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**PAKISTAN –RUSSIA RELATIONS: COLD WAR RIVALRY TO HOT FRIENDSHIP
1947-2019**

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ABSTRACT

Pakistan's relations with Russian Federation's predecessor Soviet Union have been marked by divergences, distrust, contradictions, Pakistan's over-emphasized western dependence and cold war ambiguities. Although, there were brief periods when these relations could be described as warmth. Pakistan looked Soviet-Pakistan relations through the eye of western perception and Soviets/Russians looked Pakistan through the eye of Indian perception. However, after collapse of Soviet Union things changed for the betterment and rapprochement started between relations of Russia and Pakistan. In 21st century gradually unipolar world of American dominance turned into multi-polar world of Great Power competition. Similarly, Russia emerged again a competitor of US hegemonic policies in many parts of the world including South Asia and developed its relations with sates like Pakistan which were bitter enemies in Cold World period.

This article explores how relations between Russia and Pakistan evolved from Cold War bitterness to warmth ties after dissolution of Soviet Union.

Keywords: Pakistan –Russia Relations, Cold War

INTRODUCTION

In international politics it is said that there are no permanent friends or enemies only national interests matter. Similarly, state-to-state relations depend on mutual interests and not on good will gestures. Historically Russia-Pakistan relations faced many ups and downs. Pakistan and Soviet Union established their bilateral relations in 1948 when Soviet Union sent congratulatory message to Pakistan's Prime Minister, Liaquat Ali Khan¹. However, United States and Indian factor always decided magnitude of PaK-Russia relations. There are many factors responsible for distrust in Pakistan Relations with Soviet Union. Pakistan was made on the name of Islam and Islam as a religion remained fundamental element in foreign policy making process of Pakistan. Soviet Union had been following Marxist ideology which many people in Pakistan thought against Islamic tenets. Many in Pakistan considered Marxism and Islam were opposite ideologies.² Moreover, Soviets were thinking that Islamic character of Pakistan can create problems in Central Asia.

Due to urgent economic and military needs Pakistan joined Western Block which

had its significance in those days. Since beginning different factors and incidents set the parameters of Pak-Russia relations. In 1960 U-2 incident happened.³ In 1971 during India Pakistan war USSR supported India and signed "Treaty of Peace" with India. Soviet Union supported Indian stance on East Pakistan and also provided military and diplomatic assistance to India.⁴ Pakistan, thus, considered Soviet hand in the disintegration of Pakistan and formation of Bangladesh. In Z.A Bhutto era Pak-USSR relations improved and Bhutto was the first prime minister of Pakistan who visited Moscow in 1971. In this Bhutto era Soviet Union provided financial support to Pakistan to construct Steel Mills in Karachi.

When USSR invaded Afghanistan in 1979, Pakistan supported Afghan Mujahidin and relations of both states deteriorated again. Millions of Afghan refugees fled to Pakistan and Pakistan faced economic, political and social problems due to this refugee crisis. Meanwhile, after collapse of Soviet Union in 1991, Russia-Pakistan relations entered into a new phase. Russia supported Lahore Declaration signed

between Pakistan and India. After 9/11 relations improved to the next level as leaders of both nations visited each other's country. Moreover, different bilateral agreements were signed between two states. President of Pakistan Pervez Musharraf visited Moscow in 2003 and signed agreements of mutual collaborations. Similarly, In 2007 Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov visited Islamabad and becomes first prime minister who visited Pakistan after the collapse of Soviet Union. Pakistan signed military pact with Russia in 2014 and under this agreement since 2016, joint military exercises have been held between two countries.

Pak-USSR Relations in Cold War Era: A Historical Perspective

Due to Pakistan's geo-strategic importance, its role in regional politics and its influence in the Muslim World, it is considered a significant country in the region of South Asia. Economically, politically and strategically. Pakistan remained important for the world. Regions of South, West and Central Asia make Pakistan a junction of these regions. It is surrounded by four important countries in international politics, India, China, Afghanistan and Iran. All these neighboring countries of Pakistan have their own significance in the affairs of the

international relations. Three great powers Great Britain, Soviet Union and the United States of America exploited Pakistan's geostrategic location. Pakistan's land and sea routes are important for the world.

