
Appraising the Afro-Centredness of Nigeria's Foreign Policy

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Abstract

This paper examined the concept of Pan Africanism as an ideology that emerged in response to the negative effects of colonialism and imperialism amongst African countries. It also identified the philosophy of Africa as the centerpiece of Nigeria's foreign policy as a reflection of her commitment to the Pan Africanist principle. The theoretical framework of the study is hinged on the Classical Marxist Theory of Imperialism which asserts that capitalism is expansionary and the contradictions which it encounters leads to its movement to backward regions. Secondary data from books, magazines, periodicals were analyzed. The paper observed that successive Nigerian governments have demonstrated immense commitment to this principle, as Nigeria has always played prominent role in issues affecting the African continent- be it social, economic or political. It further observed that while playing the "big brother" role in Africa, Nigeria continues to experience economic decline, which negatively affect the citizenry. It suggested the need to reappraise Nigeria's foreign policy with the interest of Nigeria and its citizens put into consideration when making decisions on foreign policy. It also recommends that the rationality behind a foreign policy decision should be considered to avoid wastage of public funds.

Keywords: Foreign Policy; Patriotism; Pan Africanism; Development; Colonialism; Imperialism

Introduction

The Nigerian constitution provides that Africa is the Centre piece of her foreign policy. In compliance to this constitutional provision, Nigeria has been immensely involved in a number of issues concerning African countries, playing a major role in continental and regional politics. From the defunct Organization of African Unity (OAU) and now the African Union (AU) to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), she has not failed to make enormous input, both financially and technically. This is demonstrated in Nigeria's fight against apartheid in southern Africa in the late 1970's and early 1980's. Her peace keeping missions in war torn African countries, as well as contribution in technical aid to African countries in need of capacity. The country almost single-handedly supported the establishment of the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) that intervened in the crises that erupted in Liberia and Sierra Leone in the 1990's. Why the Afro-centric posture of Nigeria's foreign policy is one question that continue to resonate amongst stakeholders. Pan Africanism as an ideology cannot be separated from the quest for self-determination, war against imperialism and the eventual unification of Africa. This may have influenced Padmore's (1955:117) assertion that, "a beacon of light for the struggle for self-governing African communities which may one day evolve into Pan African Federation of United States. From this argument, the idea of Pan Africanism has come a long way. It is a set of ideas geared towards combating the realist aggressive policies of imperialism in Africa. The fact that the population of Africa scattered all

over the world as a result of the trade in slave combined with the double exploitation of blacks in America gave the original Pan Africanism a definite social dimension cannot be underestimated. There is no gainsaying that Pan Africanism is revolutionary. This is in line with Nkrumah's (1963:173-174) lament on the negative effects of European activities in Africa, which have transformed into neo-colonialism. He argued that nationalist struggle deepens in the colonial territories and independence appears on the horizon, the imperialist powers fishing in the murky waters of communalism, tribalism and sectional interests endeavor to create fissions in the national front in order to achieve fragmentation. Nkrumah's position brings to fore the view that the activities of the Europeans were geared towards the balkanization of the erstwhile African kingdoms for their selfish interests and the idea of Pan Africanism, a veritable force that will tackle the trend. Regarding this Dia (1962:34) states that the messianic movements of black Africa, whether of Christian or Muslim inspiration, are nothing but sociological manifestations of the collective feelings of revolt against the presence of foreign masters; a reaction, in sum, against a process of social disintegration, taking the form of a determination to construct a whole ethnic ensemble." This notion portrays Pan Africanism as nationalistic in content- an idea which seeks to redress the unequal relationship between imperialistic Europe and the kingdoms of black Africa. If we say that Pan Africanism is nationalistic in content then we may agree that it is the sentiment and activity directed towards the creation of an African nation, the attainment of independence of African states and statehood. It is nothing more than those set of activities aimed at attainment and maintenance of political and economic independence from the colonial masters.

African political thinkers perceived race and colonial imperialism as common problems requiring a coordinated strategy on a continent-wide scale to dislodge. This sought to guarantee moral, political and material assistance to freedom.

This paper will examine the philosophy behind the idea of pan Africanism, and how successive Nigerian governments have carried out foreign policy in relation to its Afrocentric posture as well as the impact of this principle on internal governance in Nigeria.

