

# **Barriers to Repatriation of Afghan Refugees (A Case Study of Afghan Community at Shah and Khusar Colony Board Area Peshawar)**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study was conducted to explore the barriers to the repatriation of Afghan refugees. The data were collected from board area Peshawar from 76 respondents selected through simple random sampling technique and were interviewed. The study shows that Afghan refugees migrated to Pakistan mainly due to Soviet invasion in Afghanistan in year 1979. Despite having stay of almost three decades in Pakistan they have to repatriate to Afghanistan, but a large majority of the respondents had no intentions to repatriate while small number of respondents reported intention to repatriate mainly due to strict policies of Pakistan government. Those had no intention pointed out the political reasons such as lack of peace and stability in Afghanistan and bad law and order situation, they had no property/ land in Afghanistan, supplemented by lack of job opportunities while they have livelihood sources and better socioeconomic conditions in Pakistan. Socially in Afghanistan a new culture has been developed mostly favoring those like war. Social services are completely destroyed and many refugees called the new culture as alien for them especially to the new generation of Afghan refugees who have been grown in Pakistan. Many of them especially women and children enjoyed a life style that did not exist even before 1979 in Afghanistan. Refugees consider themselves more the part of Pakistani culture and hesitate to go back home. The overall impact shows that those people who had intention to repatriate mainly due to the use of force by government, destruction of houses and shops in camps. Study recommends that the repatriation process can be enhanced if peace and stability in Afghanistan is improved along with the availability of social services and job opportunities.

## **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

On December 1, 1979 former Soviet Union forces entered in Afghanistan. Afghan president Daoud was killed and Noor Mohammad Taraki named as president but when Taraki was killed Hafizullah Am in took presidency as he was executed, replaced by Babrak Karmal. Many forces in and outside Afghanistan opposed this intervention and started struggle against Soviet occupation. One of the results of this struggle was the mass migration of Afghans to neighboring countries. The number of Afghans migrated from Afghanistan to Pakistan reached to 2 million by year 1979 to 1984. Mostly these Afghans were from rural areas of Afghanistan and after migration started living in different camps mainly in NWFP and Balochistan (UNHCR Report, 2005).

The situation remained same as long as Soviet Union was present in Afghanistan. In fact the population of refugees increased to 2,4 million. In 1986 Najibullah was replaced by Babrak Karmal as the president of Afghanistan and then Soviet Union left Afghanistan in 1989. About 206,000 numbers of refugees had been returned to their country after the withdrawal of Soviet forces. Meanwhile, the mujahiddin who had already opposed the intervention increased their struggle against Najibullah government that resulted the fall of Najib's government in 1992 (Refugees Magazine, 1997).

Mujahiddin took over Afghanistan and formed Islamic Council. This government was result of a pact between various *mujahiddin* leaders but it was not followed and war erupted again but this time among *mujahiddin* leaders. The main rivals emerged during this conflict were Rabbani and Gulbadin Hikmatyar. They were fighting for the control of Kabul. On the other hand various mujahiddin leader took charge of the land they controlled and consequently a civil war situation prevailed in Afghanistan. The arrival of Afghan migrants had started again but this time majority came from Kabul city.

Taliban militia emerged as a reaction to this anarchy and warlordism. This was a group of Pushtuns, mostly studied in madrassas or Islamic Schools. In 1994 they captured Kandahar and enforced *Islamic law* or *shariah*. In the meantime they continued their expansion to the other areas and next year they captured Herat. Their advances continued to other areas and in September 1996 they captured Kabul and established their government and enforced *shariah* that was strict for many both in and outside Afghanistan. Again 133,546 populations left Afghanistan and came to Pakistan in order to avoid those strict rulers. In the meantime taliban enforced Islamic law strictly in all walks of life. Women and girls were not allowed to come out from their homes without emergency and also not allowed to go to schools, colleges etc and were asked to use burqa or veil while coming out from their homes. A small number of countries including Pakistan recognized Taliban government inspite of this that whole world was against them. During this time in Afghanistan poverty raised, infrastructure devastated and starvation enhanced (UNHCR Report, 2005).