After the inception of Pakistan in 1947, diplomatic ties were established between Pakistan and Russia in May 1948. Since its beginning Pakistan had to face many political and economic challenges. To counter these challenges Pakistan had to join capitalist western block and it angered Soviet Union. Liaquat Ali Khan, first prime minister of Pakistan, in 1949 invited by USSR to visit Moscow but Mr. Khan preferred to go to Washington than go to Moscow. In 1954 Pakistan joined South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). Moreover, Pakistan joined Baghdad Pact in 1955⁵. These organizations were against the interests of Soviet Union. Pakistan-Soviet Union relations remained strained during 1954-58 era. Another incident which further deteriorated Pak-USSR relations was U-2 incident. Ayub Khan in 1959, permitted USA to use Peshawar Air Base and the United States used it for spy purposes. For surveillance purposes U-2 spy plane used to fly over the territory of Soviet Union to gather intelligence. The plane was shot down in 1960 by the Soviets and then this incident

brought Pakistan in direct confrontation with the Soviet Union and they turned against Pakistan.⁶

Soviet Union backed India on Kashmir and considered Pakistan as friend of his rival block. In this scenario USSR vetoed many resolutions.⁷ Though it was the downward slide in Pak-Soviet relations but some bilateral agreements were also signed between Pakistan and Soviet Union. In 1961, agreement on technical and economic cooperation in the fields of petroleum was set up between two states. By the same token in 1963 air link was established between Karachi and Moscow. Furthermore, in 1964 agricultural machinery was provided by Soviet Union to Pakistan. Soviets also provided assistance in thermal power plants of Guddu and Multan in 1970s. Soviets provided support in training of skilled personals in geological survey building and production of metallurgical complex. Soviet also trained students in Steel Mills Education Center. First agreement for cultural and scientific cooperation was signed in 1965 in Rawalpindi. Similarly, The Soviet-Pakistan Friendship Society was established in Moscow in 1966. The Soviet-Pakistan Friendship Society and Pakistan-Soviet Friendship Society were established Moscow

and Karachi in respectively in 1966 and in 1970s.

During 1965 Pak-India war United States did not provide military support to Pakistan and did not fulfill treaty obligations under the Alliance. Soviets then came forward to help India and Pakistan to settle their differences and mediated Tashkent Agreement in 1966. Tashkent accord was signed by Pakistan's president Ayub Khan and Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri in Tashkent. Soviet premier Aleksey Kosygin played the role as a mediator.⁸ In 1967, Ayub Khan visited Moscow and discussed international political issues with Soviet leaders. He also discussed opportunities for bilateral cooperation and assured Soviets to eradicate U.S. military bases from Pakistani soil as according to Soviet Union these bases were used to conduct spy operation inside Soviet territory. After Ayub visit trade between Soviet Union and Pakistan increased. Similarly, thirty development projects were also funded by Soviet Union. The USSR Prime Minister Alexei Kosygin also visited Pakistan in 1968 and 1969. Different bilateral agreements were inked in the fields of economic, scientific, technical and cultural cooperation. In this period of 1960s both states strengthened their

diplomatic ties. Soviet Union supplied weapons to Pakistan in late 1960s.

In 1970, General Yahya Khan visited Soviet Union and discussed bilateral matters and economic cooperation. Soviets agreed to provide \$200 million to Pakistan to complete its Fourth Five Year Plan (1970-75). Zulfikar Ali Bhutto visited Soviet Union two times. He visited first time from 16-18 march 1972. This was the time when Pakistan has been disintegrated and Bangladesh as a sovereign state has emerged on the map of the world. In this Bhutto visit bilateral trade volume was enhanced and both states agreed to cooperate in the fields of geological and power generation.

During 1971 Indo-Pak war USSR again supported India and signed "Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation" with India.⁹ In 1971 when Pakistan conducted military action in East Pakistan, Soviet Union according to Pakistan interfered in its internal matter by condemning military action in East Pakistan. Moreover, Soviet support to India diplomatically and militarily also caused downward slide in Pak-USSR relations. During Zulfikar Ali Bhutto era Pak-USSR relations improved and Bhutto was the first Prime Minister of Pakistan who visited Moscow in 1972.