Origin and Evolution of Pan Africanism

This narration is an attempt to show the historical experience of the people of Africa which necessitated the thought of an African consciousness. Considering the state of Africa, patriotic Africans began to organize sequence of thoughts for the emancipation of Africans from the shackles of colonialism. This situation bothered Africans in diaspora, hence the emergence of a Pan Africanism philosophy. The first person to put forward this idea was Marcus Garvey. His thoughts were encapsulated in what is known as Garveyism. He was a strong advocate of African liberation and it was his zeal for pursuing this course that raised African consciousness and the desire to return to the land. He proposed the unification of Africa to form what he called the United States of Africa. He also advocated an African capitalism as a mode of production. This, he argued, will move Africa into prominence in the international community. Capitalist Africa, he argued, would surpass other countries of the world in terms of development. In his capitalism, he opined that an individual should not be allowed to own assets worth more than 5 million dollars. Any such individual will forfeit the excess to government. He also pressed that Africans should check imperialism in all ramifications and return to Africa to develop the land. It has been argued that Garvey's ideology was manifestly racist, which contributed significantly to the failure of his endeavours. He, however, succeeded in raising the consciousness of all peoples of African origin. He founded the imperial origin of African communities which was supposed to organize people to return to Africa. Another proponent of the Pan Africanist ideology was William E. B. Dubois. His school of thought advocated the following: Socialism for Africa; African Unity; Disarmament for Europeans; No Black Zionism

Dubois called for complete self-government for Africans in Africa, organized on a basis of socialism and cooperative economy which would leave no room for millionaires, black or white. National self-determination, individual liberty and democratic socialism, all constituted the essential elements of Pan Africanism as expounded by Dubois.

Another line of thought was that promoted by the late Kwame Nkrumah. In strengthening the Dubois' ideology, he strongly advocated for socialism in Africa. This was as a result of his belief that since Africa was undeveloped, capitalism cannot bring about the desired and rapid change as socialism would do. It was his view that socialism would bring Africa at par with Europe. This position was boosted by the fact that it took former Soviet Union between 1917 and 1960 to go to the moon, a feat that took capitalist Britain several hundreds of years to achieve. He recommended that Africa should be united, have a high command, a customs union, a common currency, a common objective and defined policy, especially in pursuing foreign cause. In other words, Nkrumah called for a more integrated Africa, irrespective of territorial demarcations. It was his view that only a united Africa can tackle the numerous economic, social and political problems associated with imperialism and colonialism. Nkrumah's philosophy of African unity became pronounced in 1957 during Ghana's independence.

Decision Making and Its Theories

In the course of formulating foreign policies, it is imperative to consider proven assumptions given in the process of decision making. According to Mac Ogonor (2000), as a result of this the literature of foreign policy decision making involves the following:

- i. The study of how foreign policy decisions are made;
- ii. The techniques and criteria for the making of decisions by the policy makers in order to achieve prescribed goals;
- iii. The effects or result of interactive foreign policies on the international system.

Having identified these, what follows are approaches to the study of decision making and foreign policies of nations as follows:

Political Systems Theory: This theoretical assumption views public policy as the response of a political system to demands arising from its internal and external environment. The political systems theory according to David Easton is composed of those identified and interrelated institutions that make authoritative decisions that are binding on society. This theory is a characteristic of a mature democratic and liberal political system.

Group Theory: This theory states that public policy is the product of group struggle. As Earl Latham states: What may be called public policy is the equilibrium reached in this group struggle at any given moment and as representing a balance which the contending factions or groups constantly share in their favour. In a democracy, many public policies, including most foreign policies, reflect the activities of groups. Group theory rests on the contention that interaction and struggle among groups are the central fact of political life.

Elite Theory: Viewed from the perspective of the Elite Theory, public policy can be regarded as favouring the values and preferences of governing elite. The essential argument of this Theory is that it is not the people or the masses who determine public policy or decisions. They are made by ruling elite and carried into effect by public officials and agencies.

Nigeria's Foreign Policy and its Afrocentric View

Foreign policies are those decisions which a country makes as regards how it relates with other countries. A nation's foreign policy is determined by the position and status it takes within the international circle. Since no country can exist on itself successfully, it is imperative that

nations adopt policies on how they relate with one another. These policies are based on national interest and prestige.

