

## Quadrilateral Security Dialogue: India's Strategic Ambiguities in the Indo-Pacific Region

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### Abstract

*The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD) involving Australia, India, Japan, and the United States of America began in 2017 following a decade-long gap, with the objective of ensuring a liberal Indo-Pacific area. These prolonged constraints temporarily harmed Quadrilateral cooperation, but they are not permanent due to the four countries' shared interests in preserving a regional balance of influence, access to the seas, a free economic order based on laws, combating political debt trapping, and reining in China's assertiveness to claim territories. China's new leadership has been more aggressive and stronger, actively promoting its interests in South China and East China seas and also developing the BRI in order to display hegemonic ambitions. On the other hand, the QUAD States have already responded to China's growing aggressiveness by strengthening their collaboration in a variety of sectors, therefore multiplying the Allied States' capabilities. Despite the enormous harm caused by the Covid-19 epidemic, which presented a serious threat to the member states' economic development, coordination is likely to continue in order to fulfil common goals. The study discusses QUAD's response as well as India's strategic uncertainties in the Indian Ocean owing to China's growing influence in the blue waters. Due to the differing analyses of the threats faced by China, the paper reflects the view that India plays a critical role in the dialogue between the four countries. However, this does not prevent the QUAD Alliance from cooperating more closely on standards, strategic communications, economic policies, and military cooperation in order to preserve the democratic order that has benefited all of them.*

**Keywords:** Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, Indo-Pacific area, Regional balance of influence, India's strategic uncertainties, China's new leadership.

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## **Introduction**

The world's four democracies – Japan, India, Australia, and the United States of America – have progressively realized in the last decade that ongoing development in China will reduce acceptance of US law and order in Asia. As a result, aggressive measures are required to strengthen and protect it. While the emphasis has changed slightly, the idea of assertive response was supported by diplomatic remarks by Prime Minister of India and their Foreign Minister in the December 2017 US National Security Policy (Mofa Japan, 2017).

The QUAD was created in reaction to President Xi Jinping's more assertive China, which refused his predecessor's approach of smile diplomacy. China's operations in the East and South China Seas, as well as worries about BRI Project's geostrategic and economic consequences, raised doubts on main aspects of the current framework. The members relaunched the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue – also known as the QUAD – in November 2017 as part of a 10-year effort to transform the Indo-Pacific region into a more transparent, stable, and democratic region (Economic Times, 2019). The coalition's underlying meaning was that deeper collaboration, shared interests, ideals, and views were achievable for the four countries with high capability.

## **Significance of the Study**

The QUAD, an informal strategic partnership formed by the four main Indo-Pacific democracies in reaction to China's destabilizing foreign policy, is gradually strengthening. The objective was to establish a solid alliance based on shared principles and mutual protection of interests. China is a growing threat to all of its objectives as Chinese expansionism and reckless interference have transformed the QUAD into a genuine structural system of security. Additionally, the QUAD is focused on China, with the objective of preserving a stable power balance in an open and free Indo-Pacific. While coalition participants believe that a liberal and secure Indo-Pacific is important in principle, Chinese expansionism has fueled the alliance's recent moves.

However, the QUAD's future is likely to depend on India, as the other three group members are already linked by security partnerships. The primary objective of India's participation is to establish a democratic league in the Indo-Pacific region. Even though India shares a long border with China, it must nevertheless deal with Chinese territorial aggression on its own, as it does. China's advances into the Himalayas have compelled India to take an aggressive policy. The QUAD is now more likely than ever to transition from discussion and collaboration to military

alliance, which will play a critical role in the region's present multilateral security system. The QUAD is a developing multinational effort tasked with monitoring China's presence in the Indo-Pacific area covertly.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD), an informal coalition of the Indo-Pacific region's four democracies – the United States of America, Japan, India, and Australia – is exclusively focused on China in order to oppose Beijing's forceful behavior in the region. Initially formed as an economic coalition to promote free trade zones and ease access to sea lanes, the QUAD has developed into a security coalition opposed to China's expansionist intentions in the Indo-Pacific region, with the objective of preventing Beijing from taking land. China has expanded in economic, political, and strategic areas as a consequence of its Built and Road Initiative (BRI) program, which QUAD believes is threatening the Indo-Pacific region's Balance of Power. The QUAD members are responding to an assertive China by enhancing cooperation in a number of fields, whereas India, China's immediate neighbor, faces strategic uncertainty as a result of deteriorating ties with China and Beijing's hegemonic ambitions in the region. Border conflicts and China's growing security buildup in the Indian Ocean continue to wear down New Delhi's strategic and political role in the area, notably in the Indian Ocean. India, along with the other members of the QUAD, is adopting a balanced reaction to China's aggressive behavior in the region.

