



## The Path Forward for South Korea's Diplomacy and Security: An Overview of the Campaign Promises from Presidential Candidates

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TODAY, SOUTH KOREA IS FACING A NEW SECURITY GAME OF serious tensions on the peninsula and in the surrounding region. North Korea continues its plan of nuclearization and missile development, threatening South Korea, its allies, and the security of the greater international community. The new U.S. administration has declared Obama's strategy of "strategic patience" a failure, and has apparently embarked upon a new path of "impatient" action towards North Korea. After the U.S.-China summit at Mar-a-Lago resort, China shifted its position and agreed to apply more coercive sanctions and pressure to North Korea. China warns that North Korea must not worsen the situation by continuing nuclear tests and engaging in threatening behaviors. Telephone calls between Trump and Xi, urgent meetings among the foreign ministers of South Korea, the U.S., and Japan, media spats between China and North Korea, U.S. naval deployment, and other activities surrounding the peninsula depict a serious situation indeed.

Even as Northeast Asian politics are rocked by insecurity, South Korea's diplomatic role remains limited and without true presidential leadership following the impeachment of former President Park Geun-hye. Election campaigns for the presidency are underway as South Korea prepares to elect a new president on May 9, 2017. The new president will be confronted by this challenging situation immediately upon stepping into the role, with security at the top of the new administration's to-do list. Thus, we must analyze the campaign promises and positions of each

candidate in order to understand the potential policy alternatives that a new government may adopt. This is not intended to evaluate the policy agendas put forth by each candidate. Rather, we aim to give the reader an overview of the meaningful policy ideas in the electoral campaign so that they might anticipate the diplomacy and security agenda of the next president.

Our analysis will focus primarily on the electoral promises made by the top five presidential candidates: Mr. MOON Jae-in of the Minjoo Party of Korea, Mr. HONG Jun-pyo of the Liberty Korea Party, Mr. AHN Cheol-soo of the People's Party, Mr. YOO Seong-min of the Bareun Party, and Ms. SIM Sang-jung of the Justice Party. We include the official documents provided by each of the candidates and their parties online. We also referred to each candidate's book publications, televised presidential debates, newspaper interviews, and addresses made thus far during the campaign period. By examining these materials, we

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have worked to piece together the diplomacy and security agendas and policy options that a new government under each candidate might entertain.

### **North Korea's Nuclear Threat and Korean Unification**

South Korea has been unable to make progress on either national unification or the North Korea issue over the last decade. Any attempts at doing so have been thwarted as North Korea continued its nuclear development program and threatened South Korea with missile tests. In response, the South Korean government shut down most channels of dialogue and exchange with the North through the 5.24 Measures in 2010. Following North Korea's fourth nuclear test and long-range rocket launch, Seoul decided to shutter the Kaesong Industrial Complex in February 2016, which had been a symbol of reconciliation and exchange between the two Koreas. For a decade now, inter-Korean relations have remained frozen with no exit. Despite strengthened sanctions, North Korea continues to refuse to give up its nuclear program.

The nuclear issue is quite critical to South Korea's security. As long as North Korea maintains its nuclear and missile programs, the South Korean government is not able to continue engaging in economic assistance and exchanges with the North. Denuclearization has become Seoul's precondition to restoring dialogue and exchanges with Pyongyang. Stuck at this impasse, each Korea has gone its own direction; North Korea forges ahead with its nuclear program with total disregard to international criticism, while South Korea mobilizes any measures it can to impede North Korea's nuclear progress. North Korea's persistence in its nuclear development led to a fifth nuclear test in September 2016. However, Seoul was powerless to do anything besides adopt a higher degree of economic sanctions against the North as punishment. By isolating the North, the South Korean government has also narrowed its policy choices, though it wished to

discourage North Korea's asymmetric threats.

Each of the five presidential candidates has proposed policy solutions to resolve this issue. Three of the candidates favor the consideration of peaceful solutions reliant upon dialogue and negotiation. MOON, AHN, and SIM argue that South Korea must restore its diplomatic efforts to mitigate the North Korean nuclear threat by promoting dialogue and negotiation among stakeholders. These candidates propose a resumption of the six-party talks to freeze North Korea's nuclear program, followed by Four-party Talks to establish a peace regime on a denuclearized Korean Peninsula. In other words, their solution is to pursue dialogue and direct diplomacy. SIM promises to lift the 5.24 Measures to encourage exchanges and collaboration between the two Koreas.