Nigeria is the acclaimed giant of Africa and no doubt has played a major role in tackling issues that affect the African continent, particularly those that arise as a result of the colonization of Africa. From independence to present, Nigeria has maintained a policy of Africa as the centerpiece of its foreign policy. This principle, it has maintained even as she remains unrelenting in the protection of interest of African nations. This position is based on the Pan Africanist view of liberation and development of the African continent from the pangs of colonialism. From the political to the economic and the social sphere, she has demonstrated a lot influence. Her activities in the defunct Organization of African Unity and the new African Union, sub-regional organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), as well as other African bodies is indicative of her unrelenting efforts to abide by this principle.

An Overview of Nigeria's Foreign Policy

Section 19 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provides the foreign policy objectives of Nigeria as follows:

The foreign policy of objectives shall be:

- i.** Promotion and protection of the national interest;
- ii.** Promotion of African integration and support for African unity;
- iii.** Promotion of international cooperation for the consolidation of universal peace and mutual respect among all nations and elimination of discrimination in all its ramifications;
- iv.** Respect for international law and treaty obligations, as well as the seeking of settlement of international disputes by negotiation, mediation, conciliation, arbitration and adjudication, and
- v.** Promotion of a just world economic order

Nigeria's foreign policy objective has as one of its objective the promotion of economic development of Nigeria and improvement in the living standards of Africans and has done a lot in the realization of this principle.

Foreign Economic Policies of Nigeria

The Tafawa Balewa government strove hard to demonstrate its concern for African economic development, but the poor economic base and the delicate political balance at home marked its era as low key. However, some joint efforts were established under it. One major area that seemed to have revolutionized Nigeria's foreign policy was the civil war that took place between 1967 and 1970. The war drove home the point that there is a correlation between the economic health of Nigeria and that of her poor African neighbours. Due to the civil war and the healthy state of the economy, aids of different kinds were extended to African countries. For example, the decision of the Yakubu Gowon administration to sell oil at concessionary prices to African countries which had refineries was resorted to in order not to afford Saudi Arabia any opportunity to be a regular participant in African affairs, the acute dependence of the Nigerian state on oil revenue notwithstanding. Equatorial Guinea, Liberia, Benin, Togo, etc benefitted substantially from this policy of the Gowon administration.

With the worsening of economic crises in Africa, Nigeria took the lead in advancing its position to the rest of the world. She hosted the maiden OAU Summit in April 1980 and was instrumental to the convening of the second OAU Summit in 1985. At the latter Summit, a programme of action was adopted to tackle African economic crises. In concert with other

African countries, Nigeria caused an extra session of the UN General Assembly to be convened on the African economic crises. At the Assembly, a four year programme of action for African Economic Recovery and Development was adopted. In view of the more crippling effect of indebtedness in Africa, Nigeria played a leading role in the adoption of an OAU common position on African debt crisis in 1987, which revolved around the cancellation of all bilateral debts and the massive injection of funds into Africa to support the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) manpower, as another element of development, has been impeding development in Africa. Towards resolving this, Nigeria initiated the Technical Aids Corp (TAC) scheme in 1987, whereby the surplus manpower in the country could be sent to needy African countries.

The relative progress made in the steel project in Nigeria led to more emphasis on the country's investment in Iron Ore in Guinea and Liberia. The war in Liberia made emphasis to the former and other sources to satisfy the Iron Ore needs of the country. In 1991, Nigeria increased the number of fishing trawlers in Equatorial Guinea from seven to seventeen and the license fee paid per vessel was also increased. Two years after it had been confirmed that Equatorial Guinea was hob-knobbing with the racist regime in South Africa and in attempt to wean the former from the latter. Nigeria extended a N100 million life line to Equatorial Guinea to buy some essential commodities.

