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Intervention as Statecraft: Risk and Response Under the U.S. National Security Strategy

The U.S. National Security Strategy 2025 (NSS) marks a structural reordering of American statecraft. It does not merely adjust priorities within an established doctrine; it recasts the organising logic of U.S. power. Where previous strategies positioned the United States as steward of a rules-based international order, the NSS consolidates a model in which sovereignty, economic leverage, and transactional coercion take precedence over institutional embedding and multilateral constraint. The shift is not defined by the presence of intervention.

The U.S. has long intervened in other countries, militarily, economically, and politically, when it perceived its interests to be threatened. What distinguishes the current phase is the normalisation of intervention as a routine and anticipatory instrument of governance. Coercion is deployed early rather than late, embedded in ordinary policy processes rather than reserved for crisis, and adjusted iteratively rather than escalated dramatically. Tariffs, export controls, conditional security guarantees, institutional bypass, financial restrictions, and in certain contexts direct force are treated as instruments of leverage rather than exceptional measures.

Under its new modus operandi, alliance status no longer confers insulation, and shared values no longer ensure exemption. Exposure to U.S. pressure is increasingly determined by two structural variables: the degree of American reach into a state's economic, financial, technological, and security systems, and that state's dependence on U.S.-centred networks and institutions. States highly integrated into U.S. systems but lacking reciprocal leverage face persistent conditionality. States outside those systems confront different but still calibrated forms of intervention. The key analytical question is not whether intervention occurs, but how it is structured and where it is bounded. When leverage replaces embedded order as the primary organising principle, volatility increases. Negotiation follows coercion rather than precedes it. Markets, rather than multilateral forums, emerge as the principal external constraint on escalation. The international environment becomes one of persistent bargaining rather than settled rules. Understanding this transformation requires examining the strategic logic embedded in the NSS itself.

A number of interventions in the last year indicate the impact of the emergent U.S. operating model in terms of losses and gains on others' sovereignty and economics. Understanding the current limits of U.S. power assertion and how it is calibrated is critical to how countries can respond. Five interventions by the U.S. provide an indication of the contours of the map of how the U.S. now operates internationally. These are China, Venezuela, India, Israel and the E.U. These cases are examined here through the lens of the NSS, and provide a risk and response matrix for further rounds for these parties and others.

I. The Strategic Logic of the NSS

At the core of the National Security Strategy 2025 lies the elevation of sovereignty as the supreme organising principle of state power. The ISII paper, 'America the Merchant Empire' identified a number of themes arising in this document Autonomy is framed not merely as a legal condition, but as a moral and strategic imperative that overrides alliance commitments, institutional constraints, and interdependence (Theme 1). This orientation is paired with an idiosyncratic form of realism characterised less by doctrine than by transactional flexibility, personalised authority, and situational bargaining. Commitments are narrowed, reinterpreted, or withdrawn without reference to an overarching strategic framework, allowing policy to adjust rapidly to perceived advantage (Theme 2).

National security is redefined through economic nationalism. Trade balances, re-shoring, energy dominance, and control of critical resources function as primary instruments of power rather than supporting tools of diplomacy or security policy (Theme 3). Migration is elevated to the level of an existential threat, linking border control and demographic stability directly to national survival and extending this framing beyond U.S. borders to allied regions, particularly Europe and the Western Hemisphere (Theme 4). In parallel, the postwar assumption that the United States should act as guarantor of global stability has been largely abandoned. Allies are recast as burdens to be managed rather than partners in a shared project, with security commitments increasingly conditioned on compliance and contribution (Theme 5).

Peace is no longer conceptualised as the product of institutions, rules, or collective restraint. It is treated instead as a personal status asset secured through the outcome of coercive dealmaking, achieved through demonstrations of strength, disruption, and personalised diplomacy rather than multilateral process (Theme 6). Geographically, the Strategy reasserts spheres of influence, with particular emphasis on enforcing U.S. primacy in the Western Hemisphere under a re-interpretation of the Monroe Doctrine (Theme 7).

Civilisational and cultural renewal is integrated directly into national security making identity, tradition, and social cohesion strategic assets, and framing demographic and cultural change as sources of vulnerability (Theme 8). This worldview underpins a systematic rejection of transnational institutions, which are portrayed as intrusive, sovereignty-eroding, and legitimate only insofar as they serve U.S. national objectives (Theme 9).