On the opposite side, HONG and YOO stress the importance of deterrence against North Korea's nuclear capability. HONG advocates the redeployment of tactical nuclear weapons by the South in order to offset the increasing threat posed by the North. YOO also agrees there is a need for South Korea to deploy tactical nuclear weapons, arguing that the U.S. nuclear umbrella does not provide a sufficient deterrent against the North. MOON and SIM dismiss this notion, arguing that South Korea should preserve the principle of the Joint Declaration of South and North Korea on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. It should be noted that this is the first time this issue has been discussed during a presidential election campaign.

The candidates also emphasize the importance of deterrence by strengthening South Korea's defensive power against the North Korean threat. They propose completing the construction of the Korea Air and Missile Defense (KAMD), Kill Chain, and Korea Massive Punishment and Retaliation (KMPPR) ahead of schedule. But the biggest issue in terms of South Korea's defenses has been the deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD). With the exception of SIM Sang-jung, the candidates



generally appear to agree on the necessity of its deployment as a response to the increasing nuclear threat from the North. HONG and YOO argue that THAAD is essential to strengthening South Korea's deterrence capabilities, and have even argued that the country should expand the existing THAAD further. AHN initially expressed opposition to THAAD, but later walked back on his position, stating that the progress of North Korea's nuclear and missile technology and increasing threat require THAAD's deterrence. MOON argues that the issue should be left to the new government, who should investigate and then decide. However, he stated during one of the televised presidential debates that THAAD may be necessary if North Korea continues in its aggressive posture towards the South. Only SIM has maintained her position against the deployment of THAAD, questioning its functionality and utility. The question of THAAD is not limited to deterrence. It is linked to other important security issues, such as the ROK-U.S. alliance, South Korea's relationship with neighboring countries including China, Russia, and Japan, and the defense strategy of the Asia-Pacific region as a whole.

As for unification, MOON, AHN, and SIM champion a peaceful process. They advocate pursuing the final unification of Korean Peninsula through trust-building between the two Koreas via economic and social exchanges, increased communications, mutual understanding, and reciprocal prosperity. MOON suggests putting together a collective effort to promote peace and security in the Northeast Asian region with neighboring countries. He stresses the need for South Korea to improve its relationship with Russia. AHN states that South Korea's close relationships with both the U.S. and China are compatible and not zero-sum. He also argues that building good relationships with both the U.S. and China is required to promote peace and security on the Korean Peninsula. SIM advocates institutionalizing the irreversibility of the inter-Korean relationship to pursue longstanding efforts for national unification.

## Renovating South Korea's National Defense Capabilities

Except for SIM, the presidential candidates are for increasing the defense budget. MOON criticizes past administrations, pointing out that the rate of increase of the defense budget has dropped over the last ten years, and promotes increasing the defense budget to 3% of GDP. AHN also stresses the need to increase the defense budget to 3% of GDP, stating this is required to be able to incorporate advanced technology into the country's military capabilities. YOO suggests an increase to reach 3.5% of GDP, which should be spent on strengthening defense capabilities as well as improving conditions for South Korean soldiers. HONG has not clarified his opinion on increasing the defense budget, but he has also stated that an increased portion of the national budget should be allocated to defense.

SIM, however, argues that a defense budget increase will not necessarily guarantee improved national security or powerful defense capabilities. She focuses instead on improving the quality of the South Korean military. She has suggested establishing an "Agency for Core Technology Development," which will encourage the incorporation of advanced science and technology into defense and weapon systems. In addition, she advocates a revamp of the military to bring it in line with the values and requirements of the coming 4<sup>th</sup> industrial revolution. AHN also emphasizes the importance of advanced technology in building a capable military and defense system. He argues that the era of the 4<sup>th</sup> industrial revolution will arrive soon, revolutionizing every aspect of our lives, and that the South Korean military must undergo changes to adapt. YOO proposes building a technology-oriented defense system through the "Korean Offset Strategy," which offsets North Korea's physical threat with an advanced defense system.