One of the biggest problems confronting African economic development is the high level of indebtedness. During the Babangida administration, various programmes and strategies were adopted to address the issue. Nigeria in her capacity as the Chair of the defunct OAU delivered an address to the United Nations General Assembly highlighting the gravity of the African economic crisis. In that address, General Babangida reviewed the achievement of the United Nations Programme of Action for Africa launched in 1986 and considered the document as a mild response to the problem. From the speech, the position of African leaders was that their debts were not repayable. As a solution to the crisis, the OAU Chairman called for debt forgiveness which should be accompanied by massive injection of funds to Africa under the name of reparation. However, the negative trend in the outlook of resources from Africa continued despite the efforts by Nigeria on behalf of Africa.

As a stop-gap measure towards the final integration of African economies, the ECOWAS experiment was made to work by Nigeria. Through the adoption of the liberalization scheme, there was more free movement of persons and services within the community. In view of the centrality of ECOWAS in the implementation of economic diplomacy, Nigeria legalized the duty free importation of unprocessed and handicraft goods emanating from ECOWAS. However, it was observed that the bad state of the economy under economic diplomacy made Nigeria to review her trust fund in African Development Bank (ADB) and even turned her into a great competitor for ADB loans.

In terms of trade relations, economic diplomacy as adopted by the Babangida administration made much of an impact on Nigeria-Africa relations. In 1992, for instance, out of Nigeria's total export of N82, 875.7 million, Africa only accounted for N3, 808.2 Million. Its percentage value though increased slightly to 7.6 per cent.

When this percentage is viewed in global terms, it can be seen that it was not really significant in any way. The situation in the import section revealed a similar trend. It can be seen that Nigeria-African policy then showed more bite due to a strong economic base. The difference in economic situations, therefore, constrained the country to assume the proper role of an economic crisis averter not economic crisis solver.

Nigeria avers that the first generation of Africa's integration arrangement was focused mainly on trade promotion through trade liberalization scheme based on Free Trade Areas. The strategy was to overcome three fundamental development constraints characteristic of African economies, namely: the relative –small sized economies of many African nation states, 30 percent of which have a population less than 10 million, the lack of structural comprehensiveness as maintained in the narrow set of similar low value added primary agricultural and mineral export communities and the dependence on the import of intermediate and capital goods, This lends credence to why the Chief Olusegun Obasanjo administration laid its weight behind the emergence of the African Union (AU) and the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD).

Foreign Social Policies

Refugee problems are a major problem facing the African continent. The traffic of Liberian refugees into Nigeria and other African countries was quite heavy. Sierra Leones security network was threatened by the influx of refugees from Liberia and this necessitated some concern by Nigeria. The country was, however, groaning under the weight of economic crisis as she was rehabilitating the Liberian refugees during the period. Nigeria's experience informed the continuous official attack on the western world over their lukewarm attitude towards Liberia.

Also, the operational efficiency of the Federal Roads Safety Commission (FRSC) in Nigeria drew some admiration from some African countries. They were really impressed by the remarkable reduction in the number of accidents in Nigeria. The interest shown by African states led to some collaborative efforts between the FRSC and some African countries.

Towards uniting all blacks, the world over, the Nigeria government under Chief Olusegun Obasanjo hosted the World Festival for Arts and Culture (FESTAC) in 1977. This event created a tremendous impact in the world and brought back black heritage and culture to the fore. It demonstrated that Africans and indeed blacks are unique and have a peculiar way of life.

Foreign Political Policies

Nigeria has always played the 'big brother' role in issues that relate to the African continent, the relationship between Nigeria and African states has been cordial, perhaps because of shared common interest in most political issues. Between 1988 and 1992, the Babangida administration played the role of an arbiter in the intractable Sudanese crisis. The conflict involving Ghana and Togo over the unification of all Ewe people was resolved through the efforts of Nigeria. Similarly, the Mauritanian crisis which had assumed a racial dimension was resolved through the assistance of Nigeria.

