

# **REVISITING THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHINA AND THE UNI ARAB EMIRATES (UAE) RELATIONS UNDER THE GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL (GCC)**

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## **ABSTRACT**

China and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) established bilateral cooperation in 1971, and the two countries' political, economic, and commercial connections have grown since then. China and the United Arab Emirates are key economic partners, and bilateral ties have grown to this day. Since the signing of the People's Republic of China and GCC Member States' 2014-2017 Strategic Dialogue Plan, the release of the Third Round Press Communication of the PRC-GCC Strategic Dialogue, and the signing of the 16 China-UAE Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in 2015 at the China-UAE Economic Forum held in Beijing, the two countries' relationship has grown even closer. The authors seek to explain how China leverages its long-standing partnership with the UAE into diplomatic relations in order to strengthen economic connections and commercial cooperation between the two countries. This form of study employs qualitative research methodologies as well as primary and secondary data sources. The goal of this research is to find out what the two nations are doing to enhance their economies through trade connections by employing library research methodologies. In terms of data analysis approaches, the author follows three steps: preparing and organizing data, decreasing data, and finally presenting data.

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## INTRODUCTION

Bilateral cooperation between China and the United Arab Emirates pertaining to diplomatic relations commenced in 1971, when the UAE's first President informed China of the UAE's independence, prompting a series of visits to the UAE by Chinese officials. Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan al-Nahyan, the first President of the UAE, notified Zhou Enlai, the first Chinese Prime Minister, of the UAE's independence on December 3, 1971. Both parties indicated a desire to strengthen their friendship. Following that, China immediately hosted an export product display in Dubai and constructed Changcheng Trading Center, and the Chinese civil aviation authority opened an office in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, to commemorate the two countries' strong ties (The National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs & China, 2015).

From 1971 to 2015, the Chinese leader's travels to the UAE sent a clear message that the UAE is a country that plays a crucial role in China's economic development. Significant progress was made at the third session of strategic dialogue, which took place on January 17, 2014, in Beijing. The conversation was co-led by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Kuwait's Vice Premier Sabah Al-Khalid Al-Sabah. Wang Yi noted that China and the GCC nations would undertake mutually beneficial cooperation that has huge potential and is in both sides' basic interests. China is prepared to collaborate with the GCC to strengthen bilateral political ties with the goal of developing strategic alliances and increasing practical cooperation in all sectors through the establishment of a free trade area (FTA) as a first step (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Arab Republic of Egypt, 2014).

The GCC side stated that the GCC places a high value on the development of friendly ties with China and is eager to further mutually beneficial collaboration, increase friendly exchanges, and push bilateral relations for relentless new advances. With the conclusion of this strategic discussion, the two parties signed the People's Republic of China and the GCC Member States Strategic Dialogue Plan for 2014-2017 and released the Third Round Press Communication of the PRC-GCC Strategic Dialogue. The two sides also agreed to back China's plans on the Silk

Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China &., 2010).

The UAE-China Economic Forum, which began in July 2015 in Beijing and was attended by over 500 persons from the public and business sectors, saw the signing of 16 Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) between the UAE and China in various industries. The forum, organized by the Ministry of Economy in collaboration with the District Court, various economic departments, and the Federation of Economic Chambers, is a key component of His Highness Sheikh Mohamed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces' visit to China. The slogan "Sustainable Partnership, Sustainable Investment" aims to strengthen cooperation between corporate representatives, investors, and the leadership of the two countries, under the framework of their partnership that has developed into a partnership strategy that includes 13 main pillars of trade, investment, oil, clean energy, tourism, health, environment, space, construction, and innovative industries, which has been held for three decades (Bafadal, 2018).