HONG proposes an organizational reformation of the South Korean military through the creation of a



fourth division called the “Marine and Special Forces Command” that integrates the Marine Corps and the Special Forces Command. He insists that national defense policy should be transformed to a more offensive orientation. AHN critically evaluates the existing imbalance of South Korea’s military forces, which boast a strong army but a relatively limited navy and air force. AHN advocates reinforcing South Korea’s air and naval force. MOON suggests shortening the period of mandatory military service from two years to 18 months. He proposes compensating for the decreased number of soldiers by enhancing the quality of troops and weapon systems. SIM proposes a two-track conscription system comprised of specialized soldiers who serve four years and ordinary soldiers who serve for six months. She stresses that a shortened service period is inevitable considering the demographic changes in South Korean society. She also raises the issue of gender equality with regards to the treatment of female soldiers.

The main theme of the election promises candidates are making about South Korea’s defense power is the incorporation of advanced technology into the military. Candidates are proposing defense policy plans that include an increased budget, organizational reform, the rooting out of corruption in defense industry and procurement, recruitment, and improved conditions for soldiers. Most of these promises are centered on the construction of a powerful military force with advanced science and technology, and are in response to the need for self-reliant defense capabilities that can counteract the North Korean nuclear threat and equalize the military strength of the two countries.

### **ROK-U.S. Alliance: Cost-sharing and Operational Amendments**

The ROK-U.S. alliance is essential for South Korea to protect itself from the offensive threat posed by North Korea. Since the armistice agreement of the Korean

War, South Korea has been dependent upon its alliance with the U.S. for security, and the presence of U.S. military support has been a strong deterrent against North Korean aggression. All of the presidential candidates acknowledge the importance of the ROK-U.S. alliance, and argue that the alliance system should be further developed and strengthened in consideration of the changing security circumstances around the Korean Peninsula.

Recent indications that the current alliance may be subject to changes, particularly with regard to cost-sharing, came in the form of a request from the U.S. when President Donald Trump requested that South Korea pay the cost of THAAD deployment. President Trump also raised the issue of alliance cost-sharing during his campaign. The recent request seems to indicate that the Trump administration is seeking to change the rules of alliance cost-sharing and is pressing its partner allies to pay more for security. Trump’s remark about THAAD gave immediate rise to debates and concerns among South Koreans regarding both security and the alliance. Alliance cost-sharing is not a new issue, and South Korea expects that the U.S. will request that South Korea shoulder more of the financial burden in the future. Nevertheless, the candidates have hesitated to bring up the issue in their campaigns. Only AHN has said that South Korea should prepare to re-negotiate the cost-sharing of the ROK-U.S. alliance. MOON has not made any clear statements regarding the issue, but he argues in his book that South Korea’s position in the alliance should be improved to establish a fair security partnership. He indirectly suggests that the term ‘fair relationship’ implies fair cost-sharing as well.

Following Trump’s remark that South Korea should pay the full cost of THAAD’s deployment, the South Korean government politely pushed back, stating that the U.S. would shoulder the cost according to the initial Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA)-based agreement. Shortly thereafter, the U.S. government confirmed that the original cost-sharing agreement



over THAAD would be upheld, but hinted that there may be renegotiations in the future. The cost-sharing issue, in combination with the practical pros and cons of THAAD deployment, is making the situation more complex. HONG and YOO asserted that the THAAD deployment cost should be covered by the U.S. as the two allies had previously agreed. YOO added that he had concerns regarding any further negotiation over defense cost-sharing between South Korea and the U.S. AHN said it was unlikely that the U.S. would pass the costs over to South Korea. However, he stated that he anticipates the re-negotiation of the KORUS FTA will be quite tough. MOON and SIM each took advantage of the changing situation to advocate their individual positions on THAAD. MOON took a shot at the former Park Geun-hye administration, saying that South Korea had little leverage on the issue owing to the previous government's hasty acceptance of its deployment. SIM went further, arguing that THAAD should be withdrawn immediately.