### **Literature Review**

The study of the different literature about quadrilateral connections highlighted terminological differences in distinct types of security coordination. The word alliance has been often used in International Relations (IR) to refer to interstate security cooperation. Despite its conceptual significance, researchers have been divided on its relevance.

Stephen Walt defines alliance as a formal or informal arrangement for defense cooperation between two or more countries (Walt, 1997). First is a situation in which security cooperation is specifically guaranteed in a contract, whereas the second is based on common expectations for collaboration created by verbal agreements and joint military exercises. Unlike Walt, Glenn Snyder sees an alliance as a formal coalition of states for the purpose of military action, with the objective of defending or reinforcing its members and certain other states, whether explicitly stated (Snyder, 1990). On the other hand, experts largely think that the first Quadrilateral Security Dialogue involving Japan, the US, Australia, and India

resulted in China's strategic containment in 2007, signaling the country's expanding footprint in the Indo-Pacific area.

Ashok Sharma examines the potential for distorting Quadrilateral military cooperation between the QUAD members. Australia and India are unlikely to seek an alliance with four parties, given their close economic connections with China (Sharma, 2010). India and Australia do not appear to be provoking China, as the QUAD is a diplomatic categorization with or surrounding China. This notion, however, ignores the contrast in Japan's and America's economic dependence on China, as well as their reactions to quadrilateral collaboration. Additionally, Lavina Lee asserts that China's Smile Diplomacy harmed the initial QSD attempt to persuade the international community of the peaceful growth of China (Lee, 2016). While China has upgraded its military capabilities to greater levels, the impact on the South China and South East China seas had not been demonstrated at the time. Additionally, Lavina Lee and John Lee have been examining India's QSD stance and the extent to which New Delhi is unwilling to participate. While the authors claim that strengthening security relations with Japan, the US, and Australia would motivate India, they conclude that China's efforts and engagement in the Indo-Pacific do not pose an immediate danger to India's geopolitical interests (Lee & Lee, *Japan–India Cooperation and Abe's Democratic Security Diamond: Possibilities, Limitations and the View from Southeast Asia*, 2016). And the work of Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), “Australia-India-Japan-United States Consultations on the Indo-Pacific,” media release, November 12, 2017, is also added in this. The “Quad”: Security Cooperation Among the United States, Japan, India, and Australia, a report by US congressional research council 2022 was also covered to make this study updated.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework provides a conceptual foundation for understanding how decision-makers respond to a situation upon which they must make a choice. According to contemporary QSD literature, scholars believe that the grouping of the four nations was formed in response to China's rise. Simultaneously, it emphasizes that the technological basis for defense coordination between the QUAD members has not been established. Given the study's orientation, two theoretical frameworks are proposed: the Strategic Partnership Model and the Balance of Threat theory.

According to Thomas Wilkins, a strategic partnership model is defined as a strategic alliance that is encouraged to expand in response to possible instability (Wilkins, 2008). A strategic partnership is distinct from a conventional alliance,

which was focused primarily on state security and included areas of cooperation such as economics, climate, and development. In this sense, the strategic alliance, QUAD, has developed in response to China's growing dominance in the Indo-Pacific area. While external insecurity demonstrates the significance of system-level variables, it does not define or justify what it comprises. Conversely, members of a strategic alliance do not necessarily have a common perspective of the danger, as the threat felt by India and Japan may differ from the threat perceived by the US and Australia.