Rivalry with China and Russia is reframed as managed, non-ideological competition with a focus on economic leverage, technological advantage, and geographic accommodation rather than systemic confrontation or values-based struggle, while India is not recognised as a large rising power (Theme 10). Technological leadership and supply-chain security emerge as decisive arenas of competition, with control over data, critical minerals, advanced manufacturing, and infrastructure treated as existential

requirements of national power (Theme 11). Foreign policy is bound tightly to domestic reconstruction, with reindustrialisation, internal cohesion, and a redefined notion of merit presented as prerequisites of sustained power (Theme 12).

Taken together, these themes establish a coherent operating model: sovereignty maximised, interdependence instrumentalised, leverage normalised.

II. From Strategy to Mechanism: The Intervention Framework

The NSS understanding of the U.S. as a coercive, neo-mercantile power implies the widespread and tactical threat and use of interventions to achieve US goals. The potential set of interventions for the U.S. to choose from spans multiple domains and is designed for modular deployment.

Potential U.S. NSS Intervention Framework

Domain of Leverage	Sub-Category	Strategic Objective	Who Is Most Exposed	Primary Instruments Used
Economic–Industrial	Trade and Market Coercion	Rebalance trade flows; reshore industry; enforce compliance	Export-dependent economies (EU states, China, Mexico, Japan)	Tariffs, selective sanctions, regulatory restrictions
	Supply-Chain Reorientation	Reduce strategic dependence and external leverage	Manufacturing and logistics hubs (EU, East Asia)	Export controls, reshoring incentives, sole-source requirements
	Security-Backed Resource Leverage	Ensure reliable access to energy and critical materials	Resource-rich states (Middle East, Africa, Latin America)	Security guarantees tied to extraction, infrastructure control, investment conditioning
Military–Security	Limited Military Force	Reassert hemispheric primacy; deter instability near U.S. borders	Weak or politically isolated states (e.g. Venezuela, Cuba)	Targeted strikes, maritime interdiction, special operations, leadership signalling
	Forward Presence Expansion	Secure strategic geography and emerging domains (Arctic, maritime	Small allied or semi-autonomous territories (e.g. Greenland, Pacific islands)	Base expansion, rotational deployments, integrated command structures

		chokepoints, space)		
	Conditional Security Architecture	Convert alliances into instruments of policy alignment	Security-dependent allies (European states incl. UK, Japan, South Korea)	Conditional guarantees, burden-sharing demands, defence integration leverage
Political–Institutional	Institutional Circumvention	Minimise external constraints on U.S. decision-making	Multilateral institutions (EU, WTO, UN bodies)	Bilateralisation, rule reinterpretation, reduced institutional reliance
	Collective Bloc Fragmentation	Increase leverage by weakening collective bargaining power	Political and economic blocs (EU primarily)	Differentiated bilateral incentives and penalties
	Political Alignment Operations	Encourage regime change to align with U.S. objectives and values	Democracies under domestic strain (European states incl. UK)	Diplomatic signalling, preferential access, election interference, political reinforcement
Informational–Cognitive	Narrative Preconditioning & Issue Weaponisation	Shape political space prior to bargaining, leveraging migration, sovereignty, and security	Democracies with polarised media and identity and migration pressures (Europe primarily)	Agenda priming, migration and sovereignty framing, selective amplification, elite signalling
	Weaken resistance by undermining confidence in institutions and collective action	States with high institutional density but limited external resilience	Public critique, delegitimization of institutions, threaten withdrawal (Europe, Japan)	Legitimacy and Institutional Erosion
	Extract concessions through uncertainty without formal escalation	Security-dependent allies and financialised economies	Strategic silence, mixed signals, conditional commitments, volatility normalisation	Ambiguity, Signal Manipulation & Market Steering

			(Europe, Japan, Taiwan, M East)	
Major Power Management	Managed Strategic Competition	Prevent peer dominance while avoiding systemic war	Major powers (China, Russia)	Deterrence posture, technology controls, selective engagement, economic countermeasures

The defining feature of this toolkit is modularity. Intervention need not unfold in linear escalation. Pressure can be applied through one channel, suspended, redirected, and reintroduced elsewhere. Economic coercion may precede military signalling; political leverage may accompany regulatory restriction. The choice of which interventions the U.S. deploys is a function of both dependency and reach. Dependence refers to the extent to which a state relies on U.S.-centred systems: trade access, dollar-based finance, security guarantees, technological ecosystems, intelligence-sharing, and regulatory alignment. Reach refers to the degree to which U.S. instruments can penetrate and shape a state's domestic systems. This includes the executability of sanctions, the enforceability of export controls, the depth of defence integration, and the embeddedness of U.S. standards and infrastructure.