The second ROK-U.S. alliance issue the candidates addressed was the transfer of wartime operation control (OPCON) to South Korea. MOON argues that the South Korean military is adequately prepared and that the transfer process should be completed during the next presidential administration. AHN acknowledges the need for transferring OPCON to South Korea, but he argues that South Korea should be 100% prepared before this occurs. He adds that the ROK-U.S. Combined Defense System needs to be maintained even with a transfer of control. SIM has also asserted the need to transfer OPCON to South Korea soon, and emphasizes the need to revise the SOFA in order to address the current inequality between the two allies. The two conservative candidates disagreed, arguing that South Korea needs to guarantee security support from US forces.

The ROK-U.S. alliance is regarded as the fundamental platform for deterring North Korea's military threat and guaranteeing South Korea's security. All candidates acknowledge this. However, SIM goes

further in her vision of the future security environment surrounding the Korean Peninsula. She proposes the institutionalization of a regular dialogue with all of the major players in the Northeast Asian region, including South and North Korea, U.S., Japan, China, and Russia, together with collaboration for regional security.

The core function of the ROK-U.S. alliance has always been to deter North Korea from an attack. However, since the end of the Cold War, a transformation of ROK-U.S. alliance has been discussed as the new security environment places new demands on the traditional alliance system. As the concept of security evolves, the ROK-U.S. alliance is being called upon to address new and challenging issues, not only on the Korean Peninsula and in Northeast Asia, but globally. MOON has proposed that the ROK-U.S. security partnership evolve beyond deterrence against North Korea to prepare for the variety of global threats we are facing today.

The ROK-U.S. alliance is a basic security mechanism that should be developed in accordance with the changing security environment. With the new U.S administration in office, it seems likely that the allies will soon discuss how to adjust the alliance appropriately. With sharp differences delineating the policy positions of each candidate, these discussions will not be easy, and it is important to understand and be prepared for the variety of scenarios that may play out.

### **Rekindling Relations between the ROK and China**

China will undoubtedly be one of the most important factors in the policy direction of the next South Korean government's Northeast Asian regional cooperation initiative. Amid the rising tensions fueled by an increasing sense of mutual cooperation and competition between the U.S. and China, South Korea is walking a tightrope as it balances its relationships with the two major regional players. Despite the urgency surrounding the peninsula, South Korea has





been left on the sidelines as President Trump arranged calls and meetings with Xi Jinping and Shinzo Abe to discuss possible responses in the event of more nuclear tests by North Korea. It is imperative that the new South Korean president reassert South Korea's position and national interests in any type of regional dialogue among stakeholders as soon as he or she steps into office on May 10, 2017. This necessitates a clear evaluation of how South Korea should pursue its policy vis-à-vis China, and an examination of where the five major presidential candidates actually stand regarding South Korea-China relations.

During the Park Geun-hye administration, the relationship between South Korea and China was at its height. The number of summits and senior-level meetings between the two countries increased significantly as summits and senior-level meetings between North Korea and China halted. The ROK-China FTA was signed in 2014; South Korea took the initiative in bringing China and Japan to a trilateral summit in Seoul in 2015; and South Korea confirmed its intention to join the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) in 2015. However, owing to a series of North Korean nuclear and missile tests, as well as the decision to deploy THAAD on the Korean Peninsula and a deepening rivalry between the U.S. and China, ROK-China relations deteriorated in 2016. This has hindered the further development of the strategic cooperative partnership between the two countries.

The next South Korean government faces the difficult challenge of steering the country along a dual path of managing sensitive issues, such as the deployment of the THAAD or South China Sea territorial disputes, in a strong, stable manner, and closely cooperating on long-term issues, such as the institutionalization of the ROK-China strategic cooperative partnership. In other words, South Korea needs to expand its strategic position on political, economic, and social fronts while acting as a bridge in building a regional network or community.

All five major presidential candidates agree on the

importance and urgency of rebuilding ROK-China relations. Based on the basic assumption that military-diplomatic issues should not be linked with economic issues, MOON argues that it is important to substantialize the strategic cooperative partnership between the two countries. On the political side, bilateral strategic dialogues on issues surrounding the Korean Peninsula should be implemented. MOON highlights the role of South Korea in trilateral cooperation between South Korea, China, and Japan. AHN focuses on the importance of pursuing peace diplomacy vis-à-vis the U.S., China, Japan, and Russia, and strengthening the strategic cooperative partnership between South Korea and China based on the underlying ROK-U.S. alliance. SIM emphasizes the need to address the anti-Korean sentiment prevalent in China, which will be challenging to resolve through pure diplomacy if left unaddressed. HONG, on the other hand, tends to be more critical of China. Pointing out that "Korea-China relations is a matter of living, but Korea-U.S. relations is a matter of life and death," HONG clearly puts ROK-U.S. relations before ROK-China relations.