The idea is reinforced further by Stephen Walt's Balance of Danger theory, which claims that states, rather than relying on power alone, balance against a threat through alliance formation (Walt, *Alliance formation and the balance of world power*, 1985). Walt stated that while determining the size of a danger, aggressive intentions must be recognized. Though the United States and Australia may not share the same perception of threat as India and Japan, these two countries would see it broadly, as rising Chinese dominance in the Pacific and Indian Oceans might pose a challenge to them militarily, economically, and strategically. China's increasing military progress in the oceans would be concerning for the US, even more so given Washington's defense pact with Japan. Additionally, almost 40% of the world's offshore oil production originates from the Indian Ocean (Jaishankar, 2016). China is likely to strengthen its military footprint in the Indian Ocean in order to safeguard its economic investments along the Silk Road, posing a danger to Indian Ocean countries in general and India in particular. As a result of this perceived danger, an alliance is being created to balance the threat posed by these nations in the area in general.

### **QUAD's strategic orientation towards Indo-Pacific power politics**

Military power, diplomatic objectives, the capacity to pay for future retaliation against China, and strategic culture differ significantly among the QUAD alliance members. While these distinctions are important, quadrilateral collaboration is not ruled out. The alliance must work more to preserve stability in the Indo-Pacific region, both for their own and shared interests. This needs coordination of quadrilateral defense, consistency, diplomatic communications, and targeted economic actions in order to preserve the present administrative system. A clear comparison to China's BRI illustrates the economic and political dangers and costs connected with the already began policy of receiving Chinese money. There is more work to be done by China to implement her projects and to provide a sustainable and defined source of infrastructure financing.

- ***QUAD's Military Cooperation***

Geopolitically, the QUAD's primary importance is to communicate to China that the four alliance nations are capable of threatening China and preventing additional influence that may destabilize the situation. To minimize further destabilization of the rule-based system, the ongoing development of QUAD debates at the level of foreign ministers and the increasing QUAD programme conceal the shared solution that the four nations are willing to accept. The four countries created efficient bilateral and trilateral military cooperation, with no difference between the members. As these trilateral frameworks reinforce the process of connection and trust, the strategic collaboration between the four Indo-Pacific nations with increased capabilities confirms the deterrent threat.

India appears to be secure, but the South China Sea and Doklam crises have taught New Delhi two fundamental truths about Chinese methods. To begin, preventive steps must be taken to prevent China from acting in changing the territorial status quo if construction proceeds. If a change has occurred, it cannot be reversed without a direct conflict. No member of the QUAD alliance has demonstrated that they are willing to pay this price. Second, China's ambition to achieve territorial objectives has been aided by the lack of a viable regulatory body in the South China Sea. As a result, China seemed intimidated rather than scared. India appears to have learnt the lesson of responding swiftly to China's border threats, but not to China's maritime ambitions. Given these strategic insights, the four nations must be able to extend their military cooperation without unjustly contributing to China's outdated response, while improving overall their capacity for collective and genuine action.

Variation between four states in regions of maritime significance is sometimes noted as a limiting factor in the partnership. On the contrary, it might be viewed as more productive and as a chance to share the marine industry's normal division of work. While China can only rely on the capacities of its Indo-Pacific project to strengthen maritime capacity in critical regions of interest, the QUAD coalition can collectively preserve a more beneficial multipolar system. India, which possesses stronger capability in the Indo-Pacific than the US, should be encouraged to play a larger role in the Indian Ocean (especially the Bay of Bengal).

- ***Enhancing Connectivity***

The QUAD members' primary spheres of cooperation will include greater connection, improved surveillance, as well as identification capabilities and capacity growth, all of which will have an impact on China's maritime ambitions.

Expanded naval communication should be a priority in order to reduce the QUAD Alliance's joint maritime risks and challenges. To begin, India could suggest that Australia shall participate as an official observer at the Malabar exercises to ease India's fears and progress toward non-permanent involvement. China's training should begin in the Indian Ocean to be less threatening but also to improve communication connections. As a result, exercises may place an emphasis on collaboration and participation in the supply of goods, with the possibility of military drills centered on China's behavior. At bilateral and tripartite phases, such exercises must begin and expand quickly. China may not desire to impose pressure on New Delhi, and it is certain that India's post-Doklam reset, as evidenced by President Xi's informal meeting with Prime Minister Modi in Wuhan in April 2018, provided no real outcomes other than a temporary decrease in tensions in 2017 (Rajeswari, 2019). China expanded its network in and around Doklam in reaction to India's annexation of Kashmir via CPEC Program (Baruah, 2018). Pakistan has upgraded its military forces in order to reinforce its strategic position and expand bilateral relations with China at the expense of India. China backed Pakistan's stance on the Kashmir dispute by presenting it to the United Nations Security Council after the Indian constitution's removal of Jammu-Kashmir autonomy (Rajeswari, 2019). Australia's departure from the Malabar exercise had little influence on China's policies, but rather harmed India's strategic independence.