This illustrates that China's bilateral relationships with the UAE are strengthening, with some of the MoUs having a substantial influence on China's commercial relations and bilateral cooperation with the UAE. The authors of the report want to demonstrate how China-UAE bilateral ties developed in order to boost economic ties and commercial collaboration between the two countries. Based on previous research, Bambang Cipto's first study, "China's Economic Diplomacy in the Gulf States," published by Muhammadiyah University of Yogyakarta Volume 5 Edition 2 in 2016, will most likely show progress in favor of both sides, as well as economic changes that have brought China closer to the Gulf region.

Furthermore, Jonathan Fulton's paper, "China-UAE Relations in the Belt and Road Era," was published in the Journal of Arabian Studies Volume 9 Issue 2 in 2019. It analyzes the overview and features of both nations, as well as their respective goals. The study's authors will look at how China's bilateral trade connections with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) boosted economic figures dramatically in 2015. Due to China-UAE connections since the Middle Eastern nations' participation in the Asian-African Conference (KAA), in this situation, China

exploits and utilizes the two countries' diplomacy and Sharia finance held by the UAE to grow the economy (Kusmayadi, 2018).

## **METHOD**

The author used this form of research with qualitative research methodologies in this study. Explanations and exposes regarding the concerns identified in a study are included in qualitative research. This research method begins with the collection of particular data, followed by the analysis of data from specific topics to the general, and finally, researchers present interpretations of the significance of the data acquired (Bakry, 2016). This sort of qualitative research focuses on a descriptive problem that necessitates analysis, therefore in this study, the author is expected to express the results of the research conducted and described descriptively (Creswell, 2009). The authors adopted a qualitative research method to investigate China's bilateral commercial relations with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in 2015. The author also employs a descriptive way of analysis in which the author uses data from the archives of the governments of China and the UAE; hence, the author employs this approach to make data collection, analysis, and exposure of existing data simpler. A data source is a process of an observable entity that is the topic of data that may be gathered. According to the source, data is classified into two categories: main data and secondary data (Kothari, 2004).

The author employ both primary and secondary data sources in their study. The primary data comes from official documents published by both countries, international organizations, or business groups in China and the UAE, while secondary data comes from internet sources, libraries, reports in the form of publications, and some literature studies related to research problems, such as journals, articles, books, and other supporting websites. The subject of study is an intriguing research topic that makes use of current data (J.Moleong, 2007). The study's goal is to find out what the two nations are doing to enhance their economies through trade connections. This is owing to China's tight relationship with the Gulf States, particularly the UAE, which has resulted in this diplomacy as well as expanded commercial and economic links between the two nations. The writers employed library research approaches to obtain research data for this study. This type of data may be found in papers or literature related to the

topic at hand, such as books, scientific journals, articles, organizational archives, websites, and so on, as well as other resources that are valid and relevant to the topic at hand (Bakry, 2016).

Because the internet has developed fast in recent years and supplies some of the information that the author seeks, the author used the internet to obtain data related to the study subject. The author followed the following procedures to analyze the data in this study: preparing and arranging data via preparation and organization of data This entails looking for and gathering data from current sources to guarantee that documents to be analyzed are available. The second strategy is data reduction, which is a method of gathering data from many sources, such as books, scientific journals, organizational archives, and websites, and then sorting it to make it simpler for writers to interpret this study. Furthermore, minimizing data will assist the author in locating the next data point if it is still required. Tapering the topic, categorizing the data, and removing extraneous data are some of the activities done in the data reduction step. Data reduction also entails summarizing the data to make it briefer to improve data presentation. The final phase is data presentation, which is a data preparation activity that may be given in the form of a tabular narrative or visual diagram in qualitative research. By providing the facts, it will be simpler to comprehend what happened and to prepare for the next step. The author will utilize the narrative to demonstrate how China's bilateral trade relations with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are benefiting both nations' economies.