High dependence combined with deep reach creates conditions for sustained conditionality. Moderate dependence with limited reach produces contested outcomes. Low dependence but high vulnerability may invite direct intervention if counter-leverage is absent. Significant counter-power constrains escalation even under high confrontation. This framework is independent of a country's status as an ally or rival of the U.S. guarantee insulation. A deeply integrated ally may face persistent pressure if dependence is high and reach is deep. Conversely, a rival with significant counter-leverage may compel negotiation despite hostility.

III. The NSS At Work in Five Interventions

A diverse set of five recent U.S. foreign policy actions point to a common operational logic embedded in the NSS. These interactions reveal a coherent pattern of interventions calibrated to relative power, dependence, strategic relevance, and the degree of U.S. reach over target states. Each of the five distinct episodes describe a different outer bound, intermediate zone, or operational centre of this intervention logic.

1. **China: Upper Boundary of Coercion.** The deployment of export controls, semiconductor restrictions, and technology limitations against China demonstrates willingness to apply economic coercion at scale. However, China's capacity to impose retaliatory and systemic cost constrains escalation, led to the U.S. agreeing to suspend key expanded controls for a year.[1] Coercion channels into negotiation rather than unilateral compliance. China occupies a position of contested reach. The United States retains financial and technological leverage, but Beijing's political system and economic scale limit executability. The result is managed competition characterised by recurring pressure and recalibration. Where counter-power is credible, coercion remains forceful but bounded.

2. **Venezuela: Lower Boundary of Coercion.** Venezuela illustrates the lower boundary of restraint. Limited counter-leverage and political isolation reduce escalation risk. In such environments, coercion can extend into direct political disruption. Reach becomes decisive where reciprocal cost is minimal and executability is high, allowing intervention to become decisive rather than iterative, leading to U.S. military forces mounting a strike on Venezuela and capturing President Nicolás Maduro and his spouse, with minimal coalition coordination or international authorisation.[2]
3. **India: Contested Reach.** Tariff escalation against India in 2025, ostensibly linked to India's continued purchase of Russian oil, but following India's denial that the US had intermediated the India-Pakistan conflict of 2025, illustrates the limits of coercion when dependence is moderate and domestic political constraints are strong.[3,4] Economic pressure-imposed cost but did not translate into compliance. Strategic relevance further moderated escalation. India demonstrates that severity of measures does not guarantee alignment. When domestic structures resist executability and dependence is partial, leverage degrades. This is the contested middle zone of the intervention model.
4. **Israel: Deep Reach, Politically Constrained.** Israel represents high dependence and deep U.S. reach, particularly in security and diplomacy. Yet domestic political costs within the United States constrain overt structural coercion. Pressure operates through signalling and personalised leverage rather than institutional restructuring.[5] This case shows that reach alone does not determine outcome. Domestic political constraint in the coercing state shapes how leverage is applied.
5. **Europe and Greenland: Iterative Coercive Bargaining.** Europe occupies the operational centre of the model. Dense integration with reciprocal leverage produces modular intervention. Tariff threats linked to Greenland were deployed early in 2026, prompting rapid diplomatic responses, combined with the credible threat of retaliation and market reactions thereto, and pressure was adjusted accordingly.[6,7] Within highly integrated alliances, coercion becomes iterative rather than decisive. Leverage is tested, suspended, and reapplied. Exposure is structural, not episodic.

Across all five cases, three structural features recur. First, coercion precedes negotiation. Export controls, tariffs, security signalling, and political leverage are deployed as a matter of course before institutional engagement or negotiation. Second, instruments are modular. They can be scaled up or down without formal escalation. And suspension does not equal abandonment; rather, it preserves optionality. Third, maintaining reversibility lowers the domestic political cost of intervention. By framing measures as conditional and adjustable, the current U.S. administration maintains manoeuvrability.

