

Gwadar Deep Sea Port's Emergence as Regional Trade and Transportation Hub: Prospects and Problems

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Abstract

The deep-sea port at Gwadar is visualized as becoming a regional hub, serving commercial traffic to and from Central Asian states and Afghanistan, the Middle East, the Persian Gulf, Xinjiang, Iran, and South East Asia. The development of the Gwadar port holds out for the regional countries immense economic returns. A road from Gwadar to Saindak, said to be the shortest route between Central Asia and the sea, is under construction. Goods and oil and gas reserves from these countries could be shipped to global markets. It will nearly halve the overland distance from China's landlocked western provinces to the sea: from about 4,000 km to China's east coast, to just 2,000 km south to Gwadar. The Gwadar port and the highways connecting it to Afghanistan reduce the distances of Pakistan-Central Asia traffic by about 500 km. The construction of the Gwadar port is an important component of Pakistan's overall initiative to facilitate trade with the landlocked states of Central Asia.

Key words: Gwadar port, transportation hub, Pakistan, central Asia, Xinjiang,

Introduction: Globalization has transformed the world into global village in the real sense of the term. Regional integration is an important aspect of this process. Central Asia and South Asia are two important regions of the world. Central Asia is rich in natural resources particularly oil and gas resources while South Asia is a region which is developing with a rapid pace and its internal energy resources are insufficient. The development of physical infrastructural linkages and increase in trade volume among the regions of Central Asia, South Asia, West Asia and Western China will be mutually beneficial. In this connection Pakistan's Gwadar deep sea port has vivid prospects to emerge as regional trade and energy transportation hub. Gwadar is strategically located between three increasingly important regions of the world: the oil-rich Western Asia heavily populated South Asia and the economically emerging and resource-rich Central Asia.

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Strategic Location: Gwadar is a fishing village on the Arabian Sea coast in the Pakistani province of Baluchistan. Baluchistan shares borders with Afghanistan and Iran to the west - Gwadar is just 72 kilometers from the Iranian border and about 320km from Cape al-Hadd in Oman. More important is Gwadar's proximity to the Persian Gulf. It is situated near the mouth of this strategic body of water, and about 400km from the Strait of Hormuz, through which about 40% of the world's oil tankers pass. Gwadar is located on the Gulf of Oman close to the entrance of the Persian Gulf, about 460 kilometres west of Karachi.

Historical Background: Gwadar, which in the local language means “The Gate of Air”. Pakistan’s dream of having a deep water port at Gwadar is nearly as old as its existence. It started with the recommendation of Worth Condrick who was deputed by the US for survey of the Balochistan coast in 1954. Realising importance of Gwadar, Pakistan paid £3 million (some say half that sum) in September 1958 to buy back the enclave from the Sultanate of Oman ending over 200 years of Omani control¹ Pakistan identified Gwadar as a port site in 1964. However, it was only in 2001 that significant steps toward making the proposal a reality were taken, when China agreed to participate in the construction and development of the deep sea port.²

In 1993, Pakistan started feasibility studies for the development of a major deepwater seaport at Gwadar. The port project commenced on 22 March 2002 with the first phase completed in December 2005. The construction of the port has spurred other major infrastructure projects in the area. This includes the 700 km Makran Coastal Highway which is now complete. The road links Karachi with several ports along the coast including Ormara, Pasni, Gwadar and will be extended to the Iranian border in the future. The highway has reduced travel time to Karachi from 48 hours to only 7 hours. Other road projects include the Gwadar-Quetta -Chaman road and a road link to the town of khuzdar in eastern Baluchistan.³

Pakistan is focusing on laying the Havelian-Kashghar (China) and Quetta-Kandahar (Afghanistan) railway tracks. Gwadar is going to be connected to Pakistan Railway network at an expected cost of \$ 1.25 billion (Rs. 105-billion). The Gwadar deep-sea port emerges as a place of great strategic value, enhancing Pakistan's importance in the whole region, extending from the Persian Gulf through the Indian Ocean to Southeast Asia and the Far East⁴

The construction of the Gwadar deep-sea port is just one component of a larger development plan which includes building a network of roads connecting Gwadar with the rest of Pakistan, such as the 650 km Coastal Highway to Karachi and the Gwadar-Turbat road (188 km). This network of

roads connects with China through the Indus Highway. Pakistan, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan are developing extensive road and rail links from Central Asia and Xinjiang to the Arabian Sea coast.