- ***Maritime security and Military agreements***

Another approach for the quadrilateral cooperation to establish a firm foothold in the maritime domain, particularly in submarine warfare, is to raise awareness of the maritime domain, which includes India and the Pacific. This may be accomplished through collaborating on military infrastructure and intelligence in the Indo-Pacific region. The 2018 Indo-US Communications and Security Agreement (COMCASA) offers New Delhi with accessibility to Washington's reliable and secure defense communications equipment, as well as real-time data exchange with QUAD members. This will improve the coalition's military integration and mutual naval surveillance (Panda, 2018).

Additionally, India has signed maritime agreements with a number of states, particularly Australia and the United States, which have the potential to be extended to include the QUAD's military shipping arrangements. Moreover, India and the United States reached an agreement in 2016 on a Logistics Exchange Agreement (LEMOA) (Panda, 2018). By 2020, Australia and India are anticipated to finalize a logistics agreement, which will improve future military usage

projections. This agreement must be followed by agreements between the QUAD members.

The US categorization of India as a key defense ally in 2016 and its acceptance of Tier 1 as a Strategic Trade Permit (STA) in 2018 put India on level with US allies in terms of latest defense equipment development (Commerce, 2018). The organization increases the possibility of coordinating the purchases to overcome shared information gap and eliminate wastage of resources. Additionally, it lays the groundwork for future conservation and development partnership, as well as collaboration with India and other US partners. This aim will require Japan to take a leading role in promoting peace by selling defense equipment to nations that do not have constitutional constraints on military power. The QUAD will also instantly benefit from a focused effort to establish military capabilities that are unique from those of China for minor Southeast Asian countries in the Indian and Pacific Oceans (Commerce, 2018). Several of these states have vast territorial waters and monopolized economic zones, and the QUAD is interested in strengthening their ability for surveillance and control, as well as in preserving some kind of regulatory order.

- ***Maintaining law and order***

The QUAD has to work together to withstand China's economic pressure and state practices that violate international law. In place of the BRI, the QUAD recently proposed a system of activity-based mutual financing. In late 2018, Australia, Japan, and the United States established the India-Pacific Trilateral Investment Alliance to promote and facilitate private sector infrastructure, digital networks, and energy infrastructure investment. The promise by Australia, Japan, the United States, and New Zealand to increase power coverage from 13% to 70% of the population by 2030 is a demonstration of initiative for cooperative efforts (Dziedzic, 2018).

Japan's usually overlooked contribution, which includes \$ 200 billion in infrastructure expenditure throughout Asia and Africa between 2015 and 2020, might serve as a model for this quadrilateral infrastructure fund. Japan encourages economically efficient and cost-effective infrastructure development that is also transparent in terms of bids and conditions (Dziedzic, 2018). And it is open to the creation of local jobs and the transfer of skills to accommodate country workers. Social and environmental problems are addressed correctly, and certain development criteria are reinforced. A Quadrilateral initiative is the logical factor in preventing the erosion of BRI governance standards and principles, as well as casting doubt on China's larger narrative in developing nations where Beijing alone understands their development requirements. The goal is to make



the BRI a viable choice for developing countries while also enhancing regulatory stability (Dziedzic, 2018).

While China may struggle to undertake government-led infrastructure investment, a quadrilateral infrastructure fund may use the knowledge and expertise of each country's particular infrastructure, ensuring that scarce resources are directed toward the most concentrated nations and projects. Due to their geostrategic significance, small island and coastal nations should prioritize the primary maritime communication routes that China may use for power forecasting purposes, particularly in ports and the construction of critical infrastructure.