In 1973 Soviet Union provided economic support to construct Steel Mills in Karachi.¹⁰ In 1970s, Pakistan changed its historical stance in bilateral relations with Soviet Union and improved relations with USSR. This was the time when Pakistan lost its eastern wing, East Pakistan, and recognized that warm relations with Soviet Union could prevent India from gaining one-sided mileage from USSR. Similarly, Soviets also wanted to keep Pakistan away from the influence of United States. In this era of 1970s Soviet Union provided economic assistance of various types to Pakistan by rescheduling debts and forgiving loans used in East Pakistan. Moreover, different agreements of bilateral trade were signed. Both states pledged to enhance ties in the fields of science and culture and agreements were signed.¹¹

Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979, relations of Soviet Union and Pakistan deteriorated once again as Pakistan and the US were united against the Soviets. Both Pakistan and the US decided to engage 150,000 Soviet soldiers in Afghanistan. In this era Pakistan reversed all cultural ties and banned Soviet reading material. Soviet technicians who were staying in Pakistan were asked to leave Pakistan. Pakistan supported Afghan Mujaheddin who fought

against Soviets and 13,000 thousands soviets were killed and injured in Afghan war.¹² Over three million Afghan refugees migrated to Pakistan and caused socio political unrest in Pakistan. When in 1985 Mikhail Gorbachev became the ruling head of Soviet Union, Pakistan and Soviet Union made different moves to improve their strained relations.

Pak- Russia Relations: Post Cold War Friendship

After the collapse of Soviet Union in 1991, the new state Russian Federation became successor of communist super power. Russian Federation shunned the ideology of communism and adopted capitalist economic system. One party system of communism was abolished and multi-party democratic system was introduced. Russia started to consolidate its status of great power by reviving its economy and asserting its influence in world politics. Still Russia was the largest country by landmass in the world with veto power status in UN Security Council. In post cold war era both Pakistan and Russia reconsidered their old policies and tried to improve their bilateral relationship by pursuing positive steps in foreign policy. Leaders and diplomats visited each other country and signed agreements especially after 9/11, when Pakistan supported U.S. 'war on terror'.

Pakistan realizing Russia's great power contribution as a world and regional player strengthened its ties with Russian Federation. After the disintegration of Soviet Union, United States became the sole superpower and unipolar world order was imposed on the world. Now in the world of U.S. domination, states were pursuing their independent foreign policies to nurture their national interests. Russia and Pakistan in changed circumstances followed diplomatic strategies to strengthen their bilateral ties. Both states started to send diplomatic persons to each other country as in 1992, Vice President of Russia visited Pakistan. Similarly, other Russian diplomats also visited Pakistan in coming years as Russian Foreign Minister and Deputy Foreign Minister also visited Islamabad respectively in 1993 and 1994. In response from Pakistani side Foreign Secretary and Foreign Minister of Pakistan visited Russia to take initiative in developing bilateral relations. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif visited Moscow in 1999 and he was the first head of government of Pakistan who visited Russia after 1974. Pakistan's Prime Minister met with Russian Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov and discussed economic prospects and political disagreements. During Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif meeting these important steps

were taken as both Russia and Pakistan granted Most Favored Nation (MFN) status to each other, both state agreed to end discrimination in taxes and signed agreements.

Pakistan's support for Taliban government in Afghanistan was a matter of concern for Russians.¹³ Taliban were fighting against pro-Russian Northern Alliance and it was against Russian security interests. However, after the September 11 attacks in the U.S., Pakistan supported U.S. "War on terror" and changed its policy towards Taliban. Russia supported Pakistan's contribution against terrorism. In 2003, Pakistan's President Pervez Musharaf visited Moscow and met with Russian President Vladimir Putin. In this visit both Russia and Pakistan signed different agreements of shared interests.¹⁴ Moreover, Russia acknowledged the role of Pakistan as a regional player and supported Pakistan's observer status in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Similarly, Pakistan also supported Russia's intention to be the observer of Organization of Islamic Conference. In 2007 Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov visited Pakistan and became the first prime minister who visited Pakistan after the disintegration of Soviet Union. In