Pakistan has started several projects, with financial and technical assistance from China, to develop Gwadar as a goods transit and trade point. The primary project is the construction of a deep-sea port at Gwadar to enable high-volume cargo movement to and from the landlocked Central Asian states. The new port will also encompass conversion facilities to allow for the movement of natural gas as a part of plans for a termination point for the TAPI natural gas pipeline. The secondary project is a coastal highway connecting Gwadar to Karachi, whose \$200 million cost will be completely financed by the Chinese. Gwadar will serve as a port of entry for oil and gas to be transported by land to the western regions of China.⁵

By extending its East-West Railway from the Chinese border city of Kashgar to Peshawar in Pakistan's northwest, Beijing can receive cargo to and from Gwadar along the shortest route, from Karachi to Peshawar. The rail network could also be used to supply oil from the Persian Gulf to Xinjiang. Pakistan's internal rail network can also provide China with rail access to Iran. The government declared Gwadar port a "Special Economic Zone" in the budget, 2003-2004. Oman has offered \$100 million aid for the development of social and infrastructure facilities in Balochistan. Out of \$100 million, Oman has provided \$7 million for extending of runway at Gwadar Airport, construction of jetties, up gradation of Gwadar Hospital, provision of 100 engines to fishermen and construction of power house. Oman is also financing construction of Gwadar-Hoshab Road, water supply scheme in Gwadar area and construction of irrigation dams.⁶ Rice Exporters Association of Pakistan (REAP) has decided to establish a rice zone in Gwadar to fetch the opportunities in the area after the construction of new port.

TAPI AND IPI: (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India Gas Pipeline): Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and India signed over \$7 billion gas pipeline project on 11 December 2010. The "inter-governmental agreement" (IGA) was signed by President Asif Ali Zardari, Afghan President Hamid Karzai, Turkmenistan President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and Indian Petroleum Minister Murli Deora in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan. The 1,680 km long Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline backed by the Asian Development Bank will bring 3.2 billion cubic feet of natural gas per day (bcfd).⁷

The Trans-Afghanistan Pipeline (TAP or TAPI) is a proposed natural gas pipeline being developed by the Asian Development Bank. The pipeline will

transport Caspian Sea natural gas from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan into Pakistan and then to India. The original project started in March 1995 when an inaugural memorandum of understanding between the governments of Turkmenistan and Pakistan for a pipeline project was signed. The 1,680 kilometres (1,040 mi) pipeline will run from the Dauletabad gas field (Turkmenistan) to Afghanistan. From there TAPI will be constructed alongside the highway running from Herat to Kandahar and then via Quetta and Multan in Pakistan and end in the northwestern Indian town of Fazilka⁸ The pipes will be 1,420 mm in diameter and will transport gas at a working pressure of 100 atmospheres. It will have a capacity of 33 bn cm of natural gas per year. The 1,680 km pipeline will cost an estimated \$ 3.3 billion⁹ TAPI gas pipeline project will initially provide 30 million cubic meters of gas to Pakistan and India each and 5 million cubic meters to Afghanistan on a daily basis, which can be later increased up to 90 million cubic meters in aggregate¹⁰ 1680 km long gas pipeline is expected to flow to India from Turkmenistan in the year 2014¹¹

Pakistan has announced that a massive defense facility will be constructed in the city in order to guarantee the security of the area and that a new shipbuilding centre will be built at Gwadar, with an international partner. Port of Singapore was the highest bidder for the Gwadar port after DP World backed out of the bidding process. The first phase included the construction of three multi-purpose ship berths, while the second involves nine more berths, an approach channel and storage terminals and it will provide full warehousing, trans-shipment and industrial facilities. Pakistan is positioning Gwadar as "an energy port and hub for storage and refining"¹² but it has to surmount the security problem¹³