Additionally, QUAD should continue to advocate for the adoption and utilization of Japan's investment as a model for international infrastructure participation in international level, while also highlighting China's obligations. An additional benefit of the quadrilateral development fund, which includes non-regional powers, is that weak nations are convinced that these resources exist as a result of their usage. They are incapable of defending or promoting their own internal interests.

### **Impact of QUAD on India's strategic ambiguity**

India's strategic policy is heavily influenced by the balance of power between China and other nations such as the United States, Australia, France, and Japan. QUAD is an informal strategic organization dedicated to enhancing stability and multilateral collaboration on Indian Ocean strategic issues. The external balance looked to be a sensible approach in light of the public danger to these nations and their geographical closeness to China's regional aims. Furthermore, Beijing continues to undermine the QUAD's values and legal commitments to a free democracy and a liberal international system. Indeed, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo stated publicly in October 2019 that the US is not just attempting to control China, but also reducing its existing global role, and that the QUAD may be a critical method to guarantee China retains its legitimate global position.

Even with the QUAD's balancing policy toward China, India is unlikely to wish to offend China. Rather than that, it desires cooperation with China. Indeed, India's economy is extremely reliant on China. As a result, collaboration with China is critical. Delhi has already adopted a strategy of self-government integration, and India is not a member of any organized military bloc against China. However, it remains unbalanced.

There are several reasons why India's political independence is based on an unclear foreign policy. To begin, there is the unpredictable behavior of a US president involved in a trade and technology dispute with China. Second, India is

unable to prevent the development of diplomatic, commercial, military, and commercial relations with Western enemies such as Iran and Russia. Third, India must independently showcase its strength, competitiveness, and capability in order to establish itself as a real regional leader. Additionally, geographic imagination is essential to India's historically neutral culture and attitude. A military alliance would risk India's strategic stability and, eventually, India's regional power status.

While India needs to be an effective participant on the international arena, its limitations remain embedded in the face of such a big objective. This is why India engages in so-called hedging diplomacy with China through political duplication. Modi's multi-engagement approach is motivated by a strong China, an elusive United States, and geopolitical dominance. However, its constitutional sovereignty is completely consistent with the maintenance of international peace. Meanwhile, India is hampering Australia's attempts to resolve its problems with China. While defensive fragmentation is an unsatisfactory circumstance for Delhi, it cannot be seen as a second force in the Indian Ocean.

Due to India's political insecurity and the logic of its collaboration in November 2019 in combination with this external balance plan, the concept of "Blue Dot Network" was initiated (Kumar, 2019). It is the US-led response against the Belt and Road Initiative, which is backed by Australia and Japan (QUAD members). If India joins the Blue Dot Network (BDN), the QUAD's focus will change from defense to economic growth, which may have strategic significance, particularly if China views BDN as anti BRI (Kumar, 2019).

India countered China's String of Pearls policy with its own 'Necklace of Diamonds' policy: a plan of encirclement (Khalid & Gul, 2017). India is increasing the size of its naval bases and establishing relations with strategically placed countries to counter China's activities in the ocean. New Delhi has been building or developing ports in the following countries: Iran's Chahbahar port, Indonesia's Sabang port, Oman's Duqm port, Myanmar's Sittwe port, Bangladesh's Mongal sea port, Sri Lanka's Trincomalee port and Singapore's Changi Naval base, in order to foster friendly relations and counter Chinese policies in these countries (Khalid & Gul, 2017).

India's counter strategy to String of Pearls is well-designed and the timely execution of planned strategic steps would play a key role in making India a strong leader in the Indian Ocean. As a result, India must take the initiative and strengthen ties with its neighbors and major powers. As a viable counterbalance to China's String of Pearls doctrine, the Rim and Island neighbors want cooperative leadership, not threatening leadership. Chinese ports such as

Hambantota in Sri Lanka and Gwadar in Pakistan, where China may be deploying troops, military marine equipment demonstrate that the Maritime Silk Road is more than a centuries-old commercial route. As a result, India's naval capabilities must be developed and modernized in order to survive and function in an increasingly competitive geopolitical environment.



