



## STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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"THE ROLE OF THE MIDDLE POWERS  
IN THE UNITED NATIONS"

An address by Mr. R. G. Riddell,  
Department of External Affairs, to  
the Mount Holyoke College Institute  
on the United Nations, June 22, 1948.

From your programme of studies and from your list of speakers, I take it you intend to consider international affairs in a spirit of sober realism. This I think is particularly important in regard to problems of world organization. The undertaking which is embodied in the United Nations is so vast and complicated, and the stakes are so high, that public support must be generated by something more tightly coiled and highly geared than aspirations towards brotherly love. Not that I wish to discount the importance of idealism in the forward march of political organization. I know very well that none of the great liberating movements of history could have taken place had there not been men who saw visions of a better world, and persevered in the faith that their dreams would materialize. But at the moment I think we should be concerned to make our programme as demonstrably practicable as possible. The human brotherhood is in a cantankerous frame of mind, and if its unruly members are to be persuaded not to shake the house down, it will be only because it is clear that it can be kept standing and there is some advantage in doing so.

I hope that we may be equally realistic about the place of the middle powers in the structure of world organization. The effort to define middle powers and to claim for them special attributes and privileges is of fairly recent origin. Unless, however, the conception of the middle power has substance I do not think we should take it seriously. Would it do any harm to the welfare of the international community if we gave up the effort to find a place for the Middle Powers? Have they anything to offer, if their claims to special consideration are not ignored? I come from a country that is generally regarded as a middle power. I think that its claims - and the claims that are made for it - for informal recognition as a middle power should be judged in the most practical and unsentimental terms.

No one has offered an adequate definition of a middle power, but there are certain well marked attributes which, taken singly or in various combinations, produce an identifiable result. It is probably equally difficult to define a great power, but the term has nevertheless been applied to five of them in the Charter, and it is no great task to identify them - they are the five permanent members of the Security Council. The middle powers are those which, by reason of their size, their material resources, their willingness and ability to accept responsibility, their influence and their stability are close to being great powers. The great upheavals of the past decade have given one indication of some criteria that might be applied. The heavy responsibilities of waging war and the equally heavy responsibilities of

reconstructing large areas of the world destroyed by war, have tested the abilities and the resources of many peoples. The test questions are obvious ones. When the emergency came, had they resources in men or material to put in the common pool? Did they adjust their national life to meet the emergency, conserving or expending their resources and directing their energies according to some intelligible plan? If they were invaded, did their integrity as nations withstand the shock of defeat and occupation and did they contribute to their own liberation? Did they set about the tasks of reconstruction, either on their own behalf or, if they remained intact, on behalf of others, making their resources available with the same sense of mutual dependence as in wartime? These questions, of course, are significant only insofar as they indicate what will happen if there is a new emergency, and we should perhaps rephrase them in slightly different form. In keeping the peace, which are the states that have the resources and the political ability to accept this kind of responsibility? If we fail to keep the peace, which are the states that, whether they like it or not, will have these contributions exacted from them? I do not propose to make a list. An article on this subject by a Canadian professor in the June, 1947, issue of International Organization suggested the following middle powers: in Europe - Belgium, the Netherlands, Poland; in the Americas - Argentina, Brazil, Canada and Mexico; in the Pacific - Australia, India. This is his list, not mine. You may wish to add to it or subtract from it in the discussion.

When we have made our list, we come back to the question, does it really make any difference - or is it merely a matter of national self esteem? Perhaps the best answer I can give to this question is to take an example from the experience of one country, Canada, in relation to the peace settlements. Canada participated in the war continuously from September 1939 to its conclusion in 1945. It mobilized over a million men in a population of twelve million, its forces participated in the fighting on many fronts. It financed its own effort and loaned many millions of dollars under the Canadian equivalent of lease-lend (Mutual Aid) to other allies. It expanded its industrial capacity so that it became one of the most important arsenals of the war, and it was an indispensable source of food. In the immediate post-war period it made available further millions of dollars in the form of credit for post-war recovery in devastated countries. As a result it seemed to the Canadian public that Canada should be given a part in the plans for peacemaking commensurate with the part she had played in the war. This was not simply in order to satisfy national honour. It was because, if the peace were a bad one, we should suffer from the consequences, and suffer in proportion to our size and resources. Canada, therefore, has been dissatisfied with the arrangements by which peacemaking has been kept within the control of the Big Powers. In regard to the treaties with the satellite powers, it was not until the texts had been drafted and agreed in private by the Council of Foreign Ministers that the other belligerents were permitted to comment on these texts, and at that stage their comments were largely ineffective. As far as Germany is concerned, similar procedures were suggested by which effective control of the draft treaties would remain in the hands of the major powers. No one, of course, large or small, has been able to make much progress towards a general German settlement, but the problem of associating in the settlement the effective secondary allies will remain to be solved when the process of peacemaking is renewed.