## **RESULT**

On November 1, 1984, the leaders of China and the UAE took the historic decision to establish diplomatic ties between the two nations, particularly by establishing an embassy in Beijing and a consulate general in Hong Kong, while China has an embassy in Abu Dhabi and a consulate general in Dubai (Hua, 2015). Sheikh Zayed and other key officials greeted Yang Shangkun, the then-President of China, at Abu Dhabi airport in December 1989. To revenge the Chinese president's arrival last year, Sheikh Zayed visited China in May 1990 and met with Yang Shangkun at the Great Hall of People located at the western end of Beijing's Tiananmen Square. Aside from political relations, the Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan Center for Islamic and Arabic Studies was created in Beijing in 1994 with a donation from Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan during his historic visit to China in 1990. The center, which covers an area of more

than 14 million square kilometers, intends to promote Arab and Islamic civilizations as well as teach Arabic to Chinese students (Alghoul & Aamir, 2018).

On July 4-7, 2004, a combined delegation of six finance ministers from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the GCC Secretary General visited China. At the conclusion of the visit, China and the GCC published a joint statement stating that the visit was made at the request of the People's Republic of China's government, the GCC delegation was led by Kuwait's Minister of State Finance, H.E. Mahmoud Abdelkhalik Al-Nouri and included the Minister of Finance and Industry of the State Affairs of the United Arab Emirates, H.E. Mohammed Khalfan bin Kharbash, Minister of Finance and National Economy of the Kingdom of Bahrain, H.E. Abdullah Hassan Saif, Minister of Finance of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, H.E. Ibrahim Bin Abdul-Aziz Al-Assaf, Minister of National Economy and Vice Chairman of the State Council of Financial Affairs and Energy Resources, Sultan Amin H.E. Ahmed bin Abdunabi Macki, Minister of State Finance of Qatar, H.E. Youssef Hussein Kamal, and GCC Secretary General, H.E. Abdulrahman bin Hamad Al-Attiyah visited the People's Republic of China on July 4-7, 2004, in order to establish and strengthen healthy cooperative ties between the People's Republic of China and the Gulf Arab States Cooperative Council (Yang Sheng, 2022).

During the visit, H.E. Prime Minister Wen Jiabao of the People's Republic of China met with six finance ministers from GCC member states and H.E. GCC Secretary General, and official talks were led by Chinese State Councillor H.E. Tang Jiaxuan and Kuwaiti State Finance Minister H.E. Mahmoud Abdelkhalik Al-Nouri on behalf of the Chinese and GCC sides, respectively. Chinese Trade Minister H.E. Bo Xilai, Finance Minister H.E. Jin Renqing, and State Development and Reform Commission Director H.E. Ma Kai met with GCC delegation counterparts (CGTN China, 2022). During their consultations, the two sides discussed exploring areas of collaboration between the People's Republic of China and GCC member nations, as well as expanding bilateral ties. The Framework Agreement on Economic, Trade, Investment, and Technology Cooperation between the People's Republic of China and the Member States of the Cooperation Council for Gulf Arab States was signed by the two parties (GCC) (Cleric, 2022).

Through various steps, the agreement intends to boost cooperation and technological exchanges in the aforementioned fields, expand bilateral trade exchanges, foster exchanges between the two sides' business groups, and promote joint investment (Devonshire-Ellis, 2022). To encourage and facilitate the flow of commodities and services between the two sides, they agreed to begin negotiations in the China-GCC free trade zone to develop and strengthen relations between China and GCC member states and to lay the groundwork for mutual investment between the two sides in a variety of economic areas. The first round of such talks will take place as soon as feasible in China (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2004). After the visit, both parties expressed satisfaction with the outcomes and decided to continue similar exchanges in the future in 2022. (Agencies, 2022).

