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17**Russia is Back on Stage: German and American Strategies**

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Introduction

What are the drivers of Russian Foreign Policy?

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How do Germany, the United States, and the European Union currently react towards Russia and what challenges are they facing?

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What policies should Germany and the United States adopt vis-à-vis Russia?

Russian President Vladimir Putin's recent announcement that he would accept the nomination to head the United Russia ticket in the parliamentary elections in December¹ has been only the latest in a series of surprising reports out of Russia. The differences between Russia, the United States, and Germany on the missile defense system in Europe and on the question of energy security for Europe—and its effect on European-Russian and German-Russian relations—have kept Russia and German-American-Russian relations in the news for most of the last two years. These issues, as well as other international challenges, such as the future of Kosovo, Iraq, Afghanistan, the fight against international terrorism, and the proliferation of nuclear weapons, can all only be solved with the cooperation of Russia. Europe (and in particular Germany) and the United States therefore have an interest in managing relations with Russia effectively over the coming years. German-Russian relations will also have an effect on German-American relations as well as inter- (and intra-) European relations and the same holds true vice versa. Thus, the relationship triangle between the United States, Germany, and Russia will be of importance not only for these three countries but for managing issues and upcoming problems in Europe and in the world.

With a series of upcoming elections, including the Russian parliamentary elections approaching in December 2007, the Russian presidential election scheduled for March 2008, the U.S. presidential election taking place in November 2008, and the German parliamentary elections in the fall of 2009, the next two years will bring many domestic changes in these three countries, which will have a direct implication for their respective foreign policies as well as on their relationships with each other. This makes the next two years critical for German-American-Russian relations. Russia's foreign policy in the past two years has been influenced by its domestic situation (which becomes especially evident in this transition period), its economic strength, and its strategic understanding of the world. Only if the United States, Germany, and Europe understand this, will they be able to develop a coherent strategy to deal with a Russia that is back on the world stage. A basis for a successful strategy will have to have two features: the development of a common energy approach by the European Union and European-German-American cooperation on international challenges such as Kosovo and

Afghanistan. Cooperation with Russia on solving international problems might be possible in selective cases. Increased cooperation with Russia, however, will depend on developments in its political system; therefore the West will also need to consider alternatives in order to achieve and secure its interests.

Russian Foreign Policy

In order to develop a coherent strategy towards Russia, it is imperative to understand Russian foreign policy. This policy is primarily based on Russia's domestic situation, its renewed economic strength (which is mainly supported by its energy resources and rising energy prices), and a strategic understanding of the world, Europe, the United States, and Russia's place within the world and in relation to Europe and the United States.

The Domestic Situation

Every country's foreign policy is impacted by its domestic situation and Russia is no exception. Putin's recent decision to run in the parliamentary election only highlights what many observers have already stated before: Power in Russia is centralized in the hands of an elite few. While this would not necessarily be remarkable in itself, remarkable is the fact that this power structure, which now seems to shift from the office of the President to the office of the Prime Minister in the form of Vladimir Putin, is accepted by the Russian population. An opinion poll conducted by the Pew Global Attitudes Project in 2006 found that, when asked what kind of government they

would prefer when it comes to solving the nation's problems, 61 percent of Russians surveyed favored a strong leader compared to 21 percent of Russians who would prefer democracy.² Furthermore, national and personal prosperity outweighed the benefits of democracy for the survey respondents, with 81 percent stating that a strong economy is more important than a good democracy, compared to 14 percent who preferred a good democracy.³ Most respondents see Putin as the strong leadership that Russia needs; he received a 75 percent approval rating in Pew's survey.⁴ Despite the fact that the electronic media are controlled by the government in Russia, and despite the natural limitations of public opinion polls, these findings clearly suggest that Russians are comfortable with their current government, with President Putin, and with the societal status quo. This level of approval in Russian society seems to be tied to economic well-being, which is ensured by current energy prices, guaranteeing the level of approval, at least in the short-run.