IPI (Iran-Pakistan-India Gas Pipeline): Another important gas pipeline is the Iran–Pakistan–India gas pipeline, also known as the IPI pipeline or the Peace pipeline, is a proposed pipeline to deliver natural gas from Iran to Pakistan and India. Economic advantages of the pipeline may outweigh political obstacles¹⁴ Iran and Pakistan signed an agreement for the construction of the 560-mile, \$7.5 billion pipeline from the huge offshore South Pars gas field in the Gulf through Pakistan. The project is crucial for Pakistan's growing energy requirements. Iran will supply 750 million-1 billion cubic feet of gas per day by mid-2015. The project was first mooted in 1994. It was intended to carry gas through Pakistan to India in a 2775km (1,724-miles) pipeline¹⁵

The construction of a deep-sea port at Gwadar is just one component of the Greater Gwadar Plan . Under this Plan, which will be carried out by Gwadar Development Authority, in addition to Gwadar port, a network of roads, connecting Gwadar with Karachi, Pasni , Ormara and Turbat will be constructed in four phases. The Coastal Highway linking Karachi with

Gwadar (675 km) is being built simultaneously with the port. Other highways, from Pasni to Gwadar (135km), Ormara-Gwadar (275km) and Gwadar-Turbat (188 km) will be built in Phase II of the project. The first two phases of the project, costing about Rs. 3 billion, will be completed in two to three years. In phase III, Pasni will be connected with Ormara and in the fourth phase, Pasni will be connected to Gupt at the Iranian border. This network of roads will finally be connected with China through the Indus Highway. The completion of this communication network will not only facilitate the movement of goods from China and Central Asian Republics to the countries of the Persian Gulf, Middle East, East Africa, the Indian Ocean and beyond through Gwadar, the countries of these regions will also have an easy and short route for access to Central Asia for trade and economic co-operation purposes¹⁶ Gwadar could thus emerge as the key shipping hub in the area providing mass trade to Central Asian republics as well as across Pakistan and China. A road from Gwadar to Saindak is completed. Saindak is already connected to the RCD Highway (N35) and through Quetta-Chaman it provides the shortest route for trade with Central Asian Republics. To market products produced in Western China, ports of Shanghai or other eastern ports are almost 3000 km away from the western production centers where as Gwadar provides access to a port at just 1500 km¹⁷ Pakistan, keeping in view its utmost significance in the area, has declared 'Gwadar' as a Duty Free Port and a Free Economic Zone. This has not only enhanced its commercial worth manifold but has also accelerated the pace of development to an incredible extent. Gwadar port has a special significance with reference to trade links with Central Asian Countries, Persian Gulf, East Africa, United Arab Emirates and North Western India. The ADB studies, however considered Gwadar to have the most advantageous location for such an alternative port in the region, which could handle mother ships and large oil tankers in due course. Keeping that aspect in view as well as the inherent strategic and economic benefits that Gwadar Port offered, the transport plan of the 8th Five Year Plan (1993-94) of Pakistan included the development of Gwadar Port as an essential element of its aims and objectives. Technical and financial feasibilities therefore were under taken resulting in decisions for the development of Gwadar Port by Pakistan. Along the coastal line of Makran there are four Tehsils including Gawadar, Jiwani, Kulanch and Ormara. Jiwani is the only one on the western part of Gawadar, joining Iranian border on Pakistani side. Kulanch and Ormara, on its eastern side are connecting District Lasbela and to Karachi finally. The distance between Gwadar and Karachi in this way, is around 715 km¹⁸

PAK-CHINA COOPERATION: Pakistan and China friendship is considered higher than Himalaya deeper than Indian Ocean and sweeter than honey. Gwadar Port Project has become another milestone in Pakistan and China

cooperation. Pakistan and China had signed a comprehensive agreement on March 16, 2002 at Beijing undertaking the task of construction of Gwadar deep seaport of universal standards. The work on the first phase of this mega project, which is being constructed by Chinese Harbor Engineering Company, is now at full swing. The project is bound to be a vital landmark in the economic development of the region. With the construction of a third port that Pakistan will not only be able to meet its own requirements of the future but also offer its port facilities to the neighboring countries. Central Asian Republics are endowed with mineral wealth and an educated and highly skilled and disciplined workforce¹⁹