Hu Jintao, China's sixth President, visited Dubai in 2007 and was greeted cordially by Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashid al-Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2011). Hu Jintao's 2007 visit paid off, as ties between China and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have progressively strengthened through three strategic dialogues since 2010. These discussions took place following President Xi Jinping's announcement of the strategic plan in 2013. In 2010, Beijing hosted the first strategic meeting, which led to an agreement on the future of China-GCC ties. They decided to continue the conversation in order to promote mutually beneficial collaboration and to deepen cooperation in many sectors. In 2011, Abu Dhabi hosted a second strategic dialogue. In this second round of talks, the two sides agreed to enhance and extend cooperation in tourism and finance (People's Republic of China Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011). In addition, following the Wenchuan earthquake in May 2008, the UAE government gave more than \$50 million to China, making it one of the world's largest contributions to the disaster-stricken region. The Chinese Prime Minister, Wen Jiabao, attended the opening ceremony of the 5th Summit in January 2012. During the visit, the two sides inked a joint statement on the formation of a strategic alliance (Hua, 2015). Xi Jinping, China's then-Vice President, invited Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Army, to visit China in 2009 and 2012.

During his visit, Sheikh Mohammed met with President Hu Jintao, Prime Minister Wen Jiabao, and Wu Bangguo, Chairman of the Party of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress. The UAE-China Economic Forum, attended by over 240 UAE politicians and business executives, was opened by Sultan bin Saeed Al Mansouri, the UAE's economics minister, and Mohammed Al Abbar, Chairman of the Emaar Group, who was the forum's guest of honor. Zhong Shan, China's Commerce Minister, also spoke at the summit, emphasizing his country's special relationship with the UAE and how the agreement inked by the two sides will deepen bilateral relationships in the future. Furthermore, when describing China as a leading economic and social partner, Mohammed Al Abbar, Chairman of Emaar Group, stated that cooperation between the two countries is undergoing continuous development due to their governments' support, and that the presence of officials and business leaders from both countries highlights the acumen of their public and private sectors to improve their relations (WAM, 2019).

Diplomatic ties between the two nations have yielded such outstanding results that China and the UAE inked 16 China-UAE Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) during the China-UAE Economic Forum in 2015. Some MoUs concern outcomes that would boost state income through investment, banking, commerce, ports, oil and gas, and enhanced tourism. Such as the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on The Abu Dhabi Global Development Market (ADGM) or the development of the Abu Dhabi global market and China's National Development and Reform Commission, which signed the MOU to encourage trade and investment opportunities between Chinese and UAE companies. Ahmed Ali Al Sayegh, Minister of State and Chairman of ADGM, and He Lifeng, Minister in Chief of China's National Development and Reform Commission, signed the MoU. (NDRC). ADGM recently inked a Memorandum of Understanding with China Everbright Group to research and establish a cooperative platform centered on critical industries such as real estate and financial investment. The agreement was signed by Ahmed Ali Al Sayegh, Chairman and Party Secretary of China Everbright Group, and Xiaopeng Li, Chairman and Party Secretary of China Everbright Group (WAM, 2019).



The UAE is China's second-biggest commercial partner and the Middle East and North Africa Region's largest export market, as well as an important trading center for Chinese products. The UAE considers China to be a significant investment market, while Chinese investors are bullish on the UAE's market potential. The UAE has a \$1.15 billion direct investment stake in China at the end of 2014, with \$6.19 million added in the first nine months of 2015. There are currently over 4,000 Chinese enterprises in the UAE, with \$1.66 billion in investment shares, \$85.62 million of which was just added in the first nine months of 2015. 2015 (George). The UAE chose China as a currency partner due to its historical prosperity, stability, and collaboration with China on an investment (Fulton, 2019). As part of a new economic strategy in the Gulf Region, China is attempting to establish a new breakthrough on a dirham currency (AED) that is generally stable versus the US dollar. As a result, the agreement facilitates Chinese firms doing business in the UAE and serves as a catalyst for Chinese companies to raise the intensity of their operations in the UAE (Parekh, 2008).