The most controversial issue in the ROK-China relationship is currently the deployment of THAAD. MOON strongly advocates for an open discussion of the issue with China. While acknowledging that South Korea and China do share an understanding and responsibility regarding the peace and stability of the Korean Peninsula and that China is in an advantageous position to wield influence over North Korea, MOON favors South Korea taking the lead in the dialogues on North Korea between the U.S. and China. On the other hand, the conservative candidates HONG and YOO view THAAD deployment as a matter of national sovereignty and argue that China should not interfere. While AHN Cheol-soo and MOON Jae-in fundamentally disagree over THAAD's deployment, AHN's approach toward how this issue should be handled vis-à-vis China is similar to Moon's in that both emphasize the need to include China into the dialogue.



Another salient issue awaiting the next South Korean administration is that of China's economic retaliation. In response to South Korea's decision to deploy THAAD to the Korean Peninsula, China has engaged in full-on economic retaliation, including a boycott of Korean companies, a decrease in the number of Chinese tourists permitted to travel to South Korea, and the cancellation of the concerts of South Korean artists. Considering that China is South Korea's largest trading partner, one cannot help but wonder how long South Korea's economy can endure. MOON argues that security issues like THAAD should be discussed between governments while economic issues need to be left in the hands of the private sector. Nonetheless, MOON and AHN emphasize that closer communication with China is necessary to dissuade China from economically retaliatory behaviors. While MOON sees the role of South Korea as a main player in dialogue with China, YOO argues that the U.S. needs to urge China to stop its economic retaliation against South Korea and states that the South Korean government should work toward placing this issue on the agenda of the next U.S.-China summit. HONG goes even further, having previously mentioned the possibility of pulling Korean companies from China if necessary. He has gone so far as to suggest that China shut down oil pipelines from China to North Korea as a counter-measure to pressure North Korea.

### Thawing Relations between the ROK and Japan

Under the Park Geun-hye administration, South Korea's relations with Japan can be described as "chilly" at best. Domestic politics in Japan exacerbated the problems that plagued South Korea-Japan relations during this period. Since Shinzo Abe took office, Japan has been criticized by its neighbors for its rightist and nationalistic tendencies. Despite criticisms and opposition expressed by South Korea and China, Abe visited the Yasukuni shrine and has taken an

unrelenting stance on various issues ranging from the Dokdo/Takeshima dispute and history textbooks to Japan's wartime sexual exploitation of Korean women, or "comfort women." The Park administration's strategic interest in Japan was also rather low. Even when working with China and Japan on the North Korean problem, including nuclear and missile programs, South Korea focused on China's role in pressuring North Korea and in turn, Japan's space to maneuver was limited. Security cooperation between South Korea and Japan has always been linked with historical disputes, which stir negative public sentiment and nationalism in both countries.

Despite the troubles brewing in the relationship between South Korea and Japan during this time, initiatives from the U.S. triggered signs of positive development. In January 2014, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill urging the U.S. government to encourage Japan to address the comfort women issue. This was followed by then-U.S. President Obama's initiative to bring together Park Geun-hye and Shinzo Abe after the Nuclear Security Summit at The Hague in March of 2014 for their first face-to-face talks. This opened a window of opportunity for dialogue and cooperation between the two countries through a series of summits and senior-level meetings. South Korea-Japan relations seemed to have hit a high point when the two countries signed a landmark agreement over the comfort women issue in December 2015. However, the agreement stirred up considerable controversy and debate among the Korean public and was met with strong resistance, making the South Korea-Japan comfort women agreement the most hotly debated and important issue for presidential candidates as they discuss South Korean policy towards Japan. While the previous administration did achieve certain level of success in getting a third party, namely the U.S., to support it in seeking redress over historical issues such as the comfort women, it failed to respond effectively to the changing political dynamics in Japan.