Regarding repatriation UNHCR also reports that in 2003, 340,000 people returned to Afghanistan. As this process continued some 350,000 in the 2004 and 450,000 in 2005 returned to Afghanistan, while UNHCR expected about 400,000 people will return to Afghanistan in 2006. However actual numbers of returnees this year were 132,000, which was less than the expected figure. The expected figure in 2007 is 250,000 but the actual return was 120000. Number of Afghan still in Pakistan are about 2.5 million who are still living in Pakistan and are not ready to leave it because of in secure life conditions, less working chances and many social problems in Afghanistan. In spite of all this a large population was still not willing to leave Pakistan because the conditions in Afghanistan were not fully secure for peaceful life (UNHCR Report, 2006).

### **CAUSES OF REPATRIATION**

Repatriation is a process, which has many aspects. It is a political phenomenon as the Government of Afghanistan is not stable to provide security and other needs to people. The people have to do all the required efforts for themselves. Life of people is not secure and is in danger every moment. Warlordism still prevails and different factions are fighting against one another and with occupied forces. Bomb blasts, Suicide attacks and missile attacks are daily

activities due to which refugees are not willing to go back to Afghanistan. Moreover, there is no push factor from Pakistan.

Lack of Economic opportunities is another major cause. As Afghanistan is in reconstruction phase there is no infrastructure, institutions are in weak condition and people have not much job opportunities. Refugees believe that they cannot develop themselves in these conditions and consequently they are not ready to leave Pakistan. Furthermore, large numbers of refugees are poor, having no property and land to cultivate or no access to the land.

Society tends to change every moment and more change creates unfamiliarity in the minds of men. Afghan refugees are living in other countries especially Pakistan for more than 20 years. Now it is difficult for Afghan refugees to go back to Afghanistan and start living with newly grown generation of Afghanistan with a complete new environment. On the other hand refugees considered themselves more part of Pakistani society because of similarities in culture and tradition and their association and long stay in Pakistan particularly the children born and raise in Pakistan (UMHCR Report, 2006).

#### **OBJECTIVES of the Study:**

- 1) To know about the socioeconomic condition of Afghan refugees living in Pakistan.
- 2) To find out the intentions of Afghan refugees regarding their return to Afghanistan.
- 3) To study the factors affecting the repatriation of Afghan refugees to Afghanistan.
- 4) To suggest measures to accelerate the repatriation process.

#### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Some of the reviewed studies are as follows.

Barkat, Halim (1973) has described the obstacles to repatriation of Palestinian refugees. It is found that the refugees left their homes because of various fears, psychological pressures, destruction of their villages, and economic pressure. Israel has consistently refused to repatriate or compensate the Palestinian refugees. Several reasons are cited why they cannot be absorbed in other Arab states (eg, most of them are indigenous peasants and unskilled workers). Surveys indicate that the refugees have a desire to return, but are pessimistic about the chances for a peaceful return.

Chipulis, Rita (1974) examined the sociological and economic conditions of returning migrants. Sociopolitical and economic patterns in postwar European migration are analyzed for major sending and receiving countries, with special attention to the case of migrants returning to Yugoslavia. Importation of labor is discussed as part of overall economic growth strategies in Western Europe, and policies oriented to different migration patterns (rotation, integration, and assimilation) are examined. Major factors affecting return migration are detailed, including: (1) structural changes in the economies of labor-importing nations; (2) sector dependence on foreign labor, eg, in Switzerland; (3) changes' in migrants' immigration such as those adopted by European Economic Community countries in 1972/73. The recent shift in Yugoslavian policy from encouraging employment abroad to repatriation is examined, outlining economic incentives for returnees, investment of foreign-acquired savings, and development in both the public and private sectors, Despite large industrial losses and high governmental costs, this effort to attract returnees is predicted to continue.

Gould (1974) explained repatriation on the basis of political agreement. When in Dec 1972 there were over 1 million officially recognized refugees in tropical Africa. Refugees may be considered as particular examples of international migrants, whose movements are not out of choice but who can nevertheless assume the economic and social role of other voluntary international migrants in the country of reception. They have done so in Africa more easily than refugees have done in other parts of the world. They may often settle spontaneously into empty or underused areas or in organized settlements and can quickly become self-sufficient and integrated into the economic and political structures of the host society. Refugees come from areas under colonial political domination where wars of liberation are being fought or from independent states embroiled in internal political strife. The repatriation of 180,000 refugees to the Sudan took place during 1972/73 following the political agreement in Southern Sudan, and further repatriation may follow the political settlements in the Portuguese territories.