The domestic status quo concentrates a great deal of power in the hands of very few, which has implications for Russia's foreign policy. Vladimir Putin and the Russian elite have a

IMPORTANT TREATIES IN U.S.-RUSSIAN-GERMAN RELATIONS

Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty:

Both Parties agreed to limit qualitative improvement of their ABM technology, e.g., not to develop, test, or deploy ABM launchers capable of launching more than one interceptor missile at a time or modify existing launchers to give them this capability, and systems for rapid reload of launchers are similarly barred. These provisions, the Agreed Statements clarify, also ban interceptor missiles with more than one independently guided warhead.

Source: <http://www.state.gov/www/global/arms/treaties/abm/abm2.html>

Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty:

Article IV: 1. Each Party shall eliminate all its intermediate-range missiles and launchers of such missiles, and all support structures and support equipment of the categories listed in the Memorandum of Understanding associated with such missiles and launchers, so that no later than three years after entry into force of this Treaty and thereafter no such missiles, launchers, support structures or support equipment shall be possessed by either Party. 2. To implement paragraph 1 of this Article, upon entry into force of this Treaty, both Parties shall begin and continue throughout the duration of each phase, the reduction of all types of their deployed and non-deployed intermediate-range missiles and deployed and non-deployed launchers of such missiles and support structures and support equipment associated with such missiles and launchers in accordance with the provisions of this Treaty.

Source: <http://www.state.gov/www/global/arms/treaties/inf2.html>

Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty:

The original CFE Treaty set equal limits for East and West in the ATTU on key conventional armaments essential for conducting surprise attacks or initiating large-scale offensive operations. Those armaments/equipment include: battle tanks, armored combat vehicles, and artillery pieces, as well as combat aircraft (except for naval air) and attack helicopters. In addition to limitations on the number of armaments in each category, the Treaty also provides for central zonal limits to prevent destabilizing force concentrations in Europe and for regional ("flank") limits, which were modified by the Flank Agreement of May 1996. Whereas the original CFE Treaty established an East-West group structure for limiting NATO and Warsaw Pact conventional armaments, the Adapted Treaty provides for a system of national and territorial ceilings (the former limits the number of armaments each state may possess, while the latter limits the total number of Treaty-limited equipment present within a State Party's borders); an accession mechanism for new States Parties; enhanced verification and transparency regimes; and honoring current Treaty commitments pending entry into force of the Adapted Treaty. The Adapted Treaty will facilitate NATO enlargement and reinforce the territorial sovereignty of individual States Parties.

Source: <http://www.state.gov/t/ac/rls/fs/11243.htm>

strong interest in ensuring that the transfer of power actually preserves their access to power and wealth—thus safeguarding the status quo. To achieve this, the government under Putin has used its foreign policy to legitimize the domestic power constellation. Thus, “the closer we come to the end of Putin’s second term, the more the Kremlin needs to find an idea that would preserve everything it has achieved in the past eight years. [...] [This idea] can be stated as follows: ‘We will protect the country from external enemies and establish a new global order to replace the one that so humiliated Russia in the 1990s.’”⁵ As it seeks to renegotiate all agreements with the West from the 1990s, Russian foreign policy is, thus, directly linked to its domestic situation.

The agreements that Russia is seeking to change include such important international arrangements as the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty, and the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) treaty. Negotiated in the 1990s, the Russian view is that these treaties were imposed on a weak Russia by the West; it now seeks more favorable arrangements for Russian interests. Russia, the argument goes, can now rectify this perceived wrong with its growing international strength. Recent frictions between Russia and the West can be better understood with this in mind; the West has not sufficiently accounted for this Russian mentality, which then hampers its foreign policy. Undoubtedly, it will be difficult to deal with a Russia that not only wants to stake out its interests in the game of international relations but fundamentally wants to change the rules of the game.