It is true that amidst the deepening rivalry and competition between the U.S. and China, instability and nuclear threats of North Korea, inauguration of Donald Trump, and South Korea's own presidential corruption scandal, South Korea's five major presidential candidates have not focused much on promulgating policy regarding Japan. However, once a new president is elected, he or she will need to shape this policy. Regardless of who wins the presidential election in South Korea, any South Korean leader shares an understanding that South Korea, one way or another, needs to work with Japan, 'quasi-ally' that shares democratic principles and values with South Korea, toward the common goal of mid- to long-term co-prosperity and development. Past administrations were not able to successfully delink political or diplomatic issues from historical ones, thereby making it harder for the two countries to go forward in pursuit of this goal. The next South Korean administration will need to work on building mutual trust between South Korea and Japan by de-linking historical and political issues. Because of the indelible memories of the history between South Korea and Japan and accompanying strong public sentiment, South Korea must be careful in evaluating whether an issue is for South Korea's benefit or the country's historical justification.

As mentioned above, policy towards Japan has not received much of a spotlight in the South Korean election campaigns. However, we will briefly examine two important issues relevant to ROK-Japan relations; the comfort women agreement and the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA).

All of the presidential candidates agree that the comfort women agreement signed in December 2015 was dishonorable and should be re-negotiated. MOON, however, emphasizes that South Korea needs to enhance its relationship with Japan to achieve a mature, cooperative partnership. SIM argues that future relations between South Korea and Japan should be

based on the receipt of an honest apology from Japan and an acknowledgement of its past history. HONG strongly emphasizes that South Korea should not pay much attention to how Japan responds to its actions. YOO suggests delinking the issues; South Korea should work with Japan on further implementing a currency swap or the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), agree to disagree on history issues and territorial disputes, and strongly push for a re-negotiation of the comfort women agreement. AHN also highlights that the agreement in December 2015 is a result of lack of communication and does not reflect the wishes of the victims themselves.

Candidates are divided on GSOMIA. Two of the more liberal candidates, MOON and SIM, are more skeptical of the GSOMIA. While MOON argues that there should be a more comprehensive evaluation and scrutiny of its effectiveness in terms of South Korean national interests, SIM points to a lack of consensus in the National Assembly. On the other hand, HONG, AHN, and YOO agree that the GSOMIA can be useful in receiving essential military information on North Korea's nuclear and missile programs. HONG emphasizes that the GSOMIA will benefit both countries, especially in strengthening security cooperation between South Korea and Japan in response to North Korea's nuclear threats.

## Conclusion

Regardless of who wins the presidential election on May 9, 2017, South Korea's next president will face unprecedented challenges when he or she steps into office on May 10. Not only will the president have to pick up on what has been left hanging by the previous administration, he or she will have to lay out policy agendas without the usual transition period. Security dynamics surrounding the Korean Peninsula are changing rapidly. This makes it even more important for the presidential candidates to clearly put forth their





foreign policy and security agendas early on.

In this paper, five important foreign policy and security agendas were addressed: unification and North Korea, national defense, the ROK-U.S. alliance, ROK-China relations, and ROK-Japan relations. One important item, which is missing in many of the campaign promises of the presidential candidates, is a specific roadmap for regional policy. It is noteworthy that MOON Jae-in envisions a Northeast Asian Responsible Community, in which South Korea will take initiative in promoting the common good and prosperity of the Northeast Asian region. Trilateral cooperation among South Korea, China, and Japan will be enhanced, and multilateral security cooperation will be strengthened through the reestablishment of the six-party talks. This concept of a Northeast Asian Responsible Community will couple multilateral security cooperation with an economic community. Considering that this is not the first time that the idea of creating a regional community has been suggested, it will be interesting to see how MOON's Northeast Asian Responsible Community will be different.

While the five major South Korean presidential candidates align on certain issues, they remain distinct in their advocacy of differing approaches to many key challenges facing the country. Because of the unusual circumstances, namely the presidential corruption scandal, in which the early presidential election is taking place this year, Korean public is seeking democratic and just governance, consensus, and the elimination of deep-rooted corruption. It remains to be seen how the next South Korean president will try to bring together an ideologically divided public, but now is the time for governance that promotes consensus while acknowledging and embracing differences. ■

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