The problems which confronted the middle powers in regard to the work of international organization which was commenced towards the conclusion of the war were similar in character. For the middle powers, the possibilities offered in the development of collective security were of tremendous importance. In a predatory world, the middle powers are more vulnerable than their smaller neighbours, and

less able to protect themselves than their larger ones. In general they have extensive territories, sometimes widely scattered; they have resources which are of importance to other states; their territory is usually of strategic importance to their larger neighbours. They have not, however, the means to defend themselves single-handed. They must look to some kind of association with other states to maintain their security, and indeed their national integrity. The simplest kind of association is of course a straight military alliance. But if this is the simplest, it is also the least satisfactory form of security for the smaller members of the partnership. It is only, therefore, by placing their security arrangements in the wider framework of a more general international structure that the secondary states can avoid endangering their own safety by the very measures which are designed to protect them. For a great power, membership in a successful international organization is not a matter of life and death. Its security in the long run rests on its own resources, and even a major war does not threaten it with permanent obliteration. I think it is true also that the very small powers are concerned in a less vital way with international organization than the middle states. The independence of a small power is never of such a character that its great neighbours cannot immediately dominate it if an emergency arises. For the middle powers, however, an insecure world is one which carries continually not only the danger of war, but the danger that the military and political strategy of a world in conflict will destroy its unity and rob it of its independence. For this reason the stakes are very high for middle powers in an international security organization; their concern for an organization that adequately reflects their needs and represents their position is no mere pretension.

In the United Nations, this problem has presented itself to the middle powers in two ways. It has arisen first in the form of constitutional questions, which are important not merely because of legalistic arguments, but because the Charter gives a blueprint of the political structure to be created. The second way in which the problem has presented itself is in more practical terms during the operations of the organization itself.

The preparatory work for the United Nations Charter was done by a committee of the great powers. It is not surprising, therefore, that the document which emerged from Dumbarton Oaks was in important respects unsatisfactory to states which did not hold this rank. Three questions of particular importance arose during the early discussions of the Charter and were matters of great concern to the middle powers when they had an opportunity to discuss, during the meetings at San Francisco, the draft drawn up by the Great Powers. All three of these questions concerned the Security Council, the only body provided with a mandatory authority under the Charter and the only body which has the constitutional power to impose sanctions and, indeed, to move troops. It also has the theoretical power to command the resources of the member states if these are needed by it in its efforts to deal with an emergency. It is not surprising, therefore, that states which were likely to be involved in operations initiated by the Security Council should be concerned to see that their interests were properly represented before that body. This general problem, affecting all three of the constitutional questions I have in mind, was clearly stated by the Canadian representative to the San Francisco Conference in the following terms:

"The powers which the proposals would vest in the Security Council to call upon all members to join in the imposition of sanctions - military, economic and diplomatic - raise especially difficult problems for secondary countries with wide international interests. It is likely that if sanctions have to be imposed against an aggressor, the active collaboration of some states not on the Security Council will be needed. Let me contrast the position in this respect of the great powers on the one hand and of the

secondary countries with world-wide interests on the other. Each great power is assured not only of full participation in the consideration of the dispute from the beginning, but it can itself prevent any decision to impose sanctions, even if it be in a minority of one in the Security Council. All the other members of the Organization are asked to obligate themselves in the Charter to carry out any decision of the Security Council, including decisions which might require them to send into action the forces which they are all expected to place at the Council's disposal, as well as decisions which might gravely disrupt their economic life".