Energy Policy

Russia’s energy policy is one of the key aspects of Russian foreign policy for Europe—and is also the most contentious. In the late 1980s and into the early 1990s, Europe and Russia were cooperating on issues related to energy. With the rise of energy prices leading to record high prices in recent years, Russia has used its energy resources to pay off its debt and to accumulate a considerable amount of wealth derived from its energy exports. While not reaching all aspects of the economy, energy has put Russia not only in a better economic position, but also in a strategically important position. This has been mirrored by statements of Russian politicians. Indeed, “Vladislav Surkov, the chief Kremlin ideologist, advocates converting energy and economic power into political power, and this is the essence of the Kremlin worldview.”⁶

This worldview also explains the frictions between Europe and Russia of the past couple of years over the issue of energy, which has caused the Europeans to become increasingly concerned about Russia and European energy security. While Russia’s confrontational stance towards the Ukraine by with-

holding gas deliveries in 2006, the unreliability of the Russian government, and its unwillingness to sign the European Energy Charter have tainted relations with Europe, Russia’s domestic energy policy should be of more concern to the European Union. Russia has failed to implement market reforms in the energy sector leading to a de facto monopoly in the gas market. The linkage between the energy companies and the political elite has led to the stagnation of political and legal reforms in the energy sector, hampering any potential for foreign companies to invest in the Russian energy market. Gazprom “is the company identified with the Kremlin. [...] During a speech marking the 10th anniversary of Gazprom in 2003, Putin said that Gazprom was a strategically important company. ‘Gazprom,’ he said, ‘is a powerful and economic lever of influence over the rest of the world.’”⁷ Analysts, however, have started to question the ability of Russia to deliver the promised gas to Europe. Even though Russia controls 40 percent of the world’s gas reserves, “Gazprom is buying gas instead of developing the fields,”⁸ which will lead to gas shortages in the future. Because Gazprom and Russia are not interested in international investors partnering with Gazprom to develop these fields, gas exports from Russia to the European Union will most likely have to decrease in order for the Russian domestic market to be supplied.

It will also be very interesting to see how Russia will manage the wealth from its oil and gas resources, as well as these resources themselves. Not only must Russia determine the rate of depletion of its gas reserves, it must also determine how much is consumed domestically and how much to export. Furthermore, Russia faces the question of where to invest its natural resource wealth—in Russian or foreign bonds, in security or equity. This debate in Russia, interestingly enough, intersects with the German debate about nationally owned wealth funds, including many from Russia, buying companies in western Europe. Russian investments in Europe with money derived from its gas exports have been met with suspicion and the fear that Russia will increase its political power through economic ownership. There has been considerable debate in Russia about how to alleviate that fear. By understanding this problem of Russia, Europe has an opportunity to engage Russia. If Europe misses this opportunity, however, it might be faced with an increasingly autarkic and nationalistic Russia. The non-transparent internal decision-making in Russia, however, makes any negotiations in terms of energy complicated.

Strategic Understanding of the World

Russia's strategic understanding of the world, its role in it, and the role of the EU and the United States is fundamentally different from the strategic understanding that the EU and the United States have. From Russian relations with its neighbors to the importance of the European Union and the power of the United States, Russian and Western strategic understanding differs. Russia does not yet consider the European Union an important power and cohesive entity, but rather views it as a collection of states, separated into eastern and western Europe. Putin declared that, "It is difficult for us to entertain a dialogue with the EU if it has no precise, clear structures and while Europe is still in the process of taking shape."⁹

Because Russia sees the EU as inconvenient/cumbersome and not highly effective, it has concentrated on fostering bilateral ties with key nations in Europe, most notably Germany and France. Russia has devised this strategy not only because it finds the EU difficult to deal with, but because this strategy also fits in with its overall strategic thinking and its interests in Europe. While it does not consider the EU as being powerful yet, stressing bilateral relations is also born out of a "divide and conquer" strategy. Russia has begun to master the game of using a divide in Europe and in the European Union between new and old member states and between eastern and western Europe. Understanding these fissures and using them to its advantage has become a masterful game Russia plays. This was especially evident during the missile defense issues raised by the United States. Germany, as a western European country, has been generally opposed to stationing components of a missile defense system in Poland or the Czech Republic, especially in public opinion polls. Both of those countries have been equally adamant about wanting the components to be placed in their countries. Aside from the question of the technical feasibility of a missile defense system, analysts and scientists have debated if the system would indeed be directed against threatening missiles from states such as Iran or if, in fact, planned installations could be used as a basis for a future system which would then be directed against Russian missiles, as Russia has claimed. In any case, Russia sees the missile defense system as directed against it, especially if this system would be stationed in states in the post-Soviet Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), states which it considers its "near abroad."