Conceived as a gateway from China and Central Asia to the warm waters of the Arabian Sea, the Beijing-funded “mega port” of Gwadar is developing despite many hurdles²⁰ Gwadar port has the potential to become the world's largest deep-sea ports. In three years since its inauguration, the first phase of the project is already complete with three functioning berths. The total cost of the project was estimated at \$1.16 billion USD, China pitched in \$198 million and Pakistan \$50 million to finance the first phase. China also has invested another \$200 million into building a coastal highway that will connect the Gwadar port with Karachi. The estimated cost of the the second phase is \$526 million and include the construction of 9 more berths and terminals. To connect western China with Central Asia by land routes, Pakistan is working on building road links to Afghanistan from its border town of Chaman in Balochistan to Qandahar in Afghanistan. In the northwest, it is building similar road links between Torkham in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and Jalalabad in Afghanistan. In addition, the port will be complemented with a modern air defense unit, a garrison, and a first-rate international airport capable of handling airbus service²¹

INAUGURATION: Gwadar port began its cargo handling from March 15, 2008. The first ship carrying 60,000 tonnes wheat docked, unloaded and safely sailed out from the Gwadar port. The local company chartered a panama class vessel for importing wheat from Canada. It was the largest ship to anchor in Pakistan²² Pakistan's Minister of Ports and Shipping Nabil Ahmed Khan Gabol officially inaugurated the Port on 21 December 2008²³The port project aims to have facilities that could help to develop Gwadar as an industrial city that has privately owned warehouses and cold storage, private cargo handling equipment, truck yards and corporate infrastructure such as offices along the same lines as Jebel Ali, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Singapore. Gwadar may be a gateway to the landlocked states in Central Asia, Gulf, Afghanistan and China. The emerging new oil and gas centres around the Caspian seek outlets for their products and Gwadar offers a two-way outlet to markets east and west, north and south, unhampered by the conflicts in the region. the advantage of direct access to and from Central Asian States and through them by overland routes to

Russia and Europe on the one hand and Korea and Japan on the other, which provides Pakistan a unique opportunity to cash in on its fortunate location. Gwadar can be developed into a multipurpose and mother port of the region which can accommodate motherships of Post Panamax category and need a draft of 18 metres and above. The dredging was carried out to deepen the approach channel to 14.5 metres and third dredger was also inducted to expedite the process. The deepening of approach channel is carried out under phase-II but it was also included in phase-I to keep the status of the Gwadar Port. Pakistan has planned that the existing fish harbour at Gwadar would be used as mini-port for cargo handling purpose annexed with the Gwadar deep seaport and to replace the existing fish harbour. The government aims to construct a fish landing jetty and allied harbour facilities at Pishukan, Gwadar²⁴

The Gwadar port project is improving the living standards and providing increased job opportunities to the people in the southwestern Pakistani province of Balochistan. By extending technical and financial support China has helped Pakistan in translating its dream of the Gwadar port into a reality²⁵ Singapore port operator PSA International has started preliminary planning work to build the US\$840M second phase of Pakistan's Gwadar deepwater port²⁶

To ensure future developments are carried out in an orderly, coordinated and planned manner, the Authority has appointed Artur D. Little (ADL), Malaysia, Lyon Associates, USA and Indus Associated Pakistan to prepare a Master Plan for the Port, the related infrastructure and the business plan for the port. Pakistan has adopted the landlord concept for new port development. In practice, this means that GPA will drive the overall development of the port and will raise the funds for development of general port infrastructure (primarily dredging of access channels and construction of breakwaters), while private sector investors will be the primary source for the development of terminals and cargo handling capacity²⁷ The city development Master Plan will help to transform Gwadar city into an economic focal point for Baluchistan²⁸

Prospects of Economic Development: Gwadar facility as a hub port that will contribute significantly to the revival of Pakistan's economy. The Asian Development Bank has provided U.S. \$500 million to build roads. There are also plans to lay a comprehensive rail link, along with a contemplated road network. After completion of both phases Gwadar port will have requisite infrastructure to attract its share of business. Gwadar port is advantageously located to serve South and West Asia, Central Asia in addition to western provinces of China, as compared to other competitor ports²⁹