this Russian Prime Minister visit bilateral and economic matters were discussed.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said "Pakistan is important for us in trade and economy and is an important country of South Asia and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and can play an important role in the promotion of peace and security in the region".¹⁵ To rejuvenate Pak – Russia relations after September 11 attacks governments of both states designed different strategies and adopted various tactics to enhance bilateral relations. Pakistan and Russia through political and diplomatic meetings have strengthened their relations over the last decade or so. Pakistan to minimize its dependence on the United States tried to find new states that could fulfill space of U.S. and other western countries. Russian's President Putin is in the process of revival of Russia.¹⁶

Russia has vast reserves of natural resources and has powerful soft power tool and many countries of Europe depend upon Russia for their energy needs.¹⁷ Moscow is exploring new markets to export its military hardware and to find avenues for investments and thus could boost its economy. Pakistan has insufficient natural resources in the shape of oil and gas and depends upon other states for its energy needs and may turn to Russia

to buy petroleum products. Similarly, Pakistan could buy Russian military hardware to minimize its dependent on United States. Pakistan's desire to forge close relations with Russian federation was materialized in 2007 when Pakistani petroleum minister went to Moscow and signed MoU to collaborate in the oil sector.

Pakistan's President Asif Ali Zardari met six times during his presidential term with his Russian counterpart Dmitry Medvedev to discuss bilateral, regional issues along with terrorism and drug trafficking. A meeting of the heads of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) member states was held in June 2009 in the central Russian city of Yekaterinburg. In this SCO meeting President Zardari and Medvedev discussed need of economic and political dialogue between Pakistan and Russia. Russian president discussed need of eradicating terrorism from the region.¹⁸ Moreover, he showed desire to cooperate in defense and energy sectors. Medvedev also condemned 9 June Peshawar hotel suicide attack.¹⁹

Moreover, to stabilize the region Russia hosted the meeting of leaders of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Tajikistan, in the Black Sea resort of Sochi on August 18, 2010. Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari told

Russian president Medvedev the world should "stand together...we can do it, we can do it altogether. We should support the Afghan people."²⁰ Russian President offered assistance to Pakistan for flood victims. He said, "We are mourning together with you, and we are ready to provide all the necessary assistance."²¹ Russia sent humanitarian aid to flood victims in Pakistan.²² Floods in Pakistan in 2010 caused devastation and took lives of 2,000 people and affected 20 million people.²³ Medvedev in his meeting with Zardari discussed economic relationship with Pakistan.

New Phase of Pakistan-Russia Relations

Pakistan and Russia remained indifferent in developing their bilateral trade and economic relationship. Similarly, defense relations have also been insubstantial between Pakistan and Russia, however, there was a boost in defense ties between two countries when in May 25, 2011, Commander-in-Chief Colonel General Alexander Postnikov visited Pakistan and met Pakistan Army Chief, General Ashfaq Pervez Kayani, and other military commanders. After 1980s Afghan war, Colonel General Alexander Postnikov was the only senior Russian military official who visited Pakistan.²⁴ Inter-Services Public relations (ISPR) in its statement said that

matters of professional interests were discussed with Russian commander-in-chief. It is argued that matters pertaining to death of Osama bin Laden May 1, 2011, were also come under discussions.²⁵

Russia to warm its relations with Pakistan shows its solidarity with Pakistan as on 26 November 2011, NATO helicopters and fighter jets attacked two Pakistani check posts near the Pakistan-Afghanistan border and killed 24 Pakistan Army soldiers.²⁶ Russia condemned NATO air attacks on Pakistan Army check –post and stated that it was unacceptable to violate sovereignty of an independent state.²⁷ The year 2011 is also important for Pak-Russia cordial relations as Russia endorsed full SCO member ship for Pakistan.