Russia differs from the West in understanding its relations with former communist countries, especially the ones which belonged to the Soviet Union in the past. As the EU crept closer to Russia by extending its membership to Poland and the Baltic States, Russia began to assert its power over CIS states. Thus, "the concept of 'the near abroad,' which Moscow

used in the 1990s to justify its hegemony over the new states on Russia's periphery, was suddenly revived—only now there were two versions of it, one from the perspective of Moscow, the other from the perspective of Brussels, both of which were claiming the same territory."¹⁰ Russia considers the CIS countries,, especially Ukraine, Georgia, and Belarus, as states belonging to its sphere of interest and seeks to minimize involvement from the U.S. and the EU in its neighborhood. In fact, Russia "believes that the colored revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine were engineered by the United States with help from the EU. [...] Russia dislikes the EU's European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), designed to encourage closer contacts between the EU and states of the Western Newly Independent States (NIS) and South Caucasus. It views the EU as a rival and believes the EU should not influence domestic developments in Eurasia."¹¹ In this, Russia tries to assert its influence over the states of the CIS by using energy as a foreign policy tool for example.

In terms of the United States, Russia views the U.S. as a declining power. Boggled down in Iraq and Afghanistan and with weakening economic power and moral standing in the world, the United States is perceived as losing its number one status in the world. Moscow and Washington have a different relationship than Berlin and Moscow, not only historically, but also from a geopolitical and economic viewpoint. Russia and Germany are closer in proximity and in terms of economic ties, especially in the energy sector, which will always bind Russia and Germany closer together than ties between the U.S. and Russia.

Russian-American relations have become more strained in recent years. This is partially a result of Putin's game of playing up anti-Western sentiments to unite Russia. This has been particularly successful with the younger generation of Russians. In a recent survey "nearly 80 percent agreed that 'the United States tries to impose its norms and way of life on the rest of the world' [and] [...] when asked which of five words best described the United States in relation to Russia, 64 percent chose either 'enemy' or 'rival.'"¹² Thus, even though the strategic assessment of the United States is colored by domestic considerations, Putin's anti-American stance has long-term repercussions for the Russian-U.S. relationship. Furthermore, regardless of domestic considerations, Russia does view the United States' role in the world as declining and is preparing to become another power in a potentially bi- or multi-polar world of the future.

Russia's strategic assessment of the world, its understanding of both the EU and the U.S., together with its energy resources

and its domestic political situation, have fueled its decision to reclaim its “rightful” place on the world stage. The perception in Russia that both the EU and the U.S. are not powerful or are losing power (structural challenges for the EU versus political problems with Iraq and Afghanistan for the U.S.) has emboldened Russian policymakers. Likewise, the leverage available

to a state with energy resources, like Russia’s, and the bolstering of domestic political players through foreign policy have contributed to the conclusion that Russia is back. Yet the question remains: will and how will Europe, Germany, and the United States react?

Strategies of the West

The United States, the EU, and Germany face a reemerging Russia and they will need to develop a strategy not only to deal with Russia itself, but also with Russian interests in Europe and in the world. Russia is as integral to the solution of international challenges (such as Kosovo, Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Middle East) as is the United States. Germany’s past closeness with Russia means that it will play a special role in engaging Russia in finding a solution. While Russian-German relations are not as close under Chancellor Angela Merkel as under Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, projects such as the Nord Stream Pipeline will tie both countries together. Since “Germany is Russia’s most important political partner in Europe and its top trading partner; the business community wants a productive political atmosphere, and German-Russian trade grew by 25 percent to 39 billion euros in 2005. Germany is Russia’s largest natural gas customer, importing forty billion cubic meters per year or 40 percent of its consumption.”¹³ For Germany, its relationship with Russia will most likely also be challenging, not least because of its dependency on Russia for natural gas.

