan has always provided a unique chance for Turkey to build and strengthen its zone of influence.⁷ Relations between Turkey and Kyrgyzstan are maintained at the level of strategic partnership. Kyrgyzstan-Turkey Manas University, which is shown as the most serious investment made in the post-independence country of more than 200 in the political, economic, military, cultural, and educational fields between the two countries, has enabled thousands of Kyrgyz youth to learn Turkish. There is an agreement and protocol on October 31, 2018. In addition to bilateral relations, it is seen that Kyrgyzstan actively participates in Turkey's initiatives in Central Asia. The Bishkek administration takes part in formations within the Turkic world, especially the Turkic Council, and supports such activities. As of 2006, Turkey has been the country that invested most in Kyrgyzstan, which is in the weakest economic situation among the Central Asian Turkic republics. TIKA, which started its activities in Kyrgyzstan in 1992, has also followed a very active policy in the region. Established in 1995, Kyrgyzstan-Turkey Manas University continues to positively affect bilateral relations. Turkey continues to actively invest in the educational sphere of Kyrgyzstan, thereby reinforcing its "soft power" in the region.⁸ Manas University, which the Kyrgyz people describe as the most serious investment made in the country after independence, serves as an important bridge between the two peoples. Despite all these positive developments, Kyrgyzstan, especially in the last period of Atambayev, showed an opposite direction to Turkey's policies regarding the fight against FETO, and relations became strained to a certain extent. However, after Atambayev's resignation, it was observed that some of the problems between Turkey and Kyrgyzstan were eliminated.

CONCLUSION

The end of the Cold War period has been a historical turning point for Turkey as well as for the international system. The main reason for this is that five of the 15 countries that gained their independence with the dissolution of the Soviet Union have common cultural, ethnic and religious ties with Turkey. Therefore, the independence of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan caused great excitement in Turkey. The newly independent Turkish Republics have opened a new page for Turkish foreign policy with their economic and strategic potentials.

The fact that the Caucasus and Central Asia are in a position to be the scene of conflicts of interest of the great powers in the upcoming period and the difficulties faced by the countries of the region make it a necessity for Turkey to take an active role in this geography and lead the developments. This situation necessitates Turkey to be a power center that produces an effective policy and strategy against the region's countries. Turkey should not follow a wait-and-see policy by monitoring developments in these regions from afar. Undoubtedly, these recent developments have pushed Turkey and the region's countries to seek new cooperation in its strategic depths. In this context, it has condemned Turkey, in a sense, to form a "New Turkish World Politics". In this framework, the Turkish world, mainly in Central Asia and the Caucasus, has started to come to the fore again as an area where Turkey will consolidate its current power and

⁷ Adinai Kurmanbekova Kyrgyzstan and Turkey: Has a New Level of Relations Begun? Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting, 16.06.2021 <https://cabar.asia/en/kyrgyzstan-and-turkey-has-a-new-level-of-relations-begun>

⁸ ibid

influence due to strategic reasons.

When evaluated in general, it is seen that the economic relations between Turkey and other Turkic Republics are not realized at the expected level. This is due to Turkey's inability to invest in Turkic Republics as much as developed countries due to its economic inadequacies. However, from the point of view of economic integration, it is understood that Turkey has relations with the Turkic Republics in almost all economic fields and joint institutionalization studies are carried out. Despite the lack of economic relations enough, intensive cooperation and efforts are the results of the historical, cultural, and geographical closeness and ties of Turkey and the Turkic Republics. The fact that Turkey and the Turkic Republics do not reach the desired level in foreign trade may be caused by the continued dependence of the republics on Russia in various fields. For example, Russia ranks first in the foreign trade of almost all of these republics. Therefore, if Russia experiences a crisis, other republics are also affected.

Turkey, which has recently followed a more active policy in the regional and global arena, has also drawn the attention of the Central Asian Turkic Republics. They especially requested to cooperate with Turkey on the defence industry. Kazakhstan has followed a more active policy in cooperating with Turkey in strategic areas. Turkey's success in Libya, the victory brought by its cooperation with Azerbaijan during the second Karabakh War, caused a change in the perception that "Russia always wins" in the Turkish world. The reshaped perception regarding Russia has led to the re-emergence of thoughts in the society that Turkish unity should be established.

The most crucial factor in the strategic depth of the relationship between Turkey and the Turkish world is that Turkey has become an important political and economic power. Turkey needs to be a strong actor in the world order in terms of politics and economy, in the region where traces of the tendency to integrate with the strong are observed. This situation will create the necessary environment for the Turkic republics, which have a common history and culture with Turkey, to return to Turkey. The ties between the Turkic Republics and Turkey have been systematized through the Organization of Turkic States. Such an institutional structure also has an important place in terms of existing collaborations and opportunities in the future. It is thought that the Organization of Turkic States can be extremely beneficial in terms of bringing a new breath to the politics and trade of the region that has been shaped between Russia and China so far.

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