Russians have their own picture of Afghanistan, Pakistan and central Asia. They remained concerned about Afghanistan’s geo-politics and wanted to see end of militancy and terrorism from Afghan soil. Russians considered presence of safe havens of terrorism on Pakistani soil and thus, according to them “nets of terror “in Pakistan had to be eliminated. Russia sees jihadi linkage between Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia and militants based in Pakistan.²⁸

NATO air strikes on Pakistan Army check posts on 26 November, 2011 caused

bad taste between Pak-U.S relations and Pakistan, thus, tried to reach out to those countries which could minimize its dependence on the United States. Russia was important for Pakistan to strengthen its relations and to reduce reliance on U.S. In the year 2012 many developments happened in Pak-Russia relations as Pakistan’s Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar visited Moscow in February to invite Russian President to visit Islamabad. Similarly, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov visited Islamabad on the invitation of Pakistan’s Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar, in October of that year Foreign ministers of both countries discussed improvement in relations in energy sector and drug trafficking. Moreover, Lavrov and Khar exchanged views on Afghan crisis and prevailing condition of Middle East.²⁹

In further developments, Pakistan Chief of Army staff (SOAS) General Ashfaq Pervez Kayani visited Russia in the first week of October 2012. Army Chief in his visit held detailed discussions on bilateral defence cooperation. General Kayani met with Russian Army Chief of General Staff General Makarov who welcomed General Kayani and assured his support for Pakistan Armed Forces.³⁰ General Kayani visit to Moscow has been responded by visit of Russian Ground Forces Commander-in-

Chief(c-in-c) Colonel General Vladimir V Chirkin to Pakistan. Pakistan Army Chief General Kayani and Russian Commander in Chief Chirkin met at the General Headquarters (GHQ) Rawalpindi and discussed military cooperation between two countries.³¹

Russia Pakistan relations gained momentum in 2014, the year the United States completed the NATO draw down in Afghanistan. United States to counter China, which happens to be a friend of Pakistan, increased its economic and military relations with India. Moreover, Rise of China is equally problematic for India. This increase in Indo-US relations rang the bells of concerns in Moscow. This India U.S. friendship created an opportunity for both Russia and Pakistan to strengthen their relations. Similarly, strained US Pakistan relations became reason for warmth ties between Russia and Pakistan. It was during that year of 2014 when Russia lifted its long-standing self-imposed embargo on weapons deliveries to Pakistan and sanctioned a deal of \$153 million for Mi-35M attack helicopters. Lifting the arm embargo on Pakistan enables Kremlin to play its positive role in South Asia without annoying its historical partner India. Similarly, it is said that lifting arm embargo on Pakistan will

serve Russia's national interests and will bring both countries together. Moreover, Pakistan also signed an agreement with Russia to buy Klimov RD-93 engines from Russia to be used in its indigenous manufactured JF-17 fighter jets. Historically, Russia has sold more military hardware to India than to Pakistan. Russia only sold 70 Mi-17 transport helicopters to Pakistan from 1996 to 2010.³²

In 2015, Russia and Pakistan also finalized a deal in which Russia will construct a North-South 1,100 kilometer long gas pipeline from Karachi to Lahore. Russia will invest \$2 billion in this project.³³ Pakistan and Russia signed other energy agreements as In July 2017, Pakistan's Oil and Gas Development Company Limited (OGDCL) and Russian Gazprom International signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for mutual cooperation joint ventures and use of state-of-the-art technology in oil and gas exploration and development.³⁴ In the military field Pakistan and Russia signed a broader military cooperation pact when in November 2014, Defence Minister of Russian Federation Sergei Shoigu visited Islamabad and met with Prime Minister and Defence Minister of Pakistan.³⁵ General Shoigu in his statement said "The world community not only praises

but wants to do business with Pakistan.”³⁶ Defence cooperation agreement was about for promotion international security, intensification of counter terrorism efforts and arms control activities. Moreover, this agreement was conducted to enhance cooperation between Armed Forces of Russia and Armed Forces of Pakistan.