Financial cooperation is a new bright light in the two nations' bilateral ties. Through bilateral agreements between the two countries, at least some Chinese banks, such as Industrial Commercial Bank of China (ICBC) with branches in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, Bank of China, Agricultural Bank of China (ABC), and China Development Bank (CDB), have begun to stand and operate in the UAE, facilitating the process of currency bargaining that facilitates cross-border trade and investment for Chinese companies and thus strengthening China's global financial position (Chaziza, 2019). Furthermore, the National Bank of Abu Dhabi and the National Bank of Dubai have opened branches or begun operations in Shanghai. China formed the agreement to encourage bilateral commerce and direct investment between China and the country in a local currency rather than the US dollar in order to enhance China's economy. Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed sponsored the creation of a \$10 billion joint investment fund between the two nations in 2012. The UAE also became a founding member of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, which was founded by China. China's economy grew to become the world's second-largest, and it successfully hosted the Olympics in 2008 and the World Expo in 2010. Despite the worldwide economic slump, China and the United Arab Emirates have maintained economic growth growth rates of 7.4 percent and 4.6 percent respectively (George, 2015).

The UAE is the entrance to China's commerce with Africa and Europe, therefore it plays a crucial role in global trade for China. Because of the port of Jebel Ali, which is China's transit point to the Gulf countries if they cooperate economically, the UAE is one of the countries that is important for China as an economic route between Arab countries. Jebel Ali also provides access to China's efforts to build transport routes connecting major ports along the "Belt and Silk Road" (The National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs & China, 2015). This is consistent with the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on the Port of Abu Dhabi with the Jiangsu Provincial Overseas Cooperation and Investment Company and the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (Yekti, 2018). Chinese-made products reach the UAE market through Jebel Ali Port, the world's ninth largest port. Dubai International Airport is the busiest port, making it a haven for Chinese residents who like shopping. Dubai is also one of the most appealing locations in the world for Chinese business owners (Jaber, 2016). In 2005, there were less than 20 Chinese enterprises in Dubai; by 2015, that number had risen to 4000. Dubai Mart is China's largest mega-mall created to attract visitors or UAE residents. Every day, no fewer than 50,000 people visit Dubai Mart to purchase for requirements ranging from little goods to mining tools. China backs the UAE in its efforts to protect national sovereignty, and the two nations have become mutual allies and partners in defending developing countries' interests as well as regional peace and stability.

This has been especially true in China-UAE ties over the last three decades, as bilateral economic and commercial cooperation has grown, leaving greater potential for expansion. At the time of diplomatic ties' creation in 1984, bilateral commerce volume was less than \$100 million. In 1995, the amount surpassed \$1 billion, and by 2005, it had surpassed \$10 billion. This figure continued to rise until bilateral trade volume hit a new high of \$54.8 billion in 2014. China's investment in the UAE spans a wide range of industries, including energy, banking, tourism, and education. China began importing oil from the UAE in 1995, following the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) by the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) better known as the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company signed a Strategic Framework Agreement with the China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) signed by the UAE Minister of State and ADNOC Group CEO, Dr. Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber, and chairman of the CNOOC, Yang Hua. China bought more than 11.65 million tons of oil from

the UAE in 2014, a 13.4 percent rise year on year. As China's economy expands. Total imports from China to the United Arab Emirates were reported at 22. 845.153 USD in 2015. This records an increase from previous years of 13,588,917 USD in 2010, 14,965,289 USD in 2011, 15,945,806 USD in 2012, 17,470,035 in 2013 and 22,149,904 USD in 2014 (Ma, 2010).

More significantly, China-UAE energy cooperation entails comprehensive upstream and downstream collaboration with mutual benefit. The pipeline connecting the Habshan oil reserves in Abu Dhabi and Fujairah, for example, was built by China National Petroleum Corporation and is a landmark project in bilateral energy cooperation. Al Yasat Corporation, a joint venture between China National Petroleum Corporation's Hong Kong office and Abu Dhabi National Oil Company, now operates on land and sea in Abu Dhabi (Molavi, 2015). The UAE's economics minister, Sultan Bin Saeed Al Mansouri, indicated that China is the UAE's top trading partner in terms of non-oil and gas commodities, accounting for 9.7 percent of total non-oil and gas trade in 2018, worth more than US \$43 billion. In 2018, the UAE's non-oil international trade with China accounted for 16% of overall non-oil foreign trade with Asian nations. According to Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces, China was the primary source of UAE commodity imports in 2018, accounting for 15% of total imports worth more than \$38 billion. He also stated that China accounts for 27% of UAE imports from Asia and is rated 11th in the world in terms of accepting non-oil exports and commodities re-exported from the UAE. He went on to say that the UAE is one of the top 25 nations drawing Chinese exports, and that it is the first in the Arab world, accounting for 29 percent of China's exports to Arab countries.