Hansen, et al (1979) highlighted the impact on country receiving refugees and planning to repatriate them. A host country in dealing with refugees, and the actions taken by the Zambian government to manage Angolan refugees between 1966 and 1976. Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda supported the Angolan war of liberation and allowed freedom fighters to establish base camps in Zambia. Kaunda's government also built refugee camps, attempting to control Angolan settlements and facilitate the eventual repatriation of refugees. However, field research undertaken in Angola between 1970 and 1972 shows that many Angolans tried to establish themselves in Zambia outside of government camps (ie, spontaneous resettlement) in border villages. While political vulnerability meant that many of these refugees could be exploited as a cheap labor source, this group as a whole achieved economic independence more quickly than the camp refugees. Attempts to repatriate refugees after the war have been only moderately successful, and government policy has recently become more flexible, giving Angolans the option of remaining permanently in agricultural settlements

Uranso, Robeert (1981) examined the effect of repatriation on refugees. After repatriation as war prisoner the effects on personality are studied. The role of the preexisting personality structure in the development of psychiatric illness after prisoner of war (POW) experience repatriation Vietnam POWs who were coincidentally evaluated before their captivity. Data were gathered through extensive, standardized clinical laboratory examinations, including psychological testing and psychiatric interviews. Findings indicate that the presence of or predisposition to psychiatric illness is neither necessary nor sufficient for the development of psychiatric illness after repatriation. Personality changes reflect both adaptation to the captivity environment and the impact of the ego-ideal over that of the punitive elements of the superego. The perspective of personality change rather than psychopathology is more explanatory of the findings.

Weindei, Heilu (1989) studied enhancement in repatriation due to economic problems in host country. This is a study of Ethiopian refugees in Sudan where, numbering 770,000, they have strained resources, created substantial economic problems, and generally exceeded the country's absorptive capacity. Causative factors for the large refugee movement include famine, civil strife, and environmental degradation. The settlement vs repatriation debate is described. Settlement possibilities for Ethiopian refugees in eastern Sudan include land, wage-earning, urban, and spontaneous settlements. Conceptual bases for repatriation are described,

along with resources and constraints in planning and implementing repatriation programs. Policy, social, and economic implications are discussed.

Shevyakov (1993) evaluated incentives as barrier for the repatriation of refugees. Problems of repatriation of Soviet citizens after WWII. Among the 10,181,356 citizens who found themselves in occupied territory in 1945, 5,622,336 were civilians in labor camps, and 4,559,000 were captive soldiers; the Allied Forces kept 175,849 Soviet citizens, while approximately 500,000 were deliberately hiding from the Soviet authorities. It is argued that the Allied Forces violated the Crimean Treaty on Repatriation by disputing the citizenship status of the residents of Baltic regions, western Ukraine, and western Byelorussia, and by treating many liberated Soviet civilians worse than captive German soldiers. In order to prevent Soviet citizens from repatriation, the US and British authorities relied on anti-Soviet propaganda when offering them residence in the West.

Warner, Daniel (1994) concluded voluntary repatriation as solution for refugees. Considered in this light, however, is how one conceptualizes home. Concepts of community and home, it is argued, assume a world of order and symmetry that belies the problematic of the relationship between the individual and group, the group and state, and the state and territory, and fosters the idealization of nostalgia for home. Also important in this situation are time and memory in terms of how refugees, as reported in the literature, conceive of their country of origin and return. Nostalgia for home, homogeneous group, and soil may be exacerbated over time and distorted by memory.

Wall, Sima (1994) presented political factor as an obstacle for repatriation. The current situation in Afghanistan is not appropriate for massive repatriation. Refugees in Iran and Pakistan, mostly women and children, continue to leave Afghanistan, fleeing human rights violations, hunger, exposure, continuing violence, ecological destruction, and land mines. Females in the country are under constant threat of sexual violence in the ongoing war between rival resistance groups, they are subjected to sale and forced prostitution. Nevertheless, refugee women have learned survival skills and made connections with women from the international community. A major obstacle to repatriation is the lack of any real government. Afghanistan needs to reclaim its own form of humanitarian Islam (not an imported form used to disguise a political ideology), build popular institutions from the grass-roots, and receive international financial assistance.