Germany

In its relationship with Russia, Germany has to reconcile many domestic voices: the business community versus human rights activists; anti-American voices viewing Russia as the future counter pole to the United States; analysts stressing a difficult historical relationship with Russia. Finding a comprehensive and all-encompassing policy towards Russia will continue to be a challenge for Chancellor Merkel. The German Foreign Office, under Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, proposed a strategy called *Annäherung durch Verflechtung* (change through engagement) at the end of 2006. This strategy aimed at utilizing Germany’s EU Presidency to create a binding engagement between Russia and the EU, which—based on economic and energy ties—would be impossible for either party to undo. The goal of this policy is to lead to a modernization of Russia. Given the Russian population’s resistance to Western-style democracy (which the EU and the West would most likely include into their idea of modernization), the question is how successful this approach would be. German-Russian and EU-Russian engagement will undoubtedly take place; the question is on what terms and under whose conditions. The debate centers on dependence versus interde-

pendence: does the need for energy, in particular in the EU and in Germany, create a dependence on Russia, or does Russia’s need for economic revenues and investment opportunities create interdependence between Russia and the West. Regardless, Germany will have to find a way to deal with its dependence on Russian gas resources—and it might have to come to accept that a “special relationship” does not exist with Russia, especially when it comes to the issue of energy and gas.

While there does not seem to be a realistic alternative to change this dependence, Germany can limit the growth of intake of its Russian gas by focusing on energy efficiency, renewable energy, and locating alternative sources. This needs to be complemented by a united energy policy by the European Union. By allowing Russia to play on the divisions in the EU, Russia’s leverage will only increase. Instead of allowing arguments between eastern Europe and western Europe to impede policymaking, Germany needs to use its leadership role in the EU to achieve a unified energy policy and a unified European policy towards Russia—if the EU wants to be taken seriously.

European Union

Energy relations between Russia and the EU are entering a new phase. The EU is becoming increasingly, unavoidably more dependent on Russian energy. The impression—created by EU officials—that the EU can minimize its dependence on Russia through diversification is false; it will, in fact, increase. Diversification will be an effort to minimize the growth of this dependence, but it will not prevent it. Analysts differ on assessing this fact. Some argue that this is a catastrophic problem for the EU because Russia cannot be trusted; others believe that this scenario is not a problem, because Russia is a reliable supplier. They usually point to the 1980s as an example, a decade in which a pipeline between Europe and the Soviet Union, which was originally rejected by the United States, was a great success. However, the 1980s cannot be used as such an example, because not only is the European domestic energy production greatly reduced today, but Russia is no longer interested in the status quo; instead, it wants an equal or even greater share of economic and political power and influence.

The truth lies somewhat in between both scenarios. While European dependence on Russia makes economic sense, the uncertainty of Russia's government also makes it problematic. The EU, and especially Germany, will have to address the increasing politicization of Russian energy policy and agree on a common action plan. The EU's recent focus not only on energy security but also on renewable energy is a promising start but will have to be expanded in order to secure European interests. On other issues, such as Kosovo, the relationship between Russia and the CIS, and the fight against terrorism, the European Union will also have to counter Russia's "divide and conquer" technique by creating a more cohesive approach that includes the United States. Amidst European divisions and anti-American populations, the feasibility of this remains to be seen. Removing these international issues from the national fervor in some European states and assessing them purely in the European interest should be the role of the EU in the coming months and years. Starting with Russia might, therefore, be a good, albeit difficult, task. By allowing Russia to constructively add to the discussion about the European security framework, the European Union might be able to embed Russia in European security issues. Despite his anti-Western rhetoric, Putin has always stressed that Russia is part of Europe and the EU should not close any doors to that effect. Renewal of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) in November 2007 will be a first test of that.