There is no denying the fact that the Gwadar port can attract investors, create job opportunities, and open up new vistas of economic development in the coastal region and add significant revenues in national economy provided it overcome the challenges particularly security. The port also comes as a much-needed national requirement in the wake of the rise in cargo traffic at existing ports. Besides the economic gains, substantial political benefits can be accrued from providing seaport facilities to the regional countries, especially land locked states. When Gwadar port is put in operation, Afghanistan will be one of the direct beneficiaries by accessing it for its trade as well as getting royalties when the gas/oil pipeline is materialized. The development of the Gwadar port would act as a gateway to prosperity for the entire region. Pakistan needs to keep Afghanistan engaged to facilitate the smooth and economical running of the port³⁰

The strategic interests of all nations necessarily stem from the economic interests. Gwadar, with potential to act as a hub port, can facilitate convergence of interests of all states, bringing peace and prosperity in the area. The Gwadar port is strategically located at the cross roads of natural resources of the Middle East and Central Asia, a huge consumer market of Asia with over one third of world population, and at the shortest route to southern provinces of China. Worldwide demand of natural resources is increasing at an unprecedented ratio, as is the requirement of shipping terminals to handle this demand. Gwadar port will be able to attract its share of trade for cargo and natural resources. There are huge possibilities to establish joint ventures and develop economic co-operation in the fish and sea food processing industry oil and gas exploration, and exploration of may minerals³¹

The reopening of ancient east-west trade corridors across Pakistan and the expansion of new ones coming south from China will break the isolation that has been Pakistan's fate since its founding. A major force stifling policies that might foster continent-wide transport and trade is a poverty of strategic imagination in many quarters³²

The new Gwadar deep-sea port on the Baluchistan coast and the highways connecting it to Afghanistan reduce the distances of Pakistan-Central Asia traffic by about 500 km. Continuing instability in the Persian Gulf has led the ADB to consider the strategically located port of Gwadar as an alternative to Persian Gulf ports³³

Central Asian Republics` integration into a regional trading network and connection to their southern neighbors has the potential to significantly improve their economic development. a transit corridor from Central to South Asia through Afghanistan would cost less than US\$6 billion.³⁴

Balochistan is also important for its untapped wealth of hydrocarbon, mineral, and metallic resources. Baluchistan sits on estimated reserves of 29 trillion cubic feet of natural gas and 6 billion barrels of oil³⁵ At present, Pakistan's overall trade with SCO member states plus observers is far below potential. Pakistan, Iran and the CARs are also members of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) with immense potential to contribute to the economic development of the region³⁶ Pakistan and Central Asia are important to each other, as only Pakistan can provide the CAS (Central Asian States) with a comparatively cheaper and shorter outlet for its natural energy resources and its trade to the outside world through the ports of Karachi, Port Qasim and Gwadar³⁷

The regional geo-economic developments underscore the geostrategic importance of Pakistan and particularly Balochistan province. As per Warm Water Theory Makran coast attracted Tsarist Empire as well as the USSR. Several reasons were cited for the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan on 27 December 1979 among those one was its quest to reach warm water and the nearest coast in this connection was that of Makran. Gwadar can provide round-the-year dependable communication and trade links with the world. There is no denying the fact that due to its location, Gwadar deep sea port has the potential to become a gateway for the Central Asia and Xinjiang. Xinjiang in China lies 4,500 kilometres from China's east coast but just 2,500 kilometres from Gwadar. This will make it possible for China to route some of its external trade through Gwadar sea port.³⁸

Challenges: Although there is an enormous quantum of trade that could flow through the Gwadar port, it is also faced with the tough and challenging task of competing with developed ports of the region. Concerted efforts are required for creating a conducive environment for industrialization of this region based on strategies, program and scientific approach, and efficient directions to make it a comprehensive and competitive project. If there is no broad based cooperation amongst regional and extra regional powers, there will be no security.