Cases of border disputes have also been rampant in the African continent. Despite the assurances given by the Cameroonian Defence Minister in which peaceful means was preferred in the resolution of the border crisis was signed and a host of other diplomatic efforts made the Nigerian-Cameroonian border conflict remain the most fiercely contested issue in Nigeria's African policy between 1988 and 1992. Of course there were also border conflicts with Chad and the Republic of Benin and through diplomatic efforts they were prevented from escalating. The existence of colonialism and racism in Africa was viewed by policy makers as a credible threat to Nigeria's 1943 negotiated independence. Therefore, the eradication of all forms of colonialism and racism in Africa was set as an important objective of Nigeria's foreign policy in 1960. To this end, the country was a vocal voice against colonialism and apartheid in South Africa. She matched words with action. The continued existence of the apartheid state was a serious security risk to the country. Moral, financial and diplomatic support was stepped up for the liberation movements. Guinea Bissau, Angola, Mozambique, amongst other countries were

ably assisted in their liberation wars. To hasten Rhodesia's Shell BP and to cushion the effects of the incessant attacks on South Africa on the frontline states, the country donated N50 million to Zambia and Namibia in 1986. Nigeria was, however, saved from further embarrassment by the Buhari administration. The Ibrahim Babangida administration carried the anti-apartheid posture a little further. It strengthened the country's participation in the UN Anti-apartheid Committee and continued, for a while, to press for the continued sanction on the apartheid state. Cumulatively, therefore Nigeria shares in the glory of the collapse of apartheid in 1994. As a matter of fact, Nigeria's anti-apartheid and anti-colonialism stand was not limited to Africa. The Commonwealth experienced her activities with the boycott of its Games in 1978 and a number of withdrawal from the Organization's activities was successfully carried out to demonstrate the level at which Nigeria had long identified with the struggle to eradicate apartheid. Nigeria's assumption of the Chairmanship of the Organizations Anti-Apartheid Committee caused clouds to descend on the despicable apartheid state. The immense publicity carried out at the level of the United Nations Anti-Apartheid Committee removed the racial bogey from the official western argument and this made the masses in major western capitals to be fully aware of the immorality of the then Pretoria regime.

Nigeria has participated in various peace keeping missions in Africa. This it has done as part of the United Nations Peace Keeping Operations under the aegis of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in the late 80s. It effectively carried out peacekeeping operations in the West African sub region. Nigeria's participation in peace keeping operations derives its strength from the objectives of the country's foreign policy, especially the one dealing with international peace and security. The country's participation in the Congo crisis in the 1960s was a litmus test of its commitment to peace and security on the African continent. Yet under the UN platform, Nigeria has participated in the Lebanese crisis. The decade of the 1990s, however, saw an explosion in the number of peacekeeping posts across the globe. One particular attribute of the decade was the involvement of the country under the platform of ECOMOG. While her previous efforts in the Congo, Lebanon and Chad had been under the UN and the defunct OAU frameworks and thus some attempts made to distribute the cost of operations, the ECOMOG operations has sapped the resources of Nigeria far more than the Chadian operation.

As an African country, Nigeria's ranking on the global peacekeeping may have been quite appreciable and this has helped to project a good image for Africa, specifically, her role in championing the cause of conflict management in the continent has been admirable. The ECOMOG success in Liberia was Nigeria's success.

Nigeria, from independence, has always taken Africa as the focus of her foreign policy. This can be evidenced by her prominent role in maintaining peace, cooperation and fight for the elimination of colonial rule and apartheid and fostering economic ties amongst African nations. It has, to a great extent, played a leading role in the African continent more than any other area of international relations. This is evidenced from the analysis presented in this paper, a regime by regime analysis of successive Nigerian governments reveals that the First Republic under the headship of Prime Minister Abubakar Tafawa Balewa and Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe as President initiated the Afrocentric principle of Nigeria's foreign policy. This commitment was exhibited by Nigeria becoming a founding member of the defunct Organization of African Unity in 1963. The Organization had amongst other objectives the promotion of peace and unity in the continent. In this regard, the prominent role played by Nigeria in the analysis presented above cannot be over emphasized. The regime assisted a great deal to restore peace in the crises ridden East African country of Congo. It also fostered cooperation in Africa by encouraging inter trade relationship among states.

The General Yakubu Gowon administration also maintained the policy of making Africa the Centerpiece of Nigeria's foreign policy, until it was immersed in the 30 months civil war that almost rocked the existence of the country. At the end of the civil war and despite the role that was played by some African countries that have benefitted from her Afrocentric foreign policy, Nigeria continued to play a leading role in African affairs until February 1975 when General Murtala Mohammed took over power. There were no changes as the regime maintained the country's foreign policy posture.