The first of the three constitutional problems concerned the method of election of non-permanent members of the Security Council. The principle of permanent membership for the Great Powers was not seriously contested, and the decision to elect six non-permanent members for two-year terms was accepted as a satisfactory compromise between an unwieldy body that would have a large number of small states, and a more efficient one in which the representation of small states would be limited. When it came, however, to defining the terms on which the non-permanent members should be chosen, some Governments, and in particular the Government of Canada, considered that account should be taken of the position of a middle power. In the absence of any definition of a middle power, it was difficult to determine a formula which would cover the situation adequately. The best that could be done was to write into the Article of the Charter which provides for the election of non-permanent members to the Security Council a phrase in which an attempt is made to articulate the principle that middle powers should be given special consideration. The Article to which I refer is Article 23, which directs that in the election of non-permanent members of the Security Council due regard shall be "specially paid, in the first instance, to the contribution of members of the United Nations to the maintenance of international peace and security and to the other purposes of the organization, and also to equitable geographical distribution".

This emphasis on the ability of member states to accept responsibilities and obligations was a matter of particular concern to the Canadian delegation at San Francisco. It has sometimes been referred to as the functional principle of representation in an international organization, and the idea which it embodies has now gained a fair degree of acceptance. It was stated in general terms in the Canadian Parliament by the Prime Minister of Canada on August 4, 1944, at a time when the planning for a new international organization was still incomplete.

This statement is as follows:

"The simple division of the world between great powers and the rest is unreal and even dangerous. The great powers are called by that name simply because they possess great power. The other states of the world possess power - and, therefore, the capacity to use it for the maintenance of peace - in varying degrees ranging from almost zero in the case of the smallest and weakest states up to a military potential not very far behind that of the great powers.

"In determining what states should be represented on the Council with the great powers, it is, I believe, necessary to apply the functional idea. Those countries which have most to contribute to the maintenance of the peace of the world should be most frequently selected. The military contribution actually made during this war by the members of the United Nations provides one good working basis for a selective principle of choice."

The second constitutional question which was a matter of particular concern to the middle powers during the drafting of the Charter was the need to provide some safeguard for the interests of states which are not represented on the Security Council but which are

likely to be called upon to assist in putting its decisions into effect. As I have already reminded you, Chapter VIII of the Charter furnishes the Security Council with very extensive powers, and all members of the United Nations undertake to accept heavy responsibilities in order that the Security Council can discharge its functions. Article 41 of the Charter provides that the Security Council may decide "what measures not involving the use of armed force are to be employed to give effect to its decisions, and may call upon the members of the United Nations to apply such measures. These may include complete or partial interruption of economic relations and of rail, sea, air, postal, telegraphic, radio, and other means of communication, and the severance of diplomatic relations." Again, Article 43 of the Charter provides that "all Members of the United Nations.....undertake to make available to the Security Council, on its call and in accordance with a special agreement or agreements, armed forces, assistance, and facilities, including rights of passage, necessary for the purpose of maintaining international peace and security." Article 45 places Members of the United Nations under an obligation to "hold immediately available national air-force contingents for combined international enforcement action." These provisions of the Charter, if they are put into effect, will constitute a serious limitation upon the national sovereignty of member states. In the case of permanent members of the Security Council, this invasion of national sovereignty is offset by the right of veto, which makes it possible for any permanent member to deny the Security Council at any time the right to use the powers which are given to it in these Articles of the Charter. For non-permanent members, the limitation upon sovereignty is qualified, at least for the two-year period for which they are members of the Council, by their ability to take part in the proceedings of the Council and by their right to combine in such a way as to defeat in the Security Council even such proposals as are supported by all the great powers. For all other members of the United Nations there was originally no qualification whatever upon the power granted to the Security Council to call upon them at will to make their resources available for Security Council action. Again, this appeared to be a matter of particular hardship to the secondary states which would, in effect, be the ones required to adjust their economies and move their forces in support of Security Council decisions. The difficulty was overcome in part by the addition at San Francisco of Article 44 of the Charter to the following effect:

"When the Security Council has decided to use force it shall, before calling upon a Member not represented on it to provide armed forces in fulfilment of the obligations assumed under Article 43, invite that Member, if the Member so desires, to participate in the decisions of the Security Council concerning the employment of contingents of that Member's armed forces."

This Article is supplemented by a provision in Article 47 which requires the Military Staff Committee of the Security Council, which is the military planning body on security measures and is made up of representatives of all permanent members, to associate non-permanent states with it in its work as it deems necessary for the efficient discharge of its responsibilities.