The prime objective of Pakistan's foreign policy is to develop beneficial and strong ties with all major powers and maintain cordial relations with its neighbors³⁹ But the ultimate success of the port hinges on its usage by the Central Asian Republics and in this respect, cooperation with Afghanistan, which lies between Pakistan and Central Asia, is critical. There is need to address genuine grievances, if any, of the stakeholders with regard to various projects in Baluchistan particularly Gwadar deep sea port. Measures should be taken to remove the sense of alienation, if any, of the people of Balochistan and create local stakes in the province's development⁴⁰The interpolation of trade expected to flow through the

Gwadar port suggests that the port can generate enormous revenues, provided economic and foreign policy options are handled properly.

Since it is a mega project with long term and short term local and regional impact it is facing many challenges which can be divided into local, regional and international. In this point in time security situation in the province needs improvement for full pledge utilization of the port. The Balochistan province of Pakistan is also feeling the ripple effects of Afghanistan's imbroglio. The menace of militancy and insurgency in the region further aggravated instability in the north western Pakistan. Though the whole federation is under the spell of terrorism but its impact is very much visible in Balochistan, FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Reconciling divergences of interests of the regional and neighboring countries is required.

Security and development are two facets of the same coin and reciprocate each other. One without the other is highly unlikely. Regional development and cooperation is basic component of all regional organizations like ECO (Economic Cooperation Organization), SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization) SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation). Regional and great powers have interests in peace in the region and for this physical infrastructural integration creates conducive atmosphere. The South and Central Asian Region is rich in natural resources like hydrocarbons. Multinational Corporations as well as powers both regional and global are taking keen interests in the oil and gas resources of the region.

The new geo-politics or what some observers call the New Great Game is also influencing the developments in the region. After 9/11 USA and its NATO allies have invaded Afghanistan and ousted Taliban from the corridor of power. Regional and neighboring countries supported USA in its war against terrorism. Russia, China, Central Asian Republics, India and Pakistan supported USA in war against terrorism. Russia consider Central Asia as its near abroad while China is strengthening its relations with oil and gas rich Central Asian States. Its domestic energy resources are insufficient for its fast growing energy needs. Central Asian transportation routes are directed towards Moscow. After the disintegration of USSR CARs are struggling to develop routes towards South Asia, turkey and China. The energy requirements of the regional powers will bring them to agree on projects like TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India Gas Pipeline) and IPI (The Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline). Northern outlets and transportation routes are not sufficient for export of the Central Asian hydrocarbons and the alternative lies in the south particularly through Afghanistan and Pakistan and this is a point of convergence which can be developed.

Conclusion: Regional integration of physical infrastructure between South and Central Asia is underway and in this context Pakistan's location highlights its geostrategic importance. Its borders touch two most populous countries of the world that is China and India. The integration will boost regional economic development. The construction of Gwadar deep sea port is an important part of the regional infrastructural integration. Gwadar deep sea port has the potential to provide Central Asia and Afghanistan access to Indian Ocean and an opportunity to export their natural resources through southern routes. Gwadar is a town on the Arabian Sea coast in Baluchistan, Pakistan. Pakistan identified it as a port site in 1964 but it became a reality, when China agreed to invest in this deep-sea port project in 2001. The total cost of the project is estimated at US\$1.16 billion. Singapore's PSA International in 2007 won a bid to operate the port for 40 years, it is estimated that the port would generate revenues of \$17-\$31 billion during that time. Gwadar is 72 kilometers from the Iranian border; about 320km from Cape al-Hadd in Oman and about 400km from the Strait of Hormuz, through which 40% of the world's oil passes. The deep-sea port at Gwadar is visualized as becoming a regional hub, serving commercial traffic to and from Central Asian states and Afghanistan, the Middle East, the Persian Gulf, Xinjiang, Iran, and South East Asia. The construction of the Gwadar port is an important component of Pakistan's overall initiative to facilitate trade with the landlocked states of Central Asia as well as to coop with its fast growing import export transportation needs because Karachi and Qasim Ports are not sufficient. Gwadar deep sea port is a mega project for the economic development of Pakistan, which has invested huge amount of money to materialize this dream. Regional insecurity particularly insecurity in Afghanistan, the specter of terrorism, competition with other regional ports are some of the bottlenecks yet if they are taken with wisdom there is great likelihood of Gwadar deep sea port to become hub of regional trade and transportation.

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