These characteristics distinguish the current model from earlier intervention patterns. The objective is not permanent structural reordering in every case, but continuous leverage extraction calibrated to context. Of strategic relevance is the idea that each of the intervention modes is not fixed, but played out over time, such that one can expect different outcomes for each case depending on how stakes are raised by both the U.S. and counterparties. This brings into stark foreground the need for adaptation, speed and mobility, diversification and resourcefulness.

IV. The Evident Nature of Current U.S. Power Projection

The interactions examined - involving China, India, Venezuela, Israel, and Greenland/Europe -define an operating model through which U.S. power is now exercised under the NSS. Across economic, military, and alliance domains, the same logic recurs, revealing both how power is applied and where its constraints now lie.

Intervention has been normalised with coercion as the opening move. In each case, coercion preceded negotiation. Export controls and tariffs against China, punitive tariffs imposed on India, direct military action in Venezuela, personalised political pressure applied to Israel, and tariff threats toward Europe over Greenland were deployed not as last-resort escalatory measures, but as opening moves. Intervention functions as routine statecraft rather than exceptional or system-preserving action.

Power is exercised transactionally rather than embedded institutionally. None of the interactions relied on leveraging multilateral processes or institutions. China was confronted bilaterally. India was pressured through unilateral trade measures linked to third-party policy demands. Venezuela was acted upon without coalition choreography. Israel was subjected to direct presidential leverage rather than alliance mediation. Europe was pressured through direct threats to Denmark and Greenland in particular, bypassing NATO and the European Union as collective actors. Power is asserted directly, case by case.

Economic coercion operates as a primary instrument. Tariffs, export controls, and market-access threats function as first-order tools rather than adjuncts to diplomacy or military force. China's capacity to impose economic costs produced negotiation. India's partial insulation limited U.S. reach despite severe tariff escalation. Europe's market scale enabled credible retaliation. Venezuela's isolation rendered intervention administratively feasible. Economic exposure now constitutes strategic vulnerability.

The threshold for coercive action has materially lowered. Military force in Venezuela, tariff escalation against allies and strategic partners, personalised political pressure on Israel, and expansive export controls directed at China reflect a reduced hesitation to escalate across domains. Early coercion is treated as a tactic of destabilisation, reducing risk for return rather than as creating risk, which can lower barriers to action in military, economic, and political spheres.

Legitimacy has been decoupled from objectives. Legal, moral, and institutional justification was limited or absent. Authority was grounded in domestic mandate and capability, signalling that legitimacy is no longer externally sourced. Durable international authorisation did not precede action in any of the five cases, was neither sought nor required.

Markets, rather than allies, now impose constraint. The clearest limits on escalation emerged not from diplomatic resistance, but from market response. Investor reaction followed the suspension of export controls on China, financial stress linked to tariffs on India, and the withdrawal of Greenland-related tariff threats. Financial sentiment, rather than allied objection, now functions as the primary external brake on coercion. This has limits given volatility is profitable for sophisticated market participants, while rebased markets (to lower levels) is more painful but less common.

Allies are subject to the same intervention logic as rivals. Europe's treatment over Greenland and Israel's exposure to direct political leverage illustrate that alliance status no longer confers exemption. Security guarantees, trade access, and diplomatic restraint operate as conditional instruments and

negotiable instruments rather than baseline commitments. Allies are managed through leverage rather than reassurance.

Exposure is determined by dependence and reach, not alignment. China's position derived from its capacity to impose material economic harm. India's ability to endure the threats derived from contested U.S. reach into its governance, and its moderate dependence on U.S. trade. Venezuela's vulnerability derived from isolation and administrative penetrability. Israel's position was subject to extreme dependence but was tempered by political cost. Europe's ability to withstand the threat to Greenland derived from deep economic integration and security dependence. Across all five cases, exposure to pressure is shaped by dependence, strategic relevance, and the degree of U.S. reach rather than ideology or shared values.

Intervention is modular, scalable, and reversible. The method of intervention provided in each case for flexibility. Export controls were suspended rather than abandoned. Tariffs were threatened and withdrawn. Political pressure was intensified or relaxed without institutional commitment. Even administrative control could be framed as temporary rather than annexational. Modularity lowers domestic political cost while sustaining continuous pressure, producing a persistently coercive environment.