This is only a partial remedy to the problem. At the moment, the question is in abeyance, because no progress whatever has been made towards completing the arrangements by which the Security Council will be provided with military force to carry out its decisions, and in the absence of these arrangements the Security Council is hesitant to make use even of the political and economic sanctions, the measures short of war, with which it is provided. It will become, however, a source of concern to the middle powers immediately the United Nations reaches that stage of development at which it is possible for sanctions to be invoked. The Charter as it now stands will be satisfactory in this respect only if great restraint and consideration is used in regard to any action in which a secondary state must participate.

The third constitutional problem which has caused difficulties for middle powers in the United Nations in the voting procedure in the Security Council. This is what is popularly known as the veto. There is no aspect of the work of the United Nations which is better known to the public than the veto, and this certainly is one part of the machinery which has been put to energetic use.

The voting procedure in the Security Council requires seven out of eleven votes for any important motion to carry in the Security Council, but a motion is lost, no matter how many votes it receives, if one of the five permanent members of the Security Council votes against it. It is a rough and not very satisfactory solution to a very difficult problem. The United Nations is based on democratic principles, and in a democratic community one man has one vote. But the inequalities amongst states are so great, not only in power and resources but also in responsibility, that the principle can not be fully applied. It is impracticable to suggest that a number of small states by their votes should be able to put in motion the resources of the large ones. It was therefore decided that before action could be taken in the Security Council the votes of all the large states should be required. This voting procedure has never been popular with the non-permanent members of the Security Council, and opposition has varied from forthright denunciation and demands for the removal of the veto on the part of such states as Australia and Argentina, to suggestions for extensive procedural reform the effect of which would be to lessen its undesirable consequences. During the formative period of the United Nations, no subject came closer to killing the organism before it had been born. The Yalta formula, which resulted in the present arrangement, was never regarded as a particularly beautiful child by any of its sponsors, except by the Soviet Union, which regards it as the irreducible safeguard of its position within the organization. The best that could be done, however, in San Francisco was to have the veto power qualified by a joint statement made by those who enjoyed this privilege, to the effect that they would use it with restraint and only in the common interest. Looked at in any absolute sense, this was not much of a concession to the less privileged members of the United Nations. When, however, it is recalled that some proposals advanced would have given to the middle and small powers of the United Nations an even more restricted position than they now enjoy, it was probably the best that could be hoped for. It might have been possible, in an atmosphere of greater confidence, to limit the use of the veto to actions in the Security Council actually involving the use of sanctions. I do not think, however, that this problem can be satisfactorily solved by any adjustment in the constitution. Even in the best of circumstances, it will be only by a very gradual process of evolution in custom and precedent, by the constant exercise of self-restraint on the part of both those who possess the veto and those who do not possess it, in the working out of techniques for reaching agreements, by experiment, and often by trial and error, that the veto shall be allowed to fall into disuse. In the meantime, we shall have to make the best of a situation in which an arbitrary distinction is made between five powers, which by reason of their great size and strength, possess a privileged position, and the undifferentiated mass of other members which, without reference to size and strength, do not enjoy the benefits which this privilege confers.

I notice that the general topic for your discussions during the present week is "The United States and the Soviet Union in the United Nations". The political tension which has arisen between these two great states, and between the Eastern European states generally and the democratic world has cast a shadow over the world, and the constitutional issues I have been discussing may seem, in the gloom, like pale and ghostly unrealities. Does it matter whether the membership of the Security Council really represents the distribution of

power and influence in the world when the Security Council itself has fallen so far short of the objects for which it was established? In the presence of the German problem, does it matter whether or not votes in the Security Council require the concurrence of all the permanent members? It is, however, simply because our difficulties in the United Nations are symptoms of the conflict between East and West, and can therefore be made soluble once it has become possible to restore some kind of equilibrium to the world, that I think we must continue to scrutinize them and to consider ways of dealing with them. It is with this in mind that I think we might now look at some of the practical difficulties which arise for states of middle power in the operations of the United Nations.