Tran Peter (1996) pointed out flood destruction as social cause of repatriation when the powerful typhoon that hit Bangladesh in May 1994 and its effects on Rohingya refugees (87 killed and 2,042 wounded) due to poorly constructed fortifications. The Muslim Rohingyas began their flight from Burma in 1990 because their prodemocracy beliefs conflicted with those of the prevailing military regime. Brutalization of the Muslims (including forced labor and rape) and property confiscation led to their exile. Bangladesh, with poverty and refugee problems of its own, was reluctant to accept and care for the refugees from Burma. Negotiations involving Burma, Bangladesh, and the UN finally resulted in the repatriation of all 200,000 Burmese refugees

Kaja Kazmierska (1997) examined the effect of forced repatriation on refugees for this Fritz Schutze's (1981) theory of biographical structures is used to examine interview data on the uprooting and forced repatriation of 30 residents inhabiting the eastern borderland of Poland during WWII. Analysis of three individual biographies identifies the place of the uprooting

experience in the narrator's biographic processes in terms of different trajectories, and comparisons are made with the repatriation of Jewish and German populations from the Polish territory.

Hansen, Peter (1998) worked on voluntary repatriation and said that Voluntary repatriation is often considered a natural, ideal, non-problematic solution to the refugee problem. This idealization is based mainly on an implicit understanding of refugees and identity, not on actual experience. The logic behind the idealization of voluntary repatriation derives from a perception of the world with a sedentarist metaphysics at its core. This perception divides the world into nation-states inhabited by essentialized cultural communities and sees acquisition of identity as coming from these cultural roots. A refugee is a challenge to a sedentarist metaphysics merely because the refugee is not sedentary. A viable solution to the refugee problem must take into consideration the context of repatriation, which includes different actors with potentially conflicting interpretations and experiences, and should not resort to some implicit logic of the "natural" order of things.

Mamound (2003) reported repatriation in un-peaceful conditions as risky for the refugees and he also discussed the reason for the refugee influx into Pakistan. He explained that Afghans were compelled in 1978, due to aggression on their homeland, to seek shelter in the neighboring Iran and Pakistan. Afghan refugees had no option but to seek labor in cities when the world communities stopped their aid to them. Mr. Mamound explained this as the reason behind the presence of three to four hundred thousand Afghan refugees in urban areas of the NWFP. Mr. Mamound criticized the world community for not fulfilling their promise to provide every kind of facility and financial assistance that they themselves enjoyed in 1979. He said it was a moral obligation of the world community to treat the Afghans humanely and to understand that their leaving homes, properties, relatives and homeland and adjusting to other people was difficult for them. Talking about the new plan for the reconstruction of Afghanistan in 2002, Mr. Mamound said that only \$192 million were spent out of \$1000 million on reconstruction, while the remaining amount was spent on non-developmental activities. Explaining the poor performance of government servants in Afghanistan, Mr. Mamound stated that a policeman was getting only 1,700 Afghani and that too, not on time. He stressed the need for new mega projects in Afghanistan to create job vacancies there. Mr. Mamound expressed his dissatisfaction over the repatriation after the tri-partite agreement, saying that until there is peace in Afghanistan it would be very risky for the refugees to go back. He disclosed that about two million refugees were repatriated in the year 2002, but due to the lack of basic necessities of life, law and order situation and drought, they were compelled to come back and seek shelter in neighboring Iran and Pakistan.

Prague, (2005) reported the impact of closure of camps on repatriation of refugees and presented Islamabad's decision to close the camps affects some 100,000 refugees in Kurram and Bajaur - two of Pakistan's seven "tribal agencies" near Afghanistan's southeastern border. On 6 August, Pakistan announced that all Afghan refugee camps in those areas would be closed by the end of August. Yesterday, Islamabad rejected a request by Kabul to delay the move. Islamabad have said the refugee camps pose a "security threat." Pakistan's home minister., Aftab Alimed Sherpao, said militants use the camps as safe havens as they travel to and from Afghanistan. Officials in Kabul have accused Pakistan of ignoring cross-border infiltrations into Afghanistan by Taliban and foreign Al-Qaeda fighters trying to derail September's parliamentary