The strategic risk is cumulative exhaustion rather than sudden failure. Together, the cases reveal a system under strain. Technological dominance over China depends on energy, scale, and coherence. Economic coercion of partners such as India strains strategic balancing with China. Personalised coercion of highly dependent allies erodes trust with medium and perhaps short-term consequences. Repeated intervention multiplies points of resistance. Under such strains, U.S. primacy is gradually consumed through over-application unless it is renewed in some form that leads others to concede.

China, India, Venezuela, Israel, and Greenland/Europe indicate a single operating reality - intervention has moved to the centre of U.S. statecraft. It is routine, transactional, economically coercive, and applied without exemption to rivals, partners, or allies. Order is no longer organised; compliance is extracted.

The consequence for the international system is volatility. The consequence for the United States is cumulative strain. In this model, power does not fail spectacularly. It erodes incrementally, through continuous use, until structural limits assert themselves. However, the longer term may well not be relevant in the psychology of a strategy that leverages chaos and disorder as a fundamental basis of negotiation.

V. Differentiated Exposures Across the World

The initial European response to Washington's "climb-down" over Greenland seemed to be one of relief, and in some quarters a willingness to concede more than they might have. However, that is not necessarily the most effective next move in such a game of intimidation. Europe occupies a structurally exposed position within the intervention-centred system described above. Its vulnerability does not derive from U.S. hostility, but from the depth of its integration combined with uneven capacity for collective action. However, in practice intervention risk within Europe is unevenly distributed.

Core EU states, particularly Germany, France, and Italy, combine regulatory authority, industrial scale, export dependence, and security reliance. These features make them strategically consequential and therefore frequent targets of leverage. The United Kingdom presents a distinct variant, maintaining significant diplomatic capability and market depth, but its negotiating position is more individualised and therefore more susceptible to calibrated pressure. Southern European states experience elevated vulnerability driven by migration pressure, fiscal constraints, and political volatility. Central and Eastern European countries occupy a conditional position: ideological alignment is rewarded, but strategic autonomy remains constrained. Nordic states face comparatively lower exposure, though increasing security dependence and Arctic strategic relevance, including Greenland, continue to raise risk over time.

Across Europe, exposure is therefore uneven but persistent. The central structural characteristic is this: Europe's power derives from collective scale and institutional coherence, yet fragmentation increases leverage against individual states. When pressure is applied bilaterally, the payoff to the coercer rises.

Globally, exposure to intervention is similarly determined by the interaction of security reliance, economic integration, institutional embeddedness, and strategic relevance, with regions clustering around distinct but recognisable risk profiles.

Canada occupies a position closest to the European intermediate case. Deep integration with U.S. security, trade, and financial systems, combined with the absence of a collective trade shield, creates elevated exposure to alliance conditioning, economic coercion, and supply-chain pressure[8]. Recent diversification efforts, coalition-building, and domestic capacity investment reflect an attempt to reduce leverage and build credible alternatives of scale

In the Middle East, exposure concentrates around security dependence and resource leverage. States reliant on U.S. security guarantees heightened vulnerability to conditional defence commitments, sanctions bargaining, and security-backed resource arrangements[9,10]. Intervention in this context consistent with an approach that treats security and access as negotiable instruments rather than enduring commitments.

Japan occupies a high-dependence position. However, advanced domestic capabilities mitigate some forms of exposure, yet reliance on U.S. security guarantees and technology ecosystems places Japan firmly within alliance-conditioning and supply-chain reorientation dynamics.[11] Intervention risk is moderated but not removed; alignment is treated as assumed rather than negotiated.

Across the rest of Asia, countries embedded in U.S.-centric technology and manufacturing networks encounter sustained pressure to align on export controls, standards, and security posture, while efforts to maintain neutrality become increasingly difficult.[12] Market access and regulatory alignment replace overt security threats as the primary instruments of influence.

In Africa, U.S. pressure is concentrated on access to natural resources rather than political alignment. States with critical minerals, limited fiscal buffers, or narrow export bases face heightened exposure when they resist the U.S.

Across regions, the NSS points to a consistent operating reality. Intervention is no longer exceptional, escalatory, or geographically bounded. It is differentiated by target profile, applied through instruments calibrated to existing dependencies, and normalised as a routine feature of statecraft. For

states the central strategic condition is not whether intervention will occur, but which form it will take, and how much leverage can be absorbed before autonomy erodes.