In June 2015, Pakistan’s Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Raheel Sharif went on an important visit to Moscow. He discussed bilateral defence and regional security issues with Russian civil and military leadership including Russian Land Forces Commander in Chief Colonel General Oleg Sayukov and chairman of Russian Parliament, Duma, and Sergey Naryshkin. Chairman of Duma appreciated Pakistan’s fight against terrorism. Moreover, General Raheel Sharif inspected defence exhibition during which all types of arms, aircrafts and helicopters were shown to General sharif.³⁷

After signing military pact with Russia in 2014, one solid step was taken with regard to the pursuance of the pact, both Pakistan and Russia have conducted the first ever joint military exercises under the name “Druzhba, Friendship 2016” from September-October 2016 at Cherat in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa involving 200 military personal from Pakistan and Russia. Russia-

Pakistan joint military exercises were carried on at a time when India and Pakistan were at loggerheads due to attack on Uri military camp in the Indian held Jammu& Kashmir on 18 September 2016 and India blamed on Pakistan based militants. India objected these military drills and thinking about India’s historic friendship ties with Russia, convinced Russia to call off these joint military exercises but Russia did not pay any heed on Indian concerns and held scheduled military exercises with Pakistan.³⁸

In 2014, Russia annexed Ukrainian region Crimea and since then Russian tussle with Europe and the United States continues. The United States and the European Union imposed economic sanctions on Russia. Since then Russia has been looking for alternative markets in South Asia. To capture energy market of Pakistan Russia in February 2019, signed \$10bn offshore pipeline deal with Pakistan and this was a major sign of increasing economic cooperation between Russia and Pakistan.³⁹

It is said about Pakistan-Russia relations that convergence of strategic interests and political and economic factors has brought Islamabad and Moscow closer than ever before. In March 2019, Pakistan-Russia Consultative Group on Strategic Stability held its 13th meeting in Islamabad.

This consultative group has been meeting since 2003 and providing a platform for structured dialogue between the two states.⁴⁰

The era of unipolar world has passed, replaced by a new era of Great Power competition between the US, EU, Russia and China. Today, American hegemonic role is being challenged by Russia and China. Russia is challenging US dominance in Middle East, Central Asia, South Asia and other parts of the world. United States and EU's sanctions are affecting Russian economy and President Vladimir Putin has been focusing on boosting relations with Latin American, South and East Asian countries. Though Pakistan and Russia were staunch enemies during cold war but after the collapse of Soviet Union both countries have reconsidered their past enmities and following a path of mutual cooperation. This is evident from Russia's desire to become a mediator between India and Pakistan, in the wake of February, 2019 Pulwama Attack on Indian security forces in Indian held Kashmir. This Russia's mediation offer was accepted by Pakistan and rejected by India.⁴¹ Likewise, Russian stance in the wake of Pulwama attack and scenario of Pak-India border tensions has depicted that the parameters of both countries have changed

and now Pak-Russia ties are in the process of boosting day by day.

CONCLUSION

After the dissolution of Soviet Union in 1991, both Pakistan and Russia reached the conclusion that the past should be forgotten and look ahead to make a new relationship on the bases of shared interests. Both countries realized the need to construct a new kind of future and should not remain prisoners of the past. Pakistan and Russia in the 21st century has been trying to strengthen their bilateral relations and both have taken a pro-active approach to boost their relationship in economic and military fields.

Pakistan should come out of its past and correct its errors in foreign policy making process. Now world is experiencing a major power competition between different power centers. Unipolar world scenario is over now. Great powers are competing with one another and challenging US hegemony. Uni-polar system of the world is being challenged by Russia and China. It is the most important issue for a successful country that she doesn't ignore and avoid any changes occurring in international politics. Pakistan should consider changed circumstances of the world politics and make its foreign policy accordingly. Decision

makers in Pakistan should develop a suitable policy in pursuance of their national interests.

Russia is finding markets in South Asia to sell its military hardware and gas to boost its economy which has been affected by western sanctions. Pakistan has its significance in the eyes of Russians as Russia through Pakistan could complete its cross-regional projects of various types. Pakistan is an important country in South Asia, Russia wants settlement in Afghanistan through Pakistan. Moreover, Pakistan should develop its economy through Russian assistance and develop its ties further in the field of defence and energy. Pakistan is an energy-scarce country, could benefit from energy-rich Russia, as that can boost mutual trade and cooperation. Russia's participation in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CEPEC) also could open a new chapter of Pakistan Russia relations.

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