In regard to the election of non-permanent members to the Security Council, I reminded you that the functional principle had been written into the Charter in the first order of importance. It has become quite clear, however, that in the operations of the United Nations this principle is not always followed. The old idea of geographical representation, and of the representation of groups, is all too frequently the primary basis of selection. Let us make sure, it is argued, that each area of the world is represented. Let us try to make certain that no group is left out. Sometimes the argument is carried one step further. Let us, it is said, accept the choice of any particular group for the vacancy that is to be filled. This tendency was most apparent during the last session of the General Assembly, when for many weeks the Assembly could not make up its mind whether to elect India or the Ukraine to the final vacancy on the Security Council. The arguments advanced again and again were those of regionalism. The place on the Security Council which Mr. Vishinsky demanded with great insistence for the Ukraine was claimed on the basis of regional distribution. It occurred to me at the time that Mr. Vishinsky could have made a very good claim for the Ukraine solely on the basis of the functional principle, since that constituent state of the Soviet Union which has been admitted to the United Nations played a very important role in the conflict against Germany and is certainly an area from which great resources could be made available in any system of collective security. The same kind of claim could have been advanced for India, but again it was the necessity of representing a region which was advanced as the main argument. This is not a satisfactory basis for allocating responsibility in the United Nations, and sooner or later, it seems to me, it will be necessary to come back to the functional principle of choosing members for United Nations organs, because of their ability to do the job they are chosen for, and because of their stake in the result.

If the middle powers are sometimes concerned over being given too little place in United Nations affairs, they are also worried on occasion at finding themselves too much in the limelight. This problem was very well expressed recently in a statement in the Canadian House of Commons by the Secretary of State for External Affairs:

"The position of a power of the middle rank on the Security Council is under any circumstances a difficult one. A small power is in a sense by its very smallness relieved from much of the responsibility which participation in decisions involves, and which the implementations of such decisions requires. At the other extreme the great powers can protect their positions with the veto. A "middle country" such as Canada, however, is in a different position.....  
.....The judgments which the Canadian Government express on United Nations matters must therefore be made with care and a sense of responsibility, especially since Canada is a country the views of which are taken seriously and which has the reputation of conscientiously carrying out the commitments into which it has entered."

People are not popular who talk a lot about a problem without thereafter being willing to lay something on the line towards its solution. It is uncomfortable, however, to go too far ahead of the general line of march.



Let us consider, for example, the situation in regard to the discussion in the Security Council of a problem such as Kashmir. One way of dealing with that problem would have been to suggest that the United Nations take over responsibility for the administration of the territory during the period necessary to hold a plebiscite. This action, however, apart from its merits, had the disadvantage that it would have committed the Security Council to a very great undertaking involving many risks. A great power might have proposed such a course of action, knowing that, if the arrangements eventually did not seem to be working out in a satisfactory manner, it could protect itself by the use of the veto. A small power might have proposed it knowing that, whether the arrangements worked successfully or not, it would not be seriously involved. A middle power, however, proposing strong action of this nature, might subsequently find that, because of Big Power disagreement or for some other reasons, the plan was going through in a manner that could not possibly be effective and yet, because of its own initiative, it would be under heavy obligation to make resources available for the undertaking. It is not surprising, therefore, that a power of middle rank should act with considerable caution in taking any initiative in the Security Council which involves the use of force.

The difficulty to which I have just referred is of course in itself a symptom of the political tension which at the present moment handicaps the work of the United Nations. The original conception of the Security Council was that it should be a group of responsible people supported by a group of responsible nations, who should pool their knowledge and their wisdom in attempting to resolve international disputes and threats to the peace. So far, however, except on one or two occasions, the Security Council has not risen above the level of a group of representatives of states, approaching each problem in terms of the interests of the states they represent. In these circumstances, the great powers should not expect that states in a less privileged position in the United Nations, which share their responsibility in world affairs, should place themselves in exposed positions.

So far I have been talking almost exclusively about the disadvantages and difficulties which the middle powers encounter in the United Nations. In the end, however, I come back to the point at which I began and reiterate what seems to be the paramount importance of the United Nations to powers of middle rank - an importance which, as I suggested, may be even greater than in the case of either large or small powers. For this reason one should expect a contribution to the work of international organization commensurate with the stake which they have in the experiment. In conclusion, therefore, I should like to suggest very briefly the particular contribution which the middle powers can make to the United Nations.