United States

Russian-American relations have deteriorated in recent years. There is no cohesive American policy vis-à-vis Russia and "despite shared interests—terrorism, counter-proliferation, energy—the [Russian-American] agenda has not moved forward since it was formulated after the September 11 terrorist attacks."¹⁴ Since business relations with Russia are not as deep as with China, for example, criticism of Russia in the United States is usually not muted by economic interests. Russia is often viewed by the United States in absolute terms and, while Europe and the United States are both still interested in cooperation with Russia, Russia's path to modernization and prosperity might not be a mirror image of the West's understanding of these terms. While the U.S. rightly criticizes Russia's lack of effort in reforming the economy and political system, the question remains whether the United States has enough leverage to change any of those complaints. The election campaign for the U.S. presidential elections will most likely limit any changes in U.S. policy towards Russia before November 2008. However, on key issues such as Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan, the U.S. needs to engage Russia, in order to achieve viable policy results. Even if a more isolationist tendency takes over after the presidential elections, as some analysts have predicted, Russia will have to remain on the U.S. radar screen.

Policy Recommendations for Germany and the United States

The Russian-American-German triangle will remain important throughout the domestic transitions that all three countries will experience in the next two years. How these developments will shape each country's foreign policy and the relationship with each other remains to be seen. Germany, as the driving force of Europe, and the United States should be crafting a long-term strategy to deal with Russia. To pursue "a reactive policy toward Russia that lacks a long-term strategy"¹⁵ is no longer sufficient if the West wants to achieve its interests. Therefore, the following policy recommendations should be implemented:

■ Germany, the United States, and the European Union will need to understand that they are facing a different Russia than the more accommodating Russia of the 1990s. A reemerging Russia is intent on renegotiating the agreements and treaties that were reached in that period, which they consider unfavorable and dictated by the West. In these renegotiations, the West will have to react to Russian grievances objectively. Since the understanding between Russia and the West is so different on how these agreements were reached, refusing to negotiate any treaties will not advance the Western interest in having an issue-based cooperation with Russia. The West will have to

learn to listen to Russian interests and allow Russia to develop its own patterns in democratization and modernization. While Russia has been leaning more towards an authoritarian regime lately, which would not be good either for Russia or the West, the West also has to understand that Russia will not become its carbon copy.

■ It is imperative for the West, but especially the EU, to formulate and agree upon a coherent foreign policy towards Russia, including a common European energy policy. European Commission President José Barroso's recent policy suggestions are an important start.¹⁶ These EU policies will need to take the American interests and policies into account to be successful. Germany, as having the most to gain from such a cohesive approach, will have to become the driving force behind this approach. The United States and the EU will also have to come up with a strategic approach on Russia's ambitions toward CIS states. Only if both cooperate on this issue can it be resolved satisfactorily.

■ For Germany, "the most advisable course [...] would be a twenty-first century version of peaceful coexistence—coop-

erate [with Russia] where possible, compete when necessary, but avoid military confrontation. The West should remain the West and retain its values. Russia today is neither a partner nor a friend—it is a challenge.”¹⁷ Germany and the United States will have to solve this challenge for the sake of good German-American-Russian relations which are needed to solve today’s and tomorrow’s problems.

The state of German-Russian-American relations is not only critical for the states involved, but also for the solution to many international problems. As the evolution of relations between Europe and Russia will be critical to the future welfare of Europe and for U.S. interests in the region, this triangular relationship will remain on the political agenda for the years to come. Germany will have significant influence on the development of EU policy toward Russia and is therefore a critical

component in putting the European-Russian relationship on solid ground. It remains to be seen if this can be done successfully, since it also depends greatly on the Russian domestic situation. All three countries will experience a period of transition in the next two years making predications about the future of German-American-Russian relations even harder. The United States and Europe, and in particular Germany, will have to develop common strategies to deal with a Russia that is not only back on stage, but intends to remain there for the foreseeable future. This challenge will be part of the transatlantic relations for the years to come.

NOTES

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- 15 As quoted in Angela Stent, *Conference Report: German and American Policies Toward Russia: Transatlantic and Global Dimensions*, AICGS Working Paper Series, (Washington, DC: The American Institute for Contemporary German Studies, 2007): 2.
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- 17 As quoted in Angela Stent, *Conference Report: German and American Policies Toward Russia: Transatlantic and Global Dimensions*, AICGS Working Paper Series, (Washington, DC: The American Institute for Contemporary German Studies, 2007): 6.

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Russia is Back on Stage: German and American Strategies

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