China's most important commercial partner in the Arab world is the UAE, which accounts for 26% of overall non-oil international trade between China and Arab countries (Saner & Yiu, 2003). Furthermore, Sheikh Mohamed stated that the UAE leadership wishes to strengthen and progress the country's bilateral relations with China in order to accomplish the overall interests of their people and to generate opportunities. Since the establishment of diplomatic ties 38 years ago, the two countries have treated each other with respect and friendship. Tourism exchanges are also increasing, as indicated by the UAE's inclusion on the list of Chinese tourist destinations in 2009. Because to the civilian development, various resources, tourism, and the

finest services offered by the UAE government, the UAE became a Chinese public tourism destination in 2009, and more and more Chinese are interested in viewing the spectacular attractions of Abu Dhabi. China demonstrates not only that it can cultivate investors who can enhance a country's economy, but that being a tourist destination for people from other nations can also raise a country's income, particularly in comparison to the UAE.

As a result, approximately 500,000 Chinese visitors visited the UAE in 2014, with the number of Chinese tourists increasing by more than 30 percent per year (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the United Arab Emirates, 2015). In addition, the Abu Dhabi Ministry of Culture and Tourists has inked an MoU with the National Museum of China to improve current tourism. Saif Mohammed Al Hajeri, Chairman of Abu Dhabi's Department of Economic Development, and Wang Chunfa, Director of China's National Museum, inked the deal. Another approach for the UAE to attract more tourists is to host a Chinese-themed activity at a hotel or retail center (Hua, 2015). In response to the increase in the number of Chinese visitors visiting the UAE last year, Al Mansouri emphasized that the UAE is a top destination for Chinese tourists in the region owing to its booming contemporary tourism center and historic area. Due to the availability of a state-of-the-art air transport network that spans and links all areas of the world, it is also one of the world's top tourist destinations in terms of entertainment, culture, sports, and shopping, as well as events and festivals. All of these elements, and more, have made the UAE a popular tourist destination for Chinese visitors, and the availability of more than 75 weekly flights between the two nations, as well as their joint visa waiver arrangement, has encouraged shared tourism. The number of hotel guests from China in 2018 amounted to about 1.46 million, and the Chinese market ranks fourth in terms of the number of hotel guests in the UAE (Tamimi, 2017).

## **CONCLUSION**

In response to the increase in the number of Chinese visitors visiting the UAE last year, Al Mansouri emphasized that the UAE is a top destination for Chinese tourists in the region owing to its booming contemporary tourism center and historic area. Due to the availability of a state-of-the-art air transport network that spans and links all areas of the world, it is also one of the world's top tourist destinations in terms of entertainment, culture, sports, and shopping, as well

as events and festivals. All of these elements, and more, have made the UAE a popular tourist destination for Chinese visitors, and the availability of more than 75 weekly flights between the two nations, as well as their joint visa waiver arrangement, has encouraged shared tourism.

The 2014-2017 Strategic Dialogue Plan of the People's Republic of China and the GCC Member States, the issue of the Third Round of Press Communication of the PRC-GCC Strategic Dialogue, and the 16 China-UAE Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), despite the fact that the two countries are very different in terms of cultural identity, demonstrate that through diplomacy, any country can cooperate well, whatever the difference. For China, with the growth of bilateral ties, the UAE may play a role in global commerce, successfully becoming China's second biggest trading partner, as well as an entry for China's trade to North Africa and Europe, as well as the largest trading partner in the Middle East.

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