If the experiment works out, and if over a period of a decade or more, a genuine and effective security organization has been established through the operation of the United Nations, the organization can be certain of the firm and consistent support of the middle powers, by reason of the compelling motive that I have suggested, that these powers have so great a stake in its success. This support will be made effective by the resources which the middle powers can place at the disposal of the organization, resources which, added to those that the great powers in any area could place at the disposal of the organization, might well tip the balance between success or failure in resolving a threat of war. So great is the interest which the middle powers have in a successful security organization, that I think it is possible to count on their support also in any plans which are made for effective security arrangements within the Charter of the United Nations under Article 51. In Canada, for example, there have in recent weeks been a number of outspoken official statements to the effect that the Canadian Government would view with favour any arrangements which, within the structure of the United Nations, would consol-



idate within the Western world the resources which are available for security.

I think also that the middle powers should be expected to act in United Nations affairs with a strong sense of responsibility, and that they may be counted upon to do so. They are, for the most part, states with complex political structures of their own. The United Nations has a right to expect that they will not provoke irresponsible discussions; that they will not incontinently set the great powers at one another's throats in discussions which can have no possible issue; that they will not strain the United Nations beyond its resources by setting it tasks which it cannot fulfil; that they will have interests in many parts of the world, and will therefore have a stake in the maintenance of stable conditions the world over. I am not, of course, suggesting that virtues of this kind are to be found solely in middle powers and their representatives. All I have in mind is that these circumstances should permit the United Nations to take it for granted that a middle power may be trusted with this kind of responsibility.

I think also that we should expect a particularly high standard of political leadership to come from the secondary states. For the most part they have modern parliamentary or presidential systems of government and their traditions of government are well established. Some of them are federal states, in which the habits of compromise and accommodation, which make government over wide areas possible, are well known and constantly practised. They can, and indeed do, produce political leaders in the United Nations who have been trained on a stage sufficiently large in scope so that they can grasp the problems of world government intellectually and put them in their proper perspective. They do not always produce men of this stature, of course, but they are able to do so, and the United Nations has a perfect right to expect it of them and to demand it of them.

What I have been suggesting in the course of this discussion is not that the middle powers should be granted any particular constitutional position within the United Nations, or that an attempt should be made at the moment to segregate them in any formal way from the other non-permanent members of the Security Council. Nor do I think that any attempt should be made to give formal expression to the greater measure of obligation which must rest upon the middle powers in an international organization. For the present, at least, it is important only that both the difficulties and the possibilities of the middle power position should be fully understood and that the policies of members of the United Nations should be formulated in a manner which takes into account the realities of this position.

Throughout history there have been repeated efforts by one means or another to widen the area within which common rules and practices of government prevail. Sometimes this has been done by consent, or a measure of consent, and systems have been evolved or agreements entered into by which people conducted their affairs by the rule of law and settled their differences without resort to force. Against the dark passages of war and violence are set the pages of great achievement by which large areas and sometimes whole continents have been given enlightened and progressive administrative systems. I think we are now in a period of history in which this process of enlargement is taking place. The phrase "one world" was made popular around the world by a wise and famous American. It is possible that we shall achieve one world by consent through a process of negotiation and agreement and this, I take it, is the essential task of the United Nations. There is also the unpleasant alternative that the world will be organized on the basis of force. I am sure, however, that any world organization created by force - which would, of course, be world domination - would have within it the seeds of its own destruction. There is ample evidence in history, for example, of the tough and resilient

Character of nationalism. Peoples with a strong sense of national identity have been submerged politically and even economically for decades and centuries, but have clung stubbornly to the characteristics which identified them as a national group. They have, moreover, resisted with equal stubbornness efforts to integrate them within wider political organizations because they felt that they were being threatened with annihilation.

I am sure, therefore, that the real path of progress lies in another direction. It lies through the long, patient and persistent effort that is required to build up a world organization by consent. Those of us who live in the United States and Canada know how difficult and delicate a procedure this must be, but we also know how successful it can be. We know that it requires a careful computation and balancing of forces within the community. We know that the interests of any section of a federal state must be given means of expression, that all sections of the community must be able to articulate their views, and that in a rough and ready way the power which is exercised at the centre of such a state must represent the distribution of influence in the community. I am sure that by applying these principles in our efforts to establish an international organization we shall be making the best use of the great resources which are available to mankind for the preservation of peace.

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