elections. Sherpao denies the charge.” The Afghan government has said several times that Pakistan is doing this,” Sherpao said, “But it is not true. Anyway, we are trying to arrest those foreign [terrorists] who are living there. And we don't want our soil to be used for terrorism and those acts.” The Afghan government has called on Islamabad to postpone the camp closures in Bajaur and Kurram so that refugees have time to sell property, close businesses, and prepare for the move. Most of the refugees affected by the closures are from families who have lived in Pakistan for 20-25 years. In a statement on 22 August, the Afghan government said repatriation efforts must comply with international law and previous agreements by a tripartite commission comprised of Pakistani, U.S., and Afghan officials. The statement implied that Pakistan might be forcing some refugees back to Afghanistan against their will. But the UN's refugee agency, the UNHCR, said the closure of the camps in Pakistan's tribal areas is in full compliance with international law and Tripartite Commission agreements. A UNHCR statement said Pakistan is preserving the opportunity for asylum by

Ron Redraond (2006) describing the pace of repatriation of Afghan refugees and shows that the number of Afghan refugees returning home this year from Pakistan under UNHCR's voluntary repatriation programme is set to pass the 50,000 mark. This brings to some 3 million the total number of Afghans returning from Pakistan since the programme started in 2002. More than 90 percent of returnees have repatriated with our assistance. The Afghanistan voluntary repatriation from Pakistan and Iran is UNHCR's largest return programme ever, with over 4.5 million Afghans - including 1.47 million from Iran - going home over the last four years. In Pakistan today, some 1,300 Afghans will pass through UNHCR's Iris Validation Centres in Peshawar and Quetta - where their eyes are digitally scanned - before leaving for Afghanistan to ensure that returnee assistance is only paid once. Among this group will be returnee No. 50,000 for 2006. Repatriating Afghans, verified by UNHCR, receive travel assistance plus a small grant to ease their initial reintegration in Afghanistan. In 2006, UNHCR expects over half a million Afghans to return home - 400,000 from Pakistan and 125,000 from Iran. There are some 2.55 million Afghan refugees remaining in Pakistan and approximately 960,000 in Iran.

## **RESULTS AND FINDINGS**

The results show that most of the respondents were Pukhtoos followed by small number of Tajiks along with a few respondents from other ethnic groups; they were Pushto language speakers besides Dari by some of the respondents. As far as the place of origin of these respondents was concerned a large numbers of the respondents were from Jalalabad (33%) followed by second majority were from Ningarhar (25%), Third major group of the respondents were from Surkhud (20%) while rest of the groups were from different areas such as Paktia, Lagman etc.

The time of migration identified by most of the respondents was 1979. Refugees also migrated in 1999-2000 period while a few number of the respondents migrated before these periods. The reason of migration shown by the respondents in both the selected areas was Soviet Invasion in Afghanistan followed by another small group came when Taliban Government formed in Afghanistan where as few of the respondents migrated before these periods:

The response of all the respondents of about intentions to repatriation was negative as they do not want go back home. They also replied that they had never repatriated after their migration

to Pakistan, but some respondents replied that they will repatriate probably in year 2009 or 2010 mostly to Jalalabad, Kabul, Surkhud and other areas.

There were few push and pull factors which effected the Afghan refugees. One of that were strict Pakistani policies for which 60 percent respondents replied that policies were strict where 40 percent replied that policies were not strict respondents. Regarding facilities 100 percent of the respondents replied that electricity and water were available and with a few who had also natural gas. Except this, no other facilities were available. Response to the job available in Pakistan, 88 percent stated positively. However when this were asked if job offered in Afghanistan would you repatriate, 97 percent said no due to lack of peace and security. Another source of motivation to repatriation were the relatives in Afghanistan but majority of the respondents though got relatives in Afghanistan but they could not motivate them to repatriate because of there is no peace and also they got no house/residence in Afghanistan.