The 1976 to 1979 Olusegun Obasanjo regime saw the strengthening of the Africa as centerpiece of Nigeria's foreign policy. During the period, the government vigorously pursued the fight against apartheid in South Africa. It did this by canvassing, internationally, in the United Nations for the need to put an end to white rule in South Africa.

The October 1979 to December 1983 civilian administration of Alhaji Shehu Shagari did not make any significant progress, but almost dented the image and record of previous regimes as it was unable to pay its regular financial commitments to the defunct Organization of African Unity (OAU).

Continuity in the foreign policy continued during the Babangida administration until the less than 60 days administration of Chief Ernest Shonekan. At this juncture, it is important to point out that Nigeria's foreign policy with the western countries was strained. This was predicated on the fact that these developed countries that are fully democratized wanted the country to be democratized too and since the military was not a democratic institution, there was the attempt to influence the military to hand over power to a civilian government. The military who were reluctant to hand over power were ready to part away with these western countries. The situation grew worse with the infamous annulment of the June 12 1993 Presidential elections which was presumably won by Chief M.K.O. Abiola. Threats of sanctions came from the international community and the situation continued until it was forced to hand over power to a makeshift government that he claimed will pilot the country to a successful democracy. The administration continued to play its peace enforcement role in the Liberian crisis through ECOMOG.

In November 1993, the late General Sani Abacha took over from Chief Ernest Shonekan in a palace coup. Although the administration supported the peacekeeping efforts of the previous administrations, it shifted its focus on foreign policy from its traditional western allies to Asia. This was as a result of the deepening crisis in Nigeria and its continuous violation of human rights which these western countries berated. This culminated to various sanctions imposed on Nigeria and subsequent suspension from the Commonwealth. Her traditional western allies-UK, Spain, Canada were at the forefront of the imposition on Nigeria. To save its face from the situation, it resorted to pally with countries such as China, Turkey, Indonesia, Iran, amongst others. This was the case until the termination of that regime in June 1998 with the death of General Sani Abacha.

In 1998, General Abdusallami Abubakar attempted to restore the battered image of the country with its traditional western allies. The image was boosted with the commencement of the transition to civil rule programme.

In 1999, democracy was ushered back into Nigeria with the assumption of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo as a democratically elected President. They, once more, brought back Nigeria to international limelight. The African centeredness of Nigeria's foreign policy was once more restored. This was evidenced by the administration's campaign for debt forgiveness for highly indebted African countries, the mediation in the Zimbabwean crisis, its role in the emergence

of the new African Union to replace the then Organization of African Union (OAU) and the formation of the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD).

The Alhaji Musa Yar'Adua and later Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan regimes continued to place Africa as the Centre piece of Nigeria's foreign policy through their commitment in promoting peace and security in Africa.

Conclusion

Nigeria's policy of Africa as centre piece was shaped by the concept of Pan Africanism to promote the African cause. The massive oil revenue recorded during the oil boom in the 1970's brought with it some level of confidence in the pursuit of Nigeria's foreign policy. Massive natural and human resources were placed at the disposal of liberation movements in Africa. Successive administrations have continued to maintain the posture of Africa as the centerpiece of Nigeria's foreign policy. It has striven hard to maintain peace amongst African nations and has continued to maintain its policy of non-alignment. Its leading role in the Non-aligned movement during the epoch of the cold war demonstrates this fact. Although the country's image declined during the dark days of military rule and the poor image painted by western media, African countries have ever subscribed to Nigeria's leadership role in Africa. In turn, Nigeria has continued to play the 'big brothers' role to many African countries, despite the harsh economic conditions faced by the citizenry.

Recommendations

In the light of this presentation, the following recommendations are made:

- i. With the end of oil boom and given the economic realities of the time, the most rational economic path for the country in the pursuit of foreign policy is to be Nigerian centred. The introduction of economic rationalism in Nigeria's approach to its Afrocentric policy is very necessary. The Nigerian state should adopt a new orientation in her foreign policy based on the state of the economy.
- ii. Economic interest as to what gains such posture would yield to the economy and welfare of the Nigerian citizens should be given topmost consideration in Nigeria's foreign policy
- iii. It is expected that at this stage of her existence, Nigeria should use its strategic position and influence to attract socio economic gains that would improve on its economic presently and in the future.

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