VI. Strategic Response: Repositioning Under Continuous Intervention

The strategic challenge for states is therefore not simply how to respond once pressure is applied, but how to reposition in advance to reduce exposure, raise the cost of coercion, and preserve agency over time. States are not fixed points on the dependency–reach map. Position can shift, gradually and at cost, through choices about economic structure, institutional design, coalition alignment, and administrative autonomy. Preserving agency requires anticipating where pressure is likely to be applied and moving before leverage hardens. This means reducing asymmetric dependence and limiting external reach into domestic governance.

Five elements in the architecture of a response strategy.

1. **Pooling positions rather than dispersing them.** For deeply integrated allies, particularly in Europe, bilateral responses increase vulnerability by fragmenting scale. Collective procurement, joint financing, common standards, and integrated markets convert individual exposure into pooled resilience. Pooling does not remove dependence, but it transforms bilateral leverage into multilateral friction.
2. **Building coalitions that impose third-party cost.** Coercion is most effective when applied bilaterally and absorbed quietly. Functional coalitions in trade, finance, technology, energy, and standards raise the political and economic cost of pressure and can slow or blunt its impact.
3. **Hardening institutional and administrative boundaries.** Leverage depends on executability. States can reduce U.S. reach by retaining discretion over regulation, procurement, data, and enforcement, and by limiting external embedment in governance processes. Where compliance cannot be translated into administrative action, leverage weakens.
4. **Diversifying selectively.** Diversification should target structural choke points—payments systems, energy inputs, critical technologies—rather than pursue broad or symbolic decoupling. Premature disengagement can reduce scale and weaken bargaining power.
5. **Absorbing friction deliberately.** Repositioning is costly. Economic strain and diplomatic tension are part of structural adjustment. States that treat friction as intolerable concede early; those that absorb it preserve optionality and bargaining strength.

While these measures do not eliminate external intervention, even if taken together, they alter its effectiveness by changing where a state sits on the dependency–reach map.

VII. Conclusion: New Reality Requires New Responses to Intervention as Statecraft

The NSS consolidates a new operating model in which intervention is continuous, economically centred, and transactionally applied. Exposure is determined by dependence and reach rather than alliance identity or shared values. Institutions and agreements no longer anchor order; leverage organises it. The strategic risk for others lies in misdiagnosing this reality. If intervention is treated as episodic or temporary, responses will be reactive and fragmented. If it is recognised as structural, adaptation becomes possible.

If the United States is prepared to tolerate, encourage, or instrumentally exploit separatists from Alberta,[13] within a deeply integrated ally such as Canada, the question is not whether this is exceptional, but what else can be expected. Under a leverage-centred NSS, states should expect bargaining to extend beyond tariffs and sanctions into security ambiguity in the Indo-Pacific, political environment shaping within allied democracies, and destabilisation pressure in resource-critical regions. Conditional protection for Japan in the South China Sea or Taiwan, overt support and where permitted, funding, for illiberal and far right populist parties in the U.K., Germany, and France, and intensified intervention risk in minerals-rich African states would not be aberrations, but the natural follow through of the NSS. Under the new modus operandi, these are ways to increase power and bargaining power, to testing resolve, identify fracture points and exploit dependencies before demands are made or as part of an ongoing repositioning for future demands.

The strategic problem for states is no longer how to deter intervention or restore a rules-based order, but how to avoid becoming dependents. While responses that treat pressure as temporary or ultimately subject to norms and rules, misread the environment as it now stands, rapid disengagement or symbolic decoupling may increase vulnerability by destroying scale and institutional leverage.

The decisive variable is not whether intervention will occur, but how states reposition before leverage crystallises. Those that pool capacity, harden administrative autonomy, and diversify selectively can preserve agency within interdependence. Those that respond bilaterally, despite lacking leverage, and/or concede rapidly risk converting conditionality into losses and potentially, structural subordination.

The emerging system is not one of absence of order. It is one organised through continuous bargaining. In such an environment, power is not merely possessed in the abstract or held in reserve, it is exercised persistently. The central question is not how to restore a previous equilibrium, but how to operate effectively within a landscape defined by sovereign leverage.

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