In case of Political factors and repatriation again peace and stability, law and order were main factors hindering repatriation. A 99 percent of the respondents replied that there is no peace and stability in Afghanistan while 95 percent replied that bad law and order situation effecting their repatriation. There was no security while a few others pointed out that there is violation of basic human rights in Afghanistan. In case of warlordism 48 percent of the respondents replied that there is no warlordism in their native villages but for the effect of suicidal attacks and bombing on their repatriation 97 percent replied positively and also due to these there is no peace (95%) in Afghanistan. Regarding personal enmity as another obstacle to repatriation 96 percent replied that they had no personal enmity in Afghanistan while 4 percent replied positively, which is compelling them to stay in Pakistan. Further, 100 percent replied that they do not belong to any anti government group but the presence of occupied forces effecting their repatriation (95%) as they are violating country and also sanctity of their people and life and consequently life became dangerous and innocent people are being killed by occupied forces. Another factor was strict policies or push from Pakistan where 61 percent of the respondents replied that there is push from Pakistani government.

Economic Factors also had effects in which property in Afghanistan was one but 96 percent of the respondents had no property in Afghanistan while only few had-land in Afghanistan, another obstacle in repatriation. Regarding job in Afghanistan 83 percent replied that there is no job while contrary to this 88 percent reported job in Pakistan and this consequently compel them to stay in Pakistan. Moreover 88 percent replied that there are better economic conditions in Pakistan, which is effecting their repatriation.

Social Factors had also effect on repatriation. Respondents had reported that except water no other facility is available in Afghanistan. Further, a 75 percent of the respondents said that now there is a different culture in Afghanistan with new people while on the other hand a new generation has been developed and raised in Pakistan. So, this new environment has effected their repatriation as they had no familiarity, could not adjust and consequently difficult for them to live in Afghanistan. Further, those males and females who are raised here in Pakistan were considering themselves more the part of Pakistani culture (97%) particularly the children and woman due to their grown up, relations and their jobs in Afghanistan. This is further supplemented by no difference in culture of Pakistan and Afghanistan where 99 percent of the respondents replied that there is no difference because of same life style, traditions and society.

In the overall impacts the reply of the respondents to the repatriation, 12 percent replied that they would repatriate because of strict government policies especially demolition of houses, shops etc but 88 percent replied they would not repatriate because of no peace, less job availability, no houses and no other facilities in Afghanistan. For the acceleration of repatriation process the respondents replied that it can be accelerated by providing peace (71%), residence (11%), jobs (11%) and basic facilities of life (07%).

## **CONCLUSION**

Afghanistan has been the victim of wars particularly after the Soviet Union invasion, which was followed by civil war in Afghanistan that caused the migration of large number of refugees 'to neighboring countries including Pakistan. The results show that Afghan refugees are living in Pakistan in a peaceful conditions, no warlordism, not much suicidal attacks and bombing, no personal enmity etc but on the other hand there is no peace, warlordism prevails, more suicidal attacks and bombing that made Afghanistan completely insecure for life, with danger every time, infrastructure completely destroyed and conditions really bad for living. Job availability, fulfillment of needs and survival is easy in Pakistan while in Afghanistan jobs, basic needs are not available due to lack of peace and security in Afghanistan.

On other hand refugees are living here for more than two decades. A new generation with a more Pakistani life style has been grown up. They especially women and children have enjoyed basic facilities of life that are not available in Afghanistan and because of this they consider themselves more the part of Pakistani culture and consequently effect the family decision to repatriate to their homeland Afghanistan. The results also show that repatriation of Afghan refugees ' can be enhanced by providing security, more job opportunities, basic social services and residences in Afghanistan.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

On the basis of the results following recommendations are made.

1. Peace and stability is the main factor as refugees living here in Pakistan in peaceful conditions while in Afghanistan there is no peace prevailing so it is difficult for them to repatriate. So peace and stability is required to be prevailed in order to enhance the repatriation process.
2. Economic opportunities attract people. According to sampled respondents there are better economic opportunities (job/ income sources) in Pakistan while economic conditions in Afghanistan are not satisfactory. Due to these unsatisfactory economic conditions in Afghanistan refugees are not willing to repatriate, So better economic opportunities in Afghanistan will help repatriation process.
3. Social factor was another main reason obstructing the repatriation of Afghan refugees because in Pakistan all the basic social services and facilities like water, electricity, health, transport, education etc. are available while in Afghanistan all these social services and facilities are not available. Due to this Afghan refugees are avoiding repatriation. If the availability of social services and facilities in Afghanistan is ensured, it will encourage the repatriation of Afghan refugees.

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