**Figure 1: India's Necklace of Diamonds policy**

### **Effects of QUAD on relations of India with China**

The Asian era characterized by a commitment to stability, progress, and security. Given the mutual motivations and geopolitical context, it would be advantageous to preserve peaceful and cooperative ties between India and China in the current climate. The twenty-first century is referred to as the Asian century. China and India can contribute constructively and cooperatively in this respect. In the Asian century, warm relations between India and China are critical. At the moment, the relationship is complicated with key issues, including a border conflict, nuclear security, military and diplomatic assistance for Pakistan, and membership restrictions of India in the Nuclear Supply Society (NSG).

Additionally, the conflicts of India and China can be illustrated by the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), and the 2017 Doklam standoff via a circular track. Asia has seen a historic transformation

as a result of significant demographic, scientific, and technological advancements. Given India's and China's extraordinary economic histories, the Asian century's future is bright. Despite bilateral tensions and global leadership ambitions, recent strategic alliances have benefited India and China in a variety of different conditions. The newly formed QUAD will intensify mistrust among the Himalayan neighbors.

China poses enormous geopolitical challenges for regional and external actors, including rising military investment, military expansion, militarization of the South China Sea islands, violations of international standards and increasing global strategic and economic domination. China has confronted enormous diplomatic and geostrategic difficulties not just with her neighbors, particularly India, Japan, and Australia, but also with the US. In this sense, the QUAD has been reintroduced with an emphasis on the development of a rules-based framework that prioritizes freedom of navigation and airspace, upholding the rules of international law, improved connectivity, and marine protection.

It is critical to remember that India is not just at war with China on its borders. The ideal stability between two neighbors that desire to interfere and harm one another's interests includes geographical regions in the Indian and Pacific Oceans and includes the link of Southeast Asian nations' east and west coastlines (ASEAN). However, confronting Chinese soft power initiatives, particularly through the Belt and Road Initiative, is costly. Given the gravity of the situation, India's military and financial power must be urgently developed. New Delhi is forced to confront the Indo-Pacific QUAD against an overpowering and ruthless adversary in order to meet this great challenge.

The Asian Century is concerned with stability, growth, and security. Due to mutual unhappiness and the prevailing geopolitical context, it would be a joy to foster peace and cordial ties between India and China in the current climate. If both nations continue to resist geopolitical organizations led by authorities from outside the area, the scope for peaceful collaboration between them will be restricted. Otherwise, peaceful and cooperative relations between India and China would be required to achieve the Asian century.

## **Conclusion**

Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or QUAD is an outcome of Australia, India, Japan, and the United States' geopolitical interests and concerns about China and its unilateral activities. However, strategic alignment with China's growth does not ensure the QUAD's future as a powerful policy strategy. Each QUAD member has an own perspective on China's rise and a distinct foreign policy aimed at

undermining it. Each has strong business connections to China. As a result, it would be counterproductive to promote QUAD as an anti-China framework. Additionally, the QUAD's American perspective differs from that of Australia, Japan, and India, while all four countries believe that both QUAD development and opposing Beijing's growth in the Indo-Pacific are the single most unifying factor for the alliance's success.

India, as a growing Indo-Pacific force, must approach carefully and avoid an unambiguous anti-China attitude. Similarly, India is unable to reject the US by genuinely rejecting the QUAD. The QUAD enabled New Delhi to establish a continental connection and contact corridor with its neighbors. As a result, it must maintain regular communication with nations that are not favorable to China, such as Japan, Australia, and the United States. India must develop greater autonomy and become less dependent on global supply chain systems dominated by China. Joining the QUAD is a positive move for India in terms of developing alternative supply chains and value chains, increasing infrastructure investment, and defending national interests against a highly aggressive China. Indeed, India's regional and international policy is increasingly based on a desire to counter China's enormous influence, rather than by a desire to establish an independent position as a force of any significance.

### **Recommendations**

- QUAD has strategic clarity to bring in. Real objectives of the QUAD framework must be held.
- India is the only nation with a land-border dispute with China in the QUAD system. Moreover, unlike other members, India has no formal security assurances from the United States. QUAD members should participate in activities along with New Delhi and on capability growth of the alliance.
- In infrastructure programs, India, Japan and Australia should lead as even the USA needs to be more involved in advancing the vision of connectivity.
- It is necessary that the QUAD members must not be reactive on issues